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Learning by not doing?: Investigating language use dynamics in Danish upper secondary English classes

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Abstract: This small-scale study examines English foreign language (EFL) teaching in Danish upper secondary education (*gymnasium*), investigating the dynamics of language use among pupils in Danish upper secondary English classes. Through direct classroom observations, we explore how pupils engage with the language, particularly focussing on the prevalence of Danish versus English speech. We aim to explore how much English language spoken input upper secondary pupils receive and how much English language output pupils produce. Our findings reveal a notable tendency among pupils to predominantly use Danish during English classes or opting for silence altogether. In terms of input, we found that English is widely used by teachers in class, however, they switch to Danish when teaching grammar. This phenomenon underscores an interplay of cultural, motivational, and personal factors influencing pupil language choice and proficiency development. Our discussion considers the underlying reasons behind this linguistic behaviour, as well as the challenges and implications for language learning and teaching in Danish upper secondary education. Furthermore, we look at similar phenomena in a broader European context. We discuss the potential impact of classroom environment and pupil attitudes on language use patterns, offering insights to enhance English language acquisition and communication skills among pupils. By addressing the observed disparities between language instruction and pupil language output, this study contributes to an understanding of language learning dynamics within the Danish upper secondary context.

Keywords: Classroom interaction, English foreign language (EFL), teaching, language shifts, willingness to communicate (WTC), oral proficiency

1. Introduction

Oral proficiency is an important part of overall language proficiency. Even though much communication takes place in written form and online nowadays, and portable translation solutions (which also work with spoken language) are readily available, language learners will still benefit from oral proficiency training and awareness to build up confidence and fluency. Furthermore, in a Danish context, being orally proficient is essential considering the increasingly globalised labour market and the fact that Denmark is "...usually considered a highly proficient EFL country" (Biancetti 2020: 70). According to H. Andersen (2020: 596), pupils in Danish upper secondary school (*gymnasium*) are motivated to use their spoken language, in particular when the learning tasks are varied. However, light has recently been shed on the challenges teachers face in Danish and Scandinavian foreign language teaching settings with pupils' lack of willingness to engage orally in teaching situations (Holmen 2023; Romme-Mølby 2020). Many things can impact pupils' willingness to engage such as self-confidence, group dynamics, motivation, perceived proficiency, etc; in other words, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors can play a role (Lund et al. 2023).

According to the Danish Ministry of Children and Education (n.d., b), the highest level of English in Danish upper secondary schools (termed "English A") corresponds to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level C1. The C1 level is the second highest level, and this level refers to a "proficient user" who can "express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions" (CEFR 2023). In order to improve pupils' oral proficiency (and indeed reach the C1 level), actual use of the spoken language is needed (Det Nationale Center for Fremmedsprog 2023).

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Several researchers have investigated topics related to this issue in a Danish context. aus der Wieschen & Sert (2021) investigated divergent language choices between primary school pupils and their English teachers. They observed that the pupils almost exclusively spoke Danish in contrast to the teachers, who primarily spoke English. The researchers argued that this could lead to comprehension problems, as it might be difficult to maintain a mutual understanding of what is going on when a pupil and teacher are speaking different languages. Despite this, the researchers discovered that pupils were more willing to participate if they were allowed to speak Danish in their English lessons (aus der Wieschen & Sert 2021).

Fernández & Andersen (2019) have investigated how oral communication in foreign languages other than English (German, Spanish, and French) is taught in the Danish school system (primary schools, secondary schools, and universities) by analysing and comparing the official curricula. In their study, they argue that while teachers and pupils of all levels of the educational system view oral proficiency as the most crucial component of foreign language learning, it is often neglected in comparison with writing skills (Fernández & Andersen 2019). When examining the official curricula for primary schools, secondary schools, and universities, they found that primary school curricula focused on practising everyday dialogue. However, upper secondary curricula had a stronger focus on information exchanges about social matters, and at university the communication was of academic matters (Fernández & Andersen 2019). Fernández & Andersen (2019) suggested that these showed that dialogue was only taught at primary school level. The tendency is that conversational skills are only taught in primary school, and further educational levels do not build on this but rather move on to different themes.[1] Fernández & Andersen (2019) find this problematic and highlight that the Ministry of Education states that upper secondary schools and universities are co-responsible for the development of this skill.

Initially, the present study aimed to investigate the use of spoken English during grammar teaching in Danish upper secondary school, by presenting a "snapshot" of grammar teaching through observations and interviews. We anticipated that spoken English would be rarely used and that this might contribute to pupils perceiving grammar as difficult, if they are unable to speak about grammar in English. Through observations of 10 classes from 5 different upper secondary schools involving 230 pupils plus interviews with 6 different teachers, we investigated how much Danish and how much English was spoken and explored some of the reasons behind. As expected, it quickly became clear that all grammar we observed was taught in Danish. The observations and interviews suggest that pupils were reluctant to speak English especially during group work, although their teachers encouraged them to speak English, and during grammar lessons both pupils and teachers exclusively spoke Danish. Through the teacher interviews, it was revealed that the teachers found the exam a significant reason for teaching grammar in Danish, as pupils need to answer grammatical questions in Danish using Danish-Latin grammatical terms. Thus, because of the overall lack of grammar teaching in English, we were unable to fully investigate our initial interest, however, this led to an interest in the other dynamics we observed. Therefore, we chose to investigate the students' preferences in regard to learning grammar and whether they perceived grammar as difficult because we believed that this could give us insight into the students' opinions on the language used in grammar teaching scenarios. Additionally, we interviewed the teachers to gain insight into the reasons and thoughts behind teaching grammar in Danish. In addition to the data regarding grammar instruction and preferences, we obtained observations of different types of classroom scenarios, and it became evident that there was a pattern of pupils either opting for silence or speaking Danish rather than English whenever possible. Consequently, we changed the objective of the study to instead attempt to map out what goes on in English classes in Danish upper secondary school regarding the use of

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[1] We thank the anonymous reviewer for highlighting this.

English and Danish language. In this way, the study still focuses on grammar teaching, as it stood out because it was mainly taught in Danish. Thus, the article at hand aims to investigate just how much English language spoken input upper secondary pupils receive as well as to explore how much English language output pupils produce. This also entails looking at instances of switching between English and Danish in the English language classroom.

1.1 Danish upper secondary education

In Denmark, there are four types of upper secondary education, which usually comes after compulsory full-time education. Their overall aim is to prepare young people for higher education, but they have slightly different focus areas (general education, technical or mercantile) and three of them are 3-year programmes, and one is a two-year programme. In this paper, we are concerned with the 3-year general preparatory programme also known as stx in Denmark (Ministry of Children and Education n.d., a).

In the Danish upper secondary education programmes, English is a subject which aims to impart knowledge of the English-speaking world as well as linguistic skills. Thus, it is a subject focusing on the English language, both in terms of theoretical aspects such as grammar rules but also usage-based skills such as speaking and writing, as well as English-language texts and literature (literary and media studies) and English-language culture and society (culture studies, social science, and history).

English as a subject is offered at two levels: A and B, A being the highest and the level we are concerned with in this paper. English B-level corresponds to a proficiency level of B2 in the CEFR framework.

According to the curriculum, which is mandated by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education (*læreplan)* (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2023: 6, [authors' translation]), "[t]he purpose of the teaching is for the pupils in the English subject to gain the ability to understand and use the English language so that they can orient themselves and act in a globalized and digitized world". Thus, we can see that the focus of the English subject classes is more than simply teaching pupils how to speak English, and so the classes consist of more than simple language instruction.

The examination in English A is a 5-hour written exam in addition to a 30-minute oral exam (examination in an unknown text thematically linked to previously covered material). The written exam is a national test distributed by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education.

The written exam is a digital exam and contains four subtasks that together test the examinee's fulfilment of the academic goals stipulated in the *læreplan*. The first three subtasks are shorter than the last subtask and have a grammatical focus (e.g., identify verb phrases and state the tense, voice, and aspect) and have to be answered in Danish using the Danish version of the Latin grammatical terms (e.g., *substantiv* instead of the English *noun* or the Danish *navneord)*. The fourth subtask is an analytical essay where pupils can write 900-1200 words on either a fiction or a nonfiction text. Videos are also used as material for analysis in the exam and the pupils may use books and notes throughout and they also have access to the internet. They are not allowed to use Google Translate, Grammarly, GAI or other similar aids.

Upper secondary English teachers have access to exams from previous years and a Teacher's Handbook via Prøvebanken.dk, which is a website managed by the Danish Ministry of Children and Education. The handbook contains information on the written exam set as well as good advice on how to train pupils for the written exam. Furthermore, additional materials are available for teachers via the EMU Danish Learning Portal,[2] for instance the article "Good advice for working with writing skills before the exam" (Christensen 2023).

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[2] Danmarks læringsportal https://emu.dk/stx/engelsk?b=t6

2. Theory

In this chapter, we first introduce the approach to language teaching prevalent in Denmark. Following this, we outline the distinction made in this paper between two aspects of oral language production, namely, pronunciation and fluency, before accounting for two other factors influencing English language use in Danish classrooms: code-switching and willingness to communicate.

2.1 A communicative stance on language teaching in Denmark

EFL teaching in the Danish school system employs a communicative approach to language teaching, which assumes that language is best learned by communicating (L. Andersen 2020). As such, in EFL classrooms pupils are encouraged to speak English and, in that way, develop their language skills (L. Andersen 2020).

Pedersen (2001) elaborates on the communicative stance on language teaching in Denmark and how it is based on language as communication, i.e., language is viewed as functional and interactional. This means that statements are seen as more than verbs and subjects but also as “language acts”. A statement such as “it rains” can, for example, be a language act in the form of an answer to a question, or it can be a warning or an excuse (Pedersen 2001: 2). This view on language impacts how EFL is taught, which Kirkebæk & Ballegaard Hansen (2014) expand on by expressing how pupils’ motivation is seen as a determining factor for how well they learn the target language, as well as their opportunity for getting actively involved in the teaching and thereby forming and trying out hypotheses about the target language. This will help the pupils to form a preliminary idea of how the target language works and actively develop their own dynamic interpretation of this in the process of learning the language. This transitional language is referred to as their *interlanguage* (Selinker 2007: 214, 2014: 142). To encourage the development of pupils’ interlanguage, teachers must make plans where pupils get the opportunity to use and work with language in a linguistic and communicative sense, and they must be able to continue communication in spite of being less competent in other aspects of the target language, such as grammar, i.e., the main focus would be getting the message across rather than grammatical correctness or pronunciation (Pedersen 2001: 2).

Since the primary focus is on the pupils and the language they produce, it is appropriate to consider how this type of teaching and view on language impacts the pupils. In a report outlining the tendencies and issues found in Danish EFL classrooms, Slåttvik et al. (2020) explain that most teachers across the Danish educational system strive toward making English the classroom language. Based on the answers from questionnaires given to English teachers, Slåttvik et al. (2020) found that this ideal was easier to achieve in higher educational settings while more complicated in the lower educational levels. However, respondents across all educational levels expressed that it was difficult to make pupils speak English in group work settings, which some teachers deemed problematic, while others did not see this as a problem (Slåttvik et al. 2020). While creating a strictly monolingual EFL classroom has pedagogical benefits (L. Andersen 2020), this practice has been heavily debated as the use of the pupils’ first language can have a positive influence on language teaching and learning (aus der Wieschen & Sert 2021; L. Andersen 2020; Hall & Cook 2012, Holmen 2023). As such, the practice of using translanguaging, i.e., using two languages in the educational context, could prove beneficial (Williams 2000: 144; Holmen 2023). We return to translanguaging below.

The act of encouraging pupils to speak English in EFL classrooms can be difficult as psychological and social factors can make this performance troublesome. Perceived self-competence, as in the learners’ self-assessment of their competence (McCroskey & Richmond 1991), and language anxiety, as in anxiety in relation to using or learning a second language (MacIntyre et al. 1999), have shown to be significant factors that influence whether pupils feel comfortable speaking English in EFL classrooms (L. Andersen 2020; Elahi Shirvan et al. 2019). A study by Fenyvesi et al. (2020) illustrates this by revealing how pupils for whom being proficient in English is a goal can suffer from performance anxiety, which inhibits their participation in class. Similarly, Elahi Shirvan et al. (2019)

correlate EFL pupils' perceived self-competence to their participation in classrooms showing that pupils who feel confident in their language proficiency are more likely to participate in EFL classrooms. Social factors that can further complicate making pupils communicate in English can include social norms among pupils where speaking English is socially unacceptable (L. Andersen 2020). As suggested, several factors can cause EFL pupils to experience discomfort in classroom contexts as a consequence of the communicative approach in the Danish school system.

2.2 Aspects of oral proficiency

Overall, oral proficiency in a foreign language encompasses a variety of competencies such as but not limited to phonetic competence (pronunciation), lexical competence (vocabulary), grammatical competence (including morphology and syntax) and communicative competence. A high competence level across these aspects results in a high degree of fluency, which can be defined as an ability to produce coherent speech which is easily understood by an interlocutor effortlessly and without noticeable hesitations.

As mentioned above, the highest level of English in Danish upper secondary schools (English A) corresponds to the CEFR level C1. According to the guidelines to the curriculum (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet 2023: 6), the final level of pupils taking English A at the end of their 3-year stx programme is in the lower end of the C1 CEFR level.

The core components of CEFR are language competence, activities, and strategies across functions of reception, production, interaction, and mediation (Council of Europe 2020: 32-33). In terms of communicative language competences, these consist of linguistic competence (which includes general linguistic range, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary control, phonological control, and orthographic control), sociolinguistic competence (which encompasses sociolinguistic appropriateness) and pragmatic competence (which consists of flexibility, turn taking, thematic development, coherence and cohesion, proposition precision and fluency) (Council of Europe 2020: 129, here mentioned in full).

Detailed descriptors are available for the CEFR areas for all levels in the framework (A1-C2), with phonological descriptor scales added in 2020 as the initial scale (from 2001) did not fully reflect the nuanced aspects of phonological progression (Council of Europe 2020: 23, 133).

In terms of specific oral competences, the C1 descriptor for overall phonological control includes the ability to "employ the full range of phonological features in the target language with sufficient control to ensure intelligibility throughout" (Council of Europe 2020: 134). As for sound articulation, the C1 descriptor includes the ability to "articulate virtually all the sounds of the target language with a high degree of control" and ability to self-correct (Council of Europe 2020: 134). Finally, the descriptor for prosodic features is expressed as the ability to "produce smooth, intelligible spoken discourse with only occasional lapses in control of stress, rhythm and/or intonation, which do not affect intelligibility or effectiveness" as well as the ability to "vary intonation and place stress correctly in order to express precisely what they mean to say" (Council of Europe 2020: 134).

Returning to the Danish upper secondary school context, we saw above that there is an emphasis on the functional approach to language teaching, and, in short, oral proficiency is then seen as best practised through language use in meaningful tasks (Det Nationale Center for Fremmedsprog 2023). In this study, then, we have approached oral proficiency and proficiency training as "language use", in other words as frequency or amount of spoken English (as opposed to Danish or any other language) in the English classroom.

2.3 Code-switching

In EFL classrooms, it occurs that the teacher speaks English while the students answer in their first language (aus der Wieschen & Sert 2021: 109). Such an interaction exemplifies how the *linguistic* code, which is the language actually spoken in the classroom, sometimes differs from the medium of instruction (aus der Wieschen & Sert 2021: 109). During EFL teaching, teachers and students negotiate the linguistic code, which then leads to instances of *code-switching*. According to Üstünel & Seedhouse (2005), who investigated cases of code-switching in EFL classrooms at a Turkish university, code-switching needs to be understood in the context of the teacher's pedagogical focus and can be teacher-initiated, teacher-induced, or student-initiated. Üstünel & Seedhouse (2005: 305) distinguish between teacher-initiated and teacher-induced depending on whether the teacher "initiates" a code-switch by simply switching to another language or "induces" students to make a code-switch. As such, a teacher-induced code-switch could be the teacher asking a pupil, in English, to translate a sentence into Danish. Contrarily, a teacher-initiated code-switch occurs if the teacher chooses to translate the sentence themselves (the example is based on aus der Wieschen & Sert 2021). Even though L2 is encouraged most of the time in EFL contexts, the pedagogical focus sometimes encourages the use of L1 if the teacher's goal is to get inactive learners to participate. Depending on the teacher's pedagogical focus, the students' language choices may then express alignment or misalignment (Üstünel & Seedhouse 2005: 321). As such, it is important to consider the context of the code-switches, as this can add to the reasoning behind the language alternation, which is best summed up by Üstünel & Seedhouse's (2005: 321) question: "Why that, in that language, right now?". For the purpose of this small-scale study, we will refer to instances where students and teachers speak languages distinct from each other as code-switching, as these interactions can be seen as negotiations surrounding the linguistic code, since the code-switching ultimately results in one language being spoken rather than the other.

2.4 Willingness to communicate in an L2 context

As we saw in section 2.1, several factors can be challenging for EFL pupils while learning, and some of these factors can be comprehended by exploring the concept of *Willingness to Communicate* (WTC), which in the earliest discussions was referred to as unwillingness-to-communicate, e.g., in Burgoon (1976). The union between learning and using a language is essential, according to Larsen-Freeman (2007), who argues that you do not learn something and use it, nor the opposite. "Instead, it is in the using that you learn - they are inseparable" (Larsen-Freeman 2007: 783). This relationship serves as the foundation for the concept WTC in a second language (L2) context.

MacIntyre (2007: 564) defines WTC as "... the probability of speaking when free to do so". In an earlier article, MacIntyre et al. (1998: 546) identify several variables that can affect a pupil's WTC, such as "… [t]he degree of acquaintance between communicators, the number of people present, the formality of the situation, the degree of evaluation of the speaker, [and] the topic of discussion …". MacIntyre et al. (1998: 546) argue that changing the language of communication is likely to affect these variables to a significant degree, as WTC is developed in a first language (L1) context which lacks some of the challenges that an L2 context has. More specifically, MacIntyre et al. (1998: 548) argue that pupils experience a lower degree of WTC in L2 contexts and suggest that language anxiety and motivation are key concepts to consider in this regard. These claims are further corroborated in a meta-analysis of L2 WTC, where Elahi Shirvan et al. (2019: 1248) included 11 studies which "focused on the three high-evidence correlates of L2 WTC defined as perceived communicative competence, anxiety, and motivation".

Elahi Shirvan et al. (2019: 1261) found that there is a significant correlation between L2 WTC, language anxiety, motivation, but also perceived communication competence. However, the studies included in the meta-analysis comprise people learning English in Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Turkish contexts. Thus, in a Danish or Scandinavian context the results might differ, or other factors could be significant for L2 WTC since English is taught early in school, and it is typologically close to the Scandinavian languages since they are all part of the Germanic language family.

3. EFL in context

Both in European and non-European contexts, plenty of research has been conducted concerning EFL. However, as a way to limit the scope of the research considered, we will primarily relate our research to studies conducted in Scandinavian and other European contexts. In this section, we have chosen to include Swedish and Norwegian studies as their educational systems and challenges are similar to the Danish context. Furthermore, being neighbouring countries to Denmark their culture, language, and relationship with EFL are also comparable. Finally, we consider an example of the wider European context by including a study from Poland. The study has been chosen as it contains an in-depth analysis of the same topic as this study explores. Although there are significant cultural and linguistic differences between Denmark and Poland, the study shows comparable challenges during EFL teaching.

3.1 EFL in a Scandinavian context

In a Scandinavian context, phonetic competence, and oral assessment, in general, prove to be difficult topics, which Bøhn & Hansen (2017) suggest in a study investigating EFL assessment in upper secondary schools in Norway. Based on the data gathered from 24 interviews and 46 questionnaires, Bøhn & Hansen (2017: 65) concluded that Norwegian upper secondary school EFL teachers had contrasting opinions concerning pronunciation assessment. While the teachers agreed that intelligibility should be the primary concern, their opinions differed in regard to how relevant they deemed nativeness, i.e., sounding like a native speaker of English (Bøhn & Hansen 2017: 66). However, Bøhn & Hansen (2017: 65) argue that pronunciation assessment criteria in the Norwegian school system are too vague and call for more clearly defined assessment guidelines in regard to pronunciation in order to clarify which phonological features should be emphasised.

Although not strictly related to oral language skills, Bergström et al. (2022: 403) argue that vocabulary learning is an aspect of EFL teaching that is similarly neglected as it is not seen as a learning objective. In their study conducted in Sweden, Bergström et al. (2022: 404) interviewed 14 EFL teachers who were teaching at secondary school levels and found that vocabulary was taught through other activities without any specific method of increasing the pupils' vocabulary or way of assessing the pupils' level of vocabulary. Generally, the teachers assessed the pupils' level of vocabulary by observing their overall language production and based on the teachers' intuition (Bergström et al. 2022: 404). Lindqvist & Oscarson (2019: 762) also investigated this topic and found from a mixed methods approach that Swedish upper secondary school pupils generally overestimate their abilities in regard to their vocabulary. Similar to the Norwegian study, Lindqvist & Oscarson (2019: 763) claim that the Swedish grading criteria are considered vague, which can lead to teachers and pupils being uncertain about what is expected of them, which is a tendency also found in Norway in regard to pronunciation as explained by Bøhn & Hansen (2017). However, these issues are not limited to a Scandinavian context, as the Polish educational system has similar issues of neglecting certain important aspects of EFL such as pronunciation. This is explored below.

3.2 Polish context

In a study conducted on English pronunciation in Polish secondary schools, Szpyra (2014) found that pronunciation was neglected and also less valued than other communicative skills. This meant that grammar and vocabulary were deemed more important than pronunciation, and this resulted in the pupils having low phonetic competence (Szpyra 2014: 56). The study was based on a questionnaire answered by 200 secondary school pupils between the ages of 18 and 19. Based on the responses to the questionnaire, the authors of the study then produced a pronunciation profile of an average Polish secondary school pupil. Among the points revealed by the profile, it was found that most pupils (75%) found English pronunciation easy, assessed their English pronunciation as good or very good (60%), and had a positive or neutral attitude toward pronunciation training (80%). While these numbers appear to show that pupils see themselves as competent in regard to pronunciation, Szpyra (2014: 57) attributes the pupils' answers to them having poor awareness of their pronunciation problems. To get a different perspective on this pronunciation profile, Szpyra (2014: 63) compares these findings to a study where Frankiewicz et al. (2002) asked 100 Polish secondary school English teachers about phonetic issues. These findings suggested that teachers feel that there is not enough time to teach pronunciation. As such, grammar and vocabulary take precedence over pronunciation because the exams they prepare the pupils for are predominantly written (Frankiewicz et al. 2002 according to Szpyra 2014: 63). Additionally, oral correctness and accuracy are not emphasised in communicative language teaching (Szpyra 2014). Some of these findings seem similar to what was seen in the Scandinavian context as the pupils in both contexts struggle with the oral aspect of learning English

Furthermore, Szpyra draws attention to the fact that the situation is due to a "washback effect" since pronunciation skills have a low priority in several types of examinations throughout the Polish school system:

> In all of them communicative skills are more highly valued than phonetic accuracy, which leads to further neglect of pronunciation training by both language teachers and learners. As a result, secondary school graduates usually show no concern for good pronunciation and no awareness of the importance of this aspect of language and are, consequently, characterized by low phonetic competence (Szpyra 2014: 56).

Since pronunciation practice is not prioritised, it is noteworthy that the pupils consider themselves competent in that area; however, if they do not receive any feedback on their pronunciation, they are not able to objectively assess their own competences. While low phonetic competence amongst Danish or Scandinavian pupils is not an issue, it is worth noting that Szpyra (2014) attributes the problem to the exam form in Poland. Since the challenges seem to be connected to the exam, it underlines the influence the exam form has on teaching, equivalent to what we observed in the Danish context, where the way English grammar is taught in Danish is almost dictated by how the exam is structured (see section 5.5).

The Polish and Scandinavian studies point to the issue that certain key aspects of EFL in secondary and upper secondary schools are neglected. Teachers appear uncertain of how to teach aspects such as pronunciation and vocabulary, which is not helped by the tendency that grading guidelines are vague or inefficient in EFL in secondary and upper secondary schools. This is despite the fact that these aspects of EFL are deemed important when teachers are asked directly (Bøhn & Hansen 2017; Bergström et al. 2022), which indicates a general tendency to "teach to the test" across the different countries.

4. Method

In this part we will discuss our methods before and during our data collection in five different upper secondary schools. Following this, we will consider how we approached our data analysis before we proceed to present the results. To explore how pupils engage with the language, particularly focussing on the prevalence of Danish versus English speech and how much English language spoken input the pupils receive and produce, we employed both direct observation and interviews as our methods. Our data consisted of observations of 10 classes from 5 different upper secondary schools, which amounted to a total of 230 pupils, questions to the pupils answered by a show of hands plus interviews with 6 different teachers. We only considered Danish and English, although some students might have a different native language. However, we did not observe the use of any other languages.

4.1 Data collection

Before we collected our data, we ensured that the data would be comparable and replicable by constructing an observation form and an interview guide by following the recommendations in

Ingemann et al. (2018: 173-182, 244-245). Following the construction of our observation form and interview guide, we started the initial contact process. One of the authors had some contacts who work at different upper secondary schools in North Jutland. We sent out a call and six teachers agreed to participate. They were distributed across five different upper secondary schools in North Jutland and in total ten separate classes were observed. Two of the authors observed the classes, interviewed the pupils, and afterwards interviewed the teachers. The participating classes were one 1st year class, four 2nd year classes, and five 3rd year classes, which amounted to a total of 230 pupils. We observed a total of 13 hours and 7 minutes. During that time, we observed a total of 51 groups by observing 2-5 minutes of each group. Finally, at the end of each lecture, we had 10 minutes to ask the pupils our questions. We chose observation because it allowed us to enter the field of research and hear how language is used in real teaching situations, and we chose to complement the study with interviews of both the pupils and teachers because it naturally goes hand in hand with the observation method (Ingemann et al. 2018: 230), and it allowed us to further understand what was at stake regarding how both the pupils and teachers chose to use Danish or English in different situations during class.

The observation form for the class was in two parts so we were able to separate conventional teaching from group work because we predicted that the observations would be rather dissimilar in the two scenarios. Both authors took notes in the observation forms which were compared afterwards in order to confirm validity and avoid subjective bias, thus ensuring inter-rater reliability. Disagreements were resolved by a review of the notes, since the content of the shifts was recorded. Thus, it was easy to see if a shift had simply been missed. The form was a table with room for noting the time, language, activity, remarks if necessary, and how many language shifts took place. The table for group work was similar; however, instead of noting the activity which was implicit, we noted the theme or type of group work, when the language shifts happened, and why. Furthermore, we anticipated that it was necessary to make an estimate of the shifts rather than count them, as we expected there would be too many for only two observers to count, which also turned out to be the case.

Table 1. Example of table for observation – teaching

Time	**Language (Da/En)**	**Activity**	**Remarks (Who speaks what)**	**Number of switches**
8.15	Primarily En	Today's plan is presented	Questions are answered in Danish	12

Table 2. Example of table for observation – group work

Group	**Time observed**	**Topic**	**Language spoken most (Da/En)**	**Code-switches - when and why**	**Estimated number of switches**
1	8.45-8.52	Analysis/ grammar	En	Pupil 1 only speaks Danish Pupil 2 tries to negotiate and get back to speaking English Pupil 3 speaks Danish to pupil 1 and English to pupil 2	50+

After the observation, we asked the pupils a few questions in Danish to learn more about their preferences for language use (English/Danish), specifically when learning English grammar, as this was our initial interest. We did not intend for it to take more than ten minutes, and therefore they answered the questions by a show of hands so we could count how many of them believed something or other, and they had the option to comment or elaborate on their answers if needed. The questions were:

- Whether they were taught grammar in English or Danish
- What they thought was expected of them
- If they used Danish, English or Latin grammatical terms
- What they would prefer to use
- If they preferred to discuss grammar they are familiar with in English or Danish
- If they preferred to discuss grammar they are unfamiliar with in English or Danish
- Whether or not they thought grammar was a difficult subject.

It should be noted as a source of error that asking the pupils to answer the questions by show of hands can cause them to experience peer pressure or lemming mentality as they could see what the majority of their peers answered. Despite this, this procedure was chosen as it was minimally invasive, quick to do, and did not cause any issues regarding GDPR.

After the classes were finished, we interviewed the respective teachers in Danish, following our interview guide. The guide was made so it would pave the way towards a semi-structured interview as it had a few main questions and multiple elaborating questions (Ingemann et al. 2018: 158; Kvale and Brinkmann 2008: 27, 164). During the interviews with the teachers, one researcher took notes while the other led the interview. We chose not to record the interviews, as they were often short, informal ad hoc conversations taking place in the staff room. The first question regarded their thoughts about the language they speak when they teach and functioned as an icebreaker. The other questions centred around the following topics:

- If it had always been like that throughout their career
- Whether they teach grammar in English or Danish
- Their language during other activities
- Why there is/is not a difference
- Whether they think their pupils view grammar as difficult
- Whether they think their pupils are good at grammar
- Whether they enjoyed teaching grammar
- What they think about teaching grammar in the language they teach grammar in
- If they think it would be different in the opposite language and if so, how
- How the teaching language might affect the pupils

4.2 Data analysis

The analysis of the data began with an initial eyeballing of what we had noted in the forms and what the interviews had in common and where they diverged. We relied on the notes we took during the interviews as we did not record them. We used descriptive statistics to portray in which situations Danish and English were used based on what we had written down in the observation forms. Through collaborative efforts, we also ensured inter-rater reliability, as we compared our notes and incorporated the highest number of shifts, when details of the individual shifts had been written down.

We manually counted how many of the pupils preferred to be taught grammar in Danish or English when it concerns grammar they are familiar and unfamiliar with. These numbers were added up and visualised in a bar diagram (figure 2). We also created a bar chart which showed how many of the pupils preferred to use English, Danish or Latin terms (figure 3). We calculated the frequency of statements during the interviews with the teachers such as "the reason we teach grammar in Danish, is because that part of the exam is in Danish", "I feel like I have to teach to the test", "pupils find grammar easier when I teach in Danish", and other statements which were present in multiple interviews.

Afterwards, using descriptive statistics, we compared code-switching in classroom settings and group work. We counted how many groups changed language when reading out loud, how many had long periods of silence, and whether groups changed from Danish to English or vice versa. Regarding classroom settings, we calculated the average amount of shifts, and we elaborated on who made the shifts in which situations. Finally, we employed the information we accumulated from the interviews with the teachers to form an additional perspective on our observations.

5. Results

As mentioned, our data consisted of observations of 10 classes from 5 different upper secondary schools, which amounted to a total of 230 pupils plus interviews with 6 different teachers. Since we did not specify to the teachers what we wanted to observe during class, we ended up viewing various classroom activities. However, the questions we asked the pupils at the end of each class were identical and while the starting point of the interviews was rooted in our observations, all teachers were also asked the same questions.

5.1 Code-switches in the classroom and group work

We differentiated between lecturing, i.e., when the teacher stood by the whiteboard and the pupils engaged with the teacher on a one-on-one basis, and "group work", i.e., when the pupils worked in groups and the teacher occasionally checked in on them. We chose to do so as we anticipated that our observations would differ substantially in those two scenarios. We observed 13 hours and 7 minutes, and lecturing made up 9 hours and 26 minutes of the total time observed. We were able to count every shift during the lecturing, which amounted to a total of 163 shifts combined between all ten classes, or 16.3 shifts on average in each class. On the contrary, during group work we felt the need to make an estimate of how many shifts took place, as there were too many to reliably record. Group work made up 3 hours and 41 minutes of the total time we observed.[3] We estimated that over a thousand shifts took place during that time, distributed between 51 groups in total.

During lecturing both pupils and teachers primarily kept to English unless the teacher was giving an isolated message unrelated to the subject in class. We did observe code-switching, for example when a pupil was looking for a word. We also saw a lot of code-switching during group work. Furthermore, we note that most pupils used Google Docs or similar tools to share a document to take notes during group work, which created a situation where they were able to complete their work without communicating verbally.

We observed a tendency that the groups primarily kept to Danish during their discussions in group work but shifted to English when reading aloud. Moreover, the teacher nudged them to speak English when they were present, though the pupils chose to speak Danish unless the teacher was present or they read aloud, thus, their default language was Danish. More specifically, of the 51 groups we observed, 70.59% consistently showed this tendency and only spoke English when reading aloud except when they occasionally uttered an English word. Among the groups, 25.49% also had long periods of silence. As our method was impressionistic observation as opposed to detailed recordings, we marked instances as a period of silence when it felt like an awkward silence rather than a pause occurring in natural speech. Finally, 25.49% exhibited code-switching where the group members conversed in different languages. In 46.15% of these groups, the instances of code-switching resulted in a shift from English to Danish, while in the other 38.46%, it resulted in a shift from Danish to English.

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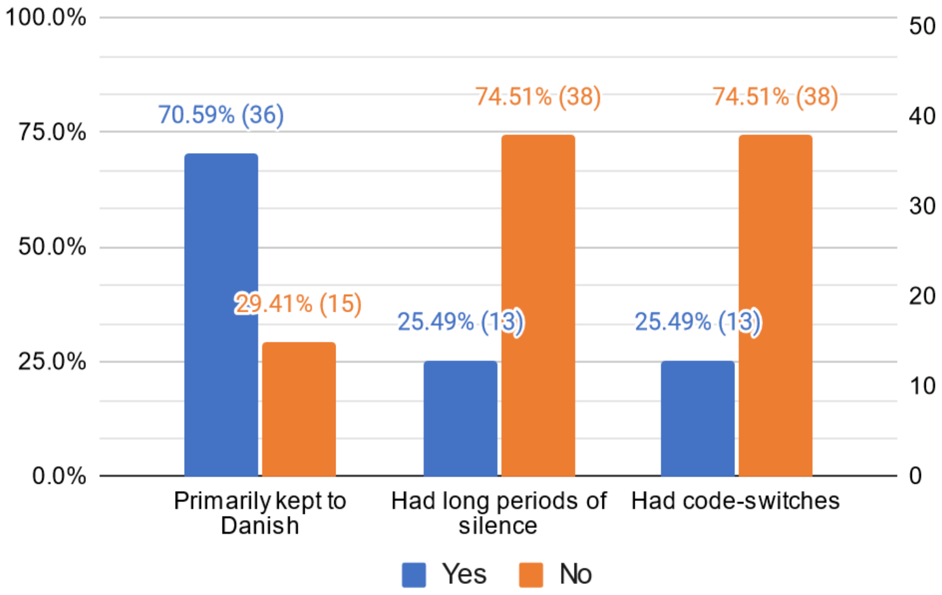
[3] One class did not have any group work when we observed them.

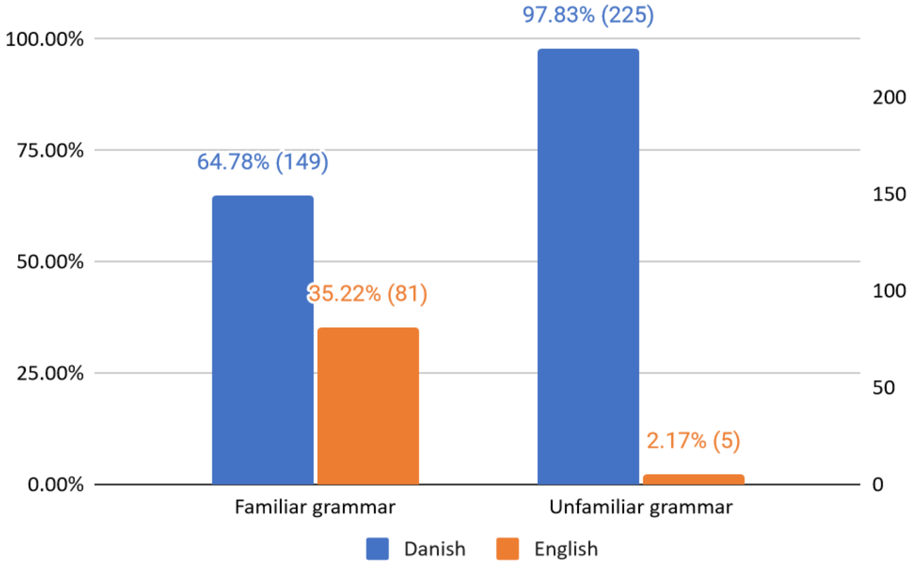
Figure 1. Code-switches in group work (N=51, shown on the right-hand axis)



5.2 Pupil opinions and preferences

At the end of each lesson, we had ten minutes to ask the pupils questions. Their answers indicated some general tendencies in the schools we visited. The first tendency that became clear after the data collection was that English grammar was typically taught in Danish. More specifically, this tendency was observed in eight of the classes while in the other two classes grammar was taught in English by the same teacher. However, the teacher was not observed to explicitly teach grammar but in the interview, they elaborated that they attempted a more integrated approach and did not have a consistent focus on grammar. As we tried to understand the implications of teaching grammar in Danish, we asked the pupils which language they preferred grammar to be taught in, whether it was grammar they were familiar or unfamiliar with. The result of these questions is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Grammar language preferences (N=230)

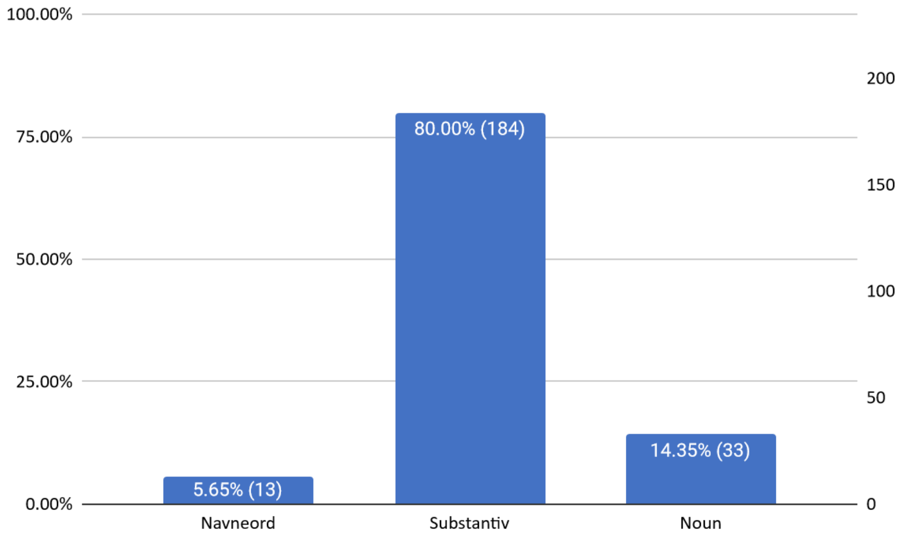


As the figure shows, 97.83% of the pupils preferred new grammar to be taught in Danish, while only 64.78% of pupils preferred repetition of grammar to be taught in Danish. When asking the pupils about these topics, we also asked whether they experienced grammar in general as difficult compared to other English related topics. To this, 41.74% of pupils indicated that they thought grammar to be particularly difficult, while the rest either thought grammar was just as difficult as other topics or easier. Unfortunately, since the pupils were asked to raise their hand if they thought it was more difficult and to keep their hand down if they thought it was the same or less difficult, we cannot say how many thought it was the same and how many thought it was less.

5.3 Grammatical terms

The final trend we observed was that the pupils preferred Latin terms. To investigate this, we only gave the example of the English term "noun", the Danish version of the Latin term "substantiv" and the Danish term "navneord" as the variation between other word classes is less pronounced. We found that 80% of the pupils preferred to use the term "substantiv", while 5.65% prefer the Danish term "navneord", and 14.35% prefer the English term "noun". These results are visualised in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3. Grammar terminology preferences (N=230)



Due to the nature of the data collected, it is not possible to test whether there are any correlations between pupils' responses to the different questions.

5.4 Teacher interviews

During the interviews with the six teachers, we saw some common elements. All of the teachers try to keep their instructions in English, apart from grammar, so English grammar is intentionally taught in Danish as opposed to everything else that is taught in English lessons. Five out of six said that they teach grammar in Danish simply because the exam is in Danish while one pointed out that the pupils are not allowed to use English terms at the exam. Since the pupils are not taught the English terms, one teacher remarked that the pupils "may lack the necessary terminology to discuss English grammar in English". Of the six teachers, five of them feel they have to "teach to the test", and two even experience grammar taught in Danish as something that is separate from the rest of the lesson. One of these teachers pointed out that teaching grammar in Danish may cause the pupils "to find it difficult to integrate the rules they have learned into their language". Though five teachers see the advantage in teaching grammar in English and think that the benefits outweigh the costs, four of them also believe that their pupils find grammar easier when taught in Danish. Finally, four of the teachers enjoyed teaching grammar. However, all of them explained that the pupils' lack of interest and participation was demotivating and made grammar teaching difficult. Additionally, one teacher stated that it was difficult to make pupils speak English when doing group work even though the teacher said that they had a very strict policy in regard to making pupils speak English. This sentiment was shared among other teachers, and one teacher expressed that it was especially frustrating when pupils insisted on answering in Danish despite being asked a question in English.

6. Discussion

The small-scale study reported here showed a tendency among upper secondary pupils to predominantly utilise Danish during English lessons, often resorting to Danish or opting for silence altogether. We also found that English teachers used both Danish and English when teaching, although this was found to be domain specific as grammar was taught in Danish whereas other topics or activities were taught in English.

These observations pose a range of questions, some of which will be discussed in the following sections. In particular, we focus on the areas of pupils' willingness to communicate, comparisons with the Scandinavian and Polish contexts and language policing. Finally, we consider aspects such as cognitive load and the wider implications of the established behaviour's contribution to the wider discourse surrounding foreign language learning in Denmark as areas for further research.

6.1 Willingness to communicate, language anxiety, and dual vulnerability

One of the things that stood out to us was the fact that pupils not only were very unwilling to communicate in English but also unwilling to communicate at all. In the group work sessions, where the stakes are lower than when answering a question in front of the class, pupils were also often quiet, preferring to work collaboratively in online documents, without communicating much orally. While this may have been due to the presence of two observers, we were not given the impression that this posed an unusual behaviour by the teachers.

As mentioned above in the introduction, according to the *læreplan,* the goal of the English A level is for pupils to reach the C1 level at the end of the three-year stx (following the CEFR also introduced above). This means that they should be able to:

> ... express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions … use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes … produce clear, well- structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices. (ILS n.d.)

Considering the observations collected for this study, where very little oral output in English was observed during pupils' group work, it can be discussed if group work facilitates an adequate opportunity for the pupils to achieve the required level of skill. Indeed, the pupils almost seemed to actively avoid speaking English. Since they avoid speaking English, it would be prudent to consider whether the phenomenon is caused by anxiety, inadequate opportunities for engagement, or if pupils simply do not find it important to practise their oral proficiency. This lack of motivation can, for example, be explained with reference to Bergström et al. (2022: 404) who suggest that "... the teachers' integrated approach to vocabulary learning was their reliance on incidental vocabulary learning, where words are understood as 'picked up along the way'". This finding points to the fact that vocabulary in EFL is underprioritised even though Bergström et al. (2022: 393) argue that it is a core feature of language proficiency, which requires explicit attention. Additionally, as the teachers did not see vocabulary as a learning objective, this could prompt pupils to deem this aspect of language learning trivial and be seen as something to "pick up along the way". This trivialisation of certain aspects of EFL could also lead pupils to overestimate their own abilities as the study by Lindqvist & Oscarson (2019: 762) (introduced in 3.1) finds in relation to the vocabulary of Swedish upper secondary school pupils. In their study, Lindqvist & Oscarson (2019: 747) investigated secondary school pupils' self-assessment of their vocabulary skills, which revealed that high performing pupils overestimated their vocabulary skills.

Adding to the topic of pupil self-evaluation, In the Polish study, Szpyra (2014: 57) finds that pupils overestimated their pronunciation abilities and specifies:

> (75.5%) of the respondents consider English pronunciation either easy or not very difficult and only 23% think it is rather difficult or very difficult. The high percentage of the former views can be attributed to the respondents' poor awareness of their pronunciation problems…

Although not being related to vocabulary like the study by Lindqvist & Oscarson (2019), Szpyra (2014) finds that Polish pupils overestimate their English abilities in relation to their pronunciation skills.

As such, in both the Swedish and the Polish study, there is a tendency for pupils to overestimate their linguistic abilities, which, in turn, could cause a lack of motivation to practise their oral proficiency, if they think they are already at the level they need to be.

In the 2023 report by NCFF investigating motivations and barriers to foreign language learning among Danish primary, secondary, and upper secondary pupils, the authors point to a "dual vulnerability" among the pupils (Lund et al. 2023: 15), which they describe as an extension of language anxiety. They state that this duality stems from the fact that learning a foreign language entails learning both content (e.g., learning about British and US history, media analysis, literary analysis etc.) as well as expression (the ability to communicate in the foreign language, i.e., vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar). The anxiety experienced by pupils in the foreign language classroom can thus be rooted in either fear of giving the wrong answer or giving the right answer in the wrong way – or a combination of the two. This type of dual vulnerability is thus unique to the foreign language classroom. As this dual vulnerability can inhibit some pupils from participating, one proposed solution to this problem is using translanguaging where multiple different languages are encouraged in EFL classrooms (Williams 2000: 144; Holmen 2023). This practice could lessen language anxiety and strengthen pupils' WTC (Holmen 2023: 47). However, a concern is that using languages other than English will not strengthen pupils' English oral proficiency.

6.2 Contextual comparison

When comparing the observations in our small-scale study to the studies made in Nordic and Polish contexts, we found notable similarities. In the classrooms we visited, both the teacher and pupils generally kept to English except for specific scenarios. Contrarily, in group work contexts, the pupils generally kept to Danish but had a large amount of code switches between Danish and English. As teachers also found it difficult to make pupils not speak Danish, our observations seem to echo those found by aus der Wieschen & Sert (2021), who observed pupils almost exclusively speaking Danish and being more willing to participate if they were allowed to do so albeit in a primary school context. Our observations also suggested that the pupils overwhelmingly preferred being taught grammar in Danish if the topics were unfamiliar to them with about one third of the pupils open to the idea of repeating in English grammar they had already been taught in Danish. However, the teachers express that the key reason grammar is taught in Danish is because of the exam, which is similar to the findings of Bøhn & Hansen (2017) and Bergström et al. (2022), who found that teachers emphasised the importance of teaching pronunciation and vocabulary, respectively, but lacked more specified assessment criteria. Szpyra (2014) finds that pronunciation specifically appears to be neglected in a Polish context, and the reason behind its neglect also appears to be because of the exam. Across the studies mentioned and our study, the characteristics of the exam govern the activities of the classroom.

6.3 Domain-specific use and language policing

In our observations, we found that Danish was often used when the activities in the classroom focused on grammar. We also found that pupils prefer that Danish is used when teachers introduce new grammatical concepts. However, a larger proportion of pupils are open to discussing grammar in English if they are familiar with the concepts (figure 2).

However, as we accounted for in section 1.1, the part of the written exam for English stx A which focuses on testing the pupil's grammatical knowledge and competence is formulated in Danish and the pupils are required to give their answers in Danish as well as using the Latin grammatical terms (e.g., *substantiv* instead of the English *noun* or the Danish *navneord*). This coincides with the practices we observed and was also substantiated by five of the six teachers we interviewed as they pointed out that they teach grammar in Danish only because that is what the pupils are required to learn to pass the exam. With that in mind, it makes sense for teachers to also introduce and teach grammatical topics in Danish and for pupils to participate in activities focusing on grammar in Danish as well. Ultimately, the exam determines what is taught and, crucially, how it is taught.

This small-scale study did not look into the motivations for this domain-specific use in the exam, in other words *why* the grammar part of the written exam in English stx A is held in Danish. One possible explanation might be the *cognitive load* argument, which is explored in further detail in section 6.4.

We see two main challenges to this domain-specific use, however. The first one concerns how this switch in language contributes to a conceptualization of and discourse surrounding the idea of grammar (and with it possibly other more rule-based linguistic disciplines such as phonetics and phonology) as something difficult. This is certainly a common discourse surrounding German in the Danish school context and we return to this general discussion below in section 6.4.

The second challenge which the domain-specific use of English and Danish might cause is a disruption to the primacy which should be given to English in the English language classroom. In the Danish upper secondary classes we visited, we experienced that the teachers tried to encourage the pupils to only speak English by adopting an "English only" rule, most likely borrowing from the idea of *language immersion*. Following the work of Amir & Musk (2013) and Amir (2013), the act of trying to establish and enforce a classroom practice where the target-language is the only acceptable language in the classroom can be termed *language policing* (Amir & Musk 2023: 151). They define this as "the mechanism deployed by the teacher and/or pupils to (re-)establish the normatively prescribed target language as the *medium of classroom interaction*…" (Amir & Musk 2013: 151, [italics in original]) and interpret it as an example of "*micro-level language policy-in-progress*" (Amir & Musk 2013: 151, [italics in original]) in the context of an English language classroom in an international school in Sweden. The act of language policing spans the break of the "target-language only" rule to the result of the language policing and can be described in the three steps this process includes: The breach of the rule, the act of language policing, and result of this interaction (Amir & Musk 2013). While language policing is often *other-policed* where more than one person is involved in the policing, language can also be *self-policed* where only the person breaching the "target-language only" rule is involved (Amir 2013).

6.4 Further research

While the small-scale study reported here certainly raises more questions than it answers, this section explores some avenues for further research, focusing on the cognitive load argument with regards to the domain specific use of English and Danish, respectively, and the possible link to the wider implications of this specific use.

Cognitive load theory (Sweller et al. 2011) is a learning theory based on an evolutionary approach to human cognitive architecture. Very simply put, according to the theory, the total working memory resources required to understand or solve a certain learning task are affected both by the design of the task and the difficulty of the learning itself. Returning to the domain-specific use of Danish in the English grammar written exam (and thus in the classroom), perhaps one avenue for future research could be to investigate whether the use of English or Danish in teaching and testing English grammar impacts the cognitive load experienced by Danish upper secondary pupils.

As mentioned above, the implications of domain-specific use not only pertain to cognitive load and learning outcomes. It likely also impacts the perceived complexity of grammar and other linguistic fields, such as phonetics and phonology, semantics, pragmatics, and the like. A suggestion for further research would be to investigate further how the domain-specific use of Danish and English in the English language classroom in Danish upper secondary schools impacts pupils' perception of the complexity of linguistic subjects (predominantly taught in Danish).

7. Conclusion

The study reported here investigated some of the complexities surrounding English foreign language teaching in Danish upper secondary schools. The main focus of the data collection was on tracking the use of English and Danish in the English language classroom in terms of frequency of use, language shifts as well as domain specific use. In the interpretation of the data, we considered the impact of factors such as language anxiety and self-perceived competence on pupils' willingness to communicate in English.

The study's exploration of code-switching in classroom settings highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment that encourages active English communication among pupils. The study points out the lack of oral proficiency training and calls for continued efforts to enhance language teaching practices and promote a more engaging learning experience for pupils in upper secondary schools. Finally, some implications of the current patterns in the use of Danish and English, respectively, were considered as well as avenues for further research.

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