

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF NON-
NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING TEACHERS IN FINLAND**

Bachelor's thesis
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Englanti on maailmanlaajuinen kieli, ja kielen syntyperäisiä puhujia on nykyään vähemmän kuin ei-natiiveja kielen puhujia. Englannin kielen opetuksessa ei-natiiveja opettajia on aiemmin arvostettu vähemmän heidän väitetysti huonompien kielellisten taitojen vuoksi. Aihetta on tutkittu maailmalla paljon oppilaiden näkökulmasta. Aiemmat tutkimukset ovat esittäneet paljon erilaisia tuloksia riippuen tutkittujen oppilaiden kulttuurista, iästä ja kielellisistä taidoista.</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee suomalaisten alakoululaisten näkemyksiä natiivien ja ei-natiivien opettajien aksenteista opetuksessa. Tämän lisäksi tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan oppilaiden mielipiteitä ei-natiiveista kieltenopettajista. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeella keskisuomalaisesta alakoulusta. Kyselyyn osallistui 20 viidennen luokan oppilasta. Vastauksista 18 olivat oikein täytettyjä, ja niitä käytettiin tulosten analysointiin. Analyysi toteutettiin sekä laadullisin, että määrällisin keinoin.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat, että vaikka oppilaiden mieltymykset vaihtelivat natiivi- ja ei-natiiviaksenttien välillä, kukaan oppilaista ei ilmaissut negatiivisia mielipiteitä ei-natiiveja englannin opettajia kohtaan. Analyysissä kävi ilmi myös, että suurimmalle osalle oppilaista ei ollut väliä, onko heidän opettajansa natiivi vai ei-natiivi englannin kielen puhuja. Oppilaiden vähemmistö, joka ilmaisi mieltymystä toista opettajaryhmää kohtaan, totesi suurimmaksi osaksi haluavansa mieluummin suomalaisen ei-natiivin kuin natiivin opettajan.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset eroavat aiempien tutkimusten tuloksista, jotka ovat osoittaneet suurimmaksi osaksi oppilaiden mieltymystä natiiveja englannin opettajia kohtaan. On mahdollista, että kyseiset tulokset ovat Suomessa erilaisia, sillä täällä ei-natiivit englannin kielen opettajat ovat enemmistönä toisin kuin muissa maissa. Näiden seikkojen vuoksi tutkimus toimii hyvänä pohjana laajemmalle jatkotutkimukselle aiheesta.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, English has become a lingua franca of the modern world and there are over a billion English speakers globally (Crystal 2012:6). Being the language of multicultural communication, English is an essential skill for each individual and good English education is in high demand (Mazumder 2017). The competition between educational facilities and countries to have the best English education has generated a global debate between native English-speaking teachers (NEST) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNEST) over the superiority of the former over the latter. Traditionally, it has been argued that NESTs' cultural and linguistic advantage would make them more qualified English teachers than NNESTs (Medgyes 1992). This debate has formed a new research field that focuses on studying English as a Second Language (ESL) students' attitudes toward their English teachers' accents (Medgyes 1992). The studies carried out around the world suggest that the students' attitudes are dependent on their age, cultural background, and their English skills (Bolton 2008).

Finland is one of the top countries when it comes to English language proficiency (EF EPI 2018) and the majority of English teachers in Finland are non-native English speakers (Vesterinen 2016: 4). While there is some research in Finland on this topic, the studies concern only adult students of English (Graham 2013; Vesterinen 2016). The purpose of the current study is to examine the perceptions that Finnish elementary school students have of native and non-native accents and their own English teachers' accents. First, it examines whether elementary students recognize different native and non-native English accents. Second, it discusses whether students pay attention to their English teachers' accents and what kind of perceptions they have of them. The data was collected with a questionnaire and a listening comprehension. The present study will thus broaden the research field by examining the attitudes of young Finnish ESL students and offers suggestions for more future studies.

The thesis will begin with reviewing the central concepts and previous studies that have been done about the topic. This is followed by presenting the data and the methods used in this study. After this, the results will be analyzed and discussed in detail. The final chapter will conclude the study by summarizing and reviewing its results. The abbreviations NEST (native English-speaking teacher), NNEST (non-native English-speaking teacher), ESL (English as a second language) and L2 (second language) will be used throughout the study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The current chapter discusses the theoretical background of this study by looking into the main concepts and research regarding the field. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the concepts of a native and non-native English speaker and the debate that has arisen between the two. The second section presents the previous studies that have been done regarding ESL students' attitudes toward their native and non-native English teachers.

2.1 The Varying Definitions of a Native and Non-native speaker

The definition of a native speaker is inconclusive, and particularly in linguistics, researchers' views diverge recognizably. Moussu (2002) reasons this by stating that nativeness is a debatable concept since there does not exist a perfect variety of English. Kramsch (1997) discusses in her column that previously nativeness has been viewed as being a privilege acquired by birth. This view has formed a clear and distinctive quality between a native and a non-native speaker (Kramsch 1997). Therefore, she claims that alternatively nativeness should be seen from a perspective in which "native speakers are *made* rather than born" (Kramsch 1997, emphasis added). In addition to these views, Noam Chomsky (1985 as cited by Paikeday 1985:59) argues that there is no native speaker since there is no certain skill set that defines one as a native speaker. These presented arguments view nativeness as an abstract concept of which definition depends on culture, society, and the current period of time. However, being native is still oftentimes distinguished from non-nativeness.

The concept of a non-native has been widely regarded as a vague term to describe second language (L2) users of English. Paikeday was one of the first researchers to study the matter of non-nativeness as a variable term in his book "The Native Speaker is Dead!" (1985). His study viewed nativeness as merely a product of linguistics' own imagination. It was suggested that the term "proficient user" would be more suitable to describe a competent language user since it would highlight the level of skill one has in the language (Paikeday 1985: 87). The study has provoked more discussion in the field and in a more current study, Cakir (2013) further discussed the definition of a non-native speaker. He stated that non-native speakers have fluctuation from professional English education to mere oral competence in English. For example, a non-native speaker could have learned the language as a child or an adult, and they might have studied English up to an academic degree or learned it by moving to an English-speaking country (Cakir 2013). Another study that supports the previously presented claims

was done by Piller in 2002. Her study regarding highly proficient non-native speakers' linguistic identities showed that a highly proficient non-native speaker can pass as a native speaker (Piller 2002). It also highlights that the concept of a non-native speaker is vague. This fluctuation can also be seen in the pedagogical setting since different countries and schools have different demands for a non-native language teacher to be professionally suitable (Bolton 2008). For example, English teachers in Finland require a university education in order to become a teacher (Asetus opetustoimen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista Luku 3, §5). This might narrow the differences in English language proficiency between Finnish English teachers, but professional training does not require acquiring native-like oral skills.

The debated distinction between a native and a non-native speaker has provoked further question that whether or not NESTs and NNESTs professional competencies match (Medgyes 1992). Such competencies include e.g. confidence in speaking, the cultural connection to the language, and native-like expressions and vocabulary (Medgyes 1992). Medgyes (1992) was one of the pioneers concerning the debate between NESTs and NNESTs. He concluded in his study that NESTs and NNESTs both possess pedagogical and personal qualities that the other does not have. In addition, he stated that in second language acquisition it can be debated on both sides that one group would be more qualified than the other one (Medgyes 1992). As an example of this, Medgyes (1992) has stated that a non-native speaker will never be able to be on the same level of language proficiency with a native speaker. Regardless, non-native speakers having the position of being ESL learners themselves gives them a pedagogical advantage (Medgyes 1992). This advantage concerns connection to their native language and the methods of L2 learning (Florence Ma 2012).

In the discussion of labeling ESL teachers as NESTs and NNESTs, it is important to acknowledge that language users' identities are constructed mainly through social recognition and interaction with other speakers (Park 2007). These social factors are important in shaping perceptions of oneself and others (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). A major part of making assumptions through interaction is how the speaker's accent is perceived (Foon 1986). In social interaction, judgments regarding one's accent are made regardless of whether non-nativeness and nativeness are distinguished in the theoretical setting or not (Moussu & Llorca 2008). In their study of NNESTs, Moussu and Llorca (2008) discuss that through labeling language users as native and non-native, NNESTs' language identities are shaped to fit the stereotypical assumption of giving more value to NES's identities. Therefore, connecting one's accent to their

proficiency to work as an English teacher creates the issue of labeling non-native speakers as less-proficient teachers (Moussu & Llurda 2008). Claiming that non-nativeness is a limitation for a person could possibly affect the teachers' self-image as a speaker and a language teacher (Reves & Medgyes 1994).

The discussion regarding the professional competence of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) over non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) is yet to reach a conclusion. The opinions are still separated due to three reasons. Firstly, not being able to form a consensus on the definitions of a native and non-native speaker. Secondly, different views on non-native speakers' language proficiency, and finally the varying objectives that education facilities, students, and their parents have (Medgyes 1992). The importance of English in today's world and the rising number of non-native English speakers creates competition between teachers (Buckingham 2014). Many educational facilities tend to use native speakers as their advantage of marketing NESTs as the "guaranteed" proficient English teachers (Santana-Williamson & Kelch 2002). Due to the debate, a field of research has arisen to examine the perceptions that students have of their native and non-native teachers and to attempt to form an agreement on the issue whether it is possible or not.

2.2 Previous Studies on ESL students' perceptions of NESTs and NNESTs

Previous research on ESL students' perceptions of native and non-native English teachers has found the results to be scattered. The findings differ depending on students' age, nationality, and level of English skills. This chapter begins by considering studies carried out around the world followed by research done on a national scale in Finland.

The first study was conducted by Yoko Goto Butler (2007) in South Korea. The study examined the perceptions of elementary school students toward NESTs and NNESTs (Butler 2007). The participants were approximately 12-year-old elementary students. They listened to North American and Korean-accented recordings after which they filled in a listening comprehension test and a questionnaire regarding their attitudes toward the recordings. The results found a preference for the North American-accented teacher (Butler 2007). The positive attitudes that the students expressed toward the American pronunciation suggest that the students would prefer a teacher who is a native speaker of English. However, according to the results of the listening comprehension, there was no difference between students' succession rate in the test with different accents (Butler 2007).

The second study executed in Japan by Chiba, Matsura, and Yamamoto (1995) aimed to discover Japanese university students' attitudes toward different English accents. The findings showed that the students responded more positively to native than non-native accents and recognizing them was easier than recognizing non-native accents. Chiba et al. (1995) claimed that the results would relate to the students having British or American study materials and hearing more of native than non-native English. However, these results gathered from research done in Korea and Japan might differ from studies done in e.g. Europe or North America. The reason for this could possibly be that the English education, its means, and goals differ greatly from other parts of the world (Bolton 2008). For example, Moussu (2002) found in her multi-cultural study that examined ESL students' reactions toward NNESTs that whilst students from other countries responded to non-native accents in a more positive way, the Korean and Japanese students expressed negativity more frequently.

The third study was carried out in the Middle East where there are many expatriates from different countries and different languages encounter each other. Buckingham (2014) conducted research on Omani university students' attitudes toward English accents. She found that the students gave preferential ratings to NESTs but responded positively to Arab NNESTs as well since they could relate to their accent the most (Buckingham 2014). The fourth study was done by Liang (2002) in the United States concerning ESL students' attitudes toward English teachers' accents. The study examined the matter through a listening comprehension and a questionnaire. The results indicated that while students did emphasize the importance of pronunciation and accent, there were no negative attitudes found toward non-native accents (Liang 2002). After considering the studies around the world, it can be concluded that students' perceptions are indeed tied to their nationality, age, and language skills. The final study done by Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) studied the attitudes of university students toward NESTs and NNESTs. The study discovered that whilst students preferred native speakers over non-native ones, they expressed that non-native teaching evoked a less demanding and easier atmosphere.

Proceeding to the national scale of the discussion, first, some background is provided in order to objectively look into the previous studies. In Finland, the English language has the status of a foreign language and it is taught mostly as the first compulsory language (Leppänen et al. 2011: 20). Finnish people usually begin their English education in the third grade at the age of approximately nine (Opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014). Although, the policy is set to change

in 2020 when students will begin their first compulsory language-education already in the first grade of elementary school (Kieltenopetuksen varhentamiskokeilujen satoa 2018). Throughout English education in Finland, students are taught mostly Received Pronunciation and North American English- pronunciation. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the students presumably hear more non-native English in their everyday life through e.g. media. Non-native speakers are the most common English teachers in Finland which is a difference to most of the other countries in the world that prefer native English speakers as teachers (Vesterinen 2016: 4).

Studies conducted in Finland have mostly focused on adult learners of English. Graham (2013) carried out a study amongst working Finnish adult learners of English. The results indicated that adult learners would prefer NESTs as their teachers since they were seen to be more authentic users of the language (Graham 2013). The clear positive opinion toward NESTs could possibly be a result of the English teaching during the times the adult students began to study English. Before the 21st century, English teaching in Finland was mostly cognitive oriented rather than socio-cultural oriented (Jaatinen & Saarivirta 2014). There was also notably less English surrounding the learners at that time compared to nowadays. This could have resulted in adult learners not learning pronunciation as much as ESL learners in Finland do nowadays. It is possible that for this reason, adult learners gave more value to native pronunciation teaching.

Research done by Vesterinen (2016) suggests that amongst university students in Finland, attitudes are mostly convergent. The students recognized both teachers' strengths and weaknesses suggesting that the ideal solution would be co-teaching. This was a proposition previously introduced by Medgyes (1992) as well. The participants in Vesterinen's (2016) study were Finnish students majoring in English. It should be noted that the perceptions of university students might differ vastly from elementary students' due to the age difference and the level of English skills that the students have. According to the previous studies done in Finland, the attitudes seem to be convergent. However, Buckingham (2014) stated in her study that adults tend to give different accents different social ratings in which native ones are usually the preferred ones. Due to this, it is difficult to determine whether elementary students' perceptions of accent would be alike or not. Therefore, a study conducted with younger learners of English in Finland is relevant to broaden the research field.

3 PRESENT STUDY

This chapter presents the current study and the methods of conducting the study in more detail. It provides the research questions, the data and the data collection methods, and the methods of analysis including the reasons for choosing these methods.

3.1 Research aim and questions

The current study concentrates on examining the understanding and perceptions that elementary school students have of native and non-native English accents and their teachers who have them. The participants in the current study have started to learn English two and a half to five years ago, thus their language competence is presumably lower than adult students' who have previously been the primary age group in most of the studies on the topic.

The specific questions regarded in this study are as follows:

- (1) Do Finnish elementary school students identify different native and non-native English accents?
- (2) Have the students paid attention to their English teachers' accents and what kind of perceptions do they express toward them?

3.2 Data and methods of data collection

The participants in the study were 20 grade five students in an elementary school in Central Finland. The approximate age of the students was 11 years. 18 of the students had been studying English for approximately two and a half years. Two of the participants had been studying English for longer than the others: one of the students was born in England and is a native speaker of English and one had been studying English for five years.

The method of data collection that was used in the present study imitates Lambert's (1960) *matched-guise* technique that was used by Butler (2007) in his study of Korean elementary students' attitudes toward NESTs and NNESTs. In this technique, "...the same speaker uses different linguistic varieties. Thus, the interviewees evaluate the personal qualities of the individuals recorded – without knowing that it is the same person..." (Solís Obiols 2002: 3). The method in the present study is close to the matched-guise technique but it includes four different speakers instead of one. The four speakers, two NESTs and two Finnish NNESTs, were all male in order to maintain consistency in the recordings and mainly to highlight the difference in accents rather than in voices.

The current study was conducted by using two mixed methods in order to clarify the results in an objective and comprehensive manner. The students were asked to complete two tasks: a listening comprehension (Appendix 1) and a questionnaire (Appendix 2). These tasks were divided into three sections. The first section considered the students' background information and their own perceptions of what an accent is. Before moving to the second section, the concept of an accent was elaborated in order to make certain the students would have a correct understanding of accents while answering the rest of the questionnaire. In the second section, the students listened to four short recordings of the same text that had two native (*British English* and *North American English*) and two Finnish non-native accented speakers to demonstrate varying NES and NNES accents. The text was a short, grammatically and lexically non-complex story. The listening comprehension allowed students to hear and remind themselves of different accents. The third section consisted of a two-page questionnaire where the students answered both closed and open-ended questions. The questions regarded their perceptions of the accents heard in the recordings and views of their previous and current English teachers' accents. The combination of closed and open-ended questions was chosen because open-ended questions allowed students to elaborate on their views that they expressed in the closed questions. The questionnaire was in Finnish to allow the students to express themselves better.

3.3 The method of analysis

The acquired quantitative data were analyzed by combining it to tables. The results from different questions were then compared to each other to find connections and patterns in the students' answers. The qualitative data received from the open-ended questions was coded and interpreted following the principles of content analysis. With content analysis the data that is in different forms can be processed in a comprehensive and accurate manner (Dörnyei & Taguchi 2009: 117). The analysis first consisted of discovering key elements within each students' response. Broad categories of these elements were then created for further description of the data and they were compared to each other to see if connections occurred between the elements (Dörnyei & Taguchi 2009: 117). The current study was analyzed by using these methods since they allow the researcher to execute a thorough and reliable analysis by concentrating on all of the data that has been provided.

4 ANALYZING THE FINDINGS

In this section, the results of the questionnaire will be discussed. Firstly, the findings on the students' definitions of accents and identifications of accents overall and accents heard on the tapes will be presented. Secondly, the questions of students' perceptions of their English teachers' will be introduced. Out of the 20 students who participated in the study, 18 completed the questionnaires correctly and these answers were used in the analysis of the results.

4.1. Describing and recognizing accents

Eight of the 18 students were able to give their own description of an accent in a manner that to some extent imitates the official definition of an accent. The definition in this case is published by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary:

a distinctive manner of expression: such as a :a way of speaking typical of a particular group of people and especially of the natives or residents of a region (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary 2019)

All of the eight responses in the study were somewhat similar in their description claiming that an accent is: "Tapa puhua/ääntää" (*"A way of speaking/pronouncing"*) with an additional explanation e.g. "Tapa ääntää eri maissa englantia" (*"A way of pronouncing English in different countries"*). One out of the 18 students answered that accent is "luonnetta, tunnetta, äänen muuntelu eri sävyisiksi" (*"character, feeling, changing voice to different tones"*). The remaining nine answered, "En tiedä" (*"I don't know"*). This concludes that nearly half of the respondents were able to define what an accent is, while over half were not.

The second section surveyed whether the students recognized accents that they heard on the tapes. Out of 18 students, four recognized all the accents on the tape, nine recognized one to three accents, and five of the students did not recognize any of them. The accent that was recognized most frequently was the British accent, the second was the first Finnish non-native, the third accent was the North American accent. The least recognized accent was the second Finnish non-native accent. As can be seen in Table 1, a correlation between the students' descriptions of accents and them recognizing different ones was found. Students who described accents in a correct manner recognized either all or at least one accent on the tape. Students who answered "I don't know" or gave an incorrect answer were more divided in recognizing accents: five of the students did not recognize any and the remaining five recognized 1-3 accents.

Table 1. The correlation between students' descriptions of accents and recognizing them

	Recognized all accents	Recognized one to three native/non-native accents	No recognition of accents	Total
Correct description	3	5	0	8
"I don't know"	1	4	5	10
Total	4	9	5	18

Before moving on to the students' perceptions of their teachers' accents, it is relevant to discuss the students' judgments of the native and non-native accent they heard on the tapes. This analysis will give more insight into the following analysis of the students' perceptions of their teachers' accents. Overall, the students' opinions of the accents on the tapes were divided. Most students favored the native accents but there was only a minor difference to students preferring the non-native accents. The North American accent was the most favored accent (9 votes) followed by the two Finnish accents (5 votes for the first and 3 votes for the second voice). The least favored accent was the British accent (3 votes).

Mostly the difference can be seen when comparing students who recognized accents and the students who did not: most of the students who recognized at least one accent favored either the British or the North American accent. In turn, two of the students who did not recognize accents favored either of the Finnish non-native accents and the rest three favored the North American accent. Two students favored both of the native accents and one student favored both of the non-native accents.

After choosing their favorite accent from the tapes, the students were asked to give reasons to their choices. These varied quite vastly. The students who preferred the native accents claimed that the native-accented voices on the recordings were "clear" (4 mentions), "easy to understand" (3 mentions), "normal" (2 mentions), "nice" (2 mentions) and "fancy" (1 mention). The two students who had been studying English for more than two and a half years gave different reasons for their preferences. The student who had been studying English for five

years favored both native accents saying that they are “kivempia kuin suomiaksentti” (“*nicer than the Finnish accent*”). The native English-speaking student stated that they favored both native accents because they are closest to their own accent. In turn, the students who preferred the non-native Finnish accents claimed that they were their favorite because they were “nice” (3 mentions), “easy to understand” (3 mentions), “Finnish” (2 mentions), “like my own accent” (1 mention) and “fun” (1 mention).

The next question after choosing their preferred recordings was for the students to choose and give reason to their least favorite recordings. Students who favored the native English recordings disliked the non-native Finnish voices the least. For example, one student who favored both native accents claimed that they did not favor the Finnish accent because it was not “real English”. Contrary to that, students who favored the non-native Finnish voices were the most displeased with the native ones. However, a few exceptions from these answers were found. There were two students who favored the British accent but found the North American accent as the most displeasing one. The reason given for this by both of the students was that the North American accent was “boring”. In addition to this, there was one student who favored the non-native Finnish accent but reported that none of the recordings were bad in their opinion.

4.2. Students’ perceptions of their teachers’ accents

Next, the second research question regarding the students’ perceptions of their teachers’ accents and whether they have paid attention to them will be examined. In this section, the analysis will be drawn from the closed and open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

All the participants in this study stated that they have only had Finnish NNESTs as their English teachers. When asked about the positive and negative aspects of NNESTs’ accents, none of the students expressed negative perceptions toward them. Five of the students did not answer the question or answered, “I don’t know”. Of the remaining 13 students, six stated that they liked their teachers’ accents because they are “nice” and “clear”. Four of the students said only that they liked the teachers’ accents but did not give a reason for their answer. Two of the students said that they liked their teachers’ accents because their English is more familiar to them. One student claimed that they have never paid attention to their teachers’ accent. Most of the students expressed opinions and explanations for their choices in this section. This would insinuate that the students have paid attention to their teachers’ accents and were able to give reasoning for their answers as well.

The students were asked about their preference for a NEST or a NNEST as their own English teacher. Ten of the 18 students stated not to have a preference. Six of the remaining eight claimed to prefer a NNEST and only two preferred a NEST. Most students who answered not having a preference said that “sillä ei ole väliä” (“*it does not matter*”). Two of the students said that they prefer a NNEST since their English accent is closer to their own, thus easier to understand. One student said that they prefer a NNEST because “jos en ymmärrä jotain niin opettaja voi selittää sen minulle niin että ymmärrän sen suomeksi” (“*if I don’t understand something the teacher could explain it to me in Finnish*”). The students who claimed to prefer a NEST said that “sitä on kivempi kuunnella” (“*it is nicer to listen to*”) and “oppisin enemmän” (“*I would learn more*”).

The results appear to be somewhat divergent from each other. The students’ descriptions of accents and their preferences varied greatly, and the possible reasons will be discussed in the following section. However, the students seemed to have paid attention to their teachers’ accents. Furthermore, they did not state to have any negative perceptions of NNESTs, which is a result that differs from Butler’s (2007) research also conducted with elementary students. The students’ preferences of a NEST or a NNEST were also divided between not having a preference and majority of the rest stating a preference for a NNEST.

5 DISCUSSION

This section aims to discuss and explain the findings from the collected results. This will be done by reflecting the results to the previous studies and discussing the possible limitations that might affect the results of the study.

The descriptions of an accent that the students gave were divided between answers that were close to the correct description and the students not being aware of what an accent is. Most of the students have been studying English for only two and a half years in which time mostly the basic features of English and pronunciation teaching are introduced (Tergujeff 2012). Familiarizing students with different accents usually occurs later in students' English language education in Finland (Opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014). However, it was not clarified whether or not the students in the current study had been taught about different accents. Because of this, it is difficult to state that the students' descriptions rely on this aspect. Additionally, it can be assumed that some of the students might have also learned about accents outside their English lessons. This could be one of the reasons behind the students' knowledge of accents. There are multiple factors in and outside the classroom that might affect the students' awareness of accents. In this study, the presented factors above are highly probable to have an effect on the results.

Comparing the results of the students' ability to recognize accents and their preferences for different recordings, it is visible that the students who recognized accents were not in favor of the non-native accent. The opinions of the students who did not recognize accents were more divided between the North American and Finnish accents. The variation between the students shown in this study differs from previous studies in which the students' responses have been overall more convergent (Chiba et al. 1995; Liang 2002; Butler 2007; Buckingham 2014). It is possible that these results differ for the reason that the students who were not familiar with different accents reacted to the voices that they heard on the tapes rather than the accents. The matched-guise technique used by Butler (2007) could have limited the chance of this affecting the students because the voice would have been the same in each recording. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that this factor assuredly has an effect on the students' preferences. A thorough consideration of the other responses and studies must be considered as well.

The rationale that the students gave for their preferences gives more insight into the results. They also explain more of the reasons behind the certain accent preferences and if the difference in the speakers' voices affected the students' answers. The explanations of their choices were somewhat similar regardless of whether the students preferred the native or the non-native accent. The difference between these groups could be related to Buckingham's (2014) point of favoring the accent that is the most familiar to one. The students who recognized different native accents are likely to find them to be familiar to them, thus also more pleasant and easier to understand (Buckingham 2014). It is possible that the reason students preferred the native accents could be found from the exposure of native language they encounter outside the classroom, e.g. through media or video games (Leppänen et al. 2011: 60, 115-117). Exposure to native English increases the students' familiarity with the native accent, therefore they might find it more favorable.

In turn, the students who preferred non-native accents are possibly more familiar with the non-native accent. This could be the result of hearing non-native English, for example at school, because of the majority of English teachers in Finland are non-native speakers. However, other possible reasons for this must be considered as well since it is difficult to determine what a Finnish non-native accent sounds like and there could be many variations between teachers' accents. In Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2005) study, the participating students expressed that listening to a teacher who shared their first language was easier and less demanding. Therefore, it is possible that this phenomenon occurs in the responses of the current study as well. Due to the reasons stated in the previous two paragraphs, it could be argued that the difference in voices made little difference for the students' responses and the reasons for favoring certain recordings were based on other factors.

When asked about the positive and negative aspects of students' NNESTs' accents, none of the students expressed negative perceptions toward them. These results differ from the other study done by Butler (2007) with elementary students and from the other studies conducted abroad and in Finland previously (Buckingham 2014; Chiba et al. 1995; Vesterinen 2016). These results are possible to relate to the previously mentioned difference of other countries' school systems preferring NESTs over NNESTs (Bolton 2008; Buckingham 2014). The constant exposure of NNESTs in Finland makes the students tolerant toward the non-native accent and possibly induces more positive than negative attitudes toward the teachers. However, it should

be noted that conducting a study with a bigger participant group and collecting data from different parts of Finland could possibly offer different results for this study.

In this discussion, it is relevant to consider also if the students feel that the teachers' accents matter regarding their understanding and language learning or if they even have paid attention to the accents. The students did not express any negative perceptions toward NNESTs' accents and over half of the students did not state a preference for their teacher's accent. However, the students did seem to have paid attention to the accents since they gave reasonable examples and reasoning for their answers. Therefore, these factors would implicate that many of the students do not see a significant difference between NESTs and NNESTs rather than implicating that the students do not care about the accents overall.

The preferences that the rest of the students did express were mostly related to the previously mentioned familiarity. Only one opinion differed by stating that they prefer the NEST since their accent is more pleasant to listen to. These factors would suggest that most of the students find NNESTs as equally proficient with NESTs regardless of their accent which corresponds with arguments presented by Medgyes' (1992) in his study. In addition, Lasagabaster & Sierra (2005) argued in their study, that in different phases of language learning students would prefer or need teachers with different strengths. For example, when learning grammar, it would be beneficial for the teacher to be able to connect the students' native languages with the one they are learning. In turn, when learning about the culture of the language, it would be more beneficial for the teacher to come from that culture. Therefore, this could be one of the reasons for these results differing from the other studies previously conducted in Finland.

6 CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to discover how Finnish elementary school students describe and recognize different native and non-native accents. In addition, the study was set to find out if the students have paid attention to Finnish NNESTs accents and if so, what kind of perceptions they have of them. The main findings of this study show that Finnish elementary school students have paid attention to their teachers' accents. Moreover, the students do not have negative perceptions of Finnish NNESTs. This could be the result of the exposure of non-native accents in the students' English education or because overall the attitudes toward non-native accents and different English varieties are becoming more tolerant due to the global state of the English language (Tergujeff 2012). In the future, further research on the reasons attitudes around the world differ would be relevant to broaden the research field.

Another significant difference to the previous research was that half of the students had no preference toward a NEST or a NNEST and the majority of those who did, preferred a NNEST. The students did not claim one teacher to be better than the other but recognized the strengths of each one. The reason for their preferences that some of the students' stated and Buckingham (2014) discussed in her study could be the familiarity with the certain accent. Since the students have only had NNESTs as their teachers, it is probable that most of the students who had a preference, expressed it toward the NNEST instead of the NEST. The results also differed from the other studies conducted in Finland (Vesterinen 2016; Graham 2013). This could be related to the age difference or Lasagabaster and Sierra's (2002) point of students needing teachers with different characteristics in different phases of their language learning.

The study suggests that the students do find native accents more favorable; yet, there were few negative attitudes found toward non-native Finnish accents. The students also expressed that while their attitudes toward the native recordings were more positive, there were no negative attitudes found toward their previous or current English teachers' accents. This is why it should be noted that while this study concentrated on examining teachers' accents, there are many additional factors and attributes that create to combine whole image of the teacher such as their physical attributes or gestures (Cargile et al. 1994).

The English language is constantly changing, and the growing number of non-native speakers will contribute to making the change even more rapid (Lasagabaster & Sierra 2005). The

perceptions that the students in the current study expressed are possibly a sign of change in the attitudes or possibly an example of an instance where non-native teachers are perceived equally as important as native teachers are. The small number of participating students in the current study limits the reliability of the results in the sense that a bigger participant group might have offered different results. Adding to that, using the matched-guise technique would offer the students the opportunity to focus their attention to only the accent rather than possibly being affected by the difference in the speakers' voices. The listening comprehension could have been completed as a graded test as Butler (2007) did in his study. It would have allowed to examine also whether students' listening comprehension skills affected their attitudes. For these reasons, this study opens the discussion for further research on the topic.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The text for the listening comprehension

A day with my grandma

On the twelfth (12th) day of February my grandmother and I went to the movies to see “The Beauty and the Beast”. I really liked it, but I like horror movies more.

After the movie we went to a restaurant. I ordered a glass of water and a hamburger. Hamburgers are my favorite food.

At three o’clock my grandmother took me back home. It was a very nice day.

Appendix 2: The questionnaire

Kyselylomake

Kevät 2019

Sara Turunen
Jyväskylän yliopisto
Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos

1. Olen ____ -vuotias
2. Olen opiskellut englantia ____ vuotta
3. Minun mukaani aksentti on:

* * * * *

Seuraavaksi kuulet lyhyen tekstin eri ihmisten ääneen lukemana. Kuuntele tarkasti ja vastaa sen jälkeen seuraaviin kysymyksiin (Ympyröi tai alleviivaa vastauksesi) :

4. Ymmärsin äänitteillä luetun tekstin: Hyvin Kohtalaisesti Huonosti En ollenkaan
5. Tunnistin erilaiset aksentit äänitteistä: Hyvin Kohtalaisesti Huonosti En ollenkaan
6. Mitä aksentteja tunnistit äänitteistä? (Mikäli et tunnistanut, voit siirtyä seuraavaan tehtävään)

7. Mitkä aksentit olivat mielestäsi helpoimpia tunnistaa ja ymmärtää? Miksi?

8. Laita äänitteiden aksentit paremmuusjärjestykseen (1= paras, 4= huonoin)

Esimerkiksi näin:

A	B	C	D

A	B	C	D
2	3	4	1

9. Miksi valitsemasi äänite oli mielestäsi paras?

10. Mistä et pitänyt huonoimman äänen kohdalla?

Mieti englannin opettajia, joita sinulla on ollut / on tällä hetkellä.

11. Oliko/onko heidän äidinkielenään suomi, englanti vai jokin muu kieli?

12. Mikäli sinulla on ollut opettajia, joiden äidinkieli on suomi, mistä olet pitänyt tai et pitänyt heidän aksentissaan?

13. Haluaisitko mieluummin englantia vai suomea äidinkielenään puhuvan englanninopettajan? Ympyröi vastauksesi.

Suomea Englantia Ei väliä

14. Miksi?
