Perceptions of bilingualism and education among bilingual speakers-The case of Finland and Spain

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Avhandling pro gradu i pedagogik

Fakulteten för pedagogik och välfärdsstudier

Allmän pedagogik

Åbo Akademi Vasa

Vasa 2018

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1 Introduction

Language surrounds us from the first second of our lives. Through language, we express our feelings, thoughts and communicate our ideas. Language is the connection with others, and we identify ourselves with a culture thanks to it. We understand the world through the tool of language.

There is a growing number of bilingual and multilingual populations around the world. The results of a survey (by the European Commission, 2006) show that 56 per cent of respondents can speak another language apart from their mother tongue, and up to 66% of the children of the world are bilingual. The increase of bilingualism in the European Union is a fact. This percentage rises to high levels in some countries. For example, 99% of the inhabitants of Luxembourg and 95% of the inhabitants of Latvia speak more than one language. The situation of bilingualism in the United States of America has been a phenomenon that has risen very fast, especially in the last decade. Factors such as immigration and globalisation have helped the development of this situation. According to the U.S Census Bureau, a fifth of the American population under the age of five years speaks a language that is not English at home. This means that since the year 1980 the percentage of bilingualism has risen in America by 140 per cent (U.S Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007).

Giving the above description it is safe to claim that we are living in a world of increasing globalization and migratory movements. Different cultures and languages are in contact and mix with each other. This creates a strong change in the linguistic aspect of society and education. The phenomenon of bilingual children is a fact that we are facing every day. Families with members who have different mother tongues are many. Yet not so much research has focused on the identities of bilingual people's perceptions of being bilingual in bi or multilingual societies. The number of multicultural societies is growing as years go by, and as societies develop (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). The phenomenon of globalisation increases the prevalence of individual multilingualism.

Economic, educational, social and political factors create a need for developing multilingual education. Multilingualism is not an exceptional phenomenon, as it is more common nowadays than some decades ago (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998).

Bilingual education refers to the use of two languages of instruction at some point in a student's school career. Multilingualism will be applied to the use of three or more languages. Bilingualism and multilingualism can be examined as a possession of the individual. The languages are not used to teach language itself, but to teach subject matter content. When referring to this subject, we find a strong complexity as we must consider different factors of economic, instructional, psychological, administrative, socio-political and sociolinguistic character (Bhatia, 2012, pp. 10-21). Parting from these points, the outcomes, implementations and goals of bilingualism and multilingualism can be analysed from a wide angle of disciplinary perspectives.

The main purpose of this work is to analyse how bilingual and multilingual individuals in western bi- or multi-lingual societies, more precisely Spain and Finland, experience being bilingual, and how the bi- and multilingualism of these two countries affect their identities. Speaking more than one language can be very constructive and make many aspects of life much richer in experiences, but can also cause a negative impact. The investigation focuses on a qualitative study, approaching the concept of being bilingual, and the meaning that this can have and influence on a future academic life.

The research question is: How does bilingualism and multilingualism affect bilingual and multilingual individuals?

1.1 Structure

This empirical research has the following structure:

1. First part: including the introduction (explaining why the topic is relevant), background, aim and research question.

2. Second part: Theoretical part. It includes definitions, language theories, theories of language acquisition, theories of second language acquisition, definition and theories of bilingualism, intelligence and bilingualism, levels of bilingualism, bilingualism around the world (Finland, Spain, etc.).

3. Third part: Method and implementation. This part includes the choice of method, data collection, selection of informers, phenomenography, qualitative research interview, validity and reliability.

4. Fourth part: Results. Presentation of the survey results and analysis.

5. Fifth part: Concluding discussion. Data analysis and methods of discussion

2 Theoretical framing and previous research

This theoretical part of the thesis outlines theories of language. There is a special focus on bilingualism in order to frame the empirical study.

2.1 Definitions of language

Both humans and animals communicate and interact with other members of the community. They warn about danger, inform about finding food, they communicate around reproduction. Humans and animals both need a way of communicating with others in order to survive.

Life would not be possible without language. There are different kinds of languages (visual, oral, written and signal language). But, what is language? Why is it so important in human communication? The word language comes from Latin *lingua* (language, tongue). We find wide information and definitions in Merriam-Webster's Dictionary:

1 a: the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community.

b (1): audible, articulate, meaningful sound as produced by the action of the vocal organs (2): a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings (3): the suggestion by objects, actions, or conditions of associated ideas or feelings <language in their very gesture-Shakespeare>

(4): the means by which animals communicate (5): a formal system of signs and symbols (as FORTRAN or a calculus in logic) including rules for the formation and the transformation of admissible expressions (6): machine language.

2 a: form or manner of verbal expression; specifically: style

b: the vocabulary and phraseology belonging to an art or a department of knowledge

c: profanity

3: the study of language especially as a school subject

4: specific words especially in a law or regulation

According to linguist Tore Jansson (2012, p.6):

"Human languages are the most highly developed and most flexible systems for communication that we know of. The distinctive feature of those systems is that they can be used to convey messages of any degree of complexity in an incredibly swift and efficient manner. Their degree of complexity, their variability, and their adaptability are instances of how different they are from the means of communication that are used by other mammals. "

2.2 Theory of language

For many centuries there has been a strong interest in defining the meaning of language. Researchers have been investigating if language is a matter of "nurture" or of "nature". Some of the versions of this question are whether language is a biological or a socio-cultural phenomenon. The 19th century brought a strong impulse to studies of this material, with the British Empiricism and German Romantic period.

Those ideals were the perfect point of departure for the structuralism schools until the first half of the 20th century (Walker, 1994, pp.18-22).

2.2.1 Language theories

For years, man has looked for the origins of human communication. The many theories concerning the human language tried to give an answer to multiple questions about the origin of our capacity to communicate.

Some of those theories are:

Receptive Language before Expressive Language

Children develop their comprehension and natural ability to understand language skills before their ability to use or express them.

Expressive language is the ability to use language to communicate, while receptive language is the ability to understand it. When the mother talks to her baby child, for example, she says to her thirteen month old child that he cannot put the sand in his mouth. The child can understand the instructions that the mother gives him, even if he is not able to talk and repeat the command with words (Kuhl, 2002, pp.110-115).

Language acquisition and the environmental influence

B. F. Skinner was a behaviourist author who proposed the idea that environment has an influence on language and language depends on the environment. The principles of conditioning, association, imitation, and reinforcement are involved in the process of language acquisition (Skinner, 1957).

The association of sound with objects, events and actions are the reason why children learn words. This idea has received negative reviews. Skinner defined positive and negative reinforcement as the main principle of operant conditioning.

Behaviour is strengthened in a process known as reinforcement. When a pleasant or positive stimulus is given to behaviour, the reinforcement makes the behaviour stronger. The behaviour is stronger when the negative stimulus is taken away.

Skinner affirmed that we human beings are born empty, and language must be acquired. The process of language learning is caused by the environment. Our actions have consequences, and this gives a nurturing view of the human language. The positive reinforcement that parents show to their children is one of the pillars of children learning. When a child vocalises, parents tend to reward this action with attention, and this is a way of increasing the vocalisation.

Children imitate the sound of the words that surround them and receive a reward. Some of the reasons are:

-Children with very little reinforcement from their parents can also develop language.

- The process of language development in a child is very fast, especially during the second year of the child's life.

-Parent-child conversations have been the object of observational studies (Brown & Hanlon, 1970).

Parents tend to focus on the accuracy or truthfulness of statements of the child´s speech, instead of correcting the grammar. This is a reason why learning grammar is not as likely as other aspects.

-Imitation without reinforcement is not learning.

Neural Networks

Some computer models (neural networks) have been created by neuroscientists in order to reproduce the acquisition of some aspects of language. There are no rules in the programming of those networks. These programmes are exposed to examples of a language.

They can learn the past tense form of verbs and the language´s statistical structure. These investigations affirm that the way in which children acquire language is like this network system: the key is exposure to multiple examples in order to learn (http://natureofcode.com/book/chapter-10-neural-networks).

Universal Grammar

 With the linguist Noam Chomsky (1957), the biological aspect of the theories of languages appeared. Chomsky argues that the human brain has a language acquisition device (LAD), a process that produces the development of language skills in children, or the innate mechanism to produce language.

Children are born with a universal grammar, and this fact makes them receptive to the common features of all languages. Because of this strong grammar background, children can very easily pick up a language if we expose them to its grammar. Human beings have an innate capacity to acquire language.

According to this theory, the following evidence can be found:

-Most children experiment in the stages of language development at a very similar age. This similarity occurs even in children developed in any kind of environment.

-The pattern of children´s language development is very similar in all cultures.

-The acquisition of language skills by children is a quick process, with no effort.

-There is a possibility of waking up the language in deaf children not exposed previously to a language. The languages, even if they come from different cultures, have similarities in sentence structure.

In the words of Chomsky (1995, p.165):

The theory of a particular language is its grammar. The theory of languages and the expressions they generate is Universal Grammar (UG); UG is a theory of the initial state of the relevant component of the language faculty.

The idea of Universal Grammar and nativism are of relevant importance. The "bio-linguistic" idea gives a vision of language as an organ or system. The tension between culture and biology (related to language) is resolved with neurobiology. Language is a cognition that makes us human. Other species of animals can communicate, being able to produce several vocalisations giving plenty of meaning. Some of them have a partially learnt system (birds). However, the only species able to produce a limited set of symbols to express an infinite number of ideas is the human being.

This quality is remarkable and has been detected in man even at a very early age. There are some investigations that show that a child of 12 months old must already express sensitivity to the basic grammar required to understand causative sentences (Rowland & Noble, 2010).

Despite the many the years and the high number of scientific investigations to find out the processes that enable children to understand and talk, nevertheless the comprehension process and the acquisition of grammar are still an unsolved mystery.

There are different types of language acquisition, according to Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek (2000, pp. 137-138):

1) First/native Language: this refers to natural acquisition of language from regular interactions, in the language used with parents, playmates, etc. Basic usage of native language and grammar is acquired from the age of zero to three (Golinkoff &Hirsh-Pasek, 2000, p.182).

2) Second/foreign Language Learning: this normally involves formal education in the school, after early childhood. Individuals construct their language systems subconsciously.

3) Multilingual development: this type is very similar to second language learning. Languages are generally learnt one after another. The learning of the third language is easier than the second language (L2) as the second language has sharpened the cognitive skills, and so it goes on with the future learning of languages.

4) Two native languages: this is also called bilingual first language acquisition. The latest investigations show that the brain is formed by two different languages. Even if the two languages are not balanced, there is no assumption that one language is primary and the other not. There can be two native languages if there is enough input in both languages during the period of acquisition of language (from age zero to three). This natural interaction time can also be performed after that age (De Houwer, 2009, p.2).

Figure 1: Resume of theories of language. There is a connection between all these different elements.
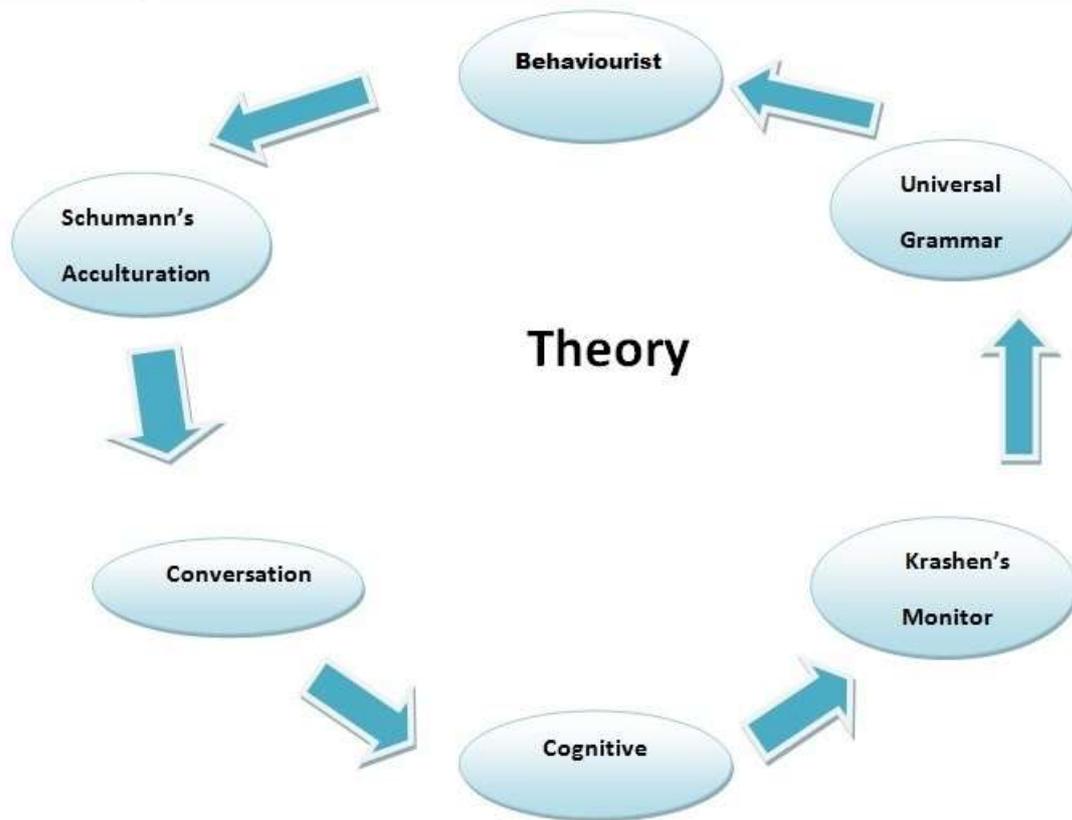
2.3 Theories of language acquisition

Since the earliest of times, man has tried to find out what language is the "natural" one for human beings, and how the process to reach the goal of speaking a language is.

Language is a natural phenomenon, an aspect of its biological nature, to be studied in the same manner as, for instance, its anatomy (Lenneberg, 1967, p. 7).

There are many ideas and theories on the acquisition of language. Modern linguistics bases its view of the human language from the natural object's point of view. This naturalistic approach to language affirms that our species has a specific ability to acquire a language. The human brain has the fascinating properties of managing the enormous complexity and the infinite ways of using language, and the capacity to obtain that tacit knowledge. We can appreciate the extraordinary faculties to use the language in an appropriate, free and infinite mode. Language is an empirical inquiry.

Linguistics' studies experienced an evolution where the human language is under study. Following the steps of biological sciences, it tries to explain the mechanisms and the abstract properties that rule language. Beginning from the biology of the human language, psychology is the goal of linguistic theory (Chomsky, 1955).

Biolinguistics studies affirm that a language is just a biological object, and it must be studied following the parameters of natural science (Jenkins, 1999). Developmental compatibility is a characteristic of this theory. There are two points of view concerning the acquisition of language.

The Language Acquisition Device (LAD) can be seen from two different perspectives: one that sees it as a general, cognitive mechanism (the psychology perspective) and the other that sees it as a specific, modular, mechanism (linguistics).

According to Krashen, the only way to make language acquisition happen is when students receive comprehensible input. Beginning students put their effort into listening and reading comprehension.

Figure 2:

Language Acquisition (Pinker, 1994, p.18).
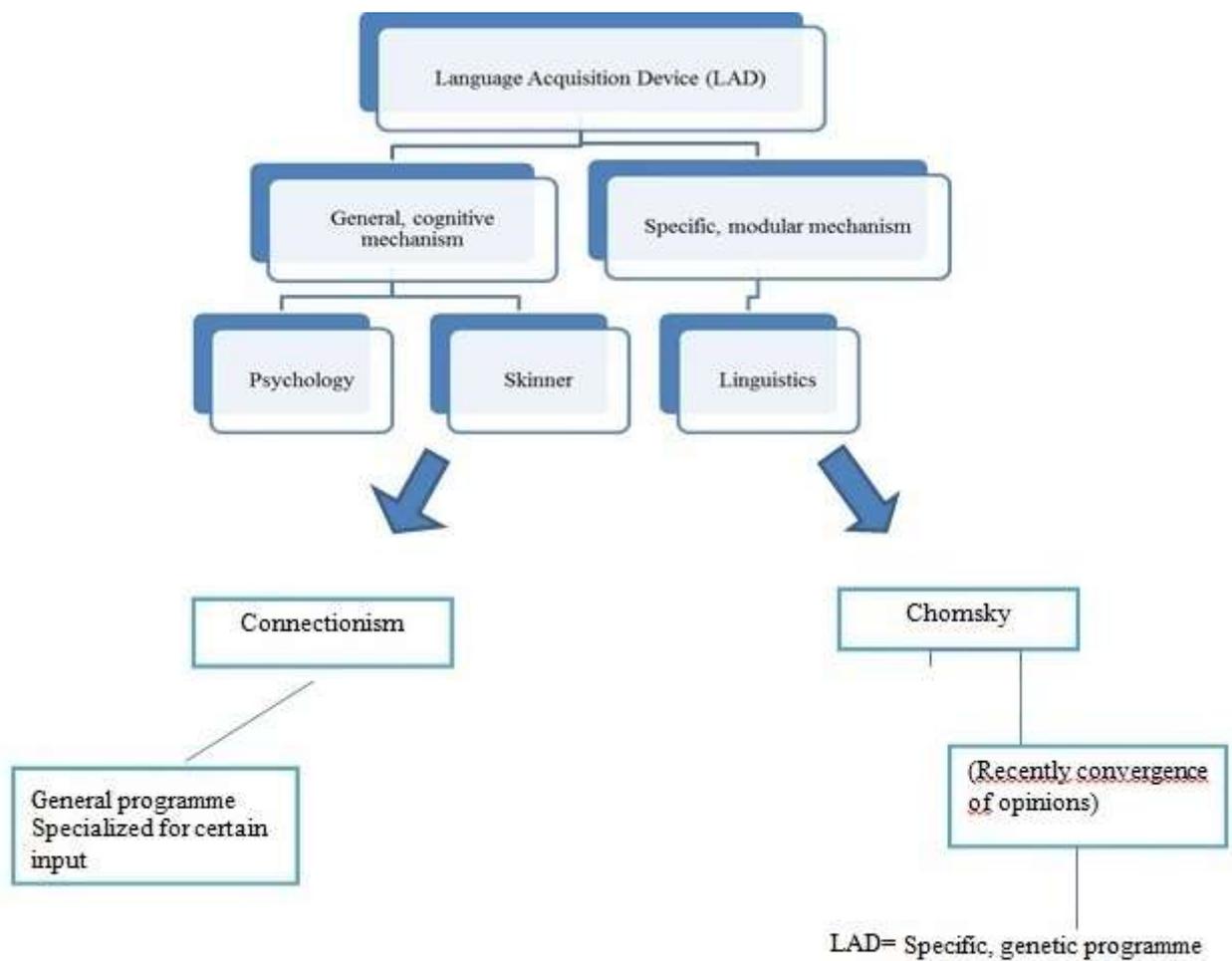
2.4 Theories of second language acquisition

Second-language acquisition is considered an interdisciplinary field. The main pillars concerning the research on second language acquisition are the role of the native language and the determinants of individual differences in acquisition that is performed successfully.

This graphic is a representation of a general view of the history of second language acquisition research:

Figure 3:

A general view of the history of second language acquisition

General view: History of second language acquisiton

1967: Pit Corder: The significance of learner's errors (essay)

1972: Larry Selinker: Interlanguage (article)

1980s: Stephen Krashen: He developes the Input hypothesis

1990s: New theories: Interaction, output and noticing theories

2000s: Studies focused on linguistic and psychology fields
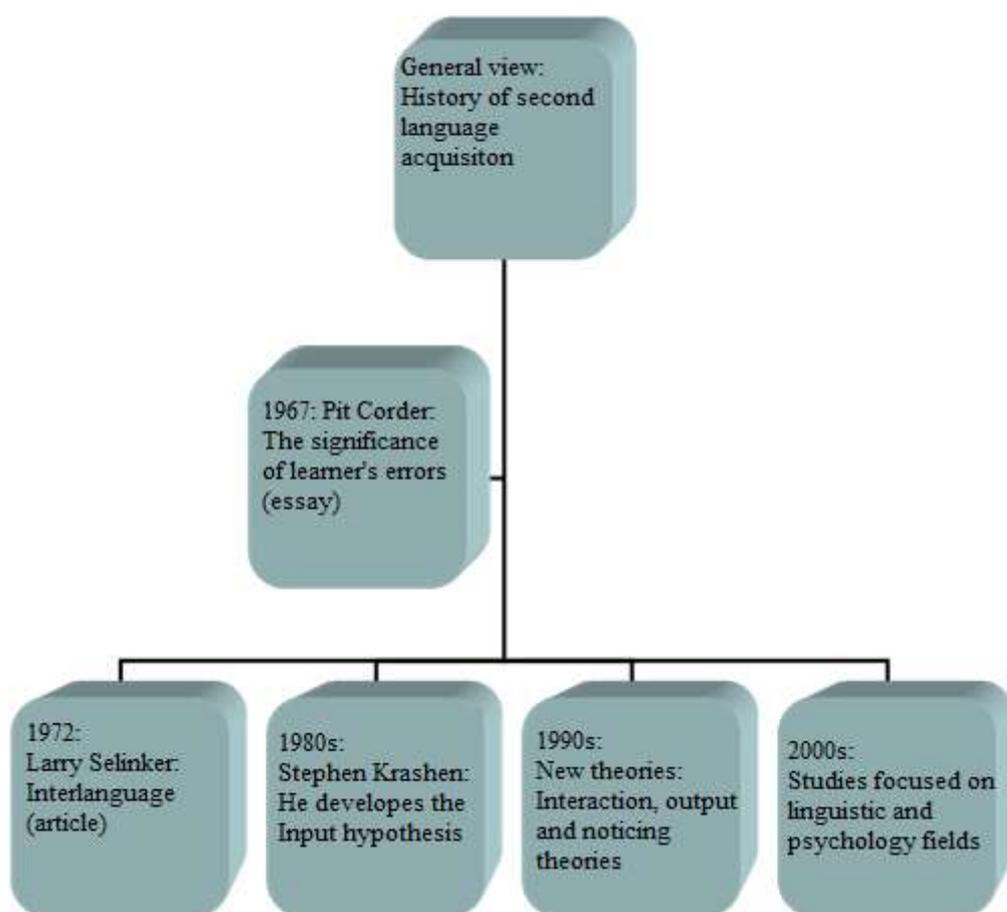
The figure shows the development of the history of second language acquisition research. The most important works were written between 1967 and the 2000s.

Contrastive analysis of the grammatical structures of the native (first) and target (second) language (in which potential positive and negative transfer were identified) defined the second period of language acquisition and teaching (Lado, 1964). This situation lasted until the 1960s. Empiricist accounts of language and learning built the roots for this view of second language acquisition. Following Chomsky (1957), the powerful popularity of rationalist views of language discredited that view.

Studies of the child language acquisition were used as the model for studies of second language acquisition. The errors produced by the learner were taken into high consideration in the developmental process.

During the 1960s and 1970s, studies of second language learner errors supported the general move away from contrastive analysis. A small proportion of errors analysed in the *corpora* of learner speech were traced to the native language (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1990). There was a remarkable similarity between these errors and the ones found in child language learners (omission of grammatical inflexions, simplification of structures, overgeneralization of rules, etc.). The source of language errors is not common in second language learners. The source language is a key factor. Some specific areas of grammar related to the source language present some difficulty. As an example of these difficulties, we find the English article system causing problems to speakers of different Asian languages (Hakuta, 1983).

Within the Universal Grammar (framework of linguistic with a rationalist orientation) distinctions are made amongst groups of languages in the process of first language acquisition. The parameters in the target language (if it is the same or not as the native language) could have consequences on second language acquisition. There is a strong theoretical attempt to revive the role of the source language with a rationalist view, even if the empirical tests of this theory are still analysed (White, 1989). Different languages take different amounts of training to master, with different results.

The more different a language is to our first language, the higher number of hours we will need to learn it (Odlin, 1989). Similarities between the first and the second language can facilitate the process of learning. Language aptitude plays a significant role, responding to individual differences in the learner (Carroll, 1981).

Added to this, motivation and attitude play an important role (Gardner, 1985). Social psychological variables play a leading role in language learning with sociolinguistic background also relevant. We find some examples of this situation in foreign language classrooms.

Within individual variation, an important source is the age at which students start the process of learning the second language.

Long (1990) affirms that there are maturational constraints on second language acquisition. Areas such as morphology, syntax and phonology require "the younger, the better" in the learner. There are some contradictions to the biological reasons for this effect, according to Lenneberg (1967). The effects of age are linear in nature. Those effects appear before and after the supposed end of the critical period at puberty. Another point is that a high level of adults with successful second language acquisition is documented. Between child and adult second language acquisition there are no qualitative differences.

Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition

Language acquisition requires interaction (Krashen, 1988). The form of the speaker's utterances is not a concern, as the main important facts are the messages that they convey and understand. The use of conscious grammatical rules is not required in the process of language acquisition. Methods that use communicative and comprehensible input are the most effective ones.

Correcting errors and forcing the situation would not give the expected results. Stephen Krashen (University of Southern California) is an expert in linguistics who has developed his Theory of Second Language Acquisition. Krashen argues that learners understanding input causes the language acquisition. This input is beyond the stage of knowledge. (Krashen, 2004).

This theory is built upon five main hypotheses:

. *The acquisition-learning hypothesis;*

. *The monitor hypothesis;*

. *The natural order hypothesis;*

. *The input hypothesis;*

. *The affective filter hypothesis.*

The acquisition-learning hypothesis is the most fundamental of the above. It is also the most used and known by linguistics around the world.

Following Krashen's ideas, we find two systems totally independent inside the second language performance. These two systems are: "the acquired system" and "the learnt system". The "acquired system" is also known as "acquisition". The acquisition is produced by a subconscious process. During this process the speakers focus on the communicative act: this is natural communication (meaningful interaction).

The "learnt system" is also known as "learning". It is produced by formal instruction. The conscious process thus gives a conscious knowledge of the language. This knowledge is the one used in grammar learning, for example.

Acquisition and learning are equally important. The relationship between acquisition and learning is explained by the monitor hypothesis. The learnt grammar is applied in practice. The acquisition system is the utterance initiator. The learning system acts like the monitor, in correcting. There must be three conditions for the "monitor" to work: sufficient time for the language learner, correctness, and knowing the rule.

Figure 4:

 Input and monitor model of language acquisition (Krashen)

Learning (the Monitor)

Input   **Acquisition (Creative construction)**   **Output**

According to the use that the individual makes of the "monitor", we find three groups of learners: over-users (who use the "monitor" with a level of high frequency), under-users (they do not use their conscious knowledge, or have not learnt it) and optimal users (they use the "monitor" appropriately).

The hypothesis of the natural order is based on some previous studies (Dulay & Burt, 1974). This hypothesis affirms that the predictable "natural order" is the factor that develops the acquisition of grammatical structures. We learn a language and acquire different grammatical structures at different times.

The input hypothesis tries to explain how a second language takes place. In this theory, we find a link with "acquisition", but not with "learning". The learner receives second language "input" one step beyond his stage of linguistic competence, causing progress in the "natural order" (Luk & Shirai, 2009, p.730).

Natural communicative input is the key. A designed syllabus will create security in that the learner receives the appropriated information for his/her linguistic competence. The affective filter hypothesis suggests that some variables play a role in the acquisition of the second language. Those variables are motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Good qualities to have as a positive for the acquisition of a second language are self-confidence, good self-image, low levels of anxiety and high level of motivation.

Negative factors that make difficult the acquisition of language are low self-esteem, low motivation and a debilitating anxiety. Those negative factors can block the mind and prevent the development of comprehensible input. The positive effect alone is not enough to succeed in the acquisition of language. Concerning grammar, Krashen suggests that grammar comprises "language appreciation" or linguistics. The only instance when grammar produces language acquisition is when the target language is used as the tool of instruction.

For Krashen, a good bilingual education must try to reach two goals:

-the development of academic language (English) and school success

-the development of the heritage language

According to Krashen, (Sjöholm & Ostern, 2000, p. 47), a good and successful bilingual programme must have the following characteristics:

1) It should provide background knowledge through the first language via subject matter teaching in the first language. This should be done to the point that subsequent subject matter instruction in English is comprehensible.

2) It should provide literacy in the first language.

3) It should provide comprehensible input in English, through ESL (English as a second language) and sheltered subject matter teaching. In sheltered classes, the subject matter is taught to an intermediate second language level comprehensibly.

Sheltered classes are for intermediates (not for beginners or for advanced acquirers or native speakers). It is extremely difficult to teach subject matter to those who have acquired no or little knowledge of the language.

Beginners should be in regular ESL, where they are assured of comprehensible input.

Including more advanced students in sheltered classes is problematic because their participation may encourage input that is incomprehensible to the other students. There is substantial evidence supporting the efficacy of sheltered subject matter teaching for intermediate level, literate students.

2.5 Bilingualism

2.5.1 Definition of bilingualism

The main question is: What is bilingualism? How can we define a bilingual person? (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998, p. 2). The task of defining who is and who is not bilingual is much more complicated than it would seem. Is bilingualism measured by how fluent a person is in two languages? Must a bilingual person be as competent in two languages as a monolingual person is?

Bilingual persons use their languages for different functions, and this is the reason why not all bilingual individuals possess the same competence as monolingual speakers. A bilingual person's competence in a language can vary over time, depending on their life circumstances. Bilingualism is not a phenomenon exclusive to modern times. We must go back to the Roman and Greek days to find the first traces. Most countries have some bilingual education project in their educational system (not just a matter of private or public school).

Werner Leopold wrote one of the classic studies of childhood bilingualism (Baker & Prys Jones, 1998). He married one of the students in his Spanish course and investigated the bilingualism of his own daughter.

Some other studies of child bilingualism contributed to the flourishing research in this area, like those by Ronjat (1913). Jules Ronjat was a Franco-Swiss linguist who wrote the first study of bilingualism written by a trained linguist. The study was published in French more than one hundred years ago. He knew the phenomenon of bilingualism, as he was himself bilingual, speaking French and Occitan (a Romance language spoken in the south of France). He was the first scientist who investigated a bilingual/trilingual (or multilingual) child.

Ronjat based his investigations on his own reality, as he wrote down in a diary the progress of his trilingual or multilingual son, Louis. Ronjat spoke in French to Louis, while the mother's relatives spoke to the child in German. The child could also speak Franco-Provençal, a language very closely related to Occitan language. Louis was fluent in various languages, and he did not suffer from delayed intellectual development by being multilingual. This was not the first study on this subject, but it was the first time that a longitudinal case study of language development in a bilingual /multilingual child was performed. The studies of Ronjat were innovative, but less systematic and methodical than the studies of Werner. F. Leopold (in *Speech development of a bilingual child. A linguist's record*.) Leopold was a pioneer and his studies were visionary, writing a huge, extraordinary complete study about his two bilingual daughters.

His work can be summed up with this quote:

> *Ignorance and superstition make the decisions of life simple. Education does not make life easier, but better and richer. Few could condemn education for this reason. Bilingualism should be seen in the same light* (Leopold, 1949, p. 188).

Bilingual children are operationally defined as persons who receive regular input in two or more languages during the most dynamic period of human communication development, that is, between birth and adolescence.

 In this definition children who learn a second language beginning in childhood are also included. If the process of acquiring a language is not done consistently, then the progress in learning the languages will fail with no evident causes. Clinically, the cases of children with primary language impairment receive different names, such as language-based learning disabilities, late talkers, language impairment and specific language impairment (SLI).

Children who develop to become simultaneous and sequential bilingual learners show three general characteristics: 1) Distributed and uneven ability and skills within and across linguistic domains. 2) Variable nature and presence of cross-language associations. 3) Individual variation in the performance of language. This phenomenon occurs even in response to relatively similar circumstances.

Empirical investigations have found a positive relation between the proficiency of the first language and the early beginning of reading in the second language for sequential bilingual children. When a child understands more words in the first language he or she is able to name more pictures in the second language. The two languages are functionally independent and interdependent. (Windsor, Kohnert, Lobitz & Pham, 2010).

2.5.2 Theories of bilingualism

After Ronjat, many linguists based their work and studies on observation of their own children's development.

Grammont suggested the principle of "one person-one language" to Ronjat. This principle (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004, pp. 1-3) affirms that two or more languages are easy for some individuals. When talking about the situation of a bilingual child (with parents who speak different languages) it is expected that each parent speaks their own language to the child. It is also expected that the child will associate each language with each of his/her parents. This relation will lead to the development of both languages without any interference between them.

The "one person-one language' principle" has also been reported by non-linguistic parents (Harding & Riley, 2003). The number of these children has been rising, and they are not studied just for investigating the principle, but to investigate the simultaneous acquisition of two languages. The "one person-one language" principle has been assumed by researchers that the children are in contact with two languages regularly from the moment that they are born (De Houwer, 1990).

 Because of these studies, we have proof that the principle can be a success in achieving active competence in both languages in children at a young age. Research on bilingual education and bilingualism has been conducted by academics since the first decades of the twentieth century. A relevant project was the extended work by Leopold (1939-1949).

The first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (1997) marked the beginning of the evaluation and synthesis of bilingual education by psychoeducational research and independent research teams (Alsace, 2008, pp. 2-4).

The term *languages in contact* means "the use of two or more codes in interpersonal and intergroup relations as well as the psychological state of an individual who uses more than one language" (Hamers & Blanc, 2000, p. 6).

Many authors have tried to define bilingualism. Here we have some definitions (Chin & Wigglesworth, 2007, p.5-6):

Native-like control of two languages. Bloomfield (1935).

The ability to use more than one language. Mackey (1962).

The practice of alternatively using two languages. Weinriech (1953).

The point where a speaker can first produce complete meaningful utterances in the order of language. Haugen (1953).

Need to discuss the degree of bilingualism/ competence in sub-components. Macnamara (1969).

It is necessary to distinguish between bilingualism and bilinguality. Bilingualism refers to the state where two languages are in contact inside a linguistic community. The result of this contact is that both codes can be used in the same interaction by several bilingual individuals (societal bilingualism).

Bilinguality (individual bilingualism) is, according to Hamers (2000), the psychological state of an individual who has access to more than one linguistic code as a means of social communication. The degree of access will vary along several dimensions, which are: psycholinguistic, social psychological, cognitive, psychological, sociological, social, sociocultural, sociolinguistic and linguistic.

The definition of bilingualism has not been problematic. We find this definition in Webster's Dictionary (1961): "having or using two languages especially as spoken with the fluency characteristic of a native speaker; a person using two languages, especially habitually, and with control like that of a native speaker". The definition that we find of bilingualism is: "the constant oral use of two languages".

A more accurate version of bilingualism is "the most relevant factor is the regular use of two languages", by Grosjean (1982). He also asks for the need to consider a holistic view of bilingualism. Bilingualism begins "at the point where a speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language", Haugen (1953, p.7) suggests.

Diebold (1961, pp. 97-112) affirmed that bilingualism commences when a person begins to understand utterances in a second language but is unable to produce them.

We also find some extreme positions around bilingualism. Bilingualism is defined as "the native-like control of two languages", including also speaking both languages perfectly, by Bloomfield (1935, p.56).

On the other extreme, we have the definition of bilingualism by Macnamara (1967, p.61) as "a minimal competence in just one of the four language skills (speaking, reading, writing and listening comprehension) in another language".

There is a middle point in the definition given by Titone (1972, p. 93).

He defines bilingualism as:

> *…. the capacity that the individual has to speak a second language, but following the structures and concepts of that language, that is, not paraphrasing his mother tongue.*

Beginning with those definitions, we reach a wide number of methodological and theoretical difficulties. One of them is the lack of specification of what is defined as native-like competence and what is not. Within a unilingual population, the meaning varies.

When an individual speaks two structurally similar languages it can be difficult to find out if we are facing a case of just paraphrasing the mother tongue.

In the early 1920s, the rise in number of empirical studies about bilingualism and its relation with intelligence was the starting point to research in psychometric intelligence. Those studies were inaccurate as they did not take into account the child's socioeconomic status and linguistic background. Instead, insignificant details for investigation, such as family surnames, residency or the foreignness of the parents were considered important in the research. (Diaz, 1983, p. 26).

2.5.3 Intelligence and bilingualism

Different studies have tried to solve the problems of definitions of bilingualism related to intelligence. Bilingualism was seen as a "language handicap" in tests of intelligence common at the beginning of the 20th century (Hakuta, 1986). Bilingualism was seen as the cause of poor performance of children of immigrant background and the main problem.

There were two opposite positions. On the one hand, we find those who believe in "nature" explanations: language handicap is seen as the result of hereditary factors (Goodenough, 1926).

And the other position believes in the "nurture" aspect of bilingualism. This explanation sees bilingualism as causing linguistic confusion and mental hardship (Smith, 1931, pp.180-187).

The middle part of the 20th century provided different research and studies with a positive view of bilingualism. These studies highlighted sociological and methodological problems linked with studies written during the first half of the 1900s. According to Peal and Lambert (1962), the early research had selection criteria that did not assess bilingualism. Selecting "balanced bilinguals" can produce a fairer assessment of bilinguals.

Research in the first part of the 20th century mostly focused on immigrants and persons with a low bilingual status. Populations of bilingual speakers with enhanced social status were excluded (Fishman, 1978).

The dependent variable (Reynolds, 1991) has been expanded thanks to the latest research. Narrow conceptions of intelligence have moved on to a wide array of measures (creativity, metalinguistic awareness, specific skills, social cognition, specific thinking skills, etc.).

A generalisation is made: balanced bilinguals are the basis for selection. Then they perform at a level equivalent to monolingual controls. This creates, in many cases, results of the positive effects of bilingualism, even if the effect sizes are small to moderate. If the degree of bilingualism is controlled, these effects are demonstrable. They can be appreciated even in children with a low bilingual status (Diaz, 1985).

This field of study is more theoretical than the empirical major challenge. A strong emphasis has been made to demonstrate the effect of lack of attention in providing an explanation of the effect. Metalinguistic awareness gives a hypothesised link to automatic versus controlled processing (Bialystok, 1988, pp. 558-567). We also find the theory of Vygotsky (Theory of word-object separation), and not much more investigation (Ianco-Worrall, 1972).

The ideas about bilingualism as being negative for intelligence and linguistics have been kept apart. The field of bilingualism is linked now to theories of cognition and language, and thus would be the explanation of the positive results. Being bilingual or monolingual affects the cognitive abilities positively. Studies of bilingualism show that the bilingual brain can have better task-switching capacities and attention than the monolingual brain. This is due to the development of the ability to inhibit one language while using another.

The effects of bilingualism at both ends of the age spectrum are very positive. This is seen in practice, where bilingual children (at the age of seven months) can adjust their body better to environmental changes. Bilingual seniors also experience less cognitive decline.

Research on the cognitive consequences of bilingualism in the brain show that when a bilingual person is using a language, the other language is active at the same time. Listening to a word means that the sounds arrive in sequential order, not the entire word all at once (Ronjat, 1913).

The brain's language system guesses the meaning of the word long before the word is finished, and lots of words that match the signal are activated.

The early stage of word recognition activates lots of words with similar traces. Auditory input acts without limit, not taking the language into account. Language co-activation is well evidenced in studies of eye movements and it happens when the word listened to can fit in both languages.

This fact is so automatic that sometimes non-similar words in different languages are considered. Some disadvantages of being bilingual can be the slower speed to name pictures (Gollan, 2005) and "tip-of-the-tongue" states (Gollan & Acenas, 2004).

The interference of one language with the other can also become problematic. Executive functions (such as attention and inhibition, inside the cognitive abilities) are activated inside the bilingual brain in order to maintain the balance between the two languages.

When a bilingual person listens or speaks, he/she uses a mechanism of control, as both languages systems are always active and competing. The constant control creates changes in regions of the brain (Bialystok, 2012).

Inhibitory control is the ability to ignore competing for perceptual information and focusing on the relevant aspects of the input. Inhibitory control ability and switching between two tasks are often better performed by bilingual people. Sensory and cognitive processing improvements are tangible benefits of being bilingual. This better processing of information in the environment is perhaps a clue to understanding why bilingual adults have more facilities to learn a third language than monolingual adults to learn a second. (Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009).

The ability to focus on information about the new language and reducing interference from the other language are the reason for this advantage (Bartolotti & Marian, 2012).

Inhibition competing for information gives other advantages, such as access to a larger vocabulary and newly learnt words. Conflict management and attention are also positively influenced by bilingualism.

This positive influence can be appreciated in infants at the early age of seven months. Bilingualism is also positive during older adulthood. It prevents the natural decline of the cognitive function. The cognitive reserve is maintained. The brain makes efficient use of networks enhancing brain function during ageing. This phenomenon is called cognitive reserve.

Bilingualism influences this reserve by keeping the cognitive mechanisms sharp and compensating for the damaged brain networks during ageing by recruiting new ones.

Executive control (Bialystok et al., 2012) and improved memory (Schroeder & Marian, 2012) are some advantages for older monolingual people. Alzheimer's disease has fewer incidences among bilingual than monolingual people. In a study of more than 200 monolingual and bilingual patients with Alzheimer's disease, the results showed a difference of 5.1 years regarding the initial symptoms of the disease. Bilingual patients reported signals of the first symptoms at about 77.7 years of age. Monolingual patients reported these at an average of 72.6 years of age (Craik, Bialystok & Freedman, 2010). Research focusing on the severity of Alzheimer's symptoms has shown surprising results. Comparing the brains of monolingual and bilingual patients showed that the bilingual brain suffered from a relatively higher physical atrophy in regions associated with Alzheimer's disease: that is, the physical signs of disease (behaviourally, brain atrophy) were much worse in bilingual than in monolingual patients. Bilingualism creates some neurological and cognitive benefits that extend from early childhood to old age. Thanks to the action of bilingualism, the brain processes information more efficiently, and the result is that it staves off cognitive decline.

All the above benefits of bilingualism apply not just to people raised as bilinguals; they are also found in people who learn a second language at later stages of their life (Linck, Hoshino & Kroll, 2008).

The publication of the Peal and Lambert study in 1962 was the starting point of numerous empirical studies about the positive effects of bilingualism on children's cognition. In 1999 an empirical study on bilingualism was undertaken by Ellen Bialystok. She studied the attentional control and the cognitive complexities of bilingual children. The research investigated 60 children, aged from 3 to 6 years old, who represented two linguistic groups.

The children were divided into two halves. The first half were children who were bilingual speakers of English (not a total mastery of English) and fluent level of Chinese. The second group comprised monolingual speakers of English. The social and economic status and background of all the children were similar, and all of them studied in the same school. During two separate sessions, the children were given tasks.

The first session included the tasks PPVT-R (receptive vocabulary) and Visually-Cued Recall Task (capacity for working memory). The second session included the Moving Word Task and the Dimensional Change Card Sort Task. The results of those tasks showed that the levels of receptive vocabulary and the capacity for working memory were equivalents. However, the results of tasks involving distracting information and more complicated and elaborated solutions showed that the bilingual children showed better skills than the monolinguals. This empirical study supported the general theory and research studies that claim that bilingual children have a more developed capacity to solve tasks based on conflicting information, control and attention than the monolinguals. (Bialystok, 1999).

During the 2000s, Bialystok, Craik and Luk (2012) carried out other research testing inhibitory control on French-English bilingual children. The results of this research showed bilingual children had lower scores in receptive vocabulary tests, but on the other hand, there was a very significant advantage in complex tasks demanding high attention control when compared with monolingual children. The researchers gave three tasks with a different time delay between exposure to the stimulus and the chance to respond. The main purpose was to examine the withholding of responses and ability to respond to different stimuli, as well as the children´s control of attention. The tasks of inhibition of responses which required the execution of motor responses and less attentional control showed equivalent results in bilingual and monolingual children. (Bialystok, Craik & Luk, p.85).

Bialystock, Craik and Luk (2012) affirm that bilingual children are constantly required to control their attention between two active and opposing language systems. This action is the reason why bilingual children have higher and better skills in bivalent displays than monolingual individuals. On the other hand, some developmental psychopathologies, e.g. autistic spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder, are the result of ineffectual inhibitory control.

This enriched cognitive control is just one of multiple advantages of bilingualism. The ability to recognise language as a system that can be explored and manipulated is known as improved metalinguistic awareness, and other qualities (visual-spatial skills, creativity, better memory, etc.) are qualities related to bilingualism. On the other hand, we find linguistic limitations, like increasing naming difficulty (Diaz & Klingler, 1991).

Apart from the neural and cognitive advantage, other benefits of being bilingual are social benefits, such as the ability to explore a culture in its own language. Bilingual individuals have an increased level of concentration abilities, cognitive flexibility and bilingual proficiency. Kovács and Mehler (2009) discovered enhanced executive functioning amongst bilinguals.

The child's social network and valorisation of the language play a role of importance in the language acquisition (Hamers and Blanc, 2000). The social environment of the child must be adequate in bilingual and cognitive development of the individual.

According to Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2008) "proficiency in and use of two or more languages by an individual; the term does not always imply an equally high level of proficiency in all the relevant languages" (p. 3).

During the 1920s, some scientists based their studies on psychometric tests of intelligence to prove the relationship between intelligence and bilingualism. The general idea during that period was that a child should not learn two languages simultaneously as it could lead to a linguistic, intellectual and cognitive delayed development.

This delay was known as "language handicap". The age of the children who took part in the investigation was from newborn babies up to the age of 12, as this age is considered the "critical period"; this is, when the human brain is most susceptible to learn (Bialystock, 2001).

2.5.4 Levels of bilingualism

According to Professor Steve McCarty (2014), bilingualism has different levels that can be used in different situations of life: individual (bilingual development), societal (cultures, policies), disciplinary (academic, professional, related fields), family (bilingual child-raising) and school (bilingual education).

Figure 5: Levels of Bilingualism (McCarty, 2014)

2.6 Bilingualism around the world

2.6.1 Finland

In the context of the European societies, bilingualism and multilingualism are becoming a part of everyday life.

Finland

Finland is a bilingual country, with a majority of Finnish speakers, and a minority of Swedish speakers. According to Ministry of Justice (*Oikeusministerio*), Finnish is spoken by around 90 per cent (4,863,351 inhabitants), while Swedish is spoken by 5.4 per cent (291,219 inhabitants) of the population. Today Finland is a multilingual country, with 148 languages spoken as a mother tongue. The number of Swedish speakers is nearly the same as in the 1880s. During that decade, the mother tongue was included in population data for the first time.

The percentage of Finnish speakers has risen, as well as the number of speakers of other languages. On the other hand, the number of Swedish speakers was at its highest point during the decades of the 1950s to the 1970s, with a high number of immigrants coming from Sweden.

According to the Finnish Constitution, an individual has the right to use his own national language, Finnish or Swedish, to the authorities. There is also a third language, Sami, which has legal status. Finnish and Swedish have the status of national languages, thanks to the Section 17 of the Constitution of Finland. The Constitution guarantees native Finnish and Swedish speakers the equal right to use their mother tongue, their own language. As a bilingual country, Finland ensures that both languages are viable and will continue being used in the future. Finnish is spoken in all the country, but in some areas such as Åland and Ostrobothnia, there are monolingual Swedish areas.

The Government of Finland pays special attention to developing, protecting, and respecting the use of these languages. In the next figures, we can read its objectives, according to the Ministry of Justice (*Oikeusministerio)*.

These are the objectives of the strategy for the national languages in Finland:

Figure 6: This table explains how Finnish and Swedish are both protected and approved as official languages in Finland. Everyone has the right to learn them, use them and be active in both languages. (Ministry of Justice, *Oikeusministerio*, 2014)

Objectives of the Strategy for the National Languages in Finland
The national languages, Finnish and Swedish, are seen, heard and approved
The national languages, Finnish, and Swedish, are used in all sectors of society
The benefits brought by the national languages are put into use for society and individuals
Everyone has the opportunity to live and be active in their own country in their own language, whether Finnish or Swedish
Everyone has the opportunity to become familiar with both Finnish-language and Swedish-language, culture and traditions in our country and with our common history, and to benefit from them

Figure 7:

To enable this:
Finland secures everyone living in Finland the right and the opportunity to learn their mother tongue, either Finnish or Swedish
Finland secures everyone living in Finland the right and the opportunity to learn the country's other national language, Finnish or Swedish

Some linguistic measures have been taken by the Finnish Government.

Figure 8:

The Government´s measures for the government term 2011-2015
Increasing the visibility of the national languages and systematic application of language legislation in administrative processes
Strengthening of Finnish and Swedish skills and appreciation of languages and culture

Finland has enacted several language laws. The most important of these laws is the *Språklag,* that is, the Language Act. This law was amended from 1931 to 1982 and abolished in favour of the new Language Act (January 1, 2004). There are more laws that deal with the Finnish parliament, public service, the Sami minority, education, the legal system, etc. We can affirm that the Swedish (official language) minority is considerably protected compared with other minority languages around the world. (Ministry of Justice, *Oikeusministerio*, 2004).

Teaching a foreign language means to teach a non- native language that is used as the language of international communication. Many times, teaching a second language can be interpreted as teaching immigrants the languages of their new country. It also can be understood as the teaching of a second national language, a language of national communication. An example of teaching a second language can be teaching Swedish as the second national language in Finland. Teaching a second language is an intra-cultural element of a person's education and a tool to help their integration (Vygotsky, 1978).

Since the days of the philosopher J.V. Snellman, it has been said that Finland has a "heavy language programme" in schools. Students in junior and senior secondary school used to have between two and four compulsory L2s (second language), and nowadays in comprehensive school, two L2s are compulsory. The results were not satisfactory. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Ministers of Education (Jaakko Itälä and Christoffer Taxell) considered using L2 (Second language) and FL (Foreign language) as the medium of instruction. This proposition did not have support. As time passed by, and as the influence of English has been growing, many changes have been made inside the Finnish Educational system. During the 1990s, educational legislation transformed the Finnish school system, and it passed from a highly centralised to a highly decentralised system. These changes resulted in the freedom being granted to comprehensive schools, upper secondary schools and vocational schools to decide whether to use a language other than L1 (First language) in teaching. The social situation has changed (with a higher number of foreign students and refugees coming to Finland), and the time devoted to language studies has also increased. Teaching the immigrant's heritage languages, and also Finnish or Swedish is functional bilingualism.

2.6.2 Spain

Spain is a country where four languages are spoken. Spanish (also known as *Castellano*, Castilian) is spoken in all the country. Together with Spanish, these languages are spoken: Galician is co-official in Galicia, Basque is co-official in Basque Country and Navarre; Catalonian is co-official in Catalonia, Valencia, and the Balearic Islands. In Spain, 99% of the population speaks Spanish (89% of the population speaks Spanish as the mother tongue), Catalan/Valencian 9%, Galician 5%, and 0.9% speak Basque. Another 3% of the population speaks another native language (Cervantes Institute, *Instituto Cervantes*, 2015).

In Spain, the Autonomous Communities are responsible for education, each community according to its laws. In bilingual communities (Catalonia, Galicia, Valencia and Basque Country) lessons are studied in both Spanish and their respective languages: Catalan, Galician, Valencian and Basque (also known as *Euskara*). All these languages derive from Latin, except for Basque (a non-Indoeuropean language), which was spoken in Spain before the arrival of the Roman Empire, and it is of unknown origin (Turell, 2001, p. 121).

The Spanish Constitution guarantees and protects the use of all these languages. All Spanish citizens must know Castilian and have the right to use it. The other languages spoken in Spain are also official in their respective Autonomous Communities, in accordance with their statutes.

The cultural richness of the different language variations of Spain is a cultural heritage that must be respected and protected. Spain is not a unitary state, and this means that the country has shifted a part of its power to local governments. Each autonomous community has its laws to deal with linguistic affairs. In addition to all these languages, we find several recognized and minority languages: Aragonese (recognized, but not official, spoken in Aragon), Asturian (recognized, but not official, spoken in Asturias), Leonese (recognized, but not official, in Castilla-Leon, in the provinces of Leon and Zamora). In the last decades, and due to a boom in immigration, the linguistic panorama of Spain has changed, with the arrival of new linguistic groups. The Government is working to maintain the linguistic normality (Cervantes Institute, *Instituto Cervantes*, 2015).

2.7 Empirical studies on bilingualism

Previous researches define children who receive regular input in two or more languages during their communication development during the period between birth and adolescence as bilingual children. Children who learn a second language in childhood are also defined as bilingual. One of the main concerns about education is to promote success with the progress of bilingual children in two or more languages.

There is a high level of children who fail during the learning of languages (language-based learning disabilities, language impairment, late talkers and specific language impairment, also known as SLI). PLI (primary language impairment) is the preferred term to define that problem, as it refers to language lag and weakness in the linguistic capacity of children. Children affected with PLI suffer from reduced social, economic and academic outcomes, due to the difficulty experienced in the process of language acquisition.

An improvement in the performance of all aspects of language is expected as children grow. That is, they have time and opportunity to practice and improve their language skills. In some cases, children experiment with the stronger development of one language and weaker improvement of the other. As a result, some children develop ability in one language and a lesser ability in the other. These cases have been analysed in children who speak two languages with different parents, or for different purposes (familiar environment, school or academic area, etc). Visual and audio language is very relevant during the process of learning languages. Children can easily name colours, shapes, animals, etc. in two languages when just receiving a visual image. The level of correction of both languages is very equal. On the contrary, when relating or describing with longer phrases, some children have difficulties in creating longer communicative speech in the second or weaker language (Petitto & Holowka, 2002, p.9-27).

Investigators have discovered that some language and skills are only present in the weaker language; while a higher number of other skills are found in the dominant language.

Another discovery was the fact that some language productions are literal translations based on lexical referents from the first language to the second language.

Bilingual children develop an unusual ability to perform cognates, relative to non-cognates (words with the same meaning in two different languages but with a different form).

Cognates are words in two different languages with the same meaning and form. The structural differences and similarities between the child's two main languages can allow the investigators to predict cross-linguistic transfer. When the child learns two languages sequentially, the empirical evidence is quite provisional. Several investigations have proved that, even if the structure is not similar, a correct relation between oral language in the L1 and early reading in the L2 reveals an evident cognitive mediation on language outcomes.

Between the late 1950s through to the 1990s, several influential empirical investigations of educational, social and cognitive aspects of bilingualism were carried out by Wallace E. Lambert, a social psychologist from McGill University.

Other previous empirical studies were carried out in the 1950s by Charles Osgood (1954) and Susan Ervin-Tripp (1953). Lambert is considered the pioneer in studying aspects of bilingualism such as aphasia, bilingual linguistic memory, language lateralization in bilinguals, measurement of language dominance, and bilingual information processing. By the late 1990s several empirical studies appeared (e.g. Harris, 1992; Groot &Kroll, 1997) as well as the 2000s (Vaid, 2014). According to Walraff (2000), two-thirds of the world's population is bilingual (Cook & Wei, 2016)

3 Method and empirical research

The use of qualitative methods gives appropriate results from the investigated situation's perspective (Bernard, H.R, 1995). In this study, a full perspective of the subject is collected and seen from different angles in order to create a complete image of the object of investigation.

Qualitative research is one kind of scientific research (Denzin, 2011, pp. 9-16) and tries to:

-Find the answer to a determined question

-Use a predefined set of procedures systematically, in order to answer the question.

-Collects evidence.

-Not determine in advance the findings which are produced.

-Produce findings which apply beyond the immediate boundaries of the study.

3.1 Choice of method

Qualitative research methodology is used in this thesis. The process of learning a language and the consequences of bilingualism in bilingual people are investigated. Another point is to explore how bilingualism is used in different contexts (in education, etc.). The methods used during this project are qualitative methods, case study method, and datasets. A description of the sources that are going to be used in the theoretical part of this work is also given. Bilingualism is becoming a part of the society, and as a part of it, it will sooner or later need to receive attention from educational programmes.

The number of bilingual students is growing and it is becoming increasingly necessary to take the pertinent academic measures to deal correctly with this situation. Different factors must be taken into account in order to choose the methodology. According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007, p. 602) "methods are the techniques and procedures used to obtain and analyse research data, including, for example, questionnaires, observation, interviews and statistical and non-statistical techniques".

3.2 Informants

During the investigation, a group of ten persons (four men and six women, Finnish citizens and foreigners, aged between 27 and 62 years old) were selected and interviewed. Their bilingual or multilingual condition was known in advance. The students were contacted by email. They confirmed that they were prepared to participate in the project and completed the questionnaires at home.

Later, the same interview was conducted with the participants in person, to elicit further information. The interviews took place at some study centres (polytechnics and schools) and lasted 45 minutes approximately.

3.3 Qualitative research interview

Qualitative Methods

Quantitative and qualitative methods can be used to investigate a phenomenon. Both methods are useful and have their own advantages. When the researcher uses qualitative methods it is because he or she wants to show how something seems to be. Quantitative methods are used as a tool for statistical analysis to prove cause and effect, whereas qualitative methods "can be seen as a concept for an approach which more or less combines the following five techniques: direct observation, participated observation, informant- and respondent interviews, and analysis of sources" (Holme & Solvang, 1997, p.91).

There are a variety of methods for collecting qualitative data. Inside the data collection approaches for qualitative research, direct interactions are involved with individuals on a one to one basis, or direct interaction with individuals in a group setting (Warren, 1988).

Some advantages of the qualitative approach are obtaining a deeper insight and richer information to study the phenomenon.

The main methods are:

-Individual interviews

-Focus groups

-Observations

-Questionnaires

Qualitative interviews are a valuable method for exploring data on understandings, opinions, what people remember doing, attitudes, feelings and the like, which people have in common (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p.2). Interviews can be unstructured, semi-structured or structured. It is good to create an informal atmosphere during the interview, involving the interviewee in a discussion or conversation, rather than in an interview.

A successful qualitative interview should involve these requirements: thoughts, preparation, development of the interview schedule, and consideration and care in analysing and conducting the interview. During the process of elaborating on this thesis, an important part of the investigation is based on the interview as the main research method.

Qualitative interviewing is an excellent tool to learn about teaching in different cultures, languages, and a method to find the solution to different problems.

The interview's objective is to obtain the required information. An interview is a process that helps the investigator to know and understand others. The major point of the message is understood and compared (differences and similarities) with other situations. It is very important to be a good conversationalist and a good listener, as Rubin H & Rubin I (1995) explain. Qualitative interviewing is considered a part of ethnography. We find examples of how ethnography research acts like a detective (Alasuutari, 1998). The aim of the ethnographer should be to produce a thick description of the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973).

There are different purposes to interviews: expanding understanding, looking for the exception that confirms the rule, documenting historical idiosyncrasies, validating the interview results with other interviews, etc. The qualitative research interview describes the meanings of central themes of the subjects. Understanding the meaning of what the interviewees say is the main task. A qualitative research interview aims to cover the meaning and the factual level. An interview on a meaning level is, in fact, more complicated (Kvale, 1996).

According to McNamara (1999), interviews are especially useful to obtain the story behind a participant's experiences. Deep information about the topic can be pursued by the interviewer. Interviews can be useful as a follow-up with certain respondents following questionnaires.

There are many differences between quantitative and qualitative data. Some of them are described in this table (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 472):

Figure 9:

Differences between quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data	Qualitative data
Based on meanings derived from numbers	Based on meanings expressed through words
Collection results in numerical and standardised data	Collection results in non-standardised data requiring classification into categories
Analysis conducted through the use of diagrams and statistics	Analysis conducted through the use of conceptualisation

3.4 Phenomenography

In the research approach of the study, phenomenography is used as a tool to perform the work. Phenomenography is described as "the empirical study of the different ways in which people think of the world. In other words, its aim is to discover the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, realise and understand various aspects of phenomena in the world around them" (Martin, 1992).

When a researcher employs phenomenography research he decides to study how people feel and experience a determinate phenomenon. This means that he is not studying a given phenomenon, according to Marton (1986). Phenomenography describes the different ways in which individuals perceive the world. Phenomenographic analysis gives us concepts such as perspective, a subjectivist, empirical orientation; learning, teaching, knowledge and implications for learning.

Another description of phenomenography is given by Walker (1998, p.25): "Phenomenography is focused on the ways of experiencing different phenomena, ways of seeing them, knowing about them and having related to them. The aim is, however, not to find the singular essence, but the variation and the architecture of this variation by different aspects that define the phenomena".

Phenomenography is a description of appearances (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997). During recent decades, research on student learning has leaned heavily on phenomenography. Ference Marton and his colleagues at the University of Goteborg, in Sweden, are associated with this practice, but it has also been adopted around the entire world. Marton (1988) described phenomenography as "an empirically based approach that aims to identify the qualitatively different ways in which different people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena (Richardson, 1999, pp. 53-82). Phenomenography is based on one word: conception. Phenomenography is a much-used research methodology to study the conceptions of teaching and learning that teachers and students have.

When we use phenomenography as a research method we have the aim of discerning qualitatively the individual's experience and parting from this point, to interpret, grasp or conceptualise a range of phenomena. Subject and object (also known as the aspect of the world) are not considerate separated subjects, as they are linked to each other.

Figure 10:

The relationship between objects with subjects and researcher (Bowden, 2005).

This figure represents the relations between the researcher, object of study, subjects and the aspect of the world.
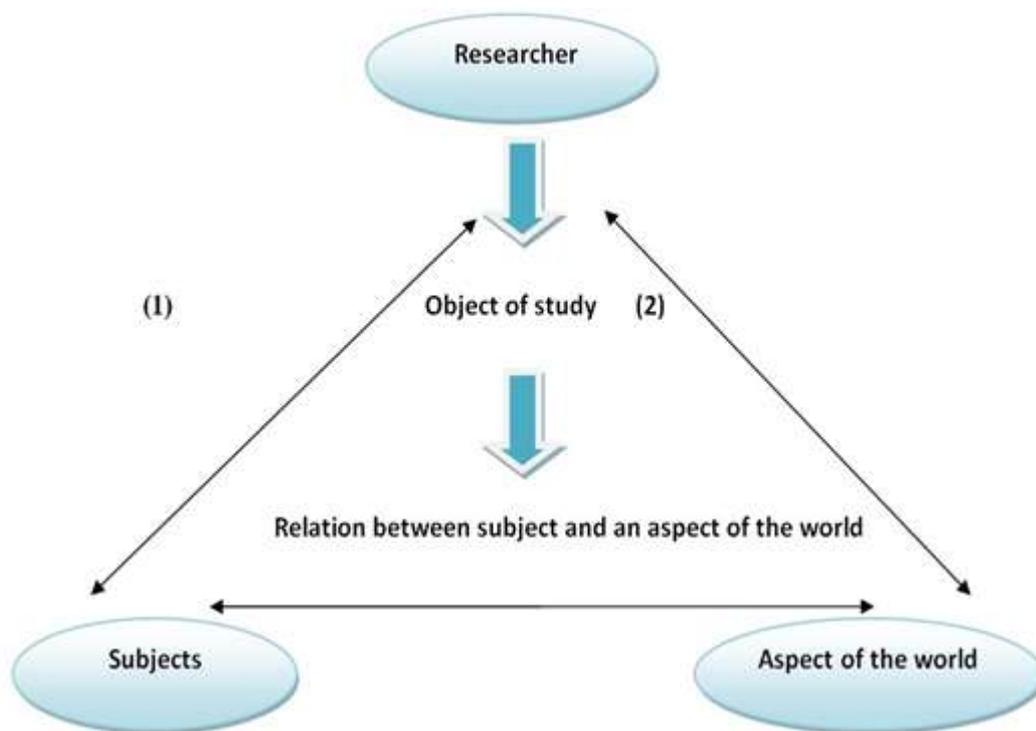
(1): Relation between researcher and subjects.

(2): Relation between the researcher and an aspect of the world

3.5 Validity

Validity is often defined by asking the question: Are you measuring what you think you are measuring? (Kerlinger, 1979, p. 138. Cited by Kvale). Another definition of validity is given by Joppe (2000, p. 1):

"Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. In other words, does the research instrument allow you to hit "the bull´s eye" of your research object?

Researchers generally determine validity by asking series of questions, and will often look for the answers in the research of others".

There is an emphasis on the extent or degree that the information gathered, assists the researcher in proving the hypothesis. Qualitative research uses interview investigations as a common practice, illustrating at various stages challenges to validity (Kvale, 1996a).

Within these stages:

1-Thematizing: The validity depends on the soundness of the theoretical presuppositions of a study. The requirements for the theory are for it to be logical and stable.

2- Designing: Validity depends on the adequacy of the design. The method that we use affects the degree of the validity. Benefit must be involved.

3- Ability: Creating a good interview is crucial.

4-Transcribing: Words should not be taken out of context or misunderstood.

The qualitative interview is one of the best methods to investigate the different experiences and development of bilingualism. Using this method, a compilation of the personal experiences and opinions of the interviewees about being bilingual or multilingual is performed. This factor has affected the lives of the interviewees at all levels. The interviews are presented following an ethical and confidential code to respect the respondents' confidentiality.

3.6 Reliability

Reliability and validity are considered an important part of the qualitative research paradigm. The reliability of a study means how credible and reliable it is. Reliability means stability, repeatability, and similarity in ways of measuring, consistently over time (Golafshani, 2003).

To obtain good quality research reliability, the quality must be analysed with the purpose of explaining (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551).

According to Stenbacka (2001, p. 552), "the concept of reliability is even misleading in qualitative research. If a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is rather than the study is not good".

According to Joppe (2000, p.1), reliability is defined as:

"The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable".

Doing this research, the study has a high level of reliability, repeating the same pattern in all the interviews, so the external factors were as similar as possible.

4 Results

The results of this investigation are based on the aim, the methodology and research issues in which the work is focused. The investigation has a specific focus on the meanings of speaking more than one language for the interviewees.

To what extent does bilingualism affect their future career? Does incorrect or wrong language learning have a strong negative impact on their lives? There was a total agreement amongst all the participants on the importance of good language learning.

Some of them point out that a previous bad experience of learning a second/third language can influence the perception of learning another language and even to give up on future studies.

The respondents also agree on the importance of the two main elements of the learning process: material (books, audio, video, grammar, etc.) and teacher (including classroom environment). Well redacted, clear, coherent study material can help the students to advance quickly and easily in their language learning process. The role of the teacher is of prime importance here: he or she must have the right knowledge and education and be able to solve any difficulties of the students. When some of these factors fail, the process of learning another language also fails. The motivation of the student sinks, and without motivation the brain is not receptive to acquire new knowledge. If the students have a bad experience in learning a language, they will probably reject learning another one.

According to Lindquist (1999, p.235): "*The teacher will have a new responsible role. He will organise the social environment which is the only element of education. If he appears simply in the role of a pump, which pumps knowledge into the pupils, he can just as well be replaced by a book, a dictionary, a map or a field-trip. When the teacher gives a lecture or holds a lesson, he only partly appears in the role of a teacher, namely the one which determines the child's relation to the elements of the environment that affect it. Also, when he simply puts forward something finished, he ceases to be a teacher*".

4.1 How bilingual persons describe bilingualism

The results from the first question are presented. An appendix with the interview questions is located on page 66. The respondents describe the subject of bilingualism or multilingualism from their own perspective and the descriptions are summarised at the end of this thesis. The respondents are persons with good skills in languages, and the situation of bilingualism or multilingualism is very familiar to them, being a part of their daily life.

A large number of the respondents use one language for one purpose (family life) and another for other purposes (study, working life). Generally, those who speak Indo-European languages have more facility to assimilate other Indo-European languages, both written and spoken. Finnish citizens have a very good language background, as the Finnish Government provides them as small children with the chance to study Finnish, Swedish and other languages. They study Finnish, Swedish and a foreign language (normally English) from an early age. Languages are a tool to travel, visit other countries and cultures. All of the respondents agree on the importance of learning languages at schools from an early age, and not leaving any child behind due to language reasons.

4.1.1 The role of bilingualism in different contexts

To what extent does the fact of speaking more than one language affect your daily life? The respondents were asked to give their opinions about the role of bilingualism in different contexts of their life: educational, professional and social/ personal life. All these details are presented here.The interviewees answered these questions during the interview:

1 What is bilingualism?

2 What is the role of bilingualism in educational life?

3 What is the role of bilingualism in professional life?

4 What is the role of bilingualism in social /personal life?

5 What importance does a good learning process have?

6 What is the importance of age in beginning to learn a language?

7 Does the fact of speaking more than a language facilitate the process of learning?

8 What is the importance of home and school (bilingual parents, material and teacher) during the process of learning a language?

9 What do you think about the language situation in Finland?

To the question 1) *What is bilingualism?* All of the respondents answered that it is the situation in which an individual is able to express himself in two languages (or more, in the case of multilingualism) in a native speaker level in those languages. The interviewees agreed on the progress of bilingualism in today's society as a process of globalisation, and that it has great support and incentive in the media and on the Internet. Bilingualism is perceived as a capacity that brings advantages to the life of the bilingual individual, despite the inconveniences that this factor may pose.

With reference to the second question: *What is the role of bilingualism in educational life?* A large majority of respondents agreed on the fundamental role that the learning of several languages has in education today. There is a growing need to speak several languages, and educational systems adapt to this situation. In the last few decades, bilingualism has experienced a notable growth in all fields. It is a fact that occurs to a greater or lesser extent in schools and academic institutions around the world.

Schools face situations in which they must adapt their study plans to the language of their students so that none of their pupils are excluded or disadvantaged in learning due to language issues. Almost all of the schools offer their students the possibility of studying the native language and, at least, one foreign language. This teaching ensures that the students are more educated in different sectors and have more possibilities to study in other places, allowing them the greatest access to technology, etc. Almost all of the respondents agree that the supervisory role of parents, together with teachers or tutors, during the teaching of languages is fundamental for the assimilation and optimal learning of languages. A large part of the interviewees believe that the study of languages in academic institutions is already good, but that it will develop and improve over the years.

The growing number of bilingual, multicultural families with different linguistic backgrounds requires a system of language teaching adapted to the society in which bilingualism is a growing phenomenon.

Regarding question number 3: *What is the role of bilingualism in professional life?* The majority of the informants described the role of bilingualism as fundamental. The informants know first-hand the fact of working in companies and places of work where there is use of both Swedish and Finnish language daily.

In many cases there is also daily use of other languages, for example English, mainly for logistical use, sending emails, conferences, seminars, etc. In the case of some interviewees, there is also the use of other languages as they work in large international companies with staff from different countries who speak different languages. The interviewees agree on the good level of languages that exists in their jobs and the opportunity they have to live in a multilingual environment. Bilingualism represents an opportunity to promote the skills of employees and to promote the possibility of working abroad or with multinational companies. Speaking several languages significantly expands the possibilities and scope at a geographical level.

In response to question number 4: *What is the role of bilingualism in social/personal life?* All the interviewees affirmed that bilingualism is an intrinsic part of their personal or social life. All the interviewees have in common the assimilation of a second language through one of their parents. This fact results in a more subjective connection between that language and personal or social relationships.

The interviewees agree that the learning of a language for personal reasons is richer and more fruitful than learning motivated by causes without no personal reason.

That is to say that languages that are learned in the personal or emotional sphere are assimilated in a more ingrained and subconscious way than those learned in other areas, for example, by obligation. The fact of speaking a certain language plays a fundamental role in the personal lives of the interviewees, and that factor is decisive when it comes to marking their personal tastes (music, film, literature, sports, travel, etc.).

It also affects their personality to be able to express themselves in one language or another. The fact of speaking a language can be crucial in relation to social relations since it can isolate the speaker in the case of not having contact with a specific linguistic group.

Many of the informants relate songs and experiences with people who speak a certain language. Being bilingual or multi-lingual is a tool that, when used properly, can significantly expand the number of interactions with the outside world and with a specific linguistic community.

In social networks, there is a great interaction between Internet users and linguistic communities that promote the growth of these languages.

The replies to question number 5: *What importance does a good learning process have?* make it clear that all the respondents believe in the importance of good learning for the effective assimilation of the knowledge necessary to use a language. The learning must be based on good didactic tools, practical, current material, and take into account the abilities and concerns of the students. Likewise, it should show empathy towards the students and take into account their strengths and weaknesses in order to achieve equitable teaching. Taking into account the students' abilities and difficulties during the learning process, emphasis should be placed on the points of conflict and difficulties in understanding for the student. In the same way, the interests or strong points would be reinforced, those in which the student is more learned. A good learning process is of great importance for the acquisition of a language. If this process fails, all subsequent teaching attempts will fail, as the basis of the teaching has not been adequate and has no solid foundation on which to base new knowledge. The good learning of a language will also influence the way in which the student will learn other languages later. If the process of learning a language is not adequate, a good assimilation of the language will not be possible and the language will be used incorrectly.

The answers to question number 6: *How important is the beginning of learning a language?* show that all of the informants consider it very important to learn a language at an early age.

The general opinion of the interviewees is that the younger they are during their learning, the greater will be their assimilation and the correct teaching of the language. The respondents affirm that the first languages they have learned (in childhood) are those in which they have greater fluency, coherence, dexterity and mastery of linguistic skills, both at the lexical, grammatical and semantic levels. The languages spoken as mother tongue were acquired subconsciously and without great effort on the part of the speakers.

Conversely with languages learned later, there are more grammatical and lexical errors and a smaller vocabulary, as well as fewer synonyms and antonyms.

The informants agree on the appropriateness of learning in the early stages of life, as there are no work or personal obstacles that can hinder a clear and fruitful learning.

The interviewees answered question number 7: *Does the fact of speaking more than one language facilitate the process of learning?* with a majority stating that being bilingual or multilingual has significantly facilitated the learning process.

Having the ability to speak a second language gives the brain the cognitive tools necessary to learn other languages more easily. The informants say that it is very easy for them to learn languages that belong to the same linguistic branch. For example, those informants who speak some Romance language have more facility to learn other Romance languages. A Spanish speaker will understand and assimilate more easily other Romance languages suc

h as Italian or French. On the other hand, speakers of languages such as Swedish will be more able to have facilities to assimilate and learn languages such as Norwegian, due to the similarity between these languages. The interviewees believe that learning English has served as a starting point to learn other languages. Speaking different languages has helped them to study new languages and feel less embarrassed to speak in a foreign language or to have stage fright in interacting in another language.

Question 8: *What is the importance of home and school (bilingual parents, material, teacher) during the process of learning a language?* was answered with all the interviewees agreeing that home and school are the fundamental pillars on which the teaching of a language is based.

Language learning, both at home and at school, must be correct and provide the necessary tools for proper learning. Parents and teachers must have correct knowledge and make good use of the language and language skills in transmitting these to the language learner.

The fact of living in bilingual families makes children automatically relate a language to each of their parents. On the other hand, cases of traumatic or painful experiences (bullying, etc.) in relation to a certain language may generate in the student an unconscious rejection of that language, since it is related to a bad experience lived by the individual.

The answers to question number 9: *What do you think about the language situation in Finland?* unanimously recognise the teaching of languages in Finland as excellent.

The Finnish educational system is one of the best in the world. Some of the interviewees praise the situation of education in Finland because in their countries there is no compulsory or free education and there is a great disparity in the quality of education in schools.

In some countries, teaching is a luxury and language learning can only be private. The interviewees stated that the majority of the population in this area of the country is able to speak Finnish and Swedish, apart from other languages, such as English.

Finnish schools provide education where Swedish-speaking children also learn Finnish, and Finnish-speaking children learn Swedish. These two language groups also receive classes in other languages, such as English.

The Finnish Constitution protects the use and teaching of the Swedish and Finnish languages. Some interviewees state that, although they feel satisfied with the situation of the Swedish language in Finland, they are concerned that the Swedish language will exist in ever smaller areas in the coming years. The Swedish and Finnish languages have media that disseminate them (television, newspapers, radio, Internet) as well as universities and colleges where pupils can study in these languages. Increasing immigration has caused an increase in speakers of other languages, such as French, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, etc. and the possibility of studying them in courses in educational centres. A summary of the most important aspects is divided into educational, professional and social or personal life:

Educational life.

The respondents agree on the benefits of being bilingual or multilingual. Languages are, in many cases, the key to being able to study for a career or to be able to study abroad. For most of the interviewees, languages have determined their perspective in choosing an educational career.

All of the interviewees agree in their intention to give the best language education to their children or future children. Some options, such as the Erasmus programme, are also an incentive for bilingual or multilingual students. All the persons participating in this investigation agree on the importance of language and education life.

The education in Finland is, arguably, one of the best in the world. Bilingualism or multilingualism gives them competence and more security in some educational aspects. It is also a tool that increases their ability to listen, pay attention and create a relation between word and object.

Professional life

Bilingualism has been determinant for the respondents and their professional life. Speaking different languages has given them the opportunity for multiple professional options and possible working destinies. It is also a tool to interact with people with different cultural and language backgrounds. The majority of the respondents agree on language skills giving them access to wider professional possibilities.

Social and personal life

Being bilingual or multilingual allows the respondents to include people with different mother tongue in their personal and social relations. The group of respondents agrees on having access to a more heterogeneous group of personal and social connections. Bilingualism and multilingualism also allow the respondents the possibility to amplify their social circle and socialise with a wider variety of persons and with different linguistic communities.

The majority of the respondents feel more secure in travelling to other countries if they have the possibility to communicate there (using English or the country's national language).

The fact of being bilingual or multilingual gives them the ability to deduce the meaning of words and phrases in languages they have not studied, but which have a linguistic resemblance to languages they know. Bilingualism and multilingualism increase linguistic understanding, social skills and the interacting with the environment. It also favours the comprehension of set phrases, and consequently to understand jokes, humorous contexts, etc., in another language.

Analysis and discussion are tools that help to investigate the phenomena of bilingualism. The transcribed interviews were analysed and used as indispensable material to support this investigation. The results will be discussed based on the research question.

5 Concluding discussion

The results of this investigation related to the aim of the thesis and research are going to be initially discussed in this chapter. The qualitative methods used during this research work give the responses and explanations that will illustrate the results of this thesis.

Following the result discussion some reflections and thoughts are presented concerning the choices of the methodology used to investigate the subject of this work. All these subjects together give results, conclusions, interesting information and suggestions for future research and investigation.

5.1 Empirical results

One of the first and most striking conclusions of this investigation is that all of the respondents think positively about bilingualism and multilingualism. The fact of speaking more than one language is something positive, that can bring many advantages to the life of a bilingual person.
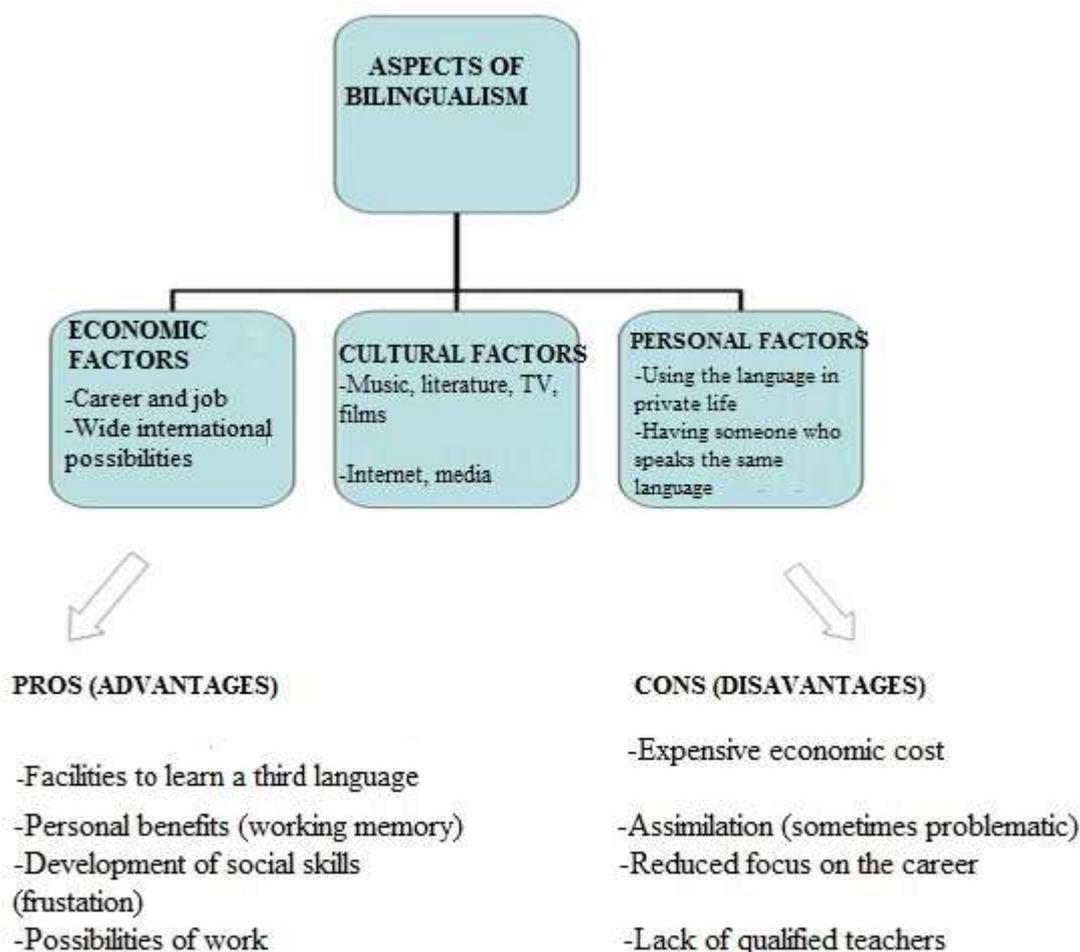
Only one of the respondents found a negative aspect, even if that person sees bilingualism in general as a positive fact. They agree that the fact of speaking more than one language is a privilege that sadly not everyone can afford, or have access to. Bilingualism "opens the doors" (as the student said) to a world of opportunities, and gives the chance to be familiar and discover a new world of culture and social interactions in other languages (literature, cinema, music, TV programs, friends who speak other languages).

The negative aspect is that some languages, depending on the social context (the place where you are) do not have the same prestigious or social status as others do. This can give a prejudiced image of the person who speaks that language (giving an erroneous image of his/her social background, ethnicity, religion, linguistic capacities, communications skills, etc.). It seems that still nowadays, in the 21st century, there are prejudices about languages in some areas of the world. The majority of the interviewees think that the fact of speaking more than one language has improved and directed their lives. All of the respondents agreed with the fact that bilingualism affects and has influence in all the aspects of life (social, education and work, etc.). According to the empirical results of the survey, the respondents agree on the importance of the good learning of languages, as bilingualism is a part of their everyday life.

They agree that languages teaching must be correctly done, in all areas, (home and school) to attain a good knowledge of the language and to be able to use the linguistic skills correctly.

Language competence is a basic tool. The language teacher, school language programme and parents' language skills are of great importance. The good teaching of the language will guarantee a good learning and development of linguistic skills.

Figure 11: Aspects of bilingualism. Advantages and disadvantages according to the students.

ASPECTS OF BILINGUALISM

ECONOMIC FACTORS
-Career and job
-Wide international possibilities

CULTURAL FACTORS
-Music, literature, TV, films

-Internet, media

PERSONAL FACTORS
-Using the language in private life
-Having someone who speaks the same language

PROS (ADVANTAGES)

-Facilities to learn a third language

-Personal benefits (working memory)
-Development of social skills (frustation)
-Possibilities of work

CONS (DISAVANTAGES)

-Expensive economic cost

-Assimilation (sometimes problematic)
-Reduced focus on the career

-Lack of qualified teachers

5.1.1 Data analysis

According to the results and the answers to the questionnaires, there is total unanimity in the affirmation that the age of learning a language is one of the main points of bilingualism. An early bilingualism affects children's language and cognitive development (Bialystok, 2008). This affirmation agrees with the results of different theoretical investigations (Sakai, 2005) that conclude that at the age of 12 years human language has been solidified. This means that until that age the brain is "open" to new languages, but after that age, it becomes more complicated and less successful to learn a language when compared with a native speaker does.

All the foreign respondents have learnt Swedish or Finnish as adults, and found this process harder and more complicated than when they learnt other languages at an earlier age. They have experienced the difficulties of learning a new language when not a child any more.

All the respondents agree on the importance and advantage of learning a language as soon as possible. According to them "the later, the worse", and this is a fact that they have experienced in their own lives. The later they have learnt a language, the less fluent they are in it. This means that when they have learnt a language as grown-ups, the difficulties to learn and speak that language have been greater than when they learnt other languages as children or early teenagers. This point proves the theory that when a language is learnt with a certain delay it is impoverished (Mayberry, 1993, pp. 1258-70).

All of the respondents agree with the fact of having more difficulties in learning languages when they are older than when they learnt languages at earlier ages. The amount of time needed to read, learn and study a language is also bigger as the age increases.

The process of learning a language becomes slower as the age increases. Knowledge received as a child is acquired faster and better than that received at later stages of life. The improvement of language acquisition at an early age is scientifically proved. There is a critical period with observed difficulty in learning a second language after puberty (Lenneberg, 1967). The opinions of the respondents agree with the theory.

The participants agree on the convenience of beginning the study of languages in childhood, preferably at an early age. The language learning process slows down and is more difficult and less successful when the language learner is older. The vast majority of the participants state that learning a language during childhood is learning with less interference because the brain and the senses are more receptive to acquiring new knowledge. They also affirm that languages learned and spoken at an earlier age are better assimilated and preserved in the memory than those learned in later years. It is common for more lexical and grammatical errors to occur in languages learned at a later age.

The morphological and phonological components are particularly deficiently acquired when the second or third language is learnt after the age of puberty. Conversely, the lexicon is acquired with greater ease.

Children learn languages with greater facility than adults (Weber-Fox and Neville, 1996). The respondents who are parents of children raised in a bilingual/ multilingual atmosphere have living proof of this facility of acquiring a language at an early age. They affirm that their children speak the second or third language better than they themselves do, even if the parents have spent a longer period and applied more effort to learn that/those language (s).

Another noteworthy point is the fact that speaking more than one language creates the ability to learn new ones (Golinkoff theory). Most of the interviewees agree on the fact that knowing a language has a positive impact and effect on learning a new one. This condition becomes an advantage when the languages are related to each other, that is, they come from the same linguistic family group (Odlin theory). As an example, a French or Portuguese speaker learns Spanish, or another language coming from Latin, more easily than a language coming from another linguistic family.

5.1.2 Responsibility for bilingualism

During the process of investigation, the majority of the respondents agreed on the importance of leaving the process of learning a language in the right hands.

The responsible parts of the process of acquisition of a language are the home and school. Both parts must be totally involved in the process and the student or learner must have a positive attitude in order to facilitate the right acquisition of new knowledge (Ellis, 2008).

Regarding the responsibility of the Government of Finland concerning language education, the respondents feel very satisfied with the situation in Finland. All of respondents feel that the linguistic politics in this country are correct; languages are respected, and people normally have a good education and knowledge of languages. They are satisfied with the Finnish system of teaching languages, and they point out the major role of the teachers.

Another aspect that the respondents find very interesting is the role of the teacher and their native language. Most of the respondents agree that having a native speaker is an advantage.

The teacher must be educated and have the necessary studies and training to teach the language. Being a native speaker of a language without the proper academic training does not give any guarantees of success.

They also find it very important to learn only one foreign language at a time. When they have learnt two or more foreign languages at the same time there can be some interference between them or some confusion with the vocabulary, etc. The participants in the research prefer to learn one language at a time. Studying many languages simultaneously can cause confusion and distract attention or mix up the lexicon of the languages. They agree that motivation and personal determination are important to improve themselves, in order to be able to have a fluent conversation and to interact fully with their environment.

5.1.3 Discussion on methodology

The questions for the survey are presented directly and are formulated in trying to cover the widest area and the largest amount of information. The interpretation of the answers is coherent, as the respondents explain the responses from their own experience and perspective.

Giving answers to a situation that they are personally experiencing now gives the possibility to have the information from a "live" perspective. The questionnaires were prepared in advance. The kind of questions and the personal skills of the respondents were taken into consideration in choosing an individual with concrete characteristics that could fit this study.

The fact of being asked about a situation that is a personal experience, and taking into account the fact that the interviewer is also foreign, bilingual and has been in a similar situation, created an atmosphere where the respondents answered very fluently. They talked openly about good and bad aspects of the bilingual situation.

 The answers give a very accurate version of reality and a very precise approach to the situation of living in a bilingual context.

5.2 Final Conclusion

Concerning the research question, this is a description of the facts:

The analysis of the answers shows that bilingualism affects all aspects of the lives of bilingual persons. Bilingualism is a growing phenomenon. Speaking more than one language gives the interviewees the chance to study or work in a sector or country that it would be impossible to do without bilingual/multilingual skills. On average participants in this research think that bilingualism is an opportunity to improve the professional profile and is a positive factor in one's personal career.

The general opinion is of being satisfied with the influence that bilingualism has on their lives, and the bilingualism phenomenon will develop more in the near future. Bilingualism also gives the interviewees the chance to find a job in places where employees come from a multicultural background. Bilingualism is a tool that can help the interviewees in many aspects during their lives. According to the respondents, thanks to bilingualism they have access to wider information, and this leads to more opportunities to acquire knowledge and culture.

1) How do bilingualism and multilingualism affect the bilingual and multilingual individuals?

Being bilingual or multilingual has positive and negative points. The majority of respondents answered that if they weigh the positive and negative aspects of bilingualism, the positive outweigh the negative aspects. From the obtained results, the positive aspects of bilingualism are more numerous than the negative points on most occasions. Most of the negative experiences reported happened while confronting a new situation (moving to a new country, the first day at school/work in another language, etc.).

After this first impact, the negative parts start to disappear, as the bilingual person can handle the new situation. The respondents explain that lack of knowledge about a situation is what causes a negative situation. The negative fact rarely occurs again, as the respondents have the necessary knowledge to avoid any negative situation. The respondents agree on the point of having lifelong learning: the individual must continue reading and acquiring knowledge.

Conclusion: The goal was to find out how bilingual or multilingual people perceive the strengths and weakness of a phenomenon that is increasing year by year.

In analysing the issues concerning the experiences of the bilingual respondents there are two conclusions: there is total agreement on being satisfied with the fact of being bilingual. The interviewees are pleased with the fact of having the chance and capacity of communicating in more than one language. The general result is positive.

Those who are parents want to "pass on" the heritage of bilingualism to their own children. From their own experience, they will also know what mistakes to avoid, and what points must be stressed. An analysis of the issues concerning the respondents' experiences about bilingualism shows a positive attitude toward it. In conclusion, the best way of learning a language is to start the learning and interacting process at an early age, (as second languages acquisition theories indicate), with a native, qualified teacher. The best is to learn one language at a time, and if the student has a personal interest in learning the language, the motivation will be stronger. And of course, being motivated will be a good help during the process of learning a language.

In order to complete this section, I have used the general conclusions obtained from the research during this work and related them to the theoretical part. Data analysis has been one of the tools used.

The interaction between individuals and their environment is of utmost importance during the process of learning languages. The fact of being able to share their opinions and experiences in a certain language with other individuals enriches them in their linguistic development. The presence of a teacher or adult improves the result of this interaction so that the individual can acquire the ability to interact in any of the languages independently.

In this case, both the role of the listener and the speaker are very important. Each of the subjects analysed in this study has developed the skill in which they had a greater dexterity. Speakers primarily promote oral expression, in which they have greater control.

In turn, listeners promote oral comprehension. In all languages there are different communication skills: oral comprehension, written comprehension and oral expression. Interaction promotes all these skills and can be considered as the fourth of them. Each student adapts their cognitive abilities and level to these skills and learns them progressively. All participants in this study have developed these skills, some highlighting certain skills and others other aspects, depending on the individual. The context in which bilingualism develops plays a decisive role in the development of this phenomenon. The social aspect is also influential in this phenomenon since the participants of this project realize a projection of themselves in this aspect.

The majority of the people who have participated in this research relate one language more closely with their work or academic life and another with their personal life. These relationships cause subjective bonds to be created with certain languages since they unconsciously relate them to certain aspects or moments of their life (episodes of childhood, relatives). When the bond or sentimental connection that binds them to that language is very high, they have had greater facility to learn that language. The human subconscious is adapted to the language and facilitates its development and understanding of it.

Some of the participants stated remembering children's songs learned in their earliest childhood in another language, and that information has been recorded in their memory. Bilingualism is considered a great advantage and an opportunity that must be taken advantage of.

At present, not all schools or educational centres have second language teaching programmes or the necessary tools to do so, although the rise of bilingualism has meant that the conditions for teaching different languages have improved with the result that the students feel comfortable and not excluded when speaking different languages. The participants in this study are accustomed to a greater use of gesture than monolingual people. It is also normal to require greater concentration in the communication aspects and more complex sentence structures. The fact of forcing the brain to perform this "extra" work comprising a second or third language generates a greater capacity and easier understanding of messages.

 One of the negative consequences of learning several languages is a higher rate of spelling errors when transcribing oral messages. The fact of being bilingual or monolingual causes a greater confusion of phonic sounds with spellings, errors in the use of commas, accents, questions, etc. Also, the quantity and variety of the lexicon are less than the vocabulary of monolingual children. A monolingual child has a richer vocabulary than a bilingual person in that same language. This means that usually when a bilingual does not find the exact word in one language, he or she uses the one corresponding to his/her other language. As a positive aspect, we have a greater development of the attention factor in bilingual speakers, necessary when we have to make a greater effort to understand the message, and unconsciously analyse the sentences in a more exhaustive way.

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The empirical analysis provided answers to these questions:

Age:

Genre:

Mother tongue:

L2 /foreign languages spoken:

Interview questions

1 What is bilingualism?

2 What is the role of bilingualism in educational life?

3 What is the role of bilingualism in professional life?

4 What is the role of bilingualism in social /personal life?

5 What importance does a good learning process have?

6 How important is age of beginning to learn a language?

7 Does the fact of speaking more than one language facilitate the process of learning?

8 What is the importance of home and school (bilingual parents, material and teacher) during the process of learning a language?

9 What do you think about the language situation in Finland?