

TEACHER TRAINEES' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH ACCENTS AND PRONUNCIATION

Bachelor's thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Englannin kielen levitessä ympäri maailmaa on muodostunut lukemattomia erilaisia tapoja lausua ja puhua sitä. Englanninkielisissä maissa puhuttujen natiiviaksenttien lisäksi myös monilla ei-natiiveilla puhujilla on oma tunnistettava aksenttinsa joka muotoutuu kun oman äidinkielen lausumistapaa sovelletaan englannin puhumiseen. Parhaimmillaan tuloksena on kiinnostava ja eksoottinen puhetapa, mutta pahimmillaan liian vahva aksentti voi haitata ymmärretyksi tulemistä. Lausumisen opettamisen taakka lankeaa usein kieltenopettajan harteille, jonka tulee varmistaa, että hänen oppilaansa oppivat puhumaan ymmärrettävästi ja selkeästi.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on valottaa englannin aineenopettajaopiskelijoiden asenteita eri englannin kielen aksentteja kohtaan sekä heidän ajatuksiaan omasta aksentistaan ja sen muotoutumisesta. Lisäksi tarkastellaan englanninopettajaksi opiskelevien kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä lausumisen opetuksesta osana englannin opetusta. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu kymmenen englanninopettajaopiskelijan haastatteluista. Haastattelu valittiin tutkimusmenetelmäksi, jotta saataisiin syvällisiä, henkilökohtaisia vastauksia ja opiskelijoiden itsensä esiintuomia näkökulmia aiheeseen.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että englanninopettajaopiskelijoilla oli erittäin positiivinen asenne eri aksentteja kohtaan. Brittiaksentti ja amerikkalainen aksentti olivat aksentit, joihin opiskelijat kokivat oman lausumisensa eniten pohjautuvan. Opiskelijoiden aksentit olivat pääosin kehittyneet median tai koulun vaikutuksesta. He kokivat, ettei lausumiseen ollut heidän kouluuikaan kiinnitetty kylliksi huomiota eikä eri englannin varianteista ollut tarpeeksi esimerkkejä tai materiaalia opetuksessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The spread of English around the world has given birth to a vast number of different accents and dialects of English. In addition to the native accents spoken, for example, in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia, there are countless of non-native accents. Each speaker's first language (L1) affects the way English learners pronounce English, which results in some very distinct accents. For example, I can easily tell a French or German speaker of English simply by listening to their accent. While these differences in pronunciation can help to distinguish the speakers' home country or town, or even social class, having a thick accent can also hinder intelligibility. For a language to serve its purpose as a means of communication it is important to be able to pronounce it so that one's message is understood, which makes pronunciation an important language skill. When it comes to pronunciation, teachers have an important role because they are often the people who give language students the example of how the target language should be pronounced. Thus it is not irrelevant what kinds of attitudes teachers have towards accents and pronunciation, and how they see them as a part of language teaching.

A number of studies have been made on attitudes towards different accents or dialects (e.g. Brennan and Brennan 1981). There is also a recent study about the teaching of pronunciation in Finland by Tergujeff (2013) in which both pupils and teachers are interviewed regarding the teaching of pronunciation. However, little research has been done on teacher trainees' attitudes towards different English accents, or how they see pronunciation as a part of English teaching. The teacher trainee period is the time when future teachers develop their professional teacher identities while they still possess a strong language learner point of view as well. It is a fruitful time to gain new ideas and think of how to improve the current language teaching system. Students can be idealistic and not too restricted by the realities of working life, which makes their insight valuable. Still, the majority of studies in the field focus on either teachers or basic to upper secondary level pupils (e.g. Tergujeff 2013, Tarkki 2010 and Pirskanen 2009). The present study attempts to fill this gap by interviewing English language teacher trainees about their attitudes towards the different accents of English, their own accents and the influencing factors behind them, as well as the status of accents and pronunciation in English teaching in Finland.

2 ACCENT, ATTITUDES, AND PRONUNCIATION TEACHING IN FINLAND

2.1 Accent and dialect

Two central concepts in the thesis study are accent and dialect. It is important to distinguish between the two terms. According to the online Oxford Dictionary of English (ODE) (n.d) *accent* is “A distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area or social class”. In the present study, the term accent will refer to spoken language pronunciation and does not concern other differences in form, grammar or vocabulary. The definition for the term *dialect*, however, is “A particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group” (ODE n.d). Edwards (2009: 71) defines dialect as “a variety of language that differs from others along three dimensions: vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (accent)”. In the present study the term dialect includes both of these definitions: dialect is a variety of language which is used in a certain region or by a certain social group, and which differs from other varieties in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

English language was once merely a language spoken in a group of islands that formed Great Britain. Cheshire (1991:1) describes it as “a collection of dialects spoken mainly by monolinguals”. Today the English language could hardly be described in those words. Through colonialism and globalisation English has spread all around the globe and become an international lingua franca and one of the most spoken languages in the world. With its spread this collection of dialects has grown considerably and numerous new dialects and accents of English have emerged. I will base the study around the three well-known accents of English: Received Pronunciation (RP), the standard American English (SAE) and the Australian English (AE).

Received Pronunciation is the standard British accent based on the southern English educated speech (ODE n.d). Despite its position as a standard British accent, only a minor percentage of people in the UK actually speak it (British Library n.d). Received Pronunciation is not a dialect but rather an accent; RP speakers' dialect is Standard English (British Library n.d). Although spoken by few, Received Pronunciation is the accent that is used in dictionaries when describing the British pronunciation of words. Furthermore, the pronunciation instructions in Finnish EFL textbooks also use RP as their standard.

A great number of regional accents have developed in the United States since the colonial times. Like in the United Kingdom, a standard codified form of American English exists in the US among the various regional accents. It is called the Standard American English, also known as General American. Unlike Received Pronunciation, which is based on a specific regional and social variety of English accepted as the standard, Standard American is a more general accent with no regional characteristics. SAE has a similar role to RP as a standard variety used in dictionaries and language education.

Australian English began forming when the British colonised Australia. According to Guy (1991: 217), most early settlers came from the south of England, and many of AE's linguistic features come from 18th century southern England. Compared to the British and American Englishes, Australian English is geographically relatively uniform (Guy 1991: 219). There is, however, great social diversity, the main differences being in the pronunciation of vocal sounds (Guy 1991: 219-220).

2.2 Attitudes and dialects

Attitude is a word that is used on a daily basis when talking about people's feelings about something. According to Ajzen (2005), an attitude is a tendency to respond favourably or unfavourable to something. Attitudes can affect the way people behave in certain situations. For example, if a person has a negative attitude towards studying, he or she might not pay attention in class, which can lead to a poor success in school. People often have attitudes, negative or positive, toward other people because of the city or country they are from, the tone of their skin or the language or dialect they speak.

Studies have been made about attitudes toward different dialects of English. The trend seems to be that people favour the standard variations over the non-standard variations. For example, according to Cheshire (1991: 26), Received Pronunciation has connotations of competence and status in the UK. According to Edwards (2009: 74-75), while few people claim superiority of one language over another, it is often thought that Oxford English is better than Cockney. Not all attitudes toward non-standard dialects and accents are negative. In fact, non-standard variations also have connotations like integrity and attractiveness (Cheshire 1991:26), as well as masculinity (Edwards 2009:78).

Tarkki (2010) studied what kinds of attitudes graduating Finnish high-school students had about the English varieties. In her study Tarkki (2010) focused on American English, British English and Australian English taking in consideration the gender differences. The main findings were that girls tended to prefer British English, and boys preferred American English. While girls thought that British accent sounded sophisticated and pleasing, boys found it excessively posh, which made it displeasing for them. Australian English, however, was not as familiar to the students, thus most of them did not have a clear opinion about it. (Tarkki 2010: 20-22)

2.3 Pronunciation teaching in Finland

Pronunciation is an essential part of one's language skills. In face to face communication the way we pronounce can create the first impression of our language skills and portray our personal and social identity (Tergujeff 2013: 9). Poor pronunciation can cause problems in communication and hinder intelligibility, which is not desirable. Finnish people often make fun of the Finnish motorsports professionals and their *Rally English* pronunciation, which is heavily influenced by Finnish pronunciation and intonation. If pronouncing English in a way that is natural to Finns is considered amusing, or even embarrassing, there is a call for pronunciation to be an important part of English teaching in Finland.

In her doctoral dissertation, Tergujeff (2013) explored how English pronunciation is taught in Finland. She did this through a mixed methods research that included four individual studies: a textbook analysis, a teacher survey, a classroom observations study, and a learner interview study. In her study, Tergujeff found that the recommendations for the teaching of pronunciation were not fully applied, and activities focusing expressly on pronunciation were rare. Also there was little teaching of phonetics after the primary level. The main models of pronunciation were RP and the General American but also other varieties were presented through receptive tasks (Tergujeff 2013: 57-58).

3 RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

The aim of the present study is to explore what the different dialects of English mean to future teachers of English. The study has two main focuses. Firstly, it focuses on the teacher trainees' feelings and attitudes towards different accents of English, as well as the reasons and motivations behind their own choice of accent. Secondly, it focuses on accents from a language teaching point of view, i.e. what teacher trainees think is the significance of accents and pronunciation in English teaching in general. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What kind of attitudes do English teacher trainees have towards different accents of English?
- 2) Which accent of English do the teacher trainees think their own accent is closest to, and what are the reasons behind this?
- 3) According to the teacher trainees, what is the role of pronunciation in English teaching in Finland?

4 DATA AND METHOD

4.1 Data collection

Interview was chosen as the method of data collection because of the nature of the research questions. The research questions required the participants to consider their own attitudes and feelings, and reflect on their own experiences. A questionnaire, for example, could not have yielded as deep and varied answers because it is not as flexible as an interview. Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2009:205) list some benefits for using the interview, including that it enables the researcher to collect the data flexibly accompanying the interviewee, and gives more possibilities for interpretation. One of the reasons they list for choosing interview is that the interviewee is seen as an active, meaning creating subject who can freely bring up matters that concern them. For me personally, this was an important reason. I wanted to know what students think about accents and pronunciation.

There were eight interview questions, the first two regarded the identity of the participant, and the rest were aimed at answering the research questions. The questions are enclosed in the

appendix for closer inspection. The interviews were executed as face-to-face interviews to get individual, personal answers. In addition, the interviews were conducted in Finnish to avoid any discomfort or doubts of possible hidden agendas. This was important because the focus of the study was on how students feel and think about dialects rather than observing and assessing their actual accents. The interviews were recorded to avoid distraction that writing notes could cause, as well as to be able to process the data more objectively and accurately.

4.2 Data analysis

According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2009: 224) the methods of analysis can be divided into two main categories: methods aiming to explain, and methods aiming to understand the data. In this study the goal was to understand the interview data so a qualitative approach was necessary. Thematic analysis was chosen as the method, and three themes that corresponded with the research questions were created.

The recorded interviews were first transcribed and saved to the computer as separate documents. The documents were then highlighted with colour codes that represented the themes. Before this was done, additional subthemes were created to make the colour coding more meaningful. For example, instead of assigning one colour to represent the whole discussion of attitudes towards accents, each accent was given its own colour. Parts where the participant discussed his/her attitude towards the British accent were highlighted with blue, the American accent with green, and the Australian accent with yellow. This made it easy to find the information needed to analyse the answers.

4.3 Participants

The participants (N=10) of this study were English teacher trainees from the University of Jyväskylä. The gender distribution was nearly even: there were six female and four male participants. From the ten participants, nine were third year students and one was a fifth year student. More advanced students were chosen for the interviews because they already had a sufficient amount of studies behind them to enable them to critically think about dialects from both personal and professional points of view.

5 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACCENTS AND PRONUNCIATION

The data received from the interviews was analysed according to three themes that corresponded with the research questions. The themes were as follows: attitudes towards accents of English, students' own accents and the reasons behind them, and the role of accent and pronunciation in English teaching. Each theme was analysed and the results explained with representative examples from the interviews.

5.1 Attitudes towards English accents

The first theme to be discussed is attitudes towards English accents. The interviewees were asked to first focus on the three varieties of English (RP, SAE and AE), and then encouraged to talk about any other accents that they wished to mention. The interviewees reported a variety of attitudes towards the three accents, as well as some others, the Scottish accent being one of the most frequent ones to be mentioned. I will first present the findings regarding attitudes towards Received Pronunciation, or the British accent, the American accent and the Australian accent and then discuss the other accents mentioned.

5.1.1 The British accent

The accent that received the greatest amount of positive remarks was the British accent. There were many reasons why it was preferred. For example, one student thought that British pronunciation was the easiest way to pronounce English. RP was also respected because of its clarity and universality. It also had connotations of being the language of academics and working life.

Example 1

Received pronunciation niin se on, sehän on hirveen selkeätä, et sitä ku kuulee niin se on silleen, silleen mulla on aika hyvä arvostus sitä kohtaan ihan sen takia että se on selkeää ja se on niinkun yleismaailmallista jollain tavalla. – received pronunciation on enemmän sitten semmonen ehkä akateeminen tai semmonen, semmosen niinkun työelämän yleiskieli

Received pronunciation, it is very clear, when you hear it it's like, like I have quite a lot of respect towards it because it is so clear and like universal in a way – received pronunciation is then, kind of, maybe academic or a kind of universal language for working life

There were also more emotional and affectional reasons to prefer the British accent. One of the interviewees had stayed and worked in the UK for a number of times. Another

humorously said that the British accent was the sexiest accent. Not all, however, preferred the British accent. In fact, two of the interviewees had a negative attitude towards it. One of them had not liked it when English teachers in school had stressed the British way of pronouncing and said she refused to pronounce words in a British way.

Example 2

Haastattelija: “Onkos aksenttia josta et pidä?” Haastateltava: “No ehkä se britti, jotenki mul on vähän tullu sii- mä en, mä aina koulussa kieltäydyin ite vähän niinku, ääntämästä niit silleen, ku meillä oli parikin opettajaa jotka aika niinkun vahvasti painotti sitä nii mä en jotenki, se ei kolaha muhun silleen samal tavalla yhtään.

Interviewer: “Is there an accent you don't like then?” Interviewee: “Well maybe the British [accent], somehow I've grown to - I don't, in school I always refused to like, to pronounce them like that, 'cause we had a couple of teachers who always, like strongly stressed it so somehow I, it just doesn't hit me in the same way [as the American accent] at all.”

Despite a few negative comments the general attitude towards the British accent was rather positive. It received the most positive comments and was the preferred accent to seven out of the ten interviewees. Also Tarkki (2010) reported a similar trend: most of the participants in her study preferred British English. Tarkki suspected that this was because of the larger number of female participants in her study, as British English was clearly favoured by girls. In the present study, however, most participants, regardless of their gender, preferred the British accent.

5.1.2 The American Accent

Like the British accent, the American accent also received both positive and negative comments. However, the American accent was criticised more than the British. One of the interviewees explained that she used to detest the American accent especially because of the American 'disposable' culture.

Example 3

En hirveesti pitänyt ennen tosta amerikka-aksentista, mutta nytten oon tullu niinku suvaitsevaisemmaksi sitä kohtaan jos näin voi sanoa, tai sen niinku, ku enemmän se johtu siihen amerikkalaiseen kulttuuriin, niinku semmoseen kertakäyttökulttuuriin ja muuhun liitty etten siitä oikein tykänny.

I didn't really like the American accent very much before, but now I've become more accepting towards it, if one can say that, or it like, because it was more about the American culture, like the kind of disposable culture and son on that I didn't really like it.

Despite not being preferred by as many students as the British accent, the American accent seemed to be familiar and understandable to all of the interviewees, even more so than the British accent in some instances. The reason for this was that the interviewees regularly heard it because of its dominant position in media in Finland.

Example 4

Yhdysvaltojen itärannikon aksentti et se on kanssa hyvin selkee mulle, et siihenkin niinkun jotenkin törmää, että sitä niinkun tulee aika paljon.

The United States east coast accent is also very clear to me, somehow you run into it too, that you hear it quite a lot.

The American accent would seem to be favoured especially by younger people. Although now preferring the British accent, two of the interviewees reported that they used to like American accent more when they were younger.

Example 5

Amerikka ehkä, ehkä en pidä enää niin paljon, ehkä nuorempana tykkäsin enemmän, mutta nyt en niin paljon.

American maybe, maybe I no longer like it so much, maybe when I was younger I liked it more, but now not so much.

However, the American accent was not merely a teenage favourite for everyone. In fact, three of the interviewees clearly favoured the American accent despite having passed their teen years. Media came up as an important source of SAE input but also other reasons to prefer it emerged. For example, one of the interviewees had friends from the United States and Canada, which influenced his accent preference.

Example 6

Siis mun taustan, tai ystäväpiirissä on niinku amerikkalaisia niin sitä kautta se on niinku tullu tutuks se aksentti, ja sitten on kanadalaisia myöskin ja ne on niinkun tietysti myös median kautta hyvin tuttuja ku kattoo paljon jenkki-sarjoja ja näin.

Well my background, or I have Americans among my friends so through that the accent has become familiar, and then I also have Canadian [friends] and of course also through media [the accents are] very familiar since I watch a lot of American TV-series and so.

The American accent was the second preferred accent with three out of ten interviewees naming it as their favourite accent. Many interviewees reported having preferred it as teenagers, so perhaps with younger interviewees the number of people preferring the American accent could have been larger. Tarkki's (2010) findings, however, would seem to

oppose this idea, since most of her participants favoured the British variation. On the other hand, the American accent was reported to be the most spoken variety among the students because of the dominant position of AE in the media (Tarkki, 2010: 20). It would seem that media is one of the main reasons behind the popularity behind the American accent. Many of the teacher trainees had started liking the British accent more when growing older, and especially since beginning their studies in the university. One of the most important reasons for this was that most of the native English teachers in the university were from the UK.

5.1.3 The Australian accent

The attitudes towards the Australian accent were quite positive. Despite it not being any interviewees' favourite accent, there did not seem to be any detectable negative attitudes towards AE. On the contrary, it was described to sound sympathetic, good and fun. One student thought the Australian accent sounded nice and smooth, and exemplified this by saying 'hello mate' in an Australian manner.

Example 7

Australia-aksentti on kans tosi mukava, niin, se on jotenkin tosi semmonen siis sulava ja [täl]lee: 'hello mate'

Australian accent is also very nice, yes, it is somehow so very kind of smooth ja like this: 'hello mate'

Whereas the British and American accents were mostly familiar and understandable to the interviewees, the Australian accent was considered to be more difficult to understand and more foreign to the students. Students reported not really having experience with the Australian accent and that it was more exotic to them. For example:

Example 8

Australia aksentti on ehkä vähän semmonen mysteeri, et sitä ei silleen oo kuullu niin paljon, niin se tuntuu vaan vähän hassulta ja kuulostaa oudolta, välillä vaikee ymmärtää.

The Australian accent is maybe a bit of a mystery, I have not heard it that much, so it feels a bit funny and sounds odd, sometimes it is hard to understand it.

The Australian accent was clearly well liked, and it received several positive comments. Despite this no one named it as their favourite accent. Perhaps this is due to the fact that it was considered by many to be more an exotic accent, and foreign to them. In addition, AE was considered to be difficult to understand, which could be explained by the teacher trainees unfamiliarity with the accent. Similar trend appeared also in Tarkki's study (2010), which

could indicate that Finnish students do not receive enough AE input to get properly familiarised with it. Further study, however, is needed to be able to draw a more reliable conclusion on the matter.

5.1.4 Other accents

Given the chance to discuss any other accents they wished to, many of the students wanted to bring up some accent besides the RP, SAE and AE. Most frequently mentioned other accents in the interviews were Scottish, Irish and Jamaican accents. Scottish accent was liked and gained interest especially from three students who had been to Scotland as exchange students.

Example 9

No mä oon erityisen ihastunut tällä hetkellä skottiaksentteihin koska mä olin just skotlannissa. Ne on aivan ihanaa kuunneltavaa varsinkin niinku maaseudulla kun se on niin tota thick ja sit se aah, se on kiva.

Well I am especially in love with Scottish accents at the moment because I was in Scotland just now. They are absolutely fabulous to listen especially in the country side where it is, well, so thick and it aah, it is so nice.

The Irish accent was also brought up in several interviews in a positive light. It was considered to sound interesting and good, although difficult to understand at times. One student had personal experience with Irish exchange students to reflect on.

Example 10

No se irkkuaksentti oli mielenkiintonen ku tutustu niihin vaihtareihin jotka sitä puhu niin tuota.. Alussa oli tosi vaikee ymmärtää sitä että ku niillä oli kuitenkin aika paljon semmosta omaa, omanlaista ääntämistyylä ja muuta niin siinä piti tosi paljon niinku keskittyä siihen mut sitte ajan kanssa siihenki silleen tottu.

Well the Irish accent was interesting when I got to know the exchange students that spoke it. At the beginning it was really difficult to understand it since they do have quite a lot of their own, own kind of pronunciation style and so, so I had to focus very hard, but over time I did get used to it.

Another accent that the interviewees wanted to discuss was the Jamaican accent. It was considered to be a very exotic accent. In fact, it was mostly given as an example of an accent that is very difficult to understand.

Example 11

Ja tota, puhumattakaan sitten joku Jamaikan englanti niin siellä on aikamoista mongerrusta.

And well, not to mention something like the Jamaican English, it is quite some gibberish there.

The interviewees overall showed a great interest towards different accents of English. In addition to the ones above, also other accents were mentioned, but only accents that were mentioned in more than one interview were included in this analysis. The accents omitted from the examples included, for example, the accents of the southern states of the US and the accent of the northern England.

5.2 Teacher trainees' own accents and the reasons behind them

As became evident in the discussion about attitudes, British and American accents were the most familiar to the teacher trainees. This also showed in their own accents, which were all influenced either by British or American accent, or both of them. The most prevalent influencing accent among the teacher trainees was the British accent. In fact, five of the ten interviewees thought that the British accent had the greatest influence on their own accent, not taking the influence of Finnish pronunciation into consideration.

Example 12

Varmaan eniten on brittienglannista vaikutteita. Jos otetaan suomalainen lausumistapa pois niin silti niinkun ulkonen vaikutus niin suurin on varmaan ollu brittienglannilla omaan lausumiseen.

Probably there are most influences from British English. If we take out the Finnish way of pronouncing, then still the biggest outside influence on my pronunciation has been the British English.

Despite the strong presence of American English in the Finnish media and its familiarity among the teacher trainees, surprisingly few of them considered they had a mostly American-influenced accent. In fact, only three of them reported it as the main influence on their accent. For those three interviewees, it seemed to be a conscious choice to speak with a more American accent.

Example 13

No just semmosest perus amerikanenglannista aika vahvastikin, tiesti en tiää sit ku ite kuuntelee omaa puhetta niin kuulostaaks se, mut silleen mä tavallaan siit mä niinku ihan tietosestiki oon ottanu niinku vähän mallia niist mitä mä oon kuunnellu ja muuta. Jenkki.

Well [the greatest influence comes from] the kind basic American English quite strongly, of course I don't know if when listening to my own speech it sounds like it, but I have consciously used what I have heard as an example and so. Yankee.

Because the British and American accents are both strongly present in Finland, often both of them had some effect on the student's accents. Consequently, not all interviewees could choose their accent with certainty. In fact, two of the interviewees thought that rather than

having a clear British or American influence in their accent they had influences from both of them. One of the teacher trainees described her accent to be an 'artistic mishmash' of all accents:

Example 14

No mä oon oppinu mun englannin kielen telkkarista kattomalla amerikkalaisia sarjoja eli mulla on ehkä pohja kuitenkin, semmonen amerikan aksentti siellä pohjalla, mut sit sen jälkeen kun on ollu just tosi paljon nyt briteissä ja sitten kattonu paljon brittiläisiä ohjelmia niin sit se aksentti on ehkä pikkasen menny siihen suuntaan, mutta mä en kuitenkaan sanois sitä että mä oisin täysin niinku brittikään, että se on semmonen aika taiteellinen sekamelska kaikkia aksentteja.

Well I have learned my English from the telly by watching American TV-shows so I maybe have a basis of, -an American accent there on the bottom, but after spending a lot of time in Britain my accent has maybe gone a little bit to that direction, but I wouldn't say I am completely British either, it is a kind of rather artistic mishmash of all accents.

When discussing the teacher trainees' accents and how they have developed into their present form four important factors emerged. The four factors that appeared most frequently in the answers were school or university, self-studying, media and television, and time abroad or native friends. Many of the interviewees said that school or university was where they got their main influence. One student mentioned the lecturers at the university as an important factor. Others reported they had consciously self-studied and practiced speaking with a certain accent at home. One teacher trainee mentioned she had practised speaking with an Australian accent during her reading break in high school.

Example 15

Itse asiassa lukulomalla vaan niinku rupesin silleen ku luin enkun kirjotuksiin niin lukemaan ääneen niitä ja sitten koitin vaan että saaks semmosen aussiaksenttin ja sit se jäi vaan päälle.

Actually during the reading break while studying for the English matriculation exam I started to read them out loud and then just tried if I could get the kind of Aussie accent and then it just kind of stuck with me.

Some students reported they had acquired an accent by spending time in an English speaking country or by having friends who are native speakers of English. One student said he had American friends, and that he had been to the United States two longer periods of time, which had contributed to his accent. Another important factor, especially in the case of the American accent, was the television and media. Several interviewees reported television series and movies and other media to be a source of input in American accent. One interviewee told that the American sitcom Friends was the most important factor in the development of her own accent:

Example 16

No siis tv-ohjelmist niin paljon et se on ehkä vähän noloa jopa. Mä aina sanon kaikille et mä oon oppinu mun enkun niinku ääntämisen tosi paljon Frendeistä, mikä on ihan totta, et mä oon niinku kuunnellu tosi paljon siinä ja tehny silleen, mulla ei oo suomenkielisiä tekstejä ollenkaan et mä tavallaan niinku kaiken sen, ne keskustelut otan silleen korvien kautta siinä, niin tota siitä vahvasti ja muutenkii tv-ohjelmista aika paljon. Ne on varmaan se tärkein.

Well from TV-shows so much that it is maybe even a little embarrassing. I always tell everyone that I have learned my English pronunciation very much from Friends, which is true, I have listened to it a lot and done so that, I have no Finnish subtitles so I kind of take all the conversations in it through the ears, so quite a lot from there and also from other TV-shows as well. They are probably the most important [influence].

The four factors mentioned above were distributed quite evenly between the interviewees. There was, however, a connection between accents and the channels through which they were learned. For example, because of the status of British English in Finnish schooling system, most of the students who named school as the main factor influencing their accent considered their accent to be closer to British accent. On the other hand, learning from media or television was typical for those who considered having a more American accent.

5.3 The status of accents and pronunciation in Finnish EFL teaching

When asked about the status or significance of accents and pronunciation in English teaching in Finland, the teacher trainees gave answers from two points of view. One was from a more teacher oriented point of view and the other was from the point of view of English language teaching in general. The language teacher point of view focused on what teachers' accents should be like, and how a teacher should think about accents. The language teaching point of view was about how accent and pronunciation are, and have been, taught in schools and what their position is among the other areas of English language teaching. Together the two aspects helped to create a holistic picture about how the teacher trainees see accents and pronunciation as a part of English teaching.

From a language teacher's point of view, two words that most frequently emerged from the interview were comprehensibility and clarity. Authentic or native like accent was not considered to be important for a teacher, instead, the goal was to have an understandable, consistent and clear accent.

Example 17

Tota, nytten varsinkin sen pääsykoekirjan kautta mikä meillä oli nii oppi tajuamaan että ei sillä aksentilla loppujen lopuksi oo mitään väliä kunhan tulee ymmärretyksi ihan niinku sillä, vaikka niinku

tietenkin opettajana haluaa opettaa niinku hyvää kieltä ja että se ois niinku mahdollisimman oikeakielistä, mutta jos niitä virheitä tulee niin ei sille voi mitään, et vähän sama aksentissa, että kunhan sä tuut niinku ymmärretyksi niin se on niinku se tärkein asia.

Well, now especially when reading the book for the entrance exam [to the university] that we had I learned to realise that after all the accent does not matter at all as long as you are understood, although of course as a teacher I want to teach proper language and as correct language as possible, but you can't help it if you make mistakes, it is kind of the same with accent, so that as long as you are understood it is the most important thing.

The same applied for students also, rather than trying to get them to learn a native like accent it was considered more important to learn to speak understandably and clearly. One student summarised the idea well in saying that she would like her students to learn to speak in a way that is natural to them but to pay attention to those parts of pronunciation that make a difference in understandability of the message.

Example 18

Niin no se on vähän sitten just mitä itekki miettii että jos mä joskus opetan sitä englantia niin mä haluaisin opettaa sen silleen että saat tavallaan puhua silleen ku sulle on luonnollista, mutta sitten niissä asioissa missä se ääntämys tekee eron että ymmäretäänkö sua vai ei, vai ymmärretäänkö sut väärin vai oikein niin siihen niinku kiinnittäis huomiota. Tavallaan että mä en ite lähtis siihen että sun täytyy nyt imitoida näitä natiiveja puhujia tässä asiassa.

Yeah well that is something I think myself that if I'll some day teach English I would like to teach it so that you [a pupil] get to speak it in a way that's natural to you, but then wherever the pronunciation makes a difference on whether you are understood or not then you should pay attention to that. Like I wouldn't do it so that you have to imitate these natives when doing this.

Besides discussing accents and pronunciation from a more teacher and student focused point of view, the interviewees also talked about their views on its status as a part of language teaching in general. The question was considered from multiple points of view such as how it has been taught to them, how it should be taught, and if it gets enough emphasis in language teaching. The interviewees were mostly asked to reflect on their own studies and time at school because of the limited amount of actual personal teaching experience.

The teaching of pronunciation was considered to be insufficient. In fact, most interviewees reported pronunciation had not been taught enough during their time in school. One student reported feeling like they were mostly left on their own with pronunciation, and the teaching of pronunciation had focused only on some of the more difficult words.

Example 19

No, en välttämättä sanois että sitä on riittävästi, että, meidät oikeestaan on jätetty aikalailla oman onnen nojaan, oman kokemuksen perusteella ainaki. En tiedä sitten et jos mulla on ollu vähemmän ongelmia ku joillain muilla, että se on keskittynyt sinne, mut mitä mä ainaki muistan kouluajoilta niin ei sitä

ääntämistä kauheesti harjoteltu. Et just jotain sanoja on, vaikeita sanoja, miten lausutaan mut sitten enemmän määriin ei.

Well, I would necessarily say there's enough of it, that, we have actually been left pretty much on our own, based on my own experience at least. I don't know, maybe I have had less problems than some others and it has focused there, but from what I remember from school pronunciation was not really practiced. Just some words, difficult words, how to pronounce them, but not really more than that, no.

A similar of phenomena also seemed to exist in relation to accents. The teacher trainees thought that they had not been taught enough about different accents of English, especially outside the British and American accents and the occasional Australian example. They thought it was important to learn to understand all kinds of accents. As an example, one interviewee explained why she thought teaching about accents should have more importance in teaching:

Example 20

No mun mielestä, mä ite pistäsin aika paljon painoarvoa koska se on väärä kuvitelma, että on olemassa vaan yksi englannin kieli. Mun mielestä on tärkeä että tuodaan opetuksessa esille just sitä että on erilaisia aksentteja ja variaatioita, koska sit kun oikeesti lähtee ulkomaille ja puhuu natiivipuhujien kanssa niin sit huomaa että ne ei puhu yhtään sellasta englantia mitä oot oppinu koulussa ja se voi olla aika suuri shokki monelle puhua jonkun natiivipuhujan kanssa, koska ne ei tavallaan noudata niitä samoja sääntöjä mitä sitte ite. Eli kyllä mun mielestä sillä pitäis olla paljon merkitystä.

Well in my opinion, I would stress it very much because it is wrong to think there is only one English language. In my opinion it is important to bring up different accents and variations in teaching, because when you actually go abroad and speak with native speakers you notice that they do not speak at all the kind English you have learned at school and it can be a pretty big shock for many to speak with a native speaker, because they don't kind of follow the same rules that you do. So yes, in my opinion it should a lot of significance.

As a whole the respondents thought that the position of accents and pronunciation in English teaching should be better, and more emphasised. The methods of teaching mentioned were mostly the traditional imitating and reading aloud, on which Targujeff (2013: 46) reported pronunciation teaching in Finland to rely on. Most of the teacher trainees reported that they had not been taught enough about pronunciation in school. On the other hand, the teacher trainees did not think having a native like accent was important for teachers, or students, but rather that it was important to focus on understandability. A similar appreciation of intelligibility over native-like pronunciation was reported also in Tergujeffs (2013: 45) learner interviews. In addition to producing understandable and clear speech, the teacher trainees thought it is important to be able to understand all kinds of native accents and dialects.

6 CONCLUSION

The general attitudes towards different accents of English among the teacher trainees were positive. Most of them had a favourite accent but few could name an accent they did not like. British and American accents were the two favourite accents of the teacher trainees, which is not surprising considering their strong position in the Finnish schooling system and in the media. Although the Australian accent was liked it seemed to be quite unknown for the students. Outside of the standard accents given as a point of view the students were especially interested in the Scottish and Irish accents. Jamaican accent was also mentioned and clearly had humorous connotations, since it brought a smile to the interviewees face each time it was mentioned. The results of the present study supported Tarkki's (2010) findings to some extent. In both studies the participants found Australian accent to be a less known, exotic accent. However, in contrast with Tarkki's findings, there did not seem to be as clear a connection between the gender of the participant and their favourite accent. In fact, from the male participants of the present study two reported preferring the British accent, and the other two the American accent. Although it was not what the present study was focused on, it is an interesting note to make.

Accent preference and the participant's own accent seemed to be connected. All the students reporting to prefer the American accent considered having a more American influenced accent themselves. In the case of the British accent, however, besides having a strong influence of the British pronunciation some reported also having influences of the American accent in their speech because of the media. The media was indeed the main source of American English input and was also the main factor contributing to the accents of those who had an American influenced accent. The British accent, on the other hand, was mostly learned in school and in the university and not from the media. These findings would imply that if the presence of the British accent in the Finnish media was stronger, it probably would contribute more to the students' accents. On the other hand, if the main variety taught at schools would be the American English, it would probably be by far the most popular and spoken variety.

The teaching of pronunciation was clearly considered to be inadequate based on the participants' own experiences. All of the teacher trainees considered that pronunciation, as well as the different accents, should be taught more. A similar dissatisfaction with pronunciation teaching arose also in Tergujeffs (2013: 45) learner interviews among

secondary level students. In the present study all the participants clearly had a preferred accent, whereas only a few pupils interviewed by Tarujeff (2013:45) reported having an accent preference. This can be explained by the different participant groups: Tergujeff only interviewed pupils from basic and upper secondary education. It is likely that the teacher trainee students have a deeper and more personal view on English accents because of their level of commitment to the language.

Because of the limited number of participants the results of this study are not generalisable. There is room for future research with a larger number of participants, in which case a questionnaire with some open ended questions could be a more suitable method of data collection. Although the results suggest that there is call for more pronunciation teaching, a more specified study could yield more concrete ideas for improving the teaching of pronunciation in Finland. Another shortfall of the present study was that the participants did not have enough teaching experience to really comment on the current situation, but could only reflect on their own experiences from school. This problem could be addressed by either interviewing more advanced university students, or pupils from basic or secondary education.

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APPENDIX**Interview questions for the bachelor's thesis interview (English)**

1. What is your name?
2. What do you study, and how long have you studied at the university?
3. How do you feel about different varieties/dialects of English, do you prefer one over the others? Why?
4. Which variety of English do you think your own spoken English most resembles?
5. Why do you think that is?/Where have you picked up your accent?
6. Are you satisfied with your accent from a professional point of view?
7. What do you think is the role of pronunciation in EFL teaching?
8. Is there/has there been enough pronunciation teaching/ teaching about different accents?

Haastattelukysymykset suomeksi

1. Mikä on nimesi?
2. Mitä opiskelet ja monenneko vuoden opiskelija olet?
3. Mitä mieltä olet eri englanninkielen aksenteista? Onko sinulla suosikkia? Miksi?
4. Mitä englanninkielen aksenttia sinun oma aksenttisi eniten muistuttaa/mistä aksentista siinä on eniten vaikutteita?
5. Mistä luulet, että tämä johtuu/mistä olet napannut aksenttisi?
6. Oletko tyytyväinen aksenttiisi ammatilliselta näkökannalta ajatellen?
7. Mikä on mielestäsi lausumisen rooli englanninkielen opetuksessa?
8. Onko lausumisen opetusta ja eri aksenteista opettamista (ollut) tarpeeksi koulussa?