LANGUAGE TRANSFER IN THE COMPOSITIONS WRITTEN BY UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Some Lexical and Syntactic Features

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Tämän sivuainetutkielman aiheena on suomen kielen transfer- eli siirtovaikutus lukiolaisten englannin kielen ainekirjoituksissa. Siirtovaikutus voidaan määritellä yrityksenä käyttää äidinkieltä apuna vieraan kielen oppimisessa ja käytössä. Koska kyseessä on kielten välinen vuorovaikutus, jossa myöhemmin opittu kieli vaikuttaa myös aiemmin opittuun, yhteen tai useampaan kieleen, ilmiötä voidaan kutsua myös nimellä cross-linguistic interaction.

Tutkimusaineistona on käytetty yhteensä 62 abiturienttien kirjoittamaa harjoituskirjoitelmaa syksyllä 2012. Aineiston analysoinnissa on keskitytty kolmeen leksikaaliseen transfer- ilmiöön, lainakäännöksiin, semanttisiin ekstensioihin ja virheellisiin kollokaatioihin sekä syntaksin osalta verbien -ing–muotojen poikkeavaan käyttöön. Tutkielman tarkoituksena on tutkia näiden piirteiden ilmenemistä ja yleisyyttä sekä verrata tuloksia Leena Meriläisen vuonna 2010 julkaistun väitöskirjan tuloksiin leksikaalisten transfer- piirteiden osalta. Hypoteesina on, että tämän tutkimuksen tulokset korreloivat Meriläisen huomattavasti laajemman aineiston kanssa.

Lainakäännöksillä tarkoitetaan ilmauksia, joiden sanamuodot ovat sinällään oikein, mutteivät välitä englannissa sitä merkitystä, jota sen luullaan välittävän. Esimerkkinä aineistosta *school numbers*, kun tarkoitetaan *grades* (Fi. *arvosanat*). Semanttisessa ekstensiossa äidinkielen sanan semanttiset ominaisuudet siirretään aiemmin opittuun vieraan kielen sanaan, esimerkiksi *learn his homework*, kun tulisi käyttää sanaa *lesson* (Fi. *oppia läksynsä*). Kollokaatioilla tarkoitetaan sanoja tai sanaryhmiä, jotka esiintyvät yhdessä. Esimerkki virheellisestä kollokaatiosta on *too small punishments*, jossa small- sanan tilalta tulisi käyttää sanaa *mild*.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset poikkeavat jossakin määrin Leena Meriläisen väitöskirjan tuloksista leksikaalisten transfer-piirteiden suhteellisen määrän osalta. Tätä selittänee omalta osaltaan tämän tutkimuksen suppea otos. Semanttiset ekstensiot ovat yleisiä molemmissa tutkimuksissa. Verbien ing-muotojen osalta voidaan tämän tutkimuksen perusteella todeta, että niiden poikkeava käyttö liittyy useimmiten tilanteisiin, joissa viitataan asioihin tai tilanteisiin, jotka eivät ole vielä käynnissä. Seuraava esimerkki on tilanteesta, jossa kirjoittajan tehtävänä on pitää puhe: *So I am here telling something about Finland for you.*

Avainsanat: language transfer, cross-linguistic interaction, loan translation, semantic extension, collocation, progressive ing-form

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

This second subject pro gradu- thesis investigates *language transfer*, or the role of mother tongue (L1) in second language (L2) – learning and the learner´s reliance on L1 (see Ringbom 1987: 1). The aim of this study is to shed light on some features of lexical and syntactic transfer that were in 62 compositions written in English by students at Lempäälän lukio in autumn 2012. I chose the topic because of my own interest in language transfer and especially in lexical transfer. In addition, I wanted to base my study on a small- scale analysis of material written by actual students in the same upper secondary school where I work at the moment.

In my study, I intend to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the lexical transfer manifestations, including loan translations, semantic extensions and collocations (classified according to Nation´s theory) in the empirical material of this particular study and how many are they in total?

2) Which of the lexical transfer features investigated in this study is the most common one (i.e. loan translations, semantic extensions or collocations)?

3) Is there to find non-standard, extended use of progressive English verb forms and if yes, in what kind of contexts?

My aim is also to find some possible explanations for the language transfer features occurring in my empirical material.

Because of the limited extension of this thesis, I do not have any comparison group to check my results against or to see whether different features of lexical transfer have diminished or increased in the written English of Finnish upper secondary school students. I cannot compare my results to Swedish speaking Finns either. My study is therefore descriptive in nature and one of its

basic aims is to deepen my personal understanding of the concept of language transfer. The thesis is also quantitative in the sense that the aim is to point out what feature of lexical transfer is the most common in the material.

My hypothesis is that my results are likely to be coherent with the results Lea Meriläinen (2010) presented in her dissertation on lexical transfer when it comes to *word meaning* and *word use* level. These terms were originally introduced by Nation (2001: 27). In my own study, I am also going to apply the theoretical framework of Nation. Meriläinen´s and my findings are going to be discussed and compared with each other in the last chapter of the thesis.

My study will focus on *loan translations* (e.g. "You must fight for your *school numbers*" pro *grades*, cf. Fi. *koulunumerot, kouluarvosanat*) and *semantic extensions* (e. g. "…but in my opinion for example a shoplifter can learn his *homework* in prison" pro *lesson*, cf. Fi. *oppia läksynsä, oppia virheistään*) on *word meaning* level. I am also going to study *collocations*, that is to say what words occur and go hand in hand with other words (e.g. "…the hard decisions should be organized in such a way that you could *solve* those one by one" pro *make*, cf. Fi. *tehdä ratkaisuja*). In Nation´s framework, collocations are observed under the term *word use.*

I am also interested in studying *syntactic transfer* in the use of the progressive -ing forms of English verbs. As far as I know, the use of English progressive verb forms has not been investigated to larger extent in the written English of Finnish students. Ringbom (1987) has studied the use of prepositions and articles of Finnish and Swedish speaking Finns. According to his studies, Finnish speaking Finns tend to simplify these two aspects by omitting them in productions (1987: 108). One reason for this phenomenon is the fact that there is no article system in Finnish, whereas Swedish has one. Swedish also has a preposition system which is similar to the English one, whereas Finnish is based on inflections, not on the usage of prepositions.

2 WHAT IS LANGUAGE TRANSFER?

In this chapter, I present some of the most common definitions used for the phenomenon in question. It is nevertheless noteworthy that there are no unanimous definitions for the phenomenon often called *language transfer*.

2.1 Definitions

In order to be able to understand what is meant by language transfer, I begin by defining the term *second language acquisition*, also called *L2 acquisition*. According to Ellis (1997: 3), "second" is used for any language that is learned subsequent to the *mother tongue,* also known as the *primary language* or the *L1* (first language) (see for example Gass & Selinker 2001: 5). Furthermore, "second" does not contrast with "foreign" but refers to any language, whether it is learned as a result of living in a country where it is spoken or learning it in the classroom (ibid.). L2 acquisition can be defined as the way in which people learn a language other than their first language (ibid). The study of this is called *Second Language Acquisition* (*SLA*) (ibid.). However, Gass & Selinker (2001: 5) separate the term second language acquisition from *foreign language learning*. The former refers to the learning of a non–native language in the environment in which that language is spoken whereas the latter refers to the learning of a non–native learning in the environment of one´s native language. In this pro gradu thesis, I study the different manifestations of lexical transfer from the foreign language learning point of view.

Ellis (1997:17) distinguishes *error*s and *mistake*s. Errors reflect gaps in a learner´s knowledge of the L2 language, whereas mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance. Mistakes are common in native speakers´ language as well (ibid). According to Ellis (1997: 19), when it comes to errors made by L2 learners there are different sources. Some of them are universal and they reflect learners` attempts to make the L2 learning and use easier. *Omission*s, for example

leaving out articles or the –s in plural nouns and *overgeneralizations*, for example the regular past tense form for *eat* (*eated*) instead of irregular form, are instances where the learner tries to facilitate the learning process of L2 (ibid). Ringbom (1986: 150) points out that especially for the beginner, reliance upon his or her L1 or other languages is an obvious way of facilitating the foreign language learning process wherever possible. The relevance of a learner´s prior linguistic knowledge is determined by the distance between the L1 and L2. The smaller the distance, the more relevant this prior knowledge is to the learner, especially in the initial stages of learning (ibid.).

Language transfer can be defined as learners` attempts to make use of their previous L1 knowledge (Ellis 1997: 19). Ringbom (1987: 1) defines language transfer as the role of L1 in L2 –learning, whereas Meriläinen (2010: 7) defines language transfer as the influence of the learner´s mother tongue on the acquisition of a second language. One of the most often cited definition of transfer probably comes from Odlin (1989: 27). According to him, "transfer is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired". Odlin (1989: 25-27) also notes that language transfer is not simply a consequence of habit formation. It is neither simply interference, because much of the influence of the native language can be very helpful. Transfer is not always native language influence either, because knowledge of three or more languages can lead to three or more different kinds of source language influence.

The term *language transfer* has also been criticized for its one- sidedness because it implies that L1 influence only entails the transfer of L1 patterns into L2, without accounting for avoidance or overproduction, that is to say, different manifestations of L1 influence (Odlin 1989: 36-37, Meriläinen 2010: 11). Kellerman & Sharwood (1986:1) define *language transfer* as "the interplay between earlier and later acquired languages" and they were among the first researchers to use the term *cross-linguistic influence*. The term has later been used by for example Odlin (1989)

and Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008). In my opinion, cross-linguistic influence is a quite adequate term for the phenomenon because it stresses the idea of interaction between L1 and L2. As Cook (2002: 18) puts it, "language acquisition or use is not transferring something from one part of the mind to another, but two systems accommodating to each other". The source and destination are no separate mental objects but overlapping systems (ibid.).

The term *interference* has also been used since 1950´s when the influence of the learner´s mother tongue on the acquisition of a second language was first introduced in the field of SLA (second language acquisition) (Meriläinen, 2010: 7). In 1957, Robert Lado claimed that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture when trying to understand and use a foreign language (in Gass & Selinker 1983: 25). This is why Lado emphasized the role of contrastive analysis of L2 and L1 in teaching. In order to be able to help students with their learning problems in L2, the teacher should be well aware of the differences between the L1 and L2 (Lado 1957: 2).

However, the term interference was in many cases considered rather negative as it represented the ideas of behaviorist psychology, where the human brain was thought to function on input–output basis, without any unconscious or conscious processing of the data or without any other psycholinguistic factors or abilities. According to behaviorist theory, learning was considered to be a form of habit formation (see for example Ellis 1997: 31). Second language learning was seen as the development of a new set of habits; this behaviorist notion was common in the 1950´s and 1960´s (Gass & Selinker 2001: 71).

Odlin (1989: 25), among other language transfer scientists, claims exactly the opposite by saying that transfer is not simply a consequence of habit formation. As for the term *positive transfer*, it implies the facilitating influence of L1 vocabulary or any other similarities between native and target languages (Odlin 1989:26). The facilitating influence of L1 is especially helpful

for beginning learners as they try to find simple equivalences between their L1 and L2 (Ringbom 1987: 58). The same goes for the facilitating effect of any previously learned foreign language (L2) on other L2s, especially language that are linguistically related. Everyone who has learned for instance French, knows how much easier it is to start learning Spanish or Italian because of their structural similarities and resemblance in vocabulary.

2.2 Overview on the history of language transfer research

In this chapter, I will present some of the main linguistic theories preceding the language transfer research of today. The general timeline of these theories is given in Figure 1.

1950's	1960's	1970's
- Lado - Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis	- Chomsky´s Universal Grammar (UG)	- Error Analysis - Selinker´s theory of Interlanguage

Figure 1. Overview on theories preceding language transfer research of today

As mentioned earlier, Robert Lado was among the first researchers to raise the topic of L1 influence in second language acquisition from the applied linguistics point of view in the 1950´s (Selinker 1986: 34 in Gass & Selinker 1983, Meriläinen 2010: 8), whereas his contemporary Uriel Weinreich (1963, originally published in 1953) was initially interested in the phenomenon from the standpoint of bilingual studies.

According to the *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis* (also called CAH) in the 1950´s, errors made by learners when trying to produce or receive a foreign language are mainly due to the interference of the mother tongue (see for example Gass & Selinker 2001: 72-73 and Dulay & al. 1982: 97). When learning a second language, it is crucial to learn the differences whereas the similarities between the L1 and L2 could be ignored. Errors were accounted for by the differences

between L1 and L2 (ibid.). The CA hypothesis rests on the following two assumptions regarding the process of language learning: 1. Language learning is habit of formation (behaviorist view on learning) and 2. Where L2 and L1 differ, the old habit (= using L1) hinders the formation of the new habit (= learning L2) (Dulay & Burt 1983: 55 in Gass & Selinker 1983). As Ringbom (2007: 32) puts it, the idea of CAH was that comparative descriptions of L1 and L2 could function as a basis for facilitating language learning and language teaching. The aim of contrastive analysis was to discover all the L1 and L2 structural differences in order to be able to prevent learners from making errors. Teaching methods were based on error correction and were very grammar–based and teacher–dominated at that time (see for example Richard & Rodgers 1986: 38, 56, 60-61).

In the 1960´s, Chomsky´s *Universal Grammar* (also called UG) (see for example Ellis 1997: 65) made its breakthrough. According to UG, any language is governed by a set of highly abstract principles that manifest themselves differently in different languages (ibid). After UG, behaviorism was soon abandoned in the study of language acquisition (Meriläinen 2010: 9) and language learning came to be seen as a creative construction of different language rules (see for example Dulay & Burt 1974: 276-277).

Dulay & Burt (1974) were among the first to see the process of L2 learning being guided by similar internal, universal cognitive mechanisms as the process of L1 learning (see for instance Dulay & Burt 1974: 37, 52)**.** This theory did not last long either. The next step was Selinker´s (see for example Selinker 1992: 231) theory of *interlanguage*. By interlanguage Selinker means learner´s language as a highly structured linguistic system which is not only an isolated collection of errors (ibid.). As James (1998: 5) puts it, interlanguage can also be defined as a learner´s version of the target language.

As Meriläinen (2010: 10) formulates it, a learner´s language is also affected by many different types of influences besides learner´s L1. These influences entail for instance formal

language instruction and learner´s developmental mechanisms as well as the L2 in question (ibid.). Ellis (1997: 31) formulates interlanguage as a learner´s mental system of L2 knowledge. Learners do not construct rules in a vacuum but they work with whatever information is at their disposal, including their knowledge of their L1 (Ellis 1997: 52). According to this view, transfer is not interference but a cognitive process (ibid.). Instead of being behaviorist in its nature, the cognitive process is a decision- making procedure, rather than an automatic process (Faerch & Kasper 1986: 49). Odlin (1989: 19) also points out that research showed resemblance between the process of learning a first language and second language acquisition. Research showed that some errors were similar in L1 and L2 learning. This made the researches wonder how different the two processes (L1 and L2) really were. Furthermore, research after CAH showed that learners with many different first languages make similar errors when learning a particular L2 (ibid.).

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis as well as interlanguage have later been criticized by Firth &Wagner (1997: 285). They claim that the previous view on SLA (second language acquisition) does not account in a satisfactory way for interactional and sociolinguistic dimensions of language (ibid.). Instead, they have concentrated too heavily on the foreign language speaker as a deficient communicator, striving to research the target competence of an idealized native speaker. By doing that, SLA research has overlooked L2 speakers´ successful communication in L2 and seems to have forgotten the importance of communicative resources (Firth & Wagner 1997: 295-296). Ellis (1997: 34) also points out that the interlanguage theory only gives researchers a new account of how L2 acquisition takes place but it does not explain what actually happens during that process or why.

Error analysis was developed after CAH model had been rejected by SLA researchers (Meriläinen 2006: 45) According to James (1998: 5), it was essential to compare the learner´s interlanguage and the target language only. Errors could be described in terms of the L2 without

referring to the L1 of the learner. This proved to be impossible and language transfer was accepted as one of the factors that cause errors in L2 learning (James 1998: 5). As Svartvik (1973: 9) puts it, errors can fundamentally be seen as positive and as having an important role in a learning strategy. Errors can also be seen to indicate the learning stage of the L2 learner (Dulay & al. 1982: 141). However, it should also be kept in mind that the term error often has negative connotations. One should rather concentrate on what a L2 learner already knows, instead of taking notice of his or hers lack of knowledge in L2. As Gass & Selinker (2001: 80) put it, error analysis relied totally on errors and excluded all other information. One "needs to consider errors as well as non–errors to get the entire picture of a learner´s linguistic behavior" (ibid.). The corrections made by the teacher should always be non–threating (James 1998: 250).

According to Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008: 111), it will probably never be possible or even prudent to predict where or when language transfer will definitely occur or definitely not occur. Instead of prediction, Jarvis and Pavlenko suggest that the ultimate goal of transfer research must remain the explanation of how the languages a person knows interact in the mind. Swan & Smith (2001: xi) also stress the fact that not all of a learner´s problems are attributable to direct mother tongue affect or interference. Unfortunately, there has been significantly less research within SLA in the last couple decades than there was earlier (Meriläinen 2006: 16).

As to more recent empirical research on language transfer in Finland, Lea Meriläinen (2010) has written her dissertation *Language transfer in the written English of Finnish Students*, where she compares the Finnish and Swedish speaking students´ written English compositions in Finnish national Matriculation Examination between 1990 and 2005. At the lexical level Finnish influence was observed in the student´s deviant word forms, word meanings and word use (Meriläinen 2010: 195). At the syntactic level, Finnish influence was detected in the students´ deviant formation of the passive construction, the expletive pronoun construction, certain

subordinate clause patterns, expressions for future time and prepositional constructions. Meriläinen chose Nation´s (2001) model as the basis in her own study, when dealing with the aspects of lexical transfer.

According to Nation (2001: 27), word knowledge can be divided into *word form*, *word meaning* and *word use*. Word form level entails factors considering the spoken and written words as well as word parts. Questions like "How is this particular word spelled or pronounced?" and "Which word parts are needed to express the meaning?" are relevant on word form level.

The word meaning level includes a word´s form and meaning, its concept and referents and associations. The following questions concerning this level are important: "What meaning does this word form signal?", "What items can the concept refer to?" and "What other words does this make us think of?"

Word use level contains the grammatical functions, collocations and constraints on use a particular word can have. On this level questions to be asked are for instance "In what patterns must we use this word?", "What words or types of words must we use with this one?" and "Where and when can we use this word?"

The cross-linguistic similarities and differences between L1 and L2 have been regarded as major factors in language transfer (see for example Ringbom 1987: 33-35). However, according to Dulay & al. (1982), Odlin (1989), Ellis (1997) and Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008), there are several non-structural factors that affect second language acquisition as well. These factors include the learner´s age, personality, and motivation. Early age and self-confidence is highly related to successful L2 learning (Dulay 1982: 75, 78). Motivation entails those attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort in learning L2 (Ellis 1997: 75). Cognitive language learning abilities, such as memory, concentration and power of reasoning also affect the learning of L2.

Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008: 199-200) also mention the intensity of language exposure as a factor influencing L2 learning and language transfer.

3 MATERIAL AND METHOD

In this chapter, I will discuss how the empirical material of my study was gathered and how it is going to be analyzed.

3.1 Material

The 62 English essays used as empirical material were collected in autumn 2012 from students writing their exercise compositions before the Finnish national Matriculation Examination in English. I asked the students to give their permission for me to analyze their writings as the empirical material only after they had finished writing their compositions. This was because I did not want them to pay any special attention to their lexical or syntactic choices or feel extra pressure while writing. The analysis was carried out anonymously and without grading the students´ outputs in any way. My material, randomly collected from a heterogeneous group of English learners, consists of compositions written by 28 male students and 34 female students. All students have Finnish as their mother tongue.

A commonly known fact is that students use English in their leisure time very differently from each other. Some play computer games online while others read books in English or have English speaking friends to chat with, either online or face to face (see, e.g., Leppänen et al. 2011). There are also students who seldom use English outside the classroom context. What I consider important for the present study is that all the students have had the same amount of formal education in English on the upper secondary school level, before participating in the Finnish national Matriculation Examination in English. During their upper secondary school education

(from three to four years), all students have also had the same textbooks when attending English classes at school.

The students were asked by their English teacher to write an essay of 150-250 words on one of the following topics:

1. What is a family?
2. Breaking the law?
3. To compete or not to compete?
4. Does Finland need more nuclear power?
5. Travelling- enjoying yourself or risking your life?
6. Curing criminals
7. Today´s pressures
8. Any job is better than no job at all
9. Improving safety in traffic
10. Speech
11. E-mail

As can be seen here, there were many different types of topics to choose from, the topics 1-9 giving the students the opportunity to ponder the question from several points of view and also motivate their own standpoint. The last two topics, speech and e-mail, differ from the other topics in form and content because the students were asked either to give a speech to an imaginary audience or write an e-mail on a specific matter and address it to a certain receiver. When choosing topic 10 or 11, the student was expected to use established, adequate courtesy phrases in order to give an authentic impression of a speech or an e-mail in English.

3.2 Method

As already mentioned in the introduction, I chose to base my study on Nation´s ((2001: 27; see also 35, 292, 300) theoretical framework on lexical transfer where *word knowledge* can be divided into

word form, *word meaning* and *word use*. These concepts are explained in detail in subsection 2.2 of this thesis. I focus on the aspects of *word meaning* and *word use*, leaving out *word form*, which in Nation´s theory is also an essential part of word knowledge. My other justification for leaving out the third component of Nation´s classification is Ringbom´s (1987: 118) findings according to which Finnish students very seldom transfer L1 words into English in their unmodified forms because the similarities between Finnish and English word forms are extremely rare (see also Meriläinen 2010: 70).

In my study, I concentrate on lexical transfer on *word meaning* level, including *loan translation*s and *semantic extension*s. On *word use* level, I take a deeper look at c*ollocation*s. On the syntactic transfer level, I am interested in finding out how *the progressive* (-ing) *form*s of English are used. All the terms used in this chapter will be further defined in chapter 4.

In chapter 5, I will present each case of a specific language transfer feature found in the compositions by giving it in its context. I also try to see if there are any explanations why the writer may have used the expression in question. The discussion and further interpretations of the main findings will be dealt in section 6 of this thesis.

Meriläinen (2006: 168-169) pointed out in her licentiate thesis that there is no significant difference between boys and girls when it comes to the different features of lexical transfer. In her dissertation (2010), Meriläinen did not find any significant differences between the two genders either. I find it reasonable to leave aside the issue of gender in my own study.

4 FEATURES OF LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC TRANSFER TO BE INVESTIGATED IN THIS PARTICULAR STUDY

I will go on by defining those features of lexical and syntactic transfer that I have chosen for my study. Before doing that, I find it necessary to begin by defining what is meant by *lexical transfer* in general. According to Meriläinen (2006: 82), lexical transfer (error) does not affect the overall syntactic structure of any given sentence or clause but only the lexical level of the language.

4.1 Loan translations

According to Ringbom (1987: 117), the term *loan translation*s refers to cases where the semantic properties of one item are transferred in a combination of lexical items. "*Child wagon*" for "*pram*" is one example on the phenomenon (ibid.) Odlin (1989: 37) talks about *calque*s instead of loan translation and defines calques as "errors that reflect very closely a native language structure". As Meriläinen (2010:74) puts it, "the word forms as such are correct but they do not signal the meanings the students assume them to signal". Meriläinen (2006: 91) also illustrates the matter by giving the following examples found in her corpus:

(9) I know that it´s hard to bring your own pet to *animaldoctor* (pro *vet*, cf. Fi. *eläinlääkäri*)

(10) In farm lives dogs and cats, of course, maybe they both *spend* there *cat´s days* (pro *lead an easy life*, cf. Fi. *viettää kissanpäiviä*)

Jarvis (2009: 114) also calls loan translations calques but more importantly points out that loan translations and collocations are closely related phenomena. There may not be need to separate those two categories of lexical transfer but perhaps to see them as a continuum (ibid).

In my opinion, errors that students make when using idioms can also be regarded as loan translations because they are more about errors on word meaning level than word use level. In this study, *idiom*s (like the Finnish equivalent in Meriläinen´s example number 10 above) are

defined as units that are conventionalized, syntactically or lexically rigid, consisting of more than one word (Nenonen 2002: 8). Furthermore, their meanings cannot be derived from the literal meaning of the individual words, that is, they are non- compositional (ibid.). According to Meriläinen (2006: 117), idioms can be categorized as lexical rather than syntactic units because idioms are independent and they do not necessarily affect the overall syntactic structure of a sentence. Meriläinen (2006: 118) also gives the following, interesting example of a student´s attempt to express a certain meaning in English by using a Finnish idiom.

(44) My head felt empty, my eyes were *standing in my head*, I was too tired to do anything, even sleep (pro *eyes staring wide open*, cf. Fi. *silmät seisoo päässä*)

Unfortunately, the meaning in the sentence above is probably not understandable to a native speaker of English because the expression used in English to describe the state of exhaustion is not the same as in Finnish.

4.2 Semantic extensions

The term semantic extension refers to cases where the L1 has a semantic influence on L2. According to Ringbom (1987: 116), *semantic extension*s occur when the learner takes over the semantic properties of an L1 equivalent, transfers them to a previously known L2 word and uses it in an extended sense. Ringbom (1987:117) gives an example on semantic extension in the sentence "He bit himself in the *language*" (Fi. *kieli* = both 'tongue' and 'language'). Meriläinen (2006: 92) also gives two examples of these in her licentiate thesis:

(12) The cat climbs beside man and lies down as near to man as possible starting to *spin* (pro *purr*, cf. Fi. *kehrätä* 'spin' and 'purr')

(13) If they have pet, it´s painful for them and they have to *lose* it (pro *put to sleep* cf. Fi. *hävittää* 'lose' or *lopettaa* 'stop')

When it comes to learning L2, semantic extensions can occur frequently especially in the early learning stage because of the learner´s limited vocabulary in L2. The learner may assume, without even realizing it, that when it comes to L1 words with multiple senses, the same range of meanings is available in L2 as in L1. Based on my own experience as a foreign language teacher, the use of semantic extensions as well as other features of language transfer is especially common among those students whose linguistic skill or awareness is below average on the strength of test results and who may also have difficulty writing in their mother tongue.

4.3 Collocations

In Nation´s theory concerning what is involved in knowing a word (2001: 56), *collocation*s answer the questions on what words or types of words occur with a particular word or what words or types of word we must use with it. James (1998: 152) defines *collocation*s as ”the other words any particular word normally keeps company with”. The question is which words typically precede and follow a certain word (ibid.). James (ibid.) categorizes collocations into three different groups: 1. semantically determined word selection (*crooked stick* but not **crooked year*), 2. combinations that have statistically weighted preferences (e.g. The army has suffered *big losses* vs. *heavy losses*, the latter combination being more common) and 3. arbitrary combinations (it is acceptable to say *make an attempt* and *have a try* but not * *have an attempt* or **make a try*). James (1998: 152) also points out that a collocation error can be either intra- or interlingual. When being interlingual, there is for instance the risk that a native German speaker might use combinations such as * *a high age or* * *a high amount* because of the German adjective *hoch* (high) collocates equally with nouns *Risiko* (“risk”), *Alter* (“age”) and *Summe* (“ amount”) whereas in English only the combination *high risk* is idiomatic.

Nation (2001: 56) gives the example of a collocation by asking whether it is more idiomatic to say *speedy food*, *quick food* or *fast food*. This example, although being a very basic

one, refers to the fact that the proper use of collocations often distinguishes even very advanced L2 (second language) learners from native speakers. Meriläinen (2010: 76) also gives two examples of incorrect usage of collocations in English:

(5.21) Most people have made a living to *bring up* animals (pro *rear*, cf. Fi. *kasvattaa* 'grow', 'bring up', 'rear')

(5.22) Everybody must *do* their choice themselves (pro *make*)

Another interesting example on collocations is the following (Meriläinen 2006: 127):

(78) I *read* my homework every day (pro *do*, cf. Fi. *lukea läksyt*)

4.4 The Progressive –ing form

Before presenting and discussing the cases with the progressive in my study, I will give some basic definitions of the use of progressive forms in English and define what is meant by s*yntactic transfer.*

According to Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 163, 171), the central functions for the progressive can be defined as "expressing a situation as in progress", "limited duration" and "future reference". Also Quirk & al (2005: 197, 210) refer to a happening in progress at a given time or referring to the future or to the future in the past, as in "*Are* you *going* to the meeting (tomorrow)?" and "They *were getting* married the following spring". Quirk & al (2005: 199) also give some examples of the progressive used to express an annoying habit as in "Bill *is always working* late at the office". Quirk & al (2005: 210) also give examples of attitudinal use of past tense or present tense when referring to a present wish or attitude: "I´*m hoping* to borrow some money" and " I *was wondering* if you could help me".

Similarly according to Biber & al. (1999: 470), the progressive aspect is used to describe activities or events that are in progress at a particular time, usually for a limited duration.

The present progressive describes events that are currently in progress or are about to take place in the near future. The past progressive describes events that were in progress or were about to take place at some earlier time (ibid.).

Biber & al. (1999: 471) also mention that the progressive aspect is most common in conversation and fiction. In conversation, most progressive phrases are in the present tense, while in fiction, most progressive verb phrases are in the past tense (ibid.). Verbs referring to activities and physical events (*shop, chase*, *dance*, *rain*, *sweat* etc.) occur very often with the progressive in conversation. Verbs referring to communication acts (*chat*, *joke* etc.) are very often used with the progressive as well (ibid.) Other verb categories that are common in the progressive aspect are verbs referring to mental or attitudinal states or activities (*look forward*, *study* etc), and verbs referring to perceptual states or activities (*watch*, *feel*, *listen* etc) (Biber & al 1999: 472). Surprisingly, Biber & al. state that both dynamic and stative verbs are included among the verbs in the progressive, not only the dynamic ones (ibid.).

In Meriläinen´s dissertation (2010: 111), *syntactic transfer* is understood in very general terms as L1 influence on the learner´s usage of target language (TL), i.e. English, syntactic structures. Meriläinen also refers to Braidi´s (1999: 2) definition of syntax as "the rules which govern the arrangement of words in the formation of sentences in a language". Braidi (1999: 3-4) observes the term *rule* in the acquisition of L2 grammar from four different points of view: 1. as the constraints and principles that linguists propose as a description of native-speaker competence, 2. native speaker´s competence rules meaning his or hers mental representations of the L1, 3. the learner´s interlanguage competence rules that he or she constructs while learning the L2 and 4. pedagogical rules that are formulated by linguists and other specialists as grammar instructions for L2 learners.

Syntax can hereby be understood as "the organizational principles that govern the placement and relationships of sentence elements", as Meriläinen (2010: 112) puts it. In my own study, I am going to follow the general definition of syntactic transfer presented by Braidi and Meriläinen above.

According to Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008: 94-95), one of the most intensively investigated phenomena related to grammatical morphology within the field of second language research is the expression of tense and aspect. As Jarvis & Pavlenko put it, it would seem probable by now for the field to have uncovered a great deal of evidence for transfer. Surprisingly, however, this has not been the case. According to Bardovi- Harlig (2000: 410-411), although universality and L1 influence usually are the questions involved when dealing with language transfer, no significant L1 effect has been identified in the longitudinal studies when it comes to acquisition of temporal expression. Bardovi- Harlig further suggests that it might be in the details rather than in the larger picture that first language influence is found.

According to Ranta (2006: 97), the correct use of the English progressive has often been seen in SLA research as a problem and one of the most challenging things to learn in the English language. Ranta (2006: 95) also notes that SLA research usually concentrates on learners´ deviant use of the target language as faulty and as a distraction to communication. Ranta (2006: 106-108) states in her study based on ELF speech corpus ELFA (ELF = English as Lingua Franca) that one of the verb groups that takes the progressive contrary to the descriptions in standard grammars are stative verbs. Stative verbs denote perceiving (e.g. *see*, *hear*) and an intellectual state or state of emotion (e.g. *know*, *like*) or relation (e.g. *depend on*, *belong to*). Ranta also found cases where the progressive was used to denote general validity or truth. Habitual activity and past points of time are also expressed using the progressive. Despite the fact that the vast majority, 87 % of the uses of the progressive by L2 learners were standard-like in her study, Ranta (2006: 111) suggests

that maybe the L2 learners assign the progressive form a totally different function. Ranta (2006: 112) concludes and suggests that the progressive –ing form of English verbs could be used to give extra prominence to the verb to ensure understanding. She underlines the communicative value of the ing- form in interaction, by giving the verb more prominence in the speaker´s utterance because it makes the verb stand out and draws attention to what the speaker wants to emphasize. Ranta also quotes Mair and Hundt´s (1995: 118-119) suggestion of the affective- emotional use of the progressive, as in *You´re always complaining*.

Dorn (2011) has also conducted a study on the progressives, but she has not tried to distinguish between the "correct" progressives and those ing- forms that do not fall into the typical categories of use for the progressives. Dorn was interested in finding out whether the progressive is communicatively effective in ELF (=English as Lingua Franca) communication or not. In her own study, Dorn separates historic progressive, i.e. the effect of making the utterance livelier, more vivid and more immediate from adding emphasis where the progressive is marked and thereby more prominent compared to the simple form. Ranta (2006) refers to the same thing by calling it communicative value of the progressive. Dorn also categorizes the unconventional use of the progressive as expressing frequent repetition and converging to someone´s speech. The latter means that a speaker uses one or more progressives and another speaker accommodates this by also using progressives (Dorn 2011: 19). To put it in a nutshell, Dorn suggests like Ranta that the progressive can have several communicative functions for the ELF speakers and the use of progressive should rather be regarded as something that facilitates the communication, instead of making it more difficult.

5 LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC TRANSFER IN THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Because of the limited extent of my research material, I am able to present each case on loan translation, semantic extension, collocation and the progressive –ing form found in my material. My aim was to see which type of lexical transfer occurs most and to find some possible explanations for the student´s choice of the particular expression in his or her essay and what he or she has meant when using it.

I had some difficulty classifying some of the examples of language transfer, especially distinguishing between loan translations and collocations. As mentioned earlier, Jarvis (2009) also sees these two categories closely related to each other. However, I will try to justify my choices of categorization.

I am going to present each case as they are written in the empirical material. In practice this means that in many cases, there may be, for instance, spelling errors or features of some other lexical transfer category than the one put under the microscope in the given subsection of this study. It is also possible that some cases with relevant lexical transfer features have not been noticed in this study, in spite of my effort to find every relevant case with a specific feature of language transfer.

5.1 Loan translations

In total, I found 11 cases where the writer had used a loan translation for one reason or other:

1) Family means different think *in the foreign countrys* (pro *abroad* or *in other countrie*s, cf. Fi. *ulkomailla* or *muissa maissa*)
2) You must fight for your *school numbers* (pro *grades*, cf. Fi. *koulunumerot, kouluarvosanat*)

3) That kind of children *are* usually either often *in problem*s or very independent (pro *are in trouble*, cf. Fi. *olla vaikeuksissa, ongelmissa*)

4) *It isn´t work what ends from this world* (pro *Work will not run out by working*, cf. Fi. *ei työt tekemällä lopu* or *ei työ ei tästä maailmasta lopu*)

5) Some families have stepmoms and stepdads, which can *make the amount* of parents in the family *rise* from two to four or even more (pro *raise the number*, cf. Fi. *nostaa lukumäärää*)

6) Children can´t *make food*, hoover the house or *wash laundrys* when they will move to an own apartment (pro *cook, do the laundry*, cf. Fi. *tehdä ruokaa, pestä pyykkiä*)

7) While *suffering* their sentences criminals can ponder their lives from a whole new perspective (pro *serve*, cf. Fi. *kärsiä* tuomionsa)

8) About my driving I also might *drive a little bit speeding* (pro *speed a little*, cf. Fi. *ajaa ylinopeutta*)

9) And why aren´t people been told of *open jobs* (*openings*, cf. Fi. *avoimet työpaikat*)

10) *Keep good care* of your children (pro *take*, cf. Fi. *pitää hyvää huolta*)

11) … you can *keep* fun holiday (pro *have fun on your holiday* or simply *have a fun holiday* cf. Fi. *pitää hauskaa lomalla* or *viettää hauska loma*)

In example 1, the writer has not been able to recall the proper word and has therefore used the word *foreign* in order to refer to other places than the homeland. In my opinion, another probable explanation is that the student did not have the proper word *abroad* in his or her lexicon in the first place. Not knowing the word, he or she may have simply come up with the expression "in the foreign countrys", hoping to convey the message he or she has had in mind.

Example 2 clearly exemplifies Meriläinen´s (2010) definition of a loan translation as "the word forms as such are correct but they do not signal the meanings the students assume them to signal".

Example 3 can be seen as open to interpretations when it comes to its category of lexical transfer but at least in some dialects of Finnish it is okay to say "olla ongelmissa" instead of

saying “olla vaikeuksissa”. I have chosen to categorize the expression as a loan translation because of the dialectal variation according to which the English expression is a direct translation from Finnish.

Example 4 illustrates how challenging it can be to express oneself when it comes to translating L1 idioms into L2. The risk of not getting it quite right is big. In example 5, the student has translated the Finnish meaning “saada vanhempien määrä nousemaan” directly into English.

In example 6, the student systematically translates the Finnish expressions word by word into English. Example 7 also exemplifies the direct translation from Finnish into English, as do examples 8-11 as well. In examples 10 and 11 one could also argue that the students have made a semantic extension when using the verb *keep*.

5.2 Semantic extensions

I found altogether 12 instances with semantic extension, many of which in my opinion reflect clearly how difficult it can be for a L2 learner to know the semantic restrictions a particular word possesses.

1)) …but in my opinion for example a shoplifter can learn his *homework* in prison (pro *lesson*, cf. Fi. *oppia läksynsä, oppia virheistään*)
2) I have no room in my *narrow* home (pro *little*, cf. Fi. *ahdas* in the sense of *pieni*)
3) I think all people should *be* brother or sister (pro *have*, cf. Fi. *pitäisi olla*)
4) And on the top of all almost every day a judge send some *new guilties* to prison (pro *convicts*, cf. Fi. *tuomion saaneita vankeja*)
5) …and it (the lamp) not *suite* in my bag (pro *fit into*, cf. Fi. *mahtua, sopia*)
6) In these day a job is very *costly* because there is no jobs like example here in Finland (pro *valuable thing*, cf. Fi. *arvokas, kallisarvoinen asia*)
7) The concept of a family is varied because different societies and cultures have their own *aspect* about it (pro *idea of* or *view on* it, cf. Fi. *käsitys* or *näkemys jostakin asiasta*)

8) To my mind family have an amazing *connection* and this *connection* means love (pro *communion*, *bond* or *tie*, cf. Fi. *yhteys*)

9) The basic *vision* of a prison is this: (pro *image* or i*dea*, cf. Fi. *käsitys, näkemys*)

10) I think the rapists and killers should be in a prison *end of their life* (pro *for the rest of their lives,* cf. Fi. *loppuelämänsä*)

11) Car driver casualties at least have stayed, maybe a bit *lowered* from year 2004 to year 2009 (pro *decreased*, cf. Fi. *vähentyä*)

12) If the weather is too cold for you, you can *warm* in sauna (pro *warm up*, cf. Fi. *lämmitellä*)

Example 1 is an illustrative example of how the learner takes over the semantic properties of the L1 equivalent ("läksy"), transfers them to a previously known L2 word ("homework") and uses it in an extended sense, to quote Ringbom´s (1987) definition. In example 2, the writer has probably thought the English word "narrow" to have the same semantic dimension as in Finnish, where the word "ahdas" can be used to refer either to narrow, cramped, strict or small places.

Example 3 typifies the difficulty for many Finns, especially those in their early stage of L2 learning, to distinguish between "have" and "be". This is understandable regarding the fact that there is only one equivalent in Finnish, "olla", for both meanings in English. Based on my own experience as a foreign language teacher, this difficulty is quite common in later stages of L2 learning as well, especially of those students who are not that good at analyzing language on an abstract level and as a linguistic system. In example 4, the student has been somewhat linguistically creative and decided to extend the meaning of the adjective "guilty" to cover nouns, too.

Example 5 is different from the other semantic extensions found in my study, because the student has clearly failed to recognize the semantic difference between " suit" as in " This work suits me (Fi. "sopia") and "This book does not fit into my bag (Fi. "mahtua"). In Finnish, both verbs, "mahtua" and "sopia" can be used for the meaning "to fit" but only "to suit" for the meaning

“sopia” in the sense of “ to be good good for someone” or “ to look good in specific clothes or colours”.

In example 6, the student has made both a semantic extension as well as used an incorrect collocation. A job can be valuable in the sense that it is of great importance but not costly in the sense of “expensive”. The student has also failed to notice that there should be a noun after the adjective.

Examples 7 and 8 entail semantic extensions of the Finnish words “näkemys, käsitys” and “yhteys”. In case 9, the writer has confused two things, the mental image (idea) of something and a vision concerning for instance future plans.

Example 10 is in my opinion especially interesting: the writer has extended the semantic meaning of the Finnish word “loppu” to cover all kinds of ends in English, without taking into consideration the final and definitive meaning of the word “end” in English. In example 11 the student has muddled up two different aspects: things decrease by themselves (Fi. *vähentyä*), whereas people lower them by doing something (Fi. *vähentää*).

Example 12 is especially interesting because the meanings of the verbs “warm” and “warm up” differ from each other: Either you warm for instance your hands by the fire or you need to warm up if you are cold.

5.3 Incorrect collocations

There are several examples of incorrect use of collocations (16 in total) in my research material. This sub-category of lexical transfer proved to constitute the largest one of them all. As Meriläinen (2006: 125-126) puts it, “the student has simply chosen an incorrect translation equivalent for the collocating word and often the difference in meaning between this item and the correct one was not very big”.

1) I have been watching your *range* and found an interesting item (pro *selection of goods* or *range of goods*, cf. Fi. *tavaravalikoima*)

2) There was a vase of *similar* price (pro that had *the same* price, cf. Fi. *sama*)

3) This said, we don´t need any more of nuclear energy, but we can´t yet *give it away* (pro *abondon*, cf. Fi. *luopua*)

4) I hope that a store of such high-quality as you are understands the needs of their customers and accepts this *proposition* (pro *suggestion* or *proposal*, cf. Fi. *ehdotus*)

5) …*learn* foreign cultures (pro *learn about* foreign cultures)

6) Also the work life competition can *make better* teamspirit *between employee* (pro *improve the team spirit* (*among the employees*), cf. Fi. *parantaa työntekijöiden ryhmähenkeä*).

7) I have heard a theory which said that family is people whose *use* the same fridge (pro *share*, cf. Fi. *käyttää* samaa jääkaappia)

8) We can also look the family from a different *view* (pro from a different *point of view,* cf. Fi. eri *näkökulma*sta)

9) Here in Finland we have, at least in my opinion, too *small* punishments (pro *mild*, cf. Fi. *lievät* rangaistukset)

10) Worse crimes, at least in my book, like murders and rapes don´t get as *big* punishments (pro *severe*, cf. Fi. *ankara* rangaistus)

11) Maybe you have to *abuse* the killer or do something else (pro *physically abuse*, cf. Fi. *pahoinpidellä*)

12) In my opinion, the hard decisions should be organized in such a way that you could *solve* those one by one (pro *make*, cf. Fi. *tehdä* päätöksiä).

13) The plane could suddenly *fall down* (pro *crash*, cf. Fi. *pudota alas*, *syöksyä*)

14) Some day car might *drive over* you but I think it will happen if it´s meant to be (pro *run over*, cf. Fi. *ajaa yli*)

15) If you have positive and good attitude for working, even those “not so brilliant” places, that´s enough and you´re going to *get far* because you are showing people that you can do anything (pro *go far*, cf. Fi. *päästä pitkälle*)

16) I hope that you *play* good season (pro *have,* cf. Fi. *pelata* hyvä kausi esim. jalkapallossa)

In example 1, the student did not know or remember that in the word “range” cannot be used alone in case one wants to express a (wide) sortiment/choice/assortment/selection of goods.

In example 2, the student has simply chosen an incorrect translation equivalent for the Finnish word “sama”, in the sense of “(exactly) the same”, instead of the meaning “ equivalent, corresponding”.

In example 3, the student has incomplete knowledge of what the English phrasal verb “give away” entails. In example 4, the student has failed to pay attention to the context (exchanging the received gift).

In example 5, the use of preposition “about” is crucial when the writer wants to express that getting to know new cultures can be interesting, intimidating etc.

In example 6, the verb “improve” would be much more suitable, considering the context. As to the word order, a sentence “Also the competition can make the team spirit better” would be more understandable to an English speaking person. However, the word order error is of a syntactic nature.

Example 7 features a typical example of the Finnish influence on the collocation in question. Undoubtedly, this case could be classified as loan translation as well (the Finnish verb “käyttää”). In example 8, the student has left out an essential part of the expression “näkökulma” in English. In my experience, this often happens because the student is not able to comprehend which words go together and constitute a meaning. In examples 9 and 10, the question is not about the size of the punishment but about its degree.

In example 11, the verb “abuse” needs to be preceded by the adverb “physically” in order to avoid other connotations. In example 12, the student presumably has experienced a moment of disbelief when choosing a verb to collocate with the noun “decision”. He or she may have been confused by two different expressions, “make hard decisions” and “solve difficult problems”.

In example 13, the writer has failed to distinguish the different meanings of the verbs “fall down” and “crash” in sentences like “I may fall down and hurt my back” and “the plane may

crash". Example 14 is a classic example of collocations, one is just supposed to "know" or to be more precise, learning the collocations in their natural contexts. In example 15, the student has chosen the verb "get" instead of "go" because of the Finnish equivalent, "päästä" = "get". This example could therefore be classified as a loan translation as well. In example 16, the student has chosen the verb "play" to go with the word "season" because in Finnish it is common to talk about playing when it is about players or teams having a good or bad season.

5.4 The progressive –ing- forms

I found surprisingly few cases with the progressive –ing- forms. There were 51 cases with progressive forms in total. One possible explanation could be the characteristics of the topics among which the students have chosen their respective topic to write their composition on. For instance, pondering the question "What is a family?" leads the student to consider the matter on general level, without necessarily referring to any specific point of time in the past, present or in future. To my mind, another factor might be that the Finnish students may avoid the use of progressive forms because they feel insecure about how to use them.

However, there are a few cases with the progressive ing-form that stand out as the ing-form has been used in a non-standard way. The cases are following:

1) *I´m pondering* in this article how different societies and cultures sees that who belongs to their family
2) I am glad that I can be here with all you guys. So I *am* here *telling* something about Finland for you.
3) The basic vision of a prison is this: a guard *is walking* the isle between the cells and *looking* at hands *comin*g out of these iron cages, where the criminals are doomed to spend their whole lives.
4) Of course when you *are travelling* it has own riskyes. You can never know what the hotel look like before you see it.
5) Everytime when you *are travelling* to upload, you should remember some things about travelling.

6) I also like competition between my swimming friends. When you *are swimming* on the pool you forget anything else and just concentrate on your result.

7) Little things that we do about even notice them *are happening* every day.

8) When you *has been thinkin*g all this, you can keep fun holiday, where ever you are!

9) I *have been watching* your range and found an interesting item.

In examples 1 and 2, the student should refer to the near future, that is, what he or she is going to do in the next paragraphs. The action, pondering or telling, is not taking place yet but it is about to. Therefore it would be more adequate to say "I am going to ponder" or "I will be pondering". When it comes to the reason why the speaker is in front of the audience in example 2, the writer should have formulated his or her sentence " I am here to tell" or in case of telling what is going to happen during the presentation, " I am going to tell you something about Finland".

In example 3, the writer describes how it (usually) looks in a prison, there is no progress going on in the given situation. In examples 4, 5 and 6, the writer means "every time you travel or swim". Therefore the use of progressive form is not justified. The same goes for example 7, where the temporal expression "every day" excludes the use of progressive.

In example 8, the idea behind the sentence is "once you have thought it all through". It expresses completed action, not action in progress. In example 9, the use of progressive form is possible when the writer means that he or she has taken a look at the items available several times and constantly, but more likely he or she means " I took a look at your range of goods and found an interesting item".

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In her licentiate thesis on lexical transfer errors made by Finnish upper secondary school students, Lea Meriläinen (2006) discovered semantic extensions to be the largest group of lexical transfer, both in the compositions written in 1990 and 2005. Collocational errors composed the second largest gro up of lexical transfer errors in her study. Her findings in her dissertation on language transfer from 2010 verify the earlier findings of hers concerning the semantic extensions. In her dissertation from 2010, she found 138 cases of semantic extension (2010: 90), 80 cases of loan translations (ibid.) and 42 cases of incorrect collocations (2010: 95) in total. Meriläinen´s corpus (2010: 52) consisted of 500 written English compositions by Finnish upper secondary school students (both Finnish and Swedish speaking), written as part of the Finnish national Matriculation Examination in 1990, 2005 and 2005. In her dissertation, Lea Meriläinen also investigated syntactic transfer but did not include the progressive ing-forms among the studied syntactic features.

In my study, I found 11 cases with loan translations, 12 cases with semantic extensions and 16 cases with incorrect collocations. My corpus is very limited in size but semantic extensions are frequent both in Meriläinen´s and my own research material. As for the loan translations and incorrect collocations, the difference in proportion between Meriläinen´s and my results may be due to different classification. It is often challenging to define whether it is about loan translation or collocation. The reason for the high proportion of loan translations among all the features of lexical transfer found in my study is that three students produced six out of the 11 cases of loan translation. This is also why one should not jump to any conclusions regarding the occurrence of loan translations in written English of Finnish students in general on the strength of my limited corpus. The proportional distribution of the features of lexical transfer in Meriläinen´s and my study can be seen in Figure 2.

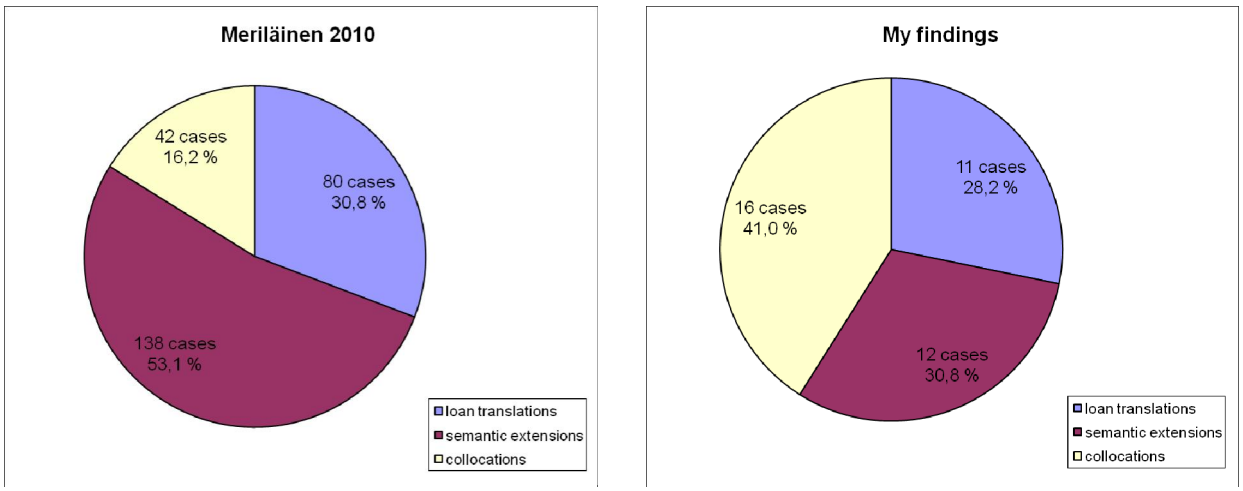

Figure 2.

The Finnish students often seem to have only one word for each concept in their mental lexicon and this particular word is then used, no matter what their semantic or collocational limitations are in English. However, loan translations are quite rare in my material, on the condition that the loan translations written by the aforementioned three students are left out of the findings, which in my opinion suggests that Finnish students´ general skills in English are good. I think an average Finnish student is more likely to resort to a direct translation from Finnish into English when he or she really does not know how the thing should be expressed in English, rather than translating meanings directly from Finnish into English without consciously paying any attention to the differences between the two languages. As for collocations, this may be the case as well. Meriläinen (2006) refers to Metso´s (1992) and Tarmo´s (1992) findings according to which boys are usually more willing to discuss things that do not necessarily have a right answer whereas girls prefer sticking to what they already know at school. Meriläinen interprets this to mean that boys are also more likely than girls to take a wild guess about which words might go together in English collocations whereas girls more often rely on their L1. I do not totally agree with Meriläinen´s interpretations because I do not see how a male student could possibly take a risk and simply guess

what words go hand in hand if he does not have several options in his mental lexicon to choose from in the first place.

According to Meriläinen, however, what is important is the fact that there is a clear decrease in all studied transfer categories, regarding loan translations, semantic extensions and collocations over the past 15 years. Meriläinen sees this development as reflecting the improved English skills of the Finnish upper secondary school students (2010: 196). As one possible explanation she offers the change that has taken place over the last two decades in the students´ formal and informal learning contexts (2010: 197). I agree with Meriläinen´s explanation, because the youth of today travel more, have access to Internet and use social media. They cannot avoid being exposed to English as English is everywhere. If one wants to improve his or hers lexical knowledge, it may not be enough to read the set textbooks at school. Naturally, it is the English teacher´s duty to offer as diverse learning opportunities and media as possible during the classes. However, obtaining really good language skills in English, especially a wide and rich vocabulary may also require voluntary involvement with English outside the formal English instruction, such as online computer games, active attendance at different forums for discussion on the web, reading newspapers, magazines or books, watching English films without subtitles as well as actively discussing with English speaking persons in the flesh. The ever increasing differences (those with good English skills are becoming better and better whereas those who do not have that good English skills lag behind more and more) in Finnish students´ English skills may be due to these school external activities.

Nevertheless, Meriläinen (2010: 187, 199, 201) points out that when it comes to syntactic features, the case seems to be the opposite. The frequencies of some syntactic transfer features seem even have increased (for instance prepositional constructions and future time) over the time. These results support the assumption that there is still need for formal education in English

grammar in Finnish schools. I am in agreement with Meriläinen here as well. Many students may think they know how to use the different English grammatical constructions without taking any particular notice of them. Many students may not be aware of the fact that the English used in advertising, music industry or casual activities is often characterized by slang or colloquial expressions. The same goes for grammatical constructions, they do not always follow the rules set for English grammar (e.g. *I ain´t got no money*).

As to deviant use of the progressive –ing forms in English, I found two main categories: The students tend to use the ing-form when referring to the near future (what they are about to do or planning to do next) or repeated action. According to different definitions on the use of progressive, future reference is one of the functions the progressive –ing form possesses. In the cases I found, however, the progressive –ing form was not suitable considering the context. If someone is going to or will be pondering some issue in his or hers composition but has not got down to business yet, it is not possible to say "I´m pondering in this article how…". The same goes for the intention of telling something about Finland to the audience: "So I am here telling something about Finland for you". The speaker has not got started yet telling anything to the audience. In cases with repeated action, it is common in English to use time adverbials (always, every time, every day etc). However, the progressive –ing form is normally not used for this purpose, only when it is about an annoying habit that someone keeps having (e.g. complaining, snoring, lying).

It could be argued, though, that we are not dealing with syntactic transfer here at all. The Finnish language does not have grammatical markers for progressive action and thereby there are no direct L1 effects on the use of the English –ing- form. However, I personally see the Finnish influence in the extended use of the progressive. The students tend to use the progressive –ing form in cases where its use is not justified. They may use it at random because they are not sure when to use it or, in many cases, use the progressive –ing form in order to be on the safe side.

As Meriläinen states in her licentiate thesis (2006: 183), most studies on lexical transfer have been conducted 20-30 years ago, including Finns as L2 learners. We should not draw drastic conclusions based on these studies when talking about the English skills of the Finnish youth today. We should also be careful when stating that lexical transfer has decreased, because it does not tell the whole truth about improved foreign language skills. The phenomenon is more complicated. In my opinion, it should be investigated with help of studies where the research material is extensive enough.

Meriläinen (2006: 183) suggests that the CA (contrastive analysis) might be useful in today´s formal classroom education of L2, too. Contrastive analysis could help the students to become more conscious of the differences between the L1 and L2 and also help them to avoid certain lexical and syntactic errors, even though the main emphasis must not be on errors but on the ability to communicate as effectively and smoothly as possible. I agree with Meriläinen on this. I am convinced it will not do any harm to contrast Finnish and English in the English classes, quite the contrary. The students´ linguistic awareness needs to be enhanced decisively, it will not improve by itself.

In order to better be able to understand the role of L1 and the process of L2 learning, more studies on the subject should be made in future. The question of how to teach students to learn English even better also demands better knowledge of the interaction between L1 and L2. Especially syntactic transfer has not been studied enough yet and maybe future researches in this particular field will give us more valuable information about the role of L1 on L2 learning.

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