

IB UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL AND NATIONAL UPPER SECONDARY
SCHOOL STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ENGLISH ORAL SKILLS:

A comparative study

Master's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa suomalaisten lukio-opiskelijoiden asenteita englannin suullista kielitaitoa ja sen testaamista kohtaan. Tietoa kerättiin kyselylomakkeen avulla kahden kaupungin IB-lukioista ja samoissa kouluissa toimivista kansallisista lukioista. Vastaajia oli yhteensä 184. Tutkimuksessa haluttiin selvittää, millaisia asenteita Suomen lukiolaisilla on englannin suullista kielitaitoa kohtaan. Samalla selvitettiin myös opiskelijoiden asenteita suullisen kielitaidon testaamista kohtaan varsinkin kansallisen- ja IB-lukion päättövaiheessa. Tutkimuksen päätavoitteena oli vertailla kansallisten lukiolaisten ja IB-lukiolaisen asenteita toisiinsa.</p> <p>Suullisen kielitaidon kasvava tarve on johtanut siihen että sitä on alettu painottaa enemmän myös opetuksessa. Koska englanti on globaali kieli, jota puhutaan lähes kaikkialla maailmassa, pitäisi englannin suullista kielitaitoa harjoitella kouluissa mahdollisimman paljon. Jos suullista kielitaitoa painotetaan opetuksessa, on loogista ajatella, että sitä myös testataan koulussa. Kansallisissa lukioissa kaikkia muita kielitaidon osa-alueita testataan lukion päättövaiheessa ylioppilaskokeilla paitsi kielten suullista taitoa vaikka lukiolaisilta odotetaankin melko hyvää suullistakin kielitaitoa.</p> <p>Asenteet vaikuttavat käsityksiin kielistä ja tätä kautta myös kielten oppimiseen. Positiivinen asenne kieltä kohtaan auttaa myös sen opiskelussa. Tässä tutkimuksessa asenne-käsite määriteltiin ensin yleisellä tasolla, sen jälkeen tarkasteltiin suomalaisten asenteita englantia kohtaan ja keskityttiin varsinkin suomalaisten oppijoiden asenteisiin.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että yleisesti molemmilla ryhmillä on positiivinen asenne englannin suullista kielitaitoa kohtaan ja molemmat ryhmät pitävät suullista kielitaitoa erittäin tärkeänä. Kansalliset lukiolaiset kokevat, että he saavat ehkä liian vähän opetusta suullisen kielitaidon saralla ja tämä johtaa siihen, että he suhtautuvat suullisen kielitaidon testaamiseen hieman IB-lukiolaisia negatiivisemmin. IB-lukiolaiset puolestaan saavat päivittäin paljon harjoitusta suullisessa kielitaidossa ja he myös tietävät, että heillä on lukion lopussa pakollinen suullisen kielitaidon koe. Tämän seurauksena IB-lukiolaiset suhtautuvat englannin suullisen kielitaidon testaamiseen paljon rennommin ja myönteisemmin kuin kansalliset lukiolaiset.</p>	
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1. INTRODUCTION

Oral skills have become more and more appreciated in the modern world since globalization has brought a new meaning for the term community. Distances are shorter than they have been before and more people communicate with other people in different countries and even continents on a daily basis. Business schools, as well as basic education, have awakened to the fact that communicational skills are vastly needed in today's world. Much of communication takes place orally and therefore the teaching and learning of these skills have gained more ground in education. In Finland the teaching and assessing of the oral skills of foreign languages has given rise to a lot of discussion in the recent past. Teaching materials have taken a turn towards having more communication exercises. Also the topic of the status of oral skills in Finnish upper secondary schools is very current since the status of oral skills has not yet been made "official" in upper secondary schools. This is because the matriculation examination still lacks a section of oral skills. All other language skills (writing, reading and listening) are being tested but not oral skills. The discussion has divided the opinions of, for example, teachers. Some claim that there should be an oral test in the matriculation examination because oral skills is an important part of language proficiency. Others, on the other hand, state that such a test is not needed and that preparing for and organizing such a test is too difficult and time consuming. For example the questions of objectivity and test arrangements have been brought out in the discussion. The purpose of this study is to find out how students in Finnish upper secondary schools feel about oral skills in English and testing them. Also the mechanism of testing oral skills will be discussed because there are many factors to testing oral skills that have to be taken into consideration when planning tests. The most likely reason to not having a section of oral skills in the matriculation examination of languages is the view that it is very difficult, and expensive, to organize such a test. Also this view will be addressed to some extent in this study. The focus of this study is on students because previous studies have been made on the teachers' opinions on oral skills. Also a new perspective of a comparative study is added to the present study because it focuses on comparing the attitudes of students in Finnish national upper secondary schools and Finnish IB upper secondary schools. These two schools have quite different ways of organizing studies and perhaps this comparison will bring out differences that might help to make the teaching and testing on oral skills better.

According to Gardner (1985), attitudes are a major factor that influences second language learning. Because attitudes are such an important factor in learning they deserve to be studied more. The

studying of attitudes provides teachers, scholars and all who work in the school environment valuable information that can be used, for example, in making teaching more efficient, learner friendly and up-to-date. Attitudes in general have been quite a popular field of study so the field of the present study was narrowed down to focus on learner attitudes and more specifically students' attitudes towards oral skills in English.

The data of this study were collected with a questionnaire from schools which have both the national upper secondary school and the IB upper secondary school in two major Finnish cities. The cities were selected purely on the grounds of convenience. The purpose of the study is to compare the attitudes of students in national upper secondary school and in IB upper secondary school. The results of the two participating cities will not be compared to each other.

This thesis will first introduce how English is taught and learned in Finland. After this the differences of national upper secondary school and IB upper secondary school will be discussed in more detail. A closer look will be taken first into their school systems in general and then the teaching of English in these two institutions will be discussed in more detail. The study will then move on to describing oral skills and attitudes. Some of the most well-known theories on oral skills will be discussed first and in this section also a closer look will be taken on testing and assessing oral skills. The next theme discussed in the study is attitudes and their influence on second language learning. After discussing attitudes, some previous studies will be introduced. This will be followed by a section on the aims, purpose, data and methods of the present study. Finally, there will be a section of the results of the study and some discussion on them.

2. TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH IN FINLAND

Johanna Birkstedt (2004: 242-251) sums up the history of English teaching in Finland. Birkstedt (2004: 243) explains that English was first introduced into the Finnish education system in the middle of the 1800s. English was first added to the curriculum of some eight-grade secondary schools as a new modern cultural or civilized language. These secondary schools had more teaching in subjects like mathematics, natural sciences and arts. In these schools the amount of English being taught was minimal at first. In 1919 English was also added to the languages in which the matriculation examination could be taken. Until the 1930s, German was the most important and popular foreign language in Finnish schools. In 1946 English, along with Russian, was raised into the same group with German as the first foreign language that could be chosen in schools. The

Ministry of Education wanted to improve the status of English and increase its teaching but still in the 1940's and 1950's English could not be taught in many small schools.

Birkstedt (2004: 245) continues that in the second half of the 1900s the Finnish basic education's reform was carried out. It started in 1963 and its purpose was to unify the Finnish basic education so that everyone had equal opportunities. In the late 1960's, when the school reform's national curriculum was formed, it was decided that in the new school system there would be two compulsory languages, one starting in primary school and the other one in secondary school. The position of English and other foreign languages strengthened during the school reform and language teaching was developed into a more communicational direction. In 1977 a section of listening comprehension was added to the English test of the matriculation examination.

Birkstedt (2004: 247) further explains that in the 1990's there was an opportunity to start another foreign language, language A2, in primary school. This opportunity was supposed to decrease the overpower of English and make room for other foreign languages. However, this reform did not achieve its goal but most pupils still chose English as their first foreign language, language A1, and some other language as language A2. According to Statistics Finland (2012), in the autumn semester of 2011, altogether 66.3% of the pupils of grades 1 to 6 of the comprehensive school studied English either as a compulsory or optional language. The percentage in grades 7 to 9 was 99.4%. Comprehensive school pupils can still start studying English either in the third grade as A1-language or in the fifth grade as A2-language, but most pupils choose to start studying English first. In Finnish upper-secondary schools, English is a mandatory subject and therefore every student in upper-secondary schools is studying English even though it is not mandatory to take the English test in the Matriculation Examinations.

According to Kaikkonen and Kohonen (2000: 7-10), language pedagogy has gone through a change in the past few decades both nationally and internationally. Language is not seen as a mere group of grammatical and formal rules anymore, but more weight has been put on the communicative side of language. This has led to the fact that the teaching of languages has also changed and taken a shift towards a learning concept that better takes the learner and their needs into consideration. The teaching and learning of languages is not only individual but social as well and intercultural and international issues are an important part of them. The use of social tasks has increased in language classes in order to develop the learning process into a more social event. Kaikkonen and Kohonen

(2000: 8) point out the role of the learner as an active participant in the language learning process and also the role of the teacher as the provider of important feedback. The learner is expected to take more responsibility for their own learning and the teacher's role has developed into a more guiding one. The successfulness of the learning is more dependent on the learners themselves and their ability and willingness to take advantage of the provided guidance. Hence, it is a logical thought that the learner's attitudes toward the language also have a significant role in the learning, which we have already seen to be the case in the previous chapter.

According to Hildén (2011: 6), the teaching of foreign languages in Finland is very much governed by Finnish legislation. The national core curriculum is followed in the teaching of foreign languages as well as in other subjects. Hildén (2011: 7) states that the objectives of foreign language teaching are linguistic, cultural and strategic and that the aim of these objectives is to enable the student to strive for building up their own identity. Even though the core curriculum is the same for everyone, the teaching is modified into action in the classrooms and the action that takes place in the classrooms depends much on the teacher.

Nikula (2008: 42) has studied the use of English in the Finnish classrooms where English is the teaching language and a tool more than the target of the teaching. According to Nikula (2008: 45) the amount of teaching in a foreign language is at a stable level in Finland. Also, Nikula (2008: 46) states that it has been shown that teaching in a foreign language has a positive effect on the pupils' language learning. This can be seen in the IB schools where English is used as the common language in almost all classes. Also a positive effect can be seen in the learning of the contents of the subject that is being taught. Nikula's study is based on data collected for Jyväskylä University. The data consists of recordings of Finnish secondary school seventh graders' physics' classes and of ninth graders' biology classes both of which were taught in English. In both subjects the teacher was Finnish and only one of the participating pupils spoke English as their first language. Nikula (2008: 48) studied the social and interpersonal meanings and dimensions of language use with relation to the situations in which the language was used and the interactional surroundings in which it took place. In other words, Nikula wanted to focus on e.g. if a student made an initiative or if the pupil was replying to a question asked by the teacher. Also, the amount of English used by the pupils and what kind of English was used were the focus of the attention.

In her study, Nikula (2008: 48-50) found that the pupils used English very actively and courageously, which was not surprising because the pupils had themselves chosen to participate in teaching in English. What Nikula did find surprising was the fact that the pupils used English also when they were talking to each other and about things related to the subject they were studying. Also, some conversations that were not related to the subject being taught but to, for example, the organization of the class and the group were in English as well. Nikula (2008: 50) also found that even though subjects such as physics and biology include plenty of difficult terms which can lead to misunderstandings and not understanding at all, the pupils were nevertheless not willing to give up English and switch to Finnish. The pupils might use some Finnish but they would also always return to using English. In other words the pupils were extremely committed to using English. In the classes of other subjects (not languages) where the teaching is in English the pupils do not have to concentrate on the grammatical correctness of their English. This leads to the fact that the pupils use English more freely and courageously (Nikula 2008: 54). Perhaps this is something that should be used more in Finnish national upper secondary schools and, why not even already, in secondary schools. If classes of subjects such as, for example, biology, history or physical education would be taught in English the pupils would not only get a great deal of passive language input but also get the chance to practise their English in a stress-free environment.

Nikula (2008: 56) continues that the use of both English and Finnish in these classes taught in English is possible. However, Nikula found that the use of Finnish is very confined even though not forbidden. This means that pupils may use some Finnish words if they do not know the word in English. These words are, for example, difficult terms connected to the subject being taught. Otherwise the pupils use Finnish when they talk about things that are not in any way connected to the subject being taught. However, Nikula (2008: 62) states that most often the pupils use Finnish in these classes for some other reason than not knowing how to say something in English. Some of these reasons can be e.g. changing to a topic not connected to what is being taught or switching from talking to friends to talking to the teacher. Nikula (2008: 66) concludes that teaching in English supports the pupils' development as users of English making them more active and fearless language users. However, also the teaching of language itself is needed.

Alanen, Hinkkanen, Säde and Mäntylä (2006) have taken a look at the structure and contents of an English class held for Finnish pupils. Alanen et al. (2006: 139) state that both English and Finnish are used in class. English is used in everyday situations like greeting and thanking and also when

instructions are given and exercises are checked. Most often the same things are also said in Finnish. The grammar parts of the lessons are often in Finnish so that the pupils can concentrate on the language being taught. Alanen et al. (2006: 145) state that maybe there is not enough dialogic communication in foreign language in the classes because much of the teaching is in Finnish and the pupils do not use the target language enough. Alanen et al. (2006: 146-147) feel that pupils should be offered more opportunities to use the target language dialogically.

Dufva (2006) has concentrated on a dialogic approach to language learning. In dialogic language learning the stress is on the functional side of language learning. In other words, language is learned to serve a purpose for the learner and the learning takes place in different kinds of interactive situations (Dufva, 2006: 42). In dialogic language learning the form of the language plays an important role as well but it is not the focus of the approach. The form of the language is learned through different kinds of language using situations, not separately. Dufva (2006: 43) explains that using the target language in authentic situations is important because in these situations the learner can actually do something concrete with the language. According to Dufva (2006: 48), it would be important to offer students learning experiences outside classrooms as well. This would enable the students to learn, for example, about different genres, registers and styles that are related to foreign languages. Dufva (2006: 46-47) states that using only language textbooks as the basis of language learning might lead to the fact that students only learn the linguistic contents of a text (words and grammar) without assimilating the function that those contents have outside the textbook's text. Because almost all of their classes are in English the IB students are offered more opportunities to use English in authentic and meaningful language using situations. In other words, the IB students are using concrete English in concrete situations and this is something that should also be done in national upper secondary schools so that the students would develop to be more independent and daring users of the language.

Now that the history of teaching and learning English in Finland has been briefly discussed, as well as some current views on teaching English, the focus of the study will now move on to introducing in more detail the two institutions that offer upper secondary education in Finland. The national upper secondary school will be discussed first and after that the IB upper secondary school. A special focus will be on how English is taught in both schools. The testing of English oral skills in these two schools will be introduced in chapter 4.2.4.

3. UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN FINLAND

In Finland there are two different kinds of institutes that offer upper secondary school education. The most common one is the national upper secondary school and the other is IB upper secondary school. In this section these two upper secondary schools will be discussed in more detail the focus being on the teaching and learning of English and English oral skills.

3.1. National upper secondary school

According to the Finnish Ministry of Education (online, 2012), the Finnish (national) upper secondary school provides students between the ages of 16-19 liberal-arts education that is a continuation of the basic education in Finland. This education enables the students to apply to any institution offering higher education. In short, the main purpose of the upper secondary school is to help students become stable and civilized individuals in the community and provide them with skills that enable them to develop themselves in different fields of life.

The teaching in upper secondary school is in the form of courses, each lasting around 38 hours (FMEC, 2012). The academic year has been divided into five or six study units which are filled with different courses in different subjects (e.g. mathematics, chemistry, physics, history, psychology, Finnish, Swedish, biology, geography, religious education, physical education, music, art etc.) from which the students can choose and make their own work plan for each study unit. The courses that are offered in each study unit vary because each school offering upper secondary education can make their own plan about which courses they offer in which study units. For example, some schools may offer one course more than once during a school year and others only offer it once. Each study unit is followed by an exam week during which the students will be tested on the things that they have been studying during the study unit.

The syllabus of upper secondary school consists of a minimum of 75 courses and among them there are 47-52 compulsory courses, 10 specialisation courses and applied courses (FMEC, 2012). The “specialisation courses are elective courses relating to compulsory studies in the same subject” (FNBE 2003: 15) and they can be either nationally determined courses or the school’s own school-specific courses. The applied courses “are integrated courses including elements from various subjects, methodological courses, vocational studies organized by the same or another education provider or other studies suitable for the upper secondary school’s role.” (FNBE 2003: 15).

The national upper secondary school ends with the matriculation examination which qualifies the student to apply to any higher education institution. The matriculation examination is nation-wide and the examinations in it are first evaluated by the teachers of each individual school and then sent on to the Matriculation Examination Board for a recheck. The matriculation examination consists of at least four examinations. Examination in Finnish (mother tongue) and literature is mandatory for everyone, and the remaining three examinations the students can choose for themselves from a group of examinations that consist of second language, one foreign language, mathematics and arts and sciences. At least one of the examinations that the students get to choose themselves has to be performed at a higher level. The examinations of mathematics and languages are offered at different levels. In addition to the four compulsory examinations, the students can choose to do extra examinations. When the student has successfully completed the needed 75 courses and passed the matriculation examinations they will be given the Matriculation Examination Certificate and the general upper secondary school certificate (FMEC, 2012).

3.1.1. A-level English

The main interest of this thesis lies in the teaching and studying of English in upper secondary school and, more specifically, in the students' attitudes towards English oral skills. Therefore the A-level English that is being taught in national upper secondary schools is discussed in more detail here.

The National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (FNBE 2003: 102) describes the teaching of foreign languages as follows:

“Instruction in foreign languages will develop students' intercultural communication skills: it will provide them with skills and knowledge related to language and its use and will offer them the opportunity to develop their awareness, understanding and appreciation of the culture within the area or community where the language is spoken. In this respect, special attention will be given to European identity and European multilingualism and multiculturalism. Language instruction will provide students with capabilities for independent study of languages by helping them to understand that achievement of communication skills requires perseverance and diversified practice in communication. As a subject, each foreign language is a practical, theoretical and cultural subject.”

A-level English means that the studying of the language has been started already in basic education in grades 1-6 (FNBE 2003: 103) and therefore when the students enter upper secondary school some of them have studied English already for seven years (English started in grade 3). The main

objective in A-level English is to achieve level B2.1 on the Language Proficiency Scale by Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in the four fields of language skills that are listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to the CEFR (2012: 129), on level B2, the students should be able to communicate very fluently and spontaneously even in long and complicated discussions. The students should also be able to keep up quite an even tempo, hesitate and pause only occasionally and be able to fluently communicate with a native speaker. Other objectives of teaching are to teach the students how to communicate in the target language and culture, give the students tools for self-evaluation and teach them strategies through which the students are able to develop themselves (FNBE 2003: 102).

Most of the teaching materials used in Finnish upper secondary schools are constructed to meet the demands of the core curriculum. Therefore most teachers use some series of books by some publisher as teaching material. In the books there are plenty of different kinds of texts and exercises the purpose of which is to fill the learning requirements set by the core curriculum.

In A-level English there are six compulsory courses and their topics are *1. Young people and their world*, *2. Communication and leisure*, *3. Study and work*, *4. Society and the surrounding world*, *5. Culture* and *6. Science, economy and technology* (FNBE 2003: 103-104). The content, emphasis, cross-cultural theme, and strategies of each course are described in detail in the core curriculum. Every upper secondary school also offers two nationally determined specialisation courses that were until the year 2010 *7. Nature and sustainable development* and *8. Globalisation and internationalisation* (FNBE 2003: 105). The content and emphasis of course 8 was changed in 2010. In 2010 course 8 was changed into an oral skills course *Speak and understand better* (FNBE, 2009).

Previously upper secondary schools were able to offer a course of oral English as an applied, school-specific course that was obligatory for students if they wanted to. From the year 2010 the oral course was taken into the syllabus of upper secondary school as a nationally determined specialisation course. This means that it is still obligatory for students but now every upper secondary school in the country has to offer it to the students and the content and assessment are the same in every school. In the process, the course assessment was changed so that the whole evaluation was ordered to be based on oral work only. This means that the course grade has to be based on the grade of the final oral test and other oral work that has been done in class. The final oral test is

constructed by the Finnish National Board of Education and with this the reliability and the fairness of the test and evaluation should be guaranteed. After the student has completed the course and taken part in the national oral test they will be given a course grade and a separate certificate from the oral test (FNBE 2009, in Appendix 1: 3). This is the only oral test that the students can take during their studies in upper secondary school. The course is, however, optional and not everyone has to take it. Based on my own experience as a teacher the course is quite popular even though it is not compulsory. The contents of course 8 and the assessment will be further discussed in chapter 4.2.4.1.

3.2. IB upper secondary schools

The abbreviation *IB* comes from the words *international baccalaureate*. The International Baccalaureate Organization was founded in 1968 in Geneva (IBO web site, 2012b.) and nowadays it has schools all around the world. More precisely IBO has 3,423 co-operative schools in 141 countries and the number of students is over 1,028,000 (IBO, 2012h). According to IBO (2012b), the IB system was originally designed for students living abroad and who were preparing for university studies. The programme first started out only offering international education for students planning their university studies but later on the system has grown to offer international education to students aged from 3 to 19 years. The first IB schools were private schools but now more than half of the IB schools around the world are state schools. Students attending IB schools are taught in an international atmosphere and the teaching language in Finland is English. In other countries the teaching language is English, French or Spanish, depending on the country (IBO 2012i). The idea behind IB is that the students are encouraged to think more and process what they learn instead of just learning things by heart. According to the mission statement of The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO, 2012a), they aim to:

“develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.” (IBO, 2012a).

The IBO offers three different basic programs of education worldwide. These three programs are IB Primary Years Programme, aimed at children between the ages of 3 and 12, The Middle Years programme for students between the ages of 11 and 16 and The Diploma Programme aimed at

students between the ages of 16 and 19 (IBO, 2012c). In Finland the last one of these is often referred to as the IB upper-secondary school, and therefore it is my main interest. The IB Diploma Programme is a two year curriculum and its purpose is to prepare students to study in universities much in the same ways as the national Finnish upper-secondary schools. Since 2010 The IB has been offering also a programme called the IB Career-related Certificate, which is a programme aimed at students between the ages of 16 and 19 “who wish to engage in career-related education” (IBO, 2012d).

3.2.1. IB Diploma Programme

The curriculum of the IB schools differ from that of the Finnish upper-secondary schools, and so does the IB diploma. In the IB Diploma Programme there are three core requirements that are surrounded by six academic areas (Figure 1). The three core requirements are: Extended essay, Theory of Knowledge, and Creativity, Action and Service. The six academic areas are: Studies in language and literature (language A1), Language acquisition (second language A2), Individuals and society, Experimental sciences, Mathematics and computer science, and The arts. The IB programme lasts for two years and according to IBO (2012e), during this time the students will: “study six subjects chosen from the six subject groups, complete an extended essay, follow a theory of knowledge course (TOK) and participate in creativity, action, service (CAS)”. Also according to IBO (2012e): “normally three of the six subjects are studied at higher level (courses representing 240 teaching hours)” and “the remaining three subjects are studied at standard level (courses representing 150 teaching hours)”. The students attending IB upper-secondary school can choose for themselves which subjects they study at the higher level and which at the standard level. The decision depends usually on which subjects the students are most interested in and in which subjects they are good at. For example, in Jyväskylä IB upper-secondary school about half of the students decide to study English at the higher level and half at the standard level (David Hamer, 2008).

As already mentioned, there are six subject groups and the students must choose one course from groups 1 to 5. In addition they have to choose one more course from either group 6 (The arts) or they can choose another course from groups 1 to 5 (IBO, 2012f). Group one is “Studies in language and literature” and usually in the Finnish IB upper secondary schools, the students (Finnish students) choose Finnish to be their A1 language. According to David Hamer (2008), Finnish courses are the only courses in Finland that are taught in Finnish. English is usually chosen from group 2 as a second language (A2 language) and this A2 Language is being discussed in more detail

here because the IB students who have chosen to study A2 English function as the peer group for the Finnish national upper-secondary school students studying A-level English.

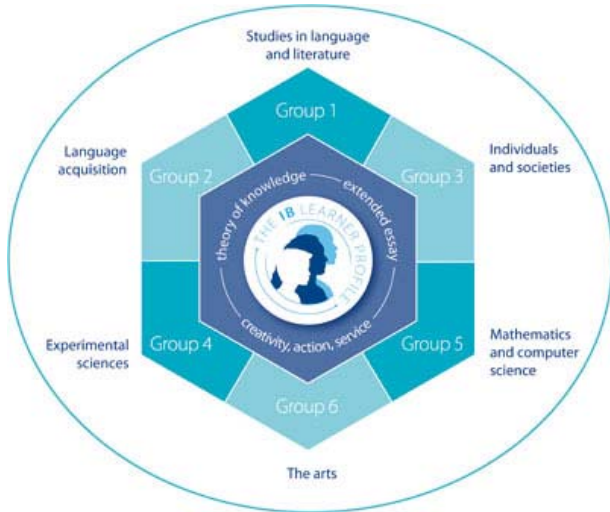


Figure 1. The hexagon displaying the Diploma Programme curriculum model of IBO in which the tree core requirements are surrounded by the six academic areas. (adapted from <http://www.ibo.org/diploma/curriculum/11.6.2012>)

3.2.2. Language A2

Group 2 of the six subject groups in IB upper-secondary schools offers a group of modern languages as well as Latin and Classical Greek from which the students can choose their second language. As already mentioned, in the Finnish IB upper-secondary schools, students usually choose this language to be English. The courses offered in group 2 can be studied at different levels. Language *Ab Initio* is for beginners, Language B is for students who already, at some point, have studied the language before and Language A2, which is my main interest, is for students with a high level of knowledge of the target language.

A2 English can be studied either at a higher level or at a lower level and this choice is up to the students. Language A2 courses include both language and literature and their purpose is to refine and enhance the students' language skills and broaden their knowledge of the cultures of the selected language (IBO 2002: 4). The teaching of Language A2 consists of studying language, texts and culture with the aim of developing the students' analytical skills. Also the students will learn more vocabulary and to use complex grammatical structures. During the course the students will study different kinds of texts, for example short stories, speeches and news reports. The purpose is to learn about the use of the language in different contexts and also to understand the difference between language styles and registers. Both literary and non-literary texts are used to study cultural options such as media and culture; future, global and social issues and language and culture. Among

these topics could be e.g. bilingualism or racism. During the course the students will also be introduced to different kinds of literature and they will study the use of language and styles in these texts.

During Language A2 courses the students will concentrate on developing four primary language skills. These skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to IBO (2002: 13), the objectives of Language A2 in speaking skills are that at the end of the course the students can:

“communicate clearly, fluently and effectively in a wide range of situations; use accurately the oral forms of the language in a range of styles and situations; use a range of vocabulary and idioms; use a register and style appropriate to the situation; express ideas with clarity and fluency; structure arguments and support them with relevant examples; engage in critical examination of a wide range of texts in different forms, styles and registers; show an appreciation of the subtleties of technique and style employed by writers and speakers of the language.”

IB students in Finland have to have a good command of English because the teaching of other subjects as well is in English. Therefore Finnish IB students get a lot of practise in English oral skills. To complete A2 English courses the students must both pass oral tasks and written tasks. The assessment of Language A2 will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.2.4.2.

4. ORAL SKILLS

Oral skills is not an easy term to define. Many students, teachers and scholars find it to be a controversial topic in the teaching of a foreign language. Foreign language classes are very often arranged in a way that written texts or exercises form the base of teaching. Some, although hopefully only few, teachers might even exclude the oral component of a language from their teaching altogether. The past ten or fifteen years have been an era of rising awareness of oral skills in language teaching even though the term has existed for a much longer time. In this chapter more information will be provided on how oral skills can be defined.

4.1. Defining oral skills

Bygate (1987:3) starts defining speaking by saying that there is “a difference between *knowledge* about a language, and *skill* in using it”, and he continues that when talking about language teaching, this separation between the two things is very important. According to Bygate, speaking is a skill

just like driving a car. The speaker has to know some things in order to be able to put together coherent sentences and, moreover, the speaker has to produce the sentences in different situations. Bygate (1987: 3) continues that an important difference between knowledge and skill is that even though they “both can be understood and memorized, only a skill can be imitated and practised”.

Fulcher (2003: 23) gives the term “speaking” a very simple definition. According to him “speaking is the verbal use of language to communicate with others”. Although Fulcher gives this simple definition he also reminds that speaking differs from written language in many ways, even though his definition might imply that speaking is the oral counterpart of writing, which it is not. Fulcher (2003: 24) states that there are many different kinds of speech events that have to be taken into consideration and that in spoken language e.g. less formal vocabulary is used than in written language. The term *communicative competence* is often used when defining oral skills or speaking. Chomsky (1965) introduced the term *competence* and made a distinction between the terms *competence* and *performance*. According to his theory, *competence* means “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language” and *performance* “the actual use of language in concrete situations” (1965: 4). This means that a person might have a high competence in a language but their performance might not be on the same level with the competence. Chomsky argued that performance is never a direct reflection of competence. Chomsky clarified that in the actual use of a language there are many things, such as false starts and changes in plans, that affect the performance and because of this, performance can never really reflect the speaker’s true competence (Chomsky 1965: 4).

Although Chomsky was the one to launch the theory on competence and performance, his theory was further developed by Hymes (1971) who introduced the term *communicative competence*. Hymes argued that if competence and performance are separated, it will lead to a situation where the speaker-listener might produce grammatically valid sentences but has no sense of the other important factors like, for example, the register of speech, in communicative situations. As Hymes points out (1971: 277), sometimes it is ok to be “appropriately ungrammatical” meaning that no matter how grammatically perfect a sentence is, it might not suit the situation at all. Hymes explains that “there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless.” (1971: 278) and according to him these rules of use are learned by communicating with others. In other words, according to Hymes (1971: 277-278), other things, such as knowing when to speak and when to be silent or what to talk about and with whom (in other words, what is appropriate and what is not in a

conversation), are very, if not more, important than knowing how to form grammatically good sentences. In Hymes's opinion a child learns the conventions of conversation while they learn the language and its grammatical use. Hymes states that competence is not just the grammatical rules of the language but that it includes the code of conduct for conversation as well (Hymes 1971: 277-279). Hymes highlights the social nature of communicative situations.

Communicative competence is Hymes's continuation of Chomsky's theory on language competence. As already mentioned, Hymes wants to emphasize the social nature of communicative situations, whereas Chomsky was more interested only in the grammatical side of language competence. Hymes (1971: 281) points out that communicative competence is made up of several different components, the grammatical competence being only one of them. Hymes starts by defining competence as "the capabilities of a person" (1971: 282) and he continues that "competence is dependent upon both (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use" (1971: 282). By this Hymes wants to stress the idea that competence is formed of more than just the grammatical component and that many kinds of knowledge are used in a communicative situation, e.g., how to behave in a certain situation. The concept of communicative competence can be seen as the beginnings of what we now call *oral skills*.

Dufva (1996: 33-34) has criticized Chomsky's views about language being a set of grammar rules that are available to basically anyone. According to Dufva (1996: 39), speech or speaking is something social and interactive by nature. Spoken language is used as a communication system and it also develops as a result of communicating with others. Dufva (1996: 40) continues that the functions and meanings of spoken language are extremely important and that the contents of the message are more important than the form they take. Dufva (1996: 41) presents that a child learning a language is not, in fact, learning a language but is learning to speak by imitating the language that surrounds them. In other words, a child is learning to use their voice to communicate a message and that the actual rules of a language, the social constructs that include also different registers and styles, develop later in life through much practice. Dufva (1996: 42) explains that in this approach language is seen more comprehensively as sounds and meaning. Dufva argues that language needs more than grammar rules to be born. Dufva (1996: 42-43) lists that speaking is cooperation between the speakers. Speakers can e.g. complete each other's sentences and predict what the other person is going to say and by doing so they generate discourse. In other words the speakers are dependent on each other and not on some internal knowledge of the language.

The work of Chomsky and Hymes has been carried on by many scholars trying to find a good definition for the term *oral skills* and in the following paragraphs we will take a closer look at some of them.

4.1.1 Canale and Swain's model

At the beginning of the 1980s, Michael Canale and Merrill Swain further developed the model of *communicative competence* which had been created by Dell Hymes a decade earlier. Canale and Swain's motive was to "determine the feasibility and practicality of measuring ... 'communicative competence'" (1980: 1) because they thought that some of the existing principles were questionable. Because of this they developed their own principles to serve as guidelines for the organization and development of second language teaching and assessment. Canale and Swain wanted to clarify what *communicative competence* actually is in order to develop a more communicative way of second language teaching and to ensure that the communication skills of a second language could be measured and assessed more accurately.

Canale and Swain (1980: 2) began their work by making a distinction between grammatical and communicative approaches to second language teaching. By doing so they wanted to accentuate the fact that in grammatical approaches language is based on grammatical forms such as phonological forms, morphological forms, syntactic patterns and lexical items, whereas in communicative approaches language is based on communicative functions such as e.g. apologizing and describing. In other words, in the grammatical approach the form of the language (grammar) is given more weight, whereas in the communicative approach the weight is on the communicative functions of the language. Canale and Swain further pointed out that they used the term "approach" to "refer to principles of syllabus construction and not actual classroom teaching materials and methods" (1980: 3).

While studying the concepts of competence and performance already launched by Chomsky and further developed by Hymes, Canale and Swain (1980: 4) came to the conclusion that, indeed, there was more to competence than just the ability to use grammatically valid sentences. As Hymes (1972) had already pointed out, competence included not only grammatical rules but also the rules of use for the language. Canale and Swain (1980: 5) considered the dilemma of whether or not grammatical competence is included in communicative competence and whether or not

(communicative) performance and communicative competence should be distinguished from each other. Canale and Swain came to the conclusion that grammatical competence cannot completely be separated from communicative competence and they reason their view by stating that “there are rules of language use that would be useless without rules of grammar” (1980: 5). By this they mean that even if a person can achieve sociolinguistic competence in one language and then transfer this skill to the use of another language, it does not mean that the person can use the two languages without some level of grammatical competence in both languages. Canale and Swain define the term *communicative competence* as “the relationship and interaction between grammatical competence, or knowledge of the rules of grammar, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the rules of language use.” (1980: 6). In other words, Canale and Swain think that both grammatical and sociolinguistic competences are a part of communicative competence. In the issue of whether or not (communicative) performance and communicative competence should be distinguished from each other, Canale and Swain came to the conclusion that “communicative competence is to be distinguished from communicative performance, which is the realization of these competencies and their interaction in the actual production and comprehension of utterances” (1980: 6). By this Canale and Swain mean that communicative performance is the actual execution of the principles of communicative competence.

While trying to establish and clarify the concept and nature of communicative competence, Canale and Swain (1980: 27) added yet another competence into the mixture. They had already stated that communicative competence included both grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence and in addition to these two, communicative competence also included a strategic competence. By strategic competence, Canale and Swain mean communication strategies, for example, how to survive breakdowns (such as false starts or hesitations) in communication. Canale and Swain want to emphasize the fact that all three competencies should be treated as equal parts of communicative competence in order to ensure that the learner can integrate all three types of knowledge (grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic) in learning a second language. They feel that if one of the competencies is emphasized more than the others, the ideal outcome of the learner’s communicative competence cannot be achieved. Canale and Swain (1980: 27) carry on stating that the learner’s communicational needs are extremely important and that they should be taken into consideration in the designing of the contents of communicative approach. By this they mean that the needs of the learner should be viewed with respect to all three areas of communicative competence. Also special attention should be paid to the genuine communicative situations that the

learner will face and the varieties of the second language. According to Canale and Swain, it is very important that the learner can take part in “meaningful communicative interaction with highly competent speakers of the language, i.e. to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic second language situations.” (1980: 27). Canale and Swain (1980: 27-28) admit that designing and organizing these kinds of situations for the learners might be challenging but that it is very important if the learners are to develop into confident second language users. Canale and Swain (1980: 28) also feel that in addition to offering the learners information, practise and experience they need in their second language communication, they should also be offered information about language already in their first language programme. This information would include, for example, grammatical rules, communicative functions, rules of appropriateness and discourse and information on register. Also the cultural aspects of second language should be taught in social studies classes so that the learners become aware of the communicational and sociocultural differences between different second language groups (Canale and Swain, 1980: 28).

Canale and Swain (1980: 29-30) sum up their framework of communicative competence by stating that the framework is to be used both in second language teaching and testing. In this framework they have included grammatical competence which includes e.g. rules of morphology, syntax, phonology and so on, sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural and discourse rules) and strategic competence (e.g. verbal and non-verbal actions taken by the speaker in order to survive a breakdown in a conversation). In the execution of their framework, Canale and Swain (1980: 32) want to emphasize the functional side of second language teaching and learning without forgetting the grammatical side. This means that they think that a functionally organized communicative approach can also include some grammatical organization. In other words learners learn grammatical rules through communicational tasks, the stress being on the communicative and not the grammatical contents. Canale and Swain (1980: 32) justify their view by stating that a functionally based communicative approach is more likely to motivate the learners than a grammatically based communicative approach. In their view this is due to the fact that even poorly motivated learners can find a purpose in learning a second language if the teaching and learning is functionally organized around a true goal such as communication.

Canale and Swain want to highlight the importance of meaningful communicative tasks in the classroom. They feel that the learners should be able to practise such communicative situations that they are likely to face in real life. The teacher’s role in the classroom should, in Canale and Swain’s

(1980: 33) opinion, be instigative and participatory in the communicative tasks. They also feel that the teacher should have a high level of communicative competence in the second language so that the teacher is able to fulfil this mission. When it comes to communicative testing of second language, Canale and Swain (1980: 34) suggest that in communicative testing both the learners competence and performance should be taken into consideration because they are two separate things. As already explained, competence is the learner's knowledge about the language and how to use it, whereas performance is the actual level on which the learner can function using the second language. Canale and Swain (1980: 34-35) consider different types of tasks that could be used in testing second language communication. They feel that both discrete-point tests and integrative type tests are possible. Canale and Swain (1980: 35) state, however, that coming up with reliable scoring methods and assessment criteria that measure, for example, the appropriateness of speech in different sociocultural or discourse situations is not that simple but has to be further discussed and developed.

4.1.2. Bachman and Palmer's model

Bachman and Palmer (1996) have studied language use from the perspective of language testing, but still their view of communicative language ability is widely known. Their work on communicative competence is based on the previous work of, for example, Hymes, and Canale and Swain. Bachman (1990: 84) proposed a theoretical framework of communicative language ability in which he stated that communicative language ability consists of "three components: language competence, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms."

By *language competence* (later *language knowledge*) Bachman means knowledge that is used in communication via language. Bachman (1990: 87-98) has first divided his model of language competence into two categories: *organizational competence* (later *knowledge*) and *pragmatic competence* (later *knowledge*). According to Bachman and Palmer (1996: 67-68), organizational knowledge controls the formal structure of language enabling a language user to produce or understand a grammatically correct sentence. Organizational knowledge is divided into two areas: grammatical knowledge, which includes vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology/graphology and textual knowledge, which includes cohesion and rhetorical organization.

Bachman and Palmer (1996: 69) explain that pragmatic knowledge is what "enables us to interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to the intentions of

language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting.” Also pragmatic knowledge is divided into two areas: *functional knowledge* (previously *illocutionary competence*) and *sociolinguistic knowledge* (previously *competence*). Functional knowledge is what makes it possible for the language user to “interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and the intentions of language users.” (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 69). By this Bachman and Palmer mean that a sentence can have multiple meanings depending on the function of the sentence and the characteristics of the participants in the situation. Bachman and Palmer illustrate what they mean by giving an example that the question “How many times have you tried to fix this lock yourself?” can either be interpreted as a question “How many times?” or as criticism towards the person fixing the lock. The other area of pragmatic knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge, means that language users are able to use language that is appropriate in a certain situation. Sociolinguistic knowledge includes knowledge about the usage of dialects, varieties, registers, idioms, expressions, cultural references and figures of speech (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 70).

The second component in Bachman and Palmer’s model of communicative language ability is *strategic competence*. Strategic competence means “the mental capacity for implementing the components of language competence in contextualized communicative language use.” (Bachman 1990: 84). In other words, strategic competence is what links language competence (knowledge of the language) to the language structures by which a language user is trying to reach a communicative goal. Bachman (1990: 100) first stated that strategic competence includes assessment, planning and execution. According to Bachman (1990: 100-103), in order to reach a communicative goal a language user must first assess the communicative situation at hand and also the person(s) who they are communicating with. After this assessment, the language user plans how they are going to communicate their message. In the execution phase the language user implements the plan they have mapped by using relevant psychophysiological mechanisms that are appropriate in the situation.

Later on Bachman and Palmer (1996: 70) rephrased strategic competence to be a “set of metacognitive components, or strategies which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use, as well as in other cognitive activities.” As already mentioned, in his earlier research Bachman stated that assessment, planning and execution are the three parts that make up strategic competence. In this rephrased version, Bachman and Palmer (1996: 70-71), however, state that there are “three general areas in

which metacognitive components operate” and these areas are goal-setting, assessment and planning. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996: 71-73), goal-setting means that the language user identifies the language use tasks or test tasks, chooses one or more tasks and decides if they are going to try to complete the tasks. In other words, goal-setting equals what the language user is going to do. In the assessment phase the language user evaluates the situation. The things being evaluated are: what kind of topical knowledge and language knowledge are needed in the situation, what kind of previous topical knowledge and language knowledge the language user has and how well has the language user done in the situation. In Bachman and Palmer’s view the third area is planning. When planning, the language user decides what is the best way to use the language knowledge, topical knowledge and affective schemata they have to finish the task at hand.

The third component in Bachman’s communicative language ability model is *psychophysiological mechanisms*. Bachman (1990: 108) describes these mechanisms by stating that they “...characterize the channel (auditory, visual) and mode (receptive, productive) in which competence is implemented.” In other words, psychophysiological mechanisms enable the language user, for example, to use auditory and visual skills to pay attention to non-linguistic information and form and pronounce words and sentences correctly. This third component was, however, excluded from the rephrased version of the theory formulated together with Adrian S. Palmer.

Together Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61) state that in order to be able to assess individuals as language users and also the individuals’ language ability “we must be able to demonstrate how performance on that language test is related to language use in specific settings other than the language test itself.” Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61) continue that in order to do so we need to take into consideration both the characteristics of language use tasks and test tasks and the characteristics of language users and test takers. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61), language ability, personal characteristics, topical knowledge and affective schemata are the language users’ and test takers’ characteristics that affect language use and test performance.

According to Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61-62), the interactional nature of language use has been stressed in the past decades. They define language use as “the creation or interpretation of intended meanings in discourse by an individual, or as the dynamic and interactive negotiation of intended meanings between two or more individuals in a particular situation.” (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 61-62). Discourse is created between individuals to carry out various functions in language use

situations. The interpretations of the things that are being said depend on the situations in which they are being said. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 62) believe that language ability cannot be separated from its interactional framework, and by this they mean that there are many interactional factors, such as language knowledge, strategic competence, topical knowledge and affective schemata, that affect or can be affected by the language use situations. These factors will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.2. Testing oral skills.

4.2. Testing oral skills

Apart from finding out what kinds of attitudes do Finnish upper secondary school students have towards English oral skills, the purpose of this study is also to find out what kinds of attitudes do these students have towards the testing of English oral skills. For this reason, in this chapter, the mechanism of testing oral skills will be discussed in more detail. In other words, which factors need to be taken into consideration when planning and executing tests of oral skills. After a general glance at the mechanism of testing oral skills a special focus will be on how oral skills are tested in Finnish national upper secondary schools as well as in the IB upper secondary schools. More light will be shed also on whether the students' oral skills have an effect on their final grade of English.

Testing language skills, or testing any other skill for that matter, might sound easy but in practice it really is not. Designing, trying out and executing tests can be time consuming and hard work. The test designer must be sure that the test measures the things that they want it to measure. The test must be the kind that can be applied to different test takers without having to worry that the reliability of the test is altered. Other things that have to be taken into consideration are, for example, test type, test conditions, assessment criteria and objectivity. Testing and assessing oral skills might be even more demanding than testing other skills. This is due to the fact that speaking is most often interactive by nature and involves more than one person. These problems and possibilities of testing oral skills will be discussed in this chapter.

According to Fulcher (2003: 1), in the United States of America the history of testing oral skills has its roots in the era of the Second World War. Fulcher (2003: 2) explains that the first oral tests did not necessarily include any speaking in them, but that the participants had to write down the pronunciation of words using phonetic script. This was due to the fact that "real" oral tests had problems with reliability and practical issues. These problems still exist as it is not easy to make tests that are reliable and easy to conduct. Many factors are to be taken in consideration when

planning a test of speaking and then assessing the test taker's results. Perhaps some of these problems are a reason why the Finnish matriculation examination of languages still lacks a section of oral skills.

Testing speaking or oral skills has its own special features but the main steps in creating a test are very much the same as in any other test designing. Luoma (2004: 4-5) describes the process of testing speaking in the form of a cycle which involves different stages. According to Luoma, the cycle begins with the need for assessing speaking. The need is followed by a stage called *system development* which consists of planning and developing a test that is coherent with what the testers want to test. The rating criteria are set out for the test in the planning stage. Also quality assurance procedures are set up for the assessment before the cycle can move on to the next stage. The third stage of the cycle is the actual testing called *administration/performance* in which the participants get to show their knowledge. The next stage is referred to as *rating/evaluation* where the participants' performance is rated by the rater(s) using the rating criteria that were set up beforehand. By rating, a score is produced, and this score should correspond to the need of assessment that started the cycle.

Luoma (2004: 6) also stresses the fact that even though the cycle may seem simple enough it contains a great deal of more work for the test developers than it would seem to. For example, assuring the test's quality is a huge factor and it covers the whole assessment cycle. Luoma (2004, 7) states that *construct validity* and *reliability* are test features that must be taken into consideration throughout the developing process. By construct validity and reliability Luoma (2004,7) means that the test developers have to be sure that they are developing a test that assesses the right thing (particular kind of speaking) and that the test gives results that are both in line and reliable. These are obviously factors that would have to be considered very carefully when planning an oral test for Finnish upper secondary school students.

4.2.1. Assessing speaking

This chapter will discuss the individual characteristics of test takers and the different levels or areas of speaking which need to be taken into consideration when spoken language is being assessed, or when a spoken language test is being designed. This is because these are factors that do have an effect on the test takers' performance even though they may not always be considered that important. The effect that, for example, the individual characteristics of a test taker have on their

test performance is perhaps one of the reasons why the reliability of the test result might be questioned. This, on the other hand, could be one of the reasons why there is not an oral skills' test in the matriculation examination of languages. These factors might also affect the test takers' attitude towards taking such a test if they know, for example, that they have difficulties in *speaking* a foreign language.

Bachman and Palmer (1996) have listed the individual characteristics that they believe to have an effect on language use and while doing this they have especially focused on the viewpoint of designing and using language tests. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 64) start by stating that there are four sets of individual characteristics that are most commonly known. The first of these is *personal characteristics* (including things like age, sex and native language), which Bachman and Palmer describe as individual attributes that are not directly a part of a person's language ability but certainly might have an effect on the person's performance. Bachman and Palmer argue that it is not possible to come up with a list of every personal characteristic that should be taken into consideration because there are so many of them, but they should be considered all the same.

Topical knowledge is another individual characteristic which has an effect on language performance. By topical knowledge Bachman and Palmer (1996: 65) mean real-world knowledge which is knowledge they describe as "knowledge structures in long-term memory". Topical knowledge is important because it enables an individual "to use language with reference to the world in which they live, and hence is involved in all language use." (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 65). Bachman and Palmer (1996,65) argue that possibly those individuals who have certain cultural or topical knowledge might do better in a test than those individuals who do not have that knowledge.

The third individual characteristic listed by Bachman and Palmer (1996: 65) is *affective schemata*. Bacman and Palmer (1996, 65) describe affective schemata as "the affective or emotional correlates of topical knowledge". In other words, it enables language users to use past emotional experiences in some language use situations as reference when they are faced with a similar kind of situation again. The affective schemata defines, at least partly, how the language user reacts in language use situations and it can either limit or ease the language user's response to the situation. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 66) continue that in a language test situation the language user's affective responses to a topic can have an effect on the language user's ability to use their language knowledge

properly. The effect can be either positive or negative. If the topic is difficult or emotionally charged the test taker might not be able to perform as well as they could if they were given a more neutral topic. On the other hand, some test takers might perform very well when given a topic they feel strongly about. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 66) further point out that the way in which the test taker reacts to interacting conversationally with others also has an effect on their performance.

According to Bachman and Palmer (1996: 66-67), the last individual characteristic that has an effect on language use in test situations is *language ability* (already discussed in chapter 3.1.2.). Bachman and Palmer argue that language ability, consists of many things and in order to make conclusions about someone's language ability it has to be defined first what part of the ability is being measured. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 21) refer to the part of language ability being measured as a *construct*. When the construct has been determined, the test can be designed to measure what it is supposed to measure.

In assessing spoken language, pronunciation, or the sound of speech, must be taken into account. Luoma (2004: 10) describes this area of assessment as "thorny" because the assessment criterion used for pronunciation is often whether the speaker pronounces words with native-, or non-native-like fluency. The defining of the native-like fluency is difficult because there is more than one variety to every language and it would be difficult to define which of these varieties should be used as the criterion. Luoma (2004: 10) argues that only few second language learners are able to achieve native-like pronunciation, and that "Communicative effectiveness, which is based on comprehensibility and probably guided by native speaker standards but defined in terms of realistic learner achievement, is a better standard for learner pronunciation." There is more to *pronunciation* or *the sound of speech* than is usually understood with these terms. Whether or not, for example, individual sounds, pitch, volume, speed, pausing, stress and intonation are included in the criteria according to which a learner's pronunciation is being assessed depends entirely on the purpose of the test (Luoma 2004: 11).

Another area of language, grammar, is also something that is very visible in speech. According to Luoma (2004: 12), grammar is an easy way of assessing speaking because it can easily be detected in speech and because most languages have a well-known grammar that can be used as criterion. However, Luoma also stresses that the grammar criteria used for assessing speaking "should be specifically related to the grammar of speech" (2004: 12). This is due to the fact that the grammar

of speech differs from the grammar of written language. The grammar of speech is simpler than the one of written language and speech consists rather of *idea units* than of long sentences because the listeners have to understand the speech in real time (Luoma 2004: 12). Luoma (2004: 12) explains further on that the grammar of speech can be divided into grammar in planned and unplanned speech. These two differ from each other in the way that unplanned speech contains more incomplete sentences and that planned speech often is formal, whereas unplanned speech can be formal or informal. Also in formal situations the language tends to be more like written language and in informal situations more like oral language with short sentences and turn taking.

The use of vocabulary is one core ingredient in assessing spoken language. The vocabulary used by a speaker depends on the situation. This means that for example in formal situations a speaker uses a different kind of vocabulary than they would use in an informal situation. Luoma (2004: 17) explains that in formal situations the speakers use more specific vocabulary and in informal situations more generic words are being used. Speakers also use fixed phrases, fillers and hesitation markers to create time to speak. The use of these elements in speech test situations is, according to Luoma (2004: 18), rarely rewarded by the test developers even though they are a common part of native speaker speech.

Luoma (2004: 19) also brings up the issue of slips and errors in speech. According to her, slips and errors are forgiven to native speakers of a language because it is believed that the native speakers know the right words, but coming from non-native speakers these errors can be considered to signal lack of knowledge. Luoma suggests that since all speakers make mistakes, native and non-native, the test raters should try to avoid counting every error. The test takers' attitudes towards the testing might be more positive if their performance in the test would be assessed by how well they manage to cope in the situation and get their message across to the listener, instead of basing the assessment solely on the use of grammatically correct or well pronounced sentences.

Apart from these more "technical" features of speaking discussed above, it must also be taken into consideration that speaking is after all a social activity in which the speakers have to listen to each other. This social activity consists of taking turns, reading between the lines and different strategies of conveying a message to others. All of these are skills that are used in daily discourse and therefore they are a meaningful part of speaking. For this reason they should also be included in the assessment of speaking. Of course, if the purpose of a test is only to test pronunciation then there is

no point in taking into consideration this aspect of speaking. In conclusion, the key factor to designing a good speaking test is to define what it is that we want to test. Luoma (2004: 28) sets out four basic rules that should guide the test developers:

- define the kind of speaking they want to test in a particular context;
- develop tasks and rating criteria that test this;
- inform the examinees about what they test;
- and make sure that the testing and rating processes actually follow the stated plans.”

When talking about language assessment, a technical term “construct” is used to refer to the thing that is being assessed or tested. (Luoma 2004: 7). What to test and how to do it are things that are being discussed further in the following chapters.

4.2.2. Speaking task types

According to Fulcher (2003: 50), one of the key factors in testing speaking is choosing the right type of task to complete the testing. According to Weir (1988: 82), speaking tests should be “purposive, interesting and motivating” from the candidates’ perspective. Weir states that the characteristics of actual communication can perhaps best be measured with oral tests but Weir also points out that the large scale assessment of speaking does, however, require a huge number of practical arrangements as well as financial resources. This is the case also if it was decided that a section of oral skills would be added to the matriculation examination of languages.

Luoma points out that the most important thing in designing a task is “what the score users need to know about the examinees’ speaking skills” (2004: 29). In other words, what it is that needs to be tested. When this has been set out, it is possible to develop specific kinds of tasks that will test the skills that need to be tested. Furthermore, the test developers have to create instructions and task materials. Also Hughes (1989: 101) explains that the problem in testing oral skills is in finding the type of tasks that represent the skills that the students are able to perform. These tasks should also be valid and reliable ways to measure oral skills. One important factor in testing the oral skills of Finnish national upper secondary school students would be that the students, and teachers, should have some knowledge about what kinds of tasks there are in the test. This way the skills needed in the test could be practiced more in classes. By adding more practice the students might view the testing more positively.

According to Luoma (2004: 44), live, face-to-face interaction is the most typical way of assessing speaking. In live testing the interaction is two-directional. This means that when the test situation is live “each speaker’s turn is a reaction to the previous turn” and clarifications can be made, whereas in tape-based testing the examinee cannot communicate with the tape recorder, but that usually the examinee responds to something that has been said to them on the tape. Luoma (2004: 45) does, however, give credit to the tape-based testing saying that when a master tape with tasks has been made it can easily be used in many different locations at the same time, and also that with a tape like this many people can be tested simultaneously. Hughes (1989: 105) makes a statement that this type of testing is quite reliable.

Weir (1988: 82) has listed some useful and valid formats for testing speaking and has also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of these formats. According to Weir (1988: 82-88), speaking can be tested, for example, by verbal essay, oral presentation, free interview, controlled interview, information transfer, interaction tasks and role play. Weir (1988: 84) argues that a free interview is a popular method of testing oral skills. Weir continues that the advantage of a free interview is its face and content validity. Free interview does have disadvantages as well. For example, because the interview is free, most often the performances of the candidates vary, and this leads to the fact that it might be difficult to compare the performances and give valid assessments especially if there are a large number of candidates. In Weir’s (1988: 84-85) opinion a controlled interview is better because the direction of the conversation is more likely to be the same for most test takers and therefore it is easier to compare the performances and give valid assessments.

Luoma (2004: 48) states that the task types are often divided into two categories; open-ended speaking tasks and structured speaking tasks. In open-ended speaking tasks the conversation is guided but the examinee is also given choices to complete the task requirements, whereas in structured speaking tasks less possibilities to choose what to say are given to the examinees. Open-ended speaking tasks can include for example description, narrative, instruction, comparison, explanation, justification, prediction, decision and role-play. Luoma describes the structured speaking tasks as “speaking equivalents of multiple choice tasks” (2004: 50) and according to her, through this type of tasks the unpredictable and creative elements of speaking are neglected. In this type of tasks, however, the examinees can easily be compared to each other. Structured speaking tasks can include tasks such as reading aloud, repeating sentences, completing sentences, factual short-answer questions and reacting to phrases. These are usually used in tape-based testing.

Luoma (2004: 35) states that the most typical way of testing speaking is to assess the speakers individually in the format of an unstructured interview and although it is not the most cost efficient way to assess speaking it does offer the tester a lot of control over the situation and the possibility to be flexible in terms of the examinee's performance. This interview model of testing has been criticized because of the tester's power and Luoma (2004: 35) continues that in an interview situation the examinee has to deal with less demands than they would in some other test situation, because they only have to comply and answer. Luoma (2004: 35-36) carries on explaining that there are other ways to conduct a one-to-one type of test, not just the unstructured interview type. For example in a structured interview there would be a warm-up discussion, the pre-planned main interaction (for example a description or a narrative task) and a wind-down phase to put the examinee at ease.

Pair interviews are an alternative for individual interviews the key being that during the interview the examinees talk with each other and the examiner is an observer not taking part in the interaction directly (Luoma, 2004: 36). The tasks performed in pair interviews can vary from instructing one's pair from one place to another on a map to constructing a story or making a joint decision (Luoma, 2004: 37). Luoma (2004: 37) states that if the tasks are designed so that each half of the pair only has half of the information they need then the tasks will also be genuinely purposive. Although pair tasks have many good sides to them (cutting the money and time needed to organize them not being the least of the good sides) they also have negative sides. Luoma (2004: 37) points out that in a pair task situation it cannot be avoided that the examinees have an effect on each other. Aside from the effects of different personalities and communication styles it is likely that the language levels of the examinees differ from each other and this has to be taken into consideration when preparing the testing.

Only a few examples of task types and methods of testing speaking have been given in this paragraph. A large number of different methods and task types exist and the important thing is to bear in mind the purpose of the testing when choosing a task and a deciding on whether to use an open-ended speaking task or a structured one or whether the task should be carried out in pairs or groups or should all the test takers do it alone. As mentioned before, to have a positive outlook on the testing of oral skills it would be important that the students and teachers knew the criteria that were being used in the assessment, and that more practice was offered to the students in classes.

Apart from choosing the right task types and method of testing, there are two other extremely important issues to be dealt with when planning testing oral skills and these are test validity and reliability. These will be discussed briefly in the next paragraph.

4.2.3. Validity and reliability

Assuring test validity and reliability is perhaps one of the major factors that is holding back the adding of an oral section in the Finnish matriculation examination of languages. Also the students might be worried about getting a fair assessment in such a test. Hughes (1989: 22) states that a valid test is a test that “accurately measures what it is intended to measure”. He describes validity in terms of four different aspects. The first aspect is *content validity* which means that a test should contain a representative sample of the relevant language skills or structures that it is meant to measure. However, these relevant skills and structures are not easy to define since they depend entirely on the purpose of the test, and further on the purpose of each test is individually specified. In other words the specifications of relevant skills included in a test for beginners is different from the skills of, for example, tests in advanced courses. Hughes argues that the more coherent the contents are with the test specifications the greater is the content validity which leads to an accurate test. Further on, if the specifications do not match the elements of the test this could lead to ignoring the teaching and learning of skills that are not tested. Hughes continues that the tests should be designed in a way that they test what is important rather than what is easy to test.

The second aspect of validity is *criterion-related validity* (Hughes 1989: 23), which means that the test results are compared to the results “provided by some independent and highly dependable assessment of the candidate’s ability” (Hughes 1989: 23). Criterion-related validity can be divided into two types; *concurrent validity* and *predictive validity*. “Concurrent validity is established when the test and the criterion are administered at about the same time” (Hughes 1989: 23). This means that two tests measuring the same skills are made and then the results of these tests are compared to each other. If the scores of the tests agree with each other the test can be considered valid. Predictive validity is concerned with finding out how well “a test can predict the candidates’ future performance” (Hughes 1989: 25).

As the third aspect of validity Hughes (1989: 26) lists *construct validity*, which means that if it can be shown that a test, a part of a test or a testing technique measures what it is meant to measure then it also has construct validity. The fourth aspect to validity is in Hughes’ (1989: 26) opinion *face*

validity. Face validity simply means that a test should look like it measures what it is supposed to measure. For example, a test of pronunciation should contain speaking in order to have face validity. In addition to these four aspects, Weir (1988: 28) offers a fifth one called *washback validity*. This means that if a test is to have washback validity the students' skills that are being tested should be the same skills that they have learned during the teaching. Weir (1989: 28) also argues that if a test held at the end of a teaching period is decided to be a communicative test in advance this will lead to the teaching being more communicative as well.

Fulcher and Davidson (2007: 114) state that reliability has been, and still is, possibly the biggest concern, and at the same time one of the most important factors in testing because tests and assessments are made by humans and humans do make mistakes. Hughes (1989: 29) defines the concept of reliability by stating that a test is reliable if a person's scores on the same test in different times are very similar. Hughes argues that because of human nature not even under the best circumstances it is possible for a person's score to be exactly the same in different times. Weir (1989: 34) states that one important aspect of reliability is that the results of a test should not depend on the rater. In other words, a test taker should score the same result no matter who the rater is. Also Luoma (2004: 177) points out that one influential factor in reliability is the rater of a speaking test and that the raters used in formal examinations are often trained for the task by the examination boards. The raters are introduced to the rating scale and assessment criteria that are being used in the assessment and they are played taped performances of different levels so that they can familiarize themselves with the characteristics of the different levels. Rater training also includes practising rating taped performances and discussion about the assessment criteria and at the end of the training, the raters take a qualifying test which ensures the standardization of the raters.

Luoma (2004: 179) further on points out that the raters must have *internal consistency* or *intra-rater reliability* which means that the raters must have a clear picture of their own ratings. Also *inter-rater reliability* is needed to ensure that all the raters rate the tests in the same way. Luoma (2004: 180) also argues that especially in assessing speaking *parallel form reliability* might be needed. This means that if more than one type of test task, for example, are being used for the assessment then the tasks should be parallel, or in other words, they should produce the same results even though the tasks are different.

In the previous paragraphs attention has been paid to testing and assessing speaking in general and also to some of the key areas of testing oral skills. Some light has been shed, for example, on the test taker's individual characteristics that affect testing, different areas of language that are present in speaking, different testing task types, forms of testing and the issues of reliability and validity. In the next paragraph a closer look will be taken into how oral skills are assessed in both Finnish national upper-secondary schools and in Finnish IB upper-secondary schools. Also the possibility of an oral section in the Finnish matriculation examinations will be discussed in more detail.

4.2.4. Testing and assessing English oral skills in Finland

As other fields of language proficiency are being tested frequently in upper secondary schools it seems as testing speaking and oral skills has been neglected. This topic raised some discussion a few years back, when the idea of adding a section of oral skills to the Finnish matriculation examination was introduced (once again).

The National Board of General Education set a committee to investigate the possibility of adding a section of oral skills to the matriculation examination of foreign languages already in 1988 (SUKO 1993: 35). The committee was set to investigate how a test of oral skills could be organized in the matriculation examination. The committee was also to find out information on oral skills' tests in other European countries and especially in the Nordic countries. Based on the information the committee would receive, it would make a suggestion how the testing of oral skills could be organized in Finland. The committee ended up stating that experimental tests should be organized in a few schools during a three year trial period, to find out what would be the best way to organize the testing, what would be a suitable timetable for executing the testing and what would be the financial costs of the testing. The experimental testing was carried out in several schools during 1990-1993 but a section of oral skills was not added to the matriculation examination when the trial period was over. However, a set of tests was designed by the National Board of Education to serve as the national measuring device of oral skills for upper secondary school students. These tests were to be graded by the teachers working at the upper secondary schools and they were voluntary for the students. The National Board of Education also started to offer training for the teachers doing the evaluation. According to the Ministry of Education (2006: 9) this model is still at use.

In 2005 the Finnish Ministry of Education (2006) set another committee to investigate again the possibility to test oral skills in Finnish national upper secondary schools. The committee was to find

out how oral skills could be tested in national upper secondary schools in a way that the evaluation of the testing would be commensurable and reliable. The committee also had to investigate which languages and which courses could be included in the testing and what would be the financial costs of this project. After considering the possibilities how the students' oral proficiency could be tested in national upper secondary schools the committee made a suggestion that one of the mandatory courses in languages would be transformed into a course of oral skills (Ministry of Education, 2006: 42-43). The committee continued that during this course the students' oral proficiency should be tested using the set of tests that has been designed by the National Board of Education. The teachers in schools would be responsible for evaluating the students' performance. The committee was against of adding a section of oral skills to the matriculation examination of languages and they justified their view by stating that the costs of designing, executing and evaluating such tests would considerably rise. The committee continued that adding such a test would also be difficult because all schools do not have language labs or enough teachers to perform the evaluation and monitoring of the students. Further on this might cause troubles in the everyday routines of the schools and certainly it would increase the costs. The committee also argues that if the testing was a part of the matriculation examination it would have to be evaluated by the sensors of the Matriculation Examination Board. In this case the outcome of the evaluation would be valued but, the number of sensors to be used would have to be much bigger than it is at the moment. And this would once again increase the costs (Ministry of Education, 2006: 35-37).

As stated above, the possibility of adding a section of oral skills to the matriculation examination has been studied and in the past years widely discussed. Takala (1993: 30) states that the level of stress given to the oral test could depend on the language that is being tested. Takala argues that in Finland it would be very important to put more stress to the teaching and testing of oral skills in Swedish, because Swedish is after all in the status of an official language in Finland. Takala (1993: 31) continues that because English is an international language of communication, all its fields (writing, speaking, listening etc.) should be equally stressed in the test. Takala (1993: 32) introduces a model according to which the oral section of the matriculation examination could be graded. In this model the students' total grade of oral skills would be formed from three different parts. The first part would be based on the teacher's continuous evaluation of the students' skills, the second part would be based on the students' self or peer evaluation and the third part would be based on a test of oral skills. These three parts would sum up to a maximum of 60 points that would be added

to the points that the students score from the other sections of the matriculation examination (of languages).

Takala (1993: 32) is in favour of organising the tests of oral skills in the matriculation examination in a way that could be standardized. Takala continues that in the test there could be a tape based section that should also be recorded and a section based on a discussion or an interview. In Takala's view the Matriculation Examination Board should provide schools with the material for the oral tests. Takala (1993: 32) states that the evaluation of the oral tests could be performed by the teachers who teach the language at the schools. Takala continues that the quality of the evaluation could be monitored by randomly picking 5% of the schools to send 5-10 students' recorded tests and evaluations to the Matriculation Examination Board.

Although Takala is in favour of adding a section of oral skills to the matriculation examination of foreign languages in Finnish national upper secondary schools, he also points out that it should be carefully studied how the tests can be designed in a way that they are reliable enough. Takala also states that the tests should be able to be organized without any bigger problems and in a cost-efficient manner (1993: 30).

The next chapter will discuss the testing of oral skills in both national upper secondary schools and IB upper secondary schools and also concentrate on the idea of an oral test in the matriculation examination of English.

4.2.4.1. Testing and assessing oral skills in national upper secondary schools

As already mentioned in chapter 2.1.1. students in Finnish national upper-secondary schools can choose course 8 in English which is an oral course of English. The objectives of course eight, *Speak and understand better*, are to develop different strategies of speech communication and practise the use of oral English in different kinds of situations. The topics discussed on the course can be the same as those of the other courses and also current affairs. The aim is to practise oral skills, both listening and speaking, via demanding texts that are related to these topics (FNBE 2009, in Appendix 1: 3). In class the students participate in different kinds of oral tasks in pairs or in groups. The students also give individual speeches and other presentations. The teacher's role is to monitor, instruct and evaluate the students' participation and oral skills also in class and because of

this, it is important to carefully consider the group size of this course so that the teacher has enough time for monitoring and assessment (FNBE, 2012b).

As previously discussed in chapter 3.1.1., the national oral test is the final test in course 8 and it is constructed by the Finnish National Board of Education. The FNBE has opened an online test bank for the assessment of oral skills. The tasks and assessment criteria in this bank are constructed by the FNBE and they are specifically intended for the assessment of course 8 of A-level English in upper secondary schools. The headmasters of upper secondary schools' can register their schools' teachers as users of the test bank. The teachers can then order the assessment criteria, general guidelines for the test and the test tasks from the bank free of charge (FNBE, 2012).

According to the General Upper Secondary Schools Decree (online, 2012), the oral skills' test includes tasks that measure the students' level of pronunciation and the students' narrative and conversational skills. The test is done in pairs and it is up to the teacher to decide the pairs. The pairs should be formed so that the students are as equal as possible in English skills. The students are given 20 minutes to prepare for the test (FNBE, 2012c) and the actual test can take a maximum of 20 minutes. In the test there are three tasks. In the first task both of the students read out loud a separate text in English and after reading ask a few questions from their pair. In the second task both students have been given a Finnish text and they should sum up the main points of the text in English and after this again ask question from their pair. The questions in tasks one and two are linked to the topics of the texts but they do not measure the listener's knowledge of the texts. The purpose of the questions is to generate authentic conversation between the two candidates. In the last task the students are given a situation and some guidelines for how the conversation should proceed. The situation can, for example, be that one student is a parent and the other is a child wanting a pet. The guidelines will steer the conversation so that the pair would first talk about the pros and cons of different pets and then move on to talking about who will take care of the pet and so on. All of the tasks are structured so that the pairs should end up talking about the same things.

The optimum situation would be if two teachers could participate in the assessment but the reality is that this is not always possible. If only one teacher takes part in the assessment in the live situation then the test situations have to be videoed so that the teacher can later on watch the videos when making the final assessment. In the assessment the teacher uses the Language Proficiency Scale to assess the students' performances. The teacher should consider the students' pronunciation, fluency,

grammatical correctness, the richness of vocabulary and structures used by the students, and how well the students perform and communicate in the given tasks (FBNE, 2012c). The final grade that the students receive is on a scale 4-10. The result of the oral test affects the grade of the course as well. The students get a separate certificate if they take the oral exam.

If a student attends the oral course and takes part in the national oral examination they will get a grade from the course. This course number will be taken into account when the student is given the final grade based on the average of all English course grades. This final grade is given in the general upper secondary school certificate, not the Matriculation Examination Certificate. In other words, the oral course and examination do not have any effect on the matriculation examination grade or Certificate.

4.2.4.2. Testing and assessing oral skills in IB upper secondary schools

The IB Diploma Programme sets out goals for the students. The goals vary from research and independent learning skills to critical-thinking and reflection skills. One of the main goals is to prepare students to gain such skills that they are ready and able to enter universities. To find out if these goals have been achieved the IB Diploma programme students take final written examinations at the end of the programme and if they pass them they are awarded with the diploma (IBO, 2012f). The written examinations are marked by external IB examiners. The IBO uses both internal and external evaluation. This means that some of the work being assessed is sent to the IBO examiners for evaluation and some of the work is being evaluated by the students' own teachers at the IB schools. In order to guarantee high level of reliability and objectivity in the assessment, external assessment is used to evaluate the final examinations and also other work such as e.g. the extended essays, theory of knowledge essays and world literature assignments. Internal assessment performed by the teachers is used in the IB schools to evaluate for example oral work in languages, field work in geography, artistic performances and laboratory work in the sciences. The assessments made by the teachers are then checked by external examiners (IBO, 2012g).

In addition to the externally assessed written examinations, the Language A2 assessment consists of two components; externally assessed written component and internally assessed oral component. The written component consists of two written papers and a written task which total to a maximum of 70% of the student's final grade. The two papers are set and assessed externally (IBO, 2002: 27).

The oral component, which is the main interest of this study, consists of two parts; an individual oral and an interactive oral activity. Both of these are worth a maximum of 15% of the student's final grade. The individual oral part is an "activity based on a text taken from a cultural or literary option studied" (IBO 2002: 27) and each student completes it individually with the teacher. The interactive oral activity percentage comes from another "activity that is based on either a cultural or literary option studied, whichever was not the focus of the individual oral". According to Hamer (personal communication), for example, in Jyväskylä IB upper-secondary school the students give presentations in three different topics set by the teacher. These presentations can be given in pairs. The presentations are assessed by the teacher and the best one of the three is what counts to their final grade. The teacher gives points to the students from both, the individual oral part and the interactive oral activity. The points are converted into a percentage and the maximum percentage of the oral component is altogether 30% of the students' final grade. The individual oral part is recorded and internally assessed and then the teacher sends the recording to the IBO to be moderated by the IBO examiners. The interactive oral activity is not sent to the IBO. The reason for the external moderation is the fact that IBO wants to be certain that the teacher's assessment is fair and accurate. The assessment of the Language A2 higher level and standard level differ only in the tasks and time spent on tasks, otherwise the assessment is the same in both (IBO, 2002: 34).

In the individual oral task the students are asked to comment on a text that has been studied in class. The teacher chooses the text, and the topic, type and style of the text can vary within the limits of the cultural and literary options that have been studied in class. The text is quite short (the maximum of 40 lines) and the student should not know in advance which text they have to comment on. The task is to critically examine the given text and study the important angles of the text analysing the stylistic features of the text (IBO, 2002: 34). The students are allowed to prepare for this task for 20 minutes in advance so that they can organize and structure their commentary and consider all points of view. The preparation takes place under supervision and the students are allowed to make brief notes. The idea, however, is not to read straight from the notes. In addition to the text being analysed, the students are given some guiding questions. The purpose of the questions is to, for example, offer a starting point or encourage the student to focus on interpretation (IBO, 2002: 35).

During the commentary the student is supposed to focus on analysing only the text at hand. The text could be, for example, an extract from a novel and in this case the student should not comment on

the whole novel. The idea is to analyse, for example, the style and atmosphere of the text extract. The students are expected to show organized communication skills and to use a register suitable for formal occasions (IBO, 2002: 36).

The role of the teacher in this oral activity is portrayed as a “sympathetic listener” (IBO, 2002: 36) who is not supposed to interrupt the student but is allowed to offer positive encouragement if the student is having difficulties in getting started with or continuing the commentary. After the student has given their commentary the teacher should give the student an opportunity to elaborate on some points that might have been given a bit too little attention. The teacher is also responsible for checking that the student understands specific words, phrases and references. The total time used for this oral activity is 15 minutes, of which at least five minutes should be used for discussion with the teacher (IBO, 2002: 35-36).

As already mentioned, the interactive oral activity can be done in pairs or in groups. Many such activities are carried out in classes and the purpose of them is to develop the students’ listening and speaking skills. The interactive oral activity can, for instance, be a structured group discussion, a role play, a dramatic presentation or an oral presentation.

In general, the assessment in IBO schools is “criterion-referenced, not norm-referenced. It judges candidates by their performance in relation to identified assessment criteria and not in relation to the rest of the candidates.” (IBO, 2002: 38). For example, in assessing the oral component three assessment criteria are being used; A) Quality of ideas, B) Presentation and C) Language (IBO, 2002: 38). Each of these three assessment criteria first set out some major features of the criteria in the form of question statements which are then followed by achievement levels with their markband descriptors. Each assessment criterion has six defined descriptors which describe achievement levels 0-10. The idea is to “find, for each assessment criterion, the descriptor that conveys most adequately the achievement level attained by the candidate’s work.” (IBO, 2002: 38). For the full assessment criteria of the oral component of Language A2 (higher level) see appendix 1.

The IB upper-secondary school students do not have a section of oral skills during the final examinations, but the individual oral and the interactive oral activities take place during the Diploma Programme on dates that the teachers decide. However, it is important to notice that the oral component does have a direct influence on the students’ final grade unlike in the national

Finnish upper secondary schools where the students' matriculation examination grade is based only on written tasks and a listening comprehension task.

In this chapter the two upper-secondary school systems working in Finland have been introduced in much detail. The term *oral skills* has been defined using a few well known theories and also the matter of testing English oral skills in Finnish upper secondary schools has been discussed. Both schools offering upper secondary education consider the reliability and validity of the oral tests very important. As already mentioned, in IB schools the recordings of the individual oral component are sent to IBO for moderation so that the students can be assured a fair assessment. On the other hand, in the national upper secondary schools the oral test in course 8 is only assessed by the teacher of that course. If a section of oral skills was to be added in the matriculation examination of languages an external evaluation of the students' performance would be important so that the objectivity of the assessment could be assured. As to the test tasks, both schools use various types of tasks in the test situation. There are both individual and pair/group tasks in the test. Also, both schools have existing assessment criteria which they use in the assessment. In national upper secondary schools the Language Proficiency Scale is being used as criterion and in IB upper secondary schools the criterion created by IBO. Even though these criterion are quite specific, neither of them directly address such factors as the students' personal characteristics, topical knowledge or affective schemata which were listed by Bachman and Palmer (1996) as individual characteristics that affect the students' performance. These criterion concentrate on the students' language ability. Again, if an oral section was added to the matriculation examination also these factors should be taken into consideration when planning the tests.

After shedding light on oral skills as well as on testing them both generally and in two different institutions offering upper secondary education, the following chapter will focus on attitudes. A rough definition of the term will be introduced as well as the link between attitudes and second language learning. After this the focus will shift to Finnish learner attitudes towards English language.

5. ATTITUDES

This study concentrates on finding out what Finnish upper secondary school students think about English oral skills and their importance and what is the students' position on testing oral skills. Therefore, in this chapter, attitudes, their formation and functions, and their role in second language

learning will be discussed in more detail. Special attention will also be given to the attitudes of Finnish students towards English oral skills.

5.1. Defining the term *attitude*

Ajzen defines the term attitude as “a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution or event” (2005: 3) and states that attitudes are evaluative in nature. Simply put, this means that attitudes tell about people’s stance towards different things (attitude objects), for example, if we like something or not. According to Ajzen (2005: 2), attitudes are “latent, hypothetical characteristics that can only be *inferred* from external, observable cues”. In other words, no conclusions about a person’s attitudes can be drawn from the outside appearance of the person and nothing definite can be said about the attitudes either just by looking at a person. In addition to attitudes, Ajzen (2005: 1) also talks about another factor that plays a major role in the dispositional explanation of human behaviour, and this factor is personality trait. Personality traits are characteristics, features or qualities of the human nature that, on their part, define the personality of a person. There exists a great variety of personality traits and among these traits can be e.g. sociability, independence and self-esteem. Ajzen (2005: 6) points out that both attitudes and personality traits are hidden and conjectural and they can be inferred from observable responses. Furthermore, both are assumed to be rather stable and enduring by nature. Nevertheless, attitudes are generally considered more pliable or flexible since they are evaluative (Ajzen 2005: 6). In other words, attitudes can change if, for example, new information becomes available, whereas personality traits are not likely to change so easily.

Because attitudes are hidden from direct outside investigation, they “must be inferred from measurable responses” (Ajzen 2005: 3). These measurable responses mean either “positive or negative evaluations of the attitude object” (Ajzen 2005: 3). In other words, the attitudes of a person can be measured from their positive or negative responses to the attitude object. These responses can be divided into three groups; cognitive responses, affective responses and conative responses (Ajzen 2005: 4). Cognitive responses reflect a person’s thoughts about and perception of the attitude object and they can be either verbal or nonverbal. The verbal responses are easy to notice; they are people’s opinions on the attitude object e.g. if someone says that English is an easy language. Nonverbal cognitive responses can be seen from the behaviour of a person, for example if a student does not like to communicate in English they are not likely to do so. Ajzen (2005: 4) describes the affective responses as “evaluations of, and feelings toward the attitude object”. These

too can be either verbal or nonverbal. The verbal affective responses could be e.g. “expressions of admiration or disgust, appreciation or disdain.” (Ajzen 2005: 5) Facial expressions, heart rate, blood pressure and the dilation of the pupil are examples of nonverbal affective responses. Conative responses are according to Ajzen (2005: 5) “behavioural inclinations, intentions, commitments, and actions with respect to the attitude object” and again these can be divided into verbal and nonverbal. Verbal conative responses are things “people say they do, plan to do or would do under appropriate circumstances.” (Ajzen 2005: 5) and nonverbal conative responses are actions “indicating favorable or unfavorable attitudes.”

Oskamp (1977: 19) too recognizes these three previously mentioned components of attitudes, although he talks about cognitive, affective and behavioural (not conative) components. Oskamp suggests that these three components could also be treated as separate dimensions, not as attitude components, and they could be called “beliefs, attitudes and behavioral intentions” (1977: 19). Oskamp (1977: 19) also points out that there are many concepts, such as beliefs, opinions, values and habits, that are connected to attitude as a term, but they cannot be considered as synonyms for the word *attitude*. Oskamp defines the term attitude as “a broad evaluative orientation toward an object” (1977: 19) and continues that opinions and beliefs are not as broad as attitudes. People have plenty of attitudes toward a great deal of different attitude objects but not all of them are in action at the same time (Oskamp, 1977: 51). Attitudes are aroused into action by an internal need or an external cue that are mostly dependent on the purpose or function they serve for the person in question.

Katz (1960: 170) has defined four functions for attitudes. The first one is *The instrumental, adjustive or utilitarian function* (also known as *Need Satisfaction*) and its purpose is to help people reach their goals, satisfy their needs or adjust to life situations. The second function is *The ego-defensive function* and it works to improve people’s self-esteem and to protect people from the harshness of the outside world. The third function is *The value-expressive function* and its purpose is to build up a person’s self-identity. The fourth function is *The knowledge function* (or *Understanding*) and it supports our understanding of the world around us.

Halloran (1967: 28), who has studied the formation and change of attitudes, is very much on the same lines with Katz’s functional approach when he points out that attitudes are tools that help people deal with things they come across in life and they are also projections of how we work as

humans. Attitudes are not innate but learned and attitudes develop through experience (Halloran 1967: 28). Furthermore, three main sources of attitudes can be found and these sources are: “direct experience with the objects and situations, explicit and implicit learning from others and personality development.”(Halloran, 1967: 29). In other words, people’s attitudes are formed on the strength of their own personal experiences, they are copied directly or indirectly from other people or they are a set part of one’s personality.

Halloran (1967: 30) explains the formation of attitudes through the process of socialization. This process is the transition in which a child becomes an adult and in this process attitudes and values are learned from the people who are close to the child e.g. parents, siblings, friends and teachers. The purpose of socialization is to learn the rules of a given society or a group so that a person can function in that society or group. Halloran (1967: 34) goes on explaining that much of this learning is the result of direct teaching or instruction but also indirect learning, such as unintended or accidental actions, plays an important part in the learning of attitudes. Another significant factor in this process is imitation. Children imitate the people around them and in this way learn by observing the behaviour of other people. Even if a person has direct experience with an attitude object they might still form their attitude based on the attitudes of other people and not on their personal direct experience of the attitude object (Halloran, 1967: 39). To put it simply, attitudes can be contagious, although, people do not adopt all attitudes that cross their paths but are likely to pick the ones that suit them the best (Halloran, 1967: 36).

This contagiousness of attitudes is important because people live mostly in different kinds of groups. One person can belong to various groups during their life and the different groups have different attitudes. These groups are called *reference groups* in the field of studying attitudes and they have two different functions. The purpose of the *comparative function* is to offer a person a standard against which one can compare oneself when self-judgement is made. The *normative function* of a reference group means that a person assimilates their attitudes and values from a particular group (Halloran 1967: 42). In short, the importance of groups in people’s lives is very big. People assimilate from groups and compare themselves to others in the context provided by groups.

In summary, attitudes are people’s presumptions about different things and they serve various purposes in people’s lives. Attitudes are often learned from the people close to us or from groups

that we belong to. Many of people's attitudes are hidden and can only be observed from different kinds of visible responses. Attitudes are also rather permanent. After having laid out the origin, formation and functions of attitudes, a closer look will be taken on the role of attitudes in second language learning and attitudes toward English in Finland.

5.2. Attitudes in second language learning

Gardner has studied the role of attitudes in second language learning and he states that "attitudes influence individuals' responses to attitude objects or situations" (1982: 132) but that they do not determine them. With this Gardner means that by observing individuals' attitudes, the chances are better to predict and understand individuals' behaviour, but still no absolutely valid predictions can be made on how someone will behave in some situation. The correlation between achievement in second language learning and attitudes has been studied quite a lot. For example, while studying the effect of attitudes and motivation to learning French in three different cities in the U.S. Gardner and Lambert (1972: 56-57) found that students with high motivation and positive attitudes got good grades, whereas students with negative attitudes were struggling with comprehension and vocabulary. Very different reasons for the positive attitudes were found. The reasons varied from paternal encouragement and personal satisfaction to strong identification with the teacher. One of the main factors was location and the attitudes of other people as well. For example in Louisiana poor success in learning French was connected to "stereotyped negative feelings toward French-Americans" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972: 57). In other words negative attitudes towards the language group led to poor success in learning the language, whereas positive attitudes have a positive effect on learning.

Gardner (1982: 134) explains that in most of the studies on attitudes and second language learning a contrast has been made between integrative and instrumental reasons for learning a language. Gardner carries on stating that integrative reasons refer to deeper interest in the target language, for example wanting to learn more about the culture and people of the target language. Instrumental reasons are more superficial; the target language is been studied, for example, because the learner wants to go on a holiday or wants a job where the target language is needed. Gardner states that studies have shown that people who learn a language for integrative reasons are generally more motivated, more proficient and have more positive attitudes than those who learn the language for instrumental reasons (1982: 134).

Gardner (1985) points out that there are many factors related to individual learners that affect the learning of a second language. In Gardner's (1985: 4) view one of the most important factors in relation to success in learning a second language is the learners' attitudes. Gardner (1985: 6) points out that learning a new language is not like any other school subject but it is, in a way, more complete and comprehensive. The language of a people brings with it also the culture of that people and with the culture come also the customs and habits of the people. Hence, learning a new language comes with the free gift of learning more than just the language and, in Gardner's (1985: 6) opinion, the learning of the language can be influenced by the students' attitudes toward the language group and the culture it represents. Gardner (1985: 7) continues that it is not only the cultural aspect of languages that might bring out a certain attitude in a learner but also the language itself involves such things e.g. speaking the language, the grammar or the way the language sounds that might cue those attitudes. In the same way, the environment in which learning takes place, teaching methods, materials and also the teacher can too be very influential in the learning process (Gardner, 1985: 7-8). Gardner and Lambert (1972: 14) argue that the attitudes that a learner holds toward the language group in question affects the learner's success. To be more precise, Gardner and Lambert (1972: 16) believe that learners who are prejudiced toward foreign peoples are also more likely to have a negative attitude toward learning a new language.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) studied English-speaking American high school students studying French in Louisiana. The focus was on the relationship between attitudes and achievement in second language learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972: 36-37) found that even though intellectual capacity plays an important part in learning a foreign language, and more particularly in the fields of grammar, vocabulary and reading, it does not have much to do with the proficiency level in oral skills. They had no airtight explanation for the fact that the students' oral competence in French varied greatly but they suspected that the reason might be related to access to the language speakers or to the fact that oral skills might be learned through an "aptitude for phonemic distinctions and memorizing foreign sounds" (Gardner and Lambert, 1972: 37).

Gardner (1985: 39-40) focuses on two types of attitudes; attitudes toward learning a language and attitudes toward the other-language community. The attitudes toward learning a language can consist of educational factors like attitudes toward the teacher or the language itself, whereas the attitudes toward an other-language community consists of socially relevant factors e.g. the group that speaks the language. Gardner (1985: 40) continues that attitudes in second language learning

can be classified in two categories: specific attitudes and general attitudes. This means that, for example, *attitudes toward foreign languages* is a quite general attitude object, whereas *attitudes toward English in Finland* is a rather specific attitude object. Gardner (1985: 43-45) reports that in addition to attitudes there are other factors as well that influence second language learning. For example, the learner's sex, age, family background and geographical location all have an effect on the success of learning a second language. On the other hand, Gardner (1985: 47) states that the learner's intelligence or language aptitude have little to do with the learner's attitudes toward the other-language community and therefore the social and educational aspects of attitudes should be considered separately.

In his studies, Gardner (1985: 50-53) approaches the question of why attitudes are related to achievement and comes to the conclusion that attitudes toward e.g. learning a second language are one of four major factors that together form the concept of motivation. The three other factors are goal, effort and want. In other words, a person's success in learning a second language is dependent on their motivation and attitudes affect motivation. Gardner (1985: 56) states that attitudes together with motivation direct a person to look for opportunities to learn the language and be actively involved in the learning process. Gardner (1985: 84) points out that attitudes in second language learning work in two directions. On the one hand, because attitudes are presumptions, they affect the way people think about the attitude object in advance and, on the other hand, the attitude object may have an effect on the person's attitude because of their personal experience with the attitude object. In other words, a person might have a negative attitude toward e.g. learning English before they start, but after getting good feedback in their studies they might develop a more positive attitude toward learning English.

As explained in this chapter, attitudes have a major role in the learning of a second language. A positive attitude towards a foreign language or the speakers of that language can help to achieve better results in the learning process. Another factor pointed out in this chapter is that attitudes are flexible and therefore can change. Also, attitudes are not innate but learned. The relevance of knowing these things is that if a positive attitude towards e.g. English, English oral skills, and testing English oral skills is promoted in schools, and why not at home too, perhaps this will lead to students actually having a more positive attitude towards them, and furthermore, perhaps students will be more successful in them. After having discussed attitudes in second language learning, more light will be shed on attitudes towards English in Finland.

5.3. Attitudes towards English

After having taken a closer look on attitudes in second language learning it is time to move on to examining the position of English in Finland. In this chapter the position of English is first briefly considered as a global language and after that the overall position of English and attitudes towards English in Finland will be examined in more detail. A special interest is on the attitudes of Finnish students on the English oral skills.

5.3.1. English as a global language

According to the British Council (2013, online), English is spoken as an official language in over 75 countries. It is the first language of approximately 375 million people and the second language of around the same figure, 375 million people. English is a language whose influence can be seen almost everywhere in the world nowadays. It has become the lingua franca of several fields of life all over the world. English is the language of e.g. business, travel, science, media and education. Not all languages become global languages or world languages or a lingua franca like English. According to Nevalainen (2004: 10), the spread and dominance of English as a world language is the outcome of many things. Nevalainen continues that the successfulness of the spread of English has its roots in the colonial power of Great Britain. Also the education system and international business relations have had an impact on English becoming a global language. One important aspect in the spread of English is that it is spoken in many parts of the world as a first language or mother tongue like, for example, in North America and Australia (Nevalainen 2004: 13).

According to Pahta (2004: 38-39), the global status of English is seen both as a positive and a negative thing. For example, in international negotiations English can be seen as an equality raising factor among people who come from different countries and cultures. On the other hand, some people see English as the language of power, domination and capitalism. Pahta (2004: 39) continues that English might even be referred to as a killer language. This is due to the fact that the speakers of many small languages might feel that their language is threatened by the overpowering status of English and some native languages of aboriginal peoples have indeed vanished because of the spread of English. Some countries are very strict about letting English words get borrowed into their own language.

5.3.2. English in Finland

In 2012 in Finland there were only about 14 600 people in Finland who spoke English as their first language (SVT, 2013, online) but if we think about the people who speak English as a second or a foreign language the number is very different. In Finland most of the population has some kind of command of English.

Hiidenmaa (2003: 59) has focused on the state of the Finnish language in today's Finland and she says that languages do not die out because of errors in grammatical correctness but that they die out of more complex reasons such as political and economic factors. This means that people should not be worried about the future of Finnish just because someone does not use the right grammatical forms of the language. Hiidenmaa (2003: 64) argues that even though Finnish is not a global language, it is an important local language and for this reason it is not likely to die out and be replaced with other languages. Hiidenmaa (2003: 61) explains that knowing more than one language makes a person's opportunities in life better. For example, in Finland it would be difficult to get higher education if a person did not know English. This is due to the fact that many materials used in colleges and universities in Finland are in English. Hiidenmaa (2003: 61) states that because of high quality foreign language teaching in Finland, the Finnish students can acquire such a competence in foreign languages that they are able to manage in their studies, work and hobbies. All kinds of immersion courses of English and English playschools have increased in Finland and also more basic and secondary education is offered in English. All in all over 80% of Finnish pupils choose English to be their first foreign language (Hiidenmaa, 2003: 90).

Altogether, English is being used more and more in Finland and it can be seen in everyday life e.g. in commercials, in newspaper ads, in the fields of entertainment, art and science. For example, many signs are only in English in Finland and Hiidenmaa (2003: 75) explains this phenomenon by saying that a sign in English is thought to serve a bigger crowd than a sign in Finnish. It is expected that all Finns understand English and there is no need for a Finnish sign. Leppänen and Nikula (2008: 12) state that the spread of English in Finland is a part of the global phenomenon in which English is gaining more foothold as a global language. At first English has not had an official role in Finland but it has been taught as a foreign language. With time the uses of English in Finnish society have increased and because of this English is nowadays an integral part of both the working life and free time activities in Finland (Leppänen & Nikula 2008: 16-17). Leppänen and Nikula (2008: 22-23) stress the fact that in Finland there are many different kinds of situations in which

English is being used. For example, English is used when a Finn is talking to a native English speaker or when the only common language between the speakers is English. Also some companies might have chosen English to be the official working language.

5.3.3. Finnish learner attitudes towards English

Sajavaara (2006: 223) states that Finnish people usually have a positive attitude towards English and that the teaching and learning of English in Finland is not questioned because people feel that they need the language e.g. in their work. Knowing English is considered to be meaningful and useful. Also Hyrkstedt and Kalaja (1998) report that English has cemented its role in Finland and, that English is seen generally as a positive thing.

On the other hand, the teaching of English in Finland is often seen as defective. The general impression is that grammar and vocabulary are the areas of English that are taught and learned the most in school whereas, the actual skills to use English in real life (e.g. speaking and communication) are being left with little attention. For example, Alanen, Dufva and Kalaja (2007: 133) found that first year university English students felt that they had learned the most about grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of English at school. On the other hand, the students also felt that at the same time they had not learned language use, more specifically speaking, at school.

Also Dufva, Lähteenmäki and Isoherranen (1996) have studied the attitudes of Finnish people towards language learning and teaching in Finland and their findings were similar to those of Alanen, Dufva and Kalaja (2007). Dufva et al. (1996: 52-54) found that many people have negative experiences of language teaching and that they are not satisfied with the teaching. Too much attention is paid to the mistakes language learners make and this gives the impression that a perfect and a faultless command of the language being taught is demanded. Also the lack of oral language practice in classes is criticized. Many of the participants of the study felt that after leaving school they had some kind of a knowledge of the language but they had no skills to use that knowledge. Many also felt intimidated in a situation where they were actually required to use the language (Dufva et al. 1996: 56-57). Apart from the teaching of languages, the participants also had opinions about learning a language. According to Dufva et al. (1996: 61-65), many of the participants felt, that the learning of a language in school was rather passive by nature. Some participants reported to have learned languages by doing, in other words, by using the language outside school in an authentic oral communication situation in the target language environment. According to Dufva et

al. (1996: 64), learning a foreign language in Finland was considered self-evident because one cannot cope with Finnish outside Finland. In other words, learning languages was seen as a positive thing but the need to learn a language to such extent that one can understand and to be understood in the language in question was stressed.

A recent large-scale national research on the use of English in Finland was carried out by Leppänen *et al.* and it was published in 2009. Leppänen *et al.* (2011:88) found that to most people English is at least somewhat important. Leppänen *et al.* (2011: 79) report that “Most Finns ... seem to have a neutral and practical attitude towards English.” They found that the respondents felt that almost everyone in Finland should know English. However they found a clear difference between different age groups and people with different level of education. Leppänen *et al.* (2011: 82) report that younger people have a more positive attitude towards English than older people and also more educated people feel more positively about English than less educated people.

What comes to the English oral skills of Finnish people Leppänen *et al.* (2011: 90) discovered that many of the respondents thought that a native-like fluency of English is highly valued in Finland. Leppänen *et al.* (2011: 90) also report that young people appreciate good English speaking skills more than older people whereas older people appreciate a good effort more. According to Leppänen *et al.* (2011:100), quite many people feel inadequate in situations where they have to discuss with a native speaker of English. Perhaps this implies that the English pronunciation and communication skills are not taught and practised enough in Finnish schools. This also brings out the fact that maybe in Finnish schools the mistakes that a language learner makes are taken too seriously. If instead of addressing grammar mistakes the students were rewarded for getting a message across to the listener maybe people would not feel so intimidated in communicative situations in which they have to speak with a native speaker of English. Most respondents (25,5%) of the study felt that their skills in speaking English was at a moderate level and the second biggest group (24,6%) was at a fairly fluent level (Leppänen *et al.* 2011: 95). 10,8% of the respondents felt that they had no skills in speaking English altogether. Leppänen *et al.* (2011: 96) state that most participants did not have problems in understanding English. Only 10% felt that they did not understand any English.

As a summary it can be said that language learners in Finland feel that whereas grammar and vocabulary are being taught sufficiently in Finnish schools the oral skills of languages are being neglected. If more weight was put on practising the oral skills and communication skills of

languages maybe language users in Finland would not be so intimidated in communicative situations in which they have to use a foreign language. Another advantage to making students practise oral skills more is that more practice would justify the systematic testing of oral skills as well as make oral skills as an important part of knowing a language as e.g. grammar or vocabulary.

6. PREVIOUS STUDIES

In the previous chapter the term *attitude* was defined and also the relevance of attitudes in second language learning or acquisition was established. Attitudes towards English in Finland, and in Finnish schools were also discussed. This chapter will introduce some previous studies which are considered to be significant regarding the present study.

Yli-Renko (1989) has studied oral skills and its assessment in the final phase of the Finnish national upper secondary school. Her focus was on testing students' oral skills in German language. Yli-Renko set out to find a suitable and reliable method of testing oral skills because she felt that the matriculation examination did not support the oral aspect of language which is rather important field of language, for example, in working life. Yli-Renko (1989: 14) justifies the *oral* testing of oral skills by stating that even though written tests measure linguistic competence they do not measure the students' capacity to operate in real communicative intercultural situations. Yli-Renko (1989: 14) also states that an oral section of language should be added to the matriculation examination because it would have the effect that more weight would be put on the teaching of oral skills in national upper secondary schools.

Yli-Renko (1989: 15) argues that the testing of oral skills should be executed in a situation which is as natural as possible. The test tasks should be interesting, motivating and functional so that the student will speak as freely as possible. Yli-Renko (1989: 15) also points out that the contents of the test should be based on the National Core Curriculum and that there are many possible ways to conduct the testing. One important factor stressed by Yli-Renko is that the test tasks should be face-to-face tasks where the student talks with the tester. One good method of testing oral skills, according to Yli-Renko (1898: 19), is an interview. In her study Yli-Renko (1898: 31) used interview, role play and describing from pictures as testing methods because she argued that using only one form of testing does not bring out all aspects of spoken language.

In the actual testing situation a native German speaker acted as the interlocutor and the performances were videoed and later on some of them were rated by two experienced German teachers. Yli-Renko being the researcher was also present in the situation assessing the students' performances. Also the native German interlocutor gave their evaluation of the students' performance before the next test taker arrived to be tested (Yli-Renko 1989: 39). Yli-Renko (1989: 60) goes on explaining the results of the study and she states that only students studying A-level German reached the same level in the oral proficiency test that their grades indicated although the test's contents did not meet with the official goals of the teaching. Yli-Renko came to the conclusion that not much weight is put on oral proficiency in the students' grades. However, Yli-Renko (1989: 61) is of the opinion that this type of testing oral skills could be added to the matriculation examination of languages. She argues that the washback effect that this type of testing would have on the teaching of languages in upper secondary schools would be extremely significant. Yli-Renko also points out that the validity and reliability of the test would be secured by training the interlocutors and assessors.

Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee (1991) have studied the oral communication aspect of foreign language teaching in Finnish national upper-secondary school. In their study Yli-Renko focused on finding out if the students achieve a good language proficiency in upper-secondary school, whether the students were satisfied with the teaching or wanted changes and if the students felt that a section of oral skills in the Matriculation examination was necessary.

The study was carried out by using a questionnaire and the participants were upper-secondary school third grade students from different schools around Finland. The students that participated in the study were groups of students of English, Swedish and German on different difficulty levels. The languages they had to comment on were English, Swedish, German, French and Russian. The results of the study show that most participants felt that they acquire good skills in writing and in grammar in school in all languages. On the topic of oral skills the participants felt that they do not learn to speak foreign languages well in upper-secondary school. The results were the same in all languages except for the level A English. The opinions concerning this language were divided almost evenly to half.

The results of Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee's (1991) study also show that the students did not think that the amount of grammar, writing and translation teaching should be reduced in language teaching.

On the other hand, they did say that they would want more practice in oral skills in language classes. When asked about adding a section of oral skills into the Matriculation examination, the opinions of the students were divided in half almost evenly. Those who were for the adding of the oral section reasoned that with a section of oral skills the Matriculation examination would better reflect the students' practical skills in languages and maybe also motivate students to learn languages. Those who were against the oral section felt that factors like excitement, nervousness, stress, tiredness and illness could affect the result of the oral test too much and also that students who did not have possibilities to speak the language outside school would be disadvantaged.

According to Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee (1991: 56-7), all the participants agreed on the fact that if a section of oral skills would be added to the Matriculation examination, more practice in speaking was needed in classes. The participants felt that the testing of oral skills should be done so that the students would talk with the tester and the situation would be recorded. The participants said that the students' own teacher should not be the one doing the evaluation, but that the tapes should be sent to the Matriculation examination board for evaluation.

Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006) studied practising, testing and assessing oral skills in Finnish upper-secondary schools. They focused on teachers' opinions. The aims of the study were to find out how oral skills are practised, tested and assessed in upper secondary schools, what are the teachers' opinions on these and how do background variables like age, sex and education affect the teachers' opinions and ways of practicing, testing and assessing oral skills. Huuskonen and Kähkönen were also interested in differences between the county of western Finland and the county of Oulu. This difference, however, is not relevant to the present study, so it will not be looked at in more detail.

The study of Huuskonen and Kähkönen was carried out by using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to in total 200 English teachers all over Finland via e-mail and 80 questionnaires were returned. The results of the study show that almost all the participants agreed on the fact that oral skills are an important part of language proficiency. Also majority of the participants felt that teaching oral skills in upper-secondary school is important. In contrast to the importance of oral skills some 60 per cent of the participants still felt that teaching written skills is more important than teaching oral skills.

Although the study illustrated that most teachers consider oral skills to be important, it also showed that a surprisingly large number of the teachers, 31, 6%, did not let the students' oral skills affect their course grades. Also 59 per cent of the participants did not test the students' oral skills. 56, 9 per cent of the participants did, however, include oral skills in their students' course grades and they used methods like constant monitoring, language laboratory tests etc. to evaluate students' oral proficiency.

The study of Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006) illustrated that most schools, whose teacher participated in the study, offer a special optional course of oral skills to the students, and in addition to this, oral skills are practised in classes. The most frequently used ways to practise oral skills with first year upper-secondary school students were reported to be dialogue, pair discussions and pronunciation exercises. The result was the same for second year students as well. For third year students the most frequently used methods were pair discussion, group discussion, and dialogue. The results of the study point out that the reasons for not practising oral skills are, according to the participants, lack of time, group sizes and student related reasons. The matriculation examination was also given as a reason.

As these previous studies illustrate, the possibility of testing oral skills in Finnish upper secondary schools has been looked into already at the end of 1980s and at the beginning of 1990s. Already at that time the link between testing oral skills and the amount of practice in oral skills has been visible. In other words, if oral skills are tested in school, they are also practised more. Furthermore, also the problems of testing and assessing oral skills in a reliable and valid manner are not new. The opinions or attitudes of both students and teachers regarding oral skills and the testing of them have been canvassed already before. Both students and teachers considered oral skills to be important. The assumption that students have a generally positive attitude towards English oral skills serves as a starting point to the present study in which the emphasis is on comparing the attitudes of students from two different institutions offering upper secondary education in Finland.

After having taken a look at some previous studies, the next chapter will introduce the present study. In the next chapter the aims, purpose, data collection and the analysing of the data will be discussed in more detail.

7. PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter the aims and the purpose of the present study will be discussed first. The research questions of the study will be introduced next. Also the methods of the study and the collection and analysis of the data will be introduced in more detail.

7.1. Aims and purpose

The general aim is to find out what kinds of attitudes do Finnish upper secondary school students have towards English, the importance of English oral skills and the testing of oral skills in upper secondary school. The study will concentrate on comparing the attitudes of students who attend national upper secondary school and students who are studying in IB upper secondary schools. The study will focus on the students' conceptions of and opinions on different aspects of English language, the teaching of spoken English in school, the use of English outside school and the testing of oral skills in upper secondary school. The information gotten through this study can be useful because it can be used to make English teaching more learner-centred. In other words, the study will reveal e.g. whether the students think that practicing oral skills is important and if they think that oral skills should be tested. The focus of the study will be on the students' attitudes towards the importance of English and oral skills and what kinds of attitudes do the students have regarding the testing of oral skills in the final phases of their upper secondary school studies. Studying the importance of English oral skills will also shed some light on how the students feel about the different areas of language and language learning. The attitudes towards English oral skills need to be examined more carefully so that the future, and present, English teachers would have more specified information on what kinds of English oral skills should be taught in schools. One aim of the study is to find out what do students think about the testing of oral skills in upper secondary school.

The field of oral skills was raised to the spotlight in Finland a few years back because there was a lot of talk about adding a section of oral skills in the English matriculation examination. Also learner attitudes have been the topic of many studies in the past years. Attitudes and oral skills have been studied separately before, but the attitudes of students on English oral skills in national Finnish upper secondary schools and IB upper secondary schools have not been studied and compared before. The goal of this study is to combine these two and find out what kind of attitudes can be found in the Finnish upper secondary schools in the field of English oral skills. Because of this the study is very well justified. Attitudes are an important factor in learning foreign languages and the

spoken language is an interesting area of language skills so this is why these themes were selected as the topic of this pro-gradu research. The research questions of the study are the following:

1.) What kinds of attitudes do Finnish upper secondary school students have towards English oral skills?

1.1) What kinds of attitudes do national upper secondary school students have?

1.2) What kinds of attitudes do IB upper secondary school students have?

1.3) How do the attitudes of the students of national upper secondary school students differ from those of the students in IB upper secondary schools?

2.) What are the attitudes of the students towards the section of oral skills in the final/matriculation examination?

2.1) What do IB school students think about having a section of oral skills in the final examination?

2.2) What do national upper secondary school students think about not having a section of oral skills in the matriculation examination?

3.) What are the students' opinions on how oral skills should be tested at schools?

4.1) What kinds of methods of testing do students find good, and why?

4.2) What kinds of methods of testing do students find poor, and why?

Before collecting the data it was thought that the students' attitudes in general are positive, and that the IB students might have a slightly more positive attitude than the students of national upper secondary schools. This is because the IB students have themselves chosen to take the IB curriculum instead of the national one knowing that most of the teaching is in English. It is logical to think that a person who chooses a school in which mostly English is used also has a positive attitude towards English.

7.2. Data and method

In this chapter the collecting of the data will be introduced in more detail. First the constructing of the questionnaire will be explained and then the focus will move on to telling about the data collection procedures. Also some light will be shed on the problems of the questionnaire and the analysing of the data.

7.2.1. The constructing of the questionnaire

When thinking about how to survey students' attitudes towards English oral skills the conclusion was reached that the study should be quantitative and that the best way to conduct a quantitative study was to collect the data through a questionnaire. This is because through a questionnaire a large number of participants can be reached fairly easily. A quantitative approach was chosen because the present study is interested in mapping the students' attitudes on a larger scale. In other words, through a questionnaire as many upper secondary school students' opinions as possible could be collected. Although using a questionnaire is faster than, for example, interviewing participants it does, however, have its downsides as well. For example, the questions can be poorly constructed or misunderstood by the participants or the participants might not answer the questions honestly. Regardless of its downsides, a questionnaire was chosen as the method to conduct this quantitative study because it was thought that through a questionnaire a more complete impression of the students' attitudes could be obtained than by e.g. interviewing.

In constructing the questionnaire the statements regarding the students' opinions of English language were compiled first. The statements were divided into four categories; *attitudes towards English language*, *teaching English oral skills in upper secondary school*, *using English outside school* and *testing English oral skills*. Each category included at least one series of statements, some more than one. The Likert scale was used as the base of the rating scale of this questionnaire. The Likert scale is "the most commonly used scaling technique" (Dörnyei 2003: 36) because of its simplicity, versatility and reliability. According to Dörnyei (2003: 37), the original Likert scale had five different response options (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) from which the participant could choose from, but nowadays the number of the response options varies from three to seven. Dörnyei (2003: 37) continues that sometimes it is preferred to use an even number of response options so that the respondents are forced to make a choice. Also in the questionnaire of the present study, four response options were chosen to be used so that the participants had to make a choice and because it might have been too tempting and easy to choose the "neither agree nor disagree" option.

Some of the statement series in the questionnaire had totally different response options because of the form of the statements. For example in the first category of statements called *attitudes towards English language* the participants had to evaluate the importance of different fields of language

proficiency (such as grammar, writing, oral skills etc.) by rating them on a scale of *not important at all, not so important, somewhat important, very important*. In the third category of statements the participants were asked how often they use English in different activities and the rating scale used was: *daily, once a week or more often, once a month or more often, not that often/ rarely*. In the fourth category the participants were given alternatives on how oral skills could be tested in upper-secondary school and they had to evaluate how good or poor the alternatives were. The rating scale was: *very poor, poor, good, very good*.

For the present study three different versions of the same questionnaire were drawn up. Because the study was compiled to be a comparative study, the questionnaire was constructed in a way that both national upper secondary students and the IB students could use the same questionnaire. The only difference in the questionnaire for the national upper secondary school students and the questionnaire for the IB students was that in the national questionnaire I used the term *matriculation examination* and in the IB questionnaire the term *final exam*. The third version of the questionnaire was merely a translated version of the IB questionnaire intended for international students who did not speak Finnish. The third questionnaire was in English (for the full questionnaires see appendices 2, 3 and 4).

In addition to the series of statements the questionnaire included a section of basic background information, and two open questions. The two open questions were about the students' views on whether the students' oral skills should affect their final grade and what would be the best way to organize the testing of oral skills in upper secondary school. The two open questions were added to the questionnaire to give the participants a chance to explain their views in their own words.

7.2.2. Data collection

The collection of the data took place in October and November 2008. Two schools from two major cities in Finland were chosen for the collection of the data. Both of these schools were schools that offer both the national upper secondary school syllabus and the IB Diploma Programme. The names of the schools and cities are left out for purely reasons of confidentiality and they hold no importance since the purpose of this study is not to compare the results of these two schools.

The teachers of these two schools were approached via an email in which they were told who was conducting the study and for what purposes. In the email the teachers were asked for their help in

collecting the data. Some of the teachers responded quickly and appointments were scheduled for meeting the participants and collecting the data. The first collection of data took place in one of the schools in the middle of October. The questionnaire was presented to four different groups of students, two IB groups and two national upper secondary school groups. The second collection of data took place in the other school in the beginning of November and there the questionnaire was presented to three IB groups and two national upper secondary school groups.

All of the participants were between the ages of 15 and 19. The participants from the national upper secondary schools were students in their first, second, third or fourth year studies. The participants from the IB Programme were in their first, second or third year studies. Altogether 186 students filled out the questionnaire. Two of these were left out from the study because they were exchange students and thus did not know about the Finnish system of education. The 184 questionnaires formed the research data. From those 184 questionnaires 101 were from the national upper-secondary school students and the remaining 83 from the IB students. All of the upper-secondary school participants were Finnish speaking, and among them was one who was bilingual. Among the IB participants there were 7 participants who were bilingual, but whose other mother tongue was Finnish. Among the IB participants there were also 9 students whose mother tongue was not Finnish. Since these participants were actual IB students, their questionnaires were also included in the data.

The researcher was present in every class that filled in the questionnaire. For some of the students it did not take more than ten minutes to fill out the questionnaire but then some used more than half an hour to finish it. Some classes were quiet and did not ask any questions, and then some classes were asking questions all the time. During the data collection some problems concerning the questionnaire became evident. Because of the tight schedule for preparing the questionnaire and collecting the data it was not possible to test the questionnaire before presenting it to the participants. When collecting the data the IB participants had some trouble understanding some of the questions in the questionnaire. The IB participants had problems especially with question number 2. In question number 2 the participants were asked what were the participants' opinions and feelings about teaching English oral skills in school. This raised some questions because the IB students' English classes are not the same as in the national upper-secondary school. As already mentioned in chapter 3.2. the English classes in the IB Diploma Programme are a lot like the classes of mother tongue (Finnish) in the national upper secondary school. This means that the students

read and analyse literature, and they do not do the same kind of exercises of grammar, vocabulary or oral skills as the students do in the national upper secondary schools. Furthermore the teaching language in the IB Programme in Finland is English so the IB students get oral skills practise through daily communication with teachers and class mates. The researcher's own background as a student of a national upper secondary school was reflected in the questionnaire and this was the reason for the problems. In the data collecting situations, this error in the questionnaire clearly came up and the IB participants were advised to think of their everyday communication in English in school as their oral skills exercises. Other than this problem no other problems came up during the collection of the data.

7.2.3. Method and data analysis

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire was first put into a numeric form according to the advice of the Computing Centre of the University of Jyväskylä using Excel programme. After that the Excel table was taken to the Computing Centre for further analysis. The data were analysed using SPSS programme. The Pearson Chi-square test was used to measure the significance of the results of the study. When the Pearson Chi-square test had a test value $\leq 0,01$ the difference in results was considered significant. The diagrams illustrating the results were made with Excel. The answers to the open questions were read and then divided into groups depending on the answers given. The results are illustrated with diagrams and discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

8. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to find out whether Finnish national upper secondary school students have different attitudes towards English oral skills than Finnish IB upper secondary school students. The focus of this study has been on attitudes towards oral skills and testing them in upper secondary schools in Finland. Special attention has been paid to the possibility of testing oral skills in the final phase of the upper secondary school education. Also the Finnish matriculation examination and its possibilities regarding testing oral skills have been discussed. In this chapter the results of the study are being discussed more extensively.

8.1. Attitudes towards English language

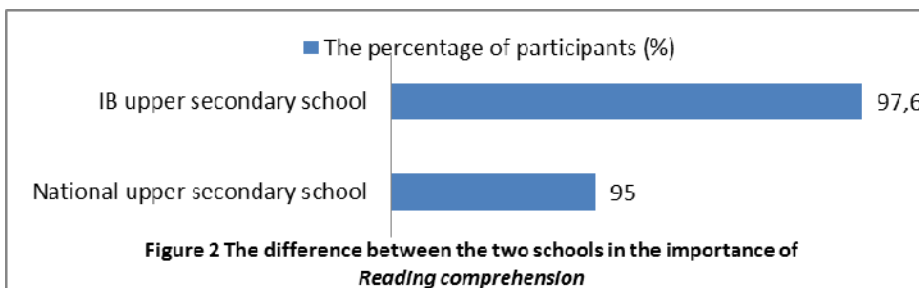
The first three questions in the questionnaire were of the category *attitudes towards English language*. In the first question (1A) the participants were asked to evaluate the importance of

different fields or components of language proficiency. The components that the participants were evaluating were:

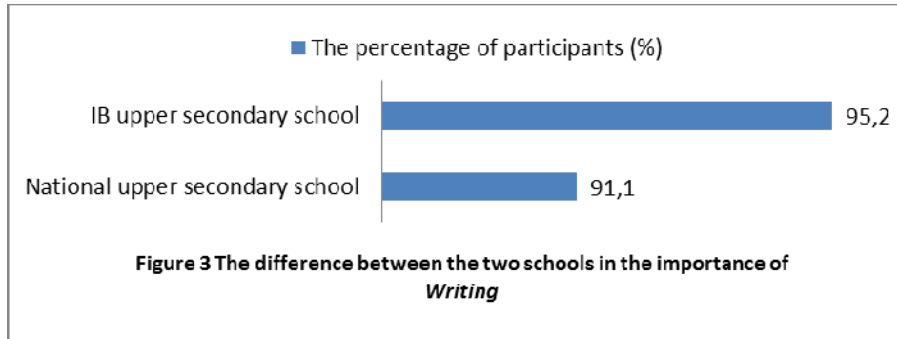
- 1.) *grammar*
- 2.) *writing*
- 3.) *oral skills*
- 4.) *reading comprehension*
- 5.) *listening comprehension*
- 6.) *vocabulary*

The scale given for the evaluation was *not important at all*, *not so important*, *somewhat important* and *very important*. In order to make the reporting of the results easier a division was made into participants stating that they found a component important (*somewhat important* or *very important*) and participants who stated that a component was not important (*not important at all* or *somewhat not so important*). The participants' opinions on the importance of different components of language proficiency are illustrated in Figures 2, 3 and 4. Figures 2 and 3 show individually the components in which a statistically significant difference was found. Figure 4 shows the components in which no statistically significant differences were found.

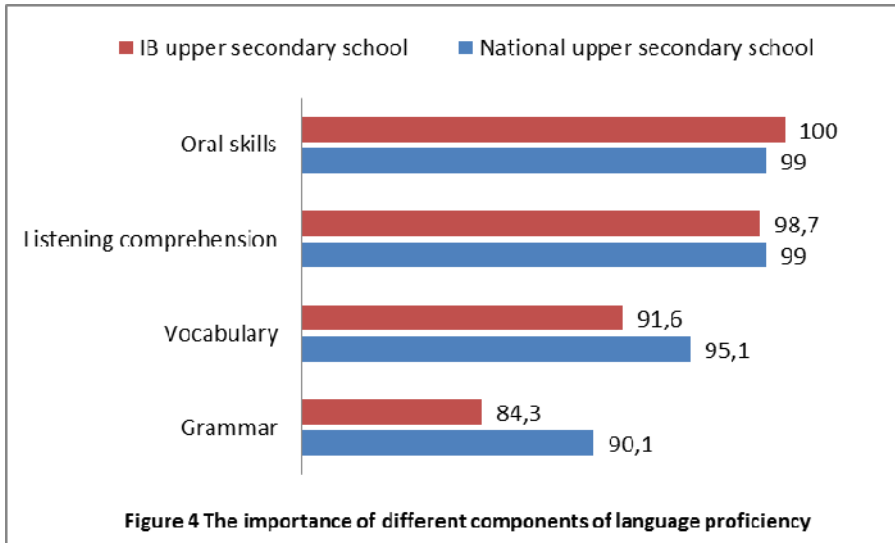
In question 1A the statistically significant differences were the ones in writing and reading comprehension. As shown in Figure 2, 95% of national students and 97,6% of IB students regarded reading comprehension as either *somewhat important* or *very important* ($p = 0,01$).



As can be seen in Figure 3, the difference between the two groups was even bigger in the importance of writing ($p = 0,002$). 95,2% of the IB students regarded writing as important, whereas the percentage was 91,1% for the national students.



As Figure 4 shows, oral skills were regarded as the most important skill among both national upper secondary school students as well as IB upper secondary school students. 100% of the national students stated that oral skills are either *somewhat important* or *very important*. The same percentage among IB students was 99%. National students regarded listening comprehension more important than IB students only a bit more frequently. 99% of National students thought that listening comprehension is either *somewhat important* or *very important*, whereas the same percentage for IB students was 98,7%. Vocabulary and grammar were, together with listening comprehension, the components that were regarded more important among national students than IB students. 95,1% of national students and 91,6% of IB students stated that vocabulary is important. The percentages for grammar were 90,1% among national students and 84,3% among IB students. Generally it can be said that oral skills were considered the most important and grammar was considered the least important among both groups of students. In total 86,9% of all participants stated that oral skills are *very important* and 12,5% stated that grammar is either *not important at all* or *not so important*.



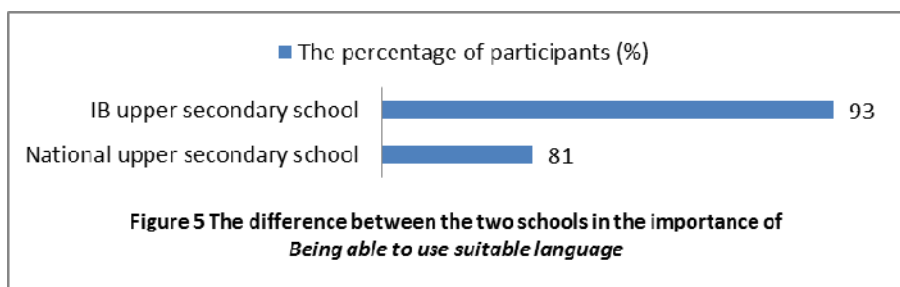
As the results illustrate, all of the different components of language proficiency were considered to be very important among both groups of students. Only the importance of grammar received a result of less than 90% of the IB students stating that it is important. This does not mean that the IB students regard grammar not to be important but rather points out that perhaps in the English classes of the IB students grammar is not focused on so much.

In the second question, (1B) the participants were asked to evaluate how important different components of oral skills were to them. The components were:

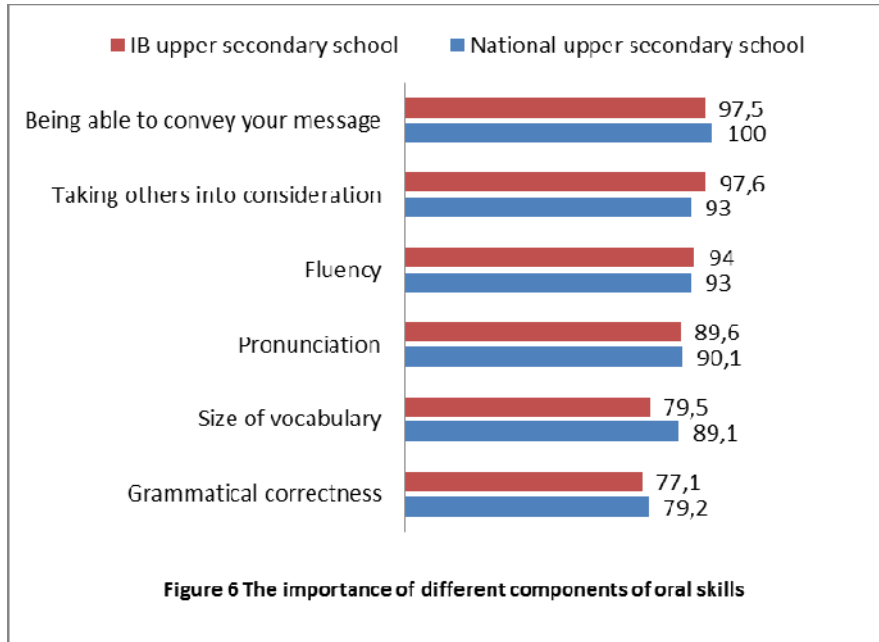
- 1.) *pronunciation*
- 2.) *grammatical correctness*
- 3.) *size of vocabulary*
- 4.) *taking others into consideration in a conversation (conversational skills)*
- 5.) *being able to convey your message to the listener despite a few mistakes fluency*
- 6.) *being able to use the kind of language that fits the situation (different kinds of conversational situations).*

The participants again used the scale *not important at all*, *not so important*, *somewhat important* and *very important* to evaluate the importance of different components. Also in question 1.B a division was made into participants stating that they found a component important (*somewhat important* or *very important*) and participants who stated that a component was not important (*not important at all* or *somewhat not so important*). The results are illustrated in Figures 5 and 6. Figure 5 shows individually the one component in which a statistically significant difference was found between the two schools. Figure 6 shows the components in which no statistically significant differences were found.

As Figure 5 shows, there was a notable, and also a statistically significant difference in the percentage concerning statement *being able to use the kind of language that fits the situation (different kinds of conversational situations)* ($p < 0,001$). 93% of the IB student stated that they thought that it is important to be able to use the kind of language that fits the situation, whereas only 81% of the national students thought so.



As can be seen in Figure 6, 89,1% of the national students thought that the size of vocabulary is important when only 79,5% of the IB students were of that opinion. The component of oral skills regarded as the most important among IB upper secondary school students was *taking others into consideration in a conversation (conversational skills)* with the percentage of 97,6%.. *Being able to convey your message to the listener despite a few mistakes* was the component which was the most important to all (100%) of the national upper secondary school participants and to 97,5% of the IB upper secondary school students. Altogether 88,4% of the participants had stated that *Being able to convey your message to the listener despite a few mistakes* was the most important component of oral skills. *Fluency* and *taking others into consideration in a conversation (conversational skills)* were components that were both regarded as equally important among national students with the percentage of 93%. Fluency was regarded as important by 94% of the IB students. Pronunciation was thought to be important by 89,6% of the IB students and 90,1% of the national students. *Grammatical correctness* was the component regarded as the least important by both groups 77,1% of the IB students and 79,2% of the national students considered grammatical correctness as the least important component of oral skills.



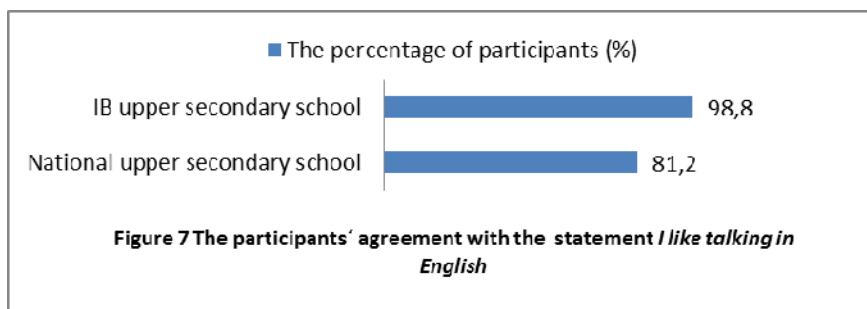
As a generalization it can be said that the two groups of students had very similar ideas on the importance of different components of oral skills. The only differences that stand out are that the IB students clearly think that they should be able to use suitable language in different communicational situations, whereas the national students are not that concerned with the issue, and that the national students regard having a sizeable vocabulary more important than the IB students. These differences might be due to the fact that IB students are more skilled in using English. Being more skilled users of English they can use different registers and if they do not know a word they can find a way to explain themselves in different words more easily.

In question 1C, the participants were asked about their opinions of English as a school subject, the usefulness of English and the difficulty of speaking and understanding spoken English. The statements used in question 1C were:

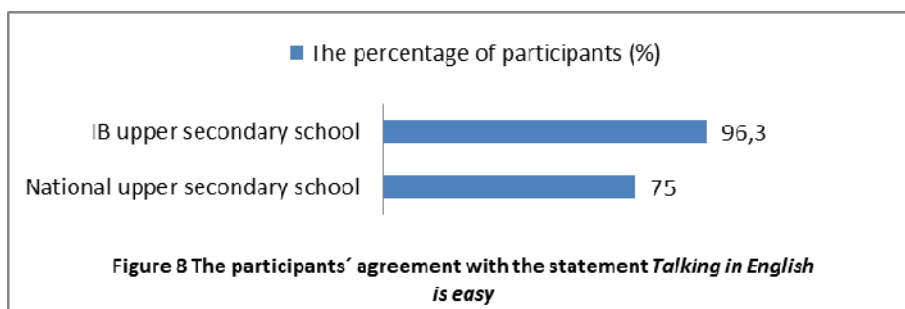
- 1.) *I like English as a school subject.*
- 2.) *I like talking in English.*
- 3.) *I think that English as a school subject is boring.*
- 4.) *Knowing English is a useful skill for me.*
- 5.) *English is not useful for me.*
- 6.) *Talking in English is easy for me.*
- 7.) *Understanding English speech is difficult for me.*
- 8.) *Knowing English is important in my opinion.*
- 9.) *In my opinion other languages are as important as English.*
- 10.) *I will need English in the future.*

The scale being used in this question was: *Strongly disagree*, *Slightly disagree*, *Partly agree* and *Strongly agree*. To make the reporting of the results of question 1.C easier a division was made into participants stating that they agreed with the statement (*Partly agree* or *Strongly agree*) and participants who did not agree with the statement (*Strongly disagree* or *Slightly disagree*). The results are illustrated in Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10. Figures 7, 8 and 9 illustrate individually the statements in which a statistically significant difference was found. The rest of the statements are illustrated in Figure 10.

In this category, there was a statistically significant difference in the statement *I like talking in English* ($p < 0,001$). 98,8% of the IB students agreed with the statement when only 81,2% of the national students were of the same opinion (Figure 7).

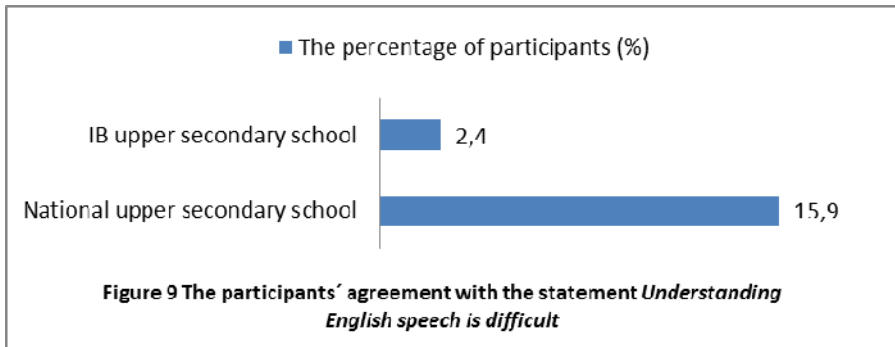


As Figure 8 illustrates, another statement in which there was a statistically significant difference was *Talking in English is easy* ($p < 0,001$). As many as 96,3% of the IB students thought that talking in English is easy, whereas only 75% of the national students were of the same opinion.

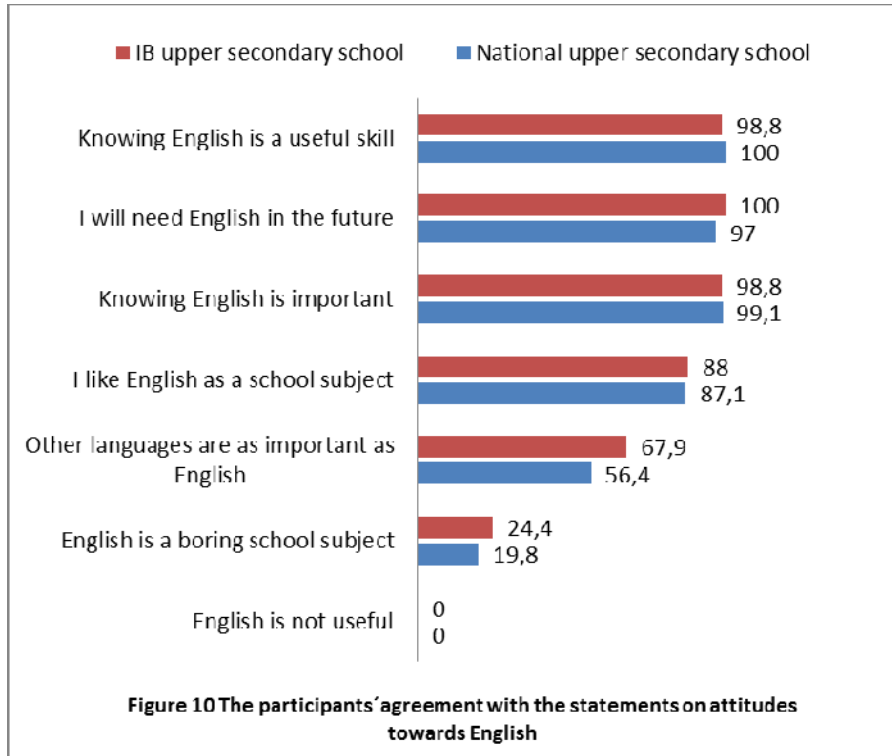


Understanding English speech is difficult received altogether low agreement percentages but, however, there was a significant difference ($p < 0,001$) between the two groups. Only 2,4% of the IB

students agreed with the statement when as many as 15,9% of the national students agreed with the statement (Figure 9).



As figure 10 shows, all (100%) of the national upper secondary school students and 98,8% of the IB upper secondary school students thought that knowing English is a useful skill. Other statements that were agreed with a lot were *I will need English in the future* (100% agreement among IB students and 97% agreement among national students) and *Knowing English is important* (98,8% agreement among IB students and 99,1% agreement among national students). The statement *I like English as a school subject* received quite even percentages of agreement among both groups. 88% of the IB students and 87,1% of the national students agreed with the statement. The statement *Other languages are as important as English* was agreed with 67,9% of the IB students, whereas the percentage for national students was 56,4%.



As a generalization it can be said that the IB students react to speaking English more positively than the national students. They also feel that they understand English better and that talking in English is something they like. This difference between the IB students and the national students is probably due to the fact that the IB students get a lot more daily practice in using the language in authentic situations. This leads to the IB students being more daring in using the language. Also, because of the big amount of practice they get, the IB students have a smaller threshold to start speaking in English than the national students do. The statement *English is not useful* received no agreement and thus supports the strong opinion of English being very important. In fact, 90,7% of all the participant strongly agreed with the statement *Knowing English is useful*. More oral exercises should perhaps be done in the English classes of the national upper secondary schools so that also the national students would start to react more naturally and positively towards speaking English.

8.2. Teaching English oral skills in upper secondary school

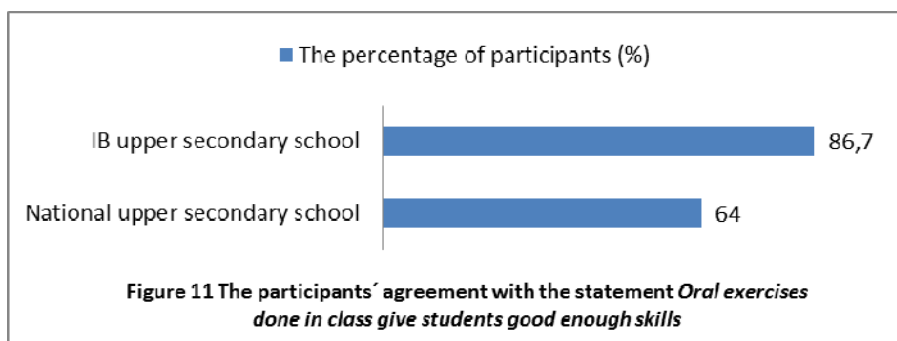
The second category in the questionnaire was *teaching English oral skills in upper secondary school* and it contained one question. In question 2, the students were asked to evaluate the teaching of English oral skills in their school. In the question there were twelve statements:

- 1.) *There is enough teaching of oral skills in upper secondary school.*

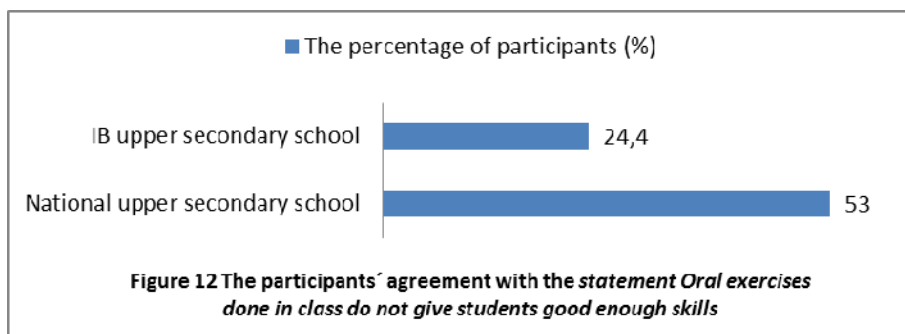
- 2.) *Exercises of oral skills done in classes give the student good enough skills to use the language outside school.*
- 3.) *The teaching of oral skills is emphasized too much in upper-secondary school.*
- 4.) *Oral skills' exercises are diverse.*
- 5.) *Learning oral skills is important.*
- 6.) *Too much time is used on oral exercises.*
- 7.) *Grammar exercises are more important than oral skills' exercises.*
- 8.) *Preparing for the final exam/ matriculation examination in classes is more important than practising oral skills.*
- 9.) *There should be more of teaching of oral skills in upper-secondary school.*
- 10.) *Oral skills' exercises done in classes do not give the student good enough skills to use the language outside school.*
- 11.) *The teaching of oral skills is not important.*
- 12.) *Oral skills exercises are boring.*

Again the scale that was used was: *Strongly disagree*, *Slightly disagree*, *Partly agree* and *Strongly agree*. To make the reporting of the results of question 2 easier a division was made into participants stating that they agreed with the statement (*Partly agree* or *Strongly agree*) and participants who did not agree with the statement (*Strongly disagree* or *Slightly disagree*). The results of this question are illustrated in Figures 11, 12, 13 and 14. Again Figures 11, 12 and 13 illustrate individually the statements in which a statistically significant difference was found. The rest of the statements are illustrated in Figure 14.

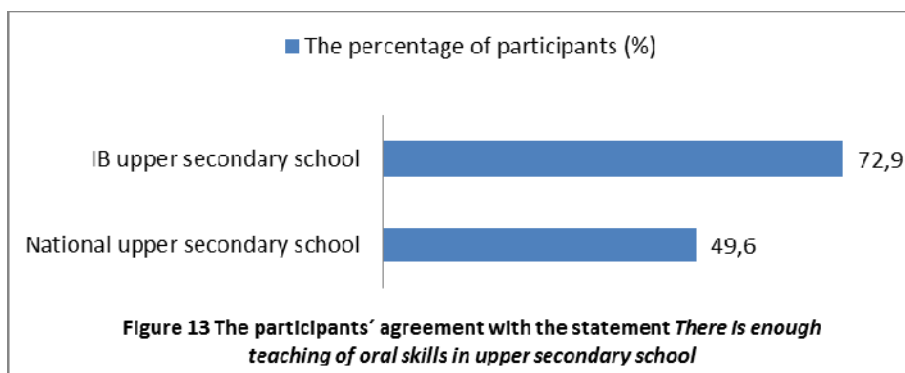
There was a major, and also statistically significant, difference in the agreement with the statement *Oral skills' exercises done in classes give the student good enough skills to use the language outside school* ($p < 0,001$) between the IB students and the national students. As many as 86,7% of the IB students thought that they achieve such oral skills in English that they cope after school. The same percentage for the national students was only 64% (Figure 11).



Among the statements there was also an opposite statement stating that *Oral skills' exercises done in classes do not give the student good enough skills to use the language outside school*. The difference in this statement was also statistically significant ($p < 0,001$). This statement was agreed with by 24,4% of the IB students and 53% of the national students (Figure 12).

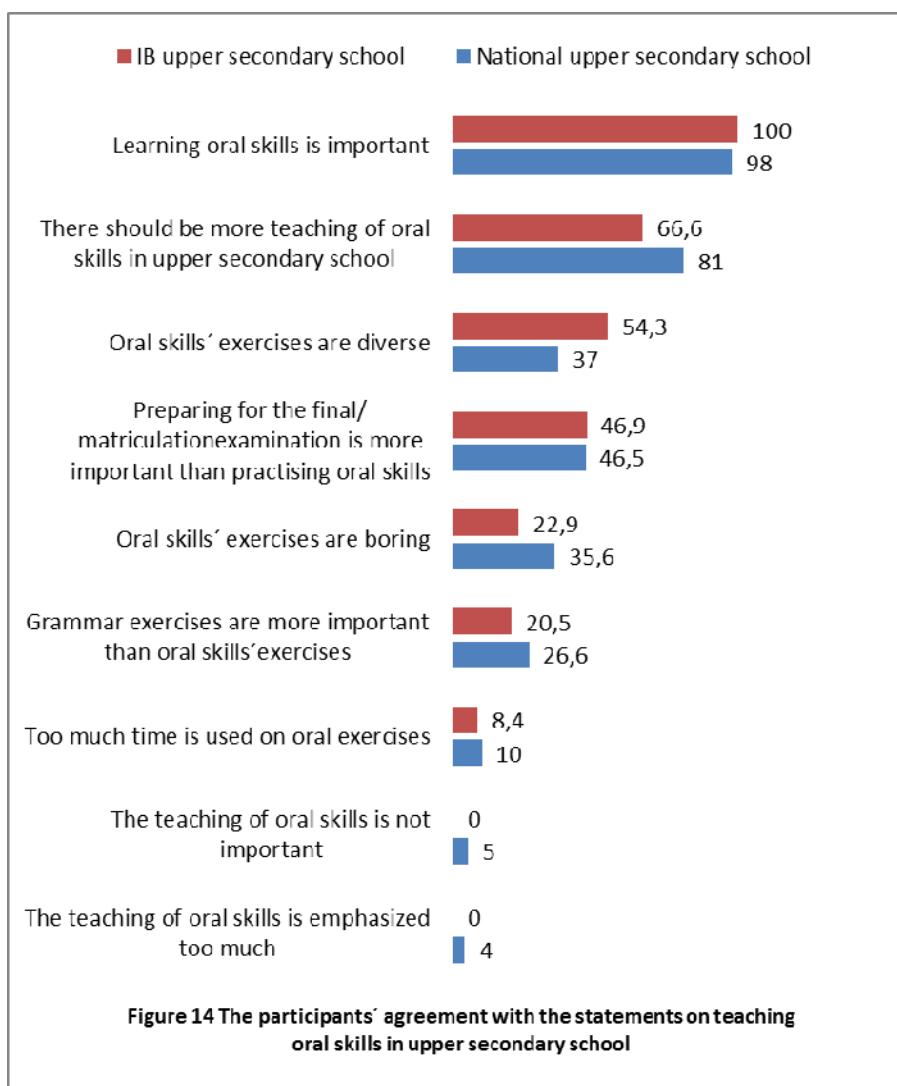


As can be seen in Figure 13, the difference in the statement *There is enough teaching of oral skills in upper secondary school* was statistically significant ($p < 0,001$). 72,9% of the IB students and only 49,6% of the national students felt that there is enough teaching of oral skills.



As shown in figure 14, 100% of the IB students and 98% of the national students thought that learning oral skills is important. The fact that the statement *The teaching of oral skills is not important* was not agreed with very much supports the idea of students regarding learning oral skills as an important part of the teaching. 81% of the national students and 66,6% of the IB students thought that there should be more teaching of oral skills in upper secondary school. 54,3% of the IB students stated that the oral skills' exercises are diverse, whereas only 37% of the national students thought so. 35,6% of the national students and 22,9% of the IB students thought that oral skills' exercises are boring. The statement *Grammar exercises are more important than oral skills'*

exercises was agreed with only by 26,6% of the national students and 20,5% of the IB students. The percentages for the statement *Preparing for the final exam/ matriculation examination in classes is more important than practising oral skills* received almost equal agreement among both groups. 46,9% of the IB students and 46,5% of the national students agreed with the statement. 10% of the national students and 8,4 of the IB students thought that too much time is used on oral exercises and 4% of the national students also felt that oral skills is emphasized too much in upper secondary school.



Overall, the students thought that learning oral skills is important. However, it was evident that the national students felt that they do not gain the sort of proficiency in oral skills in school which they think they should. On the other hand, most IB students felt that they did gain sufficient proficiency

in oral skills. This difference can perhaps be explained by the fact that IB students use oral English in school daily. The percentages show that most IB students thought that even though there is enough teaching of oral skills in school there could be more also. The national students, on the other hand thought that they do not get enough oral skills teaching and that there should be more of it in school. The students' view of the importance of preparing for the final/matriculation examination versus practising oral skills was almost evenly divided in half. In total 47,3% of all participants chose option *somewhat disagree* to portray their opinion and this option gained the biggest percentage in this statement.

8.3. Using English outside school

The third category of the questionnaire was *Using English outside school*. In this category there was only one question (question 3) and it was about how much the students use English outside school. The purpose of this question was to find out whether there is a significant difference in the usage of English on their own time between the two groups. IB students clearly use more English in school but the study set out to find out whether this was the case also outside school as well. The usage of English outside school perhaps has a connection with the students' attitudes towards the language.

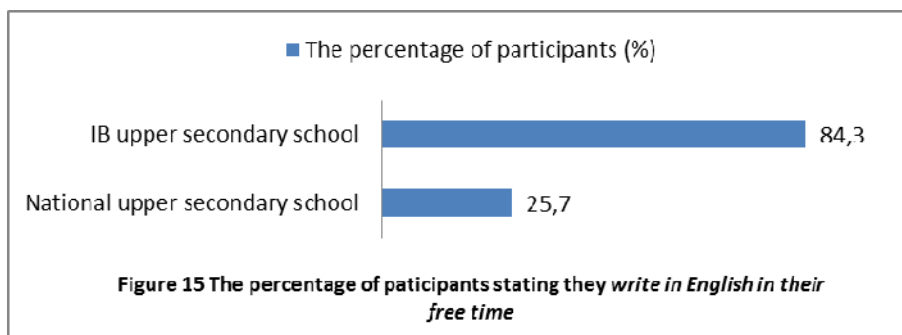
In question three the participants were again presented with a set of statements which they were asked to evaluate on a given scale. The statements of question three were:

- 1.) *I read books, magazines or web pages in English.*
- 2.) *I listen to music that is in English.*
- 3.) *In my free time I write in English.*
- 4.) *When I talk with my friends in Finnish I use English words and phrases.*
- 5.) *I write letters / e-mail in English.*
- 6.) *I play games in which English is spoken.*
- 7.) *I watch TV-shows and movies that are in English.*

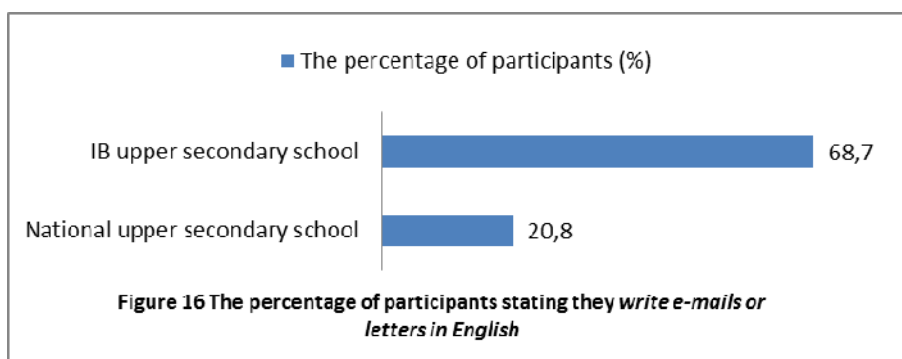
The scale given was *Daily, Once a week or more often, Once a month or more often* and *Not that often/rarely*. To simplify the reporting of the results a division was made into participants stating they used English outside school often (*Daily or Once a week or more often*) and to participants who stated using English only occasionally (*Once a month or more often or Not so often/rarely*). The results of question 3 are illustrated in Figures 15-20 so that the percentages tell the amount of participants stating that they use English often. Figures 15-19 illustrate individually the statements in which a statistically significant difference was found. The rest of the statements are illustrated in Figure 20. Figure 21 shows the percentages of participants stating that they use English daily. The

option *Daily* is illustrated in its own figure because it was thought that the differences between the two schools in this option could turn out to be rather big and therefore very interesting.

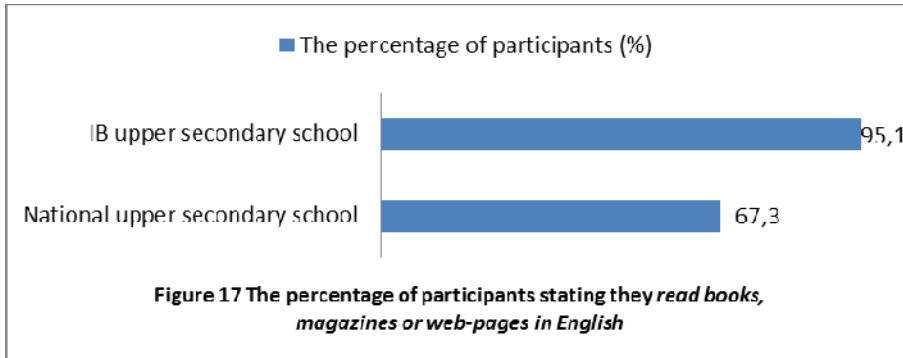
A statistically significant difference was found altogether in five statements. The biggest difference between the groups was in the statement *I write in English in my free time* ($p < 0,001$). 84,3% of the IB students stated that they do so often, whereas only 25,7% of the national students stated the same (Figure 15).



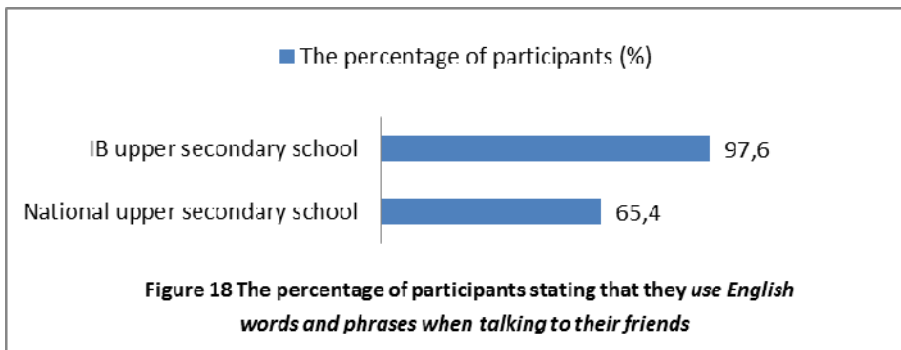
As can be seen in Figure 16, there was also a big difference in the statement *I write e-mails or letters in English* ($p < 0,001$). As many as 68,7% of the IB students claimed to do so often and only 20,8% of the national students claimed the same.



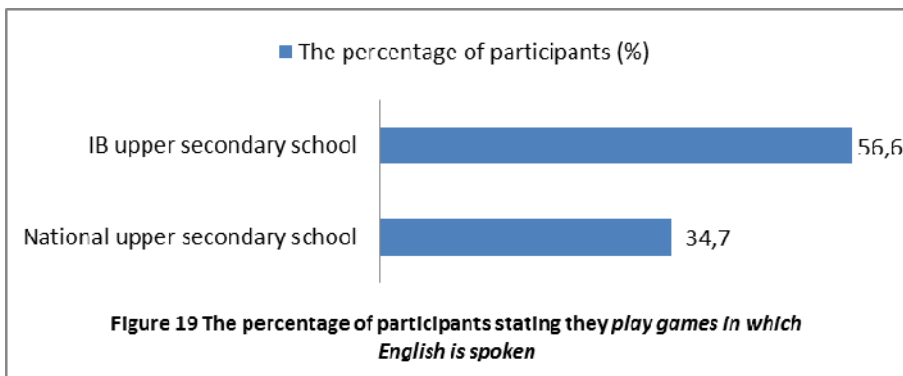
Another statement with a big statistical significant difference was *I read books, magazines or web-pages in English* ($p < 0,001$). As Figure 17 illustrates, 95,1% of the IB students said that they read often in English in their free time and only 63,7% of the national students said that they read often in English in their free time.



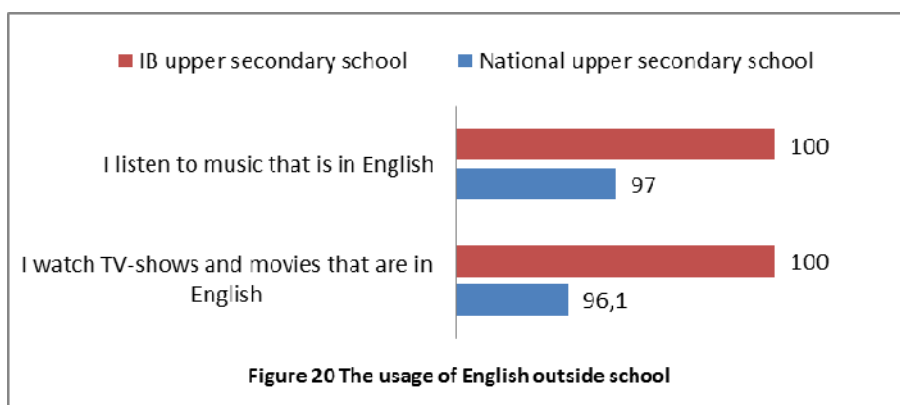
The percentages for the statement *When I talk with my friends in Finnish I use English words and phrases* were also quite different and statistically significant ($p < 0,001$). As many as 97,6% of the IB students said that they use English words and phrases in their communication often whereas the percentage among the national students was 64,5% (Figure 18).



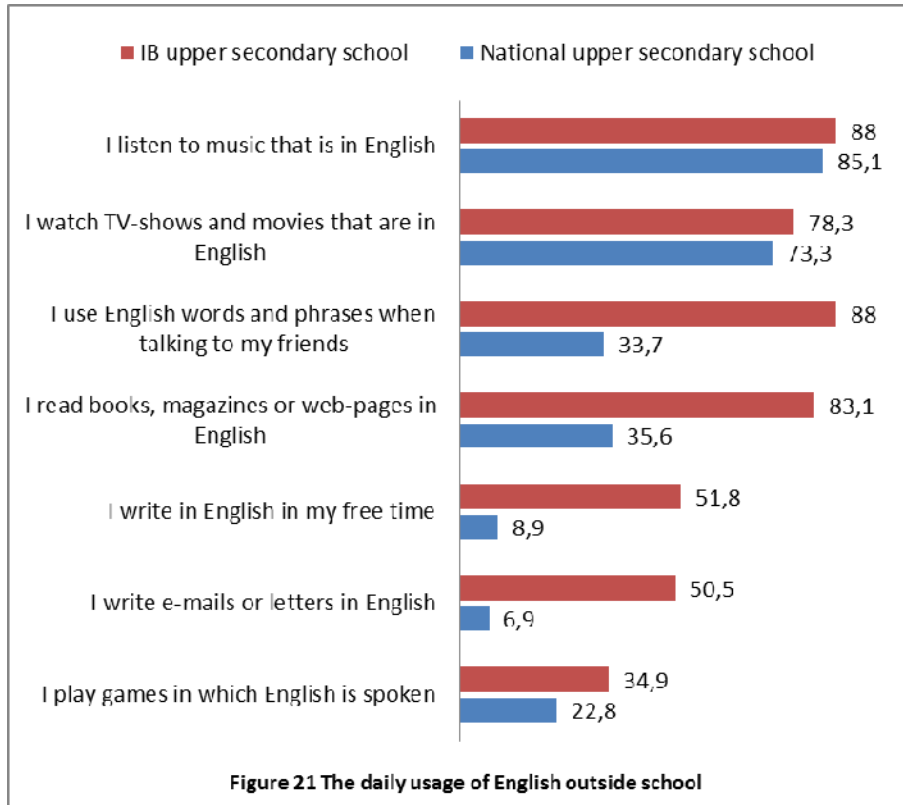
As Figure 19 shows, the difference between the two groups was also notable and statistically significant ($p = 0,01$) in the statement *I play games in which English is spoken*. 56,6% of the IB students and 34,7% of the national students told that they play such games often.



As can be seen in Figure 20, there is not much difference between the two groups in listening music or watching TV-shows and movies which are in English. 100% of the IB students stated that they both listen to music and watch TV-shows or movies in English often. The same percentages among the national students were 97% and 96,1%.



As Figure 21 illustrates, 88% of the IB school students and 85,1% of the national students stated that they listen to music and watch TV-shows or movies that are in English on daily basis. This is not surprising since music, as well as TV-shows and movies in English, are easy to access in Finland. There is however a big difference between the two groups of students in all the other statements in this question. The IB students seem to use much more English in their daily lives than the national students. The difference is notable in the daily usage of English phrases and words, as well as in reading and writing in English. 88% of the IB students claim to use English words and phrases in their daily conversations with their friends, whereas the same percentage for the national students is only 33,7%. Only 35,6% of the national students state that they read daily in English, whereas 83,1% of the IB students claim to do so. There is also a notable difference in the two statements regarding writing daily in English. More than half of the IB students claim that they both write (51,8%) daily in English as well as write e-mails or letters (50,5%) daily in English. The percentages among the national students were remarkably low with only 8,9% of the national students stating that they write daily in English and 6,9% stating that they write e-mails or letters daily in English. The difference between the two groups of students was not that notable in the statement *I play games in which English is spoken*. 34,9% of the IB students and 22,8% of the national students claimed to do so daily.



As a generalization it can be said that the differences between the two groups in using English outside school are quite significant. The IB students tend to use a great deal more English (in all of its forms) outside school. This is logical since they use English daily in school and this way receive a lot more natural language input as well. There can be other reasons for the IB students to use so much English. For example, IB students might have friends who do not speak Finnish or it might be easier for them to make contacts with foreign people on the net. This result supports the findings of Leppänen et al. (2011: 63) who also found that young people in Finland use the most English outside school. Perhaps the Even though the differences are quite big between the groups, it is a positive thing to notice that quite many national students also use English in their free time. In total 65,4% of the national students said that they use English words and phrases often in their communication with friends. This is a notable percentage even though it is a great deal smaller than the percentage of the IB students.

8.4. Testing English oral skills in upper secondary school

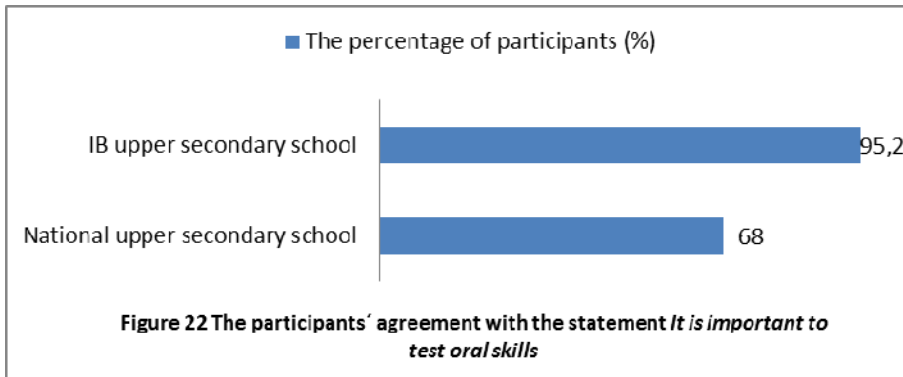
The fourth and final category of the questionnaire was *Testing oral skills in upper secondary school* and in this category there were altogether four questions. The first two of them were presented in

the form of statements or options to which the participants were asked to react using a given scale. In the first set of statements the participants were asked about their general opinions on testing oral skills in upper secondary school. The statements in this question (question 4A) were:

- 1.) *Students' oral skills should affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam.*
- 2.) *There should be a section of oral skills in the final/matriculation exam.*
- 3.) *Students' oral skills should not affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam.*
- 4.) *I think that it would be important that students' oral skills were tested in upper-secondary school.*
- 5.) *It would be better if oral skills were tested separately from the final/matriculation exam, even though it would affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam.*
- 6.) *I think that it is not necessary to test oral skills.*

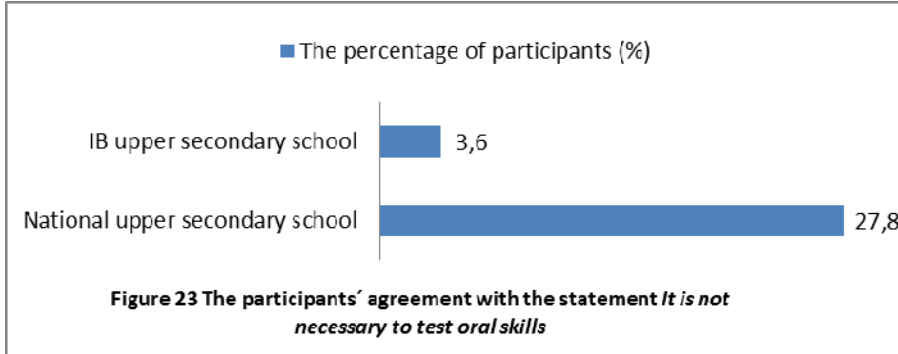
The scale used in this question was: *Strongly disagree, Slightly disagree, Partly agree and Strongly agree*. Like before, also in this question the answers were grouped according to whether the participants stated agreement (*Partly agree or Strongly agree*) or disagreement (*Strongly disagree or Slightly disagree*) in order to make the reporting of the results easier. The results of question 4A are illustrated in Figures 22-27. Figures 22-26 illustrate individually the statements in which a statistically significant difference was found. The only statement without a statistically significant difference is illustrated in Figure 27.

As figure 22 shows, 95,2% of the IB students stated that they think it is important to test oral skills. The percentage among the national students was significantly lower, only 68%. This difference is also statistically significant ($p < 0,001$).

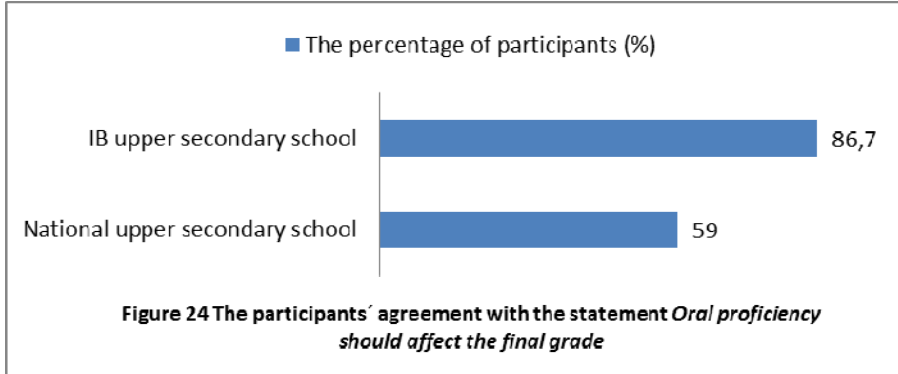


The agreement percentages of the statement *I think that it is not necessary to test oral skills* is also statistically significant ($p < 0,001$) and supports the previous statement as only 3,6% of the IB

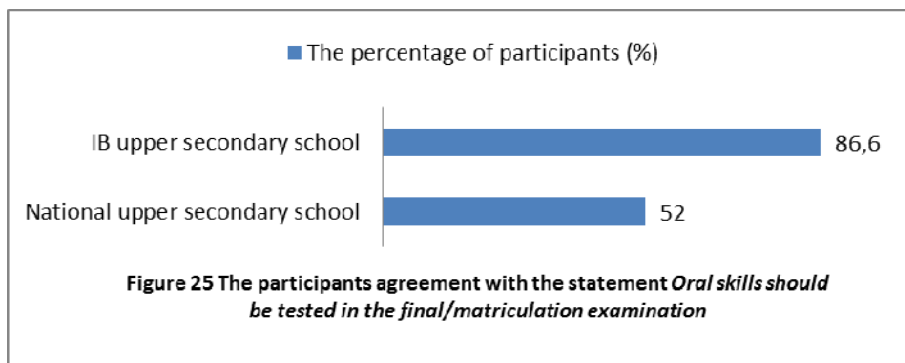
students and 27,8% of the national students thought that it is not necessary to test English oral skills (Figure 23).



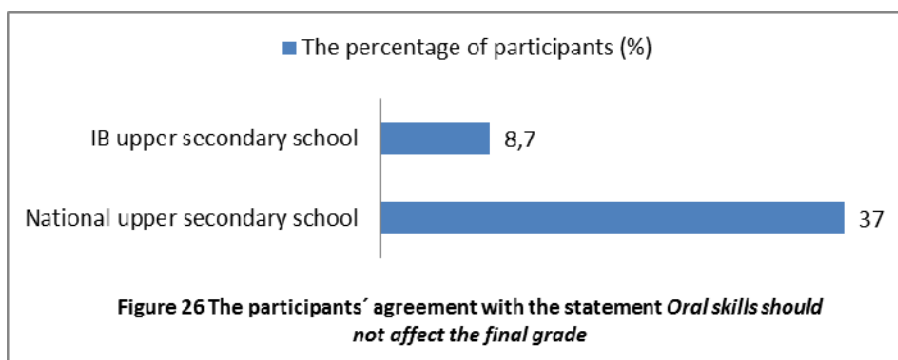
The difference in the statement *Students' oral skills should affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam* is statistically significant ($p < 0,001$). Only 59% of the national students were of the opinion that oral skills should affect their final grade, whereas as many as 86,7% of the IB students thought so (Figure 24).



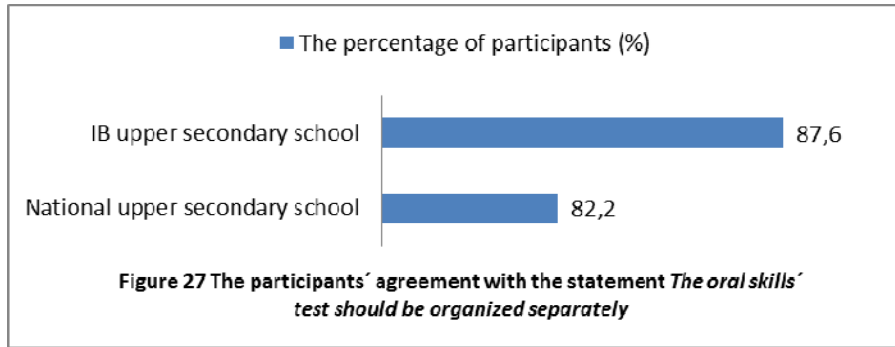
As can be seen in Figure 25, also the difference in the statement *There should be a section of oral skills in the final/matriculation exam* is statistically significant ($p < 0,001$). As many as 86,6% of the IB students said that oral skills should be tested in the final exam, whereas only 52% of the national students were of the same opinion.



As illustrated in Figure 26, the statement *Students' oral skills should not affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam* received more agreement (37%) among the national students than among the IB students (8,7%). Also this difference is statistically significant ($p < 0,001$).



As can be seen in Figure 27, most of the IB students (87,6%), as well as the national students (82,2%), thought that the oral skills' test should be organized separately so that the test does not take place at the same time with the final exam or the matriculation examinations even though it would have an effect on the final grade. Almost the same percentage (86,7%) of the IB students nevertheless felt that oral proficiency should have an affect their final grade (as could be seen earlier in Figure 24).



Overall, it can be said that the IB students view the testing of oral skills as well as the possibility of the test affecting their final grade more positively than the national students. Even though the national students view the testing and its effect on their grade more negatively the results clearly demonstrate that both students do think that it is important to test oral skills in some way. Altogether 80,4% of all students stated that testing oral skills is important. Perhaps the fact that the national students feel like they could receive more teaching of oral skills (as indicated in question 2) ties in with the more negative standpoint they have on testing oral skills. If there was more teaching of oral skills in upper secondary school maybe also the national students would feel more positively about the testing.

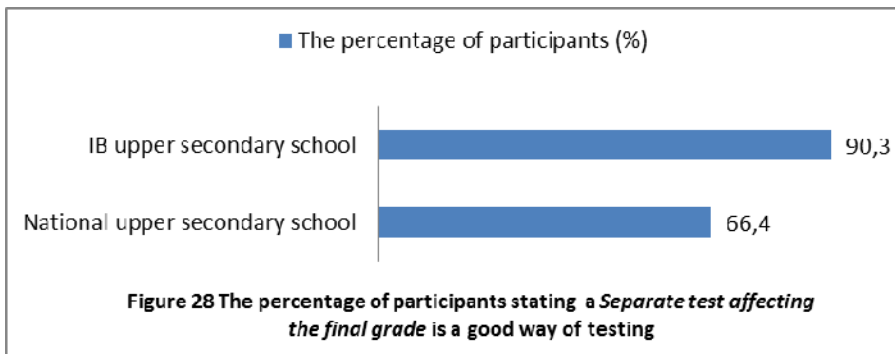
In the second question (question 4B) of the fourth category the participants were asked to evaluate how good different ways of testing oral skills are in their opinion. The participants were presented with the following ways of testing oral skills:

- 1.) *A test of oral skills that is organized at the time of the final/matriculation exam, that also affects the grade of the final/matriculation exam.*
- 2.) *A test of oral skills that is organized separately from the final/matriculation exam, but which does affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam.*
- 3.) *Mandatory but separate test of oral skills that does not affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam.*
- 4.) *Obligatory but separate test of oral skills that does not affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam.*
- 5.) *Small tests that are organized throughout upper-secondary school that affect the final/matriculation grade.*
- 6.) *Small tests that are organized throughout upper-secondary school that do not affect the final/matriculation grade.*
- 7.) *A statement of the students' proficiency in oral skills given by the English teacher.*
- 8.) *No test of oral skills.*

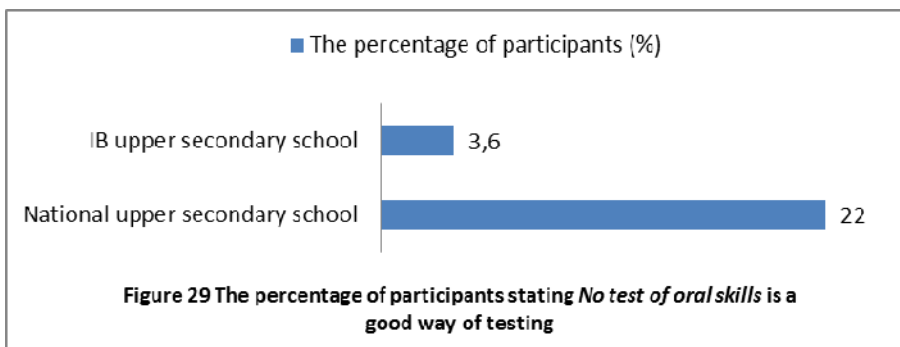
The scale given to the participants was: *Very poor, Poor, Good* and *Very good*. Again to make the presentation of the results more easy the answers were grouped into two groups; poor (*Very poor* or

Poor) and good (*Good* and *Very good*). In Figures 28-34 the results of this question are illustrated so that the percentages tell how many per cent of the participants thought that the ways of testing are good. Figures 28-33 illustrate individually the statements in which a statistically significant difference was found. The rest of the statements are illustrated in Figure 34.

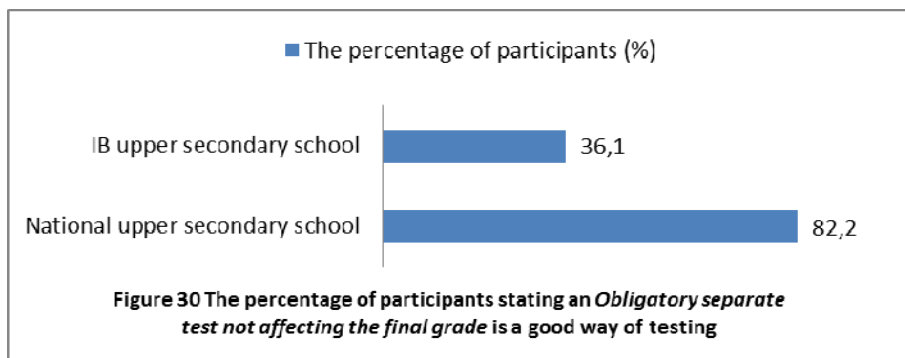
In this question there were statistically significant differences between the two groups in many of the options. As can be seen in Figure 28, the option *A test of oral skills that is organized separately from the final/matriculation exam, but which does affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam* is the one which was thought to be the best among the IB students with the percentage of 90,3%. This option was thought to be good by only 66,4% of the national students. This is a big difference between the two groups and it is also statistically significant ($p = 0,001$).



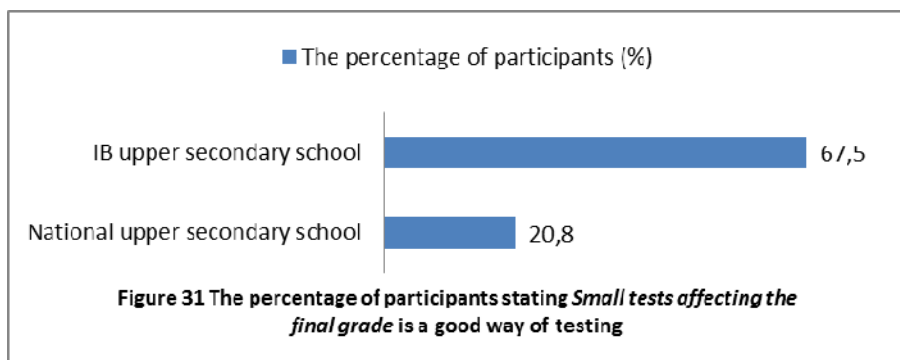
As illustrated in Figure 29, the difference in the previous statement is supported by the ranking of the option *No test of oral skills*, which was thought to be good only by 3,6% of the IB students and 22% of the national students. This difference is statistically significant ($p < 0,001$).



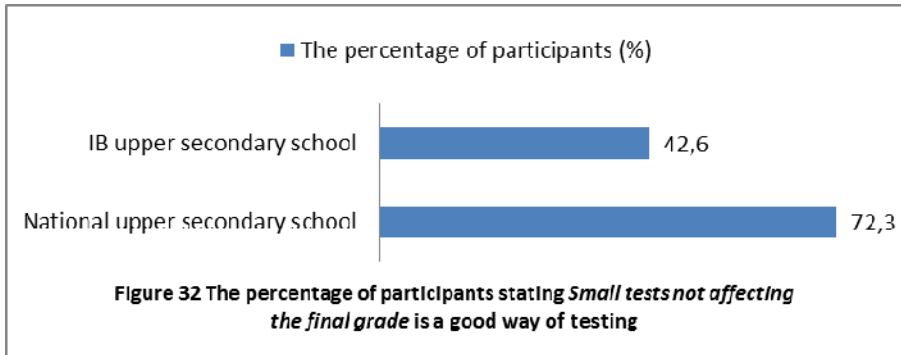
The national students considered the option *Obligatory but separate test of oral skills that does not affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam* the best option with 82,2% of the students stating that it is a good option (Figure 30). This option was said to be good by only 36,1% of the IB students. Also this difference is statistically significant ($p < 0,001$).



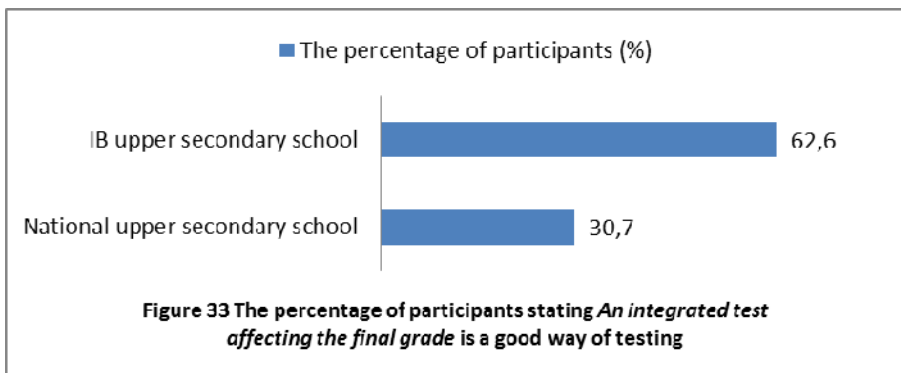
As can be seen in Figure 31, the biggest difference, which was also statistically significant, was in the option *Small tests that are organized throughout upper-secondary school that affect the final/matriculation grade* ($p < 0,001$). 67,5% of the IB students thought that is was a good option, whereas only 20,8% of the national students thought so.



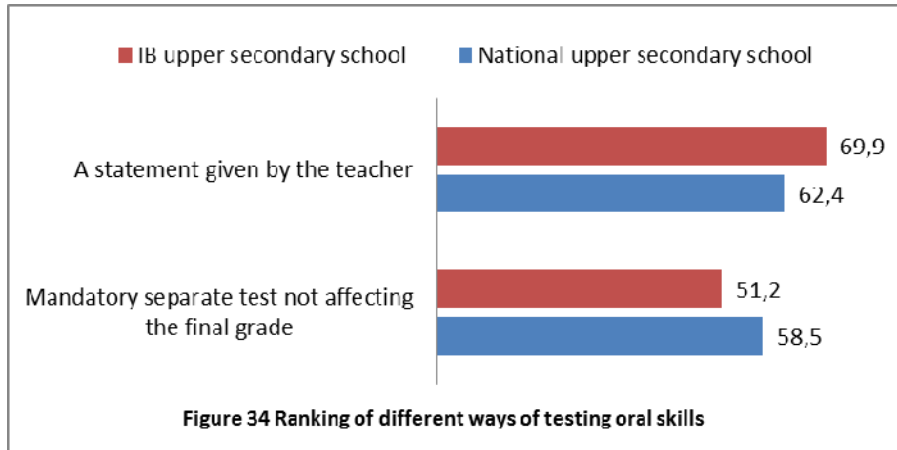
Also the option *Small tests that are organized throughout upper-secondary school that do not affect the final/matriculation grade* divided the opinions of the participants and was statistically significant ($p = 0,001$). Small tests not affecting the final/matriculation grade was considered a good option by 72,3% of the national students and 42,6% of the IB students (Figure 32).



As illustrated in Figure 33, the difference in the agreement with the statement *A test of oral skills that is organized at the time of the final/matriculation exam, that also affects the grade of the final/matriculation exam* was also statistically significant ($p < 0,001$). A test integrated in the final/matriculation exam that also affects the final/matriculation grade was thought to be a good option by 62,2% of the IB students and 30,7% of the national students.



As Figure 34 shows, the option *A statement of the students' proficiency in oral skills given by the English teacher* received almost equal support with both groups. 69,9% of the IB students and 62,4% of the national students said that it was a good option. The difference between the two groups in the option *Mandatory but separate test of oral skills that does not affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam* was not very big. 51,2% of the IB students and 58,5% of the national students considered it to be a good option.



Altogether, the option regarded as the best way to conduct the testing of oral skills was among the national students the option *Mandatory but separate test of oral skills that does not affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam*. Altogether 82,2% of the national students said that it was a good option. In other words, the national students wanted an optional test that was organized separately from the matriculation examination and which did not have an effect on their final grade. As for the IB students, they chose the option *A test of oral skills that is organized separately from the final/matriculation exam, but which does affect the grade of the final/matriculation exam* as the best way to conduct the testing. 90,3% of the IB students felt that it was a good option. It can be said that, even though, the opinions of the two groups of students differed on whether oral skills should have an effect on the final grade, both groups did agree that the oral test should be organized separately from the final/matriculation examination. In general, it can be said that the IB students are more willing to let the oral test affect their final grade than the national students. Even though it became evident in the previous question that both groups consider testing oral skills important, the national students are not very keen on letting the result of a possible oral test affect their final grade. This might be due to the fact that they are insecure about their own skills and proficiency and therefore do not want to risk the oral test having a diluting effect on their final grade.

In the fourth category there were also two open questions, the purpose of which was to find out more about the participants' opinions on testing oral skills. In question 4C, the participants were asked if they thought that their proficiency in oral skills should affect their final/matriculation grade. The questionnaires were divided into two groups: those who clearly stated that oral proficiency should have an effect and those who stated that it should not. These groups were further on divided into two groups according to whether the participant was an IB student or a national

student. The number of answers in each group was then counted. In some of the questionnaires the open questions had been left unanswered and in some, no clear opinion neither against nor for testing oral skills was stated. Altogether 32 (31,7%) national students and only 4 (4,8%) IB students clearly said that they thought that oral skills should not have an effect on the final/matriculation grade. As reasons the participants stated that oral skills are practised too little in school and that oral skills' tests are difficult to assess. Another reason stated by the participants was that they felt that shy or introverted people are in a worse position in the test situation than those who are extrovert people. One more reason mentioned was that if you can write in English you can also speak English and therefore it is not necessary to test oral skills separately. As many as 64 (77,1%) IB students and 48 (47,5%) national students were clearly of the opinion that oral proficiency should affect the final/matriculation grade. This was justified by stating that speaking is a vital skill and that knowledge merely of grammar is not enough. One participant crystallised this by saying that someone could get an L from the English matriculation examination and still not know how to *speak* English. The importance of spoken English also in working life was mentioned as a reason. In many national questionnaires, it was also stated that if oral skills were to be tested then there also should be more practise of oral skills in school.

In the other open question (question 4D) the participants were asked what they thought was the best way to test oral skills. The answers were read and divided into groups with similar kinds of answers but no division between IB and national students was made in this question. The number of participants suggesting a certain way of testing is indicated in brackets. Many participants had unfortunately left this question unanswered or had explained their general view on testing oral skills. Only the clear answers which directly answered the question were taken into account when counting the answers.

Quite many (11) participants stated that the oral exam used in IB school is a good one. These participants were obviously IB students. Other popular ways of testing were a separate oral test (11), smaller tests during the whole period of studying (6), an obligatory test (18), testing oral skills during each course (9) and an oral final/matriculation test (7). In many answers multiple possible ways of testing were mentioned. Altogether 18 participants stated that they wished that the oral exam was either very small or at least not organized at the same time with the final/matriculation examination. As the reason for this wish the participants stated that an oral exam can be very stressful for the students and that they did not want added stress during the final/matriculation

exams. One good point made by two participants was that there should not be only one big occasion when oral skills are tested but that smaller tests should be organized throughout their studies so that also their improvement and progress in oral skills would become evident.

The participants had also commented on how the actual testing should be conducted. The most popular methods mentioned were pair and group discussions (25), discussion or interview with the teacher (27), different kinds of discussion tasks (19) and presentations (12). In many questionnaires it was suggested that the teachers act as the interlocutors and the assessors of the oral test and that the test tasks should be the kind in which the students have to cope with situations they are also faced in real life. In some questionnaires it was mentioned that the oral exam could have a raising effect on the final/matriculation grade but that it would not be good if the oral exam could also bring their grade down. In general, the feeling that came across from the open questions was that especially national students view the testing of oral skills generally as a positive thing but also they fear that their oral skills are not good enough to produce good grades if tested. The IB students on the other hand are used to the idea of testing oral skills and also they have more experience in practising oral skills as well. Therefore the testing does not present such anxiety or a threat to the IB students.

Now that the results of the study have been discussed in detail, and it has been shown that there are differences in the attitudes of the two different groups of students, it is time to move on to the conclusions.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study set out to find out what kinds of attitudes Finnish upper secondary school students have towards English oral skills. The study was comparative as one of its purposes was to compare the attitudes of Finnish IB upper secondary school students and Finnish national upper secondary school students. The two school systems differ quite a lot from each other and this partly made the study challenging but, on the other hand, also revealed the significant differences between the two groups and also, perhaps, gave some reasons for these differences. Altogether, both groups of students view oral skills positively and they think that is the most important component of language proficiency since most communication takes place orally. Even students who do not like studying languages or think that they are not important usually will need English oral skills at some point in their lives. This is reflected on the students' attitudes towards English oral skills. They are viewed

an important part of knowing a language. In IB upper secondary schools, using English oral skills is a daily routine because most of the teaching is in English. Also in IB schools there are usually students who do not necessarily speak Finnish. The results also indicated that the IB students use more English in their free time than the national students. Maybe because of these reasons the IB students' attitudes are a bit more positive than the national students'.

Significant differences were found, in particular, in the students' attitudes toward the testing of English oral skills. The fact that IB students use spoken English daily and in this way get a lot of practice in it is reflected on the students' attitudes towards the testing of oral skills. Also the fact that the IB students know that they have an oral test which affects their grade has an effect on their attitudes. The IB students do not see the testing as so frightening or oppressive as the national students because they have time to get accustomed to the idea and also time to practice oral skills, too. The national students view the testing generally positively as well but they are more timid. Justifiably the national students feel that if oral skills are to be tested then they should get more practice too.

Fundamentally both schools have the same kinds of aims. They strive at raising conscious and independent young members of society. One of the main aims is also to prepare the students for their further studies in colleges and universities. Even though the aims of the schools are alike the methods differ from each other. One of the biggest differences which affects the attitudes towards English oral skills is of course the fact that English is used as the teaching language in IB schools. Maybe also in Finnish national upper secondary schools a lot more teaching should be in English. The results of the study reveal that national upper secondary school students would like to have more practise in oral skills in English. Using English daily creates a strong linguistic foundation to which the students can later on rely both in their private lives as well as in school. The old saying "Practise makes perfect" is not that farfetched. Giving students opportunities to practise spoken language as much as possible not only improves the students' language skills but also enhances their self-esteem. A healthy self-esteem makes it easier to engage in and start conversations in English.

Attitudes have a strong clout on the learning of languages and, why not also, on the teaching of languages. Attitudes guide us as people into some particular direction and because attitudes have deep roots in the subconscious of people they are also difficult to change. If schools promote spoken English already in the early years of education, the students' attitudes might develop into

more positive ones. A positive attitude towards foreign languages and speaking them can also make the learning and certainly also using them easier later in life. As the results of this study indicate students do not think that grammatical correctness is the most important thing in speaking. The students regarded such skills as being able to convey a message to the listener and taking others into consideration as the most important components of oral skills. Grammatical correctness was also considered to be very important but nevertheless it was the least important component. This is the kind of positive attitude or approach which needs to be encouraged in schools too. Of course grammatical correctness is something that should be pursued but for many people it stands in the way of communication.

One other major theme of this study was to survey the students' attitudes towards testing oral skills in English in upper secondary school. As already explained, in the IB Diploma Programme the students' oral skills have a direct influence on their final grades. Although the assessment of the oral skills take place separately from the final tests and they consist of both an individual task and a group task they are, however, taken onto account in the final grade. In the past few years the national upper secondary school's matriculation examination of English has been criticized because it lacks a section of oral skills. The fact that there is no testing of oral skills in the matriculation examination has been explained by stating that the testing would be difficult to arrange as well as it would be very expensive. This is all true. In order to test oral skills in the matriculation examination all kinds of arrangements would have to be made. A method for the testing would have to be determined first. What to test and how? Then the tests would have to be designed and tested in advance to exclude any errors. Valid and reliable rating systems would have to be planned not to mention the training of the raters and interlocutors. The validity, reliability and objectivity of the assessment would have to be guaranteed somehow. The list is long and full of questions that need to be considered carefully.

This process would be time consuming. Also the future workload of teachers and sensors would grow significantly if the oral tests were first conducted and assessed by the students' own teachers and later on sent for external evaluation conducted by the sensors. This would be an enormous process but not in any way impossible. The IB schools are doing it already so why couldn't the national schools do so too? This study revealed that IB students view oral skills' testing more positively than national students. This is due, not only to the fact that they get more practice, but also to the fact that they are used to the idea of testing. The national students in the study were cautiously positive about oral skills' testing but they clearly stated that they should get more

practice in oral skills if they were to be tested. Once the testing system is set and running it will have a wash-back effect also on the teaching of oral skills.

As Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee (1991) pointed out, there clearly is not enough teaching of oral skills in Finnish national upper secondary schools if a section of oral skills is to be added to the matriculation examination. On the other hand, it has also been pointed out that the test situation as well as the participants' individual characteristics should be taken into consideration when planning tests (Bachman and Palmer, 1996). It has been established that attitudes do have an effect in the learning of a second language and that a positive attitude can promote the successful learning languages (Gardner1985). These are all things that should be taken into consideration when planning the teaching of foreign languages in Finland.

Although some of the findings of this study were statistically significant this study cannot, however, be excessively generalized because the number of schools participating was very small. This study, however, can lead the way for more detailed and larger scale studies in the future. It would be useful to study the students' attitudes toward other languages as well. Also a larger scale study could be conducted on how the students' attitudes change during their years in education. For example, how upper secondary school students' attitudes differ from those of university school students'. Another interesting line of study would be to design, develop and pilot an oral skills test for national upper secondary schools in Finland.

As the results of this study have shown there are differences in the attitudes of Finnish IB upper secondary school students and Finnish national upper secondary school students. These differences can be found in the attitudes towards English oral skills as well as towards testing English oral skills. IB students in Finland seem to have a bit more positive attitude towards both oral skills and the testing of them. This is mainly due to the fact that IB students get a lot more practice in English oral skills because their teaching is mostly in English. IB students get to practise their oral skills daily in authentic and meaningful communicative situations. This way the IB students are more daring users of spoken English. Also, the fact that IB students have a test of oral skills which affects their final grade enables them to view testing oral skills more positively than the national upper secondary school students. The attitudes of the national students are by no means negative. Also the national students have a generally positive attitude towards oral skills. The fact that national students have a less positive attitude towards testing oral skills is rather understandable. If oral skills were focused on more in school also national students would view the testing of oral skills more

positively. Given this, it would be important to pay more attention to the teaching of oral skills in all Finnish schools. It is often said that Finnish people know English very well but that they are afraid to use it because they fear making mistakes. If practising and testing oral skills was a daily routine for all pupils and students in Finland we would soon lose the label of being shy users of English.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The assessment criteria of the oral component of Language A2 (higher level) (Adapted from IBO, 2002: 49-51.)

Criterion A: Quality of Ideas

- *How well does the candidate know and understand the subject matter?*
- *To what extent are the candidate's ideas relevant and focused?*
- *Is there evidence of critical thinking?*
- *Has the candidate shown an appreciation of language and style?*
- *Are the ideas supported by relevant examples and illustrations?*

(These are the major features of the criteria.)

Achievement

Level

- 0** **Level 1 is not achieved.** (These are the markband descriptors.)
- 1-2** **The candidate has little awareness of the subject matter.**
- Ideas are frequently irrelevant and/or repetitive.
 - There is little analysis of the subject matter.
 - Little awareness of language and style is shown.
 - Ideas are not supported by examples and illustrations.
- 3-4** **The candidate has superficial awareness of the subject matter.**
- Some ideas are relevant.
 - There is some analysis of the subject matter.
 - Some awareness of language and style is shown.
 - Ideas are occasionally supported by examples and illustrations.
- 5-6** **The candidate has an adequate understanding of the subject matter.**
- Ideas are generally relevant and focused.
 - There is evidence of critical thinking
 - An adequate awareness of language and style is shown.
 - Ideas are generally supported by examples and illustrations.
- 7-8** **The candidate has a good understanding of the subject matter.**
- Ideas are mostly relevant and focused.
 - A good degree of critical thinking is shown.
 - A good appreciation of language and style is shown.
 - Ideas are mostly supported by well-chosen examples and illustrations.
- 9-10** **The candidate has an excellent understanding of the subject matter.**
- Ideas are relevant and focused.
 - A high degree of critical thinking is shown.
 - An excellent appreciation of language and style is shown.

- Ideas are fully supported by well-chosen examples and illustrations.

Criterion B: Presentation

- *How effective is the organization of the oral task?*
- *How coherent is the structure?*
- *Are examples and illustrations well integrated into the oral task?*

Achievement

Level

- 0** **Level 1 is not achieved.**
- 1-2** **Little organization is apparent.**
- The oral task has little structure.
 - Supporting examples and illustrations are not integrated into the oral task.
- 3-4** **Some organization is apparent.**
- The oral task has some structure.
 - Supporting examples and illustrations are sometimes integrated into the oral task.
- 5-6** **The oral task is organized.**
- The structure of the oral task is mostly coherent.
 - Supporting examples and illustrations are generally well integrated into the oral task.
- 7-8** **The oral task is well organized.**
- The structure of the oral task is mostly coherent and effective.
 - Supporting examples and illustrations are mostly well integrated into the oral task.
- 9-10** **The oral task is effectively organized.**
- The structure of the oral task is coherent and effective.
 - Supporting examples and illustrations are well integrated into the oral task.

Criterion C: Language

- *How fluent, varied and accurate is the language used by the candidate?*
- *How appropriate to the oral task is the candidate's choice of register and style?*
(Register and style include the selection of appropriate vocabulary, structures, tone, etc.)
- *To what extent does the exchange flow?*

Achievement

Level

- 0** **Level 1 is not achieved.**
- 1-2** **The language lacks fluency and appropriateness.**
- There are many errors in grammar and sentence construction.
 - There is little sense of register and style.
 - There is little variety in vocabulary and idiom.
 - Frequent hesitations impede the flow of the exchange.
- 3-4** **The language sometimes lacks fluency and appropriateness.**
- Grammar and sentence construction are sometimes accurate although errors and inconsistencies are apparent.
 - The register and style are to some extent appropriate to the task.
 - The range of vocabulary and idiom is fairly limited.
 - The exchange flows but there are some hesitations.
- 5-6** **The language is mostly fluent and appropriate.**
- There is an adequate degree of accuracy in grammar and sentence construction, although some minor errors and inconsistencies are apparent.
 - The register and style are mostly appropriate to the task.
 - Vocabulary and idiom are mostly varied and largely appropriate to the task.
 - The exchange generally flows freely.
- 7-8** **The language is fluent and appropriate.**
- There is a good degree of accuracy in grammar and sentence construction, although the oral task is not necessarily free from error.
 - The register and style are effective and appropriate to the task.
 - Vocabulary and idiom are varied and appropriate to the task.
 - The exchange mostly flows freely.
- 9-10** **The language is fluent and entirely appropriate.**
- There is a high degree of accuracy in grammar and sentence construction, although the oral task is not necessarily free from error.
 - The register and style are consistently effective and appropriate to the task.
 - Vocabulary and idiom are varied and highly appropriate to the task.

- The exchange flows freely.

Appendix 2 The questionnaire used in national upper secondary schools

Arvoisa vastaaja,

tämä kysely on osa Jyväskylän yliopistolle tehtävään Pro-gradu tutkielmaa. Tämän kyselyn tarkoituksena on kartoittaa lukiolaisten asenteita englannin kielen suullista kielitaitoa ja sen testaamista kohtaan. Lue kysymykset ja ohjeet huolellisesti ja vastaa mahdollisimman totuudenmukaisesti. Omaa nimeäsi sinun ei tarvitse lomakkeeseen kirjoittaa. Kaikki vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja yksittäisiä vastaajia ei voi mitenkään tunnistaa. Kaikki vastaukset ovat tutkimuksen kannalta arvokkaita, joten kiitos paljon vaivannäöstäsi!

Sanna Mäntynen

Kyselylomake (kansalliset lukiot)

Taustatiedot

Ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto tai kirjoita se sille varattuun tilaan.

Sukupuoli:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1 | Mies |
| 2 | Nainen |

Ikä: _____

Äidinkieli: _____

Käytkö:

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1 | tavallista lukiota |
| 2 | IB-lukiota |

Oletko:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 | ensimmäisen vuoden opiskelija |
| 2 | toisen vuoden opiskelija |
| 3 | kolmannen vuoden opiskelija |
| 4 | (neljännen vuoden opiskelija) |

Viimeisin arvosana Englannin kielessä _____

Oletko osallistunut suullisen kielitaidon kurssille lukiossa?

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1 | Kyllä |
| 2 | En |

1. Käsitukset englannin kielestä

A) Arvioi seuraavien kielitaidon osa-alueiden merkitystä itsellesi. Kuinka tärkeitä seuraavat kielitaidon osa-alueet ovat sinun mielestäsi? Rastita **parhaiten itseäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto.

	1. Ei ollenkaan tärkeää	2. Ei kovin tärkeää	3. Jokseenkin tärkeää	4. Erittäin tärkeää
Kielioppi				
Kirjoittaminen				
Suullinen kielitaito				
Luetun ymmärtäminen				
Kuullunymmärtäminen				
Sanasto				

B) Arvioi seuraavien **suullisen** kielitaidon osa-alueiden merkitystä itsellesi. Kuinka tärkeitä seuraavat suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueet ovat sinulle? Rastita **parhaiten itseäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto.

	1. Ei ollenkaan tärkeää	2. Ei kovin tärkeää	3. Jokseenkin tärkeää	4. Erittäin tärkeää
Ääntäminen				
Oikeakielisyys (kielioppi)				
Sanaston laajuus				
Muiden huomioon ottaminen keskustelussa (keskustelutaidot)				
Se että saa viestinsä välitettyä kuulijoille mahdollisista virheistä huolimatta				
Sujuvuus				
Tilanteeseen sopiva kielenkäyttö (erilaiset keskustelutilanteet)				

C) Rastita **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto taulukkoon.

	1. Täysin eri mieltä	2. Jokseenkin erimieltä	3. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	4. Täysin samaa mieltä
Pidän englannin kielestä oppiaineena				
Pidän puhumisesta englanniksi				
Englanti on minusta tylsää oppiaineena				
Englannin osaamisesta on minulle paljon hyötyä				
Englannista ei ole minulle hyötyä				
Englanniksi puhuminen on minulle helppoa				
Englanninkielisen puheenymmärtäminen tuottaa minulle vaikeuksia				
Englannin osaaminen on mielestäni tärkeitä				
Muut kielet ovat mielestäni yhtä tärkeitä kuin englanti				
Tulen tarvitsemaan englantia tulevaisuudessa				

2. Englannin kielen suullisen kielitaidon opetus lukiossa

Millaisena koet englannin suullisen kielitaidon opetuksen lukiossa? Rastita **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto taulukkoon. (Yo-koe = Ylioppilaskoe)

	1. Täysin eri mieltä	2. Jokseenkin eri mieltä	3. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	4. Täysin samaa mieltä
Englannin suullista kielitaidon opetusta on lukiossa riittävästi				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset antavat hyvät valmiudet käyttää kieltä koulun ulkopuolella				
Suullisen kielitaidon opetusta painotetaan liikaa lukiossa				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset ovat monipuolisia				
Suullisen kielitaidon oppiminen on tärkeää				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukseen käytetään liikaa aikaa				
Kielioppiharjoitukset ovat tärkeämpiä kuin suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset				
Ylioppilaskokeeseen valmentautuminen tunneilla on tärkeämpää kuin suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelu				
Suullisen kielitaidon opetusta tulisi olla enemmän lukiossa				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset eivät anna riittävästi valmiutta käyttää kieltä koulun ulkopuolella				
Suullisen kielitaidon opetus ei ole tärkeää				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset ovat tylsiä				

3. Englannin kielen käyttö koulun ulkopuolella

Alla olevassa taulukossa on lueteltu erilaisia aktiviteettejä joihin englanti jotenkin liittyy. Rastita **parhaiten itseäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto taulukkoon.

	1. Päivittäin	2. Kerran viikossa tai useammin	3. Kerran kuussa tai useammin	4. Harvemmin
Luen englanninkielisiä kirjoja, lehtiä tai nettisivuja				
Kuuntelen englanninkielistä musiikkia				
Kirjoitan vapaa-ajallani englanniksi				
Käytän kavereiden kanssa jutellessani Englanninkielisiä sanoja ja lausahduksia				
Kirjoitan kirjeitä/ sähköpostia englanniksi				
Pelaan pelejä joissa puhutaan englantia				
Katselen englanninkielisiä ohjelmia ja elokuvia				

4. Englannin suullisen kielitaidon testaaminen

A) Alla olevassa taulukossa on väittämiä englannin suullisen kielitaidon testaamisesta lukiassa.

Rastita taulukkoon **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto. (Yo-koe = Ylioppilaskoe)

	1. Täysin eri mieltä	2. Jokseenkin eri mieltä	3. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	4. Täysin samaa mieltä
Suullisen kielitaidon osaamisen tulisi vaikuttaa Yo-arvosanaan				
Yo-kokeen yhteydessä tulisi olla suullisen kielitaidon osio				
Suullisen kielitaidon osaamisen ei tulisi vaikuttaa Yo-arvosanaan				
Mielestäni olisi tärkeätä että suullisen kielitaidon osaamista testattaisiin lukiassa				
Suullisen kielitaidon koe olisi parempi järjestää erillään Yo-kokeesta, vaikka se vaikuttaisikin lopulliseen arvosanaan				
Suullista kielitaitoa ei mielestäni tarvitse testata				

B) Alla olevassa taulukossa on annettu vaihtoehtoja siitä, **miten suullista kielitaitoa voitaisiin testata lukiossa**. Rastita taulukosta **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi vastaava vaihtoehto** siitä ovatko luetellut tavat mielestäsi hyviä vai huonoja tapoja testata suullista kielitaitoa.

	1. Erittäin huono	2. Jokseenkin huono	3. Jokseenkin hyvä	4. Erittäin hyvä
Yo-kokeen yhteydessä järjestettävä suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka vaikuttaa Yo-arvosanaan				
Yo-kokeesta erillään järjestettävä suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka vaikuttaa Yo-arvosanaan				
Pakollinen, erillinen suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka ei vaikuta Yo-arvosanaan				
Vapaaehtoinen, erillinen suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka ei vaikuta Yo-arvosanaan				
Koko lukion aikana järjestettävät pienemmät testit, jotka vaikuttavat Yo-arvosanaan				
Koko lukion aikana järjestettävät pienemmät testit, jotka eivät vaikuta Yo-arvosanaan				
Englannin opettajan antama lausunto opiskelijan suullisesta kielitaidosta				
Ei suullisen kielitaidon koetta ollenkaan				

C) Tulisiko mielestäsi suullisen kielitaidon vaikuttaa Yo-arvosanaan? Vastaa vapaasti omin sanoin ja **perustele mielipidettäsi**.

D) Mikä olisi mielestäsi paras tapa järjestää suullisen kielitaidon testaus lukiossa? Vastaa vapaasti omin sanoin ja **perustele mielipidettäsi**.

Appendix 3 The questionnaire used in IB upper secondary schools

Arvoisa vastaaja,

tämä kysely on osa Jyväskylän yliopistolle tehtävään Pro-gradu tutkielmaa. Tämän kyselyn tarkoituksena on kartoittaa lukiolaisten asenteita englannin kielen suullista kielitaitoa ja sen testaamista kohtaan. Lue kysymykset ja ohjeet huolellisesti ja vastaa mahdollisimman totuudenmukaisesti. Omaa nimeäsi sinun ei tarvitse lomakkeeseen kirjoittaa. Kaikki vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja yksittäisiä vastaajia ei voi mitenkään tunnistaa. Kaikki vastaukset ovat tutkimuksen kannalta arvokkaita, joten kiitos paljon vaivannäöstäsi!

Sanna Mäntynen

Kyselylomake (IB-lukiot)

Taustatiedot

Ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto tai kirjoita se sille varattuun tilaan.

Sukupuoli:

- 3 Mies
4 Nainen

Ikä: _____

Äidinkieli: _____

Käytkö:

- 3 tavallista lukiota
4 IB-lukiota

Oletko:

- 5 ensimmäisen vuoden opiskelija
6 toisen vuoden opiskelija
7 kolmannen vuoden opiskelija
8 (neljännen vuoden opiskelija)

Viimeisin arvosana Englannin kielessä _____

Oletko osallistunut suullisen kielitaidon kurssille lukiossa?

- 3 Kyllä
4 En

1. Käsitukset englannin kielestä

A) Arvioi seuraavien kielitaidon osa-alueiden merkitystä itsellesi. Kuinka tärkeitä seuraavat kielitaidon osa-alueet ovat sinun mielestäsi? Rastita **parhaiten itseäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto.

	1. Ei ollenkaan tärkeää	2. Ei kovin tärkeää	3. Jokseenkin tärkeää	4. Erittäin tärkeää
Kielioppi				
Kirjoittaminen				
Suullinen kielitaito				
Luetun ymmärtäminen				
Kuullunymmärtäminen				
Sanasto				

B) Arvioi seuraavien **suullisen** kielitaidon osa-alueiden merkitystä itsellesi. Kuinka tärkeitä seuraavat suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueet ovat sinulle? Rastita **parhaiten itseäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto.

	1. Ei ollenkaan tärkeää	2. Ei kovin tärkeää	3. Jokseenkin tärkeää	4. Erittäin tärkeää
Ääntäminen				
Oikeakielisyys (kielioppi)				
Sanaston laajuus				
Muiden huomioon ottaminen keskustelussa (keskustelutaidot)				
Se että saa viestinsä välitettyä kuulijoille mahdollisista virheistä huolimatta				
Sujuvuus				
Tilanteeseen sopiva kielenkäyttö (erilaiset keskustelutilanteet)				

C) Rastita **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto taulukkoon.

	1. Täysin eri mieltä	2. Jokseenkin erimieltä	3. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	4. Täysin samaa mieltä
Pidän englannin kielestä oppiaineena				
Pidän puhumisesta englanniksi				
Englanti on minusta tylsää oppiaineena				
Englannin osaamisesta on minulle paljon hyötyä				
Englannista ei ole minulle hyötyä				
Englanniksi puhuminen on minulle helppoa				
Englanninkielisen puheenymmärtäminen tuottaa minulle vaikeuksia				
Englannin osaaminen on mielestäni tärkeitä				
Muut kielet ovat mielestäni yhtä tärkeitä kuin englanti				
Tulen tarvitsemaan englantia tulevaisuudessa				

2. Englannin kielen suullisen kielitaidon opetus lukiossa

Millaisena koet englannin suullisen kielitaidon opetuksen lukiossa? Rastita **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto taulukkoon. (Loppukoe = Final exam)

	1. Täysin eri mieltä	2. Jokseenkin eri mieltä	3. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	4. Täysin samaa mieltä
Englannin suullista kielitaidon opetusta on lukiossa riittävästi				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset antavat hyvät valmiudet käyttää kieltä koulun ulkopuolella				
Suullisen kielitaidon opetusta painotetaan liikaa lukiossa				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset ovat monipuolisia				
Suullisen kielitaidon oppiminen on tärkeää				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukseen käytetään liikaa aikaa				
Kielioppiharjoitukset ovat tärkeämpiä kuin suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset				
Loppukokeeseen valmentautuminen tunneilla on tärkeämpää kuin suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelu				
Suullisen kielitaidon opetusta tulisi olla enemmän lukiossa				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset eivät anna riittävästi valmiutta käyttää kieltä koulun ulkopuolella				
Suullisen kielitaidon opetus ei ole tärkeää				
Suullisen kielitaidon harjoitukset ovat tylsiä				

3. Englannin kielen käyttö koulun ulkopuolella

Alla olevassa taulukossa on lueteltu erilaisia aktiviteettejä joihin englanti jotenkin liittyy. Rastita **parhaiten itseäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto taulukkoon.

	1. Päivittäin	2. Kerran viikossa tai useammin	3. Kerran kuussa tai useammin	4. Harvemmin
Luen englanninkielisiä kirjoja, lehtiä tai nettisivuja				
Kuuntelen englanninkielistä musiikkia				
Kirjoitan vapaa-ajallani englanniksi				
Käytän kavereiden kanssa jutellessani englanninkielisiä sanoja ja lausahduksia				
Kirjoitan kirjeitä/ sähköpostia englanniksi				
Pelaan pelejä joissa puhutaan englantia				
Katselen englanninkielisiä ohjelmia ja elokuvia				

4. Englannin suullisen kielitaidon testaaminen

A) Alla olevassa taulukossa on väittämiä englannin suullisen kielitaidon testaamisesta lukiossa. Rastita taulukkoon **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi kuvaava** vaihtoehto. (Loppukoe = Final exam)

	1. Täysin eri mieltä	2. Jokseenkin eri mieltä	3. Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	4. Täysin samaa mieltä
Suullisen kielitaidon osaamisen tulisi vaikuttaa loppukokeen arvosanaan				
Loppukokeen kokeen yhteydessä tulisi olla suullisen kielitaidon osio				
Suullisen kielitaidon osaamisen ei tulisi vaikuttaa loppukokeen arvosanaan				
Mielestäni olisi tärkeätä että suullisen kielitaidon osaamista testattaisiin lukiossa				
Suullisen kielitaidon koe olisi parempi järjestää erillään loppukokeesta, vaikka se vaikuttaisikin lopulliseen arvosanaan				
Suullista kielitaitoa ei mielestäni tarvitse testata				

B) Alla olevassa taulukossa on annettu vaihtoehtoja siitä, **miten suullista kielitaitoa voitaisiin testata lukiossa**. Rastita taulukosta **parhaiten omaa mielipidettäsi vastaava vaihtoehto** siitä ovatko luetellut tavat mielestäsi hyviä vai huonoja tapoja testata suullista kielitaitoa.

	1. Erittäin huono	2. Jokseenkin huono	3. Jokseenkin hyvä	4. Erittäin hyvä
Loppukokeen yhteydessä järjestettävä suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka vaikuttaa lopulliseen arvosanaan.				
Loppukokeesta erillään järjestettävä suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka vaikuttaa lopulliseen arvosanaan.				
Pakollinen, erillinen suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka ei vaikuta lopulliseen arvosanaan.				
Vapaaehtoinen, erillinen suullisen kielitaidon koe, joka ei vaikuta lopulliseen arvosanaan				
Koko lukion aikana järjestettävät pienemmät testit, jotka vaikuttavat lopulliseen arvosanaan				
Koko lukion aikana järjestettävät pienemmät testit, jotka eivät vaikuta lopulliseen arvosanaan				
Englannin opettajan antama lausunto opiskelijan suullisesta kielitaidosta				
Ei suullisen kielitaidon koetta ollenkaan				

C) Tulisiko mielestäsi suullisen kielitaidon vaikuttaa lopulliseen arvosanaan? Vastaa vapaasti omin sanoin ja **perustele mielipidettäsi**.

D) Mikä olisi mielestäsi paras tapa järjestää suullisen kielitaidon testaus lukiossa? Vastaa vapaasti omin sanoin ja **perustele mielipidettäsi**.

Appendix 4 The English version of the questionnaire

Dear student,

this survey is a part of my MA studies that are done for the University of Jyväskylä. The purpose of this survey is to map out the attitudes of upper secondary school students towards English oral skills and testing them. Please read the questions and instructions carefully and answer sincerely. You do not have to write your name on the questionnaire. All answers will be handled confidentially and nobody's identity will be revealed. All answers are valuable to the study so thank you very much for your time and trouble!

Sanna Mäntynen

Questionnaire (English version)

Background information

Circle the correct alternative or write it in the given space

Sex:

- 1 Male
2 Female

Age: _____

Mother tongue: _____

Do you attend to

- 1 National upper-secondary school
2 IB upper-secondary school

Are you

- 1 A first year student
2 A second year student
3 A third year student
4 A fourth year student

Your last grade in English _____

Have you participated on a course of oral skills/ spoken language in upper-secondary school?

- 1 Yes
2 No

1. Attitudes towards English language

A) Evaluate the importance of the following fields/components of language proficiency. How important these fields are to you? Tick the alternative that **best reflects your opinion** in the chart.

	Not important at all	Not so important	Somewhat important	Very important
Grammar				
Writing				
Oral skills				
Reading comprehension				
Listening comprehension				
Vocabulary				

B) Evaluate the importance of the following fields/components of oral skills. How important are these fields to you? Tick the alternative that **best reflects your opinion** in the chart.

	Not important at all	Not so important	Somewhat important	Very important
Pronunciation				
Grammatical correctness				
Size of vocabulary				
Taking others into consideration in a conversation (conversational skills)				
Being able to convey your message to the listener despite a few mistakes				
Fluency				
Being able to use the kind of language that fits the situation (different kinds of conversational situations)				

C) Tick the alternative that **best reflects your opinion** in the chart.

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Slightly disagree	3. Partly agree	4. Strongly agree
I like English as a school subject				
I like talking in English				
I think that English as a school subject is boring				
Knowing English is a useful skill for me				
English is not useful for me				
Talking in English is easy for me				
Understanding English speech is difficult for me				
Knowing English is important in my opinion				
In my opinion other languages are as important as English				
I will need English in the future				

2. Teaching English oral skills in upper-secondary school

What do you think about the teaching of English oral skills in upper-secondary school? Tick the alternative that **best reflects your opinion** in the chart.

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Slightly disagree	3. Partly agree	4. Strongly agree
There is enough of teaching of oral skills in upper-secondary school				
Exercises of oral skills done in classes give the student good enough skills to use the language outside school				
The teaching of oral skills is emphasized too much in upper-secondary school				
Oral skills exercises are diverse				
Learning oral skills is important				
Too much time is used on oral exercises				
Grammar exercises are more important than oral skills exercises				
Preparing for the Final exam in classes is more important than practising oral skills				
There should be more of teaching of oral skills in upper-secondary school				
Oral skills exercises done in classes do not give the student good enough skills to use the language outside school				
The teaching of oral skills is not important				
Oral skills exercises are boring				

3. Using English outside school

In the chart below there are listed different kinds of activities that involve English. Tick the alternative that **best reflects you** in the chart.

	1. Daily	2. Once a week or more often	3. Once a month or more often	4. Not that often /rarely
I read books, magazines or web pages in English				
I listen to music that is in English				
In my free time I write in English				
When I talk with my friends in Finnish I use English words and phrases				
I write letters / e-mail in English				
I play games in which English is spoken				
I watch TV-shows and movies that are in English				

4. Testing English oral skills

A) In the chart below there are statements regarding the testing of English oral skills in upper-secondary school. Tick the alternative that **best reflects your opinion** in the chart.

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Slightly disagree	3. Partly agree	4. Strongly agree
Students' oral skills should affect the grade of the final exam				
There should be a section of oral skills in the final exam				
Students' oral skills should not affect the grade of the final exam				
I think that it would be important that students' oral skills were tested in upper secondary school				
It would be better if oral skills were tested separately from the final exam, even though it would affect the grade of the final exam				
I think that it is not necessary to test oral skills				

B) In the chart below there are alternatives on **how oral skills could be tested in upper-secondary school**. How good do you think that these following ways of testing are? Tick the alternative that **best reflects your opinion** in the chart.

	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good
A test of oral skills that is organized at the time of the final exam, that also affects the grade of the Final exam				
A test of oral skills that is organized separately from the final exam, but which does affect the grade of the final exam				
Mandatory but separate test of oral skills that does not affect the grade of the final exam				
Obligatory but separate test of oral skills that does not affect the grade of the final exam				
Small tests that are organized throughout upper secondary school that affect the final grade				
Small tests that are organized throughout upper secondary school that do not affect the final grade.				
A statement of the students' proficiency in oral skills given by the English teacher				
No test of oral skills				

C) Do you think that students' oral skills should affect their final grade? Answer freely using your own words and **give reasons for your opinion.**

D) In your opinion, what would be the best way to organize the testing of oral skills in upper-secondary school? Answer freely using your own words and **give reasons for your opinion.**
