

Vocabulary in A1 level second language writing

Katja Mäntylä, Sinikka Lahtinen,
Åsa Palviainen and Maisa Martin

Background - Topling

- TOPLING: Paths in Second Language Acquisition
- Department of Languages and Centre for Applied Language Studies at the University of Jyväskylä
- 2010-2013
- Makes use of the data and results of an earlier project called CEFLING



Background - Topling

- The main objective: to compare the development of writing in Finnish, English and Swedish as second languages in the Finnish educational system (incl. adults).
- The cross-sectional data, 1,194 samples for L2 Finnish, 3,154 for L2 English, on a variety of tasks, already exists, rated for level and coded for analyses, with similar data available for Swedish. The longitudinal data will be collected during this project.

Background - Topling

- Three different angles: CEFR-levels, linguistic and pragmatic development and parameters of the development of language skills: Complexity, Accuracy, Fluency, CAF triad)
- Data: written performances, 5 different task types varying in formality and register. Assessed by 3-4 raters using CEFR
- English and Swedish as a foreign language, Finnish as a second language
- 1st-9th grade, senior secondary school, university students

CEFR A1 level and writing

- CAN complete basic forms, and write notes including times, dates and places.
- 1,000-1,500 words depending on the language (Milton and Alexiou 2009)
- Pienemann's processability theory
- 1st level content words
- 2nd level grammatical information, noun and verb conjugation
- 3rd level phrasal level processing

The data

- English, Swedish and Finnish texts
- rated as A1 texts by 3-4- independent raters using CEFR scales
- analysed with the help of CLAN-programme

- word classes, lexical accuracy and most frequently used words
- vocabulary used was compared to the vocabulary in textbooks
- the effect of writing task as well as the learner's age

Writing tasks

- Email to a friend at home/a new friend abroad
- Email to one's teacher
- Narrative piece

Older participants

- Email to a store
- Opinion piece

Participants

- The project gathers data from all educational levels.
- A1 level writing
 - English – comprehensive school (9-15 years)
 - Swedish – comprehensive school and senior secondary school (13-19 years)
 - Finnish – can be any

Results – joint words in the texts and most frequent words

- En and Sw Germanic languages, Finnish Finno-Ugric.
 - different structures
 - Finnish an agglutinative language
 - Finnish uses no prepositions
 - In Finnish, personal pronoun very often left out as verb conjugation reveals the subject,
olen töissä (am at work)

Finnish a second language to the participants

-spoken and written Finnish quite different from each other

90 texts, 30 / language. Messages, stories and opinion pieces from learners of all ages

Results – frequencies

Different words used in the texts

- English: 265/948 altogether
- Swedish: 270/863
- Finnish: 279/492

Most common words in the three languages

English:

I (87)
be (87)
and (54)
my (35)
have (24)
you (21)
a/an (18)
like (16)
not (16)
(have) got (15)
to (13)
name (12)
we (12)
can (12)
play (11)

Swedish:

jag (75) *I*
vara (61) *be*
inte (28) *not*
och (26) *and*
i (24) *in*
kan (21) *can*
på (20) *on*
min/mina (20) *my*
det (16) *the*
klockan (16) *o'clock*
har (15) *have*
vad (13) *what*
skolan (9) *school*
skoldagen (9) *school day*
börja (8) *begin*

Finnish:

olla (57) *be*
minä (18) *I*
koska (13) because
koulu (11) *school*
ja (10) *and*
ei (8) / en (7) *not*
hauska (8) *fun*
minun (8) *my*
voida (7) *can*
tulla (6) *come*
peli (6) *game*
jos (5) *if*
minulla (5) *I've got*
siellä (4) *there*
sitten (4) *then*

Most common words in the three languages

- The differences between languages show, eg verb conjugation/use of pronouns
*How old are **you**? - Kuinka vanha (sinä) **olet**?*
- In Finnish, the participants attempted to argue for their opinions, hence also subordination (may be due to Finnish being a second rather than a foreign language)
- English *you*-passive → increases the amount of *you* in the texts

Most common words – frequency lists

The texts:

I
be
and
my
have
you
a/an
like
not
to

Corpus of Contemporary American

the
be
and
of
a
in
to (prep.)
have
to (inf.)
it

Most common words – frequency lists

The texts:

jag
vara
inte
och
i
kan
på
min/mina
det
klockan

Språkbanken Press 97

i *in*
och *and*
att *that*
det *the*
som *like*
en *a/an*
på *on*
är *is*
av *of*
för *for*

Most common words – frequency lists

The texts:

olla

minä

koska

koulu / -ssa, -sta

ja

ei/en

hauska

minun

voida

tulla

The Finnish frequency list (1979)

olla *be*

ja *and*

se *it*

ei *no/not*

joka *that, which*

että *that*

tämä *this*

hän *s/he*

voida *can*

saada *may/get*

Word classes

- Finnish as a second language. 90 texts from primary school, representing 5 different text types (messages to a friend, teacher, internet store, an opinion piece and an advertisement)
- Nouns and verbs the most common ones, altogether about 50 %. Surprisingly few interrogatives (1 per cent), considering the text types and instructions given to the participants.
- 8 % conjunctions, including subordinate conjunctions such as *because*, *if* (cf CEFR which claims this does not occur at A1)
- Distribution follows the word class distribution of the Finnish frequency list, but the difference between nouns and verbs was smaller

Word classes

- Swedish. 30 texts, a story and a message. Surprisingly, messages produced a larger variety of words.
- Individual differences were big.

Jag är Maija. Jag går i stranden. Fortfarande börja regnar. Jag går i simhall.

- Nouns and verbs made up the bulk
- Codemixing, not from Finnish but from English

*Jag har en hund nu. Mina mamma och pappa **gave** det på jag och min storasyster. Jag är glada nu. Det namn är Musti. Musti är inte så storr men trevlig hund. Jag kär Musti. Musti tycker om oss också. Jag går ut med Musti varje dag. Emmi är liust*

The logo of the University of Jyväskylä, featuring a stylized white graphic of a hand or flame on a dark blue background, repeated vertically along the left edge of the slide.

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Thanks to the project course