English voices in Finnish society: The case of teenage boys playing English-language electronic games

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The increased use and influence of English in the European context of modern life and work has been subject to much debate recently. The implications of this debate are far-reaching, ranging from questions of national language policies to practical concerns such as the goals and methods of teaching English.

The study reported on here is a part of a more extensive research project that focuses on the contexts, functions and uses of English in media, educational and professional environments in Finnish society. As an illustration of the uses of English in Finland, our paper will focus on one particular media domain, electronic games, where English has an important role. Within a theoretical framework which combines pragmatic, discourse analytic and sociolinguistic approaches and methods, we will investigate how Finnish teenage boys, who have studied English as a foreign language in school for three years, interact with an English-language electronic game and with each other. More specifically, using video recordings and transcriptions of the boys’ talk while playing an electronic game as our data, we will pay attention to what forms of English are used by them, and how English elements are drawn upon and used in their interaction.

Through this kind of focused qualitative analysis with a pragmatic and discourse analytic orientation, we hope to provide insight into the situated functions, meanings of language and into the pragmatic conditions within which particular choices are made. We will also discuss how the local and situated uses of English as illustrated by our data relate to the more general sociolinguistic, social and cultural changes under way.