

TABOO OR NOT TABOO:
A study of taboo content in Finnish EFL learning
materials

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tabu on monimuotoinen käsite, jota on vaikea määrittellä yksiselitteisesti johtuen sekä tabujen valtavasta määrästä että niiden osittaisesta kulttuurisidonnaisuudesta. Tabuja ja tabukielen esiintymistä oppimateriaaleissa on tutkittu erittäin vähän ja tutkimus onkin keskittynyt lähinnä määrittelemään, mitkä aiheet ovat tabuja maailmanlaajuisissa englannin kielen oppimateriaaleissa. Tutkimuksen kohteena ovat olleet myös mahdolliset riskit, jotka liittyvät tabujen ja tabukielen oppimateriaaleihin sisällyttämiseen. Näitä edellä mainittuja tutkimuksia on tehty pääasiassa Yhdysvalloissa ja Iso-Britanniassa. Aiempien tutkimuksien keskittyessä siihen, mitkä aiheet ovat teoriassa tabuja maailmanlaajuisissa englannin kielen oppimateriaaleissa, varsinainen empiirinen tutkimus tabujen ja tabukielen esiintyvyydestä on jäänyt vähemmälle huomiolle. Tutkielmamme keskittyikin juuri tähän tutkimattomaan alueeseen.</p> <p>Tutkielmamme päätarkoitus oli verrata, ovatko samat aiheet tabuja suomenkielisissä ja englanninkielisissä englannin oppikirjoissa. Tutkimusta varten kävimme läpi neljä eri oppikirjasarjaa neljältä koulutusasteelta; alakoulusta, yläkoulusta, lukiosta sekä aikuiskoulutuksesta. Tulokset osoittivat, että aiheet, jotka ovat tabuja maailmanlaajuisissa englannin oppikirjoissa (esimerkiksi alkoholi, politiikka ja uskonto), eivät ole tabuja suomenkielisissä englannin oppikirjoissa. Löydettyjen tabujen lukumäärä oli yli 300. Tutkimus käsitti yhteensä 27 kirjaa, joten otos on kohtalaisen suuri. Tutkimus täten antaa melko luettavia viitteitä siitä, että paikalliset, ns. lokaalit tekstikirjat eivät noudata samoja ohjenuoria kuin maailmanlaajuiset vastineensa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Taboos exist in a variety of contexts, some of them being known in most societies and others being more context-specific. There are cultural taboos, dietary taboos and religious taboos, only to name a few. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning materials also have their own taboos, which vary depending on the size, needs, and qualities of the target audience. Thus, decisions made by the writers of learning materials as well as their publishers are one of the main factors affecting the contents of learning materials.

Research on taboos in learning materials is a scarcely studied area. Nevertheless, of the studies conducted, taboos in global learning materials have become one of the most discussed topics in recent years. A central issue in the area is a study by Gray (2002), since it recites the topics that are taboos in global learning materials. Other important studies in the field have concentrated on the importance of including taboo language in language teaching (Crooks 2006) as well as learners' need to differentiate different connotations words may have (Allan and Burrige 2006). Nevertheless, although many previous studies have emphasised the need for including taboos or taboo language in EFL learning contexts, no empirical studies have been conducted on which taboo topics can already be found from EFL learning materials. More specifically, to our knowledge, no studies have been conducted on exploring which topics are taboos in local EFL learning materials.

The purpose of the present exploratory study, therefore, was to determine which topics are taboos in local Finnish EFL textbooks. Specifically, the study investigated whether the same topics that are taboo in global learning materials are also taboo in Finnish EFL learning materials. Moreover, this study explored whether the authors' own hypothetical set of taboos are in fact taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks.

The remainder of the present paper is structured as follows. We will begin by providing a concise account of previous research on the field. Secondly, we will specify the methodology used for the present study. Thirdly, we will move on to present the results of the study both in a quantitative and qualitative form. Finally, we will present profiles of each of the textbook series examined, provide an analysis of the results, and compare our findings to the findings of the previous studies.

2 TABOOS AND TABOO LANGUAGE IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

Communicative competence is essential in today's globalising world, which is increasingly becoming more of a community, at least in Western societies. Today, as English is a lingua franca, it is even more important to know the difference between formal, neutral and informal language. Knowing the difference between them is not only essential for stylistic appropriateness but also to learners' communicative competence. It is, therefore, important to address these differences in the classroom.

The curricula for both comprehensive school and upper secondary school in Finland address the importance of communication, communicative competence, and behaviour in a culturally acceptable manner (*Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet* 2004, *Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet* 2003). Nevertheless, taboos or taboo language are not specifically mentioned in the curricula. Although taboos and taboo language are not included in either of the curricula, it is our strong opinion that they play an important part in learners' second language acquisition, especially in terms of understanding what acceptable behaviour is, and therefore should be included in EFL learning materials. Next, the topics of taboos, taboo language, global coursebooks and PARSNIP will be discussed in more detail.

2.1 Taboos

Taboos have always existed even though the term **taboo** was not defined until the year 1777 by Captain James Cook. He reports the word *taboo* as signifying something forbidden (Cook 1812:676). Even though the definition of taboo has remained more or less the same over the years, in today's Western world taboos are nevertheless not such strong social prohibitions as they once were. The concept of taboos indeed is difficult to define for it is a vast and constantly changing area. There are many definitions of taboos but for the present study we chose the definition by Farberow (1963:2), who defines the term *taboo* as follows:

But, first, what are taboos? Taboos are primarily backward-oriented, for, by being essentially forbidding and prohibiting, they tend to preserve the past and to control the impingement of the future on the present. Of course, not all taboos are old. New

ones constantly appear, taking various shapes and forms as the substance of the culture evolves, but they all serve the same goal – preservation of the status quo.

This definition is the most appropriate for the present study as excluding taboos from learning materials preserves the past instead of reflecting the modern, diverse culture in which the learners currently live in.

Some taboos are considered to be global, but each culture also has their own set of taboos. Allan and Burrige (2006:105) mention that new taboos on sexuality, religion, gender, disability, race and ethnicity have appeared in English-speaking societies. This phenomenon is also visible in Germany where today it is forbidden to reveal the ethnicity of criminals in newspapers. That is to say, German courts allow the names and ethnicities of criminals to be suppressed in news reports once they have paid their debt to society (Schwartz 2009, Arthur 2009). We think that this phenomenon well reflects the constant change of culture and, consequently, taboos.

As mentioned above, taboos do not remain the same over the years. New taboos appear constantly whereas old ones are taking various shapes. (Farberow 1963:2, Allan and Burrige 2006:105.) In addition to cultural taboos, course materials have their own taboo subjects, which vary depending on both the target culture and the target group. Among the taboos which are commonly excluded from global coursebooks are sex, sexuality or issues of sexual preference, as well as narcotics and alcohol, as noted by Gray (2002:159). The issues mentioned by Gray are, nevertheless, either current or already familiar to the learners and, therefore, should be included in learning materials. The commonly excluded topics mentioned above are relevant for the present study as the aim is to investigate if they are excluded from Finnish EFL textbooks as well.

2.2 Taboo language

Mercury (1995:30) defines taboo language, which is also known as obscene language, or cursing, as expressions that have their use restricted in public either explicitly or implicitly. Explicit restrictions are governed by, for instance, television network censors as well as global coursebook publishers, whereas implicit restrictions are made, for example, by parents who use euphemisms instead of taboo words.

Today the impact of taboo language is diminished by its widespread use. According to Crooks (2006:212), as taboo language is a part of day-to-day use of the language in Britain and the USA, the attitude towards it is more liberal in today's world than before. Mercury (1995:35) reports that as taboo language can be heard in movies, songs, and popular books, second language speakers get a distorted idea about which words are taboos and which are not. Although taboos and taboo language can be found in newspapers, magazines, music and television, the higher frequency of taboo language does not diminish its power.

Crooks (2006:212) notes that beginning learners of English can be baffled by the place and role of taboo language. Contrary to native English speakers, beginners have not been conditioned from childhood to taboo terms. As stated by Claire (1998:200), native English speakers react physically to the sound of taboo terms; their heart rates increase and they begin to sweat more if taboo words are spoken in places where taboos are regarded as either forbidden or deprecated. Since the beginners of English are not conditioned to either taboo terms or taboo language, it is essential that learners learn to discover *the critical nuances* between synonyms such as "coloured", "negro", "black" and "African American" (Burrige 1997:73). The critical nuances, which Allan and Burrige (2006:48) refer to as cross-varietal synonyms, are neglected in many dictionaries; all the words referring to one topic, despite their different connotations, can be gathered under only one entry with no mention of different nuances.

Crystal (1995:173) suggests that a clear line must be drawn between the language of taboo, the language of abuse and the language of swearing. Crooks (2006:214), however, notes that for non-native speakers all taboo words and phrases usually have a similar impact. When students are learning new words, as noted by Claire (1998:200), all of them are ordinary words, without the taboo meaning built in. Therefore, Crooks (2006:214) points out that it is important to teach taboo language to students because most learners do not have the knowledge to discriminate between the relative strength of different aspects of this type of language. Hence, this linguistic area should be addressed as a collective whole, instead of trying to deny the existence of more offensive words. Cunningsworth (1984:19) has expressed a similar view. He feels that cultural gaps could cause problems to language learners especially if society, politics or religion differ greatly from those of the target culture.

Crooks (2006:212) argues that there is a right time and place for addressing taboos and taboo language in the classroom. It is, however, problematic as they are still largely avoided due to their controversial nature, and teachers and parents object to teaching them to their students. Some teachers might feel embarrassed or inhibited in mentioning taboos or using taboo language in the classroom, as Claire (1998:v) points out. These inhibitions may be due to the fear of losing one's authority when addressing taboo language to students. The age or gender of students might also make teachers unwilling to use taboos or taboo language in the classroom. For instance, it might be awkward for a teacher to address sex-related issues to younger students, or students of the opposite sex or different ethnicity. Even though teachers might feel inhibited to use taboo language, Mercury (1995:29), nevertheless, argues that taboo language is an essential part of contemporary communication and should therefore be included in teaching.

2.3 PARSNIP and global learning materials

According to Bell and Gower (1998:117), global coursebooks are coursebooks which are targeted for a restricted number of teaching situations in many different countries rather than all teaching situations in all countries. In addition, Gray (2002:151-152) defines global coursebooks as being “that genre of English language textbook which is produced in English-speaking countries and is designed for use as the core text in language classrooms around the world”. Therefore, many topics that are considered to be taboo are often excluded from global coursebooks.

Gray (2002:159) mentions that the philosophy behind global coursebooks is that “one size fits all”. That is to say, global coursebooks have no specific target group or context, and as a result, as Masuraha et al. (2008:299) point out, reading texts are often short or “bland”, thus offering little for learners to think and write about. As a result, safe topics and bland content may contribute to scarcity of engaging and extensive reading and listening tasks. For this reason it may be difficult for teachers to use global coursebooks in the classroom and to keep students engaged.

According to Bell and Gower (1988:118), local textbooks are targeted at a specific learning situation in a particular culture, a quality that global coursebooks lack. Thus, the advantage of local textbooks, as pointed out by Gray (2002:165), is that the size of the book markets is

smaller than is the case with global coursebook markets. As a result, publishers can produce more tailor-made materials and take into consideration the necessary themes which have to be addressed.

In order for the global coursebook to work, however, Bell and Gower (1998:119) emphasise that the materials have to be targeted to some extent, for example to a specific age group or for a specific purpose. Even though it is said that global coursebooks are not targeted to a specific context, Bell and Gower (1998:119) posit the view that global coursebooks can be used around the world quite effectively regardless of the context. Teachers, for example, want to include groupwork in their teaching and to improve learners' communicative competence globally, not solely in Western Europe.

Taboos, as Farberow (1963:3) reports, used to be enforced by chieftains and priests whereas today the role of the enforcer has been taken over by textbook publishers. Indeed, taboos or taboo language are rarely mentioned in global learning materials due to the sensitivity of the area in question. One major concern for both global coursebook writers and publishers is that there are different taboos in different countries, a fact which consequently affects the content of global coursebooks. Therefore, in order to avoid addressing these sensitive issues, Gray (2002:159) reports that global coursebook publishers follow strict rules for what subjects are allowed to be included in global coursebooks. Among these proscribed topics are for example anarchy, AIDS, and Israel.

Gray (2002:159) also mentions a set of rules that are specified in the form of the acronym PARSNIP, which stands for politics, alcohol, racism, sex, narcotics, isms and pork. It is used as a rule of thumb by global coursebook writers and publishers of what not to include in teaching materials. These topics are not only excluded in order to fit global learning materials to as many countries and situations as possible. On the contrary, they are excluded also in order to avoid insulting potential buyers or learners with possibly inappropriate or taboo topics.

3 DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Research questions

The aim of the present study is to examine different types of taboos and taboo language found in Finnish EFL textbooks. Since taboos in educational contexts have not been extensively studied, more research is required in order to shed light on this controversial topic from a more culturally-specific perspective. Previous research in this area (for example, Gray (2002)) has focused on global coursebooks and PARSNIP, which is an acronym used by global coursebook publishers of topics not to be included in EFL learning materials. PARSNIP stands for politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork. As a result of focusing on global coursebooks and PARSNIP, the transferability of PARSNIP to other cultures has been neglected. That is to say, more research is required on culturally-specific taboos to avoid the overly cautious exclusion of all topics which can possibly insult learners in some cultures. Moreover, including only safe and bland topics can have a negative impact on the meaningfulness of EFL learning materials (Masuraha et al. 2008:299).

Taboo language and the importance of learning it have also been studied by some authors. For example Crooks (2006) and Cunningsworth (1984) advocate the importance of learners' communicative competence, which can be significantly enhanced by teaching them about taboo language, as mentioned previously in chapter 2.2. Nevertheless, as taboos and taboo language have been inadequately studied and defined, it may be challenging for a teacher to recognise which topics and expressions actually are taboo in the specific cultural context. As future teachers, we are curious to discover which topics are taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks. More research is necessary on the appearance of taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks in order to learn what topics are taboo in Finnish EFL learning materials. The main research question is the following:

“Can taboos according to PARSNIP be found in Finnish EFL textbooks?” The question can be divided into the following specific questions:

1. Are PARSNIP taboos taboo in Finnish EFL learning materials or, alternatively, do we have our own taboos?

2. What are the functions of the taboos?
3. Does the appearance of taboos increase with the age of the learners?
4. Are certain taboos completely excluded from certain school levels?
5. Is taboo language, that is, cursing, included in EFL learning materials?

3.2 Data

Our data was collected in June 2010 from Finnish EFL textbooks for four different school levels: four textbooks and four exercise books (*Wow!* series 2005-2007) for primary school, three textbooks and three exercise books (*This Way Up* series 2005-2007) for secondary school, eight books (*In Touch* series 2002-2005) for upper secondary school students and five books (*English for You!* and *English for You, too!* series 1998-2008) for adult learners beginning to learn English. The series were chosen in order to provide accurate and current results. Namely, the series chosen for the study are published in the 21st century and are currently in use in Finland. In addition, the series are from two different publishers; *Wow!* and *In Touch* are published by WSOY whereas *This Way Up* and *English for You!* as well as *English for You, Too!* are published by Otava. Textbooks from two different publishers were chosen in order to enhance the reliability of the present study. In the aforementioned textbooks, we examined texts and exercises, excluding listening comprehension tasks, which we did not consider relevant for this particular study, as the tasks mostly repeated the topics of the texts and written exercises.

The taboos that were searched for were: politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork (PARSNIP). Moreover, there was also an effort to locate taboos not listed in PARSNIP, and thus the appearance of the following taboos was also investigated: suicide, violence, abortion, cursing, and smoking (SVACS). SVACS represents the taboos that we regarded as possibly forbidden or avoided topics in Finnish EFL textbooks.

The textbooks were selected in order to get as representative a sample of Finnish EFL coursebooks as possible for the present study. Mainly, our aim was to choose one series of textbooks from each education level in order to guarantee the reliability of the study with the help of a large sample. It must be noted that some textbooks have a specific topic of concern; therefore we felt that complete series of textbooks were needed in order to avoid any sort of involuntary bias towards books concentrating on taboo topics related to our study topic. It is

also noteworthy that the present study is a case study as we do not have a textbook series to use as a control group to which to compare our results.

3.3 Methods of analysis

The method of analysis for the present study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the main method being qualitative analysis. According to Mackey and Gass (2008:182), quantification is applied since it can assist in explaining the data for the reader by demonstrating why certain inferences have been drawn from the data. It can also be used to show how the patterns have been detected. Moreover, this combination of methods was chosen in order to assist us in the verification of possible patterns in the appearance of taboos.

The method of analysis of the present study is quantitative in the sense that we searched for predetermined taboos included in the acronym PARSNIP and the results are presented quantitatively. On the other hand, our method of analysis is qualitative since we have formed a hypothesis of possible taboo subjects to be searched for in Finnish EFL textbooks. To be more specific, our aim was to also induce new categories of taboo subjects from the data, ones not included in PARSNIP. As we did not consider PARSNIP to include all the topics that we regard as taboos, we formed our own set of possible taboo topics, SVACS, which represents smoking, violence, abortion, cursing and suicide.

3.4 Research hypotheses

The following research hypotheses are based on our own experiences on the appearance of taboos as well as literature in the field. Our research hypotheses are as follows:

1. Taboos will be found but their amount is minimal.
2. The appearance of taboo topics increases with the age of the learner.
3. Taboo language is completely excluded from all the textbooks examined.
4. There are few taboos in the textbook series *Wow!* for primary school students whereas in the textbook series for secondary school, upper secondary school, and adult learners the amount of taboos is high and quite similar to one another.

5. Of the taboos belonging to the acronym PARSNIP, narcotics, sex and pork appear the least.
6. Taboos belonging to the acronym SVACS can be found, but only as side notes.

4 DISTRIBUTION OF TABOOS

In the following section, the results of the current study will be both presented and analysed. First, the number of taboos found in Finnish EFL textbooks will be displayed in a quantitative form to provide simple numerical information of the distribution of the taboos found. Second, our findings will be presented and discussed in detail. That is, multiple examples will be given of the taboos found and some reasons for their appearance will be stipulated. In addition, a few case studies will be introduced in order to enable a more comprehensive understanding of how taboos are referred to in chapters which concentrate on the taboo topics of PARSNIP or SVACS.

In the following section, firstly, our findings on taboo topics of PARSNIP will be presented individually in the following order: politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms and pork. Secondly, of the acronym SVACS, smoking, violence and abortion will be examined separately under their own respective headings as done with the taboos of PARSNIP. Cursing and suicide, however, will appear together under one heading due to their absence from the textbook series examined.

The distribution of the taboos in all of the textbook series examined is presented numerically in Figure 1. The data for the figure was collected by adding together the number of each specific taboo found. That is to say, each time a certain taboo word or theme appeared in a text or an exercise, it was counted as one appearance of taboo. There were, however, cases in which one chapter's theme, for example 'Buddhism in Scotland' in *In Touch 4*, concentrated on the topic of religion, thus repeating the term 'religion' several times (*In Touch 4*:67-68). In these cases, whether a taboo was included only once or several times in the same text or exercise, it was counted only as one appearance in order to avoid distorting the results.

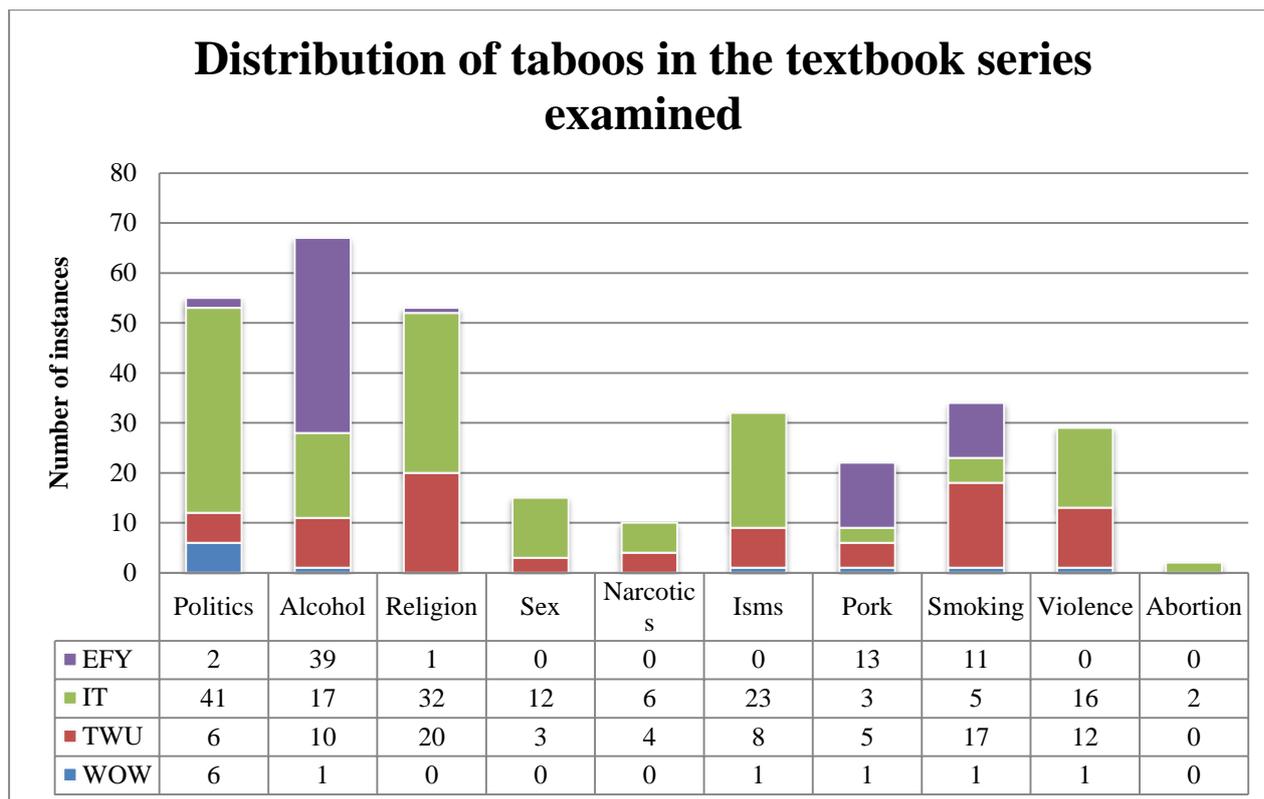


Figure 1. Distribution of taboos in textbook series examined.

EFY: *English for You* (adults); IT: *In Touch* (upper secondary school); TWU: *This Way Up* (secondary school); WOW: *Wow!* (primary school).

As expected, a large number of taboos were found in all of the Finnish EFL textbooks examined, except for the textbooks intended for primary school level. Nevertheless, regardless of the primary school students' young age, some taboo topics were found in those textbooks as well. In addition, the appearance of some taboos, for example, was clearly escalatory, that is, it increases with the age of the learner. It is also worth mentioning that both *Wow!* and *This Way Up* have their own textbook and exercise book in each level. In the following section, we will refer only to textbooks unless otherwise mentioned in order to avoid confusion.

4.1 Politics

In the textbook series we examined, the topic of politics occurs the second most often, alcohol being the first. Most of the textbook series contain versatile and engaging political topics. In the *Wow!* series, which is intended for primary school learners, politics is seldom mentioned,

but topics comparable to politics, such as poverty, human rights, famine, and racism, are covered sensitively and delicately. To illustrate this, in *Wow! 6* it is said that:

- (1) All children have rights. But millions still suffer because they are poor, disabled or have to work. They may also suffer because of their religion, race or gender. (*Wow! 6:55*)

Moreover, in *Wow!* political subjects are approached from a point of view that the young learners might find interesting and approachable, such as the importance of education in escaping poverty:

- (2) Education is important. It is one way to escape being poor. (*Wow! 6:71*)

In the series *This Way Up*, which is targeted for secondary school students, politics is mentioned as seldom as in *Wow!*. Such sensitive representation of political themes as is done in *Wow!*, however, decreases with the age of the learner. Indeed, in *This Way Up*, the extracts from texts and exercises show the true, harsh nature of reality more strongly than in *Wow!*. This is the case with *This Way Up 3*, in which there is a complete text devoted to child labour and the potential problems such work causes. On page 34 of the aforementioned textbook, there is a photograph of young children holding assault rifles. The text informs the reader of hundreds of millions of children who are working to stay alive. They are forced to work as prostitutes and do the most hazardous jobs available. Parents force their children to work either to pay off a debt or to get food, and the children may even be sold to companies for money. After reading the text, the reader is challenged to ponder the following question:

- (3) If we don't buy the products of developing countries, there will be fewer jobs, less money and food, and more dead children. If we keep on buying, there will be more and more children whose childhood will be wasted. What can we do? (*This Way Up 3:35*)

In *This Way Up*, other political topics in addition to child labour are IRA and the political problems of Belfast. Compared to *Wow!*, in which politics is only briefly discussed, *This Way Up* has complete chapters devoted to particular political topics, such as the troubles in Belfast and the above-mentioned child labour. The chapter on Belfast in *This Way Up 2* informs the learner about the divided Belfast, where children learn to hate the opposite side, and military groups from both sides have killed thousands of people, as examples 4-6 below exemplify.

- (4) ... a city literally divided in two – the Protestant and the Catholic areas – even with a wall to separate them. (*This Way Up* 2:92)
- (5) Brendan remembers when he was very young how people around him would say bad things about the Protestants... (*This Way Up* 2:92)
- (6) The Protestant military groups have killed and injured as many people as the IRA. I just read somewhere that in the last thirty years more than 3,500 people have been killed and at least twice that amount have been injured. (*This Way Up* 2:93)

Moreover, the aforementioned textbook provides a chart of the violent history of Northern Ireland. The chart lists violent events of the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s. Altogether ten events are listed, such as the following:

- (7) January 1972: Bloody Sunday. English soldiers killed 13 Catholics in Londonderry. (*This Way Up* 2:94)

Compared to *Wow!* and *This Way Up*, politics is mentioned almost seven times more often in *In Touch*, which is intended for upper secondary school students. This implies a major increase in the number of political topics. Not only is politics discussed factually as in *Wow!* and *This Way Up*, but in *In Touch* politics is also analysed and criticised. One example of how learners are required to criticise and analyse texts and political topics is from *In Touch* 8, in which the learner is expected to answer the following questions:

- (8) In what ways is [the previous text's] terrorist bombing similar to others that have taken place around the world? Why do political groups sometimes resort to bombing? Is it an effective way to further their cause? (*In Touch* 8:80)

It should be noted that the questions above refer to an excerpt from *Eureka Street* by Robert McLiam Wilson. The text describes a scene where a terrorist bomb has exploded on a busy street.

In Touch also dedicates a whole chapter to specific political topics. The manner of handling them, however, differs significantly from those in the series *This Way Up* or *Wow!*, that is, students are also required to reflect on sensitive and personal topics, such as the examples listed below:

- (9) Should compulsory military service be abolished completely in Finland? (*In Touch* 8:86)
- (10) 'Many of the world's problems could be solved if more women were in positions of power.' What do you think? (*In Touch* 8:5)

(11) Was joining the EU a mistake for Finland? (*In Touch* 8:111)

Moreover, politicians are criticised in an example paragraph of grammar section of *In Touch* 4:

(12) There aren't many things that politicians can change in our society, however much effort they put into it. (*In Touch* 4:129)

Students are asked to reflect on the topics either individually, in pairs, or in small groups, but not with the entire class. Regardless of the great number of political content in *In Touch*, it is noteworthy that although the series features a great deal of political content, most of the content is actually featured in *In Touch* 8. This should be taken into account when analysing the results.

The *English for You* series, which is targeted for adults, differs greatly from *In Touch*. Politics is almost completely absent from the texts and exercises of *English for You*. It is only mentioned twice and on both occasions in the following phrase:

(13) They talk about politics. (*English for You* 1:28, 32).

In other words, politics is referred to only by mentioning it, whereas no further discussion of politics is offered, which is surprising considering that the target audience consists of adults.

4.2 Alcohol

Of all the taboo themes examined, alcohol appears the most often in all of the series we examined. It received such a high number due to its numerous occurrences in the series intended for adults, *English for You*. On the contrary, in *Wow!*, alcohol was mentioned only once in an exercise. The exercise is featured close to the end of the exercise book of *Wow! 6*, in which there is a list of statements and the learner has to agree or disagree with them. The statement attached to alcohol is:

(14) Alcohol is bad for you. (*Wow! 6 Busy book*:131)

Most of the statements in the exercise are as effortless to answer as the one attached to alcohol. That is to say, there are clear correct answers to the statements.

A total of ten references are made to alcohol in *This Way Up*. The topic is treated patronisingly and mentioned mostly in negative contexts. For example, in *This Way Up 2* a daughter is having an argument with her parents about going to a party and her mother says:

(15) I'm sure there will be alcohol and drugs floating around and I don't want my 15-year-old daughter to hang around in such places. (*This Way Up 2:47*)

In the aforementioned example alcohol is associated with drugs and treated in a negative light. Nevertheless, although alcohol is treated negatively in most cases, this is not always the case. For example, there are a few instances in which different alcoholic beverages, such as beer and whiskey, are mentioned neutrally by name. This is the case in the lyrics of *American Pie*:

(16) Them good ole boys drinking whiskey and rye (*This Way Up 3:93*)

Whiskey is also mentioned in a chapter called 'Impression of Ireland' in which the learner is taught different expressions in Irish, one of them being:

(17) uisce beatha – whiskey (the water of life) (*This Way Up 2:91*)

In *In Touch*, alcohol is mentioned almost twenty times, which is twice as often than in *This Way Up*. In terms of the treatment of alcohol, *In Touch* differs from *This Way Up* in that it portrays alcohol mostly neutrally. Indeed, in *In Touch* alcohol is only treated negatively when the use of alcohol has become a problem, such as:

(18) They drink too much alcohol. (*In Touch 4:95*)

(19) He drinks like a fish... (*In Touch 4:121*)

(20) I knew that he had a real alcohol problem... (*In Touch 4:126*)

That is to say, whereas in *This Way Up* alcohol in itself is condemned, in *In Touch*, alcohol use is tolerated as long as the use is not a problem, as in examples 21 and 22:

(21) ...if you're desperate for a pint, have a light beer! (*In Touch 4:139*)

(22) If [a pool] had been filled with ice-cold Foster's, I think we could have drunk the lot. (*In Touch 2:63*)

Moreover, on two occasions alcohol is condemned when associated with driving under the influence. On both occasions driving under the influence is deemed very irresponsible or completely forbidden:

(23) It is extremely irresponsible to drive a car while you're under the influence. (*In Touch* 8:92)

(24) You're not driving anywhere until the effects of alcohol [wear off]. (*In Touch* 8:149)

Alcohol is a major theme in *English for You* for adult learners. Different alcoholic beverages, such as beer, cider, red and white wine, and whiskey, are referred to. Moreover, discussions typically take place in a bar setting, and ordering different types of alcoholic beverages in a bar is rehearsed. The topic of alcohol is in all cases treated neutrally, and the patronising and negative tone present in the other series is completely absent from *English for You* as can be seen in the following examples.

(25) He sits in the pub and has a beer with his friends. (*English for You* 1:28)

(26) You know, the usual stuff for a party. Some savoury snacks, salad and something to drink. Have we got any beer? (*English for You, Too!* 2: 115)

(27) They don't have enough beer and cider so Richard pops into an off-license. (*English for You, Too!* 2:127)

4.3 Religion

In our data we perceived a noticeable lack of religion in many of the textbook series investigated. For example, in *Wow!*, intended for primary school learners, religion is entirely excluded. It is worth noticing that in *Wow!* both politics and alcohol are included and discussed, albeit negatively, whereas religion is not included at all. Nonetheless, *Wow!* is not the only textbook series with a noticeable lack of religion as the same was also detected in the series *English for You* in which religion is only briefly implied by the following sentence:

(28) I always go to church on Sundays. (*English for You, Too!* 2:144)

Thus, unexpectedly, the handling of religion in the textbook series intended for adult learners is as scarce as in the textbook series intended for primary school students.

In contrast to *Wow!* and *English for You*, religion is a vastly discussed theme in both the series *In Touch* for upper secondary school students and *This Way Up* for secondary school students. In *This Way Up* the focus of references to religion is explicitly on creating awareness of different religions. There are many indications to different religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, and the Amish church. Of these Islam is mentioned relatively often compared to the other religions. Islam is discussed extensively but neutrally, and learners are informed about the nature of Islam. To illustrate this, the following example tells what it is like to go to school in Gardaia, a town in the Sahara desert:

(29) Don't imagine it's easy for Aicha, because after regular school she has Koranic school, a form of religious education where the children study the Koran. (*This Way Up* 2:15)

The Lutheran church and Christianity are seldom mentioned in *This Way Up*, although Christianity is the main religion in Finland.

In *This Way Up* 3, one chapter concentrates entirely on the Amish community (*This Way Up* 3:72-73). As mentioned above, we noticed that when different religions are discussed in textbooks intended for secondary school students, the meaning of the discussion is usually to create awareness of different ways of living. Indeed, the entire chapter of 'The Amish – another way of life' is very factual and informative. The Amish religion is defined in a very comprehensive and neutral manner:

(30) The Amish don't believe in materialistic values. For them, God, family, community, the soil and hard work are the most important things in life. (*This Way Up* 3:72-73)

Furthermore, some advantages of the Amish culture are discussed, such as the fact that as the Amish children have no television or computers, they are not exposed to drugs and crime to the same amount as children living outside the Amish community.

In the textbook series *In Touch*, which is intended for learners in the upper secondary school, the handling of religion resembles that of *This Way Up*. Nevertheless, *In Touch* also examines different religions in more depth than the other textbook series examined. Moreover, different religions are discussed critically and the possible negative aspects of these religions are occasionally mentioned. To illustrate this, *In Touch* 4 includes an essay titled 'Religion – faith, or just politics and manipulation', in which the writer critically considers different aspects of religion, mentioning the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Middle East as examples:

(31) Politics have always been practised under the disguise of religion. It's easy to take advantage of people's innermost feelings of security and their fear of God. (*In Touch 4:82*)

Chapter 12 of *In Touch 4* is wholly dedicated to Buddhism in Scotland. A Buddhist monastery in Scotland is introduced and readers are informed of the daily routines of youths with former problems in the monastery. It is noted that young people are allowed to take Tibetan monastic orders for a year, and renew it for life if they wish to do so. In addition, the five rules every Buddhist must obey are presented and daily routines are explained in detail. Thus, learners become acquainted with Buddhism quite profoundly and are made aware of the fact that many religions can be practiced regardless of one's location. Therefore, the text gives learners a clear picture of what it is like to practice Buddhism in a Western society. Like many texts that include religion in the *In Touch* series, 'Buddhism in Scotland' does not merely include facts but also brings religion closer to the learners and gives them tools to question and consider the religion from their own points of view.

4.4 Sex

One of our hypotheses was that the topic of sex would be among the most forbidden topics and thus no references to sex would be found in any of the textbooks. Indeed, no references to sex as a topic were found in either *Wow!* or *English for You*. In *This Way Up*, however, some side notes to sex were found, but only in the form of implication to prostitution. In the aforementioned text about child labour, prostitution is given as an example of work children are forced to do involuntarily:

(32) Hundreds of thousands of Asian girls are made to work as prostitutes. Many of them catch HIV.
(*This Way Up 3:35*)

Wow!, however, included a reference to AIDS, a topic which is comparable to sex since it is a sexually transmitted disease.

(33) There is poverty in several countries in Africa, Asia and South America. Many people fall ill with diseases like malaria, AIDS, and tuberculosis. (*Wow! 6 Exercise book:132*)

HIV and AIDS are also mentioned in *This Way Up* and *In Touch*. *This Way Up* refers to HIV once, as can be seen from example 32 above. *In Touch*, on the other hand, refers to AIDS a total of three times in exercises in the following manner:

(34) If we want to inhibit the spread of AIDS, health officials must raise [awareness] about the disease.
(*In Touch* 8:163)

Nevertheless, *English for You* contains no references to either AIDS or HIV. Furthermore, no other sexually transmitted diseases are included in any of the textbook series under examination.

As it can be perceived from example 32, the series for secondary school student presents sex quite negatively. Prostitution is also mentioned in *In Touch*, but this is done neutrally. In addition to prostitution, homosexuality is also discussed neutrally in *In Touch*. Students are, for example, required to consider the rights of homosexuals critically. For instance, in *In Touch* 4 students are asked to discuss whether homosexuals should be allowed to adopt children or not (*In Touch* 4:57). Indeed, our investigation clearly indicates that the textbook series intended for students in upper secondary school includes sex as a topic more often and also handles it more daringly than the other EFL textbook series under scrutiny. To illustrate this, in *In Touch* 2, the following is stated about the Finnish sauna:

(35) The rules are strict and destroy any ideas that you might have had about the sauna being a good place for sexual foreplay. (*In Touch* 2:82)

Having found numerous references to sex from the textbook series intended for pupils in upper secondary school, we expected to find some implications to sex in the textbook series aimed at adult learners. Nevertheless, no implications to sex were found in *English for You*. It is indeed unsurprising that sex is absent in *Wow!* considering the young age and level of maturity of primary school learners. However, as that is not the case with adults, we would have expected to find references to sex in *English for You*, especially since *In Touch* includes sex as a topic.

4.5 Narcotics

Of all the taboo topics examined, narcotics appear the least, being completely absent from both *Wow!* and *English for You*. The absence of narcotics from the series intended for primary school students is unsurprising because of the young age of the learner. *English for You*, however, is targeted for adults, which is why this particular topic could be considered to be acceptable due to the significant representation of alcohol and smoking in the series.

In *This Way Up*, narcotics are given similar treatment as alcohol. That is to say, drugs are depicted solely negatively and patronisingly. Drugs are mentioned merely four times in the series, and during those four times, drugs are associated with crime and vulgarity, as well as promoting violence and the use of alcohol. To illustrate this, in chapter 9 of *This Way Up 3*, a Finnish F-18 Hornet fighter pilot states what learners should not do in order to become a Hornet pilot:

(36)... you shouldn't get a criminal record, you shouldn't neglect your homework and that kind of thing, you shouldn't do drugs (*This Way Up 3:32*).

Narcotics are also mentioned in *In Touch* a total of eight times, which is twice as many as in *This Way Up*. Nevertheless, drugs are featured quite seldom in both series. When narcotics are mentioned in *In Touch*, however, they are already a problem or will lead to problems, such as a drug problem or when using narcotics has led to a fatal accident:

(37)I was eighteen and out of my head on heroin. (*In Touch 3:67*)

(38)...the pilot had cocaine and alcohol in his system at the time of the crash. (*In Touch 5:38*)

As can be seen from examples 37 and 38, specific narcotics, heroin and cocaine are mentioned by name in *In Touch*.

Overall, in *In Touch* narcotics is mentioned less often than alcohol and as a topic it is also treated more negatively than alcohol. There are, nevertheless, some exceptions. We found a text in *In Touch 5* that differs from other texts featured in the series in terms of treatment of narcotics. The text discusses what inspires artists, and it is stated that:

(39)...many artists have been drawn to alcohol and drugs, substances that offer freedom from the conscious mind. (*In Touch 5:30*)

The chapter portrays alcohol and narcotics neutrally, and not in the patronising and negative manner the subject is in most cases treated in both *In Touch* and *This Way Up*.

4.6 Isms

In the present study, isms refer to worldviews, beliefs, philosophies or ideologies, which may be regarded as taboo. For example, some series examined featured a number of environmentalist topics, but as we do not consider environmentalism to be a taboo due to the fact that environmentalism is a global and widely discussed topic that is not forbidden in nature, it is absent from our list of taboos. We, however, regarded isms such as racism, sexism, and terrorism as taboo, and they are thus listed in our taboo chart. We do not list religions, such as Hinduism and Judaism, in isms, as religions are already discussed in their own section.

Themes that we categorise in isms appear in *Wow!* only once in a chapter on Africa. The chapter, however, only implies racism, stating the following:

(40) Differences between black and white people. (*Wow!* 6:51).

We, however, regarded this remark as informing the learners about racism, while not referring to the subject in the straightforward manner as is the case with *This Way Up* and *In Touch*.

There are two types of isms present in *This Way Up*: terrorism and racism. Terrorism appears only once in the series in a text about the problems in Belfast, a case which was previously mentioned in the section about politics in the examples 4, 5, and 6. In the aforementioned text, terrorism is implied as the text tells about bombings and IRA bomb explosions:

(41) Bomb threats were everyday life: watch out for a bag left in a shop, cinema, restaurant, pub, even litter bins in the street. (*This Way Up* 2:93)

Racism, however, appears more often than terrorism in *This Way Up*, racism being mentioned mostly in exercises. For example, in chapter 18 of *This Way Up 3*, a Vietnamese refugee is telling about her experiences living in Denmark and tells that her and her husband's restaurant had been attacked because they are immigrants:

(42) The worst thing that's happened was the Molotov cocktail attack against our restaurant. My husband almost got killed. (*This Way Up* 3:60-61)

As can be seen from the example, the text does not mention racism directly, but it is implied in the text.

In Touch contains three isms: terrorism, racism, and sexism. Terrorism is approached from an analytical point of view. That is, the learner is asked to ponder if terrorist bombing is an effective way to further a cause, as was seen in example 8. There are more similar exercises included in the textbook series, such as the following:

(43) "One person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter." First define the words *terrorist* and *freedom fighter*, then discuss whether there is any truth in this statement. (*In Touch* 8:80)

(44) Why do people become terrorists? What leads to terrorist acts? (*In Touch* 8:80)

That is to say, the learner is asked to reflect on the issue of terrorism from an objective point of view. The learner is also required to consider possible reasons why terrorism occurs and to try to understand why some people become terrorists.

Racism is either presented negatively or even condemned in *In Touch*, and it is referred to several times in *In Touch*, mostly in exercises. This can be seen in the following example:

(45) I get called "spic" just because the colour of my skin. (*In Touch* 2:36)

Racism is also referred to in a few texts, as the following example demonstrates:

(46) Racial prejudice starts at school. (*In Touch* 4:86)

In addition to racism and terrorism, the topic of sexism is also addressed in terms of language. For example, *In Touch 4* offers alternative expressions that are less offensive, racist and sexist in nature. The alternative expressions offered are presented in the figure below:

Offensive	Politically correct
Miss, Mrs	Ms
Christian name	first name
mankind	humankind
Indian	Native American
Eskimo	Inuit
handicapped	disabled
a third world country	a developing country

Figure 2. Less offensive, racist and sexist word choices (*In Touch 4:65*).

All in all, there are almost three times more isms in *In Touch* than in *This Way Up. English for You*, however, features no isms.

4.7 Pork

In our analysis we found one topic, pork, that is not regarded as a taboo in any of the textbook series examined. That is to say, in all the Finnish EFL textbooks examined, pork is regarded as a self-evident part of the Finnish diet and its importance as a part of the Finnish diet is in no way questioned.

As self-evident as pork may be to the Finnish diet, in *This Way Up*, learners are made aware of the fact that pork may be taboo in some cultures. In addition, attention is drawn to the fact that pork may be dietarily restricted for some people either by their ethnic or religious group. Chapter 22 of the textbook *This Way Up 3* titled ‘Meat or no meat?’ concentrates entirely on different reasons for not eating meat, may the reasons be cultural, religious, or the simple decision of not to eat meat, for example by vegetarians and vegans. Different religions in which eating pork is forbidden are introduced, including the Jews and the Muslims. For example, it is mentioned that:

(47) The Kosher laws of Jews forbid pork, seafood and the mixing of meat and dairy products. (*This Way Up 3:70*)

Moreover, some examples are given on the polite manners of serving pork in the presence of people whose religion forbids eating pork.

(48) If pork is served in the presence of Muslims, it should be on a separate table and never on the same plate with other foods. (*This Way Up 3:71*)

Furthermore, it is noted that for Hindus and Sikhs, beef is the forbidden meat, not pork. Attention is also paid to vegetarians and vegans and the fact that they do not eat any meat, including pork. Their reasons for excluding meat from their diets are also discussed. (*This Way Up* 3:70-71.)

Altogether, there are only three references to pork in *In Touch*, which is approximately half less than in *This Way Up*. Of these references, *In Touch* includes mostly discussions that take place in a restaurant and different dishes that include pork are referred to, for example the following:

(49) I'm going for the Pork Madras (*In Touch* 4:45)

In *English for You*, all cases in which pork is mentioned, the discussion takes place in a restaurant. A restaurant's menu includes pork in different forms, such as ham and bacon, and the eaters are discussing their possible meal choices. (*English for You, Too! Starter*:50-51).

4.8 Smoking

Smoking is a part of the acronym SVACS (smoking, violence, abortion, cursing, and, suicide), which lists subjects that we regarded as taboo at the beginning of the present study in addition to the taboos included in the acronym PARSNIP. Smoking is mentioned at least once in all the EFL textbook series we examined. In *Wow!*, smoking is mentioned only once in an exercise, which contains a list of statements. The learner has to agree or disagree with the statements, and the one attached to smoking is:

(50) Smoking is good for you. (*Wow! 6 Busy Book*:131).

Contrary to *Wow!*, in *This Way Up* smoking is mentioned several times, mostly in a patronising manner. In the chapter 'Do looks matter?', it is stated several times that one should stop smoking and the text is followed with exercises which require learners to think of different ways to succeed in quitting smoking (*This Way Up* 2:120-121). For instance, learners are asked to ponder the following questions in pairs:

(51) What help can the smoker get? (*This Way Up* 2:124)

(52) What else could the smoker do? (*This Way Up* 2:124)

The learner is also required to estimate how much smoking costs in a week and in a year, and how smoking affects one's appearance (*This Way Up* 2:123-124).

In contrast, although smoking is discussed patronisingly, different types of cigarette products are included in the vocabulary for learners to memorise. To illustrate this, the following list of cigarette products are included in the vocabulary: cigarette, nicotine, chew tobacco, and snuff (*This Way Up* 2 Exercises:123).

In Touch includes fewer references to smoking than *This Way Up*, but whereas in *This Way Up* smoking is treated condescendingly, all the references to smoking in *In Touch* are made in a non-patronising manner. To illustrate this, quitting smoking is discussed in *In Touch* many times but it is done neutrally. That is to say, one is not specifically told to stop smoking but references are made to people who are either trying to quit or have already quit smoking. This is the case in the following excerpt from a grammar section:

(53) I've made up my mind to quit smoking, but I know the next few months will be tricky. (*In Touch* 4:130)

The textbook series *English for You* also has yet a different manner of handling smoking. In other words, as in *In Touch*, smoking is discussed neutrally but no stories of someone quitting smoking are included. Neither is one urged to quit smoking. Instead, smoking is discussed in an inquiring manner. To illustrate this, *English for You* includes a chapter titled 'Do you smoke?' in which learners practice forming questions of which "Do you smoke?" is practised many times (*English for You* 1:42-43).

4.9 Violence

Violence was among the topics that we considered to be taboo and, therefore, we did not expect to find a total of 29 references to violence. In addition, it was unexpected that violence would be present in *Wow!*, a series intended for primary school students due to the young age of the students. It is, however, present only in one text, which is an excerpt from the English version of *The Seven Brothers*. The text includes the following scene:

(54) But the brothers didn't run away. They used their poles to hit the bulls. And Juhani used his axe. Soon, two bulls lay dead. Tuomas saved Timo's life by breaking a bull's back. (*Wow!* 6:91-92)

In *This Way Up*, violence is mentioned ten times. When violence is present, it often takes place in a school. Violent events are depicted in detail in the manner presented in example 55:

(55) "Violence is everyday life here. The gangs terrorise the whole neighborhood. ... Bullying is the rule rather than the exception, and one teacher even got stabbed just last week. The police are here nearly every day, I'm afraid," says the principal Mrs. Wicker. (*This Way Up* 2:14)

A common theme in both *This Way Up* and *In Touch* is the conflicts in Northern Ireland, both series dedicating a whole chapter to the topic. As seen in example seven, *This Way Up* 2 lists the violent history of Northern Ireland (*This Way Up* 2:94).

Violence is also present in the *In Touch* series. In addition to the aforementioned violence in Northern Ireland, common themes in the series are genocide, terrorism, and the right to use violence. To illustrate this, *In Touch* 8 includes an exercise in which learners are required to ponder the following:

(56) Is violence ever an acceptable way of handling a situation? Are there times when you think it is reasonable to use violence? (*In Touch* 8:80)

The series also features two excerpts of novels that include violent events and expressions. For example, an excerpt from *The Gladiator* by Dewey Gram features the following scene:

(57) The spear sliced through a gladiator's neck, killing him instantly. He fell, ungainly and hard, blood bubbling through his wound. (*In Touch* 5:71)

In terms of violence, although *This Way Up* and *In Touch* share some common themes, there are also differences. For instance in *This Way Up*, the place of violence is often a school, whereas violence never takes place in school in *In Touch*. Contrary to our expectation, although there are many references to violence in both of these series, there are no references to violence in *English for You* even though its target group is older than that of *In Touch*.

4.10 Abortion

The topic of abortion is present in one textbook series, *In Touch*, in which abortion is referred to twice. The first reference to abortion is found in a text and the second in a multiple choice exercise concerning the previously mentioned text. The text is about two Indian women, one of whom is pregnant. The women have gone for an ultrasound scan at the hospital, but the sex of the baby is withheld from them. This is due to the fact that many Asian women terminate the pregnancy when they discover that the baby is a girl. Nevertheless, instead of *abortion*, the term *termination* is used.

(58) 'Well, you see' - she blushed - 'with our ... Asian ladies, we tend not to reveal the sex. It's just, we had a number of the ladies afterwards requesting ... terminations, when they found out they were carrying girls.' (*In Touch* 8:47)

(59) 6. Why is Sunita furious about the hospital policy of not telling Asian women the sex of their babies?
A. She feels Asian women should be supported in terminating their pregnancies. (*In Touch* 8:49)

4.11 Cursing and suicide

Cursing and suicide are absent from all of the textbooks examined in the present study. Although actual cursing and curse words are absent from all of the textbook series, one case that resembles cursing was found in *In Touch* 5. In the aforementioned case, an excerpt from *Educating Rita* by Willy Russell, the main character of the novel says:

(60) But listen, it wasn't borin', it was bleedin' great, honest, ogh, it done me in, it was fantastic. (*In Touch* 5:19)

We perceived this as an imitation of inappropriate language while not actually cursing and thus not taboo language. Therefore, it was not included in Figure 1, but we considered this to be noteworthy.

4.11 Summary

One of our assumptions was that some taboos included in PARSNIP and SVACS would be found in Finnish EFL textbooks but their amount would be minimal. Contrary to our belief, a total of over 300 appearances of taboos belonging to PARSNIP and SVACS were found in

the four textbook series examined, the most taboos being found in *In Touch* and the least in *Wow!*. Both *This Way Up* and *In Touch* include all the taboos of PARSNIP. Of all the taboos in all of the textbooks examined, alcohol, politics, and religion appeared the most, whereas cursing and suicide were completely absent in every series investigated. Furthermore, abortion was present in only one textbook series, *In Touch*. In addition, as predicted by one of our hypotheses, the least present PARSNIP taboos found were narcotics and pork.

Some of the SVACS taboos, such as cursing and suicide, were absent in all of the textbook series included in the present study. As cursing is absent, our hypothesis of taboo language being excluded from all the textbooks examined is correct. Smoking and violence, however, were present in most of the textbook series and the number of references found to both smoking and violence were high. Therefore, contrary to one of our hypotheses, they were not merely side notes but were used as main themes in many texts.

As predicted in one of our hypotheses, the findings of our study indicate that the handling of taboos becomes bolder and increases with the age of the learner. The hypotheses was correct in terms of *Wow!*, *This Way Up*, and *In Touch*. With *English for You*, however, the appearance of taboos significantly decreases in number, which results in the series resembling *Wow!* more in terms of appearance of taboos than *This Way Up* or *In Touch*. This may be due to the fact that *English for You* is aimed at learners beginning to study English and thus includes similar topics as *Wow!*, which is intended for children at the beginning of their English studies.

To conclude, a great number of taboos were found in the textbooks under examination and all of the PARSNIP taboos were present in the Finnish EFL textbooks. Therefore, PARSNIP seems not to be the rule of thumb of the topics not to be included in Finnish EFL learning materials. That is to say, in the light of the findings of the present study, we do not consider PARSNIP taboos to be taboo in Finnish EFL learning materials. Moreover, our assumption that smoking, violence, abortion, cursing, and suicide (SVACS) are taboos was partially correct since of these, cursing and suicide are absent in all the learning materials examined. Because of their absence, they can be considered to be topics too emotionally loaded to be included in EFL learning materials and, therefore, to be taboo in Finnish EFL textbooks.

5 TEXTBOOK PROFILES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS

The results of the present study show that contrary to global coursebooks, local Finnish EFL textbooks include many topics that are categorised as taboos by the acronyms PARSNIP and SVACS. Therefore, Finnish EFL textbooks appear to have different taboos than global coursebooks. The present study was necessary since research on taboos in learning materials has concentrated mainly on theory and global coursebooks. Therefore, there is a lack of empirical data which can either validate or invalidate the results of the present study.

The results of the present study imply that the only topics taboo in all four educational levels are cursing and suicide due to their absence from all the series examined. Many taboo topics of both PARSNIP and SVACS are absent from the series for both primary school and adult learners. In other words, in primary school textbooks religion, narcotics, sex, and abortion seem to be taboo, whereas the taboos of adult learners seem to be sex, narcotics, isms, violence, and abortion. In contrast, both secondary school and upper secondary school seem to have no taboos, since all the taboos, excluding the above-mentioned cursing and suicide, are present in both the textbook series, except for abortion, which is present only in the series intended for upper secondary school.

The aim of the following section is to connect the results of the present study with the theoretical content of chapter two. In other words, since many of the studies presented in section two are made on global coursebooks, in this section our main aim is to analyse our results in the light of the previous studies and consider if their implications also apply to the local Finnish EFL textbooks. We will start by presenting the profiles of each of the textbook series investigated, combined with an analysis of the distribution of taboos within different textbook series. Then, we will provide answers to our research questions. Finally, we will progress to comparing our findings with the findings of the previous studies on the field.

5.1 Profiles of the four textbook series examined

In this section, we will provide an in-depth analysis of our findings. Furthermore, we will suggest possible explanations for these findings. The analysis will be presented series by series, according to the intended target age, in the following order: *Wow!*, *This Way Up*, *In*

Touch and *English for You*. A profile figure of each series is provided, followed by our analysis.

5.1.1 *Wow!*

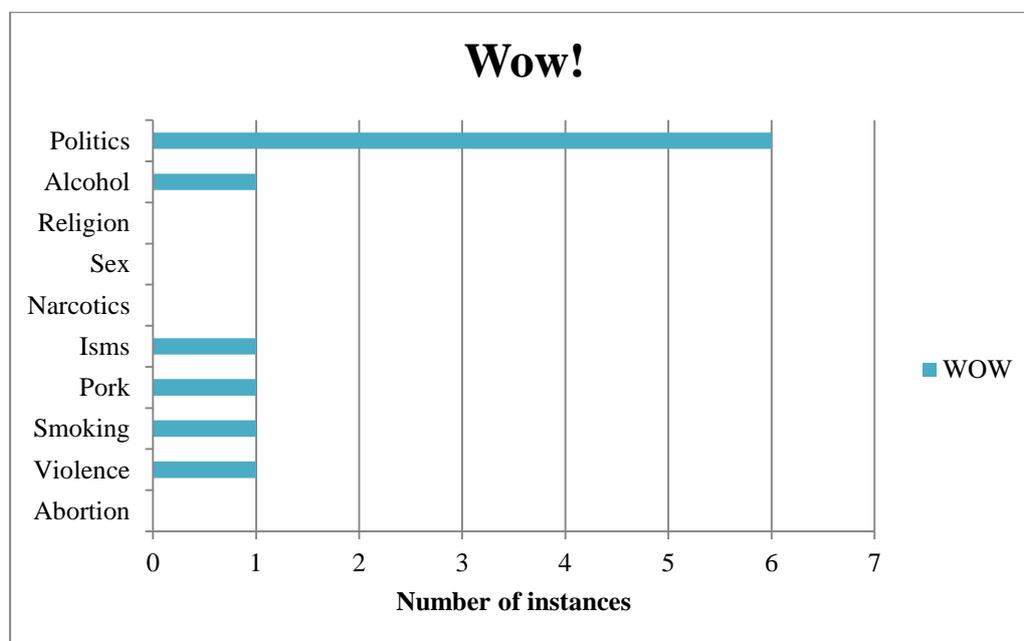


Figure 3. Distribution of taboos in the *Wow!* series.

As can be seen from Figure 3, the results of the present study clearly show that in most cases the number of taboos found in *Wow!* is minimal. From the taboos that are present in the series, politics is the only one that is mentioned more than once, the number of references being six. We believe that the reason for the relatively large number of appearances of politics is due to the intention of making children aware of different problems other children may have all over the world. Moreover, the narrator of the text is often a child and the reason for this could be to enable children to identify themselves with the narrator. It is noteworthy that references made to politics are not made in the same manner as in *This Way Up* or *In Touch*, that is, politics is not transparently referred to by the term ‘politics’. What we considered to be political topics, especially in *Wow!*, are topics that are presented in order to create awareness of political subjects.

On the other hand, taboos that are completely absent from the series are religion, sex, narcotics, and abortion. While it is understandable that sex, narcotics, and abortion are not referred to in a textbook series intended for primary school students, it is, however,

unexpected that religion is not mentioned since there are quite many references to politics. In our opinion this is unexpected because religion is not as sensitive a topic as sex, narcotics and abortion. It also would be worth discussing whether religion, sex, narcotics, and abortion are considered to be more sensitive topics than politics and alcohol. Furthermore, it is worth considering if religion cannot be mentioned in negative contexts, as is possible with politics and alcohol.

5.1.2 *This Way Up*

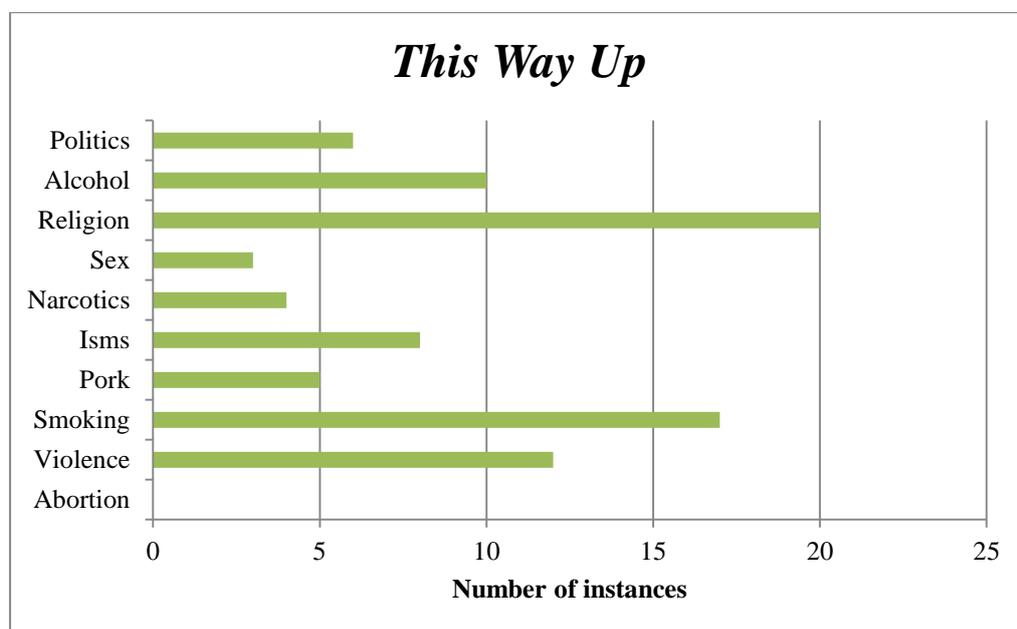


Figure 4. Distribution of taboos in the *This Way Up* series.

As can be seen from the figure above, compared to *Wow!*, the number of taboos is clearly larger in *This Way Up*. Moreover, contrary to *Wow!*, the series has more than one reference to all the examined taboos, except for abortion, which is absent in the series. Of all the taboos included in the series, religion and smoking are referred to the most. Smoking is indeed a current topic for adolescents since smoking is usually experimented on for the first time in secondary school. This might also be the reason for the portrayal of smoking as hazardous and unbeneficial for learners' well-being. In other words, learners are informed about the dangers of smoking at the time in their life, when they are probably the most prone to start smoking.

It is unexpected that although religion is absent from *Wow!*, it is the taboo most referred to in the *This Way Up*. The explanation for this may be that most students in secondary school are

experiencing puberty and thus are questioning different ideologies and points of view while shaping their identity. At that age, learners easily form harsh opinions on different subjects and the reason for the large number of references to religion thus might be to both inform the students about different religions and alleviate possible prejudice. This is especially important with Islam as students can absorb severely negative and prejudiced attitudes from their peers and parents towards Islam.

Of all the taboos included in the series, sex and narcotics have the least references in *This Way Up*. We believe that the reason for this might be due to the overall opinion that mentioning sex might have a disrupting effect on the lesson. An assumption can be made that sex can be mentioned only indirectly without disrupting the lesson as, of all the three references to sex, all are about prostitution or prostitutes. One explanation for this might be that although sex in particular is not mentioned to students, prostitution can be mentioned without baffling them since they are already familiar with the concept of sex.

5.1.3 *In Touch*

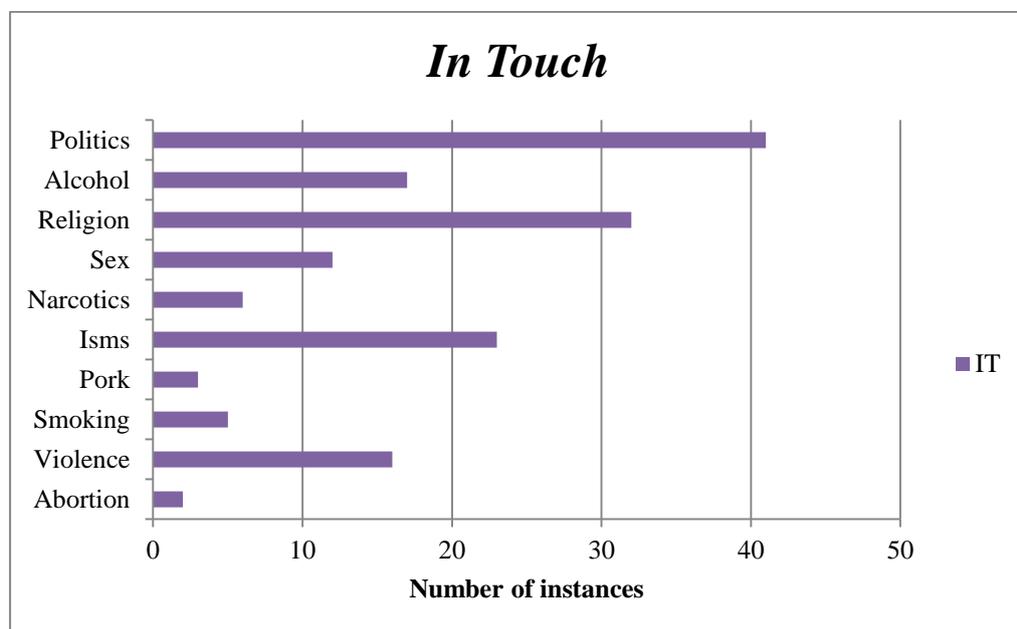


Figure 5. Distribution of taboos in the *In Touch* series.

As Figure 5 above demonstrates, the series for upper secondary school features a large number of references to politics, religion, and isms. These topics are covered in-depth in *In Touch*, political content being present the most. Politics and political problems indeed are

handled from different points of view and students are required to contemplate political topics critically. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that, however widely politics is covered, most of the political content in *In Touch* is present in *In Touch 8*, with the total of political references being 25 out of 41. This should be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions from the results.

Religion and isms are also widely covered in *In Touch*. To illustrate this, world religions are handled extensively. Contrary to *This Way Up*, references to Christianity are made in *In Touch*. In addition to this, isms, that is, terrorism and racism, are also often referred to. Moreover, it is noteworthy that *In Touch* is the only textbook series with references to sexism. Nonetheless, the series in itself is not sexist, but includes content which informs learners of less sexist word choices, which can be seen in Figure 2 in chapter 4.6.

We believe that the choice of themes in the series serves the purpose of general education, which aims to teach learners to reflect on topics critically and objectively. Some of these topics can even be regarded as controversial as in examples 43 and 44, in which learners are required to treat terrorism objectively. The skills of critical thinking and objectivity are needed especially in the matriculation examination as well as later in life.

Smoking is one of the topics least referred to in *In Touch* and is treated quite neutrally. We believe that this is due to the fact that students in upper secondary school are approaching adulthood and thus are capable of making their own decisions about topics such as smoking and alcohol. They have also been informed of the dangers of smoking previously. That is why treating smoking patronisingly would in fact hinder learning by creating a negative and patronising atmosphere in the classroom.

Pork is also one of the topics with least representation. As has been noted from the previous series examined, *Wow!* and *This Way Up*, pork is not considered to be taboo in the Finnish society. In *In Touch* pork is referred to in discussions which take place in restaurants. There are, however, few references to pork in general. All in all, the maturity of the target audience in question can be seen in both the overall choice of topics and the manner of handling them.

In Touch is the only series with references to abortion. It is to be noted, however, that the term *termination* is used instead of abortion. The reason for use of the euphemism *termination* may

be its relative neutrality compared to the term *abortion*, and thus more appropriate to be included in a language textbook. Due to the fact that abortion is an emotionally loaded topic, it is understandable that, if referred to, it is depicted only neutrally and as a side note. Nevertheless, we feel that since *termination* is such an emotionally loaded topic, its use is very unexpected.

5.1.4 *English for You*

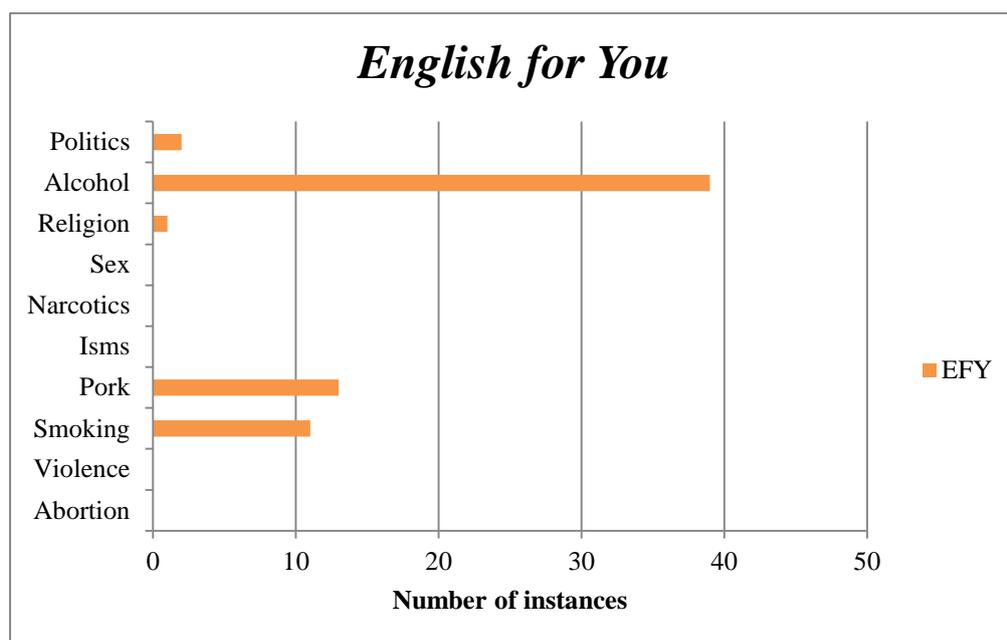


Figure 6. Distribution of taboos in the *English for You* series.

As demonstrated in Figure 6, *English for You* is characterised by a large number of references to alcohol. Moreover, smoking and pork are also featured often in the series. We believe that a probable reason for this is the needs of adult learners. In other words, adults often begin to study English for travelling purposes, and alcohol, smoking and food, or more specifically, pork, are closely related to travelling. These themes are therefore an essential part of tourist vocabulary.

The topics with the least references in *English for You* are politics and religion. This could be due to the fact that adult learners already have political and religious stances, and thus it could be unfeasible to address politics and religion. Moreover, since the topics cannot be neutrally approached, they could cause disagreements and possibly insult someone. This could divert

the attention from the lesson and therefore the safest option is to exclude them from the series altogether.

Sex, narcotics, isms, violence, and abortion are completely absent from *English for You*. Of the seven PARSNIP taboos, a total of three are excluded from the series. Due to their absence, of all the textbook series examined, *English for You*, resembles a global coursebook the most. The small number of references to politics and religion also supports this view since five of the seven PARSNIP taboos are almost completely absent from the series. Hence, the only PARSNIP taboos present are alcohol and pork.

5.2 Answers to research questions

All PARSNIP taboos were present in two of the series examined. Nevertheless, most of the PARSNIP taboos were present in all of the series we examined. We also searched for our own set of taboos, SVACS, and found that while three of the taboos were present in one of the series examined, two taboos were completely absent in all the series. The taboos absent were cursing and suicide. Yet, before drawing conclusions on their absence, it is worth questioning whether they are actual taboos or merely topics excluded from Finnish learning materials.

Overall, the taboos included had two functions. Some taboos, such as politics, religion and isms, were used to create awareness by informing learners about different cultural customs, politics and different ideologies and points of view. Other taboos were used to advise learners of the dangers of, for example, alcohol, smoking and narcotics. This was realised by informing learners of the dangers of toxic substances and their possible effects on everyday life.

It was found that, overall, the appearance of taboos does increase with the age of the learner. As the age and proficiency of the learner increases, the number of taboos also increases. This is the case with the series *Wow!*, *This Way Up*, and *In Touch*. With the adult series, *English for You*, the proficiency level is low and this may explain the low number of taboo appearances in the series. Moreover, *English for You* starts from the basics, as does *Wow!*, and indeed, a similar lack of taboo appearance can be seen in both series.

5.3 Relation to previous studies

The area of study, that is, taboos in EFL learning materials, is lacking research and thus the present study offered completely new types of results to the topic of taboos in learning materials, especially Finnish EFL textbooks. No study on the appearance of taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks has, to our knowledge, been conducted in Finland before and this makes the present study significant. Thus, the present study offers a framework with the help of which further research can be conducted on the topic.

Local coursebooks, a group to which Finnish EFL textbooks also belong, do not have such a great number of topics to avoid as global coursebooks do. This is due to the fact that they are catering for a smaller number of learners than global coursebooks. We did indeed find many different taboo topics. Nevertheless, some of the textbook series examined, in particular *English for You* and *Wow!*, include mainly safe topics that are not likely to insult anyone, such as travelling, small talk, food, and hobbies. As stated by Masuraha et al. (2008:299), these types of safe topics and bland content contribute to the scarcity of engaging and extensive reading and listening tasks, thus making the learning materials less meaningful. There were, however, instances when topics that could insult someone were also included, such as some isms (terrorism, racism) and religion. These topics were, however, found mostly in *This Way Up* and *In Touch*.

As noted by Gray (2002:159), global course materials have their own taboo subjects, and among these commonly excluded taboos are AIDS, sex, sexuality or issues of sexual preference, as well as narcotics and alcohol. In the light of the results of the present study, in Finnish EFL textbooks AIDS, narcotics and alcohol do not seem to be taboo, since numerous references to them were found in many of textbooks examined. Sex, sexuality, and issues of sexual preference, on the other hand, seem to still be at least partly taboo in Finnish EFL textbooks. Homosexuality, sexism, prostitution, as well as sexual foreplay are mentioned in some texts or exercises but none of these topics are the main topic of any chapter whereas, in contrast, some chapters were dedicated to alcohol exclusively. Furthermore, although Allan and Burridge (2006:105) report that new taboos on for example ethnicity and race have appeared in English-speaking society, ethnicity and race seem not to be taboo in Finnish EFL textbooks but contrary to this, different ethnicities are present especially in *In Touch*.

It is important that Finnish EFL textbooks include taboo topics such as politics and religion since, as reported by Cunningsworth (1984:19), cultural gaps could cause problems to language learners especially if society, politics or religion differ greatly from those of the target culture. It is indeed important to learn about practices of different countries in order to not to be misunderstood and consequently insult someone. Although references to politics and religion are entirely excluded from global coursebooks, in Finnish EFL textbooks they are quite great in number. Indeed, the present study indicates that religion and politics are not taboo in Finland but that learners are made aware of them, and in the case of the *In Touch* series, are also encouraged to examine them critically. Thus, it seems that different religions and politics are a part of common knowledge in the Finnish culture and thus there is no need to exclude them from the learning materials in the fear of insulting someone.

Students need to learn different connotations words may have, to which Allan and Burrige (2006:48) refer to as cross-varietal synonyms. Although the curricula for comprehensive school and upper secondary school in Finland both address the importance of communication, communicative competence and behaviour in a culturally acceptable manner, there are few references to politically acceptable speech in the textbooks examined (Figure 2). It is, however, our strong opinion that cross-varietal synonyms play an important part in learners' second language acquisition, especially in terms of understanding which are acceptable word choices, and therefore they should be included in EFL learning materials. As stated by Mercury (1995:34), not only do learners need to know what is taboo language but they also have to understand that nature of the conversational situation, that is, whether it is public or private, determines whether taboo language is acceptable or not.

In our opinion it is important that taboos are included in Finnish EFL textbooks since this means that a teacher is not solely responsible for implementing taboos in one's learning materials. Since implementing taboos is largely dependant on a teacher's personality and effort, a teacher who does not know how to include such materials in teaching might exclude taboo materials altogether. As a result, the students' communicative competence is not addressed wholly. As stated by Mercury (1995:34), a student, however, needs to learn what obscenities are in order to be able to use correct expressions in different situations, may they be public or private.

Mercury (1995:33-34) reports that English speakers consider taboo language to belong to their private domain, not to a public setting, such as a school. There are, however, different manners of implementing taboo language in teaching, as presented by Claire (1998:197-198). Claire discusses some important aspects to bear in mind when familiarising learners with certain aspects of taboo language. First of all, the teacher should take learners into consideration by informing them beforehand of the upcoming taboo content and give students possible alternative tasks if they feel uncomfortable with handling taboos. Secondly, if the teacher feels uncomfortable with the topic at hand, he or she should be honest with the students and admit being uncomfortable or, if possible, assign a different teacher for the lesson. Thirdly, if it is impossible to inform students about taboo topics in the classroom, the teacher should advise how students can learn about taboos and their appropriate use independently outside the classroom. In addition to Claire's guidelines, Mercury (1995:35) believes that learners should have a chance to discuss taboos and taboo language in order to give learners a comprehensive idea of their correct usage.

6 CONCLUSION

Communicative competence and knowledge of cultural taboos are increasingly important in today's global world, and in order to communicate successfully, learners should be made aware of appropriate and inappropriate language. Little research, however, has been conducted on the topic of taboos and taboo language in EFL learning materials, especially concerning local EFL learning materials. The purpose of the present study was therefore to investigate which topics are taboo in local Finnish EFL textbooks. More specifically, the study examined whether the same topics that are taboo in global EFL learning materials are also taboo in local Finnish EFL learning materials.

The present study found that all taboo topics that are advised to be excluded from global coursebooks were present in two Finnish EFL textbook series examined. In other words, politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork were present in the local learning materials examined. Furthermore, five other, possible taboo topics were searched for in the local learning materials. Two of these taboos, violence and smoking, were present in at least three of the four textbook series examined, whereas one taboo, abortion, was present in one of

the textbook series examined. The two remaining taboos, that is cursing and suicide, were completely absent from all of the textbook series examined. Due to their absence, we came to the conclusion that these two taboos are taboo in the Finnish educational context and thus excluded from local Finnish learning materials.

The results of the present study show that local learning materials have more taboo topics included in them than global learning materials. This might be due to their smaller target group. That is, it is easier for EFL textbook publishers and writers to create learning materials that are more versatile in terms of topics covered because smaller target groups have clearly defined and widely acknowledged taboos among them. Several studies also consider taboos and taboo language to be an important part of learner's communicative competence. Finnish EFL textbooks can thus be considered to serve the purpose of enhancing learners' communicative competence better than global coursebooks. Therefore, local learning materials could be an appropriate context for taboo language, which, regardless of different taboo topics included, is still excluded.

Nevertheless, the present study has its limitations. Firstly, although the number of textbooks examined is high, the results cannot be generalised to all Finnish EFL textbooks since we only inspected one series per each school level. In order to receive results that can be generalised, a larger scale study must be conducted on the area in which the number of series per each school level is at least two. That would allow comparison of acquired results to another textbook series. Secondly, another limitation of the study is that the local textbook series we examined are only from one location, that is, Finnish EFL learning materials. More research should be conducted in other countries as well in order to determine if most local learning materials do include more taboos than global learning materials. Finally, a comparison should be made between actual global and local learning materials in order to determine whether or not they exclude the same taboos as well as if global coursebooks exclude the taboos that they are advised to.

More research should be conducted before the results can be generalised, due to the fact that there are few studies on the subject of including taboos and taboo language in EFL learning materials. More specifically, it should be investigated whether local coursebook publishers have guidelines on what to exclude from their learning materials, and if these guidelines correspond to those of global coursebook publishers. Moreover, further research should be

done on the benefits and disadvantages of including taboo topics in learning materials. On the whole, more studies should be conducted on such an interesting and current topic, which has a great effect on learners' communicative competence.

All in all, the question of whether taboos should be included in or excluded from EFL textbooks should not be oversimplified. Rather, it should be asked which is more advantageous for learners; that their ability to function in different cultural contexts is increased, or that they learn the use of a foreign language by trial and error, possibly insulting other people in the process. In other words, it is to be questioned whether it is more important that learning materials are safe and thus do not insult anyone, or that learning materials are actually beneficial for the learner in terms of enhancing their communicative competence.

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