Eeva-Liisa Nyqvist

University of Helsinki/Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies

Grammatical competence of Finnish-speaking L2-learners of Swedish in immersion

There is a multitude of studies in other countries showing that immersion students generally do better than non-immersion students (e.g. Lyster 2007) because of the early starting age, rich input and the meaningful interaction the immersion provides. Early total immersion in Swedish is provided in eleven communes in Finland. The learning results are in general excellent, but immersion teachers, headmasters and education authorities also report that grammatical accuracy is a major problem for Finnish immersion students. Regardless of this, in-depth studies about the development of the grammatical competence have been rare in Finland.

My postdoctoral research concentrates on how 12- and 15-year-old Finnish-speaking immersion students from all regions in Finland having immersion schools (n=124 and n=147, respectively) master central aspects of Swedish grammar compared to 16-year-old non-immersion students (n=98). The material consists of written narratives and different grammar tests. A central question is what kinds of problems the immersion students still have at the end of immersion. Previous studies in Sweden have shown that many aspects of grammar are difficult for even high-level (non-immersion) learners of L2-Swedish (e.g. Hyltenstam 1988, 1992), and immersion students are likely to have similar problems. It is also important to identify the most problematic structures to be able to develop immersion pedagogy.

By now, my research has concentrated on definiteness and article use, grammatical gender, local prepositions, passive and subordinate questions. In my presentation, I will present both immersion as a method and my results so far with authentic examples.

Literature