

The Use of English among Finnish Early Education Immersion Children

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English Philology
Master's Thesis
June 2015

Tampereen yliopisto
Kieli-, käännös- ja kirjallisuustieteen yksikkö
Englantilainen filologia

VIITANEN, RAISA: The Use of English among Finnish Early Education Immersion Children

Pro gradu – tutkielma, 54 sivua + 4 liitettä

Kesäkuu 2015

Tutkielma käsittelee englanninkielistä kielikylpyopetusta Suomessa. Kyseisen opetusmetodin yleistymisen myötä ilmiötä tulisi tutkia laajemmin eri kielten osalta.

Tutkimus toteutettiin yhdessä tamperelaisessa kielikylpypäiväkodissa keväällä 2009. Tutkimusmenetelminä olivat kyselykaavake sekä havainnointi. Havainnoinnin tukena käytettiin videokuvausta. Päiväkotiryhmän havainnoinnin lisäksi tutkimuksessa käytettiin hyväksi havaintojani omien lasteni kielen kehityksestä kotioloissa. Tutkimusmateriaalit analysoitiin sekä määrällisen että laadullisen sisällönanalyysin keinoin.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli vastata seuraaviin kysymyksiin:

1. Kuinka paljon tutkimuksen kohteena olevat, kielikylpyyn osallistuvat lapset käyttävät englantia luokassa?
2. Millä tasolla lasten kieliopilliset ja leksikaaliset taidot ovat?
3. Millä tasolla lasten kielenymmärtäminen ja – tuottaminen ovat?
4. Kuinka paljon lapset käyttävät englantia luokan ulkopuolella?
5. Mikä on heidän asenteensa englannin kieltä kohtaan?

Tulokset osoittivat, että lapset käyttivät englantia vaihtelevasti sekä koulussa että kotona. Kieliopillisia virheitä tapahtui vielä runsaasti, mutta yleensä kommunikaatio ei silti häiriintynyt. Lasten kielenymmärtämisen todettiin olevan melko hyvää, mutta heidän puheentuottamisessaan oli vielä suurta vaihtelua. Asenne englannin kieltä kohtaan oli yleisesti hyvin positiivinen ja lapset tuntuivat viihtyvän kaksikielisessä ympäristössä. Englanninkielisen kielikylpyopetuksen tehokkuudesta ei pystytty tekemään kiistattomia johtopäätöksiä, mutta tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että ainakin kyseisellä ryhmällä kielen kehitys vaikutti olevan suurimmaksi osaksi melko helppoa ja nopeaa.

Vaikka kielikylpy on jo laajalti käytetty opetusmetodi, on se Suomessa vielä verrattain uusi ilmiö ja olisi suotavaa, että sitä tutkittaisiin laajemmin eri näkökulmista.

Asiasanat: language immersion, language acquisition, bilingual education, English teaching

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1. Introduction

Native language learning is thought of as rather simple and straightforward, and is presumed to progress quite automatically in most instances, whereas foreign language learning requires more effort. Therefore, language teachers and learners have attempted to create different approaches to make foreign language learning resemble learning one's native tongue. One solution has been language immersion. It is an approach to language learning and teaching that differs from other methods within the field. In immersion education the basic goal is to acquire a language rather than to study it. Learning happens through music, games and playing instead of studying grammar or syntax. Immersion education is often compared with teaching children to swim; you would not drop or throw a child into a swimming pool rather than gently immerse them into the water (Colburn 1999, 11). Baker describes the method with a graphic analogy:

“Immersion education paints a picture of moving gradually from the shallow to the deep end. Pupils are allowed to splash about in their home language while being taught the skills of swimming. Soon they move into deeper and deeper water, eventually acquiring the four basic strokes and skills to swim unaided in either language....” (Baker 1988, 47-48)

Even though immersion was first introduced over 40 years ago (e.g. Stanutz 1992, Genesee 1987), and has been systematically investigated right from the beginning (Laitinen 2001, 24, Swain & Lapkin 1982), there is not enough research available on the subject from the viewpoint of Finland, where the method is still relatively new and unfamiliar. Most Finnish studies are about Swedish immersion (Hämälä 1999, 53). Therefore, further research in Finland is needed among various age groups and languages.

This study concentrates on early education English immersion in one playschool in Tampere. The focus is on the language used by a group of Finnish children who attend an English immersion class. The study examines the amount of their foreign language use, in and outside the classroom, the level of their English skills and their attitude towards the English language. Whether

English immersion is appropriate and effective in the Finnish context is also investigated. More specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How much English do the studied children attending an immersion programme use inside the classroom?
2. What is the level of the children's English language skills in regards to grammatical and lexical accuracy?
3. What is the level of the children's receptive and productive skills?
4. How much English do the children use outside the classroom?
5. What is their attitude towards the English language?

My personal motivation for conducting a study about this particular area is, firstly, my two children, who attended the immersion playschool in question, and at the moment go to an international, English-language school, and secondly, my interest in language learning and teaching as a language teacher. I have worked as a substitute English teacher for several years and I aspire to teach English to children through my whole career. Furthermore, there is an obvious need for additional research on English immersion in Finland, since only a limited amount of previous research is available.

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In chapter 2 the theory of first and second language acquisition is examined. Chapter 3 introduces the concept of language immersion, discusses the historical aspects of the method, both internationally and in Finland, and describes the structure of the method. Some previous studies are also discussed. The methods and materials used for the research are presented in chapter 4 and the study results are discussed in chapter 5. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the findings with suggestions for further study.

2. Language acquisition

Since language immersion is practically more comparable with first language acquisition than foreign language learning per se, it is important to understand the basic evolution of a child's language acquisition. However, immersion *is* a foreign language learning environment, and therefore the development of second language acquisition needs to be appreciated as well.

There are two contradictory views of learning: the nativist and the behaviourist approach. The nativist approach relies on biology whereas the behaviourist approach emphasises social interaction. The dominant theories of cognitive development are based on the philosophies of two psychologists: Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget suggested that the child's cognitive development proceeds in distinct stages and is linked with biological development. For instance, he perceives the quite universal utterance 'mama' as baby syllables derived from the labial sounds indicating the act of sucking (Piaget 1959, 3-4). Vygotsky, on the other hand, saw a connection between the child's language development and the culture the child lives in. Vygotsky's view of the word 'mama' differs from that of Piaget's; he believes that 'mama' does not only mean 'mother' but also "Mama, come here" or "Mama, put me in the chair" and, in fact, the child's entire behaviour at that moment (Vygotsky 1962, 30). He claims that there is always an intentional tendency in speech and even before a child has discovered language or is able to operate logically, the first words are attempts to interact with another human being and substitute gestures (*ibid.*). Even though Piaget and Vygotsky approach language acquisition from contradictory views, Vygotsky values Piaget's theories greatly. According to Vygotsky, Piaget revolutionised the study of child language and thought (1962, 9).

Vygotsky claims that children will always try to interact with people around them, and thereby improve their skills of interaction. (See e.g. Oksaar 1983, 135, Oakley 2004, 13 and Knuutila 2009, 13.) Indeed, immersion programmes rely on this assumption, since in the method in question children

are placed in a situation that they do not speak the same language as the adults, who are taking care of them and teaching them in school. Nevertheless, they need to interact with the teachers in order to learn or communicate in general.

What differentiates acquisition from learning is that the first is related to unconscious knowledge *of* language and the second is related to conscious knowledge *about* language. Also, acquisition requires being part of a language community, whereas learning typically is a result of formal instruction (Williams & Snipper 1990, 37). As Knuutila (2009, 14) states, acquiring a mother tongue is not a simple task, even though much more straightforward in comparison with the demanding process of foreign language learning. A great deal of input and exposure to the target language is required in children's language acquisition.

According to linguists, second language acquisition (SLA) can in most instances proceed along the same lines as first language acquisition (Williams & Snipper 1990, 39). However, there are some differences. It is important to understand the stages of development in both of them when studying immersion as a language learning environment.

2.1 First language acquisition

When babies are born, they do not start learning a language, but acquiring it. According to Oksaar (1982, 146), there is a *critical age* during which one needs to be exposed to language in order for them to acquire it. Evidently, children leave this stage of development at puberty (ibid.). Therefore, it can be concluded that a child can only learn how to use any language, if they are exposed to it approximately before the age of thirteen.

Bowey states that a newborn infant's only vocal communication is crying (1994, 111). According to her, initially crying is not intentional, but merely a baby's response to feelings of discomfort, such as hunger, cold or pain. By the age of about six months, however, a baby has

discovered that their cry leads to parental response and comfort. As a result, the initial full-throated cry has developed into a “signature cry” indicating needs of attention (ibid.). In the first stages of acquisition, before actual language, infants and parents use gestures and body movements to interact with one another (Williams & Snipper 1990, 36). By the age of twelve months, a baby typically has learned to communicate by pointing (Bowey 1994, 113). Also, between the ages of 11 and 14 months most babies acquire their first dozen words, or as Bowey describes them, *vocables* (1994, 114). By combining these two skills, pointing and using vocables, a child has developed into a reasonably competent communicator. However, at the age of about 15 months a child is still quite limited in their ability to communicate, since they are unable to refer to objects which are out of sight (Bowey 1994, 113). A huge cognitive leap typically takes place at the age of 18 to 20 months when a child achieves the *naming insight* (Bowey 1994, 115). Naming indicates that a child is able to associate for instance the word “dog” to the family pet. However, Cook claims that at this stage a child’s objective is not merely to name things, but also to communicate about the things around them (1979, 5-6). For instance, by saying the word “dog” a child may also mean: “I want to pet the dog” or “I like the dog a lot”.

According to Williams & Snipper (1990, 36), children typically have a vocabulary of only 40 or 50 words by the age of 18 months, but they are already able to communicate a great deal by combining single-word utterances with gestures and context. A natural progression seems to occur after a few months from the first single-word utterances to two-word utterances, such as “all gone” and “daddy milk”. Bowey points out that a 20-month-old child has not yet acquired a language, but is well on the way (1994, 116). According to her, language acquisition can be referred to only after a child is able to combine words together in a grammatical and creative way (ibid.). Therefore, language acquisition can be considered as “a continuum with children moving from preverbal gestures to single-word expressions, two-word utterances, and finally complete expressions” (Williams & Snipper 1990, 37). After introducing the typical development of a child’s language acquisition, it

must be remembered that it is dangerous to make any generalisations about the age and pace of learning a certain aspect of language. As Cook states, all children go through the same stages in the same order, but the age and pace vary a great deal (1979, 11).

2.2 Second language acquisition

In traditional language learning, learners proceed in three stages of acquisition: the cognitive, associative and autonomous stages (O'Malley & Chamot 1990, 25). During the first, cognitive, stage learners are instructed how to perform a task, observe an expert doing it, or attempt to figure it out and study it themselves. Usually in language learning this consists of memorising vocabulary and grammar rules. The skill level at this stage is fairly primitive and errors tend to occur repeatedly. During the second stage, connections between different components of the language are strengthened and although errors may still occur, they are more often also detected. Even though language use becomes more fluent, the rules of grammar are still remembered. Achieving the third, autonomous stage, requires a relatively long period of time and practise from the learner. During this stage the skill has become virtually automatic and using the language demands far less effort and consciousness. In addition, communication hindering errors disappear. (Ibid.)

For bilinguals, second language acquisition more often resembles first language acquisition rather than traditional foreign language learning. According to Williams & Snipper, “preschool children removed from their native-language environment and placed in one governed by a different language will begin learning L2 in essentially the same way they were learning L1”, but for older children the process is not as straightforward since they will already utilise their L1 knowledge and experience (1990, 98). O'Malley & Chamot state that motivation is considered as an important element in language learning, but central to processing is the learner's cognitive system (1990, 11).

Williams & Snipper (1990, 39) introduce two types of bilinguals: compound bilingual and coordinate bilingual. A compound bilingual has acquired two languages at the same time from birth (ibid.). This type of bilingual has two first languages (L1). Both languages have developed in the same manner as anyone's first language does, and they can either be used interchangeably in any given situation, or separately, only by particular people in particular situations. A coordinate bilingual learns to speak in one language from birth and subsequently is exposed to another (ibid.). Thus, there is only one L1 and the other one is considered a second language (L2). Consequently, the children in immersion schools become coordinate bilinguals.

In immersion education, the children acquire L2 initially through routines (Mård 1995, 147). Their number one goal is to try and understand what they are expected to do in a given moment. An important contributor towards their understanding is also the non-verbal communication from the teachers, which enhances the children's learning. Contrary to L1 acquisition, in the early stages of immersion students do not necessarily adopt single words, rather than phrases in strong context during the every-day activities. Gradually, they start to pick up individual words from the familiar phrases (ibid.).

3. Language immersion

Immersion education has got its name from the verb *to immerse* (Colburn 1999, 11). This term is usually related to a calm movement associated with a liquid. Teaching a language through immersion is as if immersing a child into water gently and gradually until they are comfortable enough to dive in themselves. A child is immersed into the new language within “a controlled, caring and encouraging environment” (ibid.). According to Baker (2006, 361) the method is based on the idea that children learn their mother language rather subconsciously, without even being aware of learning a language. By mostly omitting grammar, syntax and other formal aspects of language during the early stages of immersion teaching, that subconscious nature of learning is exactly what immersion education is aiming at. In order to reinforce and promote communication, the language system is introduced to the children in the later stages of immersion. As in any other language learning environment, grammar and syntax are presented and practised when the children’s language skills improve.

Although the structure of immersion education has become well established internationally, there is some diversity in the implementation of the method. The differences mainly concern the age of entering the programme and the amount of time used to teach in the immersion language during the day. Based on the age of the child at the beginning of immersion, a division into three different forms can be made: *early*, *middle* and *late immersion*. According to the amount of the immersion language introduced to the child daily, two types of teaching, *partial* and *total*, are applied. These different forms will be introduced in more detail in section 3.1.2.

As Knuutila states, it is highly important in which kind of environment a second language is learned (2009, 20). Clearly, learners who feel uncomfortable, embarrassed or self-conscious do not perform as well as possible. Creating a relaxed, secure setting in the classroom, as well as in the entire establishment, is of the essence. In addition, the teachers need to be approachable,

caring and encouraging. It is essential that the children feel safe and happy, even though they do not share a language with the teachers at first. Also, the language used in immersion should be interesting and relevant. It should motivate the children towards learning and provide them with opportunities to communicate in the target language.

A key factor in the success of immersion programmes, is the voluntary nature of participation. The children are enrolled in the programme by their parents, who have chosen the method freely, which enhances the results. By deciding to place their children in immersion education the parents are not merely supporting their children, but also the whole programme. This support adds a positive effect to the children's motivation and attitude. (Colburn 1999, 13)

3.1 The main features of immersion teaching

Unlike traditional language teaching, immersion is a second language teaching method that surrounds or "immerses" a child with the language. The target language is used for all the functions of the school during each day, in as natural and meaningful contexts as possible. Therefore, in immersion the language is treated as a tool rather than merely the goal of teaching. In an early education immersion classroom the teacher has a very active role, since they need to participate in all the activities during the school day, such as playing, singing and reading stories in the target language (Knuutila 2009, 20-21). In addition, characteristics like, for instance, approachability, patience and intelligibility are needed from the teachers (ibid.). During the early stages of immersion, the teacher is basically an equivalent of a text book in traditional language teaching. Therefore, the teachers should aim at clear, easily comprehensible speech. Also, an awareness of each child's language skills is needed, in order for the teacher to adjust their expectations accordingly (ibid.).

In the early stages of immersion, children are not made to speak in the target language (Baker 2006, 308). Insistence in the beginning might result in a negative attitude towards the immersion language and the teachers. The initial goal is to promote understanding of the language.

Gradually, more emphasis is put on the use of language by the children as they start to communicate with the teachers. A previous study by Blanco-Iglesias et al. (1995, 245-249) shows that children tend to use mainly their mother tongue when communicating with their peers for as long as a couple of years into the programme. Until then, they use the immersion language only when addressing their teachers. Usually, during the third year the use of the mother tongue diminishes and the children feel comfortable enough to use the immersion language in most interaction situations (Blanco-Iglesias et al. 1995, 245-249).

Laitinen (2001, 26-32) lists the “defining characteristics of an immersion programme”, which work as a set of core features in most immersion programmes. The characteristics are:

1. The language background of the pupils should be homogenous. Usually the pupils’ native language is the dominant language of the society in question.
2. The target language should be the medium of instruction, as a means for maximum quantity of comprehensible input and purposeful use of the language in the classroom.
3. The teachers should be bilingual themselves, that is they must have a “native-like” knowledge of the target language and also be sufficiently proficient in the children’s native language to be able to understand them when they use it.
4. The teachers should follow the *Grammont principle*: one teacher – one language. That means that the teachers speak to the children in the target language in all situations, in and outside the classroom.
5. A thorough pedagogical training and a devotion to their work is needed from the teachers. Above all they have to be capable of establishing effective communication with the pupils.
6. The immersion curriculum must parallel the local native language curriculum. Also the classroom culture is that of the local community.
7. Pupils should have a positive attitude and motivation to the target language and attending the programme ought to be a voluntary option taken by the parents.

8. Native language instruction must not be overlooked. Pupils should achieve the same level of competence in their home language as in the target language.
9. Immersion programmes aim at bilingualism, where the native language proficiency of the pupils is the same as that of pupils who have studied in their home language, and the target language proficiency is high, though not native-like.
10. Parental and community support and involvement are essential for an immersion programme.

Whether these principles are typically implemented or not in the Finnish context, is discussed briefly in section 3.2.2.

3.1.1 Origins of immersion education

Over the years immersion education has become well established internationally (Knuutila 2009, 19). Nowadays it occurs all over the world in different languages. According to Genesee bilingual education has most likely existed since the very beginning of formal education (1987, 11). Often enough, the second language used to be a teaching medium and the students became bilingual as by-product (ibid.). On the record, however, immersion teaching was first founded in Canada in the 1960's. English speaking Canadian parents wished their children to become bilingual in French alongside with English (Stanutz 1992, 46). According to Tarone (2006, 165), applied linguists, such as Wallace Lambert, sought to find a more effective way to produce truly bilingual children, since traditional language teaching was not successful enough. Lambert and his colleagues noticed that children who moved to France seemed to acquire the French language 'through immersion', without formal teaching and achieved great results. Accordingly, the linguists in Canada developed the first French immersion schools with the notion of surrounding the children with the French language through the entire school day, just as if they were in France. It was reasoned that this type of education

would provide the children with the same conditions as those who had moved abroad and also result in the same resounding success (ibid.).

The ultimate goal behind the Canadian immersion was to teach children, who speak a majority language in their community, in a local minority language (Laurén 1991, 19). Laurén emphasizes that the Canadian immersion should not be confused with the immersion programs in the United States that aim at integrating minority children to the English speaking population. Losing one's own language and cultural identity is exactly what the Canadian program wishes to avoid. In immersion education the purpose is to produce bilingual children. Therefore, learning a second language should not interfere with a child's native language (ibid.) (More about this in section 3.1.3.)

3.1.2 Different forms of immersion education

Since the first immersion programmes in Canada in the 1960s, immersion has expanded dramatically (Genesee 1987, 19). Programmes are nowadays available in various forms and in numerous different languages. The alternative forms of immersion differ primarily with respect to the age of the child when the second language teaching begins. Therefore there is a division into *early*, *middle* (or *delayed*) and *late immersion* (ibid.). *Early immersion* is the term used when the language learning begins at kindergarten level or when starting school. If the programme begins at primary school level, with nine or ten year-olds, it is called *middle immersion*. *Late immersion* occurs if the language is introduced at the secondary school level (Colburn 1999, 11).

On a secondary basis the differentiation can be made according to the amount of teaching provided in the second language. These different types are called *total* and *partial*. In *total immersion* programmes 100% of instruction is offered in the immersion language. After a few years, the amount of instruction given in the first language increases, while second language teaching is reduced to 80%. By the upper grades, both languages are given approximately equal time and

emphasis. The title *partial immersion* is given for teaching that offers up to 50% of instruction in the immersion language throughout the programme (Colburn 1999, 11-12).

The children participating in this study are all attending a *total, early immersion* programme. They have entered the kindergarten at the age of three, four or five.

3.1.3 Previous research

When early immersion programmes initially began, its developers believed that children would learn a language much more easily by communicating with the language rather than being taught it. Still, there were no guarantees that the method would actually work and many educators were sceptical (Cummins & Swain 1986, 44). Therefore, immersion has been under a lot of scrutiny over the years. As stated by Laitinen (2001, 23), language immersion is one of the most studied forms of bilingual education.

According to previous studies, language immersion is an effective teaching method, which does not hinder with one's mother tongue development (Järvinen et al. 1999, 237). Järvinen et al. (1999, 238) continue with the notion that immersion students gain the same level of understanding of the target language as do native speakers, but their reading and writing skills stay at a lower level. Lyster (1999, 99-100) adds that "immersion students develop relatively low levels of sociolinguistic competence in comparison with native speakers". He claims that this is a result from the students not using the target language in different social situations (*ibid.*). However, as Cummins & Swain validly point out, immersion students have out-performed those who are in mainstream foreign language teaching in each and every study (1986, 44). Therefore it has been proven to be more effective than traditional teaching methods. When compared to native-speakers, immersion students have shown equal receptive skills, which means that they are as able to understand both spoken and written language as native-speakers. On the other hand, immersion students' productive skills do not quite

compare with those of native-speakers. Hence, it can be concluded that native-like proficiency in speaking and writing the language is not necessarily attained (Cummins & Swain 1986, 45-46). Still, most linguists agree that through immersion better learning results are gained than through any other teaching method, and also the immersion students develop a positive attitude towards the culture of the target language (Stanutz 1992, 60, Järvinen et al. 1999, 238).

According to Cummins & Swain (1986, 40), there has been parental concern that immersion might have a negative effect on first language development. This concern was the initial reason for the existence of early partial immersion programmes. However, these fears have been proven to have no basis at all, since the children are members of the dominant linguistic majority and are surrounded by their first language all of their “out-of-school life” (ibid.). Cummins & Swain also state that although immersion students may initially fall behind in literacy skills compared to their monolingual peers, within a year they tend to close the gap, or even out-perform them in certain aspects (1986, 40-41). Another feature that speaks on behalf of total immersion is that if literacy-related skills are learned and mastered in only one language at first, either in first or second language, the skills will transfer to the other language more easily, possibly even without explicit instruction. Whereas using two languages side by side may cause confusion, which takes time to sort itself out. These points have been proven valid by numerous previous studies (Cummins & Swain 1986, 40-43).

Previous research has confirmed that immersion is the most effective teaching method for providing students with as close to native-like language skills as possible. Indeed, it entails an adequately long period of time, for instance throughout the child’s elementary education. The longer and the more extensive the language exposure is, the better results are gained (Markkula & Suurla 1997, 93).

3.2 Language immersion in Finland

Immersion education in English first began in Finland in Kokkola in the 1970s (Laitinen 1999, 5). Until then there had only been Swedish immersion aimed at the preservation of Finland's bilingualism (Laurén 1991, 19). Since then the method has spread throughout the country and is already available in most of the larger cities and at different educational levels (Markkula & Suurla 1997, 50).

In Finland, the most popular form of immersion teaching is *early total immersion* (introduced in section 3.1.2), which means that the children are 3-6 years old at the beginning of the immersion, and all of the teaching is conducted with the target language. In addition, the immersion usually continues all the way through elementary school (Hämälä 1999, 51).

Whether English immersion in Finland has resulted in its desired outcome or not is yet difficult to determine. Although immersion has been widely studied, only a limited amount of research on English immersion in the Finnish context is available. Most of the studies concentrate on the immersion students' use of certain expressions or grammar aspects, rather than the actual effectiveness of the method.

3.2.1 The role of English in Finland

The Finnish population was first introduced to the English language in the early 1900's (Nikula 2008, 17). During the time period between the 1940's and 1960's the status of English started stabilising in Finland due to the development of international trade and business as well as the emergence of American film and music industry. Also, programmes in English started airing in the Finnish television (ibid.). Nevertheless, from the 1960's up until the 1980's English was considered as a foreign language that was studied and used in order to be able to communicate with foreigners (Nikula 2008, 16). Gradually, the situation has developed. In the 1990's the importance of English in Finland

increased dramatically. Finland became a part of the European Union in 1995 as well as gained a status of a country with high level of skills in technology and the information and communications industry. Also, there was an increase in English language education from primary school level all the way up to universities. The use of English increased in science, media, popular culture and work places (ibid.).

During the beginning of the 21st century English has become even more important in Finland. Today, it is undoubtedly the most popular and well mastered foreign language in the country. A clear indication of the popularity of English is that out of all secondary school graduates in 2006 nearly everyone, 99,5 percent, had studied English (Nikula 2008, 20).

In 2007, a national survey about English in Finland was conducted. To sum up, this is what the results revealed:

The survey confirms that English has a strong presence in Finland. English is the most widely studied language and the foreign language most commonly used. Finns also assess their own skills in English as relatively good. In addition, Finns' overall attitudes to English are quite positive and pragmatic and they do not consider English a threat to the Finnish language and culture. Instead, the knowledge of English is considered an essential resource in the increasingly multicultural and globalizing world. (Internet source 1)

3.2.2 Challenges of the concept in the Finnish context

Although language immersion has proven to be an effective method, it does have its challenges as well. As Baker states (2006, 275), there are several limitations in immersion education that were not noticed in the early evaluations. For instance, some immersion students tend to lack in grammatical accuracy and in the social and stylistic sense of appropriate language use. These features are related to the restricted language of the classroom. Since the students communicate only with other students and teachers, the social environment is restricted and understanding each other does not necessarily require grammatical accuracy. Also, the vocabulary may be mainly school-related (ibid.). This

limitation may well apply to the Finnish context, since children in immersion programmes might not have any other contact to the English language outside the classroom. Hence, their vocabulary might only consist of words and phrases used in the school environment.

Furthermore, according to previous research, immersion students relatively seldom make use of their second language abilities outside the school or after leaving school (Baker 2006, 276). Most immersion programmes are located in communities where the dominant language is the immersion students' first language. Therefore, there is a natural shift of language when children move from school to playground (*ibid.*). This limitation is also applicable in Finland on the same basis as the first one.

According to Nikula (2008, 44), most European foreign language teachers are not native speakers, but like their students, also speak the language as foreign language. This could be seen as one of the major limitations of immersion teaching in Finland. Even though the requirements for the skill level that foreign language teachers need to have were altered in 1999 (Nikula 2008, 45), many teachers still lack in proficiency. One of the main features of immersion education is that the teachers should be bilingual themselves (see 3.1). Apparently, this does not apply to most cases. In the study conducted for this thesis, none of the teachers in the classroom had native-like proficiency in English.

Tarone points out that teenagers in immersion programmes may not learn to use the current "teen vernacular" in the target language, if their out-of-school communication is mostly in the community's majority language (2006, 167-168). They will most likely resort to their mother tongue, when interacting with other teenagers outside school hours, if they have not picked up the correct terminology from outside sources. As Tarone points out, the teachers in immersion classrooms would seem ridiculous, if they tried to emulate the talk of adolescents (*ibid.*). However, this concern may not be valid in the Finnish context, since the teen vernacular in Finland to a great extent is based on "Finglish", that is Finnish mixed with English, as well as on English terms and phrases derived from popular culture and social media. Indeed, it is highly important for a teenager to acquire an

adolescent identity to reinforce their sense of belonging to a particular group. This feature cannot be obtained by using academic language only.

According to Hämälä, there have been reservations whether English is a suitable immersion language in Finland, since it is not “a natural means of communication in the near surroundings”, as it should be, according to the Canadian model (1999, 52). The biggest disadvantage of not having the immersion language spoken in the surrounding community is the lack of exposure to informal or colloquial language. Nevertheless, English has gained more and more orbit in Finland, and has eventually gained the unofficial status of the country’s “third language” (Nikula & Kääntä 2008). Therefore, the language input also outside school hours may well be sufficient.

4. Material and methods

The material for this study was collected using ethnographic and questionnaire methodology, and analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Even though the term quantitative often refers to numbers and the term qualitative to meanings, they are not necessarily each other's opposites, but can be used side by side (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 136-137). Some of the key features in the quantitative approach are the selection of participants for the study as well as categorising the material into tables or other statistically organisable forms (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 140). Quantitative analysis was used in this study, because there was a need to define the group of participants as well as to organise the results into coherent categories. A questionnaire was conducted (see appendice 3 and 4), in which some of the questions were intended to determine the structure of the study group and the rest of the questions were aimed at answering the actual study questions. Consequently, the questionnaire was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

According to Hirsjärvi et al., if a research aims at examining people's actions in public, observational methods are most suitable (2009, 185). It is common in qualitative research to gather the study material by observing people in genuine situations and natural surroundings (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 164). Therefore, in addition to using a questionnaire, observational methodology was also used. In order to gain ethnographic data, a group of children in an immersion classroom were filmed during daily and weekly situations in 2009.

Furthermore, I wrote down my observations of my own children's language learning during the first nine months in immersion. Hence, the gathered study material is the data gained from the filled in questionnaires, my observations at home and filming in the classroom. Each filming session lasted approximately 60 minutes; thus I have a total of three hours of filmed material.

4.1 The school

The study was conducted in The International Early Education Center (IEEC) in Tampere. Approximately 100 children aged from three to six attended the school at the time of the study, along with almost 20 staff members (the number of staff members depends on how many assistants, trainees etc. there are at the time). The school offers licensed private education, and city sponsored day-care and preschool. The goal of the school is to teach the children in a positive and praising atmosphere. In addition to teaching (in) a foreign language, the school aims at providing the children with skills that are needed in particular stages of development. The curriculum of the school includes language education, music, art, social studies, mathematics, science and physical education. Integrated in the curriculum is The Virtues Project™, which offers the children training in virtues, such as friendliness, honesty, responsibility and co-operation¹. The vision of The Virtues Project™ is to encourage people to live by their highest values by supporting their moral development. Since the virtues are integrated in the teaching on a daily basis, the school wishes the children to graduate with a good sense of right and wrong and with high morals and values. (Internet source 2)

4.2 The study group

The class that was studied consisted of 21 children altogether, with three adults teaching them. After sending a consent form and a questionnaire (see the appendice) to the homes of all the children in the class, the replies were analysed. Based on the analysis, 13 children were included in the study group. Altogether 16 answer sheets were received; 15 children were allowed to participate in the study, and all of their parents had also filled in the questionnaire. The remaining five families did not reply to the letter at all. Two children were omitted from the study, since they had attended the school for such

¹ More information about the Virtues Project from: <http://www.virtuesproject.com/homepage.html>

a short period of time (only a few weeks) that they were presumed still going through the *silent period* (introduced in chapter 5).

There were seven girls and six boys in the group. Eight of them were five years old, with one six-year-old and four four-year-olds. At the time of the study, the children had attended the school between six months and a year, except for two children for almost two years.

The study group	Age	Sex		The language spoken at home			Time spent at the immersion school
		Boy	Girl	Finnish	English	Something else, what?	
G1	5		x	x			7 months
G2	4		x	x			7 months
G3	5		x	x			2 years
G4	5		x	x	x	Urdu	1 year
G5	4		x	x			6 months
G6	5		x	x			6 months
G7	5		x	x			7 months
B1	5	x		x			2 years
B2	4	x		x			7 months
B3	5	x		x			7 months
B4	5	x		x			7 months
B5	4	x		x			6 months
B6	6	x		x			7 months

Table 1 The study group

The teachers are referred to in this study as T1, T2 and T3. T1 is a female teacher, who is originally from the Philippines and does not speak or understand Finnish. T2 is male and T3 female. Both of them are native Finnish class assistants. None of the teachers speak English as a native language.

4.3 Collecting the data

The whole process of data collecting in the school began with asking for permission to conduct the study in IEEC from the head of the school as well as from the teachers in question. The next step was to hand out consent forms to all the children in the class (appendice 1 and 2). The purpose of the forms was to inform the parents that their children will be filmed and researched in the classroom, and also give them the opportunity to decline their child from participating. Alongside with the consent form, a questionnaire was given to the parents (appendice 3 and 4). The questionnaire is described in section 4.3.3. After receiving both of the documents back from the parents the study group could be determined and the filming was able to start. The filming process is described in detail in section 4.3.1. The data collecting at home began in August 2008 when my children first entered the immersion school. Since the study material (i.e. my children) was present and available for my research purposes most of the time, I was able to write down observations as soon as I made them. Being in constant interaction with the children made it easy to take notes on their speech.

4.3.1 The questionnaire

One of the key methods of quantitative study is questionnaire. As stated by Hirsjärvi et al. (2009, 195), questionnaire methodology is an effective way to gain numerous responses to the same questions, which was the case with this study as well. A questionnaire was compiled and distributed to the whole class. Based on the responses the group of participants could be determined.

The questionnaire consists of ten questions. The purpose of the first five questions was to determine which children would be a part of the study group. From the answers to questions six to ten conclusions of the children's language use outside the school could be made.

There are five multiple choice questions on the questionnaire. The challenge with multiple choices is that the recipients may interpret the possible answers differently (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 202). For instance, one of the possible answers to question number six is *often*, and to some of the parents often might mean once a week, whereas someone else might interpret it as once a month. Therefore the results may not be totally conclusive. However, the possible invalidity of this one particular question does not significantly hinder with the analysis of the data.

There are also five open questions on the questionnaire. Open questions allow the recipients to answer in their own words and may introduce views and opinions the researchers themselves necessarily would not have realised (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009, 201). On the other hand, the answers to open questions may be left blank, if the recipient does not wish to consume more than a certain amount of time with the questionnaire. Although questionnaires are often considered as quantitative methods, the answers to open questions can also be analysed qualitatively, as in this particular study.

Some background information about the study group was gained from the answers to questions number one and two regarding the children's age and sex. Question number 3, language(s) spoken at home, was to determine whether the children came from a relatively homogenous language background. In question number 4 (*How long has your child attended IEEC?*), the aim was to ensure that the children had attended the school for approximately the same period of time. To investigate the children's English skills before entering the immersion programme, question number 5 inquired how much of the language the children were able to produce prior to the immersion. The actual study questions begin from question number 6: *Does your child speak English at home?* That is followed by question number 7: *With whom does the child speak English at home?* The previous questions

were attached with answer options whereas the questions to follow were open questions, such as question number 8: *In what situations does the child use English at home? Give examples.* Question number 9 examined the children's attitude towards the English language and in question number 10 parents were encouraged to write down any additional observations they might have.

4.3.1 The filming process

The study group was filmed and observed on three different days in February and March 2009. Two *morning circles* and one *show and tell* as well as one arts and crafts time were filmed. A *morning circle* is a routine, which begins each school day. The teachers together with the children discuss general topics, such as, which month it is, what day of the week it is, what the weather is like outside and how many children are present that day. As the school is a part of The Virtues Project™ (presented briefly in section 4.1), they also learn about their unit for the month and the virtue for that week. In a weekly *show and tell* the children bring an item from home (usually a book, a toy or a picture) and one at a time they have to go in front of the class and tell something about their item. The following table shows the date, length and activity in question as well as the attending participants.

Participants	Show and tell February 20 th 2009 33 minutes	Morning circle February 23 rd , 2009 52 minutes	Arts and crafts February 23 rd , 2009 29 minutes	Morning circle March 2 nd , 2009 55 minutes
G1	x	x	x	x
G2	x	x	x	x
G3				x
G4	x	x	x	x
G5				x
G6	x	x	x	x
G7	x	x	x	x
B1	x	x	x	x
B2	x	x	x	x
B3	x			x
B4				x
B5		x	x	x
B6	x	x	x	x
T1	x	x	x	x
T2	x	x	x	x
T3		x	x	x

Table 2 The filmed sessions: activity, date, duration and participants

On the days of the filming sessions, a camera was set up in the back of the classroom and the aim was to interfere with the regular classroom activities as little as possible. The teacher included me in the greeting part of the *morning circle* and at first the children were keen on asking me multiple questions, such as my reasons for being there with the camera, but after a while the children seemed to forget my presence.

4.3.2 Observations at home

My children started the immersion programme at the ages of four and five. During the first nine months of them attending the playschool, from August 2008 until May 2009, I wrote down my observations on their language development. As their knowledge of the English language was basically non-existent prior to starting in the programme, I was curious to observe the rate in which the acquisition was to happen and which kinds of expressions they were to begin using first. The observations were made during playtime, dinnertime, bedtime and other everyday situations. As an active mother who loves spending time with her children, I found it extremely fascinating and easy to research their language use. Whenever a newly acquired word or sentence structure emerged, I wrote it down. In the results section the children will be referred to as S (son) and D (daughter). I will refer to myself as M (mother).

4.4 The data analysis procedure

The first step of analysing the data was to read through the questionnaires and based on the answers to questions three, four and five it was determined which children to include in the study. The participants needed to be a relatively homogenous group, therefore the children needed to have a similar language background. Two children were omitted from the study group based on them attending the school for only a few weeks. Once the participants were chosen, the answers to the questions on the questionnaire could be analysed in more detail. The analysis was done both qualitatively and quantitatively. Questions number one through four were transcribed into a table, which shows the children's age, sex, home language(s) and time spent at the immersion programme (table 1 in 4.2). Numeric analyses also consisted of identifying and counting the number of same answers to each question. Next, also the replies to questions five, six, seven and eight were organised

into tables (table 3 in 6.1, tables 4, 5 and 6 in 6.4). The qualitative analysis included analysing what kind of words the parents had used to describe their children's language use at home and their attitude towards the English language.

The analysis procedure of the ethnographic material began by writing down the details of each filming session. Next, a table introducing the date, length, activity and the attending participants was compiled (table 2). During the analysis procedure, the filmed occasions were watched repeatedly and the parts that showed relevance regarding the study were also transcribed. From the transcriptions, it was possible to study the occurrences of the children's language use in class. Qualitative analysis of the participants' amount of English use, levels of grammatical accuracy as well as receptive and productive skills could be conducted. The results of individual children were then compared to their language use outside the school environment and their attitude towards the immersion language.

The observations at home were written down as soon as they occurred. After completing the analysis of the filmed material, it was determined which of the home observations were also relevant to the study. The next step was to divide the findings into the same coherent sections. Based on the analysis of all the study material, conclusions of the effectiveness of English immersion education in the Finnish context were attempted to make.

5. Results

The objective of this study was to examine a group of immersion children's language use in and outside the school environment. Their language skills as well as their attitude towards the immersion language were also investigated. As was already stated in section 2.1, when acquiring a language all children go through the same stages in the same order, but the age and pace vary a great deal (Cook 1979, 11). Based on the ethnographic material it was noticed that this applies to immersion as well, not merely to L1 acquisition or traditional school education. Differences were found in the children's receptive and productive skills alike. Therefore some inconsistency may be present in the findings. Also, the data gained from the questionnaire offered some inconclusive results. Answers to all the study questions were gained, but whether any general assumptions can be based on them, is yet to be determined.

5.1 The amount of English the children use in the classroom

There was a great deal of variation in the amount of English the participants used in the classroom. This may be explained by the fact that some of the children were still going through something that is called *silent period* (e.g. Knuutila 2009, 15) and some were already past it. The *silent period* is the period of time between the acquisition of the language and the time the learner actually starts to use it. As the following table (table 3) demonstrates, according to the children's parents, twelve of them spoke either a few words or not at all English before attending the school, only one child was able to manage in most situations beforehand.

5. Did your child speak English before attending IEEC?	
• Not at all	5
• A few words	7
• Simple phrases	0
• Moderately about familiar subjects	0
• Able to manage in most situations	1
• As a native language	0

Table 3 The answers to question number 5

However, participant B5, whose parents evaluated his language skills quite high, did not show significant superiority compared to the other children. He did not speak more English than others in class. At least one participant, G1, was still obviously going through the silent period, since she did not speak English in class even once, despite the teachers' encouragement.

According to Blanco-Iglesias et al. (1995, 245-249,) children tend to use mainly their mother tongue when communicating with their peers for as long as a couple of years into the programme. Until then, they use the immersion language only when addressing their teachers. It became obvious that this applies to the participants of the present study as well. The filmed material showed the children's ability to shift from one language to another depending on the situation. When the children played amongst themselves, they tended to use Finnish, whereas with the teachers they automatically attempted to communicate in English. The teachers encouraged the children to speak English, but if a child was not able to do so, they were allowed to express themselves in Finnish. After saying something in Finnish, the teacher told the child how it is said in English after which the child repeated that.

For instance, during the morning circle on February 23rd the children attempted to speak as much English as possible to the teacher. When T1 asked questions, the children always replied to her in English. However, as soon as the circle time was over and the children moved on to arts and crafts, they began speaking Finnish amongst each other. Still, if they needed assistance from the teachers, a shift back to English was made.

During the show and tell on February 20th, the differences in the amount of English the children produce in class, became evident. Participants G1, G2, B2 and B3 hardly said a word about their items, whereas G6, G7, B1 and B6 tried their best to talk in English as much as they could. The following example shows how determined G6 was to speak English, even though she struggled with it occasionally.

1) T1: Tell us about your book.

G6: I don't know how to say it.

T1: Does this book show honesty?

G6: Yes.

T1: Which part?

G6: Every part.

G6 [begins to explain the plot of the book]: She say I want food, then he say...

T1: She.

G6: Then she say may I have food. Then she say it properly... I don't member.

T1: You don't remember? Then she got food?

G6: Yes.

T1: And then, what happens then?

G6: Then he...

T1: She.

G6: Then she wants to go toilet.

T1: To the bathroom.

G6: To the bathroom. And then she say may I go to the bathroom. Then he go to the bathroom.

T1: Then *she went* to the bathroom.

G6: Then he...

T1: She, she. She is a girl.

G6: Then she wants his teddy bear.

T1: Her. Her teddy bear.

G6: And she got it. Then she wants to go outside. Then he saw a food. Then the monster say that is my food. Then he [the monster] say I want food. Then the little princess say: Say may I have food. Then he say may I have food. Then the little princess say: Say thank you. Then he say thank you.

T1: Where did you get this book? Who gave this to you?

G6: Mine...mine...my grandma give it me.

After only six months in the immersion programme, G6 was able to communicate quite effectively and told the story to the class in such proficiency that she was understood. Despite the mistakes in pronouns and tense, and with the help of the pictures in the book, the message came across without difficulty.

5.2 The children's English language skills in regards to grammatical and lexical accuracy

As Baker states (2006, 275), some immersion students tend to lack in grammatical accuracy and in the social and stylistic sense of appropriate language use. Also, since the students communicate only with other students and teachers, the social environment is restricted and understanding each other

does not necessarily require grammatical accuracy (ibid.). Examples of grammatical and lexical inaccuracy were detected in the present study.

There were several instances where the children deleted syllables from words, especially word-initially. According to Ingram (1979, 139) young children have a tendency of simplifying syllable structure due to specific phonological processes. One of the ways children use to simplify the syllable structure is the deletion of unstressed syllables. An unstressed syllable is deleted, especially if it precedes a stressed syllable (Ingram 1979, 140). Here are examples:

2) T1: Our virtue for this week is determination. Let's say it together: determination!

Everybody: Determination! (Repeatedly)

T1: What was our virtue?

B2: *Dermination.*

3) G6: Then she say it properly... I don't *member*.

T1: You don't remember?

4) T1: What did you do last weekend?

B5: I don't *member*.

5) T2: Admit when you've done something wrong.

B3: What is *mit*?

T2: Admit, *myöntää*. Tell the truth.

Since children are often told what *not* to do, negation seemed to be comprehended quite early in the immersion. Still, occasionally the children had some difficulty in forming negation. There were at least three occasions where the negative form was not quite correct, but the communication was still successful.

6) T2: “What are you doing?”

B1: “Not anything.” (Should be *nothing*.)

7) T3: “Who hasn’t done?”

G6: “Me don’t have.” (Should be *I haven’t*.)

8) T2: “What did I ask you to do?”

B5: “You didn’t ask me to do nothing.” (Should be *anything*.)

As can be seen from the following example, some of the children had difficulty in forming expressions which demand prepositions. This might be due to the fact that the Finnish language does not have prepositions.

9) B1: I don’t see the door. (Meaning: I *cannot* see *from* the door.)

Since the child was not able to form prepositions yet, it led to him not being understood by the teachers. Fortunately he was allowed to express himself in Finnish as well. Contrary to B1, who was not able to use prepositions yet, it is evident in the following example that D had acquired them already and used appropriate prepositions in the right places:

10) D: I don’t want this blanket *in* my bed, this goes *over* your feet.

5.3 The children's receptive and productive ability

In first language acquisition, children achieve the naming insight (introduced in chapter 2.1) in the early stages of language development (Bowey 1994, 115). Since language acquisition in immersion education proceeds along the same lines, it could be argued that one of the first features of immersion children's language development is naming. Consequently, the first occurrences of English use that were noticed while observing S and D at home, were examples of naming. For instance, there was a book in the classroom with pictures of animals of different colours. The teachers pointed to the animals and said *blue horse* or *green frog*, which made the children think that the names of the animals included the colour. Therefore at home S and D used to refer to any horse as *blue horse*. When they started learning colours, they understood that the animals are called *horse* and *frog*.

According to the children's parents additional comments in question number ten (Anything else you would like to say concerning your child's spoken English?), the receptive and productive skills of the children were on different levels. Apparently one child made up new "English" words, while another one understood English much better than they were able to use it themselves. Some children were only able to produce single words and short phrases, whereas some could already tell stories and use more complicated words and sentence structures. As Baker states, the initial goal of immersion teaching is to promote understanding of the language (2006, 308). The following examples demonstrate that the children clearly understood the language, even though they were not always able to reply in English.

11) T1: Where did you get that book?

G2: *Äiti osti sen mulle.*

T2: My mummy bought it.

G2: My mummy bought it.

12) T1: The snow is melting and it's going to be wet and muddy outside. What do we need to wear when we go outside?

Children: Rubber clothes!

13) T1: What is this shape? Is it a circle? Is it a triangle? Is it a square?

G7: Yes.

T1: It's a square. Say: it's a square.

G7: It's a square

A common phenomenon in the language use of children attending immersion schools is language mixing. Defining the terms of language mixing is somewhat complicated since many researchers use the same terminology to describe different concepts. However, in this study the term *borrowing* means adopting a word or a phrase from one language to another. The items are then integrated into the borrowing language and its syntactic structure. *Code switching*, on the other hand, is a related phenomenon, but, by contrast, the two languages are kept separate and their own distinct grammatical systems are used. Example number 13 demonstrates borrowing and number 14 is an example of a child code switching:

14) B6: Nyt pitää mennä *classiin*, kohta alkaa *circle*.²

15) G2: I would want a *puhtaan paperin*.

T1: What do you want?

G2: A *puhtaan paperin*.

T1: Can you say it in English?

G2: May I have a paper?

² In English: "We have to go to class now, the circle is about to begin."

Knuutila (2009, 26) claims that borrowing can be seen easier to use than code switching, because it is based on using only one grammatical system. Shifting from one system to another requires a higher degree of competence in both of the languages involved (*ibid.*). Therefore, it may be concluded that G2 had a relatively high level of skills and knowledge on the immersion language after only seven months in the programme. Based on Knuutila's study results, immersion pupils tend to use more code switching than borrowing, and are therefore able to use the two languages in a "sophisticated and skilful way to their own advantage" (2009, 47).

There are words that the children were used to saying in English even though they would speak Finnish otherwise, such as *class*, *circle*, *clean up*, *book*. According to Baker, immersion children's vocabulary often consists of mainly school-related words (2006, 275). Therefore language mixing among immersion children occurs frequently. The phenomenon apparently appears in both languages alike. In example number 15 the child knew the word in both languages, but had presumably acquired it in her native language at first and had decided to use the Finnish equivalent although she was speaking English otherwise. The children (D and S) were playing a game where they tried to find a picture of a worm from a pile of pictures. M was observing and interrupted the game with a question.

16) D: Where is the *mato*?

M: What is *mato* in English?

D: Worm.

D (turns back to the game and continues): Where is the *mato*?

Still, it is difficult to make any generalisations on the children's language skills, since they were going through different stages of learning. Some could already produce fluent speech, whereas others'

speech was limited to single words and simple phrases. It could be concluded that all the children had developed a relatively high level of comprehension ability, even though some were able to take in large quantities of information in the foreign language and others could tolerate simpler and shorter expressions.

5.4 The amount of English the children use outside the classroom

One of the possible limitations of immersion education is that the children seldom make use of their second language abilities outside the school or after leaving school (Baker 2006, 276). For that reason, this study aimed at examining the children's foreign language use outside the school environment. The filled in questionnaires as well as the observations made at home provided evidence on the issue.

According to the answers to question number 10 (Anything else you would like to say concerning your child's spoken English?), many children enjoyed talking in English at home. This was mentioned in 50 percent of the answers. However, some of the observations made by the parents were quite the opposites. For example, one child did not want to speak English at home with a parent, whereas two children "demanded" their parents to communicate in English with them.

Based on the answers to question number 6 (Does your child speak English at home?), the quantity of English the children produced at home varies quite a lot. The answers were distributed to almost all of the choices (see table 4). The tendency seemed to be that the children did use English at home, but there were three of those who do so almost never or never. This may be explained by the silent period factor once again (introduced in 6.1).

6. Does your child speak English at home?	
• Daily	6
• Often	2
• Occasionally	2
• Rarely	0
• Almost never	2
• Never	1

Table 4 The answers to question number 6

Table 5 shows that the children spoke English mainly with their parents and siblings, three of the informants mentioned grandparents as well.

7. With whom does the child speak English at home?	
• Parent(s)	9
• Sibling(s)	5
• Someone else, who?	3

Table 5 The answers to question number 7

From the answers to question number 8 (In what situations does the child use English at home? Give examples) it became obvious that the children used English in various different situations (see table 6). Actually, the actions involved in these situations seem to cover most of a small child's daily functions. Every-day routines, such as eating, getting dressed and undressed, going to the toilet and

cleaning up, are the most important learning situations in an immersion class. As Kivistö (1991, 37) mentions, children learn to use the daily vocabulary through practice, by following the teachers' examples and using language as a tool. However, as children grow, the need for exposure to more abstract language increases.

8. In what situations does the child use English at home? Give examples	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyday situations • Eating • Playing • Counting • Singing • Greeting • Communicating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting dressed / undressed • Asking questions (“May I have...?” etc.) • Translating (E.g. songs played on the radio) • Asking for meanings of words • Watching films in English • Telling stories • Rhyming

Table 6 The answers to question number 8

At home, my children were keen to use English as soon as they were able to. Their productive ability seemed to improve quite rapidly. Especially my four-year-old daughter adopted the language into play situations also at home. Even though we would speak Finnish at home, as soon as she went to her room to play, she started to speak English by herself. As stated before, every-day routines are the most important learning situations in an immersion class (Kivistö 1991, 37). According to my observations at home, the vocabulary that the children adopt first in immersion is concerned with daily routines. For example, in the first few days of school, my children learned the expression: *Milk, please*. As a result, they used the phrase also at home during meal times. Next they added the word *more* in front of the phrase. In a couple of weeks they began to use the whole sentence: *May I have more milk, please*.

There were some expressions that my children learned early on in the immersion. Since those expressions became a natural part of their speech production, once their vocabulary grew, they began using the same structures also for sentences that require a different structure. “May I go to the bathroom?” became also: “May I go to *the* pee?” Using an article with a verb is such a minor error that it does not hinder communication nor is it a mistake easy to explain to a child. It is a type of error that occurs frequently, and the children will learn to use articles correctly much later on. Also, “Go brush your teeth, please” became: “I go brush *your* teeth.” These mistakes happened when the children had been attending the school for only two months, soon after they were able to use the correct form, “*my* teeth”.

The following conversation took place in December 2008, after spending only four months in the immersion programme.

17) S: Analinilla [T1] oli tänään poskessa laastari. Mä kysyin ”Why you not take off plaster?”

M: Mitä Analin vastasi?

S: ”Because it hurts. Doctor take off this plaster.”³

The following examples are from March 2009.

18) D: You are still eating.

S: No, I’m not.

D: You are not yet ready.

19) D: Look what [S’s name] did. Don’t do that anymore!

³ In English: S: Analin [T1] had a plaster on her cheek today. I asked ”Why you not take off plaster?” M: What did Analin reply?

5.5 The children's attitude towards the English language

Based on the answers to question number nine on the questionnaire, the children's attitudes towards the English language were mainly positive. In eleven answer sheets the word "positive" was mentioned, and eight parents used the word "enthusiastic" to describe their child's attitude. From the three children who almost never or never speak English at home, two still had a positive outlook on the language. Only one of them felt frustrated and did not like to attend the school. In the positive comments the parents mentioned their child being "keen to learn new words", "ambitious and focused" and "proud of their growing abilities".

Ten of the parents had added comments to question number 10 (Anything else you would like to say concerning your child's spoken English?). Three had even continued on the reverse side of the paper. Their comments shed more light on the children's attitudes towards the language as well as being in the programme. However, the parents' observations differed from each other to the extent that it is difficult to make any generalisations about them. One parent mentioned that their child used English at school only with the teachers, and always Finnish with the children, which already became evident from the ethnographic data. This seems to be common with immersion children and may be explained by the *silent period* factor.

According to three parents, their children appeared to feel pride in their newly acquired abilities, some even to the point of bragging about them to children who do not speak English at all. Based on the observations at home, I can agree with these parents. My children's attitude towards the language was extremely positive and enthusiastic. They seemed to adopt the language quite naturally and felt comfortable in using the new language from the very beginning.

5.6 The effectiveness of immersion among the study group

According to three children's parents' comments to question number 10 (Anything else you would like to say concerning your child's spoken English?), their child's development as an English speaker

was “surprisingly fast and easy”. In addition, three children had acquired particular phrases in English in such depth that they rarely used their Finnish equivalents. These terms were mostly school related, such as *class*.

Furthermore, the skills that the study participants showed to have acquired in the previously discussed results, all speak on behalf of the immersion method being effective among the group. It must be born in mind that the children had attended the school for only a relatively short period of time and any radical assumptions at this point would be premature. Nevertheless, all the children in the study group showed development in at least their receptive skills. In order to gain more conclusive results, a follow-up study should be conducted.

6. Conclusion

This study concentrated on early education English immersion in one playschool in Tampere. The focus was on the language used by a group of Finnish children who attended an English immersion class. The study examined the amount of their foreign language use, in and outside the classroom, the level of their English skills and their attitude towards the English language. Whether English immersion is appropriate and effective in the Finnish context was also investigated. More specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How much English do the studied children attending an immersion programme use inside the classroom?
2. What is the level of the children's English language skills in regards to grammatical and lexical accuracy?
3. What is the level of the children's receptive and productive skills?
4. How much English do the children use outside the classroom?
5. What is their attitude towards the English language?

The material for the study was collected using ethnographic and questionnaire methodology, and analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis was used in this study, because there was a need to define the group of subjects as well as to organise the results into coherent sections. A questionnaire was conducted and later on analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. In addition to using a questionnaire, observational methodology was also used. In order to gain ethnographic data, a group of children in an immersion classroom were filmed during daily and weekly situations in 2009. Furthermore, I wrote down my observations of my own children's language learning during the first nine months in immersion. Hence, the gathered study material was

the data gained from the filled in questionnaires, my observations at home and filming in the classroom.

Based on the study results, it can be concluded that the children did use English in the classroom, but the amount varied a great deal. When the children played amongst themselves, they tended to use Finnish, whereas with the teachers they automatically attempted to communicate in English. The participants showed ability to shift from one language to another depending on the situation.

The children's English language skills in regards to grammatical accuracy was one of the study questions. Examples of grammatical and lexical inaccuracy were detected in the present study. However, since the students communicated only with other students and teachers, understanding each other did not necessarily require grammatical accuracy. Therefore, the communication between the participants was uncompromised by most instances.

One of the questions the present study wished to answer was the state of the children's receptive and productive skills. Differences were found in both skills alike. As all children go through the same stages of language acquisition in the same order, but the age and pace vary a great deal (Cook 1979, 11), it was predictable that the findings from both ethnographic data as well as the questionnaire would not be conclusive. It became obvious that the receptive and productive skills of the children were on different levels. Some children were only able to produce single words and short phrases, whereas some could already tell stories and use more complicated words and sentence structures. As Baker states, the initial goal of immersion teaching is to promote *understanding* of the language (2006, 308). The findings showed that all the children had developed a relatively high level of comprehension ability, even though some were able to take in large quantities of information in the foreign language and others could only tolerate simpler and shorter expressions. Therefore it could be concluded that the initial goal was achieved.

One of the possible limitations of immersion education is that the children seldom make use of their second language abilities outside the school or after leaving school (Baker 2006, 276). For that reason, this study aimed at examining the children's foreign language use outside the school environment. The filled in questionnaires as well as the observations made at home provided evidence on the issue. According to the results, many children enjoyed talking in English at home. However, some of the observations made by the parents were quite the opposites. For example, one child did not want to speak English at home with a parent, whereas two children "demanded" their parents to communicate in English with them. The results show that the quantity of English the children produced at home varies quite a lot. The tendency seemed to be that the children did use English at home and the second language use was not restricted to the school environment only.

Based on the results, the children's attitudes towards the English language were mainly positive. Even the children who rarely spoke English, still seemed to have a positive outlook on the language. Although any radical assumptions on the basis of this study cannot be made concerning the effectiveness of immersion, it still shows that results have been gained. In addition, the skills that the study participants have shown to have acquired in the results, all speak on behalf of the immersion method being effective among the group. As Knuutila points out, young second language learners have consistently outperformed older ones in previous studies (2009, 15). Also, if the goal of immersion is to achieve native-like second language speakers, apparently younger children have superior long-term achievement compared to older students (ibid.). Hämälä states that attention should be paid to the affinity of English and Finnish, since the languages do not belong to the same linguistic family (1999, 52). However, the Swedish immersion in Finland faces the same difficulty and the children attending those programmes still progress perfectly well (ibid.).

While traditional language teaching relies on school books and other material, immersion teaching focuses on natural and practical uses of language. Since previous studies have proven the efficiency of immersion, it might be worthwhile transferring aspects of the method into

other teaching as well. Immersion students are keen to learn and not afraid of using a foreign language. According to Kalaja et al. (2005, 297), children in traditional language classes consider a foreign language to be the language that is used in (school) books. They are not able to take the language into use in their life outside the language lesson. That is what language teaching should avoid, though. The ultimate goal of language teaching should be to equip the students with sufficient skills to manage in various aspects of every-day life.

Since learning a language through immersion happens through acquisition rather than through studying, Williams & Snipper introduce a valid point in favour of the method:

Acquired language patterns are internalized and deeply ingrained; many of them last a lifetime. Language learning, on the other hand, is more readily lost over time, unless it is practiced regularly (Williams & Snipper 1990, 37).

Based on the present study, immersion children's attitudes towards the English language seemed to be positive and at least the level of comprehension skills in all the children had risen. Perhaps the assumption that most of the children in this study group will develop into fluent English language users can be made given their positive attitude towards the language. In order to gain more conclusive results, a follow-up study should be conducted.

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Consent form

Appendix 1

To the parents of Analin's class

Dear all,

I am conducting a research in your children's classroom. My topic is language immersion, focusing on non-native children's use of the English language. I am going to observe and videotape some interactive situations (e.g. morning circle and show and tell). From the material I will try to find typical features in the speech of immersion students.

The videotapes are for my eyes only. I am not going to show the material to my professors, fellow students or anyone else. No names will be mentioned in the study, neither can your children be recognised from the text in any other way.

I study English philology in the University of Tampere and I am also doing my pedagogical studies (teacher training) at the moment. That means that next year I will become a qualified English teacher (Master of Arts). On the basis of the research in question, I am going to write my Bachelor's thesis, which I will develop into my Master's thesis later on.

Let me know whether your child can participate in the study or not. Please fill in the bottom part of this letter and return it to either of my children's lockers or directly to me.

Thank you for your co-operation!

Sincerely,
Raisa Viitanen
(Mum of xx and xx xx)
[contact information]

P.S. I would also appreciate it if you filled in the questionnaire attached to this letter, it will not take up more than approximately five minutes of your time.

Thank you!



Yes, I allow my child to participate in the study. No, I will not allow my child to participate in the study.

Child's name: _____

Date and place: _____

Parent's signature: _____

Analinin luokan vanhemmille

Hei kaikki!

Suoritan lastenne luokassa tutkimusta, jonka aiheena on kielikylpy, keskittyen suomenkielisten lasten englannin kielen käyttöön. Aion tarkkailla ja videoida tiettyjä interaktiivisia tilanteita (esim. aamupiiri ja ”show and tell”). Tavoitteeni on yrittää löytää kielikylvyssä oleville lapsille tyypillisiä puhutun kielen piirteitä.

Kuvaamaani materiaalia ei näe minun lisäksi kukaan muu. En näytä sitä opettajilleni, opiskelutovereilleni tai kenellekään muulle. Tutkimuksessani en mainitse lapsia nimeltä eikä heitä voi tunnistaa tekstistä millään muullakaan tavalla.

Opiskelen Tampereen yliopistossa englantilaista filologiaa ja suoritan tällä hetkellä myös opettajan pedagogisia opintoja. Eli, ensi vuonna minun olisi tarkoitus valmistua päteväksi englannin opettajaksi (fil.maist.). Kyseessä olevaan tutkimukseen pohjautuen alan työstää HuK-tutkielmaani, jonka aion laajentaa myöhemmin pro gradu -työksi.

Ilmoittakaa minulle, saako lapsenne osallistua tutkimukseen vai ei. Olkaa hyvä ja täyttäkää tämän kirjeen alaosa, ja palauttakaa se kumman tahansa lapseni lokeroon tai suoraan minulle.

Kiitos yhteistyöstänne!

Terveisin,

Raisa Viitanen

(xx ja xx xx:n äiti)

[contact information]

P.S. Arvostaisin kovasti, jos voisitte vielä täyttää tämän kirjeen liitteenä olevan kyselykaavakkeen. Se ei vie aikaanne kuin noin viisi minuuttia.

Kiitos!



Kyllä, lapseni saa osallistua tutkimukseen.

Ei, lapseni ei saa osallistua tutkimukseen.

Lapsen nimi: _____

Päiväys: _____

Vanhemman allekirjoitus: _____

Questionnaire

Appendix 3

1. Your child's age: _____ years
2. Sex: male female
3. The language spoken at home:
 Finnish English Swedish Something else, what? _____
4. How long has your child attended IEEC? _____
5. Did your child speak English before attending IEEC?
 Not at all A few words Simple phrases
 Moderately about familiar subjects Able to manage in most situations
 As a native language
6. Does your child speak English at home?
 Daily Often Occasionally
 Rarely Almost never Never
7. With whom does the child speak English at home?
 Parent(s) Sibling(s) Someone else, who? _____
8. In what situations does the child use English at home? Give examples. (You may continue on the reverse side.)

9. What is your child's attitude towards speaking English like? (E.g. positive, negative, enthusiastic, frustrated...) (You may continue on the reverse side.)

10. Anything else you would like to say concerning your child's spoken English? (You may continue on the reverse side.)

(Any additional comments are welcome, please use the reverse side!)

Thank you!

1. Lapsenne ikä: _____ vuotta
2. Sukupuoli: poika tyttö
3. Kotona puhuttu kieli:
 - Suomi Englanti Ruotsi Joku muu, mikä? _____
4. Kauanko lapsenne on ollut IEEC:ssä? _____
5. Puhuiko lapsenne englantia ennen IEEC:iin tuloaan?
 - Ei yhtään Muutamia sanoja Yksinkertaisia lauseita
 - Kohtuullisesti tutuista aiheista Tarpeeksi useimmissa tilanteissa
 - Äidinkielenä (tai sen kaltaisesti)
6. Puhuuko lapsenne kotona englantia?
 - Päivittäin Usein Satunnaisesti
 - Harvoin Ei melkein koskaan Ei koskaan
7. Kenen kanssa lapsenne puhuu kotona englantia?
 - Vanhempien Sisarusten Jonkun muun, kenen? _____
8. Missä tilanteissa lapsenne käyttää englantia kotona? Antakaa esimerkkejä. (Tarvittaessa voitte jatkaa kääntöpuolelle.)

9. Minkälainen asenne lapsellanne on englannin puhumista kohtaan? (Esim. Positiivinen, negatiivinen, innostunut, turhautunut...) (Tarvittaessa voitte jatkaa kääntöpuolelle.)

10. Haluaisitteko sanoa jotain muuta lapsenne englannin kielen puhumista koskien? (Tarvittaessa voitte jatkaa kääntöpuolelle.)

(Kaikki muutkin kommenttinne ovat tervetulleita, käytäkää kääntöpuolta!)

Kiitos osallistumisestanne!