For our second interview, we feature a stimulating discussion with Paula Kalaja, Professor Emerita at University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Professor Kalaja has been a major pioneer in researching the beliefs, identities, and attributions of language learners and teachers using their own drawings and written life stories. She has been leading the advance on narrative research in the field of second language learning by conducting innovative research, co-editing a special issue of the Applied Linguistics Review *(Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018) on visual methodologies, and spearheading four major edited volumes, including the recent book,* Visualising multilingual lives: More than words *(Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019). She was interviewed by Joseph Falout, who researches psychology in language learning and teaching. His collaborations include originating the theoretical and applied concepts of Ideal Classmates and Critical Participatory Looping. He edits for the* JALT OnCUE Journal *and* Asian EFL Journal.

Now, to the second interview!

Researching Multilingual Lives with Visual Narratives: An Interview with Paula Kalaja

Joseph Falout
Nihon University

Joseph Falout: *Why is the field of applied linguistics taking off in a new direction known as the multilingual turn?*

Paula Kalaja: The multilingual turn is somehow acknowledging what the world is like. With global communication, travel, and migration so common these days, there are so many multilingual people. And for some, such as immigrants, they are not being recognized for already knowing a number of languages, but unfortunately recognized only for not knowing the official language of the country they are trying to enter. They are considered unintelligent, treated as second-class citizens, and left unemployed. This is what is happening now in Finland too, with, among others, a flood of refugees from Asia and the Middle East. They are offered courses to learn Finnish and receive assistance in looking for jobs. But if they don't have enough Finnish—even those who are highly competent professionals such as computer engineering majors—they end up sweeping the floors.

The perspective of multilingualism, however, helps us acknowledge that multilingualism is prevalent throughout the world. We can then begin asking new questions. What are the minds of multilinguals like? Do you treat the first and second languages as separate things? Because that's the traditional way of teaching and researching in second language acquisition. The native speaker used to be the model of learning. But now, it's argued that native speakers don't possess full competence in the language. So, all of this makes a difference in the aims of teaching and testing foreign languages. For example, if a Finnish student writes an English essay and includes one word in Finnish because the student doesn't know the word in English, it is considered a major mistake. The teacher treats this word as an error instead of acknowledging it and making use of all the language resources that the student has. And it's okay for the reader, the English teacher who is Finnish, because the reader happens to know both of those languages. Do students and teachers have to stick to using only one language? If you grow up multilingual, you keep switching languages all the time. This is called *translanguaging*, and it's acceptable in most daily use. But in some formal contexts, it may *not* be acceptable. So, once you start taking a multilingual perspective, the world might look very different.

Let me relate it personally with my own research as a linguist. For a number of years, I was involved in two major research projects funded by the Finnish government to trace the development of second language writing skills. There was a huge pool of data collected longitudinally and cross-sectionally, following learners of various ages of Finnish, Swedish, or English as a foreign language. The data traced the learner's abilities to produce specific types of genres, including narrative texts, argumentative texts, and email messages to friends and to teachers. To me, that kind of research objectively traces the linguistic features used by our learners. But there was so much more we were missing. When I started researching with drawings, or visual narratives, and written life stories of learner experiences, they showed me there is much more to learning a language than mastering its grammar and vocabulary, or using it appropriately. People learning about using more than one language have different stances to the languages, which gets down to their emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and identities. This requires a subjective approach to researching their subjective experience, or their *lived experience*, as multilinguals. And that's my passion.

Could you describe researching lived experiences with visual narratives?

Visual narratives are the stories that students tell about their language learning through drawings. Usually students are given a task sheet with a question or a prompt that gets them drawing. If students don't like drawing or are poor at it, they can take photos of events where they've been learning or using the language, done simply with their smartphones. Or more elaborately, students can put together videos for YouTube postings, or make three-dimensional artefacts like dioramas, or *identity boxes* the size of shoeboxes, as Frimberger, White, and Ma (2018) did with teenagers. Another advantage of visual narratives is that they can be done with small children as well. They may not be able to express themselves elaborately or write much, but as with Inözü (2018), the researcher can ask them to draw and then interview them about their drawings. Or what if the researcher and the participants don't share a common language? Then visual methodologies could be a means to share experiences. This was the case in Melo-Pfeifer and Schmidt (2019), a study of young refugees in Germany, almost ready to graduate from a vocational school, who first drew pictures of "My life now," and then drew "My life in a year's time." The participants did not have enough German to express themselves well, although some German writing was present in some of the drawings, so the researchers got around potential language barriers by relying solely on the *multimodal voices* of the drawings.

For all visual narrative research, the researcher needs to take the further step to ask students to interpret the drawings themselves. Because once the researcher starts looking at the pictures from an outsider's perspective, the interpretations may be way off from what the students had intended to depict. Moreover, whatever the instructions on the task sheet, students sometimes have different understandings of the task. For example, in drawing "me as a learner of English," a student might draw a flourishing plant enjoying the sun and rain. That's a metaphor, and we need to decide what to do with that kind of data. So to get the insider perspective, what my colleagues and I do is have the students draw a picture on one side of the task sheet, and on the back side we ask them to provide in writing further details or their own interpretation of the drawing.

It's important to remember that what the researcher is getting at is not the "real beliefs" of learners. Beliefs are not static. Beliefs can vary from one context to another, depending upon with whom they are being shared and for what purpose.

Most of the past studies have collected learner drawings at one moment in time, offering only cross-sectional data. To see the process of learning, researchers need to collect data longitudinally, meaning at two or more points in time. For example, Umino and Benson (2019) had students who were learning Japanese in Japan take thousands of pictures on different occasions when they had been using the language. Students classified their photos freely by the kind of activity in which they were engaging and the kind of people they were with. The research investigated what happened over time to their identities as learners of Japanese and what kinds of speakers or communities they had access to. It turns out usually there is one key person, such as a tutor, who takes the students to different activities and makes it possible for them to make friends.

What are some of the challenges of conducting visual narrative research?

Linguists are not traditionally trained to analyze visual data. How do you conduct a systematic analysis? That's a tough question to answer. For those interested, there are some research strategies outlined in Kalaja and Pitkänen-Huhta (2018). And there are a lot of good introductory books out there, such as the one by Rose (2016).

Also, having dozens and dozens of students doing this each year, collecting and interpreting all the data becomes problematic. That's why we have students provide their interpretations in writing instead of interviewing each student individually. So, it's also a matter of resources.

Any challenges when reporting the findings?

Yes, let's start with Salo and Dufva (2018). They analyzed the colors in learner drawings. This gave us the idea of reproducing all the pictures in color for the edited volume that Silvia and I (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019) were proposing. All the publishers told us "no" because printing books in color gets too expensive, which was how it used to be with the old technologies. I wondered if they were stuck in their old ways of thinking. Eventually when we were negotiating with the present publisher, we asked them to do the calculations. It turned out to be around one or two Euros per copy. They agreed to do it.

How can researching with visual narrative methods inform the researcher?

The students that we have been doing research on are English majors or they are majors or minors of other foreign languages: French, German, Russian, Spanish, or Swedish. The students entering our university programs are the top people in studying foreign languages. For years, we've had them write their

life stories of their experiences of studying English in school from the age of nine through eighteen; nine years of studying English behind them. From their writings, we realized that they've always done well by school standards. But by their standards, if they hadn't gotten a top score on a small quiz or assignment, but just the next best score, it could be a disaster from their perspective. Disaster or failure is a very relative thing. Then they started blaming the teachers or thinking their classmates were no good, and on it goes. But they eventually made it into our university as high-achieving language majors. Unfortunately, all of our research has been on these high achievers—we even studied how they may imagine their ideal English class as future teachers (Kalaja, 2019; Mäntylä & Kalaja, 2019). But there hasn't been much, if any research done on the past experiences of underachieving students, at least not in Finland, so we don't know *their* perspectives.

So, I tell these teachers in training that once they become qualified to teach English, their challenge is to somehow sympathize or empathize with those who have had poor experiences in studying foreign languages according to school standards. Some students will be good, but not all of them. Some students might be working very hard, and they might be good at certain aspects of the language, such as deciphering lyrics to pop songs. But eventually, those students will fail English due to minor grammatical mistakes, such as missed articles, on formal tests. Perhaps some will give up on learning foreign languages, become computer engineers, but then once in university, they will find out that the introductory textbook for information technology is in English. The gap in language learning experiences between teachers and students can be so huge. How can language teachers understand their students?

Sometimes students can't express themselves, and it's hard for them to tell the teacher why they do or don't like English. So, having the students share their language learning experiences through drawing or writing may be a good way for teachers to empathize with their students, even if the teacher is not engaged in formal research.

Yes, indeed!

How has researching transformed you*?*

While editing the collection of papers for the special issue of the *Applied Linguistics Review* with Anne (Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018), the experiences of the refugees struck me as pathetic. Especially when I was reading the first draft of Frimberger et al. (2018), I was crying. And then I learned that Anne had been crying as well when she was editing it. We both had been crying because these reports are of young people, refugees in the U.K. without parents. It's so emotionally touching. Or the refugees in Korea (Salo & Dufva, 2018). Years of reading headlines in newspapers, and then reading these reports, and you start putting it together—there are millions and millions of people like this all over the world. The reports from the research I've been editing and reading represent just the tip of the iceberg, I'm afraid.

When I was retiring from the University of Jyväskylä last year [2017], I was supposed to give my farewell lecture on the state of the art of the research. And during the lecture, I had been projecting pictures from the Frimberger et al. (2018) study of the refugees in the U.K., reading aloud the researchers' interpretations of the youngsters' dioramas, written touchingly in *poetic mappings*, and I started welling up. I was about to burst into tears again. The poor audience looked at me with an expression of, "Will she be able to finish her talk?" Yes, I did manage to finish my talk. But you can't engage in this research without being transformed.

What is your hope for future research?

I hope that multilingualism as *lived* becomes acknowledged as a legitimate field of research. Perhaps this requires diversifying the kinds of questions asked and the research methods used in addressing aspects of being or becoming multilingual. You are multilingual. I am multilingual. I mean, who is monolingual? Monolingualism as the norm used to be the assumption in the field of second language acquisition. Chomskyan thinking was that native speakers have full competence, period. Learners were always compared with native speakers. Learners were always found having deficits, missing this, not having that, and making errors here, there, and everywhere. And yet, around and about, multilinguals have fared well enough for themselves. They survive. They progress. That is the end of the story!

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[JALT PRAXIS] MY SHARE


Steven Asquith & Lorraine Kipling

We welcome submissions for the My Share column. Submissions should be up to 600 words describing a successful technique or lesson plan you have used that can be replicated by readers, and should conform to the My Share format (see the guidelines on our website below).

Email: my-share@jalt-publications.org • Web: http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/departments/myshare

Hi everyone, and welcome to the latest instalment of My Share, the TLT *column with fresh ideas to take away. This edition is a real treat as the authors not only provide a fresh spark to an old staple, make some sense of social media, and provide a bit of useful structure for vocabulary, but also show they have heart!*

First off, Stephanie Reynolds provides a fantastic way of refreshing presentations by using QR codes to turn them into a walking audio-visual guided tour. Personally, I love this idea because it allows students to really focus closely on their speaking skills, while removing the ordeal of public speaking. I am sure some of my less extroverted students will thoroughly appreciate this new presentation format next semester. In the second article, Luann Pascucci introduces a way of using memes to encourage students to think critically about the message and provenance of sources. Memes are perfect for this, as they are not only light-hearted and funny, but also full of cultural content, providing a wonderful stimulus for discussion. Third, Blake Matheny suggests a structured means of collecting vocabulary and practicing specific grammar using graphic organizers, which could also scaffold more content specific materials. And finally, Glenn Amon Magee describes a lovely activity to wash away any mid-semester blues and provide some positive psychological support to our students. This activity, as well as teaching practical language skills, could prove a real tonic to both students and teachers alike. I am sure you will agree that this edition's selection is innovative and thought-provoking, and is a real aid to planning future classes.

—Steven Asquith

Talking Poster Presentations

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Quick Guide

- Keywords: *Presentation, speaking*
- Learner English level: *Beginner and above*
- Learner maturity: *University*
- Preparation time: *30 minutes*
- Activity time: *2 classes*
- Materials: *Worksheets, smartphones, PC/printer, paper*

In-class presentations are a great way for students to demonstrate oral communication skills. However, when in front of a class, nerves can negatively affect the presenter's smoothness, fluency, and pronunciation. To move the focus from public speaking and encourage practice and self-evaluation, this activity involves recording students' speaking and sharing the audio via QR code on posters. The result is a self-guided, museum/gallery-style presentation ses-