This study analyses the use of the first language by Finnish lower and upper secondary school students in a spoken English language test. Previous research has indicated that learners make use of the L1 in L2 learning settings for various purposes, such as negotiating understanding, clarifying vocabulary and managing tasks (see e.g. Alegría de la Colina & del Pilar García Mayo 2009). L1 use has also been connected to the learners’ level of proficiency (e.g. Swain & Lapkin 2000), and Storch and Wigglesworth (2003: 760) suggest that using L1 provides cognitive support to the learners, enabling them to "work at a higher level than would be possible were they restricted to sole use of their L2”.

The material for the study comes from a corpus which includes speech from both monologic and dialogic tasks, collected during a spoken English language test. The material includes speech from students with varying levels of proficiency completing different tasks alone or in pairs. The analysis shows how the use of L1 varies according to task type and learners’ proficiency, and the results will shed light on the role of L1 in learners’ strive towards successful interaction and task completion.

References:

Keywords: Spoken language test, learners’ proficiency, L1 use, task type.