CANCELLED: From poor English learners to proficient English users: a dialogical look at chronotopic agency and proficiency

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The process of globalisation along with its political, economic, social and cultural developments has meant that second and foreign languages, and particularly, of course, English, have become much in demand. Many businesses operating in Finland have chosen to use both Finnish and English, or, indeed, only English, as their official language in the workplace. This means that a great number of Finns who did not think of themselves as ”good at languages”, who barely passed their language exams during their years of education and who went on to train for a profession far removed from linguistics, now find themselves in a workplace where using English at a demanding level on a daily basis is a necessity – and manage just fine. The ”poor English learner” has turned into a proficient English user.

The paper looks at the experiences of adult Finnish professionals who were so-called ”poor language learners” at school– but who nonetheless grew up to be proficient English users in their professional environments. The study adopts a Bakhtinian, dialogical approach and focuses on the chronotopic agency of the participants in an interview data. The study focuses on the emic perspective: the meanings and experiences of the participants themselves regarding their journey from ”poor to proficient”. The inherently contextual nature of languaging means that one of the factors influencing an individual’s agency becomes how he or she sees the time/placeness of the English language, in general, and the time/placeness of learning and using English, in particular. The purpose of the study is to examine how the participants themselves see their trajectories as learners and users of English in the various cross-contexts of the past, present and the future, and what kinds of factors they found and find relevant to their agency and proficiency as English users.

Keywords: chronotopes, agency.