

LEARNING AND TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION IN  
ENGLISH IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOL:  
Learners' and teachers' views

Master's Thesis  
Tanja Kuivamäki

University of Jyväskylä  
Department of Languages  
English  
August 2015

## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen Tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä – Author Tanja Kaisa Margareth Kuivamäki	
Työn nimi – Title LEARNING AND TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOL: Learners' and teachers' views	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Pro gradu tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Syyskuu 2015	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 69 + 4 liitettä
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää Englannin opetuksen tilaa ammatillisessa koulutuksessa. Suullista kielitaitoa painotetaan Ammatillisen perustutkinnon perusteissa sekä koulukohtaisissa opetussuunnitelmissa, joten myös tämä tutkimus keskittyi siihen. Vastaavia tutkimuksia on aiemmin tehty lukio-opetuksesta, mutta ei ammatillisesta opetuksesta. Aihe on tärkeä koska Suomessa osallistuu vuosittain satoja tuhansia ihmisiä ammatilliseen koulutukseen.</p> <p>Tutkimukseen osallistui 61 kolmannen vuoden opiskelijaa ja kolme opettajaa. Oli tärkeää, että molempien osapuolten näkemykset pääsivät esiin. Opiskelijoilta data kerättiin Internet-kyselyn avulla, jossa oli sekä monivalintakysymyksiä että avoimia kysymyksiä. Opettajilta data kerättiin teemahaastattelulla. Opiskelijoilta kerätty data analysoitiin kvantitatiivisin ja opettajilta kerätty data kvalitatiivisin menetelmin.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat, että eurooppalaisen viitekehyksen painottama kommunikatiivinen kompetenssi oli oppimisen ja opetuksen tavoitteena. Sekä oppilaat että opettajat pitivät suullista kielitaitoa hyvin tärkeänä. Opiskelijat uskoivat tulevansa tarvitsemaan englantia myöhemmin työelämässä. Tuloksien mukaan opiskelijat ovat halukkaita oppimaan puhumaan englantia, ja myös opettajat olivat sitä mieltä, että oppilaiden asenne englantia kohtaan on yleisesti ottaen hyvä.</p> <p>Erimielisyyttä etenkin opiskelijoiden kesken oli siitä, tarjoaako ammatillinen englannin opetus tarpeeksi taitoja, jotta he selviäisivät tulevassa ammatissaan myös englantia vaativissa tilanteissa. Kuitenkin huomattavan suuri osa opiskelijoista, jotka jo olivat käyttäneet englantia työharjoittelussa, kesätöissä tms. koki että oli selviytynyt tilanteesta hyvin.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Oral communication, vocational school, students' views, teachers' views	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

## Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION.....	3
2	COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE.....	4
	2.1 History of communicative competence.....	4
	2.2 Common European framework of reference.....	9
3	ORAL COMMUNICATION.....	11
	3.1 Oral communication in general.....	11
	3.2 Teaching and learning oral communication in a second language.....	14
	3.3 Vocational school curricula.....	23
4	ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AND VOCATIONALLY ORIENTED LANGUAGE LEARNING.....	24
	4.1 English for Specific Purposes.....	25
	4.2 Vocationally oriented language learning.....	29
5	STUDIES ON STUDENTS' VIEWS ON LEARNING SECOND LANGUAGE ORAL COMMUNICATION.....	31
6	STUDIES ON TEACHERS' VIEWS ON TEACHING SECOND LANGUAGE ORAL COMMUNICATION.....	35
7	AIMS AND METHODS OF THE PRESENT STUDY.....	39
	7.1 Aims of the present study.....	39
	7.2 Data collection methods.....	40
	7.3 Data analysis methods.....	42
8	RESULTS.....	43
	8.1 Students' views.....	43
	8.2 Teachers' views.....	51
9	DISCUSSION.....	61
10	CONCLUSION.....	65
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	67
	APPENDICES.....	70
	Appendix 1- The questionnaire for the students.....	70
	Appendix 2- Interview questions for the teachers.....	74
	Appendix 3- Approximate translations of the interview examples quoted in Results.....	75
	Appendix 4- Transcription conventions.....	79

## 1 Introduction

Studying English has been compulsory for vocational school students since the 1980s (Kantelinen 2000:95). As early as in the 80s it was recommended that the main focus of the studies should be on oral skills, so that students would have the necessary skills to understand and speak the language in different work-related situations and also in their free time. Since then Finland has joined the EU and the number of immigrants has grown tremendously. Nowadays it is not only the academically educated people who need to know languages but all citizens in all professions: hairdressers, mechanics, salespersons, nurses etc. One may need to communicate in a foreign language even in simple tasks at work. Therefore it was considered relevant to study what the state of teaching and learning oral communication in English is in vocational school at the moment. A couple of studies regarding the matter have been conducted concerning upper secondary school level but none in vocational schools.

This study set to investigate the views and opinions of both vocational school students as well as teachers. It was considered important to get both sides of the story to get as realistic a picture as possible. The aim was to find out how important students find learning oral communication in English, what they like and dislike in English classes and how they see the status of English in their future occupations. The interviews with the teachers' aimed at clarifying what it is like to teach English in vocational school, on the one hand, what are the challenges but on the other hand what are the best things that make them want to teach there. All the participants of the study worked or studied in Jyväskylän Ammattiopisto (Jyväskylä college). The data from the students was collected by the means of a questionnaire and from the teachers by interviewing. 61 students and three teachers agreed to participate in the present study. The data was collected during spring 2013.

The study is organized in the following way. Chapter 2 is dedicated to communicative competence, starting from its origins all the way to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Chapter 3 will discuss oral communication and methods of teaching and learning oral communication. In addition the national and the school specific curricula will be reviewed. Chapter 4 will introduce the readers to English Language for Specific Purposes and Vocationally oriented language learning. In chapters 5 and 6 previous research on student and teacher views will be reviewed. The aims of the study and research questions can be found in

chapter 7 as well as the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 8 contains the results, which will be discussed in chapter 9. Chapter 10 is conclusion.

## 2 Communicative competence

Since 2001 the vocational school curricula concerning foreign languages have been based on CEFR, which, in its turn, is based on the views and ideas of communicative competence. Therefore it is important to understand what communicative competence means and how it was born. In this chapter, the principles and ideas of communicative competence will be introduced. Section 2.1 sums up the history of communicative competence and explains how it evolved to be what it is today. Section 2.2 is dedicated to CEFR and explains its significance to language teaching in Finland.

### 2.1 History of communicative competence

Nowadays, it is often thought that the foundations of the model were laid by Noam Chomsky in the sixties with his Generative Grammar. The present study follows that view and briefly covers the ideas of Chomsky and then moves on to those of Hymes (1971). Next in turn will be the model of Canale and Swain (1980) who were the first to create a modern model of communicative competence. The next major development came in 1996 when Bachman and Palmer published their work. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to CEFR and how communicative competence is perceived today.

#### 2.1.1 The early stages of Communicative competence

The term competence in the context of linguistics was first used by Chomsky (Chomsky 1965: 3-4). According to him a fundamental distinction had to be made between competence, in other words, a person's knowledge of his/her first language, and performance, which is the actual use of the language. The reason for doing this was the idea that linguistic theory focused mostly on what he called an ideal speaker-listener. An ideal speaker-listener would be someone who is a part of a completely homogenous speech-community, knows everything about their language and grammatically non-significant conditions, such as age, sex and education, would have no effect on their language. Naturally, it is quite impossible for such a person to exist. Although Chomsky was not interested in performance, it is acknowledged by him that to study actual linguistic performance, there are many factors and interaction between the factors that have to be taken into account and the competence of the speaker-hearer is only one factor. His point is that only in the ideal circumstances would competence

and performance be the same. In real life, a linguist must look through performance to find the competence. It must also be noted that Chomsky's aim was to aid the study of the language system, which means he was not attempting to create a model for educational purposes.

Chomsky's ideas were criticized because there is no such language learning situation where "grammatically irrelevant" factors, e.g. limitations of memory and distractions, would not exist. Hymes (1971) used this as a starting point for his article on communicative competence and his model was intended for educational purposes. For him the term meant native speakers' skill that enables them to understand and produce sentences that are appropriate to the context. He pointed out that a child acquiring a language does not only learn the grammatical rules but also the norms of appropriateness. They will learn for example when to speak, when not, and what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. They will also learn that there are attitudes, values and motivations that affect language, its characteristics and how it is used. In short, his message is that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless," (Hymes 1971: 277-278). Although Hymes's work recognizes the importance of the non-linguistic factors, for example sociocultural factors, it still was quite far from a solid basis for language education, mostly due to its complexity, generality and some controversies that remain unresolved.

The first modern model of communicative competence was introduced in the 1980s by Canale and Swain. They divided communicative competence into three subcategories, and a fourth category was added by Canale a few years later. These categories are grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980: 29-30), grammatical competence means the control of a language code a language user has. Language code includes the knowledge of lexical items and the rules of word formation, sentence formation, phonology and spelling. Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use and understand language that is appropriate to the context in differing social situations. Discourse competence is the ability to piece together and interpret forms and meanings of language in such a manner that they create coherent and logical entities. Strategic competence, which was added to the model later, means the ability to use both linguistic and non-linguistic strategies to compensate for difficulties in communication. There are two main types of strategies: firstly, those that make up for the lack of ability of mostly grammatical competence (e.g. using a paraphrase) and secondly, those that are more related to sociolinguistic competence (e.g. how to address a person if one does not have knowledge of

his/her social status). The competences in Canale and Swain's model are strictly part of language knowledge; they knowingly left the ability to use that knowledge outside the model since they felt it had not been studied enough.

### 2.1.2 The model of Bachman and Palmer

The roots of the model proposed by Bachman and Palmer lie with their desire to teach people how to design, develop and use language tests (1996: 3). Bachman had already worked on a model on language ability in 1990, which served as a basis for this framework (1996: 67). They felt that there were numerous misconceptions about language testing that should be corrected (1996:3). For this purpose, they wanted to create a framework that would work for language testing. Their model, however, also became an important description of language ability. This happened because they believed that if one wants to assess a person's language ability, it is necessary to be able to show how his/her test performance describes language use in situations other than the test itself. Therefore, to depict this correspondence, they created a framework that includes the characteristics of language use and language test tasks and those of language users/test takers.

From the point of view of language testing, language ability is an individual's most important characteristic (Bachman and Palmer 1996:61). However, there are also three other characteristics that are important for language testing but even more so from the point of view of language teaching and learning: topical knowledge, personal characteristics and affective schemata. Topical knowledge can be defined as a person's knowledge of the real world. Personal characteristics include individual attributes such as age, sex and native language. Affective schemata are a little more complex matter. Basically, they are the emotional aspects of the surrounding world, for example what kinds of issues have a lot of emotional value, e.g. violence, religion. It is mostly the affective schemata that determine how a person responds to a task. These characteristics were included in this model because of Bachman and Palmer's belief that they affect strongly both language use and test performance. In addition, they thought that these characteristics could either facilitate or impair an individual's test performance, depending on the design of the test.

Bachman and Palmer's (1996:61) definition of language use is

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

It is language users that create discourse when they use language to express, interpret or negotiate intended meanings (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 62). Furthermore, it is not only what is said or written that gives meaning to discourse but how what is said or written relates to the features of a specific situation, in which language is used. In other words, the same utterance or text can be interpreted in different ways depending on the situation, for example “*There is no milk left*” could be interpreted simply as a remark or as a request to someone to go to get some more milk or as a complaint to someone who has finished off the milk. The way the message is interpreted depends on the nature of the situation and the knowledge that the language users have of each other.

Language use (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 62) is a very complex matter because, firstly, it includes intricate and various interactions among the many individual characteristics of language users and, secondly, interactions between these characteristics and the characteristics of the language use or testing situation. It was these interactions and their complexities that led Bachman and Palmer to believe that understanding and describing language ability required an interactional framework of language use. Due to these ideas, their view of language use concentrates on the interactions between and among areas of language ability (language knowledge and strategic competence), topical knowledge and affective schemata and also how these characteristics interact with the features of the language use situation.

In this model (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 67-69), language ability includes two components: language knowledge and strategic competence. Figure 1. describes language knowledge. Language knowledge has to do with how utterances or sentences and texts are arranged. Basically, it controls the formal structure of language to

- a) produce or identify grammatically acceptable sentences or utterances,
- b) to comprehend their content and
- c) to arrange them to texts.

Organizational knowledge has two components. One is grammatical knowledge, which is concerned with producing or understanding formally correct sentences. This includes knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, phonology and graphology. The other is textual knowledge,

which is concerned with producing or understanding texts, spoken and written. To textual knowledge there are also two parts: knowledge of cohesion which has to do with the relationship between sentences in texts and knowledge of rhetorical conventions which has to do with the arrangement of text from the narrative point of view (e.g. introduction, conclusion).

Pragmatic knowledge (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 69-70) allows people to create or interpret discourse by connecting utterances or sentences and texts with their meaning, and to the intentions of the speaker/writer and to the characteristics of the setting of the situation where the language is used, mainly to figure out whether the language used is appropriate in the setting. Pragmatic knowledge too is divided into two subcategories: functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. Functional knowledge has to do with interpreting the relationships between utterances or sentences and the intentions of language users whereas sociolinguistic knowledge is concerned with the appropriateness of the language used.

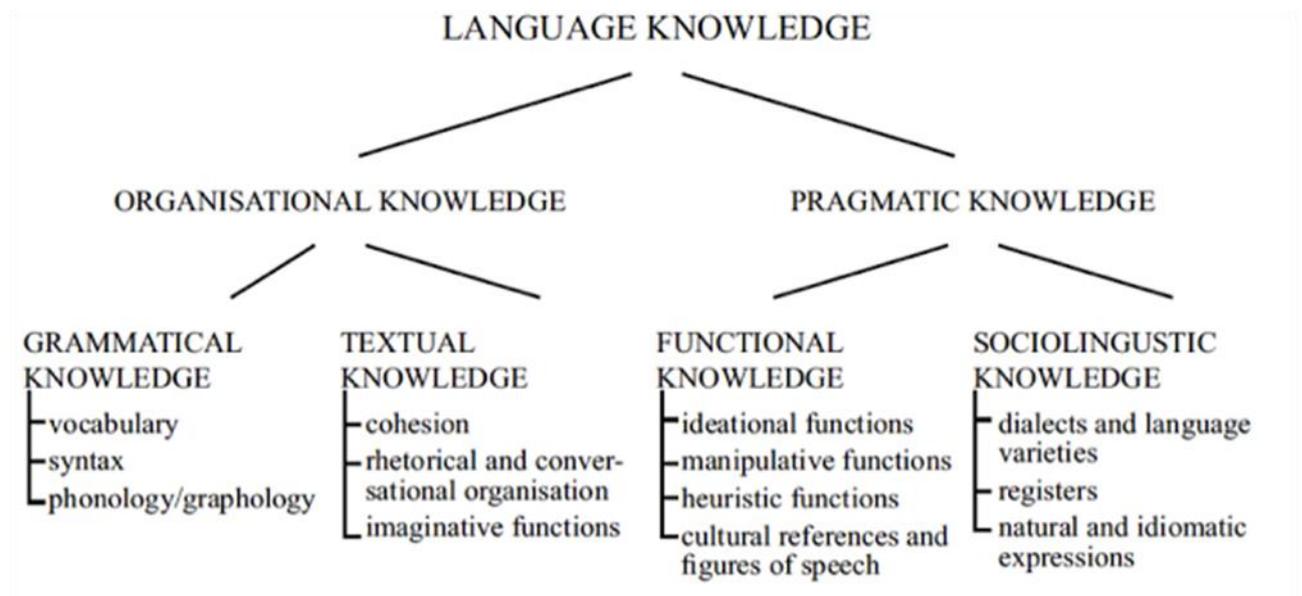


Figure 1. Language knowledge. (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 68)

In addition to language knowledge strategic competence is a component of language ability (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 70). However, it is not as relevant to the present study as language knowledge and is therefore described only briefly. Bachman and Palmer defined strategic competence as a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, that enable people to

cognitively manage their language use, and also in other cognitive activities. The most important areas in which these strategies work are goal-setting, assessment and planning.

## 2.2 Common European framework of reference (CEFR)

The work on CEFR started already in the early 70s (CEFR, 2001: ii). CEFR has two main objectives (CEFR, 2001: iii):

- “1. To encourage practitioners of all kinds in the language field, including language learners themselves, to reflect on such questions as:
- what do we actually do when we speak (or write) to each other?
  - what enables us to act in this way?
  - how much of this do we need to learn when we try to use a new language?
  - how do we set our objectives and mark our progress along the path from total ignorance to effective mastery?
  - how does language learning take place?
  - what can we do to help ourselves and other people to learn a language better?
2. To make it easier for practitioners to tell each other and their clientèle what they wish to help learners to achieve, and how they attempt to do so.”

In addition, the CEFR very much emphasises the role of the learner and states that teachers and other agents working on the field of language learning should take into account the needs, motivations, characteristics and resources of the learners (CEFR, 2001: iv). The CEFR is an action-oriented approach (CEFR, 2001: 9), which means that it regards language learners as social agents who perform tasks in their environments. In order to achieve wanted results the learners have to use their specific competences strategically. The competences are defined as “the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions.”

There are two competences that are involved in language use and learning. Firstly, there are general competences that are not language-specific but that are used in all kinds of actions, including language related actions (e.g. general knowledge, skills, learning ability). Secondly, there are communicative language competences that allow people to use languages. They are discussed in more detail below.

In CEFR (2001: 13) the communicative language competences are divided into linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. Similarly to Canale and Swain’s grammatical competence and Bachman and Palmer’s organizational knowledge, linguistic competence is

concerned with the form of language. CEFR's definition for linguistic competence is the knowledge of, and ability to use, the language system so that the user is able to create meaningful and well-formed messages (CEFR 2001:109). It is divided further into lexical competence, grammatical competence, semantic competence, phonological competence, orthographic competence and orthoepic competence. These in their turn are also broken down to narrower components.

Sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the social aspect of language use (CEFR 2001: 118). In other words, how people use language in a socially correct and appropriate way. It includes

- linguistic markers of social relations, e.g. use and choice of address forms
- politeness conventions, e.g. expressing affection, avoiding bluntness
- expressions of folk-wisdom, e.g. proverbs, idioms
- register differences, e.g. formal, neutral, intimate
- dialect and accent, e.g. which social class a person belongs to or where s/he is from

Pragmatic competences are divided into discourse, design and functional competence (CEFR 2001: 123-130). Discourse competence means a person's understanding of the principles according to which sentences and utterances are organized, arranged and structured. When a person understands the principles, his/her text and speech are coherent, for example, they do not change topic randomly in the middle of utterance, they understand whether a piece of information is given or new and they notice relations such as cause and effect. Design competence is the knowledge of how messages are sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata. Functional competence is concerned with how language is used in communication for a specific functional purpose. The participants are involved in an interaction where they are taking turns and each turn leads to a response and so the interaction moves on according to its purpose through stages until the final conclusion is achieved. For example, a visit at the doctor's office or buying a train ticket could be such functions. In vocational school, the instruction on oral communication is usually very much stressing this kind of situational language.

Currently, CEFR is the most important conceptualization of communicative competence but it has also something at least as important, and probably more practical, to offer, the common reference levels. The levels basically describe the progress in language learning from the very

beginning to the mastery of a language. Furthermore, there are levels from very general language use to detailed, such as vocabulary range, creative writing and understanding conversation between native speakers. The reference levels and descriptions will be discussed in more detail in section 3.3.

### 3 Oral communication

In this chapter oral communication and teaching and learning oral communication will be discussed. Oral communication is a complex and also somewhat controversial matter. Even scholars still do not quite agree on the definition of oral communication. Section 3.1 aims at clarifying the matter, not by offering a single definition, but by reviewing several different views and explaining what a person needs in order to communicate orally. Section 3.2 is about learning and teaching oral communication in a second language. Also here the goal is to discuss the matter from different angles, since there are almost as many approaches as there are teachers and researchers.

#### 3.1 Oral communication in general

Defining oral communication is a difficult task since it is such a complex and multidimensional language process. The most important aspect of oral communication is the fact that it is usually interactional, in other words, it occurs between two or more individuals. In addition, the participants usually take turns, acting alternately as a speaker and a listener. According to CEFR (2001: 90) in order to communicate orally, an individual must be able to:

- plan and organise a message (cognitive skills);
- formulate a linguistic utterance (linguistic skills);
- articulate the utterance (phonetic skills).
- perceive the utterance (auditory phonetic skills);
- identify the linguistic message (linguistic skills);
- understand the message (semantic skills);
- interpret the message (cognitive skills).

This seems like a long list of skills to learn and eventually, master. Another set of skills obligatory for oral communication are discussed by Bygate (1987: 6). In his view, skills are divided into motor-perceptive skills and interaction skills. The motor-perceptive skills pertain to perceiving, recalling and articulating the sounds and structures of the language in the right order. The challenge with this is the transition from the classroom to real-life situations and usage. The interaction skills are a more complex and multifaceted matter. They employ the

knowledge one has of the language and the motor-perceptive skills to accomplish communication. They are concerned with making decisions about communication, for example, what to say, how to say it and whether continuing the point is useful for one's intentions. Furthermore, right or wrong decisions always depend on matters such as what the speaker has decided to say in the first place, what are the intentions of the speaker, success of the communication so far et cetera.

Another way to approach oral communication is to discuss the differences between spoken language and written language. For example, Bygate (1987) and Brown and Yule (1983) bring up this topic and also CEFR (2001) mentions it. A major difference between oral and written language and communication is the time factor. When speaking, the words come out at the same time as they are decided on and also as they are understood. Once the words have been uttered, they are gone. This means that the speaker has very little time to plan and organize the message and, furthermore, control the language the speaker uses (Bygate 1987: 11). Moreover, it is pointed out in CEFR (2001: 92) that the receptive and productive processes overlap. Usually listeners start to plan their response before speakers have even finished their utterance. This planning is based on listeners' hypothesis of what the nature, meaning and interpretation of the speakers' message are and naturally if the hypothesis starts to seem unlikely, listeners have to adjust their planned response accordingly. Since writers have more time to organize and plan their message, their sentences are almost always longer and more complex than those of speakers. In addition, spoken language has many more syntactic mistakes due to the fact that speakers often miss their place in the grammar of their utterances. In addition to syntactic problems, there are also often mistakes made in the wording and the content of the message. For example, speakers may forget what it was they were saying or what they have already said and repeat themselves. Moreover, a message in writing is usually more economically organized than in speech (Bygate 1987: 9-10).

The density of packing of information in speech and writing is compared by Brown and Yule (1983: 6-9). Basically this is similar to what Bygate says about the economic efficiency of organization of messages. There are several factors that affect the density of packing of information. First of all, in speech the syntax is often loosely organized. Secondly, speakers use a lot of general and non-specific words and phrases, e.g. *one, other, place, thing, be, got, fine*. Thirdly, what writing normally lacks completely is interactive expressions such as *well, oh, uhuh*. In addition, the speech of native speakers is typically characterized by simple noun

phrases, for example, a phrase such as *a small black long-coated dog* would probably be divided into a number of simpler phrases by a speaker such as *The dog is small and black and it has a long coat*. Also there are very few subordinate declarative structures, such as *He broke his leg, which is very unfortunate*. Moreover, native speakers usually use interrogative structures to ask questions.

In addition to the more or less form-related characteristics, Brown and Yule (1983: 11-13) argue that also the functions of written and spoken language differ. The function of written language is in most cases transactional, in other words, transferring information, whereas the most common function of spoken language is maintaining social relationships. Most people spend a lot of time every day ‘chatting’ and their primary goal is to maintain and strengthen the relationship between themselves. Of course, speech can also be transactional. Sometimes it is embedded within a ‘chat’. Nevertheless, spoken language that is primarily transactional is most frequently used to get things done in the real world, e.g. giving instructions, making requests, explaining.

There are at least two main ways in which time pressure tends to affect the language speakers produce (Bygate 1987: 14-16). Firstly, speakers often have to compensate for the difficulties in production and secondly they use devices in order to facilitate production. There are four principal means of facilitating speech production:

- simplifying structure
- ellipsis, i.e. omission of parts of a sentence
- using formulaic expressions
- using fillers and hesitation devices

Simplifying a structure means, for example, that the speaker uses main clauses instead of subordinate clauses. Ellipsis is a very common means of facilitation but it requires background knowledge from those involved in a conversation, for example the utterance *Look!* requires that the listener sees where or what the speaker is pointing at or otherwise knows where or what to look at. Another example of ellipsis could be the statement *John knows* in which case, in order to understand, the listener must know what it is that John also knows. Formulaic expressions are set expressions, usually either colloquial or idiomatic. They facilitate production because they are learned as chunks. The fillers and hesitation devices,

such as *well*, *uhm*, are used because they create more time for the speaker to plan and organize his/her message.

Another difference between spoken and written language is that speech is dynamic behavior whereas written texts are static objects (Tiittula 1993: 63-67). Spoken language is usually situational and contextual and in the form of a dialogue, meaning that it is addressed to someone specifically. The most common and important situation where spoken language is used is a discussion, social interaction, where people together create text. In the case of written language, however, there is a difference in location and time between the producer and the recipient of the text and, moreover, the writer does not always even know who is going to read his/her text. Speakers have to take into account their listeners and adjust their messages based on their listeners' reactions in order to ensure that communication is actually happening (Bygate 1987: 12-13). These reactions have many functions: firstly, the message can be modified from moment to moment, secondly comprehension can be enhanced and therefore, thirdly, the speaker's task is facilitated, too. It is very important, however, that the speaker actually picks up on such feedback, because if he/she does not, it is highly possible that he/she will be seen as socially awkward or maybe distant or arrogant. Because speakers usually try to make their speech as understandable as possible, spoken language is full of repetitions and rephrasing.

### 3.2 Teaching and learning oral communication in a second language

In this section, the teaching and learning of oral communication will be examined. The focus is not so much on different theories, or mechanics, of teaching and learning. Instead the approach is more practical, concentrating on how oral communication can be taught and learned. There are quite a few frameworks, methodologies and manuals to choose from. Probably one reason for this is that there is no description of spoken English similar to the grammars of written English. Although the various frameworks and approaches differ from each other, similarities can also be found. In this section the works of Littlewood (1992), Folse (2006) and Nation and Newton (2009) will be discussed. Littlewood's framework is quite general and therefore a good starting point. Folse's point of view is very practical since he is a very experienced teacher of oral communication. Nation and Newton's approach is based on four 'strands' as they call them that can be applied to teaching different aspects of oral communication, and also language in general.

Foreign language is a whole new signal-system that needs to be learned to process by learners (Littlewood 1992: 11). Learners will need to learn to connect the signals with the variety of meanings they may have in any given situation and, furthermore, develop an ability to use their background knowledge to narrow down the possible meanings and recognize the specific meaning that is appropriate on a particular occasion. Now that teaching focuses on communicative competence some teachers may pay less attention to the teaching of grammar. However, according to Littlewood (1992: 14-15), the ability to make choices within the grammatical system is an integral condition to using language for communication because it allows communication to become more independent from its setting.

When people think of learning a language and words, also spoken language, they often concentrate on the literal meanings of words, i.e. the conventional meanings that can be found in dictionaries (Littlewood 1992: 24-28). Words have, however, also two other kinds of meanings that are as important, and probably a lot more difficult, to learn and teach than the literal meanings. First there is functional meaning which means the communicative purpose words have, e.g. asking/suggesting/hinting. The second one is social meaning, which means that words can mirror the relationship between people, for example what they feel for each other or what they want from each other. These relations usually show in the formality and directness of communication between people, and probably even more in spoken than written language.

Comprehensible input is one term that comes up quite often when second language learning is discussed (Folse 2006: 35-39). It sounds only logical that it would be important for learning but what it actually means, not probably even every teacher could tell. In 1985, Krashen came up with the following formula to describe the concept:  $i+1$ . Here  $i$  represents the learner's current level and  $+1$  represents the language that is a little beyond the learner's ability. This formula is important for oral communication because efficient speaking activity should encourage learners to strive for the  $+1$ . There are many different ways in which a teacher can form comprehensible input. The first is to enunciate carefully, which means paying attention to phrasing, reciting, articulation and pronunciation. The second is to be aware of usual learner mispronunciations and grammatical structures that are either confusing or unknown to students. The third thing is not to paraphrase after giving the first explanation since it is more likely to cause only further confusion. The biggest help, however, is simply to monitor one's use of vocabulary, for example the use of idioms and phrasal verbs.

In Folse's (2006: 4) opinion it is important to know what the learners are learning English for, i.e. the teacher should make a needs analysis. In addition, the teacher needs to find out what *speaking English* means to the learners, e.g. fluency, pronunciation, language accuracy, listening ability. Five key factors that all teachers should take into account when making plans for an oral communication class are listed by Folse (2006: 9):

1. The learners, including their age, proficiency levels and goals
2. The program or school, since usually teachers follow a set curriculum with certain steps
3. The topic being discussed
4. The activity or task that serves as the vehicle for conversation

Folse also (2006: 24) argues that a good oral communication teacher is familiar with the components of the target language and is able to plan a class that either concentrates on an important component of language (e.g. household words, hobbies, family words) or draws the learners' attention to important language components within a dialogue (e.g. the negative of *I eat* is *I don't eat* but the negative of *I ate* is not *I don't ate* but rather *I didn't eat*) or does both.

The teacher must also remember that all speaking activities include two languages (Folse 2006: 27-28). The first is the language in the activity itself and the second is the language the learners need to complete the activity, for example, if they are to make requests in the activity, they need to be told how to make requests appropriately. Also every activity should be introduced to the learners and the best kind of introduction makes them interested in the topic. It is important to always review possible unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar issues before starting the activity. Also a good tip is that specific assignments always do better than general ones, e.g. rank these ten boys' names in popularity for new babies last year will involve students more than a less specific task such as make a list of good names for baby boys. In addition, in a good speaking activity, learners do the speaking and the teacher's role is just to give support if needed.

It is argued by Nation and Newton (2009: x, 3, 10) that when English is taught as a foreign language, developing fluency does not often get the attention it needs. They believe this might be because it does not involve the learning of new language items and therefore is not considered to move the learners forward in their knowledge of the language. In their opinion, fluency development is essential at all proficiency levels, and even beginners should become fluent with the few language items they already know. When teachers design an oral

communication activity, class or teaching in general, they should make a distinction between fluency and accuracy (Folse 2006: 30-31). The reason for this is that it is often better to concentrate on only one of them at a time, at least if the learners are not on an advanced level. Activities that promote fluency focus on the amount of language produced in the activity whereas the focus of accuracy activities is on the linguistic correctness of the language produced. It would seem, however, that in his opinion fluency development is not neglected since he says that in an ideal world the learners would rehearse fluency so much outside classes that when in the classroom the teacher could solely focus on accuracy activities. In reality, however, the teacher mostly has to concentrate on fluency activities and only give some specific instruction every now and then to support the learners' fluency development. Since there seems to be this contradiction between the perceptions of Folse and Nation and Newton on how much teachers should spend time on fluency development, it probably depends very much on the teacher, school, learning materials etc.

According to Folse (2006: 29), it has been a common misbelief that being able to speak a language well equals being a good language teacher, and especially, oral communication teacher. Actually, for many teachers an oral communication lesson is one of the hardest to plan and teach well. It is highly possible that for a teacher of oral communication the most important thing is his/her knowledge of materials. An oral communication teacher's success depends on his/her ability to design a good class, and a good class is comprised of and, in fact, dependent on high-quality activities. Some advice is offered by Folse (2006: 47-53) on designing an effective task; the task designer should consider the following questions:

1. whether the task is a one-way task in which information exchange is optional or a two-way task in which information exchange is required
2. whether learners are given time to plan what they might say in the task
3. whether the solution to the task is open-ended, i.e., with several possible solutions, or restricted to one or a finite set of answers

Folse says that based on second language research findings, activities that are more likely to promote discussion by all students – whether in pairs or small groups – and at the same time stretch the learners' abilities, are those that require two-way exchange of information, feature a planning stage, and require a finite answer (i.e. a closed task).

The goal of Littlewood's framework (1992: 81) is the same as probably every teacher's goal: the language system becomes internalized by the learners and accessible for the communication of meanings. Also his methods are similar to most others': activities that

concentrate on the new language system, activities that engage the learner in authentic communication and activities that aid learners to create connections between language and the meanings it carries. Activities are divided into two different kinds (Littlewood 1992: 79). The first is 'part-skill practice' in which separate components crucial for communication are separated and practiced individually. The second is 'whole-task practice' where the components are incorporated into authentic communication.

Part-skill practice starts with connecting language with its literal meaning with talking about shared knowledge the learners have, i.e. they exchange literal information (Littlewood 1992: 82-89). Then language is linked with its functional and social meanings. Also communicative acts need to be practiced, for example asking, making suggestions. A good way is using role-play, moving from structured tasks to less so. Role-play, where the information that has to be transferred is real and about the learners themselves, combines literal, functional and social meanings. For whole-task practice, the framework offers quite a few options: problem-solving, discussion, creative role-playing and simulation and experiential learning. Before whole-task practice, unpredictability that is natural for communication was mostly absent but is now introduced. In problem-solving, the problem gives the learners a communicative purpose, for example deciding on a series of pictures how they should be organized to create a coherent story. A real situation in the classroom offers a good context for discussion where learners can express their own meanings in real and creative communication. In creative role-playing and simulation learners are presented with a problematic situation, the difference between the two is, that in simulation, learners act as themselves. Here too, moving from specific cues to more general information about the situation and the learners' roles and aims within it. Experiential learning pretty simply means the everyday communication needs that come up in the classroom. It is just the fact that teachers should pay attention to these possibilities. Also project working is a nice activity type for experiential learning that brings some variety to the learning process.

Nation and Newton's (2009: x-2) claim that the teacher's most essential task is to plan so that learners are taught useful things, are provided with the best possible learning conditions and offered a balance of learning opportunities. This sounds very logical and even simple but to put this into practice is easier said than done. Employing what they call 'the four strands' will bring the teacher a lot closer to his/her goal. The four strands are:

1. Learning through meaning-focused input; that is, learning through listening and reading where the learner's attention is on the ideas and messages conveyed by the language.
2. Learning through meaning-focused output; that is, learning through speaking and writing where the learner's attention is on conveying ideas and messages to another person.
3. Learning through deliberate attention to language items and features; that is, learning through direct vocabulary study, through grammar exercises and explanation, through attention to the sounds and spelling of the language, through attention to discourse features, and through the deliberate learning and practice of language learning and language use strategies.
4. Developing fluent use of known language items and features over the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; that is, becoming fluent with what is already known.

In meaning focused input learners' attention and interest should be mainly on understanding, and gaining knowledge or enjoyment or both from what they listen to and read (Nation and Newton, 2009: 3-5). This only happens if the following conditions are met:

1. Most of what the learners are listening or reading is already familiar to them.
2. The learners are interested in the input and want to understand it.
3. Only a small proportion of the language features are unknown to the learners. In terms of vocabulary, 95 % to 98 % of the running words should be within the learners' previous knowledge and so only five, or preferably only one or two words, per hundred words should be unknown to them.
4. The learners can gain some knowledge of the unknown language items through context clues and background knowledge.
5. There are large quantities of input.

Typical activities in meaning-focused output include having a conversation, giving a speech or a lecture, writing a letter, writing a note to someone, keeping a diary, telling a story and telling someone how to do something (Nation and Newton, 2009: 3-5). Again there are some conditions that should be present:

1. The learners write and talk about things that are largely familiar to them.
2. The learners' main goal is to convey their message to someone else.
3. Only a small proportion of the language they need to use is not familiar to them.

4. The learners can use communication strategies, dictionaries, or previous input to make up for gaps in their productive knowledge.
5. There are plenty of opportunities to produce.

Many spoken activities will include a mixture of meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output. It is good to remember that one person's output can be another person's input.

The functions of output that are based on Swain's work are presented by Nation and Newton (2009: 5-7). The first function is called the noticing/triggering function. It happens when learners try to produce text in the second language but actively realize that they do not know how to say what they want to say. The second function is hypothesis testing. It means that learner first produces something and then, based on feedback and his/her perception of success, either confirm or modify what he/she has produced. This function is of utmost importance in interaction when learners negotiate with each other or the teacher to clarify meaning. The feedback received in negotiation can lead to improvement in both the comprehensibility of input and learners' output. The third and final function is the metalinguistic, or reflective, function. This usually occurs with more advanced learners since it is about using spoken output to solve language problems together with others. This function has a few classroom applications, such as the strip story or dictogloss where learners co-work to construct or reconstruct a text. Also explicit structure-based tasks fall in to this category, since in these activities learners solve grammar problems through meaning-focused output.

As Brown and Yule pointed out in section 3.1, people usually use spoken language for having a discussion, which means that they take turns in speaking and listening, which means that listening is an integral part of oral communication. It is also noted by Nation and Newton (2009: 37-39) that listening is the natural precursor to speaking, since the early stages of language development in a person's first language depend on listening. Accordingly, listening was traditionally considered a passive process where the listener merely receives information that is sent by a speaker. More modern models, however, see listening as a much more active and interpretive process where the message is not fixed but is created in the interaction between the participants. In other words, the listener does not receive the message intact; instead he/she constructs the message through interpretation that is affected by context.

Learning through task-focused interaction brings speaking and listening together in communicative activities (Nation and Newton 2009: 97-98). This integration of listening and

speaking stresses active listening with the listener negotiating and shaping the spoken message. Learning to take an active role by providing the speaker with feedback is part of listening skills; for example, the listener can draw the speaker's attention to problems with the intelligibility of the message. In other words, if the listener does not understand what is being said, he/she can express this to the speaker for example by asking for repetition or clarification. One of the main ways that this kind of activity helps the listener learn is by clarifying unknown items. In addition, task-focused interaction

- makes input understandable without simplifying it, so that learnable language features are retained
- breaks the input into smaller digestible pieces
- raises awareness of formal features of the input
- gives learners opportunities for direct learning of new forms
- provides a "scaffold" within which learners can produce increasingly complex utterances
- pushes the learners to express themselves more clearly and precisely "pushed output"
- makes learners more sensitive to their need to be comprehensible

All in all, interactional activities are helpful for language learners since they offer them opportunities to learn from peers, often through negotiation, and also since the speakers must sometimes alter their output to communicate. In addition, it provides a lot of intelligible input, encourages pushed output, helps the learners to develop their language and communication strategies and it makes the learners aware of what they do not know. Activities like ranking, problem solving, information distribution and completing a map can promote this sort of learning.

There are differing views on when speaking should be added to the learners' studies (Nation and Newton, 2009: 115-116). Some researchers believe that speaking should only be encouraged after learners have significant receptive experience and knowledge of the language. Then there are others that believe that the knowledge needed for speaking will only develop if learners are "pushed" to speak. The idea here is that knowledge of a language that is gathered by receiving does not automatically transfer to language production, since the process of comprehending involves semantic decoding but production requires also syntactic processing. Pushed output has somewhat similar features than Krashen's comprehensible input  $i+1$ . Learners are "pushed" when for some reason, e.g. environment or other necessity, they have to produce spoken language in areas they are not familiar with. The unfamiliarity

can be due to the fact that learners have not spoken much earlier, or are not accustomed to the discourse or are supposed to speak better than before in terms of accuracy, coherence and/or appropriateness. Pushed output extends the limits of the speakers' knowledge and also draws their attention to the importance of specific grammatical features in producing language. It is argued by the supporters of pushed output that without it, learners mostly acquire language items that are required in comprehension.

Often, when teachers and learners talk about difficulties with spoken language, what they mean is pronunciation (Nation and Newton 2009: 75). Pronouncing well is important since it aids communication, mainly by making utterances more intelligible. It is argued, however, that there is another important reason for developing pronunciation that has to do with how the human brain works. In the working memory, there is a mechanism called the phonological loop. To put it simply, the function of the loop is to repeat a word or phrase over and over again in order to keep it in working memory or to ease its way to long-term memory. An everyday example of this is how people keep repeating a telephone number to themselves while they dial the number. The effect this has on language learning is that without a stable pronunciation of a word, it is difficult to transfer it to long-term memory since it cannot be held in the loop.

Fluency, whether in listening, speaking, reading or writing, has three characteristics (Nation and Newton 2009: 151-153). Firstly, it is about processing language in real time, which means that when learners participate in meaning-focused activity and complete it with speed and without difficulty and the talk is flowing without unnecessary pausing, they are being fluent. Secondly, fluent language use does not demand a lot of attention or effort from the speaker. Thirdly, fluency is a skill that is dependent on knowledge of the language, and developing it requires adding to and restructuring of that knowledge, it is in the end about making the best possible use of what is already familiar. There are a couple of different ways fluency development can be approached. The first is simply through repetition, if items are repeated enough times there is no other option than to become fluent with them. Another approach is to make as many connections to an item as possible, i.e. to use the item in various different contexts and situations. The third option is to combine the two previous ones. It should be mentioned that no matter the area of learning, skill or item the time-on-task principle is valid; the more time is spent doing something, the better the results.

When developing fluency there are certain things that are likely to promote it (Nation and Newton 2009:151-153). One point is that the activity should be meaning-focused. The learners' attention is on the topic and conveying a message and not on form etc. The activities should also contain mostly familiar topics, vocabulary and structures. Moreover, it is suggested that using some sort of time pressure is good, because it will give the learners a push towards speaking and comprehending faster than they would do otherwise. The key with it is to simply aid the learners to make best use of what they already know. Typical activities include speed reading, skimming and scanning, repeated reading, 4/3/2 (the same talk is repeated to different listeners in a decreasing time frame), repeated retelling, ten-minute writing, and listening to easy stories.

### 3.3 Vocational school curricula

The vocational school curricula are not quite as straightforward as those of basic education and upper secondary school. This is due to the fact that for basic education and upper secondary school there is only one curriculum. For vocational schools, however, there is a curriculum for each vocational qualification, which in practice means that there are dozens of curricula. The good news is that the curricula for so called core subjects such as mother tongue, foreign language, physics and mathematics do not vary much. The curricula for English are mostly the same in every curriculum, in some cases there may be slight differences but even those are quite irrelevant in practice. The objectives of most curricula are the following:

- the student is able to communicate and interact so that the he/she is capable of practicing his/her occupation, contribute to working life, be an active citizen and continue studies in higher education.
- the student masters the language that is needed in his/her work tasks
- the student is able to function in a multicultural and multilingual environment.

In some cases the objective of mastering the language needed in working life is defined further, for example, the language needed in the social and healthcare sector or in typical customer service and communication situations in the field of business and administration.

In vocational schools the grades are T1 (tyydyttävä), H2 (hyvä) and K3 (kiitettävä). The assessment scale for English is divided into five areas or "skills": acquiring information, comprehension of text and written communication, interaction and acting in working life language situations, knowledge of language and culture and language studies. The criteria for

the interaction section are reviewed next. A T1 student understands short and simple messages that are related to the student's field and can act accordingly. The student can tell shortly about him/herself and the work tasks of the field by answering questions in familiar work related situations. An H2 student understands basic instructions about work and work related products and processes and can act accordingly. The student can also tell about him/herself and his/her duties at work in a comprehensible manner and participate in a conversation if the other participant speaks slowly and uses simple structures. A K3 student understands main points in a normal conversation and acts accordingly. The student is able to tell about his/her work place and the work duties and also work related norms and customs. In addition, he/she can find out independently about the norms and customs of other countries and is able to ask for work related further instructions. The grade H2 is equivalent of the level A2.1 in speaking in the CEFR reference levels (SOT ops). This is very interesting since it is stated in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education that in order for a person finishing basic education to have grade 8 (scale 4-10) they should be on level A2.2 in speaking. This inconsistency is not explained anywhere but a reasonable explanation could be that in the vocational school curriculum everything is tied to the occupation and working life whereas basic education is naturally much more general. It is also stated that the two obligatory English courses can be replaced with two specific English courses of the upper secondary school, ENA1 *Nuori ja hänen maailmansa (Teen and his world)* and ENA3 *Opiskelu ja työ (Studies and work)*. This is consistent with the contents of the two obligatory courses. In addition to the national curricula, there are also the curricula of the local vocational education providers. In the curriculum of Jyväskylä college the core subjects are compiled into one curriculum, meaning that in case of English, there is one curriculum for all students. The curriculum is, however, very short and non-specific. Basically it is just a list of communicational and interactional themes. It is stated there that the emphasis on different themes depends on the field and study program but this is not explained further anywhere. The themes and goals of the first course are *Me and my studies* and *Functioning in everyday life and working life situations*. The goal of the second course is to be able to appropriately communicate in person and also via different media in occupational contexts.

#### 4 English for Specific Purposes and Vocationally oriented language learning

In this chapter two language teaching methodologies will be reviewed: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Vocationally oriented language learning (VOLL). In vocational schools

the target of English teaching is to enable students to function in a specific environment, their future profession. Therefore it is relevant to review the basics of ESP and VOLL and see how they differ from general English teaching. Since ESP has a longer history, it will be presented first.

#### 4.1 English for Specific Purposes

After the Second World War there was a huge growth in scientific, technical and economic fields internationally (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 6-8). This led to the need for an international language, and mostly due to the power the USA held at the time, English became that language. This, in its part, created a huge number of people in various professions who wanted and needed to learn English, for example, to read instruction manuals or the latest articles or to sell their products. These people did not have the time or money to study English thoroughly; they wanted to learn just enough to communicate with other people in their field. At the same time there were changes in the study of language. Up until to the 1960s linguistics had mainly concentrated on the formal features of language but then the interest in communication and how language is actually used arose. It was soon realized that the language used varies significantly according to context. This notion naturally helped and accelerated the creation of courses targeted at specific groups of people, e.g. engineers and businessmen. "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need". Also new ideas in educational psychology played a part in the rise of ESP since they emphasized the role of learners and their motivation.

Between the birth of ESP in the 1960s and the mid-1980s, ESP had had three main stages of development, was undergoing a fourth stage and there were signs of a fifth stage (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 9-13).

1. Register analysis from the 1960s to the early 1970s

The basis of the approach was that each group specific (e.g. doctors) English basically was a register of its own and it was important to find out what the grammatical and lexical features of each register were. These features then basically became the syllabus of an ESP course.

2. Rhetorical/discourse analysis

The base of this approach was the realization that the problems students have are not the result of inadequate amount of knowledge concerning the structure of English.

Instead the problems derive from not knowing how the language is really used. Most

of the teaching materials based on this approach were aiming at teaching the students to recognize textual patterns and discourse markers.

3. Target situation analysis (often called needs analysis)

This approach attempted to identify learners' target situations and then accurately analyze the linguistic features present in the situation, which will then form the syllabus for the course. This was an important stage for ESP since the learners' needs now formed the core of ESP. The most detailed description of target situation analysis is the model of John Munby called *Communicative Syllabus Design*. With this model it is possible to create a very thorough profile of learners' needs concerning communication purposes, communicative setting, structures, etc.

4. Skills and strategies

The first three phases of ESP's journey were mostly concerned with the surface forms of the language but in the early 1980s there was an attempt to look beyond. The point of interest was the thinking processes behind language use. The main idea behind the approach is that "underlying all language use there are common reasoning and interpreting processes, which, regardless of the surface forms, enable us to extract meaning from discourse (1987: 13)". Due to this idea, it was decided that instead of focusing on the surface forms of the language, the focus should be on interpretive strategies instead, that help the learner to understand the surface forms, e.g. guessing the meaning of the word from context, exploiting cognates, etc.

5. A learning-centred approach. The flaw with all the previous approaches, according to Hutchinson and Waters, was that they concentrated on descriptions of language use. If people learned language simply through descriptions, reading a grammar and a dictionary would be all people need to learn a language. Instead their goal was to understand the processes of language learning. It has to be noted here that the main interest of this approach is to maximize learning, and the learner is only one factor (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 72).

According to Hutchinson and Waters, (1987: 19) ESP is an approach to language teaching where all decisions concerning content and methodology are dependent on why the learner is learning English. A rather accurate metaphor on the difference between ESP and General English teaching is given by Basturkmen (2006:9) : "Whereas General English Language teaching tends to set out from point A toward an often pretty indeterminate destination, setting sail through largely uncharted waters, ESP aims to speed learners through to a known

destination". This does not mean that General English learners' needs could not be specified. The difference is that ESP learners' needs are much clearer right from the start (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 53). The main concern of ESP is to prepare the students to enter target discourse communities (academic, professional and workplace) with distinct and evolving communicative habits and rules. For students to be able become a part of the communities, they need to learn these customs (Basturkmen 2006: 11-12). Learners' needs can be divided into target needs and learning needs (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 53-56). Target needs consist of necessities, which are the things the learner must know to be able to function efficiently in the target environment, and wants. A learning need can for example be the need for the task to be fulfilling, manageable, generative, enjoyable, etc. To find out learners' necessities, the target situation should be observed and then the constituent parts of it should be analyzed. Since the learner probably already knows some English, next it should be found out what the necessities the learner lacks are and based on that the teacher can decide on the course design. Needs analysis has received a lot of criticism, e.g. although a person needs to learn something does not mean s/he is ready to learn it or objective needs are not always the same than subjective needs: for example, someone's objective need can be developing reading comprehension but they may want to develop oral skills more (Basturkmen 2006: 19-20).

There are two views on the nature of LSP (Basturkmen 2006: 15-17). The first one is that LSP is grounded on and draws out from a core of general language and the second is that there is no such thing as a core, or general purpose language, and every variety of a language is specific in one way or another, since language is always learned in context and the context makes the learned language specific. In addition, Basturkmen's (2006: 85-90) opinion seems to be that ESP teaching and research is dominated also by two different views on language learning and conditions it requires. The first is called acculturation where students are provided with an access to the target environment. The idea behind this is that in order for them to learn the language they need to be socially and psychologically integrated into the target community. The second is called input and interaction. This is based on providing students with lots of input and many opportunities for interaction. However, the main concern with this approach is the fact that it is quite impossible to know what is the right quantity and quality of input and interaction.

ESP teaching is based on the analysis and description of language systems (Basturkmen 2006: 35). Accordingly, there are three language systems that are most apparent in ESP teaching and research: grammatical structures, core vocabulary and patterns of text organization, e.g. general-specific or vice versa, situation-problem-solution-evaluation. A more recent development in the field of ESP teaching and research is the rise of functional explanations of language, which means that the descriptions of language use concentrate on people's communication goals and how people use language to achieve those goals (Basturkmen 2006: 47-51). Research has focused on identifying the speech acts that are typical of different target environments or situations. Paying attention to the functional descriptions is needed since research shows that even if a person is highly competent grammatically, s/he still may have problems with communicating due to the incompetence in expressing speech acts in an appropriate manner. Another approach to ESP that shares some characteristics with the functional descriptions is concentrating on genres (2006: 51-61). In ESP, genre is defined as a class of language use and communication that takes place in specific communities, for example, a medical community could have genres such as case history or treatment plan. However, since the genres are very specific, teaching based on them is best suited for groups that have very similar needs, e.g. the same profession. There are also some researchers e.g. Brown and Levinson (1988) who have concentrated on social interaction, in their case on politeness more specifically.

Finally, five broad objectives in ESP teaching are listed by Basturkmen (2006: 133-141), which are:

- revealing subject-specific language use
- developing target performance competencies
- teaching underlying knowledge
- developing strategic competence
- fostering critical awareness.

Teaching that concentrates on revealing subject-specific language use strives for demonstrating how English is used in the target environment. Developing target performance competencies means that the aim is to develop the students' ability to perform the activities of an occupation. In this case teaching focuses on what people do with language and the skills they need to do it. Underlying knowledge basically means the work-related and disciplinary concepts. Strategic competence here is seen as the instrument that allows language knowledge and content knowledge to be used in communication. Fostering critical awareness derives

from the criticism that ESP in general has received. Some researchers think that teaching non-native students to fit into the target environment and learn the practices and norms of that environment leads to a situation where the target environment, its norms and habits do not change, even if some of those norms and practices were outdated or otherwise non-desirable. Simply put, Basturkmen says that students' should be taught to also think for themselves.

It is evident that ESP has come a long way since its birth. It has branched out and many sub-disciplines have emerged, such as English for Academic Purposes, English for Vocational Purposes and further still to e.g. Business and Medical English. There are quite a few different approaches to and views on ESP and how it should be taught and what the focus of the teaching should be. Rebecca Smoak (2003: 27) who has taught ESP since 1977 states:

So, what is English for Specific Purposes? At this stage in my career, my answer is this: ESP is English instruction based on actual and immediate needs of learners who have to successfully perform real-life tasks unrelated to merely passing an English class or exam. ESP is needs based and task oriented. Teaching ESP is demanding, time consuming and different for every group of students. ESP is a challenge for all who teach it, and it offers virtually unlimited opportunities for professional growth.

#### 4.2 Vocationally oriented language learning

The term vocationally oriented language learning (VOLL) was coined by the Council of Europe when the project 'Language learning for European citizenship' was executed between 1989 and 1996 (Vogt and Kantelinen, 2013: 64). Teaching learners to communicate only in their (future) workplace is not all VOLL aims at; in addition, it is concerned with providing learners with a more general competence that combines vocational, linguistic and social skills. This derives from the fact that nowadays foreign languages and intercultural communication are present also in simple work tasks, since more and more workplaces in all fields have become multicultural and multilingual (Vogt and Kantelinen, 2013: 62-63). Employees need to be able to communicate in varying situations and professional communities. In addition, they have to be able to work together with people from other cultures and linguistic backgrounds. It is argued by Vogt and Kantelinen that giving language learners, who are preparing for a professional field or a specific occupation, what they need at the moment, is not enough. Instead they should also be provided with the tools that are needed for lifelong learning and since VOLL takes into account the holistic communication skills that are essential for effective communication at work (Vogt and Kantelinen, 2013: 65). This is one of

the main ways in which VOLL differs from LSP, since LSP is concerned with learners' immediate needs in a highly specialized professional context (Vogt, 2009: 66). It is stressed by Vogt that VOLL is as much for work as it is for life. One of its purposes is to also motivate learners to study languages later on.

Quite an impressive list of the characteristics of VOLL is also offered by Vogt and Kantelinen (2013: 66-67), according to which VOLL

- is holistic
- is learner centred
- is content based
- is action oriented
- is task based
- integrates several subjects (interdisciplinary)
- fosters learner autonomy

It is holistic since its main concern is communicating in foreign language, not just memorizing specific vocabulary. It is learner centred since learners' experiences and professional contexts determine what they are taught. For the same reason, VOLL is content based. Tasks are designed to suit the learners' future professional contexts and the tasks ideally motivate the learner, hence task based and action oriented. Projects are also an important part of VOLL. For example, business students could be given a project where they have to simulate a complex business transaction with offers, orders, processing orders and take into account all problems that could take place and find solutions for those problems. These kinds of projects require learners to become organized, negotiate with their colleagues and present and discuss results. Therefore, they are likely to promote interdisciplinarity and learner autonomy.

Despite all these beneficial characteristics of VOLL, it is far from being the most widely used approach in foreign language teaching (Vogt and Kantelinen, 2013: 67-68). Accordingly, there are two main reasons for this. The first is the teachers and teacher education. They argue that many teachers do not consider themselves equipped or competent enough to teach VOLL, since they believe that VOLL-related topics require a lot of specialized knowledge. The blame for this, in its part, falls on teacher education, since most training programs concentrate on general language education and pay only little or no attention at all to vocational language education. Consequently, teachers do not have the confidence to teach VOLL since they think that they do not have the expertise to teach languages in vocational context. The second one is foreign language learning needs (Vogt 2009: 67-68). It is stated by Vogt that often neither

teachers nor learners are sufficiently aware of the foreign language learning needs the learners have. In her opinion, this is because teachers are language specialists but rarely specialists in the vocational field they are supposed to teach and even if they were, it usually has been a while since they have worked in that field and therefore are not familiar with the newest developments and trends. Moreover, on top of the learners' wants and needs, the teacher should also be able to take into account the wants and needs of the companies and organizations that are likely to hire the learners in the future. In addition, the lack of time and other resources often keep the teacher from mapping the learners' needs in more detail. A more general point is that the language learning needs and aims are ambitious; the Council of Europe has through CEFR made language skills and intercultural communicative competence clear objectives for education throughout Europe (Vogt and Kantelinen 2013: 68). However, the concrete resources language education has in reality are often limited, particularly when it comes to allocated time and in vocational education this is even more true than in general education.

## 5 Studies on students' views on learning second language oral communication skills

In this chapter, previous research on students' views will be reviewed. Students' views have not been studied much in international scale. However, there are studies that have concentrated on some other topic but as a by-product also revealed some student views, e.g. by Green (1993) and Chavez (2007). Moreover, in 2013 three master's theses were published in the University of Jyväskylä all of which studied the matter in upper secondary schools. The theses were by Vaarala, Kaski-Akhawan and Ahola-Houtsonen. This sudden interest may have occurred due to the fact that at that time there was much discussion on the nature of the matriculation examination and its effects on English teaching in upper secondary schools.

The study by Chavez (2007: 537) examined American students' perceptions on the need for accuracy in the oral production of German as a FL, in other words how perfect they felt their spoken German should be. The students were from four different years of instruction and their perceptions were also compared to those of their teachers. The findings were numerous. Firstly, the study revealed that the students had neither general accuracy nor grammatical accuracy specifically very high in their target lists. This means that they do not feel that

making grammatical or other errors is a very big deal. Secondly, the students believed that much higher levels of accuracy were required a) to obtain a grade A b) to communicate with a native speaker and c) for their personal sense of accomplishment. Thirdly, older students rated the needed accuracy in some specific language forms higher than younger ones but the rating of general accuracy did not change. For example, verb placement, word stress and noun gender are specific language forms. Lastly, the perceptions of beginning learners in particular differed from those of their teachers regarding the level of accuracy demanded for receiving an A in a course.

The study by Green (1993: 2-8) had three objectives: 1) examine learners' rankings of different ESL activities and practices, some of which concentrated more on communication and real life language use and others which emphasized formal correctness, 2) find out if there is a correlation between accounted enjoyableness and perceived effectiveness, and 3) see if there is evidence of a correlation between learners' past experiences and their current preferences. The participants of the study were university students. A clear result, with only one exception, was that communicative activities were considered to be more enjoyable than non-communicative ones. However, the distinction was not present when the students ranked the activities according to their perceived effectiveness, i.e. how helpful the activities had been for their English learning. In addition, the results showed a moderate to high correlation between enjoyableness and effectiveness, which is good news since the researcher speculated in the beginning that there might be a belief that what is enjoyable cannot be effective. An interesting finding was that the correlations between past experiences and enjoyableness/effectiveness were quite weak; one could think that bad or good experiences would have a strong effect on how enjoyable the activities were considered to be. The results leave an interesting question: enjoyableness and effectiveness clearly correlate but how much does the enjoyableness of an activity/practice contribute to its effectiveness and vice versa? However, the researcher does remind the reader that the group studied in this case was homogenous, hence the results might or might not recur with other groups. Therefore it is suggested by Green that if a teacher wishes to be sensitive to learners' needs and wants, s/he could use a questionnaire similar to the one used in this study to find out the learners' opinions.

In 2011, student perceptions of oral participation were studied by Tepfenhart in State University of New York as part of her master's thesis. Thirty eight students who studied

Spanish as a FL from grades 8 to 12 participated in the study by filling a questionnaire (2011: 9). The students were asked what their favorite aspect of language class was and 21% answered speaking, 18% games, and both learning and movies were chosen by 13%. Other aspects were chosen by 10% and less. The students were also asked the reason for their choice and 37% stated fun as their reason and 26% answered “helps with learning”. Furthermore, 30 out of 38 students said that they enjoyed speaking in class and only four students did not enjoy it and other four enjoyed it sometimes. However, even though the students liked speaking in general, speaking in front of class was chosen as the least favorite aspect of a language class by 13%, being second only to quizzes/tests (15%). The good news was that the students obviously were keen on learning since “learning” was chosen only by 2% which was the lowest score. The participants were also asked to rank the four skills according to their importance and the resulting order was speaking, listening, reading and writing. Most students’ reason for the order was that speaking is the skill one needed most when traveling and communicating with native speakers (2011:12-16).

The study by Vaarala (2013: 64-83) examined Finnish upper secondary school students’ perceptions on oral communication in general and from the point of view of ESL teaching. Four students were interviewed for the study. According to the study the students felt that getting one’s message across and fluency were important factors in communication. Maybe somewhat surprisingly, understanding was mentioned several times. Pronunciation was also considered to be relevant for communication. An interesting finding was that the students often mentioned also sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of language use, such as general interactive skills and knowledge of cultural conventions. When the students were asked what was the best way to learn oral skills, they all mentioned authentic material or environment. When the students were questioned more closely on pronunciation, their views differed quite drastically from each other; two of them considered pronunciation important whereas the other two felt that good pronunciation is a good thing but not a necessity, “an aesthetic” matter as one of them put it. However, both students to whom pronunciation was important were also concerned with prosodic elements such as intonation and word stress. All four students thought that oral communication was not emphasized enough in upper secondary school English teaching. It was also claimed that oral communication exercises were inauthentic and thus not motivating enough. One student also hoped that the teaching would concentrate more on developing fluency.

Finnish upper secondary school students' views on oral skills education were also the focus of a study by Kaski-Akhawan (2013: 27-40). However, her study concentrated more on oral skills exercises. A questionnaire was the means of collecting the data. According to the results the students thought that both most pleasant and most useful oral skills exercises were ones that had a topic that the students found current and interesting. The least pleasant exercise was giving a presentation. The students were content with the variety of exercises but wished that the exercises would concentrate on topics that they found more interesting. In addition, many students thought that they would benefit from getting more practice in pronunciation. However, in the students' opinion oral skills get enough attention in upper secondary school. The most popular types of oral skills exercise were clearly pair or group discussions.

Another study on learning and teaching English speaking skills at upper secondary school is by Ahola-Houtsonen (2013: 46-63). Forty five students from two different schools answered a questionnaire and in addition four students were interviewed. The study showed that students mostly have a positive attitude towards learning and teaching English speaking skills at upper secondary school and consider it important. When the students were asked about practicing speaking skills, the opinions varied. Almost an equal percentage of the students found speaking English difficult and easy. However, the results suggest that boys considered speaking English easier than girls. When the students were asked whether or not enough time had been spent on practicing speaking, about 40% did not have a clear opinion. However, about 60 % of the students thought that a lot of time was spent on practicing grammar. In addition, the four students interviewed all thought that they had not had enough practice in speaking skills. An interesting finding was that over 60% of the students thought that school instruction has given them enough skills to communicate in English. Furthermore, boys thought this more often than girls. Almost 73 % of the students said that English skills were useful to them outside school, but it has to be noted that the question was about both oral and written skills.

The study by Chavez (2007) concerning accuracy gives an important reminder of how essential it is for teachers and students to communicate with each other and express the expectations and targets they have of the year/course etc. It is likely that the present study will also give an indication of the amount of communication between teachers and students in a Finnish vocational school. In addition, it will be interesting to find out how highly Finnish vocational school students and teachers value accuracy, and if accuracy is not on top of the

list, what then is. The study by Green (1993) concentrated on ESL activities, aiming to find out learners' views on them. In the present study, as well, students get to share their views on different activities. Green found out that learners usually preferred communicative exercises, and the Finnish studies support this. The present study will show if vocational school students agree on Green's findings. Green also asked an interesting question on the enjoyableness and effectiveness of activities, i.e. whether learners' believed that fun could also be educational.

The studies by Kaski-Akhawan (2013), Vaarala (2013) and Ahola-Houtsonen (2013) examined learning and teaching oral communication in upper secondary schools. They all approached the subject from slightly different angles. Kaski-Akhawan's study mostly concentrated on oral communication activities, Vaarala's on pronunciation and Ahola-Houtsonen had a more general point of view. Probably the greatest challenge of the present study is to cover all those areas, since there are no previous studies concerning vocational schools. The biggest difference between upper secondary school students and vocational school students is that people go to vocational school to learn a profession, not to study English or mathematics or chemistry. Those who really want to learn more have the possibility of a double-degree which means that they can also attend upper secondary school courses. All in all, the attitude and level of enthusiasm in a vocational school English class may be very different from an upper secondary school English class. Another significant factor is that in vocational school, there is very little time set aside for English so the teachers have to be very picky on what they teach in that limited amount of time.

## 6 Studies on teachers' views on teaching second language oral communication skills

In this chapter previous studies on teachers' views will be examined. It seems that they have been studied even less than students' views. Vaarala's, Kaski-Akhawan's and Ahola-Houtsonen's master's theses studied also teacher perceptions. In addition, Huuskonen and Kähkönen's (2006) theses focused solely on teacher perceptions. However, as was the case with student perceptions, there are studies that have focused on some other aspect but revealed also information that is relevant to the present study. In 2010, İnceçay and İnceçay conducted a case study of needs assessment of English teachers and in 1995, Okamura studied teachers' and nonteachers' perceptions on elementary learners' spoken Japanese.

The study by Vaarala (2013: 84-89) examined the perceptions of teachers, too. Four teachers were interviewed for the study. The first questions were concerned with the definition of oral competence. The teachers' answers clearly leaned on communicative competence since they all mentioned communication or getting one's message across as the defining features of oral competence. In addition many aspects of oral communication were brought up by the teachers, including social interaction skills, familiarity with cultural conventions and nonverbal communication. Furthermore, every teacher mentioned some aspect that they found particularly important; two teachers concentrated on register and cultural conventions, one spoke a lot about genuine interaction and the fourth emphasized the significance of idiomatic speech. In addition, pronunciation, communication strategies and vocabulary were considered a part of communicative competence by two or more teachers. However, e.g. pronunciation was seen more as a characteristic of good oral skills. The teachers were also asked what the best way to learn oral competence was and a common opinion was that mere use of English and contact with others who spoke English were the best ways. One teacher highlighted the importance of guidance provided by teachers.

Two teachers were interviewed by Ahola-Houtsonen (2013: 47-50). Both of them had an impression that students generally had a positive attitude towards language learning. However, one teacher felt that students did not always appreciate the fact that they had a chance to practice oral skills at school for their future's sake. Also in this study the teachers were asked questions about the importance and methods of teaching oral skills. One teacher said that the students should speak in English in every class. When the teachers were asked about activity types, quite a repertoire came up: pair work, games, dialogues, group discussions, small talk, cultural knowledge and revising phrases and situated language.

In the study of Huuskonen and Kähkönen in 2006, 80 Finnish upper secondary school teachers answered a questionnaire concerning practicing, testing and assessing oral skills (Huuskonen and Kähkönen: 76-83). The results showed that almost every teacher (98,8 %) saw oral skills as an important part of language proficiency. However, around 60 % of the respondents thought that in upper secondary school teaching written skills was more important than teaching oral skills. This is probably at least partly due to the matriculation examination. Furthermore, 31,6 % of teachers stated that students' oral skills did not affect

course grade. An interesting result was that 90 % of the teachers believed that their students would be able to manage in everyday situations in English after finishing school. The teachers were presented with a list of teaching methods and exercise types for oral skills and they chose which of them they used with first, second and third-year students. The list included dialogue, role play, group discussion, pair discussion, oral presentation, debate, describing a picture, pronunciation exercises and other methods. All methods were used with all students but the results suggest that the use of dialogues and pronunciation exercises decreased during the years and the role of some other methods, such as debate, presentation and group discussion, increased. Throughout the years, pair discussion was clearly the most frequently utilized method. Another question was concerned with factors that hinder the practice of oral skills. Half of the teachers mentioned lack of time as a factor and a third named group size and a quarter mentioned student related reasons, such as lack of motivation, shyness and complicated social relations in class. The most important factors that were considered to facilitate/encourage practicing oral skills were good books and exercises (25 %), student related reasons (55%) and teacher related reasons (15%). Many teachers felt that students were motivated to learn to speak English because they were aware of its importance to their future. Also many were of the opinion that students liked to talk and oral exercises made classes more enjoyable for them. For example the teacher's own attitude and enthusiasm towards oral communication were listed under teacher related reasons.

Four teachers were interviewed by Kaski-Akhawan (2013: 40-47). Also in this study the teachers were provided with a list of exercise types and they had to choose which they had used in lessons; three of them stated they used all types: dialogue, role play, group discussion, pair discussion, presentation, debate, describing a picture, and pronunciation exercises. When they were asked if there were any other exercise types they had used, quite a few came up, at least preparing an advertisement, presenting oneself, summarizing listening comprehensions, discussing videos, telling jokes, improvisation, acting, and interviewing parents were mentioned. Pair and group discussions were the teachers' favorites in this study, too.

In the study by İnceçay and İnceçay, eighteen teachers working in an English preparatory school of a private university in Istanbul were interviewed (2010: 317-321). Some of the results are very interesting indeed. The teachers were asked to rank the four language skills. Half of the teachers felt that all skills are equal but the other half ranked reading as the most important and speaking should be given least attention. One interviewee said that in order to

learn speaking and writing one must have had extensive input through reading. Another one said that “speaking is the last step of language use” and that it is the most difficult skill to be improved. However, some teachers suggested that a special speaking club with lots of authentic material would be very good for the students. The teachers also felt that there were three major problems in teaching speaking. The first one was the number of students, which was mentioned in some of the Finnish studies, too. The second problem was the school program that was apparently very full and the third one was that the teachers did not believe that students were interested in learning speaking.

In the study by Okamura (1995: 32-34) 39 native teachers and 41 native nonteachers were asked to evaluate recordings of four Japanese learners speaking in terms of grammar, fluency, appropriateness, vocabulary, comprehensibility and pronunciation. A very expected outcome was that the teachers tended to be more critical and particularly so towards grammar. The results suggested that for both teachers and nonteachers comprehensibility was the most important factor overall and fluency and grammar were the most important factors when differentiating between high proficiency and average students. There were two students that fell into each category and while the two test groups agreed on the ranking of the average students that was not the case with the high proficiency students. The researcher speculated that this could be due to the fact that while the teachers appreciated the student whose grammar structures and vocabulary were more sophisticated but whose pronunciation was not as good as the other student's. The nonteachers however may have been more impressed by the fluency and pronunciation of the other student; in addition the student was also more outgoing than the teachers' choice. Another finding was that the teachers' work experience did not seem to affect their evaluations.

In the study by Vaarala (2013) four teachers were interviewed and the results showed that every teacher values different aspects of language and of oral communication and probably therefore also emphasizes different aspects accordingly in their teaching. It will be interesting to see what kind of aspects vocational school teachers give priority to and if they differ from those mentioned by upper secondary school teachers. Furthermore, finding out whether the students and the teachers agree on the importance of different aspects could prove to be illuminating.

Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006) found out many things and it will be intriguing to see the differences between their results and the results of the present study. The teachers in their study emphasized more written skills than oral communication, as did the teachers in the study by İnceçay and İnceçay (2010). Since vocational school does not have the pressure of matriculation examination, it is likely that oral communication is emphasized more. In addition, a third of the teachers in Huuskonen's and Kähkönen's study admitted that oral skills do not affect the grade. The curriculum of Jyväskylä college clearly states that the course grade must be based on both written and oral performance. Whether or not this is true, in practice it is yet to be seen. Another interesting result was that 90% of the teachers in their study believed that their students have enough skills to cope also in English language in the future. Naturally, coping in any given situation, e.g. writing an e-mail, ordering food, chatting with a foreigner, is different from coping in a strictly work-related situation, and therefore the results of their study and the present study are not precisely comparable, but the question in itself is nevertheless very important and finding out the vocational school teachers', and students', views on the matter will be most interesting.

## 7 Aims and methods of the present study

In this chapter the aims and methods of the present study will be introduced. First the aims of the study and the research questions will be discussed. Then the data collection methods and participants will be presented and finally the data analysis methods will be introduced.

### 7.1 Aims of the present study

The ability to communicate in English in any and all professions has been considered important for decades now. However, that is about as far as it goes. It is stated in the national vocational school curricula that everyone should be able to function in both the professional environment and private life in English also, but it is not explained how this could or should be accomplished. There are studies that examine the state and challenges of teaching and learning of oral communication in English in other levels and forms of education but there are none that would study the matter in vocational school. The amount of vocational school students has always been great and is still growing, e.g. in 1999 there were c. 125 000 vocational school students but the number grew steadily throughout the years, and in 2013 the number was already over 150 000 (Ministry of Education and Culture n.d.). Thus the aims of

the present study are quite simple and yet fundamental. The most important goal of the study is to examine what the current state of teaching and learning oral communication skills is in vocational school. Since there really are not any previous studies, it seemed most logical to start with this very basic question. However, in order to make planning the data collection methods and, later on, analyzing and reporting the results, the goal was divided into four research questions:

- 1 a) What are the students' views on the teaching of oral communication in English in vocational school in relation to their future occupation?
- 1 b) In their opinion, how essential a part of their professional skills is English communication skills?
- 1 c) Do they feel that the training has given them enough skills to manage in the future?
2. What are the teachers' views on teaching oral communication in English in vocational school?

In other words, it could be said that the purpose of the present study is to map out the phenomena of teaching and learning oral communication in vocational school. According to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2000: 129-130), a study like this aims at seeking and finding new points of view or phenomena and shed some light on phenomena that are not well known and also develop hypotheses.

## 7.2 Data collection methods

In this section, the methods of gathering data will be described. First, the participants will be introduced then the questionnaire and finally the interview. The data was gathered during spring 2014.

### *Participants*

In order to get as realistic and comprehensive picture of the state of things, it was considered the most logical course of action to have the views of both vocational school students and teachers. The students were third-year students, for the simple reason that they had the most extensive experience of vocational school English teaching and also on using English outside the classroom. In the beginning, the aim was to get at least a hundred students to participate in the study, from four different professional fields, so that also the fields could have been

compared with each other in addition to comparisons by gender and grade. The questionnaire was first sent to 300 students of those four fields, but after a month, only around 30 had answered the questionnaire. Therefore the questionnaire was sent to about 150 more students. However, this still did not produce enough answers. At this time, it was late spring, and the students were about to graduate soon, so it was unfortunately necessary to abandon the original plan concerning the professional fields. In the end, the questionnaire was sent to little over a 1000 students, and 61 answers were received. Of the 61 students 48 were female and 13 were male. The most recent grade of 33 students was 3, of 20 students it was 2 and 8 students had received grade 1.

Fortunately, there was better luck with the teachers since it was originally thought that three to five interviews would be a fair number and in the end, three teachers agreed to the interview. At the time of the interviews, one teacher was just about to retire, one had been teaching for ten years and one had graduated only a couple years before. Two of the teachers taught mostly students of hotel and restaurant services and tourism. One taught students of many fields, e.g. laboratory technology, publishing and printing and metalwork and machinery.

### *Questionnaire*

To collect data from a large group of people and to get answers to many questions, a questionnaire is the most efficient method, (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara, 2000: 184) and was applied in the present study to gather data from the vocational school students. Furthermore, when using a questionnaire, the researcher does not affect the participants or their answers with his/her presence. Moreover, the participants can answer the questionnaire when it best suits them and ponder on the questions as long as they want (Valli 2001:101). Three of the research questions concerned the students' views and the questionnaire was planned based on those questions. Since the research questions were so extensive, it was a challenge to create a questionnaire that would answer the questions without being much too long and complex. In addition, it was thought that a questionnaire with only multiple-choice questions and/or Likert-type scales would not provide the researcher with a sufficient amount of data, and furthermore, the depth of the data would not have been satisfying. Thus, the questionnaire became a combination of multiple-choice questions, scales and open-ended questions. In the end, the questionnaire had 17 questions, one of which was about the students' back-ground information (see Appendix 1). Nine questions were multiple choice questions and seven open-ended questions. The questionnaire was in the Internet and the link

was sent to the students via e-mail with a cover letter. The program used to create and distribute the questionnaire was [freeonlinesurveys.com](http://freeonlinesurveys.com).

### *Interview*

There were two main reasons for choosing a qualitative approach and interview as the method of data gathering concerning teachers. Firstly, there just are not enough teachers in the Jyväskylä college to conduct a quantitative study and secondly, teachers probably have a lot more to say about these matters than students. In addition, an advantage of an interview is that it is much more flexible than a questionnaire, so it can be adjusted according to the situation and the interviewee (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2000: 185). Furthermore, an interview gives the interviewee the opportunity to express him/herself as freely as possible. In addition, it gives freedom to the interviewer as well, e.g. he/she can ask further questions or ask for arguments etc. (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2004:35). A half-structured interview was chosen, since there the questions are the same for all interviewees but it is possible to e.g. change the order of the questions. There are other views on the meaning of *half-structured* but they all boil down to the point that some aspects of the interview are set in the stone but not all (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2004:47). As was the case with the questionnaire, it took a lot of time and effort to create an interview that would give a sufficient amount of information, without becoming too time consuming to conduct. Eventually, the interview contained 21 questions (see Appendix 2), four of which were concerned with background information. The amount of time that each interview took was 15 to 20 minutes.

## 7.3 Data analysis methods

### *The data from the questionnaires*

To analyze the data from the questionnaires, a quantitative approach was applied. The program that was used to create the questionnaire in the Internet, also made a representation of the results in quantitative form, providing the researcher with frequencies and percentages. Of course, this was only the case with the responses to the multiple-choice questions. In order to analyze the responses to the open-ended questions, a content based analysis was used (Valli 2001:159). First, the answers were combed for recurring themes and then each answer was placed under a theme. In some cases, e.g. when asked about the most or least useful exercises, one answer could fall under two or more themes, depending on how many exercise types the person had mentioned. After this categorization, the results were turned into a numerical

form. The results were also ran through SPSS. The Pearson Chi-square test was used to measure the results' statistical significance. However, mostly due to the rather small amount of participants, no statistically significant differences were found.

### *The data from the interviews*

Since the approach to the data of the interviews was qualitative, the chosen data analysis method was data based content analysis. This was chosen because most other methods are used when there already is a theory on what the results will show. In this case however, the aim of the interviews was to showcase and map out the phenomena of teaching English in vocational school, not create theories. In addition, it was considered important to examine the variety of perspectives, opinions and experiences the three teachers had. Analyzing data from interviews has many phases. First the interviews must be transcribed. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme dealing with qualitative data contains features of both analysis and synthesis. In analysis, the data is classified and synthesis aims at creating the big picture and presenting the phenomena from a new angle (2004: 143). So basically, in order to make conclusions, the data must be first divided into pieces and then put back together. In the case of the present study, the themes were present already in the interview questions so classifying the data was not a great challenge. However, sometimes the teachers said things that were more related some other theme than the one they were actually asked about. Classifying that sort of information and finding a right place for those comments took most effort.

## 8 Results

In this chapter the results of the present study will be reported, starting with the results based on the questionnaires in section 8.1. The research questions concerned with those results were:

- 1 a) What are the students' views on the teaching of oral communication in English in vocational school in relation to their future occupation?
- 1 b) In their opinion, how essential a part of their professional skills is English communication skills?
- 1 c) Do they feel that the training has given them enough skills to manage in the future?

Section 8.2 will report the results based on the interviews. The research question related to those results was:

## 2. What are the teachers' views on the teaching of oral communication in English in vocational school?

This chapter merely reports the results, they and their significance will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

### 8.1 Students' views

In this section the quantitative results based on the questionnaire will be reported. It is unfortunate that only a very small percentage of the students the questionnaire was sent to chose to actually fill out the questionnaire. Due to the relatively small number of answers (61) cross checking the results by gender and by grade did not reveal any statistically significant differences. However, despite this there were some interesting and even surprising results.

#### *The importance of oral communication in English*

In the questionnaire, there were three questions that dealt with the importance of English and different areas of the language and oral communication. The students were first asked how important oral communication in English was for them from the perspective of their future occupation (Table 1).

Table 1. The importance of oral communication in English

	<b>All (N=61)</b>	<b>Female (N=48)</b>	<b>Male (N=13)</b>	<b>Grade 1 (N=8)</b>	<b>Grade 2 (N=20)</b>	<b>Grade 3 (N=33)</b>
Very important	11 (18.0%)	8 (16.7%)	3 (23.1%)	0	<b>6 (30.0%)</b>	5 (15.2%)
Important	<b>30 (49.2 %)</b>	<b>25 (52.1%)</b>	<b>5 (38.5%)</b>	<b>4 (50.0%)</b>	5 (25.0%)	<b>21 (63.6%)</b>
Quite important	11 (18.0%)	9 (18.8%)	2 (15.4%)	2 (25.0%)	5 (25.0%)	4 (12.1%)
Not very important	9 (14.8 %)	6 (12.5 %)	3 (23.1%)	2 (25.0%)	4 (20.0%)	3 (9.1%)
Not at all important	0	0	0	0	0	0

Half of the students (49.2 %) answered that they found oral communication in English important and both very important and quite important were chosen by 18 %. In other words, 85 % of the students recognized the importance of being able to communicate orally in English. In every group *important* was the most common answer with the exception of Grade

2 students, whose most common answer was *very important*. In addition, *not very important* was most often chosen by Grade 1 students (25 %) and male students (23,1%).

The students were then asked to estimate the importance of different aspects of language, again from the perspective of their future occupation (Table 2).

Table 2. The importance of different aspects of language (N=61)

	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Not very important</b>	<b>Not at all important</b>
Reading comprehension	15 (24.6%)	<b>24</b> <b>(39.3%)</b>	18 (29.5%)	3 (4.9%)	1 (1.6%)
Listening comprehension	17 (28.3%)	<b>27</b> <b>(45.0%)</b>	13 (21.7%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.6%)
Writing	8 (13.1%)	<b>21</b> <b>(34.4%)</b>	20 (32.8%)	11 (18.0%)	1 (1.6%)
Speaking	<b>22</b> <b>(36.7%)</b>	<b>22</b> <b>(36.7%)</b>	13 (21.7%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.6%)
Grammar	6 (9.8%)	16 (26.2%)	14 (23,0%)	<b>24</b> <b>(39.3%)</b>	1 (1.6%)
Vocabulary	19 (31.2%)	<b>25</b> <b>(41,0%)</b>	14 (23%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.6%)

Speaking, listening comprehension and vocabulary were all considered important by over 70% of the students. Speaking, however, was the only area that an equal number of students rated as *very important* and *important*. With 24 students out of 61 choosing *not very important*, grammar was very clearly the least important area in the students' opinion. Only one student thought that no area at all was important. Comparisons by gender or by grade did not give any significant results. However, an interesting piece of information was that all six students who considered grammar very important were male. Also, no area was rated as very important by grade 1 students except for vocabulary, which one grade 1 student thought to be very important.

The students were also asked to estimate the importance of different aspects of oral communication (Table 3).

Table 3. The importance of different aspects of oral communication (N=61)

	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Not very important</b>	<b>Not at all important</b>
Pronunciation	5 (8.2%)	<b>23</b> <b>(37.7%)</b>	22 (36.1%)	10 (16.4%)	1 (1.6%)
Grammar	6 (9.8%)	15 (24.6%)	18 (29.5%)	<b>20</b> <b>(32.8%)</b>	2 (3.3%)
Vocabulary	15 (24.6%)	<b>25</b> <b>(41.0%)</b>	16 (26.2%)	4 (6.6%)	1 (1.6%)
Fluency	9 (14.8%)	<b>27</b> <b>(44.3%)</b>	17 (27.9%)	7 (11.5%)	1 (1.6%)
Ability to make oneself understood	<b>38</b> <b>(62.3%)</b>	13 (21.3%)	7 (11.5%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (1.6%)
Rules and conventions related to spoken English (e.g. how to be polite)	19 (31.2%)	<b>25</b> <b>(41.0%)</b>	7 (11.5%)	9 (14.8%)	1 (1.6%)

The most important area was the ability to make oneself understood, which about 83 % of the students considered very important or important. The remaining areas were rated as important by most students, with the exception of grammar which was again rated not very important by 32.8%. Also here only one student thought that no area was at all important, although grammar was rated as not all important by another student, too. Probably the biggest surprise with these results was how highly the students valued the rules and conventions related to spoken English, about 72 % of the students rated it as very important or important. Comparisons by gender and by grade did not produce any significant results.

A question that did not directly deal with the importance of English but probably was reflected in the results was a question where the students were asked how often they believed they would have to speak English in their future occupation. Most students (41.7%) answered a couple times a month. Almost a third (28.3%) of the students believed they would have to speak English weekly but the same percentage answered more rarely than once a month. Only one student believed she would have to speak English daily.

### *Teaching oral communication in vocational school*

Six questions in the questionnaire concentrated on teaching and learning oral communication. Two questions were multiple-choice and the rest were open-ended questions. In the first question concerning activities the students were asked how much they had practiced speaking English at school. A clear majority of the students (68.3%) felt that it had not been practiced enough. Almost a third (30%) thought that it had been practiced enough and only one student answered too much. ‘Not at all’ was not chosen by anyone.

The next four questions dealt with oral communication activities. Question four was a multiple-choice question where the students were asked to choose which activities they had done in English lessons in vocational school (Table 4).

Table 4. Activities done in English lessons (N=61).

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responses (N=61)</b>	<b>%</b>
Dialogue	46	75.4
Presentation	20	32.7
Role-play	16	26.2
Pair discussion	55	90.1
Group discussion	30	49.1
Pronunciation exercise	43	70.4
Other	9	14.8

Pair discussion, reading dialogues and pronunciation exercises were the most common activities in vocational school English lessons and role-play was the rarest activity. However, it has to be noted that many students had chosen only one activity type although they probably have done other kinds of activities, too. Other activity types that were mentioned were (job) interview, discussion with the teacher and oral examination. One student had answered “*practicing authentic future customer service situations*”.

The following three questions were open-ended questions and not all students answered them. The first one enquired which activity types the students had found the most useful and why, and it was answered by 48 students. Pair discussion was considered the most useful with 35.4 % of the students mentioning it. A quarter of the students stated simply *discussion*, and

*group discussion* was mentioned by 18.8%. Pronunciation exercises were mentioned by 20 %. For some students the topic of the discussion was the factor that made an activity useful. Exercises that were related to the future occupation was mentioned by 18.8 %, and 14.6% stated that authentic exercises were most useful. Other exercise types that were mentioned were role-play, reading aloud and presentation. Some students also gave reasons for their answers but most did not. The reasons for choosing pair discussions were that they were fun and the students felt that it was easier and not so stressful when there was just one person listening to their speech. Many students said that they wanted to use English *for real* meaning that they had to improvise and they wanted the exercises to challenge them and make them think how to say something. The only reason given for choosing pronunciation exercises was that they made the speech more understandable.

The students were next asked which activity types they found the least useful and why. The question was answered by 41 students. A little over a quarter (26.8 %) thought that all exercises were useful. Ready-made dialogues were mentioned by 17%, pronunciation exercises by 15% and pair discussions by 12%. Other activity types that were mentioned were role-play, presentations and reading aloud. Some students did not answer with an activity but rather with a situation or a topic. Such situations included speaking in front of a group or talking to a stranger since they create too much pressure. Answers related to the topic of a discussion were *topics not related to occupation* and *topics that were not interesting*. Dialogues were not considered useful because they do not create a challenge. Pronunciation exercises were thought to be boring, and one student stated that paying too much attention to pronunciation and grammar can create anxiety and fear of speaking aloud. The problem with pair discussions, according to the students, was that often they were not done properly, e.g. skipping the difficult parts or talking about something else than the given topic.

The final question concerning activity types was what kind of activities the students would want to do in English lessons and why. This question was answered only by 35 students and the range of answers was quite wide. The most common answer with 20 % was activities related to occupation. Both *group discussion* and *discussion* were mentioned by 17%. *All kinds of activities* was the answer of 14 %. Other activity types that were mentioned were e.g. pair discussion, role-play, presentation and dialogues. Some students thought that the activities they had done had been too easy. Most students did not give any reasons for their

answers but the most common reason for choosing any given answer was *because that is how you learn best*.

#### *Using English outside the classroom*

The next four questions were concerned with using English outside the classroom. The first question aimed to find out how and how often the students used English in their free time (Table 5).

Table 5. Use of English in free time (N=61)

	Daily	Weekly	Couple times a month	Less than once a month	Never
Reading (e.g. books/magazines)	8 13.1%	13 21.3%	8 13.1%	<b>19</b> <b>31.1%</b>	13 21.3%
Watching tv and movies	<b>28</b> <b>45.9%</b>	19 31.2%	6 9.9%	7 11.5%	1 1.6%
Writing (e.g. letters, poems)	8 13.1%	5 8.2%	13 21.3%	<b>23</b> <b>37.7%</b>	12 19.7%
Playing computer and video games	5 8.2%	12 19.7%	13 21.3%	10 16.4%	<b>21</b> <b>34.4%</b>
Speaking with friends	8 13.1%	5 8.2%	13 21.3%	17 27.9%	<b>18</b> <b>29.5%</b>
At work	3 4.9%	8 13.1%	11 18.0%	<b>20</b> <b>32.8%</b>	19 31.1%
Listening to music	<b>45</b> <b>73.8%</b>	8 13.1%	4 6.6%	2 3.3%	2 3.3%
In the Internet (e.g. websites, social media, e-journals)	<b>24</b> <b>39.3%</b>	20 32.8%	9 14.8%	3 4.9%	5 8.2%

The most common activity outside the classroom that required using English was clearly listening to music, which 73.8% of the students did daily. The two other activities that most students did daily were watching tv and movies (45.9%) and using the Internet (39.3%). All the other activities were much rarer. Most students read, wrote and used English at work less than once a month (32.8%) and never played computer or videogames (34.4%) or spoke with friends in English (29.5%).

The next question was whether or not the students had used English in a situation related to their future occupation, e.g. summer job, practical learning. Of the 61 students 41 answered

yes which means that 67.2% had already had the chance to use English in a work related situation. Those 41 students then answered the following question asking if they had used oral communication or written communication. It was also possible choose both, which some students obviously had done. Oral communication skills had been used by 39 students out of 41 and 11 out of 41 had used written communication. This result supports the view that it is more likely to have to communicate orally than in writing. The final question concerning this topic was an open-ended question asking how they had felt about the work-related situation where they had used English. Did the students think that they had managed well or had they perhaps had some difficulties? A total of 39 students answered this question, and 22 (56.4%) reported that the situation had gone well, without difficulties. Nine students said that at first the situation had felt challenging but in the end everything had gone well, and only four students said that the situation had been difficult. The reasons for the difficulties had to do with too limited vocabulary or the other party's poor English skills. There were four students whose answers did not quite fall into any of the previously mentioned categories. One student said that she had been able to get the message across and another said that she could have continued the discussion but did not come up with anything to say. The third said that the situation was nothing out of the ordinary and that there is no point in worrying your pronunciation or if you do not remember all the words. The fourth one told that she had been in practical training abroad and the situations had often been challenging. She had understood almost everything but lacked the courage to speak.

The next question was also an open-ended question asking the students if they believed that the significance of the English language would change in the course of next five years, and again they were asked to consider this from the point of view of their future occupation. This question was answered by 48 students. Exactly half of the students believed that the significance of English would grow, e.g. due to immigration or because there were more work opportunities abroad. *Maybe or it depends* was the answer of 9 students. The reasons were e.g. depends on which corporation you worked in or whether there would be more immigrants. There were 11 students who believed that the significance would not change, mostly because in their fields English already was important and they thought that it would continue to be as important. Only one student said that the significance would lessen but this was because he believed he would change into another field of work than the one he was studying at the moment.

The final question in the questionnaire was in fact a statement: “The English courses in vocational school have provided me with enough skills, so that I will be able to manage situations and function also in English in my future occupation”. The students were asked to give their opinion on the statement. It was very interesting to see how ambivalent the results were. The question was answered by 45 students, and 16 of them agreed with the statement but also 16 students disagreed and the rest 13 students were a little indecisive. Some students who agreed with the statement mentioned, however, that there could be more courses or that some aspects. e.g. vocabulary, could have been studied more. Most of the students who disagreed with the statement said that there just were not enough courses or time. The ones who did not have a clear opinion mentioned several pros and cons about the courses. The students’ own effort and motivation was mentioned a couple times. Some said that they had learned enough to manage in very basic situations but that they would have wanted and needed to learn more. A couple of the students also said that the courses in vocational schools had given them very little but that they had otherwise acquired (free time, previous education) enough skills to get by.

## 8.2 Teachers’ views

In this section the results based on the interviews will be reported. The opinions and thoughts of the teachers were often similar despite the differences in the experience, age and their students’ study programs. However, there were also questions that got interestingly versatile answers. A slight problem with some questions was that the answers were not quite what was expected, e.g. when asked how oral communication could be taught, the teachers started to list activity types when the idea was to find out about different teaching methods. Most of the questions were however well understood and thoroughly answered. The translations of the quotations can be found in Appendix 3.

The first two questions of the interview aimed at clarifying what it was like to teach English in vocational school. The first question was about the best aspects of teaching English in vocational school. Freedom was mentioned by Teacher A and C. Since the curriculum was very loose it gave the teachers a lot of freedom, unlike in basic education and in upper secondary school in particular. Teacher A also felt that this freedom took a lot of pressure off the teachers and in addition there was not the same kind of feeling of constant hurry and of being rushed as in other types of schools:

### Example 1

tota noin niin no mun mielestä on parasta se että täällä ei oo niinku niin semmosta selkeetä tavallaan mitä pitää kurssin aikana kaikkea saa. niinku käydä läpi et ku sit aattelee lukioo sielä kappaleet 1-5 käydään ja kielioppiasiat nämä ja nämä. tavallaan semmonen ehkä vapaus siinä, että ei oo niinku ei oo kiirettä myöskään samalla tavalla ku varmaan yläasteella ja lukiossa sitte on myös. (Teacher A)

Teacher B enjoyed also the chance to create her own teaching material. Teachers B and C said it was amazing how much the teachers' own vocabulary expands over the years:

### Example 2

se valtava mahdollisuus saada oppia ihan eri asioista ja se laventaa siis sanavarasto on kertyny ihan vuosien varrella ihan todella mittavaks. (Teacher B)

Furthermore, Teachers A and B both liked the fact that teaching concentrated more on communication than e.g. grammar. Moreover, Teacher C mentioned also how teaching English was linked with all kinds of projects and other studies:

### Example 3

näillon jotain tiettyjä jaksoja vaikka joku hyvinvointimatkailu mihin kuuluu niinku suomeks opetusta et mitä niinku on Suomessa hyvinvointimatkailu ja sit niisson aina enkku ja ruotsiki mukana ja sit mää linkitän ne aina siihen sitte jaksoon että mitä ne tekee siinä jaksossa (Teacher C)

Question two was what the most challenging aspects of teaching in vocational school were. The answers were quite versatile. Issues with motivation were mentioned by Teacher A, although the problems were more serious with other languages than English. However, skipping classes was apparently quite common, which of course disturbs teaching:

### Example 4

no ehkä se moti- motivaatio ongelma, se nyt ei englannissa oo niinku niin paha mut onhan se tavallaan ku ne on tullu opiskelemaan tänne niinku ammattia eikä niinku tavallaan äidinkieltä eikä kieliä eikä matikkaa eikä muuta, tavallaan se että sitte jaksais pysyä mukana ja olemaan tunneilla sit poissaolot on aika iso ongelma. (Teacher A)

Teacher B found dealing with very heterogeneous groups the most challenging aspect and she enjoyed creating teaching material, in contrast Teacher C said that teaching material posed most problems:

#### Example 5

ne kirjat mitä on ni ne o hirveen yleisiä ja ja mitä matkailulleki on niin muutama hassu kirja mut ei sielä niinku oo ruotsiks jotain talvimatkailua laskettelua lumikenkävaelluksia ja tämmösiä et ne on niinku kasattava ite se on vuosien projekti.  
(Teacher C)

It was interesting, and maybe even a little surprising to find out how the teachers found very different kinds of aspects either enjoyable or challenging. However, some issues e.g. heterogeneity of the groups were mentioned later by the other teachers, too. It could also be seen how personality affected the answers since one teacher enjoyed something another found very challenging.

The teachers were next asked to define oral communication, what kind of building blocks it consisted of and after that they were asked what a person needed to be good at oral communication. Teacher A's definition was quite a simple one: just speaking, to know how to produce words and sentences and to get one's message across. Teacher B first mentioned pronunciation, then fluency and also the fact that one must have something to say:

#### Example 7

No tietysti hyvä ääntäminen on lähtökohta. vaikka osaisit kuinka hyvin mutta jos äännät huonosti niin ei sua ymmärrä ku toinen suomalainen (Teacher B)

The most encompassing answer was given by Teacher C: vocabulary, listening comprehension, courage, spontaneity, creativity and paraphrasing were mentioned among other things:

#### Example 6

No tietysti se lähtee sieltä sanastosta myös sitte semmosesta nii niin rohkeudesta semmosest et löytyy semmosta spontaaniutta niinku reagointikykyä ja. ja. tietysti kuullunymmärtäminen ja sitte kaikki otetaa avuks niinkun eleet ja ilmeet ja ja kädet ja sitte se on tosi tärkeätä että jos et muista jotain mietitään nyt vaikka tuota melontaa et

muista vaikka mikä on joku peräsin ni sitte niin niin osaat jotenki kiittää sen sen vaikket muista sitä sanaa ni semmonen innovatiivisuus semmonen kekseliäisyys, luovuus se on tärkeätä. (Teacher C)

When asked to define good oral communication skills, quite a few aspects were mentioned. For Teacher B, it meant that a person has large vocabulary that enables the speaker to use idiomatic language. Teacher A also mentioned vocabulary and she stated that the person had to have some grammatical knowledge, too. Courage and enthusiasm to speak were also important in her opinion. Teacher C, too, considered vocabulary to be important and pronunciation since it makes speech more understandable. The speaker had to speak slowly and clearly in an audible voice. She also mentioned that the speaker must pay attention to the listener by repeating and making sure that the listener has understood what was being said:

#### Example 8

no tietenki pitää olla jos nyt kielistä puhutaan siis tavallaan sanavarastoa pitää olla, pitää olla myös jonkun verran sitä kieliopin hallintaa että ei voi niinkun sanoja laittaa ihan mihin järjestykseen tahansa et joku tämmönen käsitys siitä mitä miten ne lauseet siinä kielessä syntyy niin sitä pitää olla ja tavallaan semmosta mitä ny itekki tuola tunneilla aattelee niin semmosta niinku sitä innostusta ja halua ja niinkun, rohkeutta siis puhua tavallaan se et vaikka nyt ei kaikki menis aina oikein mut jos sua ymmärretään ihan ok niin mikäs siinä sen kun puhut vaan ja höpötät vaan eteenpäin et ei ajattele niitä virheitä virheitä niin paljoo ja sitte just se ymmärtäminen et jos sua ymmärretään niin sitte sitte kaikki on ihan ok (Teacher A)

The next four questions of the interview concentrated more specifically on teaching oral communication. The first two were what is there to teach in oral communication i.e. what can be taught and how can oral communication be taught. The questions were not exactly successful since the teachers started to tell mostly about different activity types although the interviewer elaborated further and tried to find out more about teaching methods. Basically the only points that could be interpreted as answers to what there was to teach in oral communication were vocabulary and pronunciation that were mentioned by Teacher C and courage that was mentioned by Teachers A and C. According to Teacher A, Finnish people and students paid much too much attention to errors they made and often did not want to speak because they fear making errors. Therefore she tried to always remind the students that

speaking, even if there were errors, was a lot better option than not speaking at all. Also the importance of the ability to paraphrase was clear in her answer:

#### Example 9

no siis nimenomaan sitä et puhut vaan vaikket aina osaiskaa siis se rohkeus on tavallaan se mikä ja varsinki suomalaisilla se että sit hirveesti jotenki niihin virheisiin kiinnitetään huomiota ja itekki ku tuolla nyt jotaki suullisia tehtäviä oon teettäny niin jos on joku pohja esimerkiks ollu että missä on kirjottanu vaikka suomeks keskusteluja ja sitte että käypäs kaverin kanssa ni mä yritän kauheesti siinä aina sanoo sitä että niinku omin sanoin omin sanoin että ei tarvi niinku täältä paperista nyt lukee että mihin kohtaan tulee pilkku ja mihin ei ja et se tavallaan omin sanoin ja sitte just et uskaltaa vaa ja puhuu vaa ja sit sanoo jotaki muuta jossei nyt sitä lapussa olevaa sanaa muista ja tavallaa menee vaan niinku eteenpäin eikä jää jumittaa sillee että nyt mä en sitä sanaa muista ja tavallaan et osais niinku kiertää sitte sitä mitä ei osaa ja puhuis vaan he he (Teacher A)

Since many groups of tourist guide students were taught by Teacher C, courage to speak in front of an audience was emphasized. Often tourist guides work in pairs and that is taken into account also. The students often practice speaking in front of their own study group, other groups and e.g. by giving presentations to people visiting the school:

#### Example 10

No tietysti mitä me nyt varsinki esimerkiks matkailijoiden kans paljon otetaan niin sitä ryhmä edessä olemista sitä että ne niinku menee yksin ovat yksistään tai ovat pareittain niinkun luoka eessä oman ryhmä eessä muitten ryhmien eessä ne me tehään monenlaisia projekteja ne esittelee Keski-Suomea matkailuvelvoimatekijöitä ja muita niinku semmosta. et rohkeus on varmaan sanasto ja ääntämisen ja kaiken muun lisäksi ni yks yht tärkeimmistä et ne uskaltaa uskaltaa olla siellä avata sen suun (Teacher C)

The question asking how oral communication could be taught together with the following question on activities and task types the teachers used to teach oral communication resulted in quite a repertoire. Pair and group discussion were mentioned by all. Usually the students were given a dialogue in Finnish that they then translated into English or an A-B task where one student has the other students lines in English and vice versa. There was a consensus that simply giving a topic or an open question to discuss rarely worked:

## Example 11

niitä on paljon siis pariharjotuksia, erityyppisiä ryhmä ryhmissä puhumista parit kuulustelevat toisiaan ja sitte mulla on valtavasti tämmösiä dialogeja jotka on käännetty englanniksi mä oon ite paljo tehny itseki ettiny dialogeja ja kääntäny tää on yhestä kirjasta finish for foreigners siinä on tukikielenä ollu koko ajan englanti tätä luetaan ne lukee auki sit ne kääntää ottaa suomennokset ja lähtee lukemaan parin kanssa vaihtaen roolit (Teacher B)

Another activity type that was mentioned by every teacher was Alias, a game where students explain words to each other in English. It was seen as the best way to develop the ability to paraphrase and it was also one of the students' favorites:

## Example 12

aliasta ja et pitää selittää yrittää englanniks selittää sitä sanaa ja mikä on niinku mun mielestä hirveen tärkeä siinä niinku siinä oikeessa kielitaidossa se just että selittää sen sanan mitä et muista niin jotenki muuten tavallaan että ei niinku niin hirveesti aattele et se on oikeesti aika hyvä taito (Teacher A)

In addition to Alias and pair and group discussions, a variety of other activity types were mentioned, too. Reading aloud was mentioned by teacher B. Teacher A said that since oral examinations, which will be discussed in detail further on, were usually in the form of interviews that was also sometimes practiced in class. Small talk exercises, watching videos and video clips and describing a picture or exercises where maps are used were mentioned by Teacher C:

## Example 12

tehtäviä että et niinkun reagointia small talkkia katotaan videoita tuolta netistäki löytyy paljo esimerkkejä niinku siitä vuorovaikutuksesta ja erilaisia reagointi juttuja ja mun perässä. onhan niitä vaikka kuinka paljo erilaisia kuvia ja erilaisia kortteja ja ja sitte tuota karttoja ja vaikka minkälaisia (Teacher C)

Teachers B and C also talked about listening comprehension and practicing it. In Teacher B's opinion kids nowadays heard English all the time and since there really were no such exercises for vocational school students as there is for the students in basic education and

particularly upper secondary school, she had given up teaching listening comprehension per se. Sometimes they watched video clips from YouTube but that was all:

#### Example 13

no nehän on nykyajan lapset niin nehän kattoo televisioo ja kuuntelee sitä puhetta ja sit pojat varsinki pelaa pojat on menny aikaa sitte ohi tyttöjen tässä englannin kielen osaamisessa että kyllä ne pelit ne on oppinu paljo sieltä ja sitte tosiaan elokuvia katsomalla ja mä en juurikaan täällä enää viime vuosina oo tota kuunt- . niin sanotusti mitää kuuntelutehtäviä koska ei oo mitää sopivia kuuntelutehtäviä ammatti jutuille no youtubesta jotakin oon semmosta mutta ei ne oo semmosia niinku lukiolaisille on ei ne oo semmosia et mä luotan siihen ne vapaa-aikanaan kyllä kuuntelee sitä englantia. mä oon jättäny jo vuosia sitten pois sen semmosen vaatimuksen iteltäni että minun pitäisi tarjota kuultua koska ne kuulevat sitä koko ajan kun on edelleenkin kyseessä englantia (Teacher B)

According to the teachers YouTube was in practice the only source for listening comprehension exercises, since there are very few textbooks or other such sources for activities for vocational school students. However, there are some textbooks for vocational school students that Teacher C had used with some groups and the books also contained some listening comprehension exercises:

#### Example 14

millä kurssilla millä kirjat on sitte iha cd ja sit just jotain laivamatkoja varaava asiaks niin sitte ne on ihan tosi hyviä mutta sitte tuota on niillä kursseilla mmillä ei oo kirjaa niin kuullunymmärtäminen paljohan se on sitte youtube videopätkien varassa esimerkiks mietitään melontaa niin sielähän on paljon how to paddle ja how to sitä ja tätä ja tuota (Teacher C)

The next three questions of the interview aimed at finding out what kind of challenges the students and teachers face when teaching and learning oral communication. Heterogeneous groups were mentioned by all the teachers. Not only the students' skills varied like in any other English class but in addition there could be students from very different educational backgrounds in a group. This lead to a situation where every lesson required ability grouping, which naturally adds to the teachers' workload:

### Example 15

sielä on se peruskoulupohjasia jotka tekee kahen tutkinnon opintoja eli ovat lukiossa ja sitte on myös semmosia jotka on kirjottanu tai joilla on jo toinen ammatti joo niin tietysti se taso on on... tasoerot on valtavia (Teacher C)

The teachers were also asked what kind of challenges oral communication posed for the students. Although students were used to talking about e.g. themselves and their lives, occupational vocabulary was usually limited which of course made discussing occupation related topics challenging. Also the idea of small talk was still a little strange to the students; after all it was what many foreigners appreciated. In addition, the lack of courage was a problem for many students, especially if their skills were not quite as developed as those of their class mates:

### Example 16

No kyllähän se vaikka niillä periaatteessa iha hyvä sanavarasto on mutta kyllä se kuiteski on aika suppeeta mitä niinku tuolta somesta ja missä ne nyt pyöriikää et kyllä ne semmosista yleisistä varmasti osaa keskustella omasta perheestä ja harrastuksista ja näin mutta ja sitte se mikä niiltä ehkä puuttuu on se semmonen mitä ulkomaalaiset haluais sitä small talkia sitä ei vaa niinku osata et mitä pitääkö tässä nyt jostain säästä tai mites nukuitko hyvin ja niinku että häh ei niinku kiinnosta he he ja sitte tietysti aina se että ku on niin eri tasosta sakkia et heikompi alkaa niinku jännittämään et ne ei varmaa uskalla sit sanoo mitää (Teacher C)

The third question concerned textbooks and teaching materials in general. It was discovered that actual textbooks were used only by one teacher with some groups. The books she had chosen paid enough attention to developing oral communication and had a practical approach, e.g. she told about a book she had used with students of hotel services in Swedish lessons that was built on situations that the students would encounter in their future occupation such as *incheckning* and *utcheckning* (check-in and check-out). The most important source for teaching material seemed to be the Internet. In addition, the teachers' own effort and inventiveness played a significant role, since often at least the vocabulary of the found activities had to be modified. Also colleagues were mentioned as a source of material. However, it was mentioned a couple of times that once a good activity had been designed it could be used over and over again and the amount of material grows quickly and after a couple of years on the job one would already have quite a repertoire of material and activities.

The next question in the interview was how important developing oral communication in vocational school was in the teachers' opinion. All the teachers agreed that it was the most important thing in vocational school English teaching. It was stated that the point in all teaching in vocational school was practicality and with English, the most practical skill was to learn to speak and express oneself. Therefore, e.g. teaching grammar was basically nonexistent, although there were optional courses where one could also improve grammar skills:

#### Example 17

no kyllä minun mielestä kun kerran tullaan ammattikouluun tullaan käytännöllisen opetuksen piiriin ja mikä ois sen käytännöllisempää kun oppis vähän puhumaan ja ilmasemaan itseään. Kielioppi jää kyllä toiseksi niillä mennään mitä on peruskoulussa opittu et meillä on sitte valinnaisissa kursseissa meillä on näitä kielioppi juttuja voi sitten syventää se joka haluaa. et kielioppia en opeta (Teacher B)

In addition to the fact that it was more and more common to have to communicate in English with customers, it was also pointed out that it is very possible, especially in the bigger cities and companies, that also one's co-workers would be English-speaking:

#### Example 18

No täällähän se on kaikkein tärkeintä koska täällä se on se asiakaspalvelu mikä täällä korostuu meillä kaikista eniten kun aatellaan et on hotelli ja ravintola ja matkailualaa ni asiakkaita varten iha ehdottomasti ja sitte jos mietitään kokkejaki niin se on tänä päivänä hyvinki mahdollista varsinkin jos lähet Helsinkiin tai Jyväskyläänki että se viereinen kokki siinä vieres joka työskentelee niin se ei oookkaan suomenkielinen välttämättä (Teacher C)

The next question was about the impression the teachers had of students' general attitude towards English and learning it. There was a consensus that students generally liked English and considered it useful. Sometimes there were motivational issues for one reason or another, e.g. sometimes students who were weaker did not seem really even wanting to learn the language. However, a somewhat surprising discovery was that all the teachers felt that sometimes there was also what could be described as arrogance towards learning. Many

students were very skillful and sometimes it was enough for them and they did not feel that they needed to learn or practice more:

#### Example 19

osa varmasti kuvitteleeki omasta kielitaidostaan ehkä jopa enempi kö mitä se sit loppupeleissä on et jos yhtään laitat semmosta helpompaa tehtävää niitte eteen vaikka kurssi aluks niinku nyt lämmitellään et pitää aina korostaa tää o tämmönen lämmitely että lupaan että nämä vaikeutuu loppua kohti ni. vähä semmonen jopa ylimielinenki asenne on välillä et mä kyl mä osaan nää ja nää o iha tämmösiä perusjuttuja (Teacher C)

#### Example 20

semmosta pientä on havaittavissa että ne ketkä on tosi hyviä niin ne voivat sitten ajatella jo että ei niitten oikeestaan tarttis joskus ne kysyyki et mä osaan jo että tartteeko mun täälä käydä kun ne ei ymmärrä että eihän ne nyt kuitenkaan noita ammatillisia juttuja eikä sitten tommosia mistä ne tietää mitä on vuokratyö ja tämmöset näin ei ne tämmösiä tiä eikä sitä asiasisältöä mikä niihin liittyy. et tullaan niinku sillä tavalla takki auki että mä oon valmis maisteri niin siinä sitä asenne ongelmaa on kohtuullisen paljon jo nimenomaan näissä näissä hyvissä on. ja sitten semmosta oon huomannu että kun harjotuksia tarkistetaan niin ne ei korjaa niitä et se jätetään sillee. mukavuusalueelta ei välttämättä haluta irrottautua ei haluta oppia uutta (Teache B)

The national and school-specific curricula and oral examinations were addressed by the next question. The aims of the curricula were met according to the teachers, of course some students had to struggle but mostly there were not any problems. All the teachers had an oral examination in the end of each course. Actually, in the fields Teacher B taught oral examinations were not obligatory but she did them anyway but according to her she was the only teacher in those fields who had chosen to organize such examinations. The examinations were practiced in advance and the students had a clear idea of what the situation would be like. Often the examination was a job interview where the teacher played the role of interviewer and the students played the role of interviewee but there were many other kinds of examinations too. E.g. Teacher B had sometimes asked the students of publishing and printing to give her a tour in their work space and explain the chain of production of a product. Teacher C's examinations sometimes consisted of several short tasks, e.g. how to react if a customer was about to take his/her drink outside the allowed space. The travel guide students often worked in pairs, acting as if they were leading a group of tourists.

The final question of the interview was the same statement the students were presented with in the questionnaire: “The English courses in vocational school provide the students with enough skills, so that they will be able to manage situations and function also in English in their future occupation”. The teachers agreed that again the competence level of the students was very varied. Some struggled but some were as good as those who have gone to upper secondary school. However, they believed that most students would manage in their future occupations, maybe not perfectly but well enough. Teacher C pointed out that it also depended also on the occupation, e.g. tourist guide students need the extra obligatory courses that were part of their curriculum in addition to the two courses that all vocational school students had to take:

#### Example 21

kyllä mä sanosin että joka haluaa ja yrittää ja jolla nyt on jonkinlaista kielitajua ja semmosta niin kyllä ne ainakin auttavasti selviää ja hyvät oppilaat ovat aivan yhtä hyviä kuin lukion käyneet iha huippuja parhaimmat osaa puhua englantia täysin sujuvasti jos ne suostuvat sitte vielä ammatillisia oppimaan semmosta mitä ne ei vielä tiedä niin nehä o ihan huippuja (Teacher B)

## 9 Discussion

In this chapter, the main results will be highlighted. In addition, the results concerning students will be compared with those concerning teachers. Also, the results will be compared with some of the findings of previous studies reviewed in chapters 5 and 6. In the last section, the merits and limitations of the present study will be discussed.

The overall attitude of students towards learning to communicate in English was positive, as was also found by Ahola-Houtsonen (2013). The teachers interviewed confirmed that students seem to find learning English important and pleasant. However, it was a surprise that all the teachers also agreed on that there are students who are overly confident or even arrogant about their skills. This sort of thinking has not been encountered in the previous studies. However, a logical reason for this could be that, in the end, English courses are a lot more challenging in upper secondary school where the other studies have been conducted. The only hint of this line of thinking in the results based on the questionnaire, was that some students

felt that the exercises they had been provided with were claimed to be too easy and should be more challenging to be interesting.

Another significant finding in the present study was how the students value the different aspects of language use and of oral communication. Again the results were in line with the previous studies. Firstly, speaking was clearly the most valued aspect as was also found by Tepfenhart (2011). For the majority of the students, the ability to make oneself understood was the most important aspect of oral communication. This was also found by Vaarala (2013). Furthermore, the second most important aspect in the present study was the rules and conventions in English, and the students in Vaarala's study had similar thoughts. It is noteworthy that the young people today recognize the fact that it is not enough to be able to form sentences and pronounce them correctly but that also sociocultural factors must be taken into account. This also compliments the Finnish curricula and teachers for paying attention to this important aspect of language use.

In addition to similar findings regarding student perceptions, there were similarities in teacher perceptions as well. Also the teachers were mostly concerned with communicative competence and preparing the students for their future lives. However, there were some restricting factors in both upper secondary school and vocational school. In upper secondary school, it is the matriculation examination, which still does not have an oral examination and thus it forces teachers to give plenty of time for other aspects than oral communication. In vocational school, time is also the most significant restricting factor but here for the simple reason that there are so few courses. Another challenge, that is for sure present in every ESL classroom, but is somewhat accentuated in vocational school is the heterogeneity of the learners.

The students' favorite exercise types were in line with the findings of previous studies, e.g. those of Kaski-Akhawan (2013), Green (1993) and Tepfenhart (2011). The most popular exercises are communicative in nature and more specifically, pair and group discussions are on top of the list in every study. However, as was pointed out by Ahola-Houtsonen (2013), not just any discussion will do. The topic of the discussion is very relevant. In her study, the students wanted to discuss topics they found interesting and important. In the present study, the results clearly indicated that students wanted exercises to be relevant and educational from the perspective of their future profession. This was evidently a major objective of the teachers

who participated in the present study. However, since the vocational school curricula state that students must also learn to tell about themselves and their lives, it is not possible to do only exercises that are related to their future occupations. Although students enjoy talking in general, speaking in front of the class and giving presentations did not get them excited, on the contrary they were among the least favorite exercise types in all studies.

A question that was asked both the students and teachers in the present study was whether or not they believed that the vocational school English courses had provided the students with enough skills to be able to function in their future occupations also in English. The answers were quite varied. Some believed that the courses did their job but many who thought along these lines also emphasized the significance of the students' own effort and commitment to the studies. In the study by Vaarala (2013), over 60% of the students felt that the education had given them enough tools to manage outside school. It must be remembered here, however, that in the present study the question was specifically about the situations in the students' future occupations, not outside school in general. Unfortunately a significant number of students felt that the courses were by no means enough. The teachers' opinion also was that there were quite a few students who would have required more courses and remedial instruction. Furthermore, as was pointed out by Teacher C, this also depends somewhat on the future occupation. Even if a carpenter or a plumber would survive with the things learned in the two obligatory courses, a tourist guide most certainly would not.

A most interesting finding in the present study was that even though many students said that they had not learned enough in vocational school, a significant majority of the 39 students who already had used oral communication in a work related situation felt that they had managed well in the situation. Thus it may be that some of the students who did not feel they had learned enough had not yet had a chance to use English in a work related situation. In addition, Finns are generally considered to be shy about speaking English, which may also be a factor. It is a difficult thing to objectively assess one's own skills and probably many people do much better than they think they do. Although Teacher C said that one of her goals is to develop students' courage to speak, confidence in oneself and one's skills comes only with time and practice. School can get one started but it is in the end up to students whether or not they want to develop their skills further.

The aim of this study was to get a general picture of the state of learning and teaching oral communication in vocational school. Despite the challenges with data gathering in particular the study filled its purpose fairly well. Although the results cannot be generalized to cover all vocational schools in Finland, it gave a good idea of what is happening in this one particular large vocational school. The views of the students concerning oral communication in English were mainly positive but when it came to the actual teaching there was quite lot of variation in their views. This was an expected outcome and would probably recur in a study of a larger scale. The teachers who participated in the present study gave an important point of comparison for the results gathered from the students. The Finnish school system is very lucky to have teachers who are so dedicated to their work but it is doubtful that every teacher in Finland is like them.

In addition, to achieve the goals set for the present study, it seems that the questionnaire and the interview questions were well planned. In the questionnaire, there did not seem to be any questions that were difficult to understand or had been misunderstood. Of course, open-ended questions are always a small risk because the person answering the questionnaire is more likely to skip an open-ended question than a multiple choice one. However, a clear majority of the students in the present study also answered the open-ended questions, which also gave the results some substance and depth. It was considered rather closely by the researcher whether or not to provide the teachers with a definition of oral communication. In the end it was decided that it was important to find out how the teachers themselves defined oral communication since their thoughts about and understanding of oral communication affected their other answers and, more importantly, the way they teach oral communication.

There were a couple challenges while conducting the study, as is always the case with research. The biggest one was with the collecting of the data from the students. The idea to distribute the questionnaire via email turned out to be a mistake. It would have been a lot better to collect the answers in person in classrooms, that way there would have been many more answers and the gathering would not have taken months. In addition, it probably would have enabled comparison between study fields and maybe gender as well.

A questionnaire as a data collection method also has its drawbacks, as pointed out by Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2000). One can never know how honest the person is in answering the questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaire does not give the whole truth. For

example, in the present study the students were asked what oral communication exercises they had done in their English classes in vocational school. There was a significant number of students who only mentioned one exercise type. However, the teachers interviewed all had quite a repertoire of different kinds of exercises and the students must have encountered more than one exercise type during their school years.

## 10 Conclusion

The students and the teachers both have a positive attitude towards English, learning it in general and learning oral communication specifically. Furthermore, they also recognize the importance of oral communication in English. Indeed, they agreed on the fact that it is the most important thing that can be learned. This is very good news since the status of English as a lingua franca and in Finland is significant and still growing. The challenge of course is to teach so much in such a little time. The students themselves wish that the lessons and things taught would more often be related to their future occupations and be more authentic. In addition, it could be a good idea to make oral examinations obligatory since both teachers and students find them useful and a better way of testing their skills than written tests. Maybe in the future it will be considered whether vocational school English should concentrate solely on occupational English and leave teaching the other things to basic education.

Since teaching and learning oral communication in vocational school has not been studied before, it would be of utmost importance to study the topic further. In the end, hundreds of thousands of Finns study in vocational schools every year. This study was only a light scratch on the surface of what is going on in one school, although it did achieve its goals fairly well. Thus a larger scale study, preferably a nationwide report, would be in order. It might also be instructive to make comparisons between different study fields.

Needs analysis is an essential tool in ESP. In vocational schools, English is taught for a specific purpose, a specific profession. However, the English teachers in vocational schools do not usually have actually practiced the profession their students are studying for, and therefore they lack firsthand knowledge of what their students will face when they enter working life. Moreover, the students also lack this knowledge and therefore it would be futile to have them fill a needs analysis. The people that could, however, provide a needs analysis

are the ones already in working life. Therefore a study that would gather information from people in working life could prove to be very valuable from the point of view of English teaching in vocational schools and of teaching material designing.

The present study also revealed that there is a great demand for teaching material that would be suitable for English teaching in vocational schools. Every teacher prepares some material at some point in their career but in vocational schools it is a necessity quite continually. A study on vocational school teachers', and maybe also students', opinions and wishes concerning teaching materials would be a good starting point for developing material for teaching English in vocational schools. In addition, teaching in vocational school probably could be taken better into account in teacher training programs. It might be a good idea to have even some of the trainee teachers do practical training in vocational schools.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahola-Houtsonen, T. (2013). *Learning and teaching English speaking skills at upper secondary school: the students' and the teachers' views*. Unpublished Pro Gradu Thesis. University of Jyväskylä, Department of Languages.

*Ammatillisen perustutkinnon perusteet 2014*. Finnish National Board of Education [online]. [http://www.oph.fi/saadokset\\_ja\\_ohjeet/opetussuunnitelmien\\_ja\\_tutkintojen\\_perusteet/ammattiliset\\_perustutkinnot/tutkinnon\\_perusteet\\_2014](http://www.oph.fi/saadokset_ja_ohjeet/opetussuunnitelmien_ja_tutkintojen_perusteet/ammattiliset_perustutkinnot/tutkinnon_perusteet_2014) (29 July 2015)

Bachman, L. and Palmer, A. (1996). *Language testing in practice: designing and developing useful language tests*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Basturkmen, H. (2006). *Ideas and options in English for specific purposes*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the spoken language: an approach based on the analysis of conversational English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bygate, M. (1987). *Speaking* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Canale, M. and Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics* 1 (1), 1-47.

Council of Europe (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment*. Strasbourg: Language Policy Unit.

Chavez, M. (2007). Students' and teachers' assessments of the need for accuracy in the oral production of German as a foreign language. *Modern Language Journal* 91 (4), 537-563.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.

Folse, K. (2006). *The art of teaching speaking: research and pedagogy for the ESL/EFL classroom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Green, J. (1993) Student attitudes toward communicative and non-communicative activities: do enjoyment and effectiveness go together? *Modern Language Journal* 77 (1), 1-10.

Hirsjärvi, S. and Hurme, H. (2004). *Tutkimushaastattelu. Teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö*. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

Hirsjärvi, S., Remes, P. and Sajavaara, P. (2000). *Tutki ja kirjoita*. Helsinki: Tammi.

- Hutchinson, T. and Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes: a learning-centred approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huuskonen, M. and Kähkönen, M. (2006). *Practising, testing and assessing oral skills in Finnish upper secondary schools: teachers' opinions*. Unpublished Pro Gradu Thesis. University of Jyväskylä, Department of Languages.
- Hymes, D. (1971). *On communicative competence*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- İnceçay, G. and İnceçay, V. (2010). A case study of needs assessment of English language teachers. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*. [online] 2 (2), 317-321. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042809001128> (29 July 2015)
- Kantelinen, R. (2000). Kieliopinnot ja kielenopettajantyö ammatillisessa koulutuksessa. In Kaikkonen, P. and V. Kohonen. *Minne menet kielikasvatus?: näkökulmia kielipedagogiikkaan*. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 95-100.
- Kaski-Akhawan, H. (2013). *Teaching and learning oral skills in Finnish upper secondary school: a study of students' and teachers' views on oral skills education*. Unpublished Pro Gradu Thesis. University of Jyväskylä, Department of Languages.
- Littlewood, W. (1992). *Teaching oral communication: a methodological framework*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ministry of Education and Culture. *Tilastoja ja tunnuslukuja ammatillisesta koulutuksesta*. [online]. [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/ammattillinen\\_koulutus/tilastoja\\_ja\\_tunnuslukuja/?lang=fi](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Koulutus/ammattillinen_koulutus/tilastoja_ja_tunnuslukuja/?lang=fi) (29 July 2015)
- Nation, I. and Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. New York: Routledge.
- Okamura, A. (1995). Teachers' and nonteachers' perception of elementary learners' spoken Japanese. *Modern Language Journal* 79 (1), 29-40.
- Opetussuunnitelma yhteiset tutkinnon osat*. Jyväskylän ammattiopisto [online]. <https://www.jao.fi/loader.aspx?id=26afc1d1-6f47-4a4d-a613-e3bdb7f7e657> (29 July 2015).
- Smoak, R. (2003). What is English for specific purposes. *English Teaching Forum* 41 (2), 22-27).

Tepfenhart, K. (2011) *Student perceptions of oral participation in the foreign language classroom*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of New York, Department of Curriculum and Instruction.

Tiittula, L. (1993). Suullinen kielitaito: puhutun kielen ja suullisen viestinnän ominaispiirteitä. In S. Takala. *Suullinen kielitaito ja sen arviointi*. Jyväskylä: Kasvatustieteiden tutkimuslaitos, 63-75.

Vaarala, T. (2013). *Oral competence in upper secondary school teaching: teachers and students' views*. Unpublished Pro Gradu Thesis. University of Jyväskylä, Department of Languages.

Valli, R. (2001). Kyselylomaketutkimus. In J. Aaltola and R. Valli (eds.), *Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin I*. Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus, 100-112.

Valli, R. (2001). Mitä numerot kertovat? In J. Aaltola and R. Valli (eds.), *Ikkunoita tutkimusmetodeihin II*. Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus, 158-171.

Vogt, K. (2009). VOLL as lifelong learning: matching wants and needs. In R. Kantelinen and P. Pollari. *Language education and lifelong learning*. Joensuu: University of Eastern Finland, 63-82.

Vogt, K. and Kantelinen, R. (2013). Vocationally oriented language learning revisited. *ELT Journal* 67 (1), 62-69.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 The questionnaire for the students

**KYSELY AMMATIOPISTO-OPISKELIJOILLE ENGLANNIN PUHUMISEN OPPIMISESTA JA OPETUKSESTA****1. Kuinka tärkeää englannin puhumisen taito on tulevan ammattitaitosi kannalta?**

- a) todella tärkeää
- b) tärkeää
- c) melko tärkeää
- d) ei kovin tärkeää
- e) ei lainkaan tärkeää

**2. Kuinka usein uskot joutuvasi puhumaan englantia tulevassa ammatissasi?**

- a) päivittäin
- b) viikoittain
- c) pari kertaa kuussa
- d) harvemmin kuin kerran kuussa
- e) en koskaan

**3. Kuinka paljon mielestäsi ammattiopiston englannin kursseilla harjoitellaan puhumista?**

- a) ei yhtään
- b) liian vähän
- c) riittävästi
- d) liikaa

**4. Mitä seuraavista puheharjoituksista ammattiopiston englannin oppitunneilla on tehty?**

- a) dialogi (valmis vuoropuhelu)
- b) esitelmä
- c) roolipelit/-leikit
- d) parikeskustelu
- e) ryhmäkeskustelu
- f) ääntämisharjoitukset
- g) muita, mitä?

---



---



---

**5. Mitkä puheharjoitukset ovat mielestäsi hyödyllisimpiä? Miksi?**


---



---



---



---



---

**6. Mitkä puheharjoitukset ovat mielestäsi vähiten hyödyllisiä? Miksi?**

---



---



---



---



---

**7. Millaisia puheharjoituksia haluaisit tehdä englannin kursseilla? Miksi?**

---



---



---



---



---

**8. Arvioi seuraavien kielen osa-alueiden merkitystä tulevan ammattisi kannalta**

	todella tärkeä	tärkeä	melko tärkeä	ei kovin tärkeä	ei lainkaan tärkeä
luetunymmärtäminen					
kuullunymmärtäminen					
kirjoittaminen					
puhuminen					
kielioppi					
sanasto					

**9. Arvioi seuraavien suullisen kielitaidon osa-alueiden merkitystä tulevan ammattisi kannalta**

	todella tärkeä	tärkeä	melko tärkeä	ei kovin tärkeä	ei lainkaan tärkeä
ääntäminen					
oikeakielisyys (kielioppi)					
sanaston laajuus					
sujuvuus					
se, että saa tehtyä itsensä ymmärretyksi					
englannin puhumiseen liittyvät säännöt ja käytännöt (esim. miten					

tervehditään ja puhutellaan kohteliaasti)					
---	--	--	--	--	--

**10. Miten ja kuinka usein olet käyttänyt englantia englannin tuntien ulkopuolella viimeisen puolen vuoden aikana?**

	päivittäin	viikoittain	pari kertaa kuussa	harvemmin kuin kerran kuussa	en ollenkaan
englanninkieliset kirjat ja/tai lehdet					
englanninkieliset elokuvat ja/tai tv-ohjelmat					
kirjoittaminen englanniksi (esim. kirje, e-mail, runo)					
englanninkieliset pelit (esim. tietokone-, videopelit)					
englanninkielisten ystävien/tuttavien kanssa puhuminen					
töissä					
musiikin kuuntelu					
Internet (esim. englanninkieliset sivustot, nettilehdet, sosiaalinen media)					

**11. Oletko jo käyttänyt englantia tulevaa työtäsi vastaavassa tilanteessa/ tilanteissa, esim. kesätöissä, työharjoittelussa?**

- a) Kyllä
- b) Ei

**12. Jos kyllä, käytitkö tilanteessa/tilanteissa suullista vai kirjallista kielitaitoa vai molempia?**

- a) suullista (puhuminen, kuunteleminen)
- b) kirjallista (kirjoittaminen, lukeminen)

**13. Jos kyllä, millaiseksi koit tilanteen/tilanteet? Selvisitkö mielestäsi hyvin vai oliko kenties vaikeuksia?**

---

---

---

---

**14. Uskotko, että englannin kielen asema/tärkeys työsi kannalta muuttuu seuraavan viiden vuoden aikana? Miten?**

---

---

---

---

---

---

**15. Mitä mieltä olet seuraavasta väittämästä: "Ammattiopiston englannin kurssit ovat antaneet minulle tarpeeksi taitoja, jotta selviydyn tulevassa ammatissani myös tilanteista, joissa vaaditaan englannin kieltä". Perustele vastauksesi.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Taustatiedot:**

**1. Sukupuoli**

- a) mies
- b) nainen

**2. Koulutusala:**

---

**3. Ammattiopistossa käytyjen englannin kurssien määrä: \_\_\_\_\_**

**4. Viimeisin englannin kurssiarvosana: \_\_\_\_\_**

VAPAA SANA - jos sinulla on vielä jotain sanottavaa aiheesta, kommentoi tähän:

---

---

---

---

---

---

## APPENDIX 2 Interview questions for the teachers

### HAASTATTELU KYSYMYKSET AMMATTIOPISTON ENGLANNINOPETTAJILLE:

1. Kauanko olet työskennellyt opettajana?
2. Kauanko olet opettanut ammattiopistossa?
3. Entä mitä kieliä olet opettanut? (Jos muita kuin englantia, mitä kieliä opetat tällä hetkellä?)
4. Minkä alojen opiskelijoille opetat englantia tällä hetkellä?
  
5. Mikä on parasta ammattiopistossa englannin opettamisessa? Miksi?
6. Entä haastavinta? Miksi?
  
7. Mitä mielestäsi on suullinen vuorovaikutus, mistä aineksista tai osa-alueista se koostuu?
8. Mitä mielestäsi ovat hyvät suulliset vuorovaikutustaidot?
  
9. Mitä opetettavaa suullisessa vuorovaikutuksessa on?
10. Miten suullista vuorovaikutusta voi opettaa?
11. Millaisten tehtävien kautta opetat suullista vuorovaikutusta?
12. Millaiset tehtävät koet hyödyllisimmiksi opiskelijoiden suullisten vuorovaikutustaitojen kannalta? Miksi?
  
13. Tuottaako suullisen vuorovaikutuksen opetus ao:ssa ongelmia opettajille? Millaisia?
14. Tuottaako suullisen vuorovaikutuksen oppiminen ao:ssa ongelmia opiskelijoille? Millaisia?
15. Ottavatko oppikirjat suullisen vuorovaikutuksen tarpeeksi hyvin ja monipuolisesti huomioon vai joudutko etsimään/tekemään oppimateriaalia? Miksi?
  
16. Kuinka tärkeäksi koet opiskelijoiden suullisten vuorovaikutustaitojen kehittämisen ammattiopistossa ja miksi?
17. Kuvaile opiskelijoiden yleistä asennetta englannin kieltä ja sen opiskelua kohtaan.
  
18. Ottaen huomioon, että ao:ssa on vain kaksi pakollista englannin kurssia, mitä mieltä olet OPS:in tavoitteiden realistisuudesta?
19. Kuinka suullinen vuorovaikutus otetaan huomioon arvioinnissa? Ops:ssa sanotaan että arvioinnin tulee perustua suullisiin ja kirjallisiin tehtäviin mutta toteutuuko tavoite käytännössä?
  
20. Mitä mieltä olet seuraavasta väittämästä: ammattiopiston englanninkurssit antavat opiskelijoille riittävästi taitoja, jotta he selviytyvä tulevassa ammatissaan myös tilanteista jotka vaativat englanninkieltä.
21. Onko vielä jotain, mitä haluaisit sanoa?

### APPENDIX 3 Approximate translations of the interview examples used in Results

#### Example 1

in my opinion the best part is that it is not so strictly regulated what has to be done during a course, you can go through lots of things, like if you think about upper secondary school, there you go through chapters 1-5 and this and that grammar point, so the freedom basically, and there is no rush like in secondary school probably and also in upper secondary school.

#### Example 2

the amazing chance to learn about so many different things and topics and it expands the vocabulary, during the years the vocabulary has grown to be very large

#### Example 3

they have certain periods on some topic like well-being travelling when they have teaching in Finnish and then Swedish and English are also involved and I always try to link my teaching with the topic of the period

#### Example 4

well, maybe the motiv- motivational issue, with English it's not that bad but then they have come here to learn a profession and not Finnish or foreign languages or maths et cetera, so staying focused and going to classes, absences are quite a big problem

#### Example 5

there are some books but they're very general, e.g. for travelling there are a couple of books but they don't have stuff like winter tourism, with snowshoeing or downhill skiing, that kind of material you have to prepare and find yourself and that takes years

#### Example 6

of course, good pronunciation is a starting point. It doesn't matter how well you know a language if you pronounce it badly only another Finn will understand you.

#### Example 7

vocabulary is the foundation but then also that kind of courage, one must be spontaneous, able to react and and. of course listening comprehension and also using your gestures and facial expressions and hands and a very important thing is that if you can't remember something e.g. think about paddling. and you don't remember the word rudder you can come up with an explanation. that kind of innovativeness and creativity that is important

## Example 8

well of course when we're talking about languages, vocabulary is a factor, also some knowledge on grammar is necessary because you can't just put words after one another, so some understanding on how sentences are formed and also, what's noticeable in the classroom, enthusiasm and willingness and courage to speak, even if you don't always get everything right but get your message across that's OK, just keep on babbling and talking and don't focus on the mistakes so much and that understanding, if you're being understood, then everything is fine.

## Example 9

well, exactly that you keep on speaking even if you don't always know how to say something that courage kind of and with the Finns especially, they focus so much on the errors so when I give my students an activity where they have an example in Finnish I always try to remind them to use their own words, not just focus on the paper and whether there's a comma or not, so using one's own words and that courage, just talks and if you can't remember the word in the paper you keep on going, maybe try rephrasing and not stop the activity because you can't remember one word. and also the ability to explain and rephrase

## Example 10

well, with the tourist guide students e.g. we often practice being in front of a group, wither on their own or with a partner. in front of their own group and also other groups we have many kinds of projects that represent the factors that attract tourists to Middle Finland and such. So courage is in addition to vocabulary and pronunciation one of the most important things. that they are bold enough to be there and open their mouths.

## Example 11

lot of pair activities, different kinds of group discussions, the pairs ask each other about homework and then I have tons of these dialogues that have been translated to English I've done many myself and searched for dialogues and translated this is from a book called Finish for foreigners and there English is the supporting language and they read this and then translate to Finnish and read it with their partner.

## Example 12

exercises like reacting to something and small talk, watching videos, you can find many examples on communication and interaction in the Net. also repeating after me. There is so much out there, different kinds of pictures and cards and maps and so on.

## Example 13

the children nowadays they watch TV and listen to English and then boys, boys especially play they have surpassed the girls a long time ago in English skills so those games, they've learned a lot from there and then by watching movies. I haven't really

used many so called listening comprehension activities in the past few years since there aren't any that would be suitable for vocational school stuff, well there's YouTube but they aren't the same as what's for the upper secondary school. I trust they listen to English in their free time. In years I haven't demanded myself that I should offer them training in listening comprehension because they hear it all the time

Example 14

in the course where we use books there is a CD and they have activities like booking a cruise and they're real good but in the courses where there isn't a book the Listening comprehension relies mostly on YouTube e.g. if we think about paddling there are many videos like "how to paddle" and how to this and that

Example 15

there are people from basic education who are doing a double degree i.e. are also attending upper secondary school and people who have graduated from upper secondary school or already have some other profession so the differences in the proficiency levels are huge

Example 16

well they basically have a good sized vocabulary but then it is quite narrow what they use and learn in social media and I'm sure they know the general like talking about family and hobbies and so on but what they're lacking is what many foreigners would prefer and that's small talk, people just don't know how to small talk, they're like do I have to talk about weather and did you sleep well when I really don't care and also with the differences in the proficiency levels the weaker students get stressed easily and then don't have the courage to say anything

Example 17

well in my opinion vocational school is about practical training and what could be more practical than learning to express oneself and speak English a little. grammar is clearly secondary priority, we rely on what they've learned in basic education we do have optional courses where they can polish their grammar if they want to but I don't teach grammar

Example 18

well here it is the most important thing since our focus is on customer service and if we think about the hotel and restaurant business and tourism it's definitely for the customer and e.g. cooks today, it's very possible if you go to Helsinki or in Jyväskylä too that the cook working next to you doesn't necessarily speak Finnish

Example 19

there are some who have more confidence in their skills than they actually should, like if I give them an exercise that is on the simple side e.g. in the beginning of a course I

have to explicitly tell them that this is just a warm up and promise that it'll get more challenging. sometimes that kind even a little arrogant attitude can be noticed like those are so easy and I know this stuff already

#### Example 20

I've noticed that sometimes those who are really good may think that they don't need to learn more. sometimes they even ask if they have to come to the lessons since they already know everything. What they don't realize is that they don't have the profession related vocabulary, I mean they don't know words like lease work I mean how could they know? Nor the related subject matter so they sometimes have the attitude that there's nothing more they need to learn and this specifically the problem with the good students e.g. I've noticed that when homework is being checked they don't make any corrections maybe they don't want to leave their comfort zone or learn anything new

**APPENDIX 4** Transcription conventions

keskeytynyt sa-	keskeytynyt sana tai lause/ a cut of word or utterance
<u>mitä</u>	painotettu sana/ a stressed word or utterance
.	tauko/ pause