

PRONUNCIATION EXERCISES IN TWO UPPER
SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL COURSE BOOKS

Bachelor's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Ääntämys kuuluu olennaisena osana vieraan kielen oppimiseen ja opettamiseen. Ääntäminen antaa ensivaikutelman vieraan kielen puhujan kielitaidosta, ja ymmärrettävä ääntämys on ensisijaisen tärkeää vieraskielisessä vuorovaikutuksessa. Tästä huolimatta ääntämys oli pitkään laiminlyöty osa-alue vieraan kielen oppimisen ja opettamisen tutkimuksessa. Viime vuosina kiinnostus ääntämisen oppimisen ja opettamisen tutkimukseen on kuitenkin noussut, mutta tutkimuksia oppikirjojen ja ääntämyksen suhteesta on vähän.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman päämääränä on ollut selvittää yhtäläisyyksiä ja eroja ääntämyksen esittämisessä kahdessa suomalaisessa lukiotason englannin kielen kurssikirjassa. Aineisto on koottu kahdesta syksyllä 2015 julkaistusta lukion A1-englannin ensimmäisen kurssin kirjasta. Tutkimuksessa on kerätty sekä määrällistä että laadullista aineistoa, mutta pääasiallinen tutkimusmenetelmä on ollut laadullinen sisällönanalyysi. Kurssikirjojen ääntämykseen liittyvät tehtävät on luokiteltu eri kategorioihin Tergujeffin (2010:194) mallia mukauttaen. Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että ääntämysharjoitukset edustavat aiempaa vähemmän perinteisiä tehtävätyyppejä, ja ääntämysharjoitukset ovat aiempiin tutkimuksiin verrattuna tasaisemmin jakautuneet eri tehtävätyyppien välille. Tutkimus osoittaa myös, että kirjojen välillä on merkittäviä eroja tehtävätyypeissä ja tehtävien määrässä.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is an important aspect of learning a foreign language. A certain level of pronunciation is required of an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) speaker in order to speak comprehensibly with both native and non-native speakers of English (Jenkins 2000). As pointed out by Tergujeff (2013:9) pronunciation tends to be the aspect that creates a first impression of an EFL speaker's language skills. She adds that pronunciation has an important role in face-to-face interaction as well as an effect to the image that speakers present of themselves. In other words, when communicating in a foreign language, pronunciation is an important aspect that draws the listener's attention and it affects how the listener forms an opinion of the speaker's language skills.

According to Luukka et al. (2008:64), in addition to national curricula, teaching in Finland is in practice guided by the course books. They state that course books have a significant effect on what is perceived as central and important in teaching foreign languages. Luukka et al. (2008:95) also found that 98% of the 324 foreign language teachers they surveyed often use a textbook and 95% use an exercise book in teaching. These findings are supported by Tergujeff (2013:52), who reported that 97,8% out of 103 EFL teachers she interviewed said they used a textbook in teaching. Tergujeff adds that learner interviews also suggest that course books are thoroughly studied in EFL classrooms.

Numerous studies have been conducted on textbooks in recent years (see e.g. Braslavsky & Halil 2006 and Hickman & Porfilio 2012), but the focus of textbook studies has been more on areas like ethnicity and gender representation. Less focus has been given to e.g. grammar, oral communication and pronunciation in course books. According to Derwing & Munro (2005), pronunciation in the English language has not been studied very extensively, although in recent years there has been more interest in it (Derwing 2010).

In this study I examine two upper secondary school EFL course books from Finland with the purpose of finding out what the amount of pronunciation materials in these course books is, as well as how pronunciation teaching is approached in these books. This will be done by calculating the percentage of pronunciation exercises in these books in relation to

other exercises and categorizing these pronunciation materials into 6 distinctive categories, adapted from Tergujeff (2010:194). These categories are phonetic training, read aloud, listen and repeat, rhyme & verse, spelling & dictation and ear training, and will be discussed further in section 3, The present study.

I have decided to focus on exercises and exclude other materials, such as texts, vocabularies and information boxes, from this study because of two main reasons. First, I have neither the resources to examine and categorize all other materials in these course books nor the room to study all materials to an adequate extent. Second, I do not have access to all the materials related to these course books, which include e.g. teacher's materials, learner's vocabulary apps and videos and recordings for some exercises. In further research either of these can be overcome, but the scope of this particular study is somewhat limited, and thus I have decided to narrow down my interest to only exercises.

My aim in this study is comparative rather than evaluative. Apart from discussing the differences between the course books with regard to the amount of pronunciation exercises in each category, I will not assess the course books' efficiency in teaching pronunciation. I cannot evaluate how well these books serve pronunciation teaching as I do not have knowledge on how teachers use them during classes or how well learners actually learn pronunciation when using each course book. Instead, I aim to describe the most important features of pronunciation exercises in both books as well as the differences and similarities of the books. Thus, my focus in this study is on the following research questions: *1. What is the extent to which pronunciation-specific exercises are present in these course books?* and *2. What are the most notable characteristics of the pronunciation exercises?*

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It has been suggested that pronunciation as an aspect of language learning has been largely overlooked in recent years (Derwing & Munro 2005). According to Tergujeff (2013:10), this is a negative side in the rise of Communicative Language Teaching. Tergujeff asserts that pronunciation is essential in communication and it gives the listener a first impression of

the language skills of the speaker. Next I will summarize existing research on how pronunciation is currently taught as well as how it should be developed.

2.1 Aspects of pronunciation teaching currently

Tergujeff (2013) studied pronunciation teaching in the Finnish context from various viewpoints and on different levels between primary schools and upper secondary schools. Her doctoral dissertation included four sub studies: a textbook analysis, a teacher survey, classroom observation and learner interviews. The results of her extensive study indicate that pronunciation is not taught enough in Finnish EFL classes. Moreover, English pronunciation teaching in Finland does not correspond with recent recommendations: instead of major aspects of pronunciation, such as intonation and stress, pronunciation teaching in Finland tends to focus on individual sounds. In addition, Tergujeff noted that exercises with an explicit focus on pronunciation are rare, and while phonetic symbols are taught at the primary level, they are not used to a great extent later on in teaching.

According to Derwing and Munro (2005; 2014) as well as Tergujeff (2013), one of the reasons behind the lack of pronunciation teaching may be that teachers do not get proper training. Derwing and Munro (2014) state that no training on pronunciation teaching is given to future EFL teachers. In practice, this means that EFL teachers have no help in discovering the proper way to teach pronunciation.

Tergujeff (2010:201) discusses her findings on the different kinds of pronunciation teaching materials to great extent. She states that most pronunciation teaching activities in Finnish textbooks can be classified to just three categories: phonetic training, read aloud and listen and repeat. According to Tergujeff, all of these categories are considered to be traditional, and together they amount to 80% of all pronunciation-specific activities. It is somewhat alarming, that 80% of pronunciation exercises in Finnish textbooks are considered traditional, although Tergujeff states that some newer ideas are also present, such as children's rhymes and comic strips as part of pronunciation teaching. Nevertheless, Tergujeff criticizes the textbooks she studied for not having some of the activity types introduced in recent literature in the field, e.g. games concentrating specifically on pronunciation.

Hietala (2013) studied communication skills more broadly in EFL textbooks and found that communication exercises have a tendency to focus on productive skills whilst overlooking e.g. non-verbal communication, cultural differences and pronunciation. She argues that oral skills exercises in EFL course books are too much focused on formal speech and complex sentence structures, when spoken language rarely reaches these goals. Additionally, Hietala found that pronunciation is a minor category in communication exercises, and is sometimes only present as a separate section at the end of the course books.

2.1 Studies on how pronunciation teaching should be developed

Various studies stress the importance of using phonemic transcription in pronunciation teaching. Janczukowicz (2014) recommends the use of phonetic transcription as part of pronunciation teaching, claiming that the benefits of teaching phonemic transcription to learners include ensuring that new vocabulary items are learned properly, enabling students to use dictionaries on their own and addressing pronunciation similarly on all levels of learning. What this means in practice is that if phonemic transcription is taught early on in EFL-teaching, the learners can learn pronunciation consistently with the same phonemic script on all levels, which may be less confusing than introducing different ways of learning pronunciation on different levels. Janczukowicz also argues that the teacher's use of phonemic transcription must be consistent with that of the textbook that is used in class. Janczukowicz' claims are supported by Lintunen's findings. Lintunen (2004) studied the connection between learners' pronunciation skills and their competence to use and understand phonemic transcription. Lintunen found a clear correlation between pronunciation and phonemic transcription skills and states that learning phonemic transcription may result in improved pronunciation skills. In addition, when asked after the study had finished, most of the subjects indicated that transcription teaching had improved their pronunciation.

Couper (2003) found that an explicit pronunciation syllabus greatly benefits learners' pronunciation skills. The pronunciation syllabus included focusing attention to the features of pronunciation, with which individual learners had difficulties. After that learners were explicitly instructed with these features and encouraged to practice and monitor their own

pronunciation. Couper's results indicate that an explicit syllabus has great gains and that learners believe that teachers should explicitly teach pronunciation. Couper reported that learners were enthusiastic about the way that pronunciation was taught and hoped a similar approach had been adopted earlier on (Couper 2003:66). In a later study Couper (2006) showed the benefits of pronunciation teaching. In an immediate post-test after a two-week period of explicit instruction and practice sessions on specific aspects of pronunciation the error rate of the learners dropped from 19.9% to 5.5%. This study suggests that appropriate instruction and practice lead to dramatic improvement in learners' pronunciation.

Hietanen (2012) claims that pronunciation teaching in Finland may have been too much concerned with trying to teach native level pronunciation and that the focus should instead be on comprehensible pronunciation. She argues that Finnish learners of English are more likely to need English with other non-native speakers instead of native speakers of English. Furthermore, she states that when English is used as a *lingua franca*, i.e. between non-native speakers, intelligibility is far more important than adopting a native-like accent.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this section I will first elaborate on what kind of data was used in the present study as well as how it was chosen, after which I will explain the method that was used to study the data.

3.1 Data

For the purposes of this study I have chosen two Finnish upper secondary school course books: *On Track 1*, published by Sanoma Pro, and *Insights Course 1*, published by Otava. These are the new course books from two major publishers for the first course of English as an A1-language in Finnish upper secondary schools, and schools will start using them in the fall of 2016. Therefore, they offer a representation of course books of English in their current state in Finland. At the time when data was acquired for this study, no course books had been published for the later courses of A1-English, which is why only the course books for the first course were studied. These course books include both texts and exercises as well

as separate grammar sections, which means that there are no additional workbooks or grammar books included. With limited data, I did not aim at making general conclusions about pronunciation materials in Finnish textbooks or study trends of pronunciation materials in EFL course books. Instead I aimed to examine these two new course books to find qualitative conclusions on how they approach pronunciation teaching. Moreover, my aim was not to compare the books to decide which serves the purposes of pronunciation teaching better, as I had no information on how the course books are used by teachers and what kind of results can be seen in learners who use these books.

3.2 Methods

The method of this study is data-driven classification or more broadly qualitative content analysis. First I systematically read through both course books in order to find all the exercises that were connected to pronunciation teaching. However, I did not include e.g. the texts and their recordings and listening comprehensions, where learners hear English but are not actively taught correct pronunciation. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, I looked for instances where learners were explicitly taught pronunciation and had to focus on pronunciation themselves, and secondly, I did not have access to extra material for these books, such as teacher's materials and recordings for listening exercises, so I did not have data on what kind of English and how much is spoken on the recordings. My criteria for a pronunciation exercise was that it had to include either 1) use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), 2) oral communication in English with a focus on pronunciation or 3) some other kind of explicit focus on pronunciation.

After collecting all the exercises related to pronunciation I classified them into 6 categories, that was adapted from Tergujeff (2010:194):

1. phonetic training
2. read aloud
3. listen and repeat
4. rhyme & verse
5. spelling & dictation
6. ear training

My classification is quite similar to that of Tergujeff's, with some minor alterations to make

the classification more suitable for my study as well as avoid some of the problems that the classification seemed to have. Firstly, I excluded the fifth category in Tergujeff's study, rules & instructions. This was done as it was clear that I did not have the resources to examine all the materials in the course books, but wanted instead to focus on only the exercises. Secondly, I decided to omit another category, awareness-raising activities, as well. With some major restrictions set by a limited data, it was clear that I could not have as many categories as Tergujeff. The categories in Tergujeff's study also seemed to overlap to some extent, and with a restricted data that could have affected the results in such a way that the number of exercises in each category would have been too small to draw any conclusions on. Therefore, I decided that fewer categories would in this instance produce more interesting results and differences between the categories as well as the two books.

4 RESULTS

Next I will present the results of my study and briefly comment on how they relate to each of my categories as well as the rationale of how the exercises were classified in each category, i.e. what were the characteristics of the exercise categories. The categories are discussed in order from the most common to the least common as can be seen from Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of exercise types in each category, by percentage of all pronunciation exercises in both books.

1. Read aloud	31%
2. Ear training	28%
3. Spelling & dictation	15%
4. Listen and repeat	13%
5. Phonetic training	13%
6. Rhyme & verse	0%

Read aloud

Read aloud exercises were the most common of all pronunciation-specific exercises in the two course books. Exercises were categorized as read aloud if they included reading aloud

without a communicative function. For example, reading aloud questions that are to be answered was not seen as a pronunciation-specific exercise. Instead, read aloud exercises include reading words, sentences, dialogues or texts and usually to a partner (see e.g. *On track 1*, 1D, p. 17). Read aloud was the most common category in these course books with 31% of pronunciation exercises.

Ear training

Ear training was the second most common category in the course books studied. These exercises were mostly focused on differentiating phonemes or words stress (e.g. *Insights Course 1*, 1, p. 96). As such, they normally included use of the IPA: Ear training exercises were often preceded by the phonetic symbols and example words that were to be practiced.

Spelling & dictation

Spelling & dictation included exercises where learners had to spell words or sentences to a partner who then wrote down the words or sentences they heard (e.g. *Insights Course 1*, 1, p. 93). These exercises are mostly used to teach words that have an irregular or difficult pronunciation as well as to practice spelling.

Listen and repeat

The traditional pronunciation teaching activity, listen and repeat can be as simple for the learners as saying aloud the words that they hear from the teacher (e.g. *On Track 1*, 5H, p. 61). These exercises are normally connected to vocabulary and pronunciation learning and many of the exercises in the two course books examined in this study make use of minimal pairs (e.g. *On Track 1*, 3A, p. 40).

Phonetic training

Phonetic training exercises were considered to be tasks, that include use of the IPA and have a focus on the production on specific phonemes or on difficult combinations of phonemes for Finnish learners of English. Tergujeff (2010:195) also mentions exercises such as reading text that is written solely in phonetic symbols, which did not appear in the two course books studied in this Thesis. Instead, the phonetic training exercises in the present study were almost exclusively tongue twisters (e.g. *On Track 1*, 7E, p. 79). Moreover, while Tergujeff

(2010:194) found that phonetic training was the most common category amounting to 33% of all pronunciation-specific materials, in the present study the proportion of phonetic training exercises was only 13%.

Rhyme & verse

In this study, the category rhyme & verse meant exercises that use rhyming words for example in the form of a poem to present differences in pronunciation. While rhyming minimal pairs were used to some extent, the exercises belonged clearly to the category listen and repeat. Therefore, there were not any instances of rhyme & verse in the two course books studied.

Table 2. Number of instances of each exercise type in the course books.

	On Track 1	Insights Course 1
Phonetic training	5	0
Read aloud	10	2
Listen and repeat	5	0
Rhyme & verse	0	0
Spelling & dictation	2	4
Ear training	8	3
Total pronunciation exercises	30	9
Total exercises	208	212

Table 2 shows the distribution of pronunciation-specific exercises between the two course books and the six categories. As is evident from the table, there is a significant difference between the two course books in the number of pronunciation-specific exercises. The percentage of pronunciation exercises in *On Track 1* is 14%, whereas in *Insights Course 1* the percentage is 4%. This is a considerable difference even if the data may be small. Furthermore, *On Track 1* has exercises in five of the six categories of the study, while *Insights Course 1* has exercises in three categories: it is evident that there is more variety in pronunciation exercises in *On Track 1* than in *Insights Course 1*.

Table 2 also provides information on which categories were most prominent in each book. Interestingly, while *On Track 1* has a greater amount of pronunciation exercises, they primarily belong to the three categories of traditional exercises mentioned by Tergujeff (2010:201). 66% of the pronunciation exercises in *On Track 1* were categorized as either phonetic training, read aloud or listen and repeat, whereas only 22% of the exercises in *Insights Course 1* were in one of those categories. Still, the percentage of exercises in the three traditional categories in both books is 57%, which is much smaller than in Tergujeff's study where 80% of exercises belonged to phonetic training, read aloud or listen and repeat.

5 DISCUSSION

This section is divided into two parts. In the first part I will discuss the results of this study and their implications as well as how they relate to previous studies. The second part is dedicated to evaluation of the study and the validity of the results.

5.1 Discussion of the results

Tergujeff (2010:201) found that the majority of materials on pronunciation in Finnish EFL textbooks can be classified into just three categories: phonetic training, read aloud and listen and repeat. According to Tergujeff, these three categories are considered traditional and even though traditional exercises are by no means worse than newer types, there should be variety in exercise types. The results of this study, however, show that new course books are more even with regard to distribution of exercise types: while read aloud was the most common category in this study, the two other categories, phonetic training as well as listen and repeat, were only the fourth and fifth categories out of six with 13% of pronunciation exercises belonging to each of the two categories. Interestingly, the two least common categories in Tergujeff's study (2010:195), namely ear training and spelling & dictation, were the second and third most common categories in the present study with 28% and 15% respectively.

These results suggest that the new course books examined in this study may be better designed to have variety in exercise types than the previous course books of Tergujeff's

study. The exercises seem to be more equally distributed to multiple categories, as five out of six categories had more than 10% of all pronunciation exercises. In comparison, in Tergujeff's study (2010:195) only three out of eight categories included more than 10% of pronunciation-specific activities. This implies that current course books are designed with more attention to making at least the pronunciation exercises more diverse to support different kinds of learning.

Comparison between the two course books examined for this study shows that there are some fairly significant differences between the two. While *Insights Course 1* is less focused on traditional exercise types and has some newer types as well, it has a significantly lower percentage of pronunciation exercises. In *On Track 1* 14% of all exercises are pronunciation-specific and whereas in *Insights Course 1* only 4% are. With a remarkably close number of total exercises in the course books – 212 in *Insights Course 1* and 208 in *On Track 1* – there are over three times as many pronunciation exercises in the latter book. Perhaps as a result of the greater number of pronunciation exercises in *On Track 1*, it also includes exercises from more categories than *Insights Course 1*, ultimately meaning more variety in exercise types as well.

On a more general level, both course books seem to exclude exercises on aspects of pronunciation such as intonation and rhyme completely. That is, sentence-level or suprasegmental pronunciation materials are non-existent in the course books studied. Instead, pronunciation exercises focus on singular phonemes or words. This discovery supports Tergujeff's (2013) findings on Finnish EFL teaching not corresponding with recent recommendations.

Tergujeff (2013) also noted that Finnish EFL-teaching does not make use of phonemic transcription as much as it perhaps should, as phonemic transcription is similar to the Finnish language in that it has one grapheme corresponding to each sound. Tergujeff (2013:23) states that native speakers of Finnish are familiar with each letter corresponding to each sound, which may make phonemic transcription especially useful for Finns. Both of the course books studied did however make good use of phonemic script. In addition to many pronunciation exercises including phonemic transcription to illustrate differences in

pronunciation, both books also had glossaries after study texts and in *On Track 1* at the end of the course book as well, all of which included phonemic transcriptions of the pronunciation of all words. This finding is in line with Tergujeff's (2013:40) perception that Finnish textbooks in particular do rely on phonemic transcription.

5.2 Evaluation of the study

There has to be some discussion on the limitations of this study. My focus in this study has been on the two course books, *Insights Course 1* and *On Track 1*, and the pronunciation materials within them, and I collected no data on how the books are actually used in EFL teaching in Finland. Furthermore, with the limited scope of this study, I had no access to the electronic materials, recordings and vocabulary apps that both teachers and students have access to and that provide important additional material to teaching. Therefore, conclusions cannot be drawn based on this study on how and how much pronunciation is actually taught in Finnish schools. However, this study does provide results on how much pronunciation is included in the exercises of the two new course books that were studied as well as what the prominent characteristics of pronunciation-specific exercises are.

The second notable limitation of this study is that it only included two course books. With limitations set by the schedule by which new course books were to be published as well as the schedule and scope of this thesis, there was no possibility to include more books in this study. With limited data, the conclusions that can be drawn on EFL course books in Finland are also limited. However, the first course of A1-English in Finnish upper secondary schools is supposed to revise and repeat what learners have already been taught, and thus the course books should include different exercises corresponding to how much different aspects of language have been taught. In addition, the publishers of the two course books studied are two of the major publishers of EFL coursebooks in Finland. This study does therefore provide some generalizations on how much pronunciation is included in upper secondary school EFL-textbooks. More research is nevertheless needed to draw definite conclusions on the quality of pronunciation teaching in Finnish EFL-course books.

All of the limitations in this particular study can be improved and expanded upon in further research. Especially the additional materials to these course books, such as vocabulary apps,

provide an interesting research subject. In addition, once more course books in these series are published, they can provide much data to be examined. In addition, the way that these course books are used in EFL-teaching could be studied as well as other methods of pronunciation teaching.

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