

## WHAT DIFFERENCES ARE THERE BETWEEN FINNS AND SWEDISH-SPEAKING FINNS LEARNING ENGLISH?

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The role of the mother tongue in foreign-language learning has not yet been satisfactorily explained. It is generally agreed today that the mother tongue is an aid rather than an obstacle in the process of learning another language, but exactly how it influences this process has not been established.

Finland is a country where conditions are unusually favourable for an investigation of problems connected with foreign-language learning. There are two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. Finnish is spoken by more than 92% of the population, whereas 6-7% have Swedish as their mother tongue.

For a long time there has been no language conflict in Finland. The two language groups share a common cultural heritage, and essentially most Swedish-speaking Finns today regard themselves not as a separate nationality within Finland, but as primarily Finns, with merely a mother tongue different from the majority of the population. Thus two groups, linguistically completely different, have an educational and cultural unity that would be difficult to find elsewhere.

At Åbo Akademi's Department of English a project (financed by the Academy of Finland) has been set up to investigate the different types of errors Finns and Swedes (i.e. Swedish-speaking Finns) make when learning English. An ultimate aim is to shed more light on the part actually played by the mother tongue (L1) in the learning of a foreign language (L2), and also to provide some conclusions relevant to English teaching in Finland.

The material so far examined consists partly of recent entrance examinations to the Department of English, and partly of special tests designed for a considerably lower level at a commercial college, where very few of the students are academically inclined. Also, the computer-analysed figures from the National Examination in English have been taken into account. On the other

hand, texts written by university students of English have not yet been thoroughly examined, mainly because most errors made at this advanced stage show much less of obvious LI-interference.

The students at the Swedish-medium university of Åbo Akademi are drawn from both language groups in Finland, the percentage of Finnish-speaking students being around 25. Often, however, a majority of the candidates applying for a place at the department have been Finns. If the results of the top twenty candidates in recent entrance tests are examined, the Finnish applicants attained the following ranks:

Table 1

Year	Rank numbers	Total
1972	1, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17	(total 7 out of 20)
1973	3, 7, 11, 12, 13, 17	" 7 " " "
1974	6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 20	8 " "
1975	5, 15, 17, 19	" 4 " " "

The best results have generally been obtained by a fairly small number of Swedes, and since more than two thirds of the applicants are rejected, the percentage of Finns accepted has been considerably smaller than that of the Swedes. Still, there is not a very great difference between the mean results of the two language groups. Since it might be of interest to examine the differences between the language groups in the different parts of the test, the following table shows the total results for the entrance examination and the results in its different subsections:

Table 2. Results from entrance examinations 1972 - 75 with standard deviation (SD)

Year	Finns (N=56)		Swedes (N=69)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1972				
Section				
A. Reading Comprehension (9 items)	6.7	1.6	7.4	1.3
B. Grammar (45)	35.2	2.9	36.0	3.7
C. Vocabulary (70)	45.6	7.4	48.7	8.3
D. Pronunciation (5)	1.6	1.6	2.2	1.1
E. Composition (20)	8.1	3.0	9.3	2.3
TOTAL (149)	97.7	11.7	103.5	12.6
1973				
Section				
A. Grammar (56)	37.8	4.1	41.5	4.9
B. Vocabulary (50)	29.6	5.9	28.8	8.1
C. Pronunciation (24)	16.8	2.7	18.4	2.4

Section	1974		1975	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
D. Composition (60)	29.8	10.2	35.1	7.8
TOTAL (190)	114.0	16.3	124.2	16.7
1974	Finns (N=63)	Swedes (N=45)		
A. Grammar (15)	9.8	2.0	10.9	1.8
B. Articles (15)	12.4	1.7	14.2	0.9
C. Prepositions (15)	10.5	1.7	11.4	1.5
D. Vocabulary (30)	19.2	4.5	22.8	4.3
E. Spelling (28)	20.7	2.7	21.5	2.6
F. Pronunciation (38)	19.7	8.6	22.1	8.3
G. Composition (40)	27.4	6.4	30.4	4.6
TOTAL (181)	119.3	18.0	133.3	17.6
1975	Finns (N=42)	Swedes (N=58)		
A. Sound Recognition (110)	87.1	4.0	90.8	3.2
B. Partial Dictation (76)	42.9	9.6	52.4	7.5
C. Close Test (156)	89.5	13.0	92.9	13.6
D. Grammar & Vocabulary (23)	14.5	2.9	14.9	2.5
E. Composition (80)	53.5	5.7	54.9	5.3
TOTAL (445)	187.5	27.4	305.5	22.0

This table shows that on the average the Swedes have generally done consistently better than the Finns, but not very much better. There is an exception to this, and that is the test in partial dictation (only in 1975), where the difference is considerable in favour of the Swedes.

A partial dictation test primarily tests listening comprehension, and it thus appears that this would be the area where Finns, as compared with Swedes, would meet the greatest difficulties. This is not surprising, since, generally speaking, tests of receptive skills will favour learners with a cognate L1. It is above all in these skills that positive transfer from the mother tongue takes place.<sup>1</sup>

However, like listening comprehension, reading comprehension, too, is a receptive skill, and results from the national matriculation examination in English which includes both listening comprehension and reading comprehension also show a difference between Swedes and Finns. From the two years during which

<sup>1</sup> Cf. W. F. Mackey (1965: 109): "If (a learner)... is learning simply to understand the language, the greater the similarity between the first language and the second, the easier the latter will be to understand. In using the language, however, it is the similarity that may cause interference by the misuse of such things as deceptive cognates".

the 'new type' of foreign language examination has been in operation the following tables of mean results can be compiled:<sup>2</sup>

Table 3. National Matriculation Examination

			1974	1975
Listening Comprehension	(30 items)	Fi.	19.7	21.6
		Sw.	22.4	24.8
Reading Comprehension	(30 items)	Fi.	24.1	22.8
		Sw.	25.7	24.7

While the differences in reading comprehension are 1.6 (1974) and 1.9 (1975) in the Swedes' favour, the differences in listening comprehension are higher both years, 2.7 and 3.2.

Some further hints about the Finn's difficulties in perception and discrimination can be found from an analysis of spelling errors. Exact figures from spelling errors in our material are not yet available, but a few general trends can be discerned.

The first quite obvious point to be made about spelling errors is that they depend on what type of test they occur in. In a dictation or partial dictation test, they may occur at any stage in the process involved, but usually a large proportion of errors are due to faulty perception and discrimination. On the other hand, such errors are much less frequent in translations, and especially in compositions, since the student generally at least thinks he knows the words he uses. In these tests the explanation of the error must generally be sought in the later, productive stage, where the student fails to find the correct *Wortbild*, the right graphemic realization of the word.

In a dictation test Finns make many more errors than Swedes, and most of these errors are due to faulty perception and discrimination. If an error occurs at the phonemic level only, the version Finns produce tends to give an entirely different pronunciation of the word. Examples are *\*obbortunity* pro *opportunity*, *\*gloud* pro *cloud*, *\*jattting* pro *chatting*. On the other hand, when the spelling produces the same pronunciation as the original, as in *\*receaved* pro *received*, Swedes seem to make at least as many mistakes of this type as Finns.

Another difference that can be observed in dictations is that where Swedes go wrong they usually do so at the phonemic level only, i.e., they substitute wrong phonemes, whereas Finns make more errors where wrong *words*, not phonemes, are substituted. Perception of word boundaries also seems to cause greater difficulties for Finns than for Swedes.

In compositions and translations, spelling error frequencies are not notably

<sup>2</sup> The number of candidates taking this optional examination (the other option being a translation from and into English) was: 1974 3084 Finns, 324 Swedes; 1975 5654 Finns, 654 Swedes. The percentage of Swedes choosing the new type of examination, where an essay is also required, was higher than that of the Finns both years.

different for the two language groups. Even here, however, where errors normally occur at the phonemic level only, a difference in type of errors can be seen, in that many of the errors made by Finns are ultimately due to perception difficulties. The well-known difficulty for Finns in distinguishing /p, t, k/ from /b, d, g/ in the Germanic languages is particularly evident.

However, the perception and discrimination of individual phonemes is probably not the main reason for the poor results of Finns in tests where listening comprehension figures prominently. In the perception of larger units there seem to be other, more important causes of errors which are due to differences between Finnish on the one hand and Swedish and English on the other.

One factor of importance here is stress. In Finnish, the stress is fixed on the first syllable of a word, whereas the stress in Swedish is similar to that in English in that the stress is usually on the first syllable, but not invariably so. Finns have thus lost an important clue for the discernment of word boundaries.

Another difference connected with word boundaries is the existence of both initial and final clusters of consonants in Germanic words, a phenomenon which is not paralleled in standard Finnish (except in loanwords). For Finns this may mean another loss of clues to word boundaries, particularly relevant at the early stages of learning.

A linguistic feature in Finnish, but not in English or Swedish, that also contributes to a clear expectation of word boundaries is vowel harmony. If Finns meet an /ä/ or an /ö/ immediately following an /a/, /o/, or /u/, they are used to assuming that there is a word boundary between these syllables or that the word is a compound.

One of the differences between a spoken and a written medium is that the spoken medium is linear in that one cannot go back and ponder upon what was said earlier. It may well be that this uninvestigated time factor is responsible for a difference between Swedes and Finns in comprehending spoken English. Not only may the lack of immediately obvious associations with similar words in their L1 require a longer time for the understanding process of the Finns and thus cause greater difficulties on both the receptive and the productive side. We also have to reckon with the fundamental difference in structure between the Germanic languages and Finnish. Finnish is an agglutinative language where productive suffixes carry a lot of information. It contains greater syntactic redundancy than Swedish or English, and concord, especially in the noun phrase, plays a very prominent part. In his L1 a Finn is used to be given a large number of syntactic clues, not all of which are essential for the semantic interpretation of the message. When he is learning to understand spoken English, where such clues are much more sparse, the time to interpret the message may not be sufficient, and comprehension can be expected to be impaired much more than for a Swede in the same situation. A field of interesting psycholinguistic experiments lies open here.

In analysing grammatical errors, it has seemed sensible to concentrate on a few areas where Finnish differs from the Germanic languages. One obvious area is the use of the articles, where Finns lack a corresponding reference frame on their L1. Word order is another promising area, for different reasons. In a synthetic language such as Finnish, subject-verb word order is relatively free, whereas both English and Swedish have much more fixed, but different, rules for inversion. Further, subject-verb concord might provide interesting comparisons. In Finnish the present indicative forms of the verb are inflected in all persons, both singular and plural. In Swedish, on the other hand, there is only one verb form for all persons. In this respect English, with its third person -s ending, occupies an intermediate position between Finnish and Swedish.

To begin with the articles, it is immediately obvious that Finnish intermediate learners of English have great problems compared with Swedes. The groups investigated were English learners at a commercial college who read English for about five years on the average. The social background of the two groups were near identical. The tests used were partly a translation, partly an essay. In a comparative analysis of such tests the total number of potential errors should also be computed for both groups. All nouns that could be preceded by an article, numeral or possessive pronoun were regarded as potential sources of errors. Out of a total of 174 article errors occurring in our material, there were only 4 that did not fit this description, i.e., they were errors where articles had been placed in front of words which cannot be preceded by an article or another modifier.

Table 4. Errors in article usage, commercial college

	Translation		Essay	
	Fi. (N=58)	Sw. (N=42)	Fi. (N=58)	Sw. (N=42)
Average number of errors	0.7	0.2	1.6	0.8
Number of actual errors	40	8	94	32
Number of potential errors	408	293	1164	911
Percentage of errors actual/potential	9.8%	2.7%	8.1%	3.5%

This table shows a marked difference between the two language groups and it appears that a large number of Finns seem to have a very poor grasp of the system of English articles. It is also interesting to see the distribution of errors, if the essays are divided into three groups according to their general standard (language and content):

Table 5. Number of errors in article usage, commercial college, essay

	Fi.				Sw.			
	Gr. I (N=14)	Gr. II (N=24)	Gr. III (N=20)	Total (N=58)	Gr. I (N=9)	Gr. II (N=17)	Gr. III (N=16)	Total (N=42)
Article used where it should be omitted	7	14	3	24	1	4	6	11
Article used where it should be used	7	24	33	64	2	7	4	13
Wrong choice of article	—	3	3	6	—	3	5	8

Thus, the lower the general standard of the Finns, the greater is their tendency simply to ignore the existence of the articles in English.

In the use of the articles Swedes thus seem to have a greater advantage, compared with Finns. However, at a more advanced stage the Finns seem to reach almost the same stage as the Swedes, at least in answering question of the multiple-choice or blank-filling type. The following table shows the results (percentages of correct answers) in the entrance examinations to the Department of English:

Table 6. Percentage of correct answers to question on the use of articles

	Number of items	Finns	Swedes
1972	6	65.2%	67.1%
1973	17	73.0%	76.9%
1974	15	82.7%	94.7%

The type of test used may well be relevant to the small difference between the two language groups.<sup>3</sup> For, if there is anything striking in this table it is that the differences are not greater.<sup>4</sup> Test items of grammar trap students who are poor in certain areas of grammar, but a good knowledge of such grammatical traps as are set in the test items does not guarantee communicative competence. In fact, test items of this kind do not discriminate very well at this relatively advanced level. The candidates' essays would probably

<sup>3</sup> In 1974 the test items were too easy to give relevant information to our project.

<sup>4</sup> Oller and Redding (1971: 90 ff.) found that in the use of English articles there was a difference between learners whose L1 has formal equivalents and those whose L1 has not: "G1 (students whose L1 has formal equivalents) performed better on the test of article usage than G2 (students whose native language did not have equivalents...). The differences... were statistically significant".

tell us more, but since they are rather short they contain only a limited number of article errors. The data from these essays have not yet been fully assembled.

It is dangerous to speculate on the general differences between Finnish and Swedish schools (the candidates come from a large variety of schools), but we should remember that in view of the lack of a reference frame for Finns, Finnish teachers are acutely aware of the difficult learning problem of the articles. Thus the emphasis on the mastery of grammatical rules, at least where the articles are concerned, may well be stronger in Finnish schools. However, the difficulties and labour involved in testing such a hypothesis are too great to be worth the effort.

In subject-verb concord, a contrastive analysis would seem to predict that Swedes have a greater learning difficulty, since they go from a simpler system with no present-tense endings for the verb to a more complex one, whereas Finns go from a more complex system with endings for all persons to a less complex system, where only the third person has a marked form with an *-s* ending. The Swedes perceive the *-s* as redundant in terms of their own system and can therefore be expected to omit it very frequently, whereas the Finns are merely subjected to the pressure from the unmarked forms which influences all learners of English, and can thus be expected to make fewer errors than Swedes.<sup>5</sup> In the entrance examinations at least, this hypothesis seems to work. In the composition required in 1972, the Swedes (N=69) made 22 concord errors, whereas the Finns (N=56) made only 3. The equivalent figures in 1974 were 15 for Swedes (N=45) and 4 for Finns (N=63), and in 1975 13 for Swedes (N=58) and 5 for Finns (N=42). Above all, as might be expected, the Swedes tended to omit the *-s* (the ratio in 1972 was 13 Swedes to 1 Finn, whereas 9 Swedes and 2 Finns inserted the ending when it should not be there).

At the intermediate stage, however, the picture is wholly different, as can be seen from the following table. Contrary to what might be expected, there is a clear difference in favour of the Swedes:

Table 7. Errors of subject-verb concord, commercial college, essay

	Finns (N=58)				Swedes (N=42)			
	Gr. I	Gr. II	Gr. III	Total	Gr. I	Gr. II	Gr. III	Total
Number of actual out of potential errors	8/287	47/486	67/369	122/1142	2/170	8/388	10/323	20/881
Percentage actual/potential errors	2.8%	9.7%	18.2%	10.7%	1.2%	2.1%	3.1%	2.3%

<sup>5</sup> For the concept of redundancy, see George (1972 : 9 ff.)

Since the distribution of concord errors at this stage is especially interesting, it will be worthwhile to look at them in some detail. They can be subdivided in the following way:

Table 8. Number of errors of subject-verb concord, commercial college, essay

	Finns (N=58)	Swedes (N=42)
3p. pres. <i>-s</i> omitted in main verb	79	2
<i>-s</i> used with plural subject	4	—
<i>were</i> pro <i>was</i>	18	11
<i>was</i> pro <i>were</i>	7	6
<i>are</i> pro <i>is</i>	5	—
<i>is</i> pro <i>are</i>	2	1
<i>have</i> pro <i>has</i>	7	—
Total	122	20

This table shows that by far the majority of concord errors made by Finns consist of leaving out the third person *-s*. In fact, for at least the worst Finns, a picture emerges similar to that of the articles: they seem to be almost unaware of the system of English verb inflection, and their tendency is consistently to ignore the *-s*. As far as subject-verb concord is concerned, these Finns are clearly at what Corder calls the presystematic stage of learning: they are "only vaguely aware, if at all, that there is something to be learned, that the target language has a particular system" (Corder 1973 : 271). These pupils have not yet reached the stage of having a choice problem in the sense of choosing between well-defined and understandably organized alternatives,<sup>6</sup> since this stage presupposes a basic knowledge of what alternatives to choose from.

The Finns thus seem to dwell much longer than the Swedes at the pre-systematic stage of learning English, or to put it differently, their organizational problem is much greater. This is perhaps a more concrete way of putting the well-known fact that learning a related language takes less time than learning a non-related language.<sup>7</sup> At the early and intermediate stage of English-language learning these initial disadvantages of the Finns weigh much more than individual similarities and differences between isolated grammatical constructions, which play only a subordinate role. They are

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Eugene Galanter (1966 : 53): "This problem of how the person or the animal organizes his universe is at once the deepest and the least understood of all the problems in psychology". Galanter's book explores the fundamental importance of the two themes of choice and organization for psychology.

<sup>7</sup> See, e. g. Jakobovits (1970 : 204 ff.), referring to H. Cleveland, G. J. Mangone and J. C. Adams (1960 : 250 ff.)

only parts of the whole complex process of expanding and reorganizing one's language capacity to include another language as well as L1. As foreign-language learning progresses beyond the elementary stage, the learner gradually comes to reduce the numerous organizational problems to choice problems with clear-cut alternatives.

This distinction between choice and organization may illuminate the controversial question of L1-transfer. It seems that there is a distinction between L1-transfer at the organizational level and transfer at the choice level. At the organizational level, similarities between L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> facilitate learning, i.e., they cause primarily positive transfer, in that the learner is able to recognize and understand familiar concepts and categories and can proceed relatively rapidly to the problem of choosing between a set of alternatives. Where L1 and L2 differ considerably from each other, the small degree of such positive transfer leads to numerous organizational problems. Organizational transfer is most clearly seen, or rather least obscure, in grammar and vocabulary (including word-formation), but it is still, I think, very little understood. At the same time it is more fundamental than choice-level transfer, since it comes first in time. Beginners, and to some extent also intermediate learners, produce a substantial number of errors for which no rational explanation can be found and which are clear evidence of their organizational problems. At the choice level, no such relatively clear-cut distinction can be made. Negative and positive transfer occur, but it is difficult to assess the relative importance of 'false friends' and similarities that are only superficial on the one hand, and the positive L1-influence, which is much harder to pin down in concrete terms, on the other. Also, as learning proceeds, intralingual interference is the cause of more and more errors.<sup>8</sup> Errors at the choice level are much more amenable to analysis, and numerous investigations of errors have been made, with detailed classification into different categories according to type of error and cause of error. Hardly anything, however, has so far been said about positive transfer from L1.

Of course the relatedness of the foreign language to L1 is not the only factor that determines the length of time during which a learner remains at the stage of organizational difficulties. Age and intellectual and social background, proficiency in L1, language-learning aptitude, the learning situation and the degree of contact with L<sub>2</sub>, and motivation are other variables that have to be taken into account.

So far our project, which has a slightly different slant from that of most other error analyses in that we are primarily concerned with comparing error frequencies, not with the typology and classification of errors, has yielded material for discussion of what is probably the most fundamental aspect

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. Taylor (1975).

of applied linguistics: the foreign-language learning process. Much more work needs to be done before anything can be said with certainty, but it is, at any rate, encouraging to find that the same frequency pattern tends to repeat itself year after year in our entrance tests. The main differences between Finns and Swedes can tentatively be summarized in the following way:

— The differences in proficiency largely depend on what type of test is used. The more spoken language and the more receptive skills<sup>9</sup> are tested, the greater the difference tends to be in favour of the Swedes. Grammar items, on the other hand, even out the differences.

— The Finns have considerable organizational problems in learning English, whereas the Swedes pass much more quickly on to choice problems. Our investigations confirm the view often expressed by experienced English teachers in Finland that Finns have much greater initial learning difficulties, which are, however, evened out as learning proceeds.

— There may be a difference in the learning strategy. The Finns seem to depend more than the Swedes on the written forms of the language. The hypothesis that this is due to a different teaching method at Finnish schools, with heavier emphasis on grammar and the written skills, is possible, though not probable, and for practical reasons it is almost impossible to verify or refute it. A learner with a related language as his L1 probably adopts a more assimilatory strategy of L<sub>2</sub>-learning than a learner with an unrelated L1. To a considerable extent, the learner of a related language will depend upon his linguistic intuition, and he may well feel that knowledge of the details of the grammar he has been taught is of only subsidiary use to him. Compared with Finns, Swedes seem to acquire not so much a new system of rules as a modified system of rules using the rules of their L1 as a base.

— The consequence of this may well be that a Swede tends to, as it were, prune out rules that do not seem all that important to him. Consciously or subconsciously it is easy for him to adopt some such attitude as: "This is more or less what I know from before. It's easy and I need not bother about details, since I shall be able to manage somehow anyway." Such an attitude may be particularly harmful at the later stages of learning and will prevent thorough active mastery of the L<sub>2</sub>, but it is not necessarily a great obstacle for achieving communicative competence at a fairly low level.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For practical reasons, the difference between Finns and Swedes in productive oral skills has not yet been investigated.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. what Harold Palmer wrote as early as 1917 (1964 : 33): "The problem to be faced by a Frenchman about to learn Italian has a very different character from that encountered by an Englishman setting out to learn Hungarian. French and Italian are cognate or sister languages... The resemblances... constitute both a facility and a source of danger. French and Italian are very similar in structure, and by far the greater part of their vocabulary may be arranged in homo-etymonic pairs. That is to say, most French words have their etymological equivalent in Italian, which may generally be recognized

From these preliminary results are there any lessons to be drawn for English teaching in Finland? One obvious consequence of the difficulties of listening comprehension for Finns is, of course, that more attention than before should be paid to listening comprehension in Finnish schools. One might even venture further and question the method which is generally used in schools when pupils start oral production at the very beginning. An alternative might be to make the pupils start by concentrating entirely on listening, without producing anything for themselves for the first few months. Naturally such a method would also involve an elaborate listening comprehension test battery which would maintain the motivation and the active participation of the pupils. Good results by this method have been achieved in the U.S.A. by Valerian A. Postovsky, teaching Russian to American cadets (Postovsky 1974). The difficulty here may be that there is insufficient time available for Finnish schoolchildren to be immersed in a foreign-language bath of the kind used by Postovsky, but with the aid of school television and radio it would be possible to improve present results considerably, even within the framework of the present number of school hours.

The method of delaying oral production at the initial stage of learning will get further support from those who stress the essential sameness of L1-learning and L2-learning. A child learning his L1 has to listen for a long time before he learns to speak. In spite of some recent attempts to this effect, the parallel between L1-learning and L2-learning should probably not be

at sight. When a Frenchman can take a long passage in Italian and decipher its meaning by converting each word into its French morphological equivalent, he may be excused for assuming that etymological and semantic identity are one and the same thing. To a certain extent also he may be justified in concluding that it is possible to speak and understand Italian while thinking in French. It will be difficult, perhaps impossible, for him to resist putting his theory into practice, and by doing so to become the victim of all the fallacies which militate against success in language-study; he will become a bad learner.

An Englishman studying Hungarian will have no such temptation. On the face of it there is no possible etymological or morphological identity between Hungarian words and English ones. The superficial difficulty of the language will tend to force him to adopt a right line of study, just as the superficial facility of Italian will tempt the Frenchman into the wrong path. A paradox-loving Belgian pupil... once declared English to be far more difficult of acquisition than German. Written English, he said looked so absurdly easy that it was impossible not to believe that it was a word-for-word transcription of French; its apparent facility discouraged serious study. German, on the contrary, was so different from French in every respect that all efforts at a similar method of translation were doomed to failure.

This shrewd observation concretizes the essential differences between a pair of cognate languages and a pair which are non-cognate. The former constitute a direct temptation to a vicious system of mechanical conversion; in the latter case the absence of morphological resemblance tends to a sounder system of study.

A pupil will be more docile and require fewer disciplinary measures when learning a language of a totally strange nature".

stretched too far. However, we may also remember the well-known phenomenon of the child who, transferred to a foreign-language environment says hardly anything in the new language for the first few months, but then suddenly, within a short space of time, learns to maintain quite long conversations. It seems that the child needs a reasonably long period to get used to the foreign language in all its aspects: only then can he perform himself.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A first version of this paper appeared in Ringbom and Palmberg (1976), where more detailed information can be found about the tests and the errors commented upon here. In preparing this paper I have profited greatly from comments and suggestions made by, among others, Geoffrey Philips, Roger D. Sell, and Viljo Kohonen and the other members of the Text Linguistics Research Group.