A Country in Focus

Review of recent applied linguistics research in Finland and Sweden, with specific reference to foreign language learning and teaching

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This review covers recent applied linguistic research in Finland and Sweden during the years 2006–2011, with particular emphasis on foreign language learning and teaching. Its primary aim is to inform the international research community on the type of research that is going on in these countries. Special attention is given to topics which have attracted a lot of interest in the area: language immersion schools and CLIL, cross-linguistic influence, corpus linguistics (English as a lingua franca) and language use in multilingual urban settings.

1. Overview of research and language policies in Finland and Sweden

This review provides information on applied language research in Finland and Sweden from 2006 to 2011, with special regard to foreign language learning and teaching. It includes work published in these countries written in English, French or German, that is, languages international readers may be assumed to be able to read. A primary aim is to give small national journals, Ph.D. theses and language associations some international exposure. Although this survey mainly covers work published in Finland or Sweden, which may be hard for international readers to access, we should not forget the global nature of research in these areas and the extensive international contacts of Finnish and Swedish researchers. Excluding internationally published work would distort the picture of ongoing research in the two countries, as researchers often publish internationally even when dealing with local data and issues. The coverage of works published internationally will, however, be even more selective than for nationally published work and will primarily be restricted to work illustrating the most common research trends in the countries dealing with local data and issues. Thus, relatively few contributions to standard journals in the area such as *IRAL*, *Language Learning*, *Second Language Research*, *Applied Linguistics* and *Journal of Pragmatics* are included. On the other hand, a few contributions to journals less well known to linguists, such as reports on CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) in international science journals, have been included, as well as some contributions to various internationally published anthologies. About a third of the items listed were published internationally. Many researchers from abroad have contributed to national publications in Finland and Sweden, but, in principle, unless they have collaborated with Finnish or Swedish researchers and dealt with data from Sweden or Finland, such works have not been included.
The national data in this survey comes from five main sources: conference publications, university series (faculties of education and language departments), doctoral dissertations, national journals and Festschriften. Among conference publications, the annual yearbooks of the national associations of applied linguistics, AFinLA and ASLA, are relevant (Salo et al. 2007; Garant et al. 2008); the Finnish association, in particular, has played a major role in the national history of applied linguistics study. The faculties of education are also important, and regular conferences on language didactics are organized, with subsequent publication of conference volumes (Koskensalo, Smeds & de Cillia 2009). The ongoing language immersion project in Vaasa was one of the earliest of its kind, and CLIL has also been frequently discussed in both Sweden and Finland. Festschriften for professors in languages or language education contain potentially relevant material (Bendtsen et al. 2006; Bowen, Mobärg & Ohlander 2009), as do many doctoral dissertations in modern language departments.

It is generally held that the Nordic countries and the Netherlands are particularly successful at developing a high level of proficiency in English. Several reasons can be given for this. The countries are small and the importance of the English language is recognized by everybody, so the motivation for learning English is high. Swedish, Norwegian, Danish and Dutch are languages related to English, which means that, in these countries, not too much effort is required to develop at least an approximate comprehension of English. Popular American and British TV series are not dubbed, but presented with subtitles. The position of English as the lingua franca of our times is probably even more marked in these countries than elsewhere in Europe; for the status of English as a lingua franca in Sweden as well as in the European Union, see Modiano (2009).

This status has been the topic of extensive corpus-based research at Helsinki University. In Finland, L2 use of Swedish, Finland’s other national language, which is spoken by a little over 5% of the population, has been increasingly replaced by English. At school, the choice of a second language for nine-year-olds is open, but more than 90% of the pupils in Finnish-language schools choose English. There is, however, a growing number of language immersion schools, most of which focus on Swedish, but these are still very few in number. The total number of Finnish-speaking students in Swedish immersion schools has been estimated at about 4,500. Much of the research in this area is written in Swedish or Finnish, thus falling outside the scope of this survey. Immersion or partial immersion schools for English have also become more common in recent years. On the whole, English proficiency has been steadily improving in Finland, and international evaluations have placed Finland very near the top of the list, in spite of the obvious disadvantages most Finns encounter because of their non-Indo-European L1. Swedish proficiency, however, shows the opposite trend in Finland, partly because of a reduction in the number of hours devoted to Swedish in Finnish-language schools. The official status of Finland as a bilingual country, however, makes it an excellent field for studies of bilingualism and multilingualism. Typically, Finnish–Swedish bilingualism has been studied by Swedish-speaking researchers, though more often from a sociological than a linguistic perspective. There has also been a fair amount of research on cross-linguistic influence. Discourse analysis and the analysis of L2 writing skills are in the foreground of Finnish applied linguistic research, and research on the learning of Finnish as L2 is quite extensive, though, again, publications are mainly in Finnish.
Among researchers in Finland there seems to be widespread agreement that there should be more diversity in the foreign languages offered at school and that the dominance of English is not altogether a good thing. Three recent articles criticize the situation in Finland regarding proficiency in foreign languages other than English: Pyykkö (2009), Nikula et al. (2010) and Ylönen & Kivelä (2011) (cf. Takala 2009). Pyykkö gives a survey of language education policy in Finland, noting, for example, that among university students a fair knowledge of languages other than English is rare. Like Pyykkö, Nikula et al. emphasize that new ways of approaching language education, such as CLIL, are needed, as are ways of making out-of-school learning more attractive. Ylönen & Kivelä, who conducted a survey among university staff in Finland, conclude that, perhaps paradoxically, the more internationalization and multilingualism have gained ground, the more English rules the academic world.

Among decision-makers as well as the general public in Finland there is still a fairly common mistaken belief that having to learn several languages confuses learners. Too many people still hold the view that in Finland people should speak Finnish, and in communication with any foreigner, English should be enough. For researchers, much work remains to be done to convince these people of the advantages of a more diverse language education policy.

The main change that has occurred in Finnish society in recent decades is certainly increased internationalization, especially following the country’s accession to the EU in 1995. An apprehensive attitude towards speaking foreign languages was prevalent in earlier days: it was commonly held that it was not advisable to speak a foreign language unless you could do it really well, avoiding errors. Finnish attitudes and Finnish language behaviour have, however, gradually changed and are opening up all the time. As far as English is concerned, ability in reading, listening and writing is generally high. The results of international evaluations present a flattering picture of Finns’ knowledge of English, and standards of English have clearly improved during the last three decades. A few caveats should, however, be made. Finns’ weakest skill is clearly oral production, which has not been tested systematically. Foreigners living or staying in Finland often report negative experiences of communicating, usually in English, with Finns. These problems are, however, not primarily problems of language proficiency, since many of these foreign guests speak worse English than their Finnish hosts; they are, rather, problems of general, culturally-bound social and communication skills. In advanced learners everywhere, socio-pragmatic competence tends to lag behind linguistic competence, and this seems to be especially true in Finland. Many Finns have a relatively undeveloped socio-pragmatic competence, and their shortcomings are heightened in cross-cultural communication. But changes are occurring: in the last 30 years the emphasis in schools has gradually shifted from the development of writing and translation skills to the enhancement of communicative competence, at least as far as English is concerned. Good results in the school-leaving examination do not guarantee a place at university: many faculties, including those in the humanities, have entrance tests including careful screening of the candidate.

The situation in Sweden is in some respects similar, in others different. English is a compulsory first foreign language at school, while German, French and Spanish are optional. Schools in Sweden have always paid more attention than those in Finland to oral proficiency, but sloppy writing and a lack of grammatical knowledge have been targets of criticism whenever language education at higher levels is discussed. In Sweden it is fair to say that nearly everybody can communicate in English, and university students often have a fair knowledge
of at least one other foreign language, although concern has been expressed about insufficient knowledge of foreign languages other than English. In universities, the main problem seems to be that language teachers are expected to qualify in a very short time. While the quality of staff at university language departments is high, the quality of students preparing for a career involving foreign languages varies a lot with respect to writing proficiency, linguistic knowledge, general education and motivation. There are no entrance tests in language departments. Among decision-makers in Sweden there is not the general short-sightedness about language education policy that there is in Finland. Acknowledging that the number of foreign languages known in Sweden is in decline, though the position of English is stronger than ever, Hyltenstam & Österberg (2010) point to an ambition on the part of the Swedish authorities for linguistic diversity. Whether their curricular goals are actually reached in practice is another matter: most school curricula present an idealized, over-ambitious picture of what most students can realistically achieve. All the same, aiming for the sky might mean that the average pupil at least reaches the tree-tops. And, generally speaking, an advantage of the Nordic educational system is that a larger proportion of pupils than in most countries do actually reach the tree-tops. Though variation in educational standards is inevitable, there is, globally speaking, no great gulf between the best and the worst schools in Sweden or Finland.

Much research in Sweden has concentrated on CLIL, language testing, multilingualism in urban settings, near-native competence and L2 transfer to L3. In 2011 the EUROSLA conference was held in Stockholm. The volume of abstracts for this conference, EUROSLA 21 (2011), provides a great deal of information on what research is going on, especially in Sweden, so it is listed here, but no individual abstracts are mentioned.

Since space is limited here, the selection of articles to include is critical, and no claims for completeness can be made. One criterion for selection is how representative each article is of what is going on in the countries. As the borderline between teaching/learning and related areas of research is fluid, there is bound to be a certain overlap between the sections: some of the items could, indeed, fit into more than one section. In addition to covering topics that have been extensively studied, a subsidiary aim has been to comment on some worthwhile topics that have been rather neglected. Special attempts have been made to find general surveys of particular areas of research.

2. Foreign/second language learning/acquisition

2.1 Finnish and Swedish as foreign languages

Jyväskylä is the principal location for the study of Finnish as a foreign language and can, in fact, be regarded as the country’s main centre for applied linguistic research in general.

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1 A terminological note on foreign language learning/second language acquisition: while some researchers use these terms interchangeably, others make a clear distinction between them. Often, however, it is not possible to distinguish the two. When Finnish, for example, is studied by foreigners in Finland, the language is spoken all around them, but people wishing to learn Finnish are usually also given a substantial amount of teaching to facilitate learning. Finnish as a second language is typically learnt by Swedish-speaking Finns, but, again, this learning is complemented with teaching at school. Not much research on this has been published internationally. As far as English and other international languages are concerned, language learning in Finland and Sweden can mainly be regarded as foreign language learning (cf. also Hammarberg 2010).
Martin (2008) provides an excellent comprehensive survey of work in the field up to 2006. She places Finnish and research on Finnish as a foreign language in a wide frame of reference, summarizing studies that show how a non-Indo-European language can – and has been – used to throw light on theories and ideas about language universals. The issue of the journal *Nordland* in which Martin’s paper appears also provides surveys of Swedish, Danish, Norwegian and Icelandic as target languages (in Swedish, Norwegian and Danish).

Research on Finnish as L1 has an important place in the Jyväskylä-based CEFLING project, one of whose aims is to compare Finnish teenagers’ L1-writing with their L2-writing in English. Jyväskylä University is responsible for the freely accessible internet publication *Apples – Journal of Applied Language Studies* (http://apples.jyu.fi/). At Oulu University, an international corpus of learner Finnish, ICLFI, has been compiled by Jarmo Harri Jantunen (www.oulu.fi/hutk/sutvi/oppijankieli/en/).

Lauttamus & Hirvonen (2011) have studied the influence of English on the Finnish of immigrants to the United States and Australia. Phonological adaptation is a typical phenomenon in the language of first-generation immigrant Finns, who stick to Finnish as their main language. *Bathroom* becomes *paattiruuma* or *paattumi*, to conform to Finnish phonological rules. Such phonological adaptation is different from transfer, which occurs at the lexical level. Second-generation immigrants generally shift their main language from Finnish to English and, as they become functionally bilingual, are often ashamed of their parents’ non-native English.

In Sweden, the stimulus for much research on Swedish as a foreign language has been provided by the number of immigrants in Sweden. Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam (2009) is a prize-winning article relating native-like proficiency to age of onset. In this thorough and well-argued study the authors find that native-like oral L2 proficiency is much less common than had been previously assumed. They state, quite rightly, that the scope of research on native-likeness (or ultimate attainment) should be wider, taking into account measurements of various L2 features, including all linguistic levels (phonology, grammar, lexis, etc.), skills, processing and automatization, as well as both perception and production. More sensitive test instruments are clearly also needed, including reading and writing, which do not figure prominently in this study. The authors do not mention that skill in writing largely depends on wide vocabulary knowledge, connected to the educational background of the test-taker, and is an area where advanced non-native learners frequently surpass natives with less education. But there are aspects of near-native writing where native speakers are hard put to identify any non-native features. A grey area exists between native and near-native writing, but to find all non-native features takes more than a couple of native judges. The native–non-native distinction is criticized by Fraurud & Boyd (2011), who analyse data relating to linguistic practices and background. They conclude that the distinction between native and non-native speakers results in a categorization into two heterogeneous groups or, if only clear cases are included, in the exclusion of many language users. Håkansson & Norrby (2010) studied environmental influence in a comparison of learners of Swedish in a foreign-language setting (Melbourne) with learners in the target language environment (Malmö). Grammatical, lexical and pragmatic aspects were investigated. Grammar acquisition, analysed within the framework of Pienemann’s processability theory, progressed similarly in the two groups, while differences due to target language exposure occurred in lexicon and pragmatics. An earlier work by the same authors is Norrby & Håkansson (2007), who analyse how
the morpho-syntactic structures used by four Australian learners of Swedish interact with linguistic complexity, as shown by sentence length, subordination and nominal vs. verbal style. Cekaitė (2006) studies how young children with different L1s unrelated to Swedish participate in the daily work of a Swedish classroom.

Sociolinguistic and grammatical aspects of proficiency have been in the foreground in the research on Swedish. Boyd (2009) provides a survey of sociolinguistics in all Nordic countries. The ambitious project ‘Language and language use among young people in multilingual settings’ spanned six years (2001–2006) and involved more than twenty researchers from several universities in Sweden. It focused on linguistic practices among adolescents in urban contexts with relatively high proportions of migrants. Various linguistic features of Swedish were analysed, charting developments in the phonology, syntax and pragmatics of the language of Swedish youth. Two overlapping anthologies present the results of the project: Quist & Svendsen (2010) and Källström & Lindberg (2011). The former also provides a survey of recent research on linguistic practices in three comparable countries: Denmark, Norway and Sweden; contributions on the Swedish scene are by Boyd, Ganuza, Bodén and Bijvoet & Fraurud, while the twelve contributions to Källström & Lindberg are by Bijvoet & Fraurud, Bodén, Ekberg, Fraurud & Boyd, Ganuza, Johansson Kokkinakis & Magnusson, Källström, Lindberg, Otterup, Prentice & Skölberg, Svensson and Tingsell.

2.2 Other languages as target languages

A frequent topic in informal discussions about foreign language learning is whether language learning aptitude has any connection with musical aptitude. For oral skills, an interesting doctoral dissertation investigating this is Milovanov (2009), who makes use of neural and behavioural evidence. The title of her work is, however, misleading, in that she deals only with production and discrimination of sounds, not all language skills. She concludes that musical aptitude and linguistic skill, both in the production and the discrimination of sounds, are connected.

In a thought-provoking paper, in which many ideas go back to Bakhtin, Dufva et al. (2011) argue for ‘multilinguality’ as opposed to ‘monologism’ as a basis for discussions of language learning and teaching. The authors want to reconsider the role of grammar in learning and teaching. Learning how to do things with language should be seen as an important goal of language education, and a dynamic approach of this nature is based on the idea that both language usage and people are mobile. Learners face new speech genres, assume new positions, attach new values and adjust their language-user identities to the various usages and languages they encounter. Language should be seen not merely as an object of teaching as such, but also as a tool for meaning-making.

The status of English as the general lingua franca means that German, which before World War II was the main foreign language in Scandinavia, especially in Finland, has lost ground. Ylönén & Vainio (2010) report on the status of German at Finnish universities. University students from all faculties were asked to evaluate their skills in German and their attitudes towards multilingualism. The authors conclude that academic multilingualism should be more actively promoted. Kara (2007) studied the development and evaluation
of oral proficiency in German. Her subjects were Finnish comprehensive and senior secondary school students, and she recommends using the language portfolio for teaching and evaluation. Problems Finns have when learning French have been investigated by Kalmbach (2009), following his earlier dissertation from Jyväskylä.

One question frequently asked is whether it is easier for bilinguals than for monolinguals to learn a new language. Klawitter Beusch (2011) set out to answer this question, focusing on immigrant teenage learners of German in Sweden. The problem here is that there are so many variables affecting learning other than linguistic proficiency in the background languages, and it is not easy to keep these variables constant. If the groups are truly comparable, much previous research has testified to the general advantage of bilinguals. The monolingual group in Klawitter Beusch’s study had better school results and were more highly motivated than the bilinguals. It is easy to agree with what is implicit in Klawitter Beusch’s study: that it is dangerous to draw general conclusions on the basis of only one variable, that of bilingualism/monolingualism (cf. Ringbom 2007a, 94f.)

Lindqvist, Bardel & Gudmundson (2011) study lexical richness in Swedish learners’ L2 French and L2 Italian. For L2 French, the most advanced learners were found to have a lexical profile similar to that of native speakers, while the vocabulary of the Italian L2 group was not as rich as that of native speakers. Bardel & Lindqvist (2011) is a follow-up study in which the focus is on thematic vocabulary and cognates among the low-frequency words used by learners at different proficiency levels. These features are seen as a fruitful complement to traditional lexical profiling analysis. Research in Romance languages at Lund has also focused on the learning of French as L2, including child second-language acquisition. Granfeldt, Schlyter & Kihlstedt (2007) compare child L2 acquisition with adult L2 acquisition and simultaneous bilingual first-language acquisition. They have some criticisms of the ideas of Universal Grammar, but mainly use terminology and references from work within the generative research paradigm. Their principal research question is whether the developmental pattern of child L2 acquisition is more like L1 acquisition or adult L2 acquisition. For the majority of the phenomena under investigation, child L2 acquisition followed a pattern more similar to L2 than to L1 acquisition. The conclusion of Schlyter & Thomas (2011) is similar: child L2-learners initially behave like adult L2 learners, but they develop in target-like behaviour faster than adults. Ågren (2009) compares Swedish writers of L2 French at high-school level with native writers and finds that Swedish learners at this level do not differ much from native writers in the use of number agreement. Different stages in the development of French as L2 are outlined in Schlyter, Granfeldt & Ågren (2009).

Bartning, Forsberg & Hancock (2009) analyse morpho-syntactic deviance in the oral production of advanced learners and native speakers of French. Learners’ errors of this type tend to be present even at a very high level of proficiency. Information structure and the use of formulaic language are also good measures of a high level of proficiency. The study concludes by proposing a transitional stage of L2 users, ‘functional bilinguals’, intermediate between the advanced learner and the near-native speaker. Bartning (2009) also deals with this issue.

English is a language which many learners acquire outside the classroom. In the international anthology on out-of-class learning edited by Benson & Reinders (2011) there are two contributions from Finland and one from Sweden. Kuure (2011) presents a case
study of a Finnish learner's technology-mediated practices showing that online computer games, and activities related to them, provided a means of using English for nurturing social relationships and participating in networking among peers. Kalaja et al. (2011) compare Finnish students’ attitudes to L2 English and L2 Swedish. The classroom situations did not differ much for the two languages in that the learner experiences focused on formal aspects, the learning of grammar and vocabulary. Outside the classroom English was used a lot more, while the students of Swedish did not make as much use of the affordances available to them. The students investigated came from areas where there are few native speakers of Swedish.

Sundqvist (2011) found that the English proficiency of those involved in extramural activity in Sweden was better than that of their peers, but points to the difficulties in establishing a cause and effect for this relationship: do learners become more proficient as a result of their extramural English, or do they become more engaged in extramural English because of their level of proficiency? Sundqvist (2009) also deals with the effect of linguistic activities on the language learning in which learners engage during their spare time, and found that extramural English improves oral proficiency, especially vocabulary. Boys spent more time on these activities than girls, which means that extramural activities had a greater effect on boys than on girls.

Lewis (2008) compares intermediate Swedish L2 learners’ and native speakers’ usage of formulaic sequences in English. Support is given to the hypothesis that L2 learners predominantly use the idiom principle, involving a single choice of retrieving a memorized sequence, though the learners’ formulaic language does not always match the native language target.

Lemmouh (2010) investigated lexical knowledge in the writing of Swedish university students of English, also including a longitudinal aspect. As one would expect, some evidence of quantitative and qualitative growth was found after both one and two terms of study (in the Swedish university system, longer periods could not be investigated). The study concludes that lexical richness is not an essential criterion in teachers’ assessment of essays.

Trollstad (2010) studies adult Swedes learning German in a German-speaking environment. Case and gender, as well as German information structure, are seen as particularly difficult aspects of the language, in spite of the subjects having spent a long time in Germany.

2.3 Cross-linguistic influence

In Sweden, cross-linguistic influence (transfer) in connection with L3-acquisition has been a topic of considerable interest at the Stockholm Department of Romance Languages. Swedish learners of French have received particular attention, with special emphasis given to non-native transfer from English. Cross-linguistic influence on learners’ spoken French was studied by Lindqvist (2006). Her results indicate that proficiency in the target language largely determines how much learners rely on assumed cross-linguistic similarities in French conversation. The lower the target language proficiency, the more background languages were used; the different roles of the background languages Swedish and English were
also examined. Nilsson (2007) examined reading practices, especially the processing of cross-linguistic similarities at the lexical level, using think-aloud protocols and a cross-linguistic word association task. When learners had problems with understanding a text they were found to rely particularly on assumed interlingual similarities. Bardel and Lindqvist are the editors of a special issue of IRAL devoted to third-language acquisition, in which three of the contributions originate from Stockholm: Hammarberg, Lindqvist and Falk & Bardel. Hammarberg (2010) considers some terminological issues and calls for clarification of the concepts L1, L2 and L3. Lindqvist (2010) compares inter- and intralingual influence in Swedish learners’ L3 French. Falk & Bardel (2010) provide a survey of the relevant factors affecting L3 learning: typology, L2 status and proficiency level in the areas of vocabulary and syntax. They also discuss how neurolinguistic approaches to multilingualism might improve our understanding of cross-linguistic influence on L3 acquisition.

Serrander (2011) investigated lexical access in Spanish by Swedish learners. Previous research had found that early stages of foreign language development were characterized by predominantly phonological processing. At the initial stages of learning, this phonological processing does not facilitate learning: Serrander suggests a stage of uncontrolled phonological processing preceding phonological facilitation. One of the key figures among Stockholm applied linguists is Björn Hammarberg. In a recent volume (Hammarberg 2009) he conveniently brings together five earlier studies of an adult multilingual speaker, adding a concluding sixth chapter. The main data is provided by a longitudinal corpus of NNS–NS conversations covering 21 months from the beginner stage. The subject was a native English speaker learning Swedish in Stockholm after many years’ stay in Germany. She had a strong tendency to activate items and patterns from L2 German in her L3 production, especially at the early stages of L3 learning.

Hammarberg is one of the few linguists who have followed learners for a significant sequence of time, and more longitudinal studies of various aspects of language learning are certainly needed. Ohlander (2009) investigates cross-linguistic influence on immigrants’ learning of English in Sweden. He finds considerable differences between Swedish-born and non-Swedish-born students with immigrant backgrounds, and emphasizes the importance of language teachers being aware of cross-linguistic forces and of the main typological dimensions along which languages may differ.

Rosén (2006) discusses information-structural problems experienced by speakers of Swedish in writing German. The data are compared with Swedish and German native control corpora. Learners seem to transfer their language-specific L1 information structure to the target language. In their German texts, Swedish learners break basic principles of discourse organization, which they do not do in their L1.

Ringbom (2007b) focuses on the distinction between cross-linguistic similarities that are perceived, and similarities that the learner merely assumes. The importance of cross-linguistic similarity is discussed in detail in Ringbom (2007a), where new studies are made using extensive material collected earlier to illuminate the differences between Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking learners of English in Finland. The different effects of transfer in comprehension compared with production are stressed. Collaboration with the American Scott Jarvis resulted in Ringbom & Jarvis (2009). Ringbom (2011) revisits the notion of
redundancy in foreign language learning that was proposed by H. V. George many years ago (George 1972). When a target language category does not exist in the L1, the learner perceives it as redundant, and frequently omits items of this category at early stages of learning.

Meriläinen (2010a) is a thorough Ph.D. dissertation examining transfer in Finnish students writing their Matriculation Examination in English. A considerable merit of the work is that it takes account of both lexis and syntax, as well as addressing changes in the students’ English proficiency since 1990. Error analysis shows that while grammatical accuracy does not seem to have changed in recent years, a noticeable improvement can be seen in vocabulary use. This is obviously the result of the internationalization of Finnish society in addition to pedagogical changes that have been introduced in Finnish schools. The other side of the coin is the point Meriläinen makes in (2010b): for learners whose L1 is very different from L2, informal learning and communicative language teaching may be insufficient for enhancing grammatical competence.

Transfer in the English of immigrant Finns has been studied by Lauttamus, Nerbonne & Wiersma (2007) and Opas-Hänninen et al. (2009). Morphology is an area where some previous research has maintained that cross-linguistic influence is rare or even non-existent. Kaivapalu & Martin (2007), however, provide compelling evidence for morphological transfer in learners of Finnish. Their data clearly support the views of the Americans Jarvis and Odlin, working along the same lines. Kaivapalu & Martin point out that the reasons for minimizing the effects of morphological transfer must be seen against the fact that most SLA researchers have concentrated on languages with little morphological variation. Many researchers have been prone to overgeneralize about learning processes on the basis of limited data. Comparing Estonian and Russian learners of Finnish (all three languages being morphologically rich and Estonian and Finnish being closely related), Kaivapalu & Martin show that cross-linguistic influence is clearly seen in bound morphology. In Estonian learners there is much positive transfer that facilitates learning, while the L1 transfer in Russian learners is predominantly negative. The authors conclude that separate study of positive and negative cross-linguistic influence will be necessary in future.

Bohnacker (2006) criticizes earlier work by Häkansson et al., who maintained that learners of German, regardless of their L1, follow a hypothetical universal developmental path of L2 German verb placement. Bohnacker’s study of Swedish learners indicates that learners of German can make use of syntactic transfer from L1 as well as L2 in L3 acquisition. This is in line with research already mentioned in this section. Similarly, Bardel (2006) also finds evidence of L2 syntactic transfer on L3 learning of Italian. L2 knowledge of one Romance language helps when learning another.

3. Foreign language teaching, measurement and evaluation

Much research has been conducted on language pedagogy in both Finland and Sweden. The education of language teachers largely takes place at faculties of education in cooperation with university language departments. National conferences on language didactics are held regularly and give rise to conference proceedings in which most of the contributions are in the national languages, with a few in English or German. Takala (2009) makes the point that
although many languages are taught in Finnish schools, no systematic use has been made of the resources that lie in the similarity between the Germanic languages English, German and Swedish. He makes some constructive suggestions for how multilingual education could be improved in Finland.

In both Finland and Sweden new approaches to language education have been tried and reported. Koivistoinen (2008) shows how computer-mediated communication in authentic situations can be successfully integrated with English teaching at the early stages of learning (students aged 10–11). She makes use of quantitative and qualitative data as well as recorded observation, field notes, videotaped interview conversations and essays.

Solin (2008) analysed university researchers producing portfolio texts, most of which were job applications, to find out what conventions are acceptable and relevant in Finnish academic communities. Palviainen (2010) studies the level of Swedish proficiency among Finnish university students entering a course leading towards the Civil Service Language Proficiency certificate in Swedish, which is a compulsory part of a university degree. More than half of the students fail to reach a level that would mean they were prepared for the test, and Palviainen stresses the need for consistent assessment procedures at all educational stages. She also makes suggestions for improving the general level of Swedish at secondary school level.

Anckar (2011) studies the validity and reliability of multiple-choice listening comprehension tests, focusing on the processes and strategies of the test-taker. She makes use of items from the listening comprehension test for French in the Finnish Matriculation Examination, analysing the test-takers’ introspective responses and identifying different types of guessing and elimination. Elimination was used most frequently by the strongest test-takers, while the highest proportions of guessing were found in the weakest subjects.

Erickson has been active in surveying the national assessment of foreign languages in Sweden. In Erickson (2009) she focuses on the development and use of national materials designed to complement teachers’ continuous assessments. Special attention is given to the contributions of students to the process. National syllabuses for foreign languages are largely inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). After a general election in 2006 and a change of government, changes in the system of assessment were initiated, including earlier grading, an increased number of grade levels, more national tests and tests in more subjects. Sundqvist (2008) investigates inter-rater reliability of oral proficiency in English among 9th-graders, which was found to be high. Likewise, agreement in assessments between the four raters and the informants’ English teachers was high. Oscarson & Apelgren (2011) analyse language teachers’ views and experiences of assessment principles, finding that the most common forms of assessment were observation of free oral communication, own tests and essay on a given topic. Dragemark Oscarson (2009) explores how upper secondary school students in Sweden perceived their own English writing ability in relation to syllabus goals. Syllabus goals encouraging student responsibility and autonomy are seen as viable and realistic.

In Sweden there has been a conflict between applied linguists and general educationalists. Linmarud (2006) presents a well-balanced survey of the issues, pointing out that cooperation between Swedish linguists, educationalists and sociologists at times seems only skin-deep.
In Finland there seems to have been less direct confrontation between these groups, but, as elsewhere, contacts between related research areas such as psychology of language, SLA, bilingualism and language didactics could be improved. In Jyväskylä, however, researchers are taking an active part in the SLATE network, which has the laudable aim of integrating SLA and testing research perspectives. SLATE aims at combining knowledge of communicative proficiency, as expressed by the CEFR scales, with the degree of control of various linguistic features at a given CEFR level. Huhta (2010) provides information on this, and in another article (Huhta 2009), he evaluates the testing offered for aviation purposes in Finland.

The CEFLING project mentioned in section 2.1 involved intensive cooperation between SLA researchers and testing experts in Jyväskylä. The promising results so far are summarized in Alanen et al. (2011), an earlier study being Alanen, Huhta & Tarnanen (2010). The construct of L2 proficiency, where the role of variation and variability of performance is important, provides a powerful link between the two fields. Theoretical and methodological issues are discussed in depth, and the authors also deal with the problems involved in developing tasks and assessment procedures. Martin et al. (2010) also report on the CEFLING project. They aim to show how the development of particular linguistic structures can be tracked across the six CEFR levels and what evidence can be found for the potential co-development of different domains. The parameters used were frequency, accuracy and distribution across the six levels, and the structures investigated were locative cases and transitive and passive constructions in L2 Finnish. Takala (2010) also deals with testing assessment practices in relation to the CEFR. Forsberg & Bartning (2010) aim to match the CEFR scales with the development of linguistic proficiency, in this case in Swedish learners’ L2 French. The features discussed are morpho-syntax, discourse organization and the use of formulaic sequences.

Stoltz (2011) investigates the amount of Swedish and French produced by teachers and students in the FL classroom. The study relies on audio recordings of interactions taking place in two classrooms in Sweden. The author points to the difficulties involved in speaking French in a classroom context where Swedish is consistently present and the knowledge of French not very advanced. Sundberg (2009) analyses how teachers mediate linguistic and cultural otherness in the French foreign language classroom in Sweden. More attention was found to be paid to linguistic than cultural otherness.

Ullholm (2010) finds that immigrant parents’ childhood experiences largely determine the degree of their children’s bilingualism and the chances of language maintenance. The author concludes that the prospects for Hungarian language maintenance in Sweden are limited. In his dissertation, Gyllstad (2007) develops and evaluates tests of collocation knowledge for advanced learners of English. Wolter & Gyllstad (2011) also investigate the learning of collocations in English and conclude that special attention in teaching should be given to collocations with no equivalent form in L1. Granath (2009) outlines how teachers can utilize corpora in the teaching of EFL syntax at university level.

Kohonen (2006) uses the theoretical framework of experiential learning for the European Language Portfolio (ELP), where conscious attention is paid to the importance of the students’ interaction and their experiences, attitudes and feelings about their language and intercultural learning.
M. Björklund (2008) examines the conditions for EFL learning in Swedish-medium schools in Finland. Considerable heterogeneity was found among both teachers and learners, but on the whole English is becoming a second language rather than a foreign language for many learners. Sjöholm, Forsman & M. Björklund (2009) focus on how the teaching of English has been affected by the internationalization of the world. They pay particular attention to EFL education in the Finland-Swedish context, advocating more holistic and process-oriented approaches to language education.

Larzén-Ostermark (2009) investigated the attitudes of Finnish student teachers to integrating the intercultural dimension into their teaching. Their views were generally positive, and in their teacher training the students wanted more attention given to culture teaching. Forsman (2006) focuses on the implementation of cultural aspects of learning in the language classroom, advocating the promotion of intercultural competence in which awareness of difference and diversity is taken into account.

Maijala (2009) studies the role of national and regional variation in the materials used for the teaching of German in Finland. She finds that regional varieties of the German language are given very limited space.

3.1 Language immersion and content and language integrated learning (CLIL)

At Vaasa University, with Christer Laurén as prime mover, pioneering work began in establishing immersion teaching in Finland more than 20 years ago. The target language was Swedish, and much of the recent work has been published in Swedish or Finnish. Research in immersion teaching is continuing, and the researchers have been in close contact with immersion projects in other countries, including Canada, Italy and Spain. Laurén (2009) presents an immersion project where the emphasis is on teacher–student cooperation. In CLIL, an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. An international conference on CLIL was organized in Kokkola in 2004, and the conference volume in English (S. Björklund et al. (eds.) 2006) provides a comprehensive overview of the useful work done in this area. Many of the contributions to this volume deal with Swedish immersion in Finnish schools (Bergström, Mård-Miettinen, Rauto, Södergård, Bergroth and Björklund 2006a and b). In addition, Jäppinen (2006) gives a general picture of CLIL, while Merisuo-Storm (2006) compares literacy skills and learning attitudes in Finnish CLIL classes with monolingual classes. There is much good research on language immersion in Finland, but it has not made a great difference to the number of schools adopting this approach. Many administrators were originally sceptical about the usefulness of immersion and for some reason this scepticism has not completely disappeared. One reason for the small number of immersion schools in Finland may be that they are generally for Swedish, not the more popular language, English, but it is much easier to find qualified native speakers of Swedish than of English.

Vuorinen's comparative study (2009) of bilingual education in America and Finland shows the benefit of being able to combine research with long experience of language teaching. The study is particularly valuable in that it is longitudinal. Vuorinen interviewed the same groups of students in their first year of elementary school and then, after nine
years, during their final year of high school. He sees bilingual education as an asset, but the educational and cultural contexts in the two countries are, of course, quite different. The situation of the American subjects has a closer parallel with today’s new immigrant Finnish citizens.

Active research on CLIL English in Finnish schools has been carried out at Jyväskylä, especially by David Marsh and Tarja Nikula. The *International CLIL Research Journal (ICRJ)* is published there in cooperation with BEP (the Bilingual Education Platform Network); the first issue appeared in 2007. So far the international character of ICRJ has meant that there have been few Finnish or Swedish contributors, and little data from Finland or Sweden. Marsh and Nikula have frequently collaborated with colleagues from abroad, but only some of their internationally published works are listed here. Dalton-Puffer & Nikula (2006) examine how directives are performed by teachers and students in Finnish and Austrian CLIL classrooms. The specific conditions of classroom discourse affect the language environment in classrooms and should be taken into account when defining objectives for CLIL education. Jäppinen (2006) deals with CLIL from a general pedagogical perspective, offering some suggestions in the light of future learning needs.

The Finnish national conference volume on language didactics (Koskensalo et al. 2007) contains a section on CLIL. Seikkula-Leino (2007) outlines the development of CLIL teaching in Finland following the curriculum reform in 2004. Rasinen (2007) studied learners’ reactions to CLIL teaching and found that learners generally indicated positive attitudes. Using CLIL led to increased efficiency in learning and teaching. Similarly, Pihko (2007) found that while students learning with both traditional ELT and CLIL show generally positive attitudes to the learning of English, CLIL learners were more satisfied with and confident about their English proficiency. The most important international publication on CLIL to date is probably Marsh & Wolff (2007), with one Finnish and one Swedish contribution. Järvinen (2007) here provides a model for implementation of CLIL. She makes the point that models of CLIL must increasingly focus on the accuracy of the form component. In the same volume, Sylvén (2007) gives the background to CLIL studies in Sweden and compares the contacts of CLIL students and regular students with English outside the classroom. Sylvén (2010) is a longitudinal study over two years, comparing incidental vocabulary acquisition among CLIL students at upper secondary schools with that of traditional students. As in the Finnish studies, CLIL students were found to improve more than the traditionally taught group. Sylvén also leads an ongoing project, Content and Language Integration in Swedish Schools (CLISS n.d.), which aims to investigate the development of written academic language, English and Swedish, in CLIL classes and corresponding ELT classes.

Apart from Sylvén, other Swedish researchers have also investigated CLIL. Kjellén Simes (2008) examines the effects of immersion education on advanced Swedish teenage learners of English. She analyses low-frequency vocabulary and the ratio of motivated tense shift in free written production and finds that immersion education has positive effects, especially on less proficient but motivated students. Two articles relating to this topic are Kjellén Simes (2007, 2009). Svartholm (2010) has investigated the use of sign language in bilingual education for the deaf in Sweden.

Airey (2009) studied CLIL learning of physics in Sweden, videotaping and interviewing physics students at two Swedish universities. Comparison between teaching in English and
teaching in Swedish showed that, above a certain threshold level of disciplinary language competence, it did not appear to matter what the teaching language was. Airey has also published conference papers and articles related to this topic (Airey & Linder 2006, 2008). Kukkonen (2006) reports on CLIL physics in Finland.

4. Foreign language skills: listening, speaking and writing

The use of computers has revolutionized corpus linguistics, and a variety of corpora, especially for English, are now available. Many linguists in Finland have compiled linguistic corpora, which provide much material for research. Laitinen (2010) is a brief survey of English corpora compiled in Finland, also including information on the ongoing project Corpus of English in Finland (FIN-CE). This corpus of non-native use of English in Finland is designed for research into sociolinguistic variability as the outcome of language contact. Another related project is ELFA (English as Lingua Franca) led by Anna Mauranen. This project at Helsinki University has collected a very useful corpus of one million words of spoken academic English, continuing the tradition of successful compilation of English corpora which has long been a hallmark of the Helsinki Department of English. Much recent Helsinki-based research has focused on how English is actually used as a lingua franca in various contexts. More than twenty publications in the ELFA project by Mauranen, Hynninen, Ranta and others from the past three years are listed on the home page of Helsinki University (www.eng.helsinki.fi), but only some of their works are included here (most of those omitted were published internationally). The volume edited by Mauranen & Ranta (2009) grew out of the presentations at the first international conference on ELF in Helsinki. Mauranen here provides an introduction and Ranta (2009) stresses the differences between spoken and written language. She finds that several non-standard grammatical features are not only frequent in ELF but also occur in L1 spoken English all over the world, including the speech of educated native speakers. Björkman (2009) studied ELF in a Swedish engineering setting seeking to find out about the effects of non-standardness in ELF speech. Pragmatic features were affected by the nature of a lingua franca setting, while morphosyntax was not. Mauranen & Hynninen (2010) have edited volume 6 of the digital journal Helsinki English Studies, a special issue on English as a lingua franca. Two other special issues, Journal of Pragmatics 43.4 (2011) and Nordic Journal of English Studies 5.2 (2006), also focus on ELF, and contain contributions dealing with Finnish and Swedish data. Björkman (2011), for example, investigates the role pragmatic strategies play in the communicative effectiveness of English as a lingua franca in Swedish higher education. She recommends that lecturers in lingua franca settings create as many opportunities as possible for the use of pragmatic strategies, increasing interactivity in lectures. Hynninen (2011) investigates the mechanisms of mediation in an ELF university setting. Mediation is defined as a form of speaking for another, in which a co-participant starts rephrasing another participant’s turn. Ranta (2006) finds that ELF speakers have found an extra function for the progressive, suggesting that the use of the progressive gives the verb more prominence and salience in the speaker’s utterance. Mauranen (2010) regards lingua franca evidence as useful for discovering essential, possibly universal, aspects of discourse, such as discourse reflexivity. Orientation towards interlocutors is more prominent in dialogue than in monologic language.
Learner language corpora, especially the international corpus of advanced learner English (ICLE) compiled in Belgium, have also provided data for studies in Sweden, and several studies have compared Swedish advanced learner language in the SWICLE corpus (the Swedish component of the ICLE) with the native speaker corpus in ICLE. Mondor (2008) shows that Swedish advanced learners rely on fewer types of verb-particle constructions than native speakers. This pattern tended to be overused in informal constructions where the L1 provided counterparts, and underused in polysemous and idiomatic constructions without such links. Herriman & Boström Aronsson (2009) explored how Swedish advanced learners compare with native speakers in terms of how they organize information in argumentative writing, focusing mainly on selection of theme and thematic variation. Overuse of some themes leads to a style of non-native writing that is closer to spoken than to written native language. In another comparison, Erman (2009) found that collocations were underused by learners, partly because too little attention had been paid to multiword patterns in the classroom. Herriman (2009) discovered that we was overused by Swedish learners, especially when making use of positive face strategies, emphasizing what they and their readers have in common. Olofsson (2009) compares German, Italian and Swedish learners in the use of the zero relativizer and finds that the German learners differ from the other two groups. More generally, Metsä-Ketelä (2007) focuses on the vagueness of learner language, describing how non-native learners with various L1s use the vague expression more or less in international settings. Lingua franca speakers can come up with innovative uses of vague expressions without compromising the effectiveness of communication.

In an analysis of videotaped lunch conversations, Röcklingsberg (2009) points out the culture-specific differences between Swedes and Germans in the same type of interaction. For L2 French, Forsberg (2006) has compared the use of formulaic language (‘pre-fabs’) in native and non-native (Swedish) speakers, finding that learners’ use of formulaic language increases along with their progress in learning, and that the non-native distribution of the different categories of pre-fabs gradually moves towards native-speaker distribution, though only advanced learners who have spent considerable time in a French-speaking country produce the same proportion of lexical pre-fabs. Sharp (2007) outlines the different functions of Swedish–English language mixing in two domains: the spoken discourse of business executives and the casual conversation of young adults.

Paananen-Porkka (2007) studied the speech rhythm of Finnish adolescents speaking English. She found that they pause too frequently and in inappropriate places. They know how to reduce the duration and quality of unstressed sounds but do not do it frequently enough. For Finns, pausing may be a more important component of English speech rhythm than sentence stress.

5. Applied linguistics: general studies, translation studies, attitudes

language users’ views on learning English, and compares the learners’ self-portraits with the results of Kalaja et al. (2008). Sign language users tend to see the process of learning English as a lonely one: most of the visual imagery of sign language users is related to a ‘road’. Grasz (2007) discusses a survey of learners’ attitudes about multilingualism, finding that Finnish university students of German tend to associate multilingualism with native or near-native competence in the language. In a longitudinal study, Aro (2009) examines the beliefs that Finnish elementary school children hold about English and the learning of English. Fifteen children were interviewed in their first, third and fifth years at school. The learners developed from a stage in which they co-operated with parents and teachers towards a more independent role in language studies. This process, however, did not apply to all learners: at the age of 12 some learners began to portray themselves as passive recipients of teaching rather than as active students. Henry & Apelgren (2008) investigate the attitudes to FL learning in Sweden at the point when a new foreign language is introduced into the curriculum.

Translation studies have been common in Finland. This is partly due to the special translation schools founded in association with the universities in the 1970s (Tampere, Turku, Savonlinna and Kouvol). A few years ago these were merged with the university language departments. Works on translation have generally been published internationally and many are only loosely connected to issues of learning and teaching. Only Vehmas-Lehto (2008) is included here, as it presents a broad-based survey of the international field of translation studies and is published in an AFinLA volume, not easily accessible. Also, the author is not particularly well known in the Anglo-American context, since she has primarily worked with translations between Russian and Finnish.

Airola & Kantelinen (2008) survey the language education given at Finnish polytechnics – in my opinion a better term than the grand (official) term ‘universities of applied sciences’ that the authors use for Finnish Ammattikorkeakoulu – where language studies are intended to be linked to the students’ professional field. Teachers were asked to describe the strengths and developmental needs of their own institutions and the data was analysed.

Leppänen (2007) analyses youth English from a discourse-analytic and sociolinguistic perspective – how young people use English in the media – while Leppänen & Nikula (2007) report on a project examining the uses and functions of English in the media, education and professional life. English affects these three domains in a variety of ways. For young adults in particular, the use of English becomes well motivated and socially significant: English has an important role in constructing new forms of expertise and social relations.

Valentini (2008) analysed how EU information and communication policies developed between 2001 and 2006 and how they were implemented in two member states, Finland and Italy. EU communication strategies were found to be rather similar in the two countries and insufficiently tailored to the needs of the local population.

Dervin (2008) deals with identity and interculturality in university student mobility. He is critical of some of the oversimplified dogmas about students’ stays abroad. Bylund Spångberg (2008) investigated age-related differences in L1 attrition in an L2 setting, finding that the onset of puberty was a turning-point for the degree of conformity with native behaviour.
6. Concluding words

This review has covered much of the applied linguistic research done in Sweden and Finland during the years 2006–2011, with special emphasis on foreign language learning and teaching. Special attention has been given to topics that have attracted a lot of interest in the area: language immersion and CLIL, cross-linguistic influence, corpus linguistics, English as a lingua franca and language use in multilingual urban settings. On the whole, the studies listed here show that applied linguistics in these countries is well and thriving, and there has been a marked rise in publication activity in the past few years. But applied linguistic research in both Sweden and Finland has a broader scope than can be captured in this review. Among related topics not included here for lack of space are, in addition to translation studies, bi- and multilingualism, dyslexia and key-stroke logging. Finally, there is a special need for continued activity in longitudinal studies, and more cooperation between disciplines should also be encouraged, for example between psychology and applied linguistics.

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ELFA project. www.helsinki.fi/englanti/elfa/index.html


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