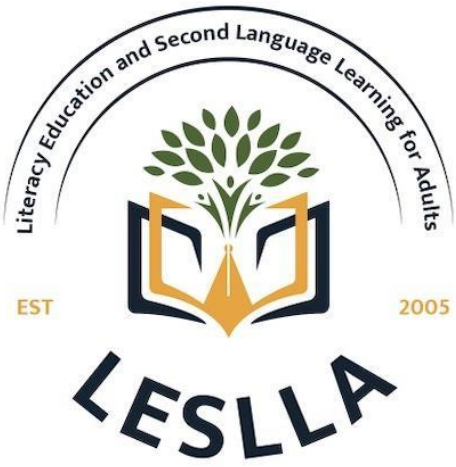
LESLLA Symposium Proceedings



Recommended citation of this article

Tammelin-Laine, T. (2015). No Verbs, No Syntax: The Development and Use of Verbs in Non-Literate Learners' Spoken Finnish. LESLLA Symposium Proceedings, 9(1), 249–273. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8022590

Citation for LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

This article is part of a collection of articles based on presentations from the 2013 Symposium held at City College of San Francisco, San Francisco, California, USA. Please note that the year of publication is often different than the year the symposium was held. We recommend the following citation when referencing the edited collection.

Santos, M. G., & Whiteside, A. (Eds.) (2015). Low-educated second language and literacy acquisition (LESLLA): Proceedings of the 9th symposium. Lulu Publishing Services. https://lesllasp.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org/index.php/lesllasp/issue/view/474

About the Organization

LESLLA aims to support adults who are learning to read and write for the first time in their lives in a new language. We promote, on a worldwide, multidisciplinary basis, the sharing of research findings, effective pedagogical practices, and information on policy.

LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

https://lesllasp.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org

Website

https://www.leslla.org/

No Verbs, No Syntax: The Development and Use of Verbs in Non-Literate Learners' Spoken Finnish

Taina Tammelin-Laine, University of Jyväskylä

Abstract

There are many published studies describing the learning of Finnish as an additional language (L2) by educated adult learners, but hardly any research is available on how low-educated adults learn Finnish. This article presents findings on the development and use of verbs in four non-literate learners' spoken language. The focus is on verbs because of their essential role both in spoken and written utterances. The data were collected in a classroom context during a literacy training of 10 months, and the data collection method was participant-observation supported by note taking and audiotaping. The general premise of the study is a combination of sociocultural and usage-based theories of language learning. The findings show that the participants used verbs rather infrequently: only 22.7% of all the utterances included at least one verb, although individual differences were found both in the number of verbs and the use of the verbs. The main reason for the low use of verbs seems to be the absence of the subjects' explicit teaching. In Finnish, the learning of verbs just by picking them out from spoken language without the support of literacy skills and especially without explicit teaching is challenging because of the complex verb conjugation system.

Introduction

In Finland, people have taken reading and writing skills for granted since the 17th century, when the Lutheran Church began teaching these skills to all people. At that time, literacy skills were even a prerequisite for getting married. However, in the last few decades, the number of non-literate and low-educated adults and adolescents has increased due to immigration from countries with low literacy rates. For example, the estimated literacy rate in Afghanistan was approximately 28.1% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013), and at the end of 2013, there were 3,704 people born in Afghanistan living in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2014). When compared with most Western countries, the numbers are still small, but they are likely to increase. The latest statistic for participants in adult language and literacy training is from 2013, when the total number was 1,234 (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, forthcoming).

The relationship between additional language (L2) learning and literacy skills in a learner's native language (L1) is scarcely known, because, to date, most of the L2 acquisition knowledge has been based on research describing the learning processes of educated language learners (see also Tarone, Bigelow, & Hansen, 2009). Because Finnish has a transparent orthography with a complex inflectional system, it provides a unique perspective for adding theoretical and empirical knowledge to this field. Additionally, this study aims to add practical knowledge for the integration training of immigrants.

The general premise of this study[15] is the usage-based theory of additional language learning (e.g., Bybee, 2008). According to this and other construction-based views, languages are initially learned in interactional situations by way of natural affordances (e.g., Bybee, 2008; Ellis, 2002), with imitation and memorizing constructions as unanalyzed chunks both playing an essential role (e.g., Myles, Mitchell, & Hooper,

[15] This work was supported by the department of languages at University of Jyväskylä, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Langnet doctoral program, and the Ellen and Artturi Nyyssönen Foundation.

1999; Ellis, 1996; Suni, 2008). Usage-based theories emphasize the importance of interaction between usage and cognitive development. However, the learners cannot benefit from affordances before having the ability to discriminate and recognize words and constructions from a stream of L2 speech. The learners of this study seem to be able to pick out some words from spoken Finnish, but they have not completely reached the stage of imitation and chunk memorization.

To learn a language involves learning verbs. Without verbs, language learning cannot proceed further than the word level because the verb is the most essential part of the spoken utterance and of the written sentence (see, e.g., Aitchison, 2012). This article focuses on three research questions: How much do the participants use verbs in their spoken language in an L2 Finnish classroom context? Which verbs are used and when? How does the use of verbs develop during the data collection period? Following a brief literature review related to the study of verbs in language acquisition, the present study and its main findings are described, followed by a discussion of the findings and implications for practice and future research.

Background

The development of verbs in L2 learning. The noun–verb distinction can probably be found in all languages (Baker, 2003). According to Aitchison (2012), it seems to be more difficult to learn verbs than nouns because verbs are connected to syntax in a complex way. In their seminal work, Klein and Perdue (1992) suggest that at the beginning of the additional language learning process, utterances are very simple, mainly comprised of disjointed nouns, adverbs, and particles, but not yet verbs. This is especially typical for Finnish, as the use of verbs requires some mastery of inflection (see also Puro, 2002). After this initial stage, learners begin to use verbs that, at this point, are usually not inflected for person or other grammatical categories.

Viberg (1993) suggests that concrete nouns are cognitively easier to process than verbs, which are therefore learned later, and argues that the relative increase in the number of verbs in learner language corresponds with the general development of the language skills, while the increase in the number of nouns does not. This is because there is a relationship between the increase in the number of verbs and the learning of syntax. Additionally, Niiranen (2008) points out that, among adolescent learners of L2 Finnish, "the number of verb lexemes is related not only to syntactic knowledge but also to inflectional knowledge" (p. 53). She concludes that "the size of verb vocabulary and language proficiency certainly must correlate in some way" (p. 53).

In light of the studies mentioned above, verbs arguably are essential to the linguistic structure in all languages because syntax does not exist without them. Pajunen (2001) divides verbs into primary and secondary classes on the basis of their relationship to the language-external reality. These semantic classes (used later in the analysis of the present study) form a universal structure, which may help L2 learners in learning verbs. All languages contain verbs referring to, e.g., speaking or moving. In Puro's (2002) study, L2 Finnish learners used mostly primary verbs, such as verbs of speaking and verbs of cognition, in the early stages of language learning. This suggests that at least some verbs in these semantic classes are relatively easy to learn.

When language learners are non-literate, they lack the ability to study verbs from books, so they must pick them up from the spoken language. This is challenging, given the abstract and complex nature of verbs. In Finnish, the relevance of verbs is even higher, as the subject can be incorporated into the verb and therefore the verb alone can comprise a whole sentence. Without verbs, there is no syntax, a fact often forgotten by literacy teachers, who often tend to concentrate on easily taught concrete nouns.

Verb conjugation in Finnish. Finnish verbs are inflected for person, number, time, mode, and voice. The personal pronoun is necessary only in the third person, both singular and plural. The Finnish negation

construction consists of the auxiliary *ei,* inflected in person and number, and the bare stem of the lexical verb (see Table 1). There is also the particle *ei,* which is used as the opposite of *kyllä* ("yes"), and it looks and sounds exactly the same as the negation verb in the third person singular. (For further details, see Karlsson, 2008.) These *ei* particles are not included in this study, but this detail in the grammar may mislead the emergent learners to assume that the Finnish negation word is always *ei*.

Person	**Affirmative**	**Negative**
1. singular	(minä) asu**n**	(minä) e**n** asu
2. singular	(sinä) asu**t**	(sinä) e**t** asu
3. singular	hän asu**u**	hän **ei** asu
1. plural	(me) asu**mme**	(me) e**mme** asu
2. plural	(te) asu**tte**	(te) e**tte** asu
3. plural	he asu**vat**	he ei**vät** asu

Table 1. Conjugation of the verb asua 'to live' in affirmative and negative forms (present tense, the indicative mood)

Below, some sentence patterns are presented to help the reader to understand the examples later in this study.

In wh-questions, the word order after the question word is usually straight and the conjugated verb follows the subject (e.g., *Missä Maija asuu?* "Where does Maija live?"), while in yes/no questions, the word order is reversed. In yes/no questions, the question suffix *ko/kö* is added to the end of the conjugated verb (e.g., *Asuuko Maija Oulussa?* "Does Maija live in Oulu?"). In negative yes/no questions, the question suffix is added to the conjugated *ei* (e.g., *Eikö Maija asu enää Oulussa?* "Doesn't Maija live in Oulu anymore?"). Usually, the negative response to both affirmative and negative yes/no questions contains conjugated *ei* either with or without the bare stem of the lexical verb (e.g., *Asuuko Maija Oulussa? Ei [asu].* "Does Maija live in Oulu? No [she doesn't]").

The Present Study

Participants. All of the participants (their names are pseudonyms) in this study were women attending their first Finnish L2 language and literacy course. Their Finnish oral skills at the beginning of the data collecting period were rather low: Amina and Asra could talk a little about topics related to their everyday life, but Husna and Rana could only say a few phrases, such as *huomenta* ("[good] morning") or *kiitos* ("thank you"). As shown in Table 2, none of them reported having completed prior schooling or acquired literacy skills in any language; however, all of them knew some of the Roman alphabet. The average age of the four participants was 35.5 years (range = 24–45), while the mean length of residence was 15.25 months (range = 12–18 months).

Adult education center	Name	Age*	Country of origin	Native language	Other languages	Length of residence in months*	Earlier education
Town A	Asra	24	Afghanistan	Dari	Farsi	18	none
Town B	Amina	45	Afghanistan	Dari	Russian	15	none
Town B	Husna	45	Afghanistan	Dari	-	16	none
Town B	Rana	28	Iran	Kurdish (Sorani)	Farsi	12	none

Note: * in August 2010, at the start of data collection

Table 2. Summary of study participants

Three of the four participants, however, had previous experience in oral L2 acquisition in either Farsi or Russian.

Learning context. The women attended language and literacy training classes provided by adult education centers in two towns, A and B. These workforce entry-level classes are free, but participation is required for receiving an integration allowance. In Finland, the adult education centers provide only the training, not, for example, child care or any other services. In both towns, the total number of lessons per week was 35. The length of each school day was approximately five lessons of 45

minutes each. Additionally, the students were expected to study at home two hours per day. The class size was 15 students.

In town A, the teaching seemed to primarily function in orientation with an array of learning activities (e.g., learning by doing), and the main goal of the course was to learn vocabulary and oral skills for everyday life. Literacy skills were taught along with the vocabulary. In town B, the teaching was mainly reading-oriented, following the reader *Aasta se alkaa* (*It Begins with A*) (Laine, Uimonen, & Lahti, 2006). The main goal of the course was to develop reading skills; vocabulary was not explicitly focused on.

In both classrooms, the lessons consisted mainly of teacher talk, but initiation-response-feedback (IRF) cycles led by the teacher (see, e.g., Tainio, 2007) were also common. However, the participants also engaged in some small talk in Finnish (e.g., asking questions) occasionally with their teachers, the researcher, and the other students. They also used their native language quite often during the lessons. Most of the participants had few meaningful situations wherein to use Finnish outside the classroom because their family members or friends commonly acted as their interpreters.

Particularly in adult education center B, the teacher's ungrammatical omissions of the copula were common, e.g., *Mikä nimi?* ("What name?"; meaning, "What is this?") and *Tämä hyvä* ("This good"). This practice likely reduced the opportunities for learners to hear and learn the standard Finnish forms, especially as Finnish differs from Dari and Sorani Kurdish in the use of the copula. In general, there seemed to be very little explicit teaching of verbs in either Finnish class.

Data and Method

The data for this study were collected longitudinally in the classrooms by participant observation, supported by note taking and audio recording of the lessons. Classroom-based data collection was important given that, for the learners in this study, the classroom often was the only context

of everyday interactional situations for the participants, due to their lack of contact with native speakers of Finnish and few opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom (e.g., Norton Peirce, 1993; Elmeroth, 2003).

The data collection period extended from August 2010 to May 2011. In town A, data collection consisted of six days during the autumn and four days during the spring (five lesson hours per each day), and in town B, the number of days was eight and 13. The observation sessions were arranged as frequently as possible. Over these sessions, all of the Finnish utterances produced by the participants were documented. During the observation period, the instructors taught their usual curriculum, the only abnormality being the sporadic presence of the researcher. All the students in the classrooms regarded her as an assistant teacher, and natural interaction with the participants and other students occurred.

The analysis began with counting the number of words and utterances produced by each participant and encoding the utterances that included one or more verbs. Utterances associated with episodes when learners were reading or repeating after the teacher were omitted, as they were not originally produced by the participants. The two main categories used here are declarative and interrogative utterances divided into two subcategories, affirmative and negative. Additionally, some of the interrogative utterances are disjunctive, consisting of both an affirmative and a negative verb. These utterances have been separated from other types of interrogatives because of their more complex nature. The verbs have also been sorted into groups based on Pajunen's (2001) semantic classification. The utterance contexts (e.g., IRF cycle, interaction between students) are not discussed in this article, but some examples of them are visible in the utterance samples presented in the analysis.

The analysis is both quantitative and qualitative: the analysis consists of frequency counts of the utterances supported by samples of utterances produced by the participants.

As can be seen in Table 3, only 22.7% of all the participants' utterances included at least one verb; in other words, approximately one out of every five utterances utilized a verb. The participant who used the

most verbs with the greatest variety was Asra, with 19 different verbs and approximately 30% of utterances including a verb. There was a clear distinction in verb use between Asra and Husna, the latter of whom used the least number of verbs and had the narrowest verb repertoire. She was also the only monolingual participant, but it is not possible to say whether her difficulties in picking up verbs were related to her being relatively less experienced in language learning.

The data	Amina	Asra	Husna	Rana	Total
Number of words	669	512	387	635	2203
Number of utterances	264	241	179	270	954
Declarative utterances with verb(s)	44	50	13	58	165
Interrogative utterances with verb(s)	13	23	8	8	52
Percentage of utterances with verb(s)	21.6	29.9	11.7	24.4	22.7
Number of different verbs used	15	19	12	14	31

Table 3. Utterances including verb(s) in the data

In the next section, the use and development of verbs in the sample of learners is described in more detail. The verbs are presented in the semantic groups. Only the verbs *ei* and *olla* ("to be") are presented separately, because of their special nature. In the examples, a question mark refers to rising intonation; an ellipsis, to lengthy pauses.

Findings

Lexical verbs. According to Pajunen (2001), *verbs of speaking* refer to verbal communication, either oral or written. In the data, the verbs in this semantic class were common, especially in interrogative utterances. Table 4 shows that these verbs were used in the data altogether 42 times, mostly by Amina and Asra. Their frequent use of *kirjoittaa* ("to write") may have some connection to their relatively faster development of literacy skills. Rana and particularly Husna were relatively slower in learning to read (see Tammelin-Laine & Martin, 2014).

Finnish verb usage	Amina	Asra	Husna	Rana	Total
kirjoittaa 'to write'	17	12	1	-	30
puhua 'to talk, to speak'	1	3	2	1	7
lukea 'to read'	3	-	1	-	4
sanoa 'to say'	-	1	-	-	1
Total	21	16	4	1	42

Table 4. Verbs of speaking and their occurrence in the data

Amina and Asra used *kirjoittaa* in affirmative declaratives and interrogatives but also in disjunctive interrogatives, as can be seen in examples 1 and 2. These kinds of utterances were used when confirmation of instructions given by the teacher was needed. The marker of disjunctive utterance was either *ja* ("and") or a short pause[16] between the alternatives.

(1)
Kirjoitta *suu* ja ei? (target: Kirjoitanko *suu* vai en?) (Asra, March)
Write+SG3 *mouth* and no+SG3? "Shall I write *mouth* or not?"

(2)
Lukee … ei kirjoita. (target: Luenko vain, en kirjoita?) (Amina, April)
Read+SG3 no+SG3 write+NEG? "Shall I just read this, not write?"

All of the participants conjugated verbs of speaking in the third person singular, regardless of the person in question. Additionally, in August, Asra twice used the form *puhu,* the imperative form (the second person singular) of *puhua. Puhua* occurred at least once in the data of

[16] Normally, disjunctive utterances in Finnish are expressed either with *tai* or *vai* (both meaning "or") between the alternatives. In this data, the participants use only a short pause or the word *ja* (more details in Tammelin-Laine, 2014).

every participant. On the other hand, *sanoa* was used only once, by Asra. This observation suggests that Asra had noticed the small semantic difference between these two verbs and brought them both into her own verb repertoire.

The next group is *verbs of space,* which express the position of a person or an animate subject. These involve verbs referring to lying, sitting, standing, and living somewhere (Pajunen, 2001). As can be seen in Table 5, all of the participants used *nukkua,* but the use of other verbs varied according to the participant. These verbs were used mostly in affirmative declaratives.

Finnish verb with a translation	**Amina**	**Asra**	**Husna**	**Rana**	**Total**
nukkua 'to sleep'	1	1	2	10	14
istua 'to sit'	-	-	1	5	6
asua 'to live'	-	1	-	-	1
odottaa 'to wait'	1	-	-	-	1
Total	2	2	3	15	22

Table 5. Verbs of space and their occurrence in the data

The most complex use of *nukkua* by Rana (example 3) suggests that at the end of the data collection period, she had noticed the idea of verb conjugation, albeit she still used a lot of variation and incorrect personal endings.

(3)
Menen kotona nukkuu. (target: Menen kotona nukkumaan.) (Rana, May)
Go+SG1 at home sleep+SG3. "At home, I go to sleep."

The question in example 4 is typically asked by the teachers in beginners' language education. Asra did not generally inflect verbs or nouns in her spoken language in August, so it serves as an example of chunk learning by imitation (see also Myles et al., 1999; Bybee, 2008).

(4)
Opettaja missä sinä asut? (Asra, August)
Teacher, where you live+SG2? "Teacher, where do you live?"

It is interesting that only Asra was able to incorporate a question frequently asked of her into her own production for purposes of genuine interaction. One potential reason for this may be in the instructor's functional language teaching, in which the focus was on oral everyday language skills and interaction.

According to Pajunen (2001), intransitive *verbs of motion* are used in expressing movement from one place to another. Transitive verbs of motion refer, for example, to using the hands to move something (e.g., *panna,* "to put"), or in giving, taking, paying for, or buying something. The verbs in this class are presented in Table 6. It is worth noting that all the participants except Husna used more than one verb of motion.

Finnish verb with a translation	**Amina**	**Asra**	**Husna**	**Rana**	**Total**
mennä 'to go'	1	3	3	4	11
kävellä 'to walk'	2	1	-	1	4
tulla 'to come'	-	2	-	1	3
antaa 'to give'	-	-	-	1	1
maksaa 'to cost'	-	1	-	-	1
panna 'to put'	1	-	-	-	1
Total	4	7	3	7	21

Table 6. Verbs of motion and their occurrence in the data

In this study, verbs of motion were used mostly in affirmative declaratives. However, Asra and Husna used them in their interrogative utterances. Husna's spoken language seemed to involve only the form *mene*.

Example 5 is from a classroom situation in which the teacher was teaching the verbs *ottaa* ("to take") and *panna*. Amina showed that she understood the difference by putting her textbook on the table

and saying the utterance aloud. Otherwise, in April, she did not use inflection either in nouns or verbs.

(5)
Panen pöydälle. (Amina, April)
Put+SG1 table+ALL. "I put on the table."

Asra's question in example 6 was expressed the day after the class visited the market square, a task for which the class had studied some important phrases, such as one asking the price of an object.

(6)
Paljonko maksaa? (Asra, April)
How much cost+SG3? "How much does it cost?"

Based on Amina's and Asra's language skills in general and also on the broader classroom context, it seems that the utterances in examples 5 and 6 were plausible examples of language that the learners had learned as chunks.

Pajunen (2001) suggests that *verbs of events* express a process or a change that has come about by physical causation in, for example, the human body or nature. The participants of this study used the verbs in this semantic class rather infrequently, mostly in affirmative declarative utterances. In the data, there are some examples of the use of the verbs *itkeä* ("to cry") (Rana, four times; Husna, once), *loppua* ("to end") (Rana, twice), *nauraa* (Husna, once), *paistaa* ("to shine") (Amina, once), *sataa* ("to rain") (Rana, once), *sopia* ("to be okay") (Amina, once), and *särkeä* ("to ache") (Asra, once).

In this study, *verbs of action* express action in a general meaning (*tehdä,* "to do" or "to make"), action in the manipulation of something (*silittää,* "to iron"; *pestä,* "to wash"), and physiological action (*syödä,* "to eat") (see Pajunen, 2001). *Syödä* was used by all the participants (once by Amina, Asra, and Husna, and three times by Rana), *silittää* and *tehdä* both twice by Asra, and *pestä* once by Rana. The verbs were mostly used

in affirmative declarative utterances. Additionally, Asra used *silittää* and Rana *syödä,* each twice in interrogative utterances.

Verbs of perception express, for example, seeing and hearing (Pajunen, 2001). In this study, both Amina and Asra used the concrete seeing verb *katsoa* ("to look") three times. Additionally, Asra used the verb *kuulua* ("be heard") in its abstract meaning (example 7). She was the only participant who exhibited learning of this question typical of social interaction.

(7)
Mitä kuuluu? (Asra, March)
"What is heard?" "How are you [doing]?"

In this data, *verbs of cognition* were used only by Asra. The verbs in this class express, for example, thinking, the state of knowing, and desire (Pajunen, 2001). Asra used the verb *tietää* ("to know") twice in negative declarative utterances (see example 11, later), and *haluta* ("to want") once in an affirmative declarative utterance.

Olla. In Finnish, the verb *olla* refers both to being and having, but the meanings are distinguished by the syntactic construction. This can be seen in Table 7.

Person	**Be**	**Have**
1. singular	(minä) ole**n**	**minulla** on
2. singular	(sinä) ole**t**	**sinulla** on
3. singular	hän on	**hänellä** on
1. plural	(me) ole**mme**	**meillä** on
2. plural	(te) ole**tte**	**teillä** on
3. plural	he o**vat**	**heillä** on

Table 7. Overview of "being" and "having" in Finnish, in present tense and the affirmative

The frequent affordances of both the copula and the "to have" construction are very typical of beginners' language education where the learners are taught to describe, e.g., their nationality and family.

Educated beginners also use *olla* very frequently in their spoken Finnish (see Puro, 2002). In this data, the use of *olla* was rather infrequent, which is shown in Table 8.

Finnish verb with a translation	**Amina**	**Asra**	**Husna**	**Rana**	**Total**
olla 'to be'	3	1	2	3	9
olla 'to have'	6	-	2	1	9
Total	9	1	4	4	18

Table 8. The copula verb olla ('to be') and its occurrence in the data

The participants used *olla* mostly in unanalyzed chunks, such as in examples 8 and 9. However, in the participants' spoken Finnish, *olla* was lacking in most of the utterances that normally contain this verb.

(8)
Mikä tämä on? (Amina, November)
What this be+SG3? "What is this?"

(9)
Minulla on kaksi lasta. (Husna, March)
I+ADE be+SG3 two children. "I have got two children."

In the instruction, the use of the copula was mentioned, but this practice did not seem to lead to internalization. One potential reason for the infrequent use of the copula is transfer from the native language, because, in Dari and Kurdish, the copula in certain contexts consists of enclitics, not independent verbs (*Learn Dari,* n.d.; Thackston, 2006). The rather complex nature of the "to have" construction may be the reason why Amina, Husna, and Rana used it when the class was practicing it, but not in other contexts. On the days of observation at adult education center A where Asra was studying, the class was not focused on the "to have" construction, which may help to explain why this feature did not appear in Asra's language at all.

Ei. Table 9 shows that in the data, *ei* occurs mostly independently, followed by no lexical verb. Only Amina, Asra, and Rana occasionally used lexical verbs in declarative negative utterances. Additionally, there were some examples of lexical verbs in negative and disjunctive interrogatives in Amina's and Asra's data, which were presented in the section about lexical verbs. Potential reasons for this pattern among the participants are the rather low use of verbs in general and their seeing *ei* as a negation word instead of as a verb with conjugation. The simple negative verb stem *ei* is also sufficient for getting the message across. *Ei* was included in this study because it is a conjugable verb in Finnish, even though the participants did not conjugate it correctly.

Negative utterances	Amina	Asra	Husna	Rana	Total
Declarative with lexical verb(s)	6	3	0	3	12
Declarative with no lexical verb(s)	15	38	4	34	91
Interrogative with lexical verb(s)	2	3	0	0	5
Interrogative with no lexical verb(s)	4	1	0	4	9
Total of declaratives	21	41	4	37	103
Total of interrogatives	6	4	0	4	14

Table 9. Negative utterances in the data

It is worth noting that Husna used negative utterances considerably less than the other participants. Additionally, all of her negative utterances were from the last three months of the data collection period, and these were expressed without lexical verbs (e.g., *Tämä ei tyttö tämä poika* ["This no girl this boy"]). This was exceptional when compared to the other participants, who used negative utterances from October onward, occasionally including a lexical verb. Again, this may reflect Husna's relative lack of experience with learning additional languages.

In the data, the negation verb was used in the form *ei* only. It can be followed by the lexical verb in its default form (third person singular), as in example 10, or by the grammatically correct stem of the lexical verb (example 11). Amina and Asra used both of these negative utterance types, but Rana used only the first of them.

(10)
(Oletko sinä jo väsynyt? Haluatko nukkumaan?)
Ei nukkuu. (target: En halua nukkumaan.) (Rana, May)
No+SG3 sleep+SG3.
("Are you tired? Do you want to go to sleep?") Rana: "I don't want to go to sleep."

(11)
Minä ei tiedä. (target: Minä en tiedä.) (Asra, March)
I no+SG3 know+NEG. "I don't know."

Rana was the only participant who used negation more than once in the same utterance (example 12). This may be interpreted as her desire to emphasize her message.

(12)
Ei opettaja ei kotona ei hyvä. (target: Opettaja, ei ole hyvä olla kotona.) (Rana, May)
"No teacher no at home no good." ("Teacher, it is not good to stay at home.")

As a whole, it was typical for Rana to use utterances including *ei hyvä,* but it was not typical of the other participants. This pattern reflects Rana's enthusiasm for expressing her opinions of and dissatisfaction with a large variety of issues, but also the need of learning how to use the copula in Finnish.

The development of the use of verbs. During the 10-month period of language education, the participants seemed to learn to use verbs gradually, beginning with simple affirmative utterances. The use and number of different verbs increased in time in every participant's language, even if they seemed to be at different stages in the development of their use of verbs. For instance, Husna began to use verbs after approximately eight months, while the other participants did so much

earlier, after the first month of education (Amina and Asra) or after the fourth (Rana).

Individual differences between the participants in both verb repertoire and frequency were rather clear, because the participants using verbs more frequently and with larger variety in general also used verbs in more complex utterances, such as in disjunctive interrogatives. The number and frequency of verbs also seemed to be in line with the reading development, for Amina and Asra were the fastest learners of the decoding skills, while Husna was the slowest (more details in Tammelin-Laine & Martin, 2014).

A feature in the development of verb use that all the participants shared seems to be that they hardly conjugated the verbs they used in other persons but the third person singular (the default form). Additionally, the unconjugated use of *ei* was typical for all of them. However, the participants who used verbs more frequently and had a wider verb repertoire seemed to use the lexical verb with *ei* more frequently.

Discussion and Conclusions

The data for this study were collected longitudinally in two classrooms, and they include, altogether, 266 tokens of 31 different verbs. The participants used verbs in the classroom context rather infrequently in general: only 22.7% of all utterances included at least one verb. Individual differences among the four participants were found both in the number of verbs used and the way of using the verbs. A different data collection method (e.g., controlled interview or oral language testing) could have led to different results. However, participants' meaningful situations of language usage took place mainly in the classroom context, so the classroom was an obvious choice for collecting naturally occurring spoken language data.

Of all the participants, Asra's verb repertoire was the widest. She also used verbs most frequently. Most of the verbs occurred in interrogative utterances, but some also occurred in negative and disjunctive questions.

Asra was the first one to start using verbs. The development of the use of verbs showed in her more complex structures and her increase of verb use over time. In her data, the two most common verbs were *ei* followed by no lexical verb (39 instances) and *kirjoittaa* (12 instances).

Amina had the second largest variety of verbs and the second highest percentage of verb use. She used verbs mostly in affirmative declarative utterances, but also in negative and disjunctive interrogatives. Amina seemed to start using verbs actively from March, although there were some examples of verb use from October onward in her data. Also in Amina's data, the two most common verbs were *ei* followed by no lexical verb (19 instances) and *kirjoittaa* (17 instances).

Most of Rana's verbs occurred in affirmative declarative utterances, but also in interrogative and negative utterances. Rana started using *ei* followed by no lexical verb before affirmative verbs, which occurred in her data from December onward. The most frequent verbs in her data were *ei* followed by no lexical verb (38 instances) and *nukkua* (10 instances).

Husna seemed to have the narrowest verb repertoire and the lowest percentage of verb use. This may result from her not having learnt other languages previously. She also had the most consistent frequencies in the verbs she used, the most frequent verbs being *ei* followed by no lexical verb (four instances) and *mennä* (three instances). Most of the verbs occurred in affirmative declaratives from January onward, but she did not start using verbs until the last month of data collection.

According to Voionmaa (1993), in the European Science Foundation (ESF) project on additional language learning by adult immigrants, "The number and variation of verbs acquired correlated with general increase of lexical richness and variation" (p. 2). This result is in line with the findings of this study and the study of Tammelin-Laine and Martin (2014) on non-literate adult learners.

Approximately 32% of the verb tokens in the data belong to three semantic groups: verbs of speaking (42 instances), verbs of space (22 instances), and verbs of motion (21 instances). It is worth noting that, for example, modal verbs such as *voida* ("may," "can") and *pitää* ("must") are not used at all. Therefore, strings of verbs are also lacking in the data.

In general, the participants used *olla* much less than expected. Sentences with the copula are essential in social interaction, as in introducing oneself and describing one's family and country of origin. Given that utterances that omit the copula, while they may be functional, label even an otherwise advanced speaker as clearly clumsy and foreign, this issue should receive more explicit attention in teaching.

At the same time, *ei* was very common in participants' spoken language. However, none of them began to conjugate it in person and number during the data collection period. This pattern leads to the conclusion that the participants may assume that the Finnish negation word is always *ei*.

Language development is often assumed to start with unanalyzed chunks (e.g., Myles et al., 1999) learned by imitation. This study suggests that at the beginning of the language learning process, non-literate learners may not use or benefit from imitation as much as educated learners do. Therefore, they also seem not to learn phrases or constructions easily from the stream of spoken language without explicit instruction (see also Tarone et al., 2009). This can be partly explained by the fact that non-literate learners tend "to focus on the semantic elements of the communication, rather than the morphosyntax of the language" (Tarone et al., 2009, p. 110). On the other hand, the studies of Reis and Castro-Caldas (1997) and Bigelow, Delmas, Hansen, and Tarone (2006) show that L1 literacy skills have a positive influence on the development of L2 oral skills in general. Additionally, the alphabetic literacy level of L1 is shown to affect, for example, the phonological skills and verbal memory of adults (Dellatolas et al., 2003). Both of these are needed for processing and storing chunks into memory for later use. Thus, Tarone et al. (2009) "are certain that older language learners who lack alphabetic print literacy are using the linguistic input they receive orally in different ways from those who are alphabetically literate" (p. 116).

Verbs form the basis of Finnish syntax, and therefore the learning of syntax fails to progress without learning verbs. For many of the participants in this study, interactive language-use situations in their L2 occur mainly in the classroom context. Because of this limitation,

literacy instruction should give them both affordances and scaffolding for learning a new language, and especially for learning verbs. Both a large variety and the frequent use of verbs helps in getting one's message across from the beginning of the language learning process. Additionally, vocabulary in general should be increased before starting to learn how to read so as to secure a meaningful and motivating learning process, which often requires a lot of effort when starting to learn an additional language as an adult.

In this article, some of the first steps toward understanding the development and use of verbs by non-literate learners in an L2 Finnish classroom context are explored. Further research is required, for example, to examine more specifically how the context affects the learners' spoken language development. In addition to larger samples, research on the potential relationship between the richness of verb vocabulary and the development of reading skills would add knowledge valuable for both researchers and practitioners.

References

Aitchison, J. (2012). *Words in the mind. An introduction to the mental lexicon* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Baker, M. C. (2003). *Lexical categories: Verbs, nouns, and adjectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bigelow, M., Delmas, R., Hansen, K., & Tarone, E. (2006). Literacy and the processing of oral recasts in SLA. *TESOL Quarterly, 40*(4), 665–689.

Bybee, J. (2008). Usage-based grammar and second language acquisition. In R. Robinson & N. C. Ellis (Eds.), *Handbook of cognitive linguistics and second language acquisition* (pp. 216–236). New York: Routledge.

Central Intelligence Agency (2013). Afghanistan. In *The world factbook.* Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html

Dellatolas, G., Braga, L. W., Souza, L. N., Filho, G. N., Queiroz, E., & Deloche, G. (2003). Cognitive consequences of early phase of literacy. *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society, 9*(5), 771–782.

Ellis, N. C. (1996). Sequencing in SLA. Phonological memory, chunking, and points of order. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 18*(1), 91–126.

Ellis, N. C. (2002). Frequency effects in language processing. A review with implications for theories of implicit and explicit language acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 24*(1), 143–188.

Elmeroth, E. (2003). From refugee camp to solitary confinement: Illiterate adults learn Swedish as a second language. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 47*(4), 431–449.

Karlsson, F. (2008). *Finnish: An essential grammar* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Klein, W., & Perdue, C. (1992). *Utterance structure. Developing grammars again.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Laine, R., Uimonen, E., & Lahti, Y. (2006). *Aasta se alkaa.* Helsinki: Opetushallitus.

Learn Dari. (n.d.). Retrieved July 27, 2014, from *Learn Languages.* http://mylanguages.org/dari_phrases.php

Ministry of Employment and the Economy (forthcoming). *Foreign jobseekers at employment and economic development offices in 2013.* Helsinki: Ministry of Employment and the Economy.

Myles, F., Mitchell, R., & Hooper, J. (1999). Interrogative chunks in French L2. A basis for creative construction? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 21*(1), 49–80.

Niiranen, L. (2008). *Effects of learning contexts on knowledge of verbs. Lexical and inflectional knowledge of verbs among pupils learning Finnish in northern Norway* (Doctoral thesis). University of Tromsø, Norway. Retrieved July 27, 2014, from http://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/2109/thesis.pdf?sequence=1

Norton Peirce, B. (1993). *Language learning, social identity, and immigrant women.* Ontario: National Library of Canada.

Pajunen, A. (2001). *Argumenttirakenne. Asiaintilojen luokitus ja verbien käyttäytyminen suomenkielessä.* Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

Puro, T. (2002). *Suomi toisena kielenä-aikuisoppijan verbien kehittyminen alkeiskurssilla* (Unpublished licentiate thesis). University of Jyväskylä.

Reis, A., & Castro-Caldas, A. (1997). Illiteracy: A cause for biased cognitive development. *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society, 3*(5), 444–450.

Statistics Finland (2014). *Country of birth according to age and sex by region 1990–2013.* Retrieved July 27, 2014, from http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/kuv_en.html

Suni, M. (2008). *Toista kieltä vuorovaikutuksessa. Kielellisten resurssien jakaminen toisen kielenomaksumisen alkuvaiheessa. Studies in Humanities, 94.* Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.

Thackston, W. M. (2006). *Sorani Kurdish—A reference grammar with selected readings.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University. Retrieved July 27, 2014, from http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iranian/Sorani/sorani_1_grammar.pdf

Tainio, L. (Ed.) (2007). *Vuorovaikutusta luokkahuoneessa. Näkökulmana keskustelunanalyysi.* Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Tammelin-Laine, T. (2014). "Tämä hyvä?" Kurkistus luku-ja kirjoitustaidottomien suomenoppijoiden esittämiin kysymyksiin. *Puhe ja kieli, 34*(2), 81–99.

Tammelin-Laine, T., & Martin, M. (2014). The simultaneous development of receptive skills in an orthographically transparent second language. *Writing Systems Research.* Retrieved August 15, 2014. doi: 10.1080/17586801.2014.943148

Tarone, E., Bigelow, M., & Hansen, K. (2009). *Literacy and second language oracy* (1st ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Viberg, Å. (1993). Crosslinguistic perspectives on lexical organization and lexical progression. In K. Hyltenstam & Å. Viberg (Eds.), *Progression and regression in language. Sociocultural, neuropsychological & linguistic perspectives* (pp. 340–385). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Voionmaa, K. (1993). *On the semantics of adult verb acquisition.* Göteborg: Kompendiet.

Appendix

Abbreviations

Number
Singular is not indicated

Person
SG1 First person singular
SG2 Second person singular
SG3 Third person singular

Voice
Active is not indicated

Mood
Indicative is not indicated

Tense
Present tense is not indicated

Negation
Negation verb of Finnish is indicated with English negation word *no*, followed by the personal ending.
NEG Negative form of verb in present tense is indicated with *NEG*.

Case
Nominative is not indicated
ADE Adessive
ALL Allative