

**THE ROLE OF PRONUNCIATION AND
THE PRESENTATION OF PROBLEMATIC PHONEMES
IN TEN FINNISH EFL TEXTBOOKS**

A Candidate's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tutkielmassa käsiteltiin englannin kielen ääntämisen roolia ja ongelmallisten foneemien esiintymistä kymmenessä suomalaisessa englanti vieraana kielenä -oppikirjassa. Suomalaisilla englannin kielen oppijoilla on todettu olevan ongelmia erityisesti eräiden foneemien ääntämisessä, ja ongelmia on nostettu esiin myös mediassa.</p> <p>Tutkielman taustoitukseksi tutustuttiin tutkimuksiin ääntämisen opettamisen roolista kouluissa, englannin kielen ääntämiseen yleisellä tasolla sekä suomalaisille ongelmallisiin piirteisiin, jotka sisältyvät myös itse tutkielman tuloksista raportoimiseen. Aiemmissä tutkimuksissa oli todettu ääntämisen opettamisen perustuvan juuri oppikirjojen materiaalille, joiden laatua ja määrää myös kritisoitiin. Koska ääntäminen on jäänyt aikaisemmillä asteilla vähäiselle huomiolle, sen seuraukset näkyvät myös mm. yliopistotasoisten kielen opiskelijoiden ääntämyksessä näiden toistaessa tiettyjä samantyyppisiä virheitä.</p> <p>Tässä tutkielmassa haluttiin selvittää, millainen oppikirjojen rooli on ollut ääntämisen oppimisessa, sillä kirjat ovat tunnetusti hyvin tärkeässä osassa kouluopetuksessa. Oppikirjat tähän tutkielmaan valittiin eri tasoilta ja vuosilta vertauksien ja riittävän kattavan esityksen mahdollistamiseksi. Erityistä huomiota kiinnitettiin suomalaisille hankalien foneemien esitykseen, sillä nämä eroavat suomen äännerakenteesta tai puuttuvat siitä kokonaan ja siksi aiheuttavat ongelmia. Tutkielmassa pyrittiin huomioimaan ongelmallisten foneemien mahdolliset esiintymiset ko. oppikirjoissa.</p> <p>Ääntämisen rooli kirjoissa oli johdonmukaisesti vähäinen ja ääntämiseen liittyvä aineisto esiintyi pitkälti samantyyppisissä harjoituksissa. Kuuntelemista ja matkimista näkyi kirjoissa pidettävän tärkeänä. Ongelmallisten foneemien esiintyminen sen sijaan oli runsasta materiaalin rajoitetusta määrästä huolimatta. Havainnollisia ohjeita materiaali ei juurikaan tarjonnut, joten sen ja aikaisempien tutkimusten antamien taustatietojen perusteella oli pääteltävissä, että opettajan vastuu ääntämisen opettamisessa ja ylipäänsä esille tuomisessa on todella merkittävä.</p> <p>Materiaalin rajallisen määrän vuoksi tarkkoja päätelmiä ei voida johtaa, mutta tutkielma antaa viitteitä siitä, että ääntämismateriaalin laadun ja määrän suhteen olisi oppikirjojen julkaisemisessa olisi tehtävä parannuksia; tässä suhteessa lisätutkimukselle on selvästi tarvetta.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

Finland – and subsequently the Finnish language – is no longer in lingual isolation but constantly influenced by the English speaking world (Luutonen 2008: 74). Because of the recurring stimuli, people are theoretically able to get lingual support and develop their language skills just by being under the influence of the English language. The lack of language skills is typically identified through poor oral skills, especially inadequate pronunciation. In the media, English spoken with a heavy Finnish accent is treated as a sort of weak form of the language and has unofficially been labelled as “tankeroenglanti”¹ (Ilta-Sanomat 2006). The topic was only recently discussed in the October 2009 issue of Helsingin Sanomat Kuukausiliite, a monthly journal published by the biggest national newspaper in Finland. A jury of two native English speakers were asked to judge the language skills of Finnish high-ranking politicians by listening to recordings of their speeches. The results were not particularly good (2009: 44-50): the English pronunciation proved to be especially demanding and difficult, and gave the media yet another reason to scorn the oral skills of Finnish users of English.

Only a few decades ago teaching of foreign languages concentrated mainly on grammatical accuracy and repetition as a means of learning to use any given language. This was called the grammar-translation method that lacked authenticity and focused on written instead of spoken language (Johnson 2001: 163-166; see also Tossavainen & Turunen 1988: 7). As a result, older generations – including most of the present Finnish politicians, also mentioned in the article of Helsingin Sanomat Kuukausiliite (2009: 53-54) – may still suffer from the lack of communicative skills and feel insecure using a foreign language in communicative contexts. Thus the reasons for poor pronunciation should be quite obvious. These people were educated before the 1970s when a sociolinguistic revolution replaced teaching of grammar as

¹ 'Tankeroenglanti' phenomenon was named after a joke about the late Finnish politician, Ahti Karjalainen, who used to pronounce English in a very crude, Finnish way, as in 'dangerous' [tanke'rous] (HS Kuukausiliite 10/2009: 47).

the most emphasised part of language learning with a broader view of language as it is used in real life (Johnson 2001: 182). This was a widespread phenomenon, and as teaching of spoken language increased alongside general improvements in the language teaching field, the use of language in real life social contexts increased (Johnson 2001: 50-51). Since language in social contexts naturally involves oral communication and seeing that language is more and more available in its spoken form, one should at least assume that people are more aware of that aspect of language than at the time of grammar-translation method, and are given the opportunity to learn the essentials of spoken English as well, such as pronunciation.

Therefore, it still seems possible that even younger language users have problems pronouncing English properly, even though they are supposed to have got more communication oriented teaching at school than their seniors were given (Lintunen 2005: 375). In fact, problems with pronunciation do not only occur among politicians or other non-expert users of language, for even undergraduate university students of English seem to have issues with the English phonetic system at the beginning of their studies, and moreover, these problems have not changed significantly over the past decade or two (Lintunen 2005: 364), regardless of the growing influence of English as *lingua franca*.

Naturally one begins to wonder if pronunciation is taught at all. Research on the role of teaching pronunciation in Finnish schools has been limited, and as Tossavainen and Turunen (1988: 90) show, there are no systematic rules for teaching of pronunciation although teachers do recognise the importance of oral skills: there is either no time for it or not enough material for pronunciation teaching. However, Tossavainen and Turunen (1988: 91) also point out that because language teaching is generally based on textbooks, there should – at least hypothetically – be material available. Unfortunately Tossavainen and Turunen's study does not include the analysis of textbook material, but they do refer to there being need for further study related to that particular part of pronunciation teaching (see also Tossavainen & Turunen 1988: synopsis).

English, unquestionably the most popular foreign language (SUKOL ry), is studied in Finnish schools from very early on, beginning on first to third grades and continued throughout the educational system until the matriculation examination.

There is a lot of material for teaching of English, and due to competition between publishing houses the quality of English as Foreign Language (hereafter = EFL) textbooks should be quite high in Finland. Despite the amount of material, there has been no research concerning the pronunciation exercises and materials in textbooks used in schools.

As most of the few studies in the field of English pronunciation teaching in Finnish schools date back a few years, it is time to take a new look at the topic. It is also interesting to see if textbooks that are otherwise given great value and attention in classrooms all over the country are to be trusted in giving guidelines in the art of pronunciation. Therefore, this study will take a look at how pronunciation is presented in ten different Finnish EFL textbooks and examine if the most problematic, individual features of English pronunciation for Finnish learners are taken into consideration: How are pronunciation in general and the most problematic phonemes addressed in learning materials, if at all? And, moreover, has there been any development during the past two decades when it comes to pronunciation related content of the material?

In the next chapter background for these questions will be provided in relation to previous research on the matter of pronunciation and problematic phonemes. From there, based on the background information, these questions will be applied to the material of the present study in order to assess the role of pronunciation and problematic phonemes in ten different Finnish EFL school books, and to draw conclusions based on the material.

2. PRONUNCIATION AND PROBLEMATIC PHONEMES

One should imagine that pronunciation is especially troubling when using a language that is completely different from that of one's native speech. Many Finnish learners of English could very well justify their incapability to pronounce properly based on that deduction and, therefore, feel even more insecure and embarrassed without proper instructions (Tossavainen & Turunen 1988: 8). Finnish and English have very different, not only grammatical but also phonetic systems: Finnish is spoken almost

exactly like it is written whereas the English sound system has little in common with the actual writing practices. This relationship, according to Morris-Wilson (1992: 10), is known as the sound-spelling fit of a language. The differences in language systems are often a major reason behind pronunciation difficulties (Tossavainen & Turunen 1988: 13; see also Kenworthy 1987: 4), and because of this, Morris-Wilson (1992: 11) emphasises the importance of being able to separate phonetics from spelling in order to avoid misinterpretations and pronunciation errors.

To prevent these sound-spelling fit related errors from happening, foreign language pronunciation can be presented with the help of universal symbols. In the present study, as all the material concerns namely English foreign language learning, the phonetic signs are based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (hereafter the IPA). What kind of part the IPA actually plays in textbook materials as means and support for learning pronunciation, will be covered in the present study.

Based on the basic differences between English and Finnish it is clear to see that Finnish students may have problems in pronouncing English at some point of their studies and that they should receive support accordingly. However, as Tossavainen and Turunen (1988: 2) reveal, the responsibility of teaching pronunciation relies solely on the teacher. Lintunen (2005: 385) claims that it is possible for a learner to graduate from school without anyone commenting on the learner's pronunciation abilities along the way. The national curricula for comprehensive (2004: 141) and upper secondary schools (2003: 102) both emphasise the need to learn satisfactory communicative skills but say nothing about pronunciation itself. As a result, it may be easy to neglect the issue of pronunciation altogether.

Thus, teacher's choices undoubtedly play a huge part in learning pronunciation at school; pronunciation exercises can be skipped and selected. In Tossavainen and Turunen's (1988: 68) study, 70% of teachers reported they used pronunciation exercises provided by textbooks either "always" or "usually"; those, who never took any advantage of textbook exercises or used them only occasionally, were, for the most part, upper secondary school teachers. As Lintunen's (2005) research based on higher education students' pronunciation abilities reveals, more attention should be paid to pronunciation on upper secondary level; for the subjects in Lintunen's research it would have been profitable from the point of view of their choice of

career as English language experts and definitely useful for other pupils as well. However, in 2009, Finnish National Board of Education published a decree concerning upper secondary education: according to the decree (2009: 3), Finnish upper secondary schools are from now on compelled to offer a course in foreign language oral skills. Whether or not this will have an effect on the role of pronunciation remains to be seen.

Another point related to the teacher's role is the question of teachability – learnability to be taken into account: distinction between sounds, quality of sound and register are important for discourse but difficult to teach; individual sound segments (e.g. phonemes), on the other hand, are easy to teach, but by themselves less important for communication (Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994: 73). In addition, as Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994: 74) highlight, focusing on linguistic forms alienates students from real language and responding in a natural way; they will certainly see the language as artificial. They might also face difficulties in seeing larger patterns, such as intonation and other supra-segmental features of a language (Grimson 1989: 57).

Other general differences between learners affect learning pronunciation as well. Some people will overcome their problems eventually and achieve a better, if not native-like pronunciation while others may face difficulties long after their first encounter with the English language; some are inherently better at foreign languages than others (Kenworthy 1987: 6). However, learner attributes and individual, both linguistic and non-linguistic differences² and consequently their effects on learning pronunciation are not dealt with in this study due to its limited look on the subject.

Moving on to the features that the present study will examine, one has to elaborate on the issue of problematic phonemes for Finnish language learners. Previous studies in the field of contrastive phonetics have revealed that certain pronunciation problems indeed occur repeatedly among Finnish users of English, but not much attention has been paid to them by the public (Lintunen 2005: 384). In Tossavainen and Turunen's study (1988: 79; see also 1988: Appendix 5), Finnish teachers of English identified the most challenging areas of pronunciation that they had faced with their pupils in the following order: fricatives /θ/, /ð/ and sibilants /s, z, ʃ, ʒ/. Only after these phonemes other features such as intonation, stress and rhythm

² See Kenworthy 1987: 4-9) for a more comprehensive list of pronunciation affecting factors.

followed. Additionally, Peacock (2007: Introduction) states that by paying attention to the following major sound contrasts Finnish speakers could significantly improve their English pronunciation and, as a result, sound more natural:

- sibilants [s], [ʃ]: *sit, ship*
- voiceless/voiced stops and fricatives [p,t,k], [b,d,g]: *pig, big*
- labial consonants [v], [w]: *vine, wine*
- dental fricatives [θ], [ð]: *think, this*
- vowel contrasts [i], [ɪ]: *sheep, ship*

Peacock (2007: Introduction) also believes that the sibilant sounds particularly can present some Finnish learners with the problem of “primary acquisition”. This means that they will probably face difficulties in pronouncing the four different sibilant sounds even as separate units because the Finnish language has only one palato-alveolar sibilant, which according to Morris-Wilson (1992: 71) falls in between the other four sibilants and does not even exist in the English pronunciation system. Furthermore, according to Morris-Wilson (1992: 54-152), the most obviously problematic distinct phonemes for Finnish users are:

- fricative /v/: often confused with /w/ (59)
- fricatives /θ/, /ð/: do not exist in Finnish but are interpreted through it (62)
- sibilants /s/, /z/: quality of the sound requires attention (68) as in *kissed, roses*
- sibilants /ʃ/, /ʒ/: distinction and quality in comparison to /s/, /z/ (71): *bushes, garages*
- plosives /p, t, k; b, d, g/: strength, aspiration and distinction (90)
- affricates /tʃ/, /dʒ/: place and duration of articulation (98) as in *witch, ridge* (compare with *wits, rids*)
- vowel sounds /æ, ʌ, ɒ/: place of articulation and distinction in between (132) as in *cat, cut, cot*

To support these findings Lintunen’s conclusions based on his research seem to indicate the same about which phonetic features can be recognised as difficult for Finnish learners of English. Yet he states that it is more complicated to assess the pronunciation of vowels than consonants because the evaluators all have different opinions regarding the production of vowel sounds (Lintunen 2005: 378). The

variation of regional and national accents is evident and can affect evaluation: the word *past*, for example, has two possible ways of pronouncing, either [pa:st] with the phoneme /a/ or [pæ:st] with the phoneme /æ/. Furthermore, in Lintunen's study (2005: 379), the subjects did not leave any vowels unpronounced, which usually is a common mistake, on a frequent basis. Neither did they pay attention to the quality of the vowel sound: for example, the long phoneme /i/ in *beat* [bi:t] is significantly distinct from short /ɪ/ in *bit* [bɪt], but the subjects were apparently oblivious to the change in quality of the vowel sound. There are other words that require much more attention than this minimal pair, and not being aware of the difference in quality might result in misunderstandings. Lintunen (2005: 378) argues that the difference in quality is apparently very problematic for Finnish learners of English, even in higher education.

Moreover, as Morris-Wilson (1992:189) claims, producing longer word groups and sentences should be even more difficult for Finnish learners than mastering specific phonemes. After having learnt the basic skills, learners should consider features such as linking sounds, co-articulation, stress and rhythm in order to make their pronunciation sound more natural and fluent (Morris-Wilson 1992: 189-193). Natural English pronunciation includes, of course, intonation as well, and to further enhance one's pronunciation, accent variation should also be taken into account. Most of EFL textbooks published in Europe base their oral guidelines on British English Received Pronunciation (RP) (Grimson 1989: 90), which, according to Morris-Wilson (1992: 16), is used in the British media and not connected with any particular social or geographical area of society. It should be noted, though, that the modern media provides much material in American, Australian and other English varieties and thus relying exclusively on just one would be limiting from the point of view of the learner.

Based on the above, it is obvious that individual phonemes are on top of the list of problematic features for Finnish users of English and should, therefore, be regarded important for the goals of the present study. The previous studies did not examine the relationship between problematic phoneme production and challenges that language learners face when uttering longer segments. Neither was the question of context addressed; what kind of pronunciation related problems occur in everyday speech,

outside language laboratories in which the previous study concerning pronunciation in practice was conducted (Lintunen 2005). However, including accent variation and analysing wider, problematic areas, e.g. intonation, stress and natural articulation (in addition to comparing results from different contexts), is impossible in a small-scale study such as the present one, so the main focus will be on problematic phonemes. In the next chapter, the material for this study will be examined in relation to the following research questions:

1. How is pronunciation in general presented?
2. Are the problematic features brought up by previous studies taken account of?
3. Is there variation between publications for different levels or from different decades?

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

Data for the present study was collected from ten textbooks used in Finnish schools. To clarify the term ‘textbook’ in this context, one should know that there are often two subcategories of textbooks (also known simply as ‘schoolbooks’) and they are supposed to be used simultaneously: one is literally a textbook that includes texts and vocabularies whilst the other (often titled as exercise or work book) provides supporting glossary for the texts, exercises and grammar. In this part of the present thesis, the term ‘textbook’ refers to this specific kind of schoolbook, which contains all the texts, but traditionally no exercises. One should note, however, that textbooks used at upper secondary schools are usually a combination of both text- and exercise books, and will, therefore, be referred to as course books.

As material for this paper, the following EFL textbooks were observed:

- *Wow! 4* (textbook & exercise book) for 4th graders (published in 2004)
- *Express 4* (textbook & exercise book) for 4th graders (2000)
- *Smart Moves 3* (textbook & exercise book) for 9th graders (2008)
- *Success 9* (textbook & exercise book) for 9th graders (1994 & 2000)
- *Culture Café Book 1 & Book 8*, upper secondary school course books (2004)

Because of the small scale of the present study, books from each grade of the educational system could not be included. Therefore, the books were chosen selectively from different stages, the beginning and the end of both the comprehensive and upper secondary schools, in which learners are on completely different levels of learning. Doing so provides the possibility to do as broad a study as possible within the scope of the present thesis.

Out of the total of ten textbooks six (*Wow!*, *Smart Moves* & *Culture Café*) have been published quite recently and are actively used in schools. In addition, a couple of older textbooks from the mid 1990s were included in the study to compare them with the newer ones and to see if any changes as to pronunciation issues had taken place during the decade in between, and if adjustments in the national curriculum had also affected the pronunciation related content of textbooks in general. Older upper secondary textbooks were not included because the curriculum at upper secondary level was changed only a couple of years before and its effects on course book publishing were practically nonexistent. As a result, older upper secondary course books may be still in use and, therefore, were not included in this study.

Each book was carefully studied in order to list every exercise, text passage and other section that might have something to do with pronunciation issues, such as listening, talking and repeating. The aim was to determine if the phonetic problems brought up by previous studies were taken into account in the given text- and exercise books; tables were then drawn on the basis of the material. In the section below each book is described more carefully in terms of pronunciation related content.

3.1 *Wow! 4 Study Book*

The *Wow!* series is relatively new (published 2004), having been on the market for only a couple of years. As with most textbooks made for elementary school pupils (grades 1-6), *Wow!* relies heavily on colourful appearance that is most likely to appeal to young students. Therefore the emphasis of the book is on pictures that help pupils to relate to the topics.

Wow! 4 Study Book seems at the very first look to be a classical case in which chapters are placed successively after one another. They can be either listened to on CD or read aloud by the teacher. The index in the book reveals that certain

phonemes, both consonant and some vowel sounds, will be looked at and rehearsed. In addition to narrative stories and dialogues there are songs, presumably to create variation and to demonstrate that a foreign language can be used in different genres. One entire chapter is dedicated to words beginning with the same phoneme but ending in very different utterances (such as *bag* – *badge*).

Most of the pronunciation will most likely be learned through listening to chapters and songs, and as it is to be expected at this level, the amount of time spent on rehearsing different phonemes and utterances is entirely depended on the teacher. He or she can easily choose phonetic exercises based on the level of the class and pronounce him-/herself accordingly, given that the teacher has satisfactory pronunciation skills.

However, the IPA as such is not used anywhere except the vocabulary at the end of the book where each word is given a transliterated structure in addition to normal, alphabetical forms.

3.2 *Wow! 4 Busy book*

Compared to its companion the exercise book in *Wow! 4* series is not as colourful – possibly due to financial reasons – but full of different phonological issues. First of all, on the flipside of the cover, there is a list of specific IPA-signs and example words that include these. It should be noted that the list uses guidelines that a 4th grader might have difficulties in comprehending without the assistance of a teacher (e.g. “a long vowel”, “stressed syllable”).

As in the accompanying textbook, the index in the book suggests that certain phonemes will be looked at and also indicates which chapters these phoneme exercises are attached to. Listening and repeating (in the form of singing along) is emphasised yet again, but the most striking difference to the textbook is that the IPA follows along from the very first pages. There are no specific rules on how to read the IPA apart from the short list in the flip page of the cover – the teacher’s role in this is undeniably important.

Moreover, making sure that everyone using the book knows how to read the IPA is essential because the phonetic alphabet is present throughout the entire book. It is

interesting to notice that each and every new word or expression that is introduced (whether connected to respective chapters or individual exercises) is transliterated into phonetic signs. These words can be found in the margins under the title “How to pronounce”. All chapters also have their vocabulary written using the IPA. The further one advances, though, some familiar words and their pronunciation ought to be remembered since instructions are not repeated again.

There are 17 exercises in total that teach specific phonemes (how to read, comprehend and pronounce) and a couple of exercises that deal with reading the IPA. By the time the book is finished the pupils should be quite familiar with the basics of pronunciation after so many words and much repetition.

3.3 *Express 4 Storybook*

The *Express* series was originally published in the 1990s but the specimen used in this study dates back to 2000. Revised editions have not been printed, though, so this book should work very well in comparing the content with a much newer *Wow!* series. *Express 4 Storybook* is also a colourful publication that includes topics closely related to the pupils’ normal lives and adventures beyond their day-to-day activities. When it comes to pronunciation related issues, *Express 4* is very similar to its modern counterpart: chapters are to be listened to from the tape and then possibly read aloud. This, just as in *Wow! 4*, means that pupils have to listen carefully, repeat and mimic as much as they can and are willing to.

The possible difference between the two 4th graders’ textbooks is not very apparent at the first glance, but something has clearly changed: instead of a CD for students’ own use, there is a cassette available in bookstores. This is an interesting detail that might need some further investigation: were pupils keener on buying their own tapes back in the 1990s than they are now in the era of the CD and digital media and most importantly, if they did buy these tapes (or CDs), did listening to them somehow affect their using the language?

In the *Express 4 Storybook* index one can see that phonetic signs can be found towards the end the book. All in all, pronunciation matters are not much reflected on

during the first part of the book. The latter part, however, includes a small dictionary of particular theme words, complete with pictures, and surprisingly enough, these groups of words do have phonetic signs with them. This is unexpected because looking back a few pages one can see a section of extra readings where lists of unfamiliar or challenging words lack phonetic signs altogether.

Nevertheless, from there the book goes on listing numbers, days of the week and the alphabet complete with the IPA and, furthermore, shows a list of phonetic signs just as the index had already revealed. The vocabulary at the end (both English-Finnish and vice versa) also gives phonetic instructions with each word.

3.4 *Express 4 Workbook*

As in the newer *Wow!* series, the workbook part of the *Express 4* pair is much more devoid of colours and includes much more theory. The workbook index gives the reader something to look forward to since six out of seven units in the workbook apparently has a small section dedicated to pronunciation, called “Sounds right”. Just like in *Wow!* these pronunciation exercises deal with certain phonemes, mostly giving examples (words, short sentences) and sometimes small games in which pupils are to figure out a word or sentences written in phonetic signs.

Most interesting is the first “Sounds right” section that asks pupils to think back on what they remember about phonetic signs. Pupils are not forced to continue from where pronunciation teaching for them ended the previous year, but are given a chance to recollect and rehearse before going deeper into pronunciation and possibly new phonemes.

As is customary, the vocabulary in each chapter includes words written in phonetic signs. The IPA makes an occasional appearance in random exercises that have lists of more rare words and in cases where it is important for the pupils to know how to pronounce a certain word. There are a lot of communication tasks, repetition and listening in the form of chapters, poems and songs, which can vicariously affect one’s pronunciation skills as well.

3.5 *Smart moves 3 Texts*

In the brand new *Smart moves* -series (2008) designed for secondary school teaching, colourful drawings have been replaced by authentic photographs and the overall look of the books is much more mature. Chapters even deal with negative issues and instead of children's rhymes there are songs made famous by popular artists.

Unfortunately, pronunciation is clearly not as central in terms of language learning as in the lower level materials. The textbook index gives no hint whatsoever as to whether or not pronunciation plays a part in any of the chapters. The answer would be no since none of the chapters have pronunciation guidelines, and even the lists of new words (introduced alongside songs with no phonetically educational content, such as minimal pairs etc.) lack phonetic guidelines.

However, there is a section called "Help pages" in the middle of the book that includes lists of words (numbers, letters, expressions, thematically connected words such as housing and body parts) with phonetic signs. This is similar to what was seen in the 4th graders' books. There is also an entire section dedicated to the phonetic alphabet with general information on reading the IPA and other important guidelines to follow when pronouncing English. The grammar section of the book includes phonetic signs only in a couple of cases, these being irregular verbs, and reflexive and demonstrative pronouns. The vocabulary at the end of the books also includes phonetic signs.

3.6 *Smart moves 3 Exercises*

Just like in the previous cases, the workbook of *Smart moves* series is much less colourful and more pronunciation-oriented than its companion textbook. Yet pronunciation issues are not mentioned in the index. Just like in the previous series, each chapter has its own vocabulary in the exercise book and this time (unlike in the textbook part of the two where it was lacking altogether) the IPA does play a significant role – each word is transliterated. This has been done even with some unfamiliar words that one might face in individual exercises. In these cases, phonetic signs are presented in small word boxes which can be consulted whenever necessary.

There are 11 exercises that deal with particular phonemes and the pronunciation system, but compared to the 4th graders' book, these exercises have much more

repetitive characteristics – it seems that the students are expected to know quite much already and are more likely to process old information than to obtain any new. This time intonation is also taken into consideration whereas in the *Wow!* series it was not present at all. It can certainly be seen as evidence of students' improved language skills.

3.7 *Success 9 Textbook*

In general this 9th graders' textbook from 1994 is very much similar to its modern counterpart, but the photographs give away the era, and thus create an outdated feel about the book. Moreover, instead of a CD, there are tapes available for personal use so that one can listen to chapters outside school as well, and some songs in addition to the regular, prose chapters, but otherwise *Success 9* does not reveal any surprises.

The difference between *Success 9* and *Smart moves 3* is that in the first mentioned not even the alphabetical wordlist at the end includes phonetic signs, whereas the latter particularly excels at that. In fact, pronunciation or its most obvious element, phonetic signs, only makes an appearance in the chapter related vocabularies at the end of the book (which is a separate section from the actual alphabetical vocabulary). One can also find a short list of phonetic signs with explanations in Finnish combined with example words in English.

However, unlike any of the other books, *Success 9 Textbook* clearly states that the instructions given in the book are based on the generally accepted form of spoken British English. This is the only time that the differences of spoken English are acknowledged in any of the books used in the present study. Although *Success 9* may be inferior to the newer *Smart moves* -series when it comes to pronunciation and the amount of phonetic signs used, it certainly gives – even though short – clarification about what these symbols represent in reality:

“Tässä kirjassa annetut ohjeet noudattavat yleisesti hyväksyttävää brittienglannin ääntämistä. Ääntämisohjeissa ei ole otettu huomioon kaikkia mahdollisia ääntämistapoja. Joku saattaa pitää rinnakkaisuutta annettua ohjetta parempana, esimerkiksi sana **condition** voidaan ääntää [kɔn'diʃən] tai [kɔn'diʃn]. **Often** voi ääntyä [ɔfn], [ɔfən] tai [ɔftən]. Tärkeintä on, että omaksutaan jokin yleisesti hyväksytty ääntämismuoto.” (p. 128)

Because of this, it is possible for a student to comprehend and achieve better knowledge about pronunciation themselves (as self-study) when using *Success 9* than, for example, *Smart moves 3* in which there are no written instruction concerning the nature of different utterances and, as a result, the responsibility of introducing this falls on the teacher. It should be remembered, however, that the explanation given in *Success 9 Textbook* is not profound and that each new word has a range of varieties according to which they can be pronounced.

3.8 *Success 9 Practice Book*

Even though all of the other workbooks have been much less multi-coloured than their accompanying textbooks, at least some colour has been used. *Success 9 Practice Book* is an exception, as it is entirely printed in black and white and is, for that reason, perhaps the least attractive in appearance.

The first pages in *Success 9* exercise book reveal that there should be some listening, music and talking tasks, although the role of pronunciation is left unclear. That is still the case after taking a look at the book since exercises are not distinct from one another and it is hard to find any task relating more or less to pronunciation without a more thorough examination.

There are no similar sections for pronunciation as in *Smart moves*, so the number of exercises depends on how one looks at them. Some of the exercises are called “Wag your tongue...” and they are the closest resemblance to phonetic exercises. They consist of different poetic texts that are to be repeated after the tape, and they all deal with different phonemes. No specific reason for practising is given, so the pronunciation learning happens here on a larger scale of smoothening one’s speech than just rehearsing individual phonemes. Nonetheless, there are 21 “Wag your tongue...” exercises and other more or less pronunciation related tasks with listening, repeating and communicating. Overall, *Success 9* does have much more intonation and speech exercises than any other of the books in the present study.

Still, it is puzzling that even though the accompanying textbook specifically informs of its having based its phonetic transcription on British English, parts of the texts and topics are related to American, Australian and Hongkong cultures – one should imagine that to be the case with pronunciation as well. Some of the pronunciation

exercises do have other than British expressions in them, which might encourage one to choose that particular way of pronunciation for oneself. This may prove problematic for students as one interested in other English pronunciation systems can only find phonetic transliterations based on British custom in the vocabulary.

3.9 *Culture Café Book 1*

This course book is intended for upper secondary school beginners, and is so far the most mature of the material included in the present study. Chapters, the subsequent vocabularies and exercises are arranged differently than in the lower level books: each chapter functions as a sort of a unit, and before continuing onto the next one, students are to complete exercises related to the given unit.

At the very start it is stated that English is everywhere and can thus be picked up relatively easily; this should include pronunciation as well. As anyone who has studied at an upper secondary school knows that students at this level are expected to take more and more responsibility over their own studies and can, therefore, be relied on to choose a way of pronunciation suitable for their own needs and purposes. Teachers can only support this choice, not take as much responsibility as on the lower levels of education, and as a result, students are no longer necessarily obligated to take in everything that is given.

As opposed to the other books studied in the present thesis, *Culture Café Book 1* offers much more conversational tasks alongside conventional chapters and songs: the individual's responsibility covers also the way how precise and active they are when uttering English. However, listening still seems to be very important, as one of the major parts of any foreign language matriculation examination is the listening comprehension test.

At first there are no phonetic signs even with unfamiliar words but suddenly it appears – phonetic signs seem to be used with words that are long or otherwise difficult to pronounce without proper guidance. There is also a list that deals with the alphabet complete with the IPA but no exercises related to that, so the purpose of the task is most likely to remind one of how to spell letters in English.

In the Self service -section, which contains a variety of language exercises, two pages have exclusively been dedicated to pronunciation. A few phonemes are rehearsed (students are notified of the differences in written and spoken forms of some sounds) but overall the section is limited and small. Since it is placed separately at the end of the section, it could be easily forgotten.

A more comprehensive list of the phonetic alphabet is presented at the end of the book, at the beginning of the vocabularies and on the flipside of the back-cover which can be consulted at any time. What is most striking is that although the vocabularies of the chapters include the IPA, the alphabetical vocabulary does not have transliterations; this could cause problems for students who are looking for a specific word and its phonetic transliteration in the vocabulary and cannot associate it with any particular chapter.

3.10 *Culture Café Book 8*

Culture Café Book 8 (which appears very similar to book 1 of the same series), is intended as the last course book before taking the matriculation examination. For that reason it is interesting to see that the course book is almost totally deficient in pronunciation issues. Chapters and songs can be repeated after the tape as usual but since there are no instructions, doing so would seem to be the student's own responsibility. Chapter related glossaries make use of the IPA occasionally and give a short list of the phonetic signs at the beginning of the section but all in all it is very little.

Only one exercise relates to pronunciation: it is a small revision exercise on stress. That aside, pronunciation is not highlighted in the book; the reason behind this may be that the book concentrates on preparing students for the matriculation examination, which consists of only listening and reading comprehension in addition to structure and vocabulary tests and requires written skills instead of oral.

4. THE ROLE OF PRONUNCIATION IN THE BOOKS

In summary, all the books studied have one specific feature in common: they all provide a learner's own CD (or cassette) which includes all chapters and some of the exercises. The CD/cassette can be a very helpful tool at home. The more fluent a student becomes, the more he or she is expected to take responsibility and rehearse pronunciation outside school as well. For example, intonation is something that a student with a background in a language where this feature is present will have less problems learning (Grimson 1989: 337). For a Finnish user, though, learning supra-segmental features of English takes time (Morris-Wilson 1992: 193) which is limited at school, and therefore the CD or cassette can provide valuable assistance.

Overall, listening is emphasised in all of the books, and it does seem to indicate, alongside with Tossavainen and Turunen's (1988: 90) deductions, that pronunciation teaching relies mostly on the students' abilities to imitate sound patterns; Peacock (1990: 16) calls this the standard laboratory procedure. Reacting to stimuli and imitating should be advantageous when learning longer patterns and combinations of sounds. Be it stories based on dialogue or songs with rhymes, listening is known to be important for training the ear and thus for becoming a fluent mimic (Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994: 125). Some pupils are gifted and can pick up pronunciation and articulation spontaneously, but for those without the talent, dividing pronunciation issues and problematic features into individual segments, such as phonemes, can be very helpful (Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994: 67).

There are no drastic differences moving from the older books to the newer ones. The 4th graders' books are similar when it comes to presenting phonemes with corresponding simple words and sentences. The 9th graders' books differ a bit more: in *Smart moves 3 Exercises* instructions are clear and concise, whereas *Success 9 Practice Book* presents pronunciation exercises sometimes without any proper guidance or motivation. Either learners were much more active in the 1990s or the textbook writers simply did not consider the information to be of any use outside the classroom.

As can be seen on Table 1, on the lower levels pronunciation is presented in the form of phonemes and learning them plays such a significant role that it must be

mentioned in the index. No such information can be found in the higher-level books. The IPA is used consistently throughout all of the books with the exception of *Culture Café Book 8* which – understandably – concentrates on theoretical issues as expected before the matriculation examination and features the IPA only occasionally. It is good to see that some sort of general information is offered on all levels and it becomes quite clear that despite all one should be much more fluent in pronouncing English on the level of *Culture Café Book 8* than on the level of *Wow! 4* or *Express 4*.

Table 1. Pronunciation related features in the textbooks studied

Book titles	<i>Wow! 4 Study book</i>	<i>Wow! 4 Busy Book</i>	<i>Express 4 Storybook</i>	<i>Express 4 Workbook</i>	<i>Smart Moves 3 Texts</i>	<i>Smart Moves 3 Exercises</i>	<i>Success 9 Textbook</i>	<i>Success 9 Practice Book</i>	<i>Culture Café Book 1</i>	<i>Culture Café Book 8</i>
Indication in the index	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×
IPA used	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Problematic phonemes (some)	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓	×	✓	✓	×

By looking at Table 1, we can see that only *Wow! 4 Study Book*, *Busy Book* and *Express 4 Workbook* included pronunciation related topics in their indexes. This may refer to the differences in judging the value of pronunciation: on lower levels, where one is introduced to the pronunciation of English, finding these sections and exercises should be as easy as possible. It is then taken further in upper level textbooks when learners have gained more experience and become more fluent in their language skills; apparently there is no longer need to include information on pronunciation in the index. However, in the upper secondary books pronunciation skills are even more on the background, while the material, as Peacock (1990: 178) states, should always cover the vocabulary that the learner might need in the future. Enhancing and refining knowledge further is mostly the learner's own responsibility.

The lesser role of pronunciation in upper secondary school materials could very well be one of the reasons behind university students' struggling with phonemes and fluent speech.

As was already mentioned, one of the biggest problems with higher-level textbooks in the present study is their insufficient indexes when it comes to pronunciation. Even though pronunciation as such might play a part in the book, it is not mentioned in the index and, therefore, may make it unreasonably difficult for one to have a second look at a particular, problematic area of pronunciation. Lower level textbooks are better in this sense. However, books used at elementary schools are the property of the school and as a result, often collected back after the school year. Thus students may not be able to consult their older books from previous years, as they might sometimes contain valid and helpful information.

What is positive, though, is to see that regardless of the number or quality of cases, the IPA is used in all of the books to support either learning or preserving pronunciation. The way the IPA is made use of seems to depend on the level of the learner, the textbook writers' preferences and the role of pronunciation compared to other areas of language learning. Teachers have stated that phonetic transcriptions are taught at primary school and therefore it would be needless to look at them again on upper secondary level (Tossavainen & Turunen 1988: 71). Unfortunately, information can often be forgotten, and there is certainly need for revision of the basics of pronunciation, such as the IPA, on upper levels.

In other words, the learner is clearly expected to need less guidance on upper secondary level than at primary school. On the other hand, primary school pupils tend to need more overall guidance. Therefore, including so much guidelines for reading phonetic signs in the books when reading them mostly happens under the supervision of a teacher seems rather problematic, whereas higher level students would probably need guidance for self-study but, unfortunately, there is very little of it.

As the findings above have shown, the role of pronunciation is varying; some books give it more attention by placing pronunciation related exercises and passages with the intention that they are easy to find and use, whilst others do not reckon with such

layout related issues at all. Judging by the comparison between older and newer textbooks, the time of publication is not as important an issue as the level of the given textbook users. Unlike one would imagine – the number of exercises growing by each school year – lower level textbooks have relatively more pronunciation passages than their higher level counterparts which rely more and more on the student's own responsibility and motivation to learn and on the teacher's willingness to pick up these issues anywhere, even in passages where there are no distinctly pronunciation related exercises available. This, in addition to the number of exercises and passages, would suggest that some of the books consider pronunciation learning to be of higher value than others. The next part will look at how the actual problematic phonemes are distributed between the different books.

5. THE PRESENTATION OF PROBLEMATIC PHONEMES IN THE BOOKS

The phonetic exercises in the books studied do seem to follow a common model: at first one is presented with the phonemes in question, followed by some words that include these sounds. This, according to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994: 143), means that aspects of language can be separated from speech and thus taught much more easily than supra-segmental features (see also Morris-Wilson 1992: 193). Because, naturally, not all available information can be published in a school book, writers must make decisions and choose the aspects of language that serve as a basis, which many pupils are satisfied with (Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994: 143).

However, not all problematic phonemes are rehearsed as such in the books included in the present study. Sometimes there is specific information available as to which phonemes one is supposed to look at, other times one is left to conclude it oneself. For example, in *Smart Moves 3 Exercises* sibilants are practiced through a series of words, such as *sea*, *sheet* and *rich*, without any information concerning the actual phonemes. The difference must be heard.

It seems that the phonemes are deemed easier or harder by the textbooks, and some of the books pay more attention to these problems than others. For example, *Success 9 Practice Book* offers poems including, e.g. minimal pairs /p/-/b/, /t/-/θ/ etc., but

training these problematic phonemes carefully is overwhelmed by the need to practice intonation and natural speech. Sibilants and fricatives are, according to the material, clearly problematic. They are dealt with repeatedly whereas others, e.g. the length of the vowel sound, appear only in one of the books (see Table 2).

Table 2. Presentation of problematic phonemes and their distribution between the textbooks studied

Book titles	<i>Wow! 4 Busy Book</i>	<i>Express 4 Workbook</i>	<i>Smart Moves 3 Exercises</i>	<i>Success 9 Practice Book</i>	<i>Culture Café Book 1</i>	<i>Culture Café Book 8</i>
/s, ʃ, ʒ, z/	✓ (no /ʒ/)	✓ (no /s/, /ʒ/)	✓ (no /ʒ/, /z/)	✓ (no /ʒ/)	✓	×
/v/, /w/	✓ (with /f/)	✓ (with /f/)	✓	✓ (with /f/)	×	×
/p,t,k/ /b,d,g/	×	✓	✓	✓	✓ (only /p/ /b/)	×
/θ/, /ð/	✓	✓	✓	✓ (with /t/ /d/)	×	×
/tʃ/, /dʒ/	✓	✓ (no /tʃ/)	✓	✓ (no /dʒ/)	×	×
/i/, /I/	×	×	×	×	×	×
/æ, ʌ, ɒ/	✓	×	×	×	×	×
Others?	/ə/, /əː/ /ɔ/, /ɔː/					

The problem of primary acquisition (Peacock 2007: Introduction) when pronouncing the four English sibilant sounds based on the knowledge of just one Finnish sibilant is obviously a major one as it is rehearsed on all levels (table 2) but the textbooks themselves do not show any difference between the English /s/ and the Finnish /s/ - it is, once again, left for the teacher to explain. Moreover, only one of the textbooks (*Culture Café Book 1*) presents the sibilant /ʒ/ as such: elsewhere it appears as part of the affricative /dʒ/. Leaving out the fine distinction between /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ on the lower levels may have been a result of deciding to concentrate on bigger differences such as between /s/ and /ʃ/, whereas on upper secondary level one can certainly go into detail.

One feature that textbook writers seem to regard as necessary to take a look at, although Morris-Wilson (1992) and Peacock (2007) do not, is the relationship of the fricative /f/ in comparison to /v/ and /w/. The variation of sounds is reviewed on both 4th and 9th grades, with the exception of *Smart Moves*. It is possible that in the newer series the distinction between /f/ and /v/ is regarded as self-evident whereas the older series rely on going through already achieved information in case pupils have forgotten it. However, as Morris-Wilson claims (1992: 59), telling the difference between /f/ and the other two fricatives should not be too difficult for a Finnish language user.

The fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are dealt with either separately or in comparison to /t/ and /d/, which are the closest sounds in the Finnish system. This is sure to cause problems and, as Morris-Wilson (1992: 62-63) claims, mostly due to lack of concentration or appreciation of the friction noise (air pushing though the teeth) of the sound. As these phonemes are rehearsed both on 4th and 9th grades, one should think that a learner with problems should be able to correct their sound production quite easily.

Apparently, looking at table 2, vowel distinction is not as important as that of consonant sounds. The only time that the different vowels /æ/, /ʌ/, and /ɒ/ are rehearsed happens on the 4th grade (specifically in *Wow! 4 Busy Book* in which the idea of rehearsing vowel sounds continues on with phonemes /ə/ and /ɔ/), whereas the length of the vowel, as in /i/ and /I/, is considered as late as on course 8 at upper secondary school. Even though vowels present fewer problems than consonant sounds (Lintunen 2005), it would be interesting to find out if vowel sounds are dealt with in books for grades that were not included in the present study.

As has now been seen, phonemes that cause problems among Finnish users of English are given attention in the textbooks, but the teacher is expected to explain the details, even on higher levels; as such, the given textbooks have very limited instructions, and thus cannot be trusted in providing enough support for self-study. What was interesting, though, is that just like the role of pronunciation in general, lower level books offer sometimes more pronunciation material and more simple guidelines, which even higher level students could benefit from. Nevertheless, information concerning basic phonetic production (such as the IPA) is limited on

higher level textbooks, and without it, students could, therefore, forget what certain symbols represent and how the corresponding sound is actually produced. To conclude this thesis, the findings will be elaborated upon in the final chapter in relation to possible future research in this area of pronunciation teaching.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study has been to determine if pronunciation related issues and the most problematic phonemes for Finnish users of English are taken into account in Finnish EFL textbooks which play a significant role in learning and teaching the language, and to see if changes as regards of pronunciation related content have occurred between older and newer publications or when moving from one level to another.

Overall, judging by the given textbooks, it can be said that the pronunciation of English in Finnish EFL textbooks is thought to be, if not the most important part of foreign language learning, at least worth considering, the small number of relevant exercises and text passages notwithstanding. It is, undeniably, one of the areas of language learning in which a teacher's role and participation is extremely vital. From the very first stages of learning to read the IPA to a more advanced level of language proficiency the time spent on pronunciation at school is depended solely on the teacher. Obviously there is the possibility of self-study, but examining the ways and significance of self-study, reasons for it and its effects on pronunciation fall beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Nonetheless, even though the present study has listed quite a few features that present problems for Finnish users, similar problems occur among learners with different native languages as well (see Kenworthy 1987: 124-160). As has been seen in both the previous and the present studies, Finnish learners have fewer difficulties in producing English vowels than consonant sounds, but, for example, for a learner with for example Arabic as a native language the situation may be quite the opposite (Kenworthy 1987: 125-126). Drawing comparisons between Finnish and foreign

textbooks should, therefore, be worthy of note since there might be relevant and helpful points that the Finnish textbook writers have not even thought about.

Furthermore, as Tossavainen and Turunen's (1988: 70) findings appear to confirm, especially upper secondary teachers have found either the number or the quality of pronunciation exercises in textbooks dissatisfying, which seems to have been the main reason behind not using enough time on teaching pronunciation on upper secondary level. Based on the findings in the present study these claims could be very well justified. This also supports Lintunen's (2005) deductions on university students' poor pronunciation skills, as they have not had enough training on previous stages of education. However, one must bear in mind that the present study involved only two upper secondary level textbooks; hence no certain conclusions can be drawn from the results. Other books from different courses might include more pronunciation related exercises.

Assuming that the teachers involved in the study conducted by Tossavainen and Turunen (1988) have a lot of experience in teaching and using textbook materials, their estimates concerning the material can, therefore, be deemed reliable, and based on the indications provided by the present study regarding the role of pronunciation, one could easily conclude that improvements are definitely needed when it comes to pronunciation related content of textbook materials. In order to suggest any improvements and to draw accurate, reliable conclusions on the role of pronunciation and the presentation of problematic phonemes, a wider variety of different textbooks should be studied and evaluated. This could not be done in the present study and is, therefore, its main drawback. Nevertheless, the present study does serve a purpose as basis for further research and shows what kinds of aspects should be taken into account in the future.

Since the scale of the present study was rather limited, supra-segmental features of English were not looked into. Nonetheless, the material indicated that intonation, stress and accent could very well be studied based on textbook analysis. As was seen in the case of *Success 9 Practice Book*, many of the pronunciation related exercises dealt with American English whilst the vocabulary in the book promoted RP, which could cause problems for learners. It would be interesting to examine this particular controversy of different varieties of English further in terms of affecting

pronunciation learning in general, as well as the presentation of supra-segmental features in EFL textbooks.

The aim of the present study was to see and count how many and what kinds of pronunciation related topics there were available in the given textbooks and if the most problematic phonetic features were taken into consideration. This can be seen as a very theoretical look on the subject, whereas other methods, such as gathering data from the users of the material, have a more practical side to them. Considering that Tossavainen and Turunen (1988) had already studied the role of pronunciation teaching from the viewpoint of the teacher, in the present thesis the opinions of students could have been included by examining, for example, what the actual target group has to say about the pronunciation material. As for the present thesis, the method needed to be narrow enough to fit the needs of a small-scale study that concentrated on occurrences of text passages and exercises, which, as such, offer very little variation when examined theoretically.

All in all, pronunciation is not difficult, and one should not be afraid of uttering a foreign language. Absolute correctness in speech, as compared to native-speakers, is not relevant for a foreign user – more important aspects are intelligibility and appropriateness (Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994: 12; see also Kenworthy 1987: 13-14). As long as the message in the speech is understandable, there will be no need to criticise one's pronunciation. Although, as we have seen, certain aspects of pronunciation do require more attention and patience than others, by being active and benefitting from the material provided as much as possible, problems in pronunciation and phonetic production can be overcome. Besides, as Peacock (2007: Introduction) reminds, mastering all the problematic areas will not make a Finnish speaker of English sound like a native; one will, however, be easy and pleasant to listen to. And that is an encouraging thought.

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