

FINNISH 9th GRADERS' VIEWS ON ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AND RALLY ENGLISH

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Englannin kielen asema Suomessa on vakiintunut, vaikka sitä pidetään edelleen vieraana kielenä. Suomalaisten englannin kielitaito on myös varsin korkealla tasolla. Kuitenkin joillekin suomalaisille englannin suullinen kielitaito ja ääntäminen voivat tuottaa vaikeuksia. Suomen kielessä on suomen vaikuttamalle englannin kielen ääntämiselle oma käsitteensä: rallienglanti. Rallienglanti on Suomessa yleisesti tunnettu käsite, mutta siitä on niukalti aiempaa tutkimusta. Tämän maisteritutkielman tavoitteena oli tarkastella rallienglantia ilmiönä erityisesti siitä näkökulmasta, millaisia näkemyksiä yläkoululaisilla on englannin ääntämisestä ja rallienglannista. Tutkimuksessa pyrittiin muun muassa kartoittamaan rallienglannin käyttötarkoituksia ja käyttötilanteita. Näkemyksien subjektiivisuudesta huolimatta niiden tutkiminen on hyödyllistä, sillä ne vaikuttavat oppimiseen ja siihen, miten kielen käyttäjiä kohdellaan.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin kyselytutkimuksena, johon osallistui 50 yhdeksäsluokkalaista erästä keskisuomalaisesta koulusta. Ennen kyselytutkimuksen toteutusta kysely pilotoitiin toisen koulun yläkouluryhmällä. Kysely sisälsi sekä avokysymyksiä että strukturoidumpia kysymyksiä, jotka analysoitiin kysymyksestä riippuen temaattisella analyysillä tai kuvailevan tilastotieteen avulla. Tutkimuksen pienen osallistujamäärän vuoksi sen tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä, mutta vastausten pohjalta oppilaiden näkemykset englannin ääntämisen oppimisesta, opetuksesta ja rallienglannista olivat enimmäkseen positiivisia. Rallienglanti oli oppilaille tuttu käsitteenä ja rallienglannin tarkoituksellisesta käytöstä annettiin erilaisia esimerkkejä. Vastauksissa korostuivat ennen kaikkea rallienglannin käyttö huumorimielessä sekä läheisten ihmisten kuten perheen ja ystävien kanssa.</p>	
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FIGURES

FIGURE 1 English pronunciation being covered in English oral skills teaching	28
FIGURE 2 Students being encouraged to develop oral skills at school	28
FIGURE 3 Perceived English proficiency	29
FIGURE 4 Perceived ease of English pronunciation.....	30
FIGURE 5 Understanding different spoken varieties of English.....	31
FIGURE 6 Anxiousness to pronounce English in the classroom	31
FIGURE 7 Native-like English pronunciation as a learning goal	32
FIGURE 8 Comprehensibility as a pronunciation learning goal	33
FIGURE 9 Deliberate use of Rally English	34
FIGURE 10 Deliberate use of Rally English when one is unsure of the word's pronunciation	35
FIGURE 11 Encountering Rally English related humour	36
FIGURE 12 The perceived intelligibility of Rally English.....	36
FIGURE 13 Understanding a person speaking English with a strong Finnish accent	37
FIGURE 14 The assumed intelligibility of Rally English to non-Finnish speaking people	38
FIGURE 15 Perceived oral proficiency of a person speaking English with a Finnish accent	39

TABLES

TABLE 1 In what kinds of free time situations do you encounter Rally English?	24
TABLE 2 In what kinds of free time situations do you encounter Rally English?	25
TABLE 3 What has been a difficult thing for you to learn that is related to English pronunciation?	26
TABLE 4 In what ways has English pronunciation been taught to you during your time in basic education?.....	27

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
2	ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN FINNISH EDUCATION	4
	2.1 Learning objectives and assessment of oral proficiency in Finnish basic education	4
	2.2 Pronunciation models and goals	6
3	SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF PRONUNCIATION.....	9
	3.1 Researching people’s views and beliefs	9
	3.2 Accent and identity	10
	3.3 Relevant previous research	11
4	RALLY ENGLISH EXPLAINED THROUGH CONTRASTIVE PHONETICS.....	14
	4.1 Intonation and word stress	14
	4.2 Letter-sound correspondence	15
	4.3 Differences in vowel sounds	15
	4.4 Differences in consonant sounds.....	15
	4.5 Dental fricatives and affricates	16
5	THE PRESENT STUDY.....	17
	5.1 Research aims and questions.....	17
	5.2 Data and methods	18
	5.2.1 Participants.....	18
	5.2.2 Pilot study.....	19
	5.2.3 Data.....	19
	5.2.4 Methods of analysis.....	20
	5.2.5 Ethical considerations	21
6	RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	23
	6.1 Participants’ free time English use	23
	6.2 Perceptions of pronunciation learning and teaching.....	24
	6.2.1 Pronunciation learning	24
	6.2.2 Pronunciation teaching in Finnish basic education from students’ perspective	27
	6.3 The participants’ perceptions of their own English pronunciation.....	29
	6.3.1 Students’ oral proficiency and anxiousness to speak English	29
	6.3.2 Students’ pronunciation learning models & goals	32
	6.4 The contexts of using or encountering Rally English	33

6.5	Rally English from the perspectives of intelligibility and perceived oral proficiency	36
7	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	40
7.1	Summary of the results	40
7.2	Review of the research process and concluding remarks	42
	REFERENCES.....	44
	APPENDICES	

1 INTRODUCTION

In Finland, English is considered a foreign language even though it is widely used in for example media, education, technology, and commercial advertising (Taavitsainen & Pahta 2008: 30). In recent years, English has been studied more in basic education compared to Swedish, which is the second official language in the country (Official Statistics of Finland 2020). Even the second-largest city in Finland, Espoo, has decided to make English one of their official service languages (Mykkänen 2021). Thus, the foreignness of English in Finland is debatable and the debate has been ongoing for some time (Leppänen et al. 2008). Some may even argue that English can be considered a third language in the country (Sjöholm 2003; Leppänen et al. 2008). English has therefore cemented its position in Finnish society which has in part affected the English oral proficiency of Finns.

A Swedish language instruction firm Education First, or in short EF, produces a yearly test called English Proficiency Index (EPI), which measures the reading and listening skills of the test takers. The data consists of 2,000,000 test takers around the world taking the EF Standard English Test (EF SET) or one of their English placement tests in 2020 (EF 2021: 32). In the 2021 EPI, Finland was in the very high proficiency category and ranked ninth from the total of 112 countries (EF 2021: 6). It should be noted that the test takers are usually keen to learn English and are curious to see their skill level. This might skew the results higher or lower compared to the general population. However, Helsinki was the third best among the city scores which gives more support to the claimed very high proficiency (EF 2021: 8). Even though the status of English in Finland is well established and Finnish people are highly proficient in English, Finns might feel uncertain with their English pronunciation.

Moreover, Finnish people can be critical of other Finns speaking English. Finnish has the words *tankeroenglanti* and *rallienglanti* 'Rally English' to describe a thick, clearly noticeable Finnish accent while speaking English. Both of these words carry humorous or even denigrating connotations. Rallienglanti originates from the way some Finnish

rally drivers have pronounced English in their sports interviews (Yle News 2022). Similar terms referring to the first language influenced English pronunciation, usually with disparaging connotations, include the Dutch *steenkolenengels* “coal English”, Italian *inglese maccheronico* or “macaroni English” and the Japanese *Engrish* (Peterson 2022a: 268). The existence of these words may indicate that criticising first language influenced pronunciation of English is not solely a Finnish social phenomenon. Next, I will present the research motives and introduce in brief the research I conducted.

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into Finnish secondary school students’ views of their own English pronunciation. In addition, the research will elaborate on their views about the Finnish-influenced way of speaking English, often referred to as Rally English. It should be noted that in this research, I tend to use Rally English instead of Finnish-influenced way of speaking English to keep it short and I do not support belittling or mocking one's own or others’ language skills in no shape or form. The term Finglish has also been used to describe Finnish-influenced English but its emphasis is more in how English affects how Finnish is spoken, especially among North American Finnish immigrants and their descendants (Nolte 2011). Finglish can also have some words that are adopted from the other language or words that have combined elements from both of the languages. To clarify, in Rally English, the roles are reversed and Finnish language pronunciation affects how English is spoken.

As the topic is not widely researched, the need for this kind of research is significant. Dufva and Sajavaara (2001) researched Finnish-English in their article through contrastive phonetics. In addition, there has been a growing interest to research English oral proficiency teaching in Finland (Tergujeff 2013; Tergujeff et al. 2017). Before the aforementioned, Morris-Wilson (1999) published their doctoral thesis about “Attitudes towards Finnish-accented English”. This thesis consisted of two studies, one focusing on speech error evaluation and the other on speaker evaluation: mainly British or Finnish participants guessing the speakers’ age and evaluating personality traits using adjectives based on the accentedness of the speech sample. The second study is more sociolinguistic in its nature, which is also the emphasis I adopted in my research. I will discuss some of these studies and others in more detail in the background chapters of the thesis.

Even though views are personal and subjective, they are still worth researching as they affect learning and the way language speakers are treated. Views are widely studied in foreign language research but views about Rally English are still a quite unexplored phenomenon. One of the contributing factors for choosing this topic was influenced by my bachelor’s thesis interviews, in which teachers pondered whether

students deliberately use Rally English to hide their anxiousness to speak English in the classroom. These research interviews and several informal coffee break discussions amongst teachers and student teachers sparked my interest to investigate Rally English even further. I thank you all for the inspiration.

2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN FINNISH EDUCATION

This chapter introduces the English curriculum in basic education from the perspectives of oral skills, curricular aims, goals, and assessment criteria. In addition, it presents some possible pronunciation models and goals students may employ in their spoken language learning. The chapter discusses English oral proficiency and its learning in Finland and thus, the term oral proficiency needs to be introduced. Canale and Swain (1980; cited in Tergujeff & Kautonen 2017: 13) have presented a model of communicative competence, which consists of three groups of competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and strategic skills. Linguistic skills consist mainly of lexical, morphological, phonological, and syntactic skills, or what vocabulary the language has and how word and sentence formation as well as pronunciation work in the language. Sociolinguistic skills mean the ability to use language in different contexts: social norms regarding conversation and different registers need to be taken into account when conversing with others. Strategic skills in this model encompass the linguistic and bodily communication strategies. The model has been cited quite often as it is fairly comprehensive and it also takes into account body language, which has a significant role in spoken communication (Tergujeff & Kautonen 2017: 13). It should be noted that my theme, pronunciation, is a small subcomponent in oral proficiency.

2.1 Learning objectives and assessment of oral proficiency in Finnish basic education

In Finland, compulsory education consists of grade levels from 1 to 6 in primary school, grade levels from 7 to 9 in lower secondary school and the beginning of secondary level education. Compulsory school attendance begins in autumn during the year in which a child turns 7. Recently, compulsory attendance in school was increased so that the compulsory education lasts until one has turned 18 or has

graduated from upper secondary level education, usually either vocational school or upper secondary school. The new compulsory education act came into effect in spring 2021 (Opetushallitus n. d. A.; Compulsory Education Act, 2020). The term basic education refers to the aforementioned 9 grades combined ending in lower secondary school. In Finnish basic education, English has been taught for decades. Due to the updated basic education curriculum, all Finnish pupils start studying their first foreign language or the second national language by the spring of their first school year (OSF 2019). The first foreign language is quite often English even though other languages may be available. As mentioned in the introduction, English has surpassed Swedish as the most studied language right after Finnish (OSF 2019).

The most recent National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, or in short NCCBE, was published in 2014. The NCCBE has set learning objectives for oral proficiency, even though the term has not been clearly defined in the curriculum (Tergujeff & Kautonen 2017: 13). However, the curriculum states the objectives “interaction skills”, “language-learning skills”, “text interpretation skills” and “text production skills”, which present aims for oral proficiency learning (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014: 596). It should be noted that even though the curriculum uses the word “text”, it refers to it in a multimodal way, meaning that it includes both spoken and written pieces of language interpretation and production. This can be noticed when the curriculum mentions the aim to “... guide the pupil to produce both spoken and written text for different purposes on general topics or topics meaningful for the pupil while paying attention to the diversity of structures and good pronunciation” (NCCBE 2014: 596). One of the first aims mentioned in the English as a foreign language curriculum is the aim “... to encourage the pupil to participate in discussions on diverse topics ...” (ibid.: 596). The curriculum also states the aim to “... guide the pupil towards positive interaction where delivering the message is most important” in its language study skills objectives (ibid.: 596).

In addition, the core curriculum mentions the phenomena of informal learning and the status of English as a global language. According to the curriculum, Finnish students use English often in their free time, which should be taken into account when planning teaching and while choosing contents for learning (NCCBE 2014: 594). The teaching of English should also consider the “distribution of English language and its status as a means of global communication”. The curriculum also refers to English as a lingua franca (ibid.: 596). The term lingua franca refers to a language that is used between L2 speakers that do not otherwise share a common language (Seidlhofer 2005: 339). During English lessons, stating the wide use of English nationally and

internationally for students is also relevant, as it can help in the development of intrinsic motivation for learning the language.

The core curriculum presents the assessment criteria for English language and what a student should be able to do in order to receive a good grade in their final assessment (grade 8, grading from 4 to 10). In the case of English, the final assessment is done in the spring term of ninth grade. The grade 8 criteria for English, especially from the oral proficiency aspect, include that the student "... is able to act in interactive situations while encouraging others", is able to "... communicate, to participate in discussions, and to express his or her opinions fairly effortlessly in everyday communication situations" and can "... apply a number of basic rules of pronunciation also in expressions that have not been practised" (NCCBE 2014: 600). These assessment criteria aim at B1.1 level language skills. These criteria are partly based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which investigates spoken language skills from the points of view of range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence (Council of Europe, n. d.). The Finnish National Board of Education has also produced a separate language skill assessment scale or *taitotasoasteikko*, where B1.1 is referred to as "toimiva peruskielitaito" (Opetushallitus n. d. B: 5), which could be translated in English as "working basic level language skill". The ideas and teaching objectives of the curriculum will be compared with pronunciation models and goals presented in the next subsection.

2.2 Pronunciation models and goals

In this subsection, I will present some pronunciation models and pronunciation goals students may choose for their learning. In addition, I will introduce some models and goals that students mentioned in Ilola's doctoral thesis (2018). I will also investigate whether the chosen models and goals in this study align with the core curriculum and its aims. First, I will explain the two key terms. A pronunciation model is a spoken form of a second or foreign language that the language learner tries to achieve. A pronunciation model is not necessarily achieved but it guides spoken language learning, working as an ideal towards which one aspires (Lintunen & Dufva 2017: 42). A pronunciation goal, in turn, is a more concrete, intermediate stage that is more likely to be achieved. These goals are either short-term, for example for a particular course or school year, or long-term, such as the language skill-level one attempts to achieve (Lintunen & Dufva 2017: 42).

Choosing a suitable pronunciation model can be difficult for teachers and students alike. There are a vast number of language varieties, and they are often affiliated with social status and geographical region (Lintunen & Dufva 2017: 42). The previously mentioned use of English as a lingua franca should also be considered while choosing a suitable pronunciation model. Lintunen and Dufva (2017: 43) emphasise that choosing a model is always a compromise. Not choosing a language variety as a model should not mean that it is considered to be of lower rank or less acceptable. Lintunen (2014: 168) argues that all spoken forms of language are equal from the linguistic perspective. Pronunciation teaching should, therefore, accommodate different English varieties in the classroom, at least by introducing where they are used and what they sound like so that students can develop their receptive language skills. Receptive skills refer to the ability to understand language, for example its different spoken forms, without the ability to produce it (Lintunen & Dufva 2017: 47). Other social aspects of pronunciation than choosing a pronunciation model will be discussed more in depth in the next chapter.

Native-like pronunciation can be a pronunciation model, even though it might be difficult to achieve. Striving for native-like pronunciation can also be quite irrelevant or unrealistic for some language learners (Derwing & Munro 2005). It should be noted that language in its spoken form can be muddled and even first language speakers can make mistakes in producing language. Choosing a native-like pronunciation can be difficult, especially in the case of English. In Finland, English teaching seems to have emphasised British English due to its closer geographical location even though English has many native varieties (Lintunen 2014). Usually in education settings, this closer proximity aspect as well as opting for a more standardised language pronunciation is quite common (Lintunen 2014; Lintunen & Dufva 2017).

One of the key features when choosing a pronunciation model is quite often aiming at understandable pronunciation. The terms often used in language research are *intelligibility* and *comprehensibility* (Derwing & Munro 2015: 3-6). Intelligibility refers to the spoken message being understood, which can be measured and is therefore more objective, while comprehensibility refers to the subjective experience of how easy or difficult it is to understand spoken language (Tergujeff 2022b: 124). Most likely due to the subjectivity of comprehensibility, the Finnish core curriculum translated into English uses the word intelligibility. In the core curriculum, intelligibility was a recurring theme. (NCCBE 2014). The chosen pronunciation model should be clear and understandable, whether one is using English with a non-native or native speaker. As a result, English as a lingua franca has been set as a pronunciation model in increasing numbers. English as a lingua franca does not set one native variety over the other, nor

does it see native-like pronunciation as a premise (Lintunen & Dufva 2017: 49). According to Statista (2022), English is currently the most spoken language in the world. Native speakers of English account to roughly 400 million people, whereas there are about 750 million people that use English as their second or foreign language. For that reason, it is statistically more likely that a conversation in English is between non-native speakers and thus, English as a lingua franca as a pronunciation model may be even more relevant in the context of Finnish education. Next, I will briefly discuss oral proficiency goals of lower secondary students.

Amongst ninth graders, the final assessment can impact the learning goals students set for themselves, as the grades received affect their ability to apply and to receive a study place for secondary level education. If the students use English regularly in their free time, it is likely that they see English as personally relevant. Actually, many of the participants in Ilola's study (2018) claimed that English oral proficiency was important for them. In fact, English pronunciation was one of the most remarkable elements of oral proficiency presented in this data (Ilola 2018: 106). For their own oral proficiency learning goals and pronunciation models, the interviewed students mentioned clarity, intelligibility, and in some cases, native-like pronunciation. Thus, the participants' goal and pronunciation models seem to mostly align with the core curriculum. However, the participants pointed out that there is no such thing as perfect pronunciation (Ilola 2018). Some of the participants seemed to favour intelligibility or English as a lingua franca model over native-like pronunciation. However, many of them seemed to connect native-like pronunciation with good English oral proficiency. I expect similar results in my research, at least to some extent. I will present Ilola's (2018) research design in more detail in the next chapter discussing previous research on views.

3 SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF PRONUNCIATION

This chapter examines pronunciation from social and psychological perspectives. First, the chapter explains the term view and what one should acknowledge when researching views. The second subsection introduces a few previous studies about views, especially from the perspectives of oral language proficiency and pronunciation. Finally, the last subsection of this chapter discusses accent as a way of conveying identity and establishing a status as a language speaker.

3.1 Researching people's views and beliefs

Studying beliefs or views is quite common in foreign language research, but also in other research fields. Studying views in different fields of research may explain why there are so many definitions for the word (Pajares 1992: 313). Defining a view may be difficult, as it is closely tied to attitudes, values, opinions, ideologies, observations, experiences, and perspectives (Pajares 1992: 309). Woods (2003: 205) has researched teachers' beliefs and defined beliefs through three components: beliefs, assumptions and knowledge (BAK). In this definition model, the components are not seen as qualitatively different but as parts of a spectrum. One of the reasons why views and beliefs have been so vastly researched in foreign language research is that one's views can affect the language learning process. The beliefs and how one acts based on them can either advance the learning process or hinder it (Barcelos & Kalaja 2011: 281). Researching views can also bring insight into students' perspectives about oral proficiency, its learning and assessment (Ilola 2018: 15) and hence act as a way to develop teaching and test its effectiveness (Dufva 1995: 38; cited in Ilola 2018: 15).

There are a few issues one should be aware of while researching views and beliefs. Firstly, views and beliefs are dynamic, formed in a context through discourse. As a result, one person may have different beliefs about the same topic at different times (Barcelos & Kalaja 2011: 282, 285). Furthermore, even though one expresses a belief, there is no guarantee that this person acts upon it and is also possible to be unaware of one's beliefs (Woods 2003: 207). Moreover, measuring and observing beliefs are inferences from the participants' intentions, what they say and how they act (Pajares 1992: 314), which may lead to inconsistencies. Even the same person can contradict oneself in their belief expressions (Barcelos & Kalaja 2011: 281). Views can have affective and evaluative components; Pajares (1992: 310) argues that cognitive knowledge, too, may have affective and evaluative components. Pajares (1992) questions the idea of knowledge being somehow purer or more truthful than beliefs. These aforementioned notions should be taken into account when researching views using a questionnaire as in this study. Carrying research by using this method may lead to a false assumption that people are always aware of their beliefs and are able to express them in an accurate and consistent manner while filling a questionnaire (Woods 2003: 207). In my research, I tried to mitigate this issue by distributing the questionnaires during an English class, which is a more natural setting for the students and these views may be more easily retrievable in this setting. I also added the "I cannot say"-option to the questions so that those students who are not aware of their views may express this.

3.2 Accent and identity

There is a connection between accent and one's identity. Identity refers to the personal conception of who one is and where one situates oneself amongst other people (Edwards 2009). Accent, in turn, refers to the dialectal differences stemming from social class or region of origin, or the phonological variation influenced by the speaker's first language whilst speaking another language (Derwing & Munro 2008). Even though the next paragraph discusses accent as something one may choose, some people might not be able to change their accent even if they wished to and it is debatable whether one should even try.

In English as a foreign language (EFL) research, there have been different arguments for choosing a non-native or native-like accent whilst speaking English. As one's accent may place as in a social group or nationality, some EFL speakers may feel inclined to change one's accent to a more native-like due to a perceived lower social status or impurity of one's non-native accent (Sung 2014: 551). However, some people may argue that opting for a native-like accent may be comparable with changing one's

identity or that one is embarrassed of one's nationality (Baran-Łucarz 2017: 120). There might also be pragmatic reasons to choose a local non-native accent, either as a conscious choice or as a mere acceptance of one's circumstances (Sung 2014: 551). Moreover, some EFL speakers may opt for a native-like accent to showcase their language skills (Sung 2014) or whilst aiming at intelligibility (Li 2009). Nevertheless, achieving a native-like accent is not an easy accomplishment and as previously mentioned, in some cases an irrelevant goal. In addition to these arguments for opting a native or non-native type of pronunciation, some people may use a different accent depending on with whom one is interacting (Kong & Kang 2020). In Sung's (2014) research among undergraduate students in Hong Kong, no clear majority for either type of accent was found. Instead, it seems that there are justifiable reasons for both and there are strong individual differences.

3.3 Relevant previous research

Previous research investigating English oral proficiency in countries other than Finland has to some extent focused on people's attitudes towards English varieties and how non-native English speakers speak English, particularly those studying in higher education (Ilola 2018: 22). It is noteworthy that research on oral proficiency in places where English is considered a second language may not be applicable in English as a foreign language context. For example, participants' age and educational background can affect their views. Hence, caution when comparing results of different studies is necessary, even though at surface level the topic seems to be similar. For this reason, the focus of this subsection will be on presenting previous oral proficiency related research in Finland.

Nowacka (2012) conducted a similar study about views on pronunciation with Italian, Spanish and Polish university and college students. The data was collected through a questionnaire. In this study, one of the main findings was that most of the participants targeted native-like or good English pronunciation and that a majority of them agreed with the statement that students should aim for native English pronunciation. Even though the participants of this study are older and attend a higher education compared to the ones in my research, the research findings may come to a similar conclusion since in the research setting of Nowacka's (2012) study, the participants are also part of the EFL context. In addition, the data collection method was the same as in this study.

Next, I will present a few studies researching secondary school students' pronunciation related views in the Finnish context. Ilola (2018) researched secondary school students' views on English oral proficiency and its learning and assessment. In Ilola's doctoral dissertation, the data consisted of semi-structured interviews as well as peer and self-evaluations of nine 9th graders from three Finnish basic education schools. The data was analysed with qualitative content analysis and the participants received pseudonyms. In this study, the participants expressed many aspects of pronunciation, such as types of pronunciation that are considered agreeable and desirable, the intelligibility and clarity of pronunciation as well as issues that are considered difficult in pronunciation (Ilola 2018: 106-108). As in the curriculum, the participants emphasised clarity and intelligibility over 'perfect' pronunciation and some of them seemed to have adopted the view that the overall message being conveyed is more important than exactly right pronunciation. Moreover, the participants gave examples of possible difficulties in pronunciation, mentioning the differences of Finnish and English /r/-sounds and the differences in letter-sound correspondence. The aforementioned research findings may bear resemblance to the research findings of this study.

Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus KARVI, in English the Finnish National Centre for Education Assessment, produced an assessment of learning outcomes for the long syllabus of the English language in 2013 (Härmälä, Huhtanen & Puukko 2014: 11). The research was commissioned by the Finnish National Board of Education. The research sample accounted for six percent of ninth-graders at the time. The assessment measured participants' productive language skills in spoken and written form as well as language comprehension through listening and reading comprehension tasks, recorded speech samples and written assignments. It should be noted that only some of the participants were part of the spoken language assessment.

Härmälä, Huhtanen and Puukko (2014) also produced a student questionnaire in which the participants answered questions about their views on the English language and studying it. The questionnaire also collected some background information about the participants and compared some of these variables to the views they presented. In this research questionnaire, the participants had mostly positive views about their English language competence and a strong majority of them saw English as a useful subject (Härmälä et al. 2014: 149). A striking finding was that the participants targeting upper secondary school education viewed English in a more positive light, regarded it as slightly more useful and trusted their own language competence more compared to participants aiming at a vocational school degree after graduation.

In addition to these previously mentioned studies in the Finnish education context, Leppänen et al. (2009) constructed a large-scale national survey about English use

among Finns, attitudes towards English and views about English. The participants were 15–79-year-olds selected through random selection. The data consisted of 1,495 questionnaire responses in either Finnish or Swedish depending on the participant's first language. The questionnaire covered these topics: languages in one's life, English in one's life, English language competence and studying English, English use, English alongside one's first language, and the future of English language in Finland (Leppänen et al. 2009: 21-22). This survey was not restricted to English language use in educational settings, but also discussed English use in free time. Some of the questions in the questionnaire were similar to the ones in my research questionnaire and I will thus compare the results with each other in the results chapter.

Previous research about Finnish-accented English or Rally English has usually adopted the perspective of contrastive phonetics (Dufva & Sajavaara 2001; Kivistö 2016) in which the sounds of two languages are described and compared with each other. This perspective is covered more in detail in the next chapter. In addition, there has been some research analysing Finnish-speakers' speech errors in English (Morris-Wilson 1999; Horslund & Van Nostrand 2022; Tergujeff 2022a). Furthermore, there has been research about learning, teaching, and assessing oral proficiency in Finland, especially from the English language perspective (Tergujeff 2013; Tergujeff & Kautonen 2017). In addition, Morris-Wilson (1999) investigated how Finnish speakers' pronunciation of English was perceived by British and Finnish listeners. Peterson (2020; 2022a; 2022b) has researched attitudes and language ideologies of English, especially in the Finnish context. The "Intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness of English spoken by Finns"-research project (ICASEF) has produced valuable information about Finnish-accented English and its intelligibility. Some of the publications of this project are still in process, but the one already published (Tergujeff 2021) offers insight into how foreign accent, intelligibility and oral proficiency relate to each other. The main finding of this paper (Tergujeff 2021) was that speakers' ease of understanding and foreign accentedness were only loosely connected with the speakers' overall oral proficiency measured by CEFR and that the connection was especially weak between oral proficiency and accentedness. However, views about Rally English among secondary school students have not most likely been researched before.

4 RALLY ENGLISH EXPLAINED THROUGH CONTRASTIVE PHONETICS

This chapter presents some significant differences between Finnish and English phonetics. English is a Germanic language whereas Finnish is a Finno-Ugric language that is part of the Uralic language group (Suomi, Toivanen & Ylitalo 2008: 3). The languages are not closely related, which may cause difficulties in learning English pronunciation. The following subsections will investigate phonological differences between the languages from different aspects.

4.1 Intonation and word stress

Ladefoged (2005: 116) defines intonation as the pattern of pitch changes in a sentence. In English, there is usually a falling intonation in *wh*-questions, statements, and commands. In contrast, rising intonation is usually seen in tag questions to express uncertainty and yes-no questions. Compared to English, rising intonation is less common in Finnish even though echo-questions are usually expressed with a rising intonation (Suomi et al. 2008: 117). Finnish intonation tends to be neutral: statements usually have a smoothly descending pitch (ibid. 2008: 114-115). This results in Finnish being sometimes described as monotonous, even though there is variation in intonation for example in situations where one expresses excitement or doubt.

In word stress, the stressed syllable is usually in a higher pitch and produced louder and longer than the unstressed counterparts (Ladefoged 2005: 110). The stress system is moving in Germanic languages such as English while Finnish has a fixed stress system (Suomi et al. 2008: 22). In Finnish, the primary word stress is usually in the first

syllable. The exceptions to this rule are single-word utterances and greetings, where the stressed syllable is at the end (Suomi et al. 2008: 77).

4.2 Letter-sound correspondence

Finnish has a strong correspondence between its sound structure and orthography, even to the extent that statements such as “Finnish is spoken as it is written” are not unheard of. However, according to Suomi et al. (2008: 142) this can be considered an oversimplification and the discrepancy between how Finnish words are pronounced and written may become larger in the future. To note, Finnish does have a clear correspondence between a phoneme and grapheme with the exception of using /ŋ/ and no /g/ in words with the letters -ng in words such as *tango* and *englanti*.

4.3 Differences in vowel sounds

When comparing the vowel sounds of English and Finnish, Finnish vowels tend to be less extreme than the respective English vowels. Suomi et al. (2008: 20) argue that the greatest discrepancy between the vowels in the international phonetic alphabet (IPA) and the Finnish vowels concern the Finnish mid-series /e/, /ø/ and /o/. These vowel sounds are somewhere between the English vowels [e] and [ɛ], [ø] and [œ], and [o] and [ɔ]. As a result, the vowel sounds Finns produce while speaking English may resemble more the vowel sounds of Finnish.

In addition to the aforementioned vowel sounds, Finnish first language (L1) speakers may raise the English /ɪ/ sound to [ɪ] or [i], which bears more resemblance with the Finnish /i/ vowel (Horslund & Van Nostrand 2022). This mistake was the second most common type of error among the participants of Horslund and Van Nostrand's study investigating Finnish L1 speakers' errors in spoken English. The error was especially common among those participants who were less experienced with the English language.

4.4 Differences in consonant sounds

The most distinct differences between Finnish and English consonant sounds are in how /p/ sounds, /r/ sounds, /s/ sounds, and /v/ sounds are pronounced (Suomi, Toivanen & Ylitalo 2006). Dental fricatives will be discussed in the next subsection.

Firstly, the English /p/ and the Finnish /p/ are both bilabial plosives, but the English one is aspirated while the Finnish one is not (Suomi et al. 2006: 77).

Secondly, the /r/ sounds differ from each other in these languages. In Finnish, /r/ is usually pronounced as a trill or a tap depending on the context, the main allophone for /r/ sound being the [r] (Suomi et al. 2008: 30). English /r/, in turn, is produced as a voiced postalveolar approximant [ɹ]. Most likely due to the differences in /r/ pronunciation, some participants in Horslund and Van Nostrand's study (2022) produced the English [ɹ] either as a tap, a trill or a fricative.

Thirdly, the Finnish /s/ is less sharp compared to English [s], being somewhere between the English [s] and [ʃ] (Suomi et al. 2008: 27). This may partly explain why the participants of Horslund and Van Nostrand's study (2022: 134) interchanged these sounds in sentences with many s-letters combined, in addition to their notion of these sentences being a tongue twister.

Lastly, the differences in v-sounds may cause difficulties for some language learners. In Finnish, /v/ is usually pronounced as a central approximant [v], which is closer to the English /w/. This may lead to mispronunciations and cause confusion for the listener trying to decipher whether the speaker is talking about a vest or west. It should be noted that in Morris-Wilson's research (1999: 275), the mispronunciation of /v/ was ill-perceived by the British participants.

4.5 Dental fricatives and affricates

English has dental fricatives such as [θ] and [ð] whereas Finnish does not. Finnish also lacks affricates, which are combinations of plosives and fricatives such as [tʃ] and [dʒ] that can be found in the English language (Dufva & Sajavaara 2001: 250). Not having these sounds in their L1 may cause problems for Finnish speakers, especially in the early stages of their English language learning.

To conclude, Finnish-influenced issues with English pronunciation may be categorised by suprasegmental differences such as word stress and intonation differences, Finnish lacking a spoken element English has, and the Finnish sound landing somewhere between two English sounds and thus causing misunderstandings in some cases. Morris-Wilson (1999) argues that the error gravity is more serious with /v/, /dʒ/, and /θ/ therefore, pronunciation practise and teaching should take these into account.

5 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, the research aims and questions are presented. In addition, the participants and the pilot study are introduced. Furthermore, the chapter presents the collected data and the methods employed to analyse it.

5.1 Research aims and questions

The purpose of this study is to shed some light on Finnish-speaking secondary school students' views about English pronunciation, and more precisely, on their views about the Finnish-influenced way of pronouncing English. The main research questions are:

1. How do the participants perceive their own English pronunciation and its learning?
2. What kinds of views do the participants have about the intelligibility of Rally English?
3. Do the participants recount using Rally English deliberately or have they noticed others using it deliberately? If yes, in what kinds of contexts?

The first research question aims at finding how the participants regard themselves as English speakers. I would like to find out if they see pronunciation as difficult or easy and to see if the participants have found ways to learn English pronunciation that are pleasant and effective for them. The second question explores their perceptions about the intelligibility of Rally English and whether they see it as an understandable way of pronouncing English or not. In the third question, the aim is to find concrete examples of Rally English use and map scenarios where they have encountered Rally English, either themselves using it deliberately or seen others use it that way.

One of the research foci in this study is the Finnish-influenced way of pronouncing English. Previous research presented in the background chapter introduced some similar research designs and research aims (Nowacka 2012; Härmälä et al. 2014; Ilola 2018). However, the combined research design, purpose of the study, research setting, and research focus is somewhat unique. For example, the study constructed by Nowacka (2012) also used a questionnaire to study English pronunciation views among Italian, Spanish, and Polish university and college students. In their research, however, the research setting and the participants differ from this research. In Ilola's doctoral dissertation (2018) the research setting and the participants are alike, but the research design and the research focus differ from this study. Rally English as a phenomenon seems to be not that widely researched topic in foreign language research. Hence, one of the objectives of this research is to hopefully initiate more elaborate research on the phenomenon. Deeper understanding of Rally English may affect how English is taught in Finnish schools in the long term.

5.2 Data and methods

This section introduces the participants and the pilot study that was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the research questionnaire. It also describes the data collection and the methods used to analyse the data. Lastly, the section covers the ethical considerations relevant for this study.

5.2.1 Participants

The participants of the actual study were 50 consenting secondary school students. Two participants answered the research questionnaire but did not give their consent to use and collect their responses. As a result, these two participants and their questionnaire responses were excluded from the study. The participants were all ninth graders from one Finnish-speaking comprehensive school in Finland. The research questionnaire was anonymous and it did not collect any background information. Not gathering any personal information and using anonymous ways to answer can encourage participants to answer more truthfully (Patten 2014). The participants were all 15-year-olds so they did not need the consent of their parents in order to participate. However, the parents and the participants were all informed of the study beforehand.

5.2.2 Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted in May 2022 among 16 consenting eighth grade students in another secondary school in Finland. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the research questionnaire so that it is clear and understandable for the participants. In the pilot study, the participants filled the online research questionnaire and gave written feedback on its clarity. As in the actual research study, I was present in the classroom and the participants were able to ask for clarification if needed. Based on the written feedback, some of the questions in the research questionnaire were rephrased. Especially the expression *englantia äidinkielenään käyttävä* 'a person using English as their first language' caused confusion and therefore, the expression was switched to *syntyperäinen puhuja* 'a native speaker'. Even though the previous term was more inclusive, the term was changed for the sake of clarity since the Finnish version may have been a bit wordy.

5.2.3 Data

Comprehensive school as a setting for data collection was chosen for its expected participant heterogeneity compared to upper secondary schools in Finland. Private schools are quite rare in Finland so comprehensive schools have students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. A research questionnaire was chosen as the method of data collection. Questionnaires are a way of collecting information about social phenomena, the way people behave in certain situations as well as the participants' values, beliefs, and opinions (Vehkalahti 2019). In second language research, various kinds of questionnaires are the second most used method of collecting data, after language proficiency tests (Dörnyei & Taguchi 2010). Research interviews may have caused nervousness in the participants and might have been more difficult to execute. In addition, the research questionnaire could be filled anonymously, which could help the students present their views more openly. As a result, a research questionnaire seemed a fitting way of collecting data.

To start the data collection phase, a few of the English teachers in the school who taught ninth graders were contacted in person and asked to spare some of their class time for the study. I was acquainted with the teachers as I had been substitute teaching in this school. With the willing teachers, a suitable lesson time from some of their groups was selected. The research questionnaire was distributed among five groups of ninth grade students during their English lesson in September 2022. The estimated time to complete the questionnaire was about 5-10 minutes. The questionnaire was in Finnish so that the students were able to understand the questions clearly and to answer them without too much effort.

The research data was collected through a Webropol-based online research questionnaire. I was present in the classroom when they filled out the questionnaire so they had the opportunity to ask for clarification. I was not closely acquainted with the students and could not connect a person to their study answers, so their anonymity was not jeopardised. The students used their own mobile phones or borrowed a laptop from school to fill the questionnaire. The 19-point questionnaire consisted of 4 open ended questions, 5 yes-no questions, and 10 Likert-scale questions. The yes-no questions had also a Finnish "I cannot say" option. In some cases, a short text box appeared after answering yes. As an example, the statement "I sometimes use Rally English deliberately" had this text box appear after answering yes so that the participants could specify in what kind of situation this had happened. Likert-scale questions usually have a statement to which participants agree or disagree to varying extents. The questionnaire used the 5-point Likert scale, which had the Finnish equivalents of strongly agree, mildly agree, neither agree nor disagree, mildly disagree and strongly disagree. The questions were grouped together in sections based on the way they should be answered. The research questionnaire can be found in the Appendix in Finnish and English.

5.2.4 Methods of analysis

The questionnaire responses were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis, whereas the close ended questions were analysed through descriptive statistics. In short, thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse, and report recurring themes from the data (Braun & Clarke 2006: 79) . In the yes-no questions that asked to specify when answering yes, the text box answers were analysed using thematic analysis as well. Firstly, I will explain the use of descriptive statistics in this research. After that, I will explain in more detail what thematic analysis is and how I used it to analyse the data.

Descriptive statistics consists of quantitative methods used to describe, summarise, and calculate data. The data is presented in numerals, either in the research text and/or with figures such as pie charts, line and bar charts and line graphs (Vetter 2017: 1797). Descriptive statistics are used to describe the data in detail but it cannot make predictions of populations, in this case all Finnish secondary school students studying English as a foreign language. In this research, I use bar charts and percentages to present the students' views. Descriptive statistics can be used to answer basic wh-questions (Vetter 2017: 1797) so it is a suitable method to analyse this data set.

In thematic analysis, the selected data is searched in its entirety for repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke 2006: 86). The thematic analysis phases introduced by

Braun and Clarke are the following: familiarising oneself with the data, the generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes in relation to the codes and the entirety of data, generating names and definitions for themes and lastly, the production of the report. These phases are not linear, instead the phases can be repeated and the themes re-examined throughout the process. I followed these rough guidelines to conduct the data analysis for the open-ended questions. More distinctively, the approach is reflexive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis and qualitative content analysis have similarities but thematic analysis, especially its reflexive approach, focuses more on the themes derived from the data rather than the data solely (Braun & Clarke 2021: 40).

Thematic analysis suits the research questions and aims well. The research questions are quite open, which is suitable in this situation with quite scarce previous research. According to Lochmiller (2021: 17), “what” or “how” research questions leave room for elaboration and description, which are the key strengths of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a good tool to give an overview of the themes derived from the data. It also helps in grouping ideas and statements into bigger ones and presenting them in an organised manner in the results section of the thesis. I intended to form a rich description of the entire data, which may have simplified it. Nevertheless, the most important themes should be visible. This way of applying thematic analysis is suitable especially for under-researched topics (Braun & Clarke 2006: 83).

Like every method of analysis, thematic analysis has its limitations. Lochmiller (2021) states that combining conceptual or theoretical frameworks with thematic analysis might be difficult. However, in the case of this research with meagre theoretical framing, the method of analysis is still applicable. Moreover, Lochmiller (2021) argues that thematic analysis can be used with too little a thought to the depth of analysis. It is essential that the theme is derived from the categories and the connections to the data are clearly demonstrated. In order to avoid this pitfall, I attempted to devote enough time for analysing the data.

5.2.5 Ethical considerations

Before the data collection during the English lessons, the participants and their guardians received the research notification and privacy notice. The research notification as well as the privacy notice were shared with them through an information system called Wilma. Wilma is used for school-home communication, marking assessment and to track attendance in lessons. Wilma is a product of Visma and it is widely used in Finnish schools. The user identifiers for Wilma are usually given to permanent school personnel and substitute teachers working for a longer period of time. I had

my user identifier as I was working in the school and could send the message directly to the students and their guardians. Therefore, I deemed it a safe and effective way of distributing the research documents for the participants.

A separate consent form was not distributed and signed. Instead, their consent was inquired in the research questionnaire at the beginning with a statement in Finnish: "I have been informed of the purpose of the study and I consent to the use and collection of my questionnaire responses". As I mentioned earlier, two people answered the questionnaire but did not give their consent and were thus excluded from the data. The questionnaire and its responses were stored in Webropol, which was accessed through my university user account. The responses and the collected data are deleted after the thesis is completed.

6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents and analyses the participants' answers which were gathered through the research questionnaire. The original questionnaire was conducted in Finnish but in this chapter, the questions have been translated into English by the author. The original questionnaire in Finnish can be found in the Appendix. Furthermore, the relevant research discussed in the background theory chapters will be compared with the results of this study. Firstly, the participants and their free time English use is presented. Secondly, the participants' perceptions of English pronunciation learning and teaching are examined. Thirdly, the participants' views of their own English pronunciation are introduced. Fourthly, the contexts where the participants report using or encountering Rally English are presented. Moreover, the participants' perceptions about the intelligibility of Rally English are explored. Lastly, the perceived oral proficiency of a person speaking in a strong Finnish accent is investigated.

6.1 Participants' free time English use

The questionnaire asked participants in the second question to mention instances where they encounter English in their free time. This was an obligatory open-ended question so everyone of the 50 participants answered it. The three scenarios with most mentions where English was encountered were while watching TV-series and movies (17 responses: 34%), while playing video games (14 responses: 28%) and while using social media (13 responses: 26%). Internet use also gathered many responses (11 in total: 22%) in addition to speaking English face-to-face or online with family members or friends (9 responses: 18%). Themes that were less common but still recurring in the responses were listening to music in English, encountering English in stores, products and in advertising, watching videos in English, English used while travelling as well

as reading books in English. A few of the participants even stated that English is *kaikkiialla* ‘everywhere’ and that English is present in most of their free time activities. The 7 most recurring themes are presented in Table 1 below. These responses align with the national survey of English constructed by Leppänen et al. (2009) in that TV-series, movies and music were common instances to encounter English. Leppänen et al. discuss social media, too, even though the popularity of social media has vastly increased after their survey was published.

TABLE 1 In what kinds of free time situations do you encounter Rally English?

Theme	Number of mentions	Percentage of mentions
While watching TV-series and movies	17	34%
While playing video games	14	28%
While using social media	13	26%
While using the internet	11	22%
While speaking English with friends or family members	9	18%
Product placement in stores and advertising	6	12%
While listening to music	6	12%

6.2 Perceptions of pronunciation learning and teaching

This section presents the results of the questionnaire related to pronunciation learning and teaching. Firstly, the section covers the meaningful and rewarding ways to learn English pronunciation and what the participants considered difficult in learning pronunciation. Secondly, the section shows the responses related to pronunciation teaching in the basic education English lessons.

6.2.1 Pronunciation learning

In the third question, the participants were asked to offer examples of meaningful and rewarding ways to learn English pronunciation. The question offered a few examples, which might explain why the responses differed from the ways they recount encountering English in their free time. The question did not specify whether the learning happened in the participants’ free time or in school settings so that the responses would offer more examples of the ways that are considered meaningful and rewarding regardless of the learning setting. 29 of the respondents (58%) considered watching videos in English a meaningful and rewarding way to learn pronunciation. Speaking in English with other people was also deemed meaningful and rewarding, mentioned by 19 or 38% of the respondents. Songs and music, both in the forms of

listening and singing, or more specifically: rapping to them, gathered 17 responses (34%). Less prevalent but still clearly recurring themes were watching series and movies in English and listening to podcasts in English. These ways to learn pronunciation deemed meaningful and rewarding could be applied to English pronunciation teaching in a classroom setting. The themes mentioned are listed here in Table 2.

TABLE 2 In what kinds of free time situations do you encounter Rally English?

Theme	Number of mentions	Percentage of mentions
Watching videos in English	29	58%
Conversing with others in English	19	38%
Songs and music (listening & singing)	17	34%
Watching movies and TV-series	10	20%
Listening to podcasts	4	8%

The fifth question sought to discover what the participants considered difficult in learning to pronounce English. Ten of the respondents expressed having no trouble learning pronunciation. This was expressed in some cases with bluntly “nothing”, or with a slight degree of uncertainty in the form of “ei juuri mikään” or “ei erityisesti mikään”, translated ‘hardly anything’ or ‘nothing in particular’. In contrast, two participants claimed that everything regarding pronunciation has been difficult to learn.

Other respondents offered examples of what they considered challenging to learn. The examples were mostly of difficult speech sounds or their combinations, including consonant sounds and their combinations in addition to one participant mentioning several vowel sounds combined causing difficulties to them. The difficult consonant sounds were the hissing [ʃ]-sound in words such as ‘sheep’, the /th/-sound, most likely referring to both voiceless and voiced dental fricatives, [θ] and the voiced [ð] present in words ‘thin’ and ‘that’ as well as the English /r/-sound. These difficulties in producing English consonant sounds have been noted in previous research discussed in the background (Dufva & Sajavaara 2001; Ilola 2018; Horslund & Van Nostrand 2022). However, in contrast to Ilola’s and the findings of this study, Morris-Wilson (1999: 112, 116) states that in their study, r-sounds were not so problematic for the participants of their study. In addition to these single consonant sounds, the combination of ‘rl’ in words such as girl world were mentioned by a few participants.

Other aspects in pronunciation learning that caused difficulties were more broad. Some participants mentioned pronouncing long words or certain words as difficult,

while for others the pace or fluency of pronunciation felt hard. This idea is well-described by the following extract:

Vaikeaa on ehkä ollut tiettyjen äänteiden sovittaminen yhteen. Jos lauseen yrittää ääntää oikein, puheesta tulee hitaampaa. Jos taas puhuu nopeammin, joitain äänteitä voi jäädä pois.

English translation: It may have been hard to combine certain sounds together. If one tries to pronounce the word right, speech becomes slower. Whereas if one tries to speak faster, some sounds may be left out.

In addition to the aforementioned examples, learning the differences between the sound systems of Finnish and English was considered difficult to learn, especially from the viewpoint that Finnish lacks sounds that are present in English. Three participants mentioned English silent letters and two other participants felt that there is inconformity between the expected pronunciation and the way the word is pronounced. These expectations may arise from letter-sound correspondence and its irregularities, which was stated by four participants. As mentioned in the background, this may be a result of the Finnish letter-sound correspondence being fairly straightforward. The same phenomenon was mentioned by one of the interviewed participants of Ilola's research (2018: 108). All of the aforementioned themes are listed in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3 What has been a difficult thing for you to learn that is related to English pronunciation?

Theme	Number of mentions	Percentage of mentions
Nothing regarding English pronunciation has felt tricky to learn	10	20%
Examples of difficult speech sounds and combinations	10	20%
Letter-sound correspondence, i.e: how the word is written vs. how it is pronounced	4	8%
English silent letters	3	6%
Pronouncing long words or words that are perceived as difficult	3	6%
Inconformity between expected pronunciation and the way the word is pronounced	2	4%
Different sound systems of Finnish and English	2	4%
Everything related to learning English pronunciation has felt tricky	2	4%

6.2.2 Pronunciation teaching in Finnish basic education from students' perspective

This subsection focuses on the English pronunciation teaching in Finnish basic education. First, the answers to question number four will be introduced. In this question, the participants were asked to recount how English pronunciation has been taught to them. 16 of the participants or 32% named the practice of repeating words out loud, either after the teacher or a tape. Moreover, reading textbook texts out loud was named by nine participants (18%). Discussions with one classmate or in small groups were also frequently mentioned, with nine respondents referring to them (18%). One of them mentioned A-B discussions in slips of paper, where one takes the role of A and the other the role B where one tries to translate the sentence and say it out loud in English and the other one corrects this person if needed. This form of discussion exercise is more guided than discussing more freely about a certain topic and is thus fairly common in the earlier stages of language learning with limited vocabulary. In addition, listening to spoken English was recounted by six participants or 12% of them. The answers gathering single mentions were oral exams, being taught to understand and use phonetic alphabet and playing games. The themes gathering more than single mentions are listed here in Table 4.

TABLE 4 In what ways has English pronunciation been taught to you during your time in basic education?

Theme	Number of mentions	Percentage of mentions
Listen and repeat exercises	16	32%
Reading texts out loud	9	18%
Classroom discussion	9	18%
Listening to spoken English	6	12%

In question number 11, the participants were asked if they felt that English pronunciation had been dealt with enough in their English oral skills teaching. The answer options were set to match a Likert scale with the polar options of “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree”. The bar chart below (Figure 1) presents the participants' views on the matter, the biggest group being the ones that “somewhat agree” with the statement (44%) followed by the group of participants neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement (32% of the participants).

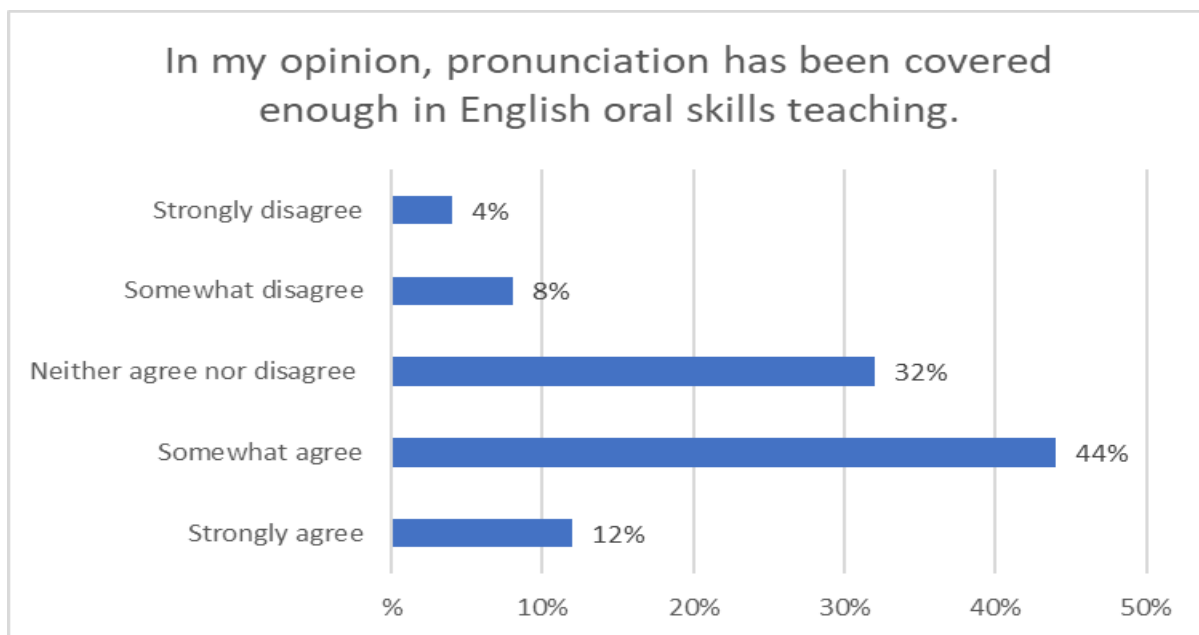


FIGURE 1 English pronunciation being covered in English oral skills teaching

Question number six explored oral skills teaching through encouragement. The question aimed at exploring if the students felt that they have been encouraged to develop their oral skills at school. In this question, it should be noted that it investigates oral skills in general rather than strictly referring to English. Figure 2 shows that 32 of the total 50 respondents (64%) agreed with the statement.

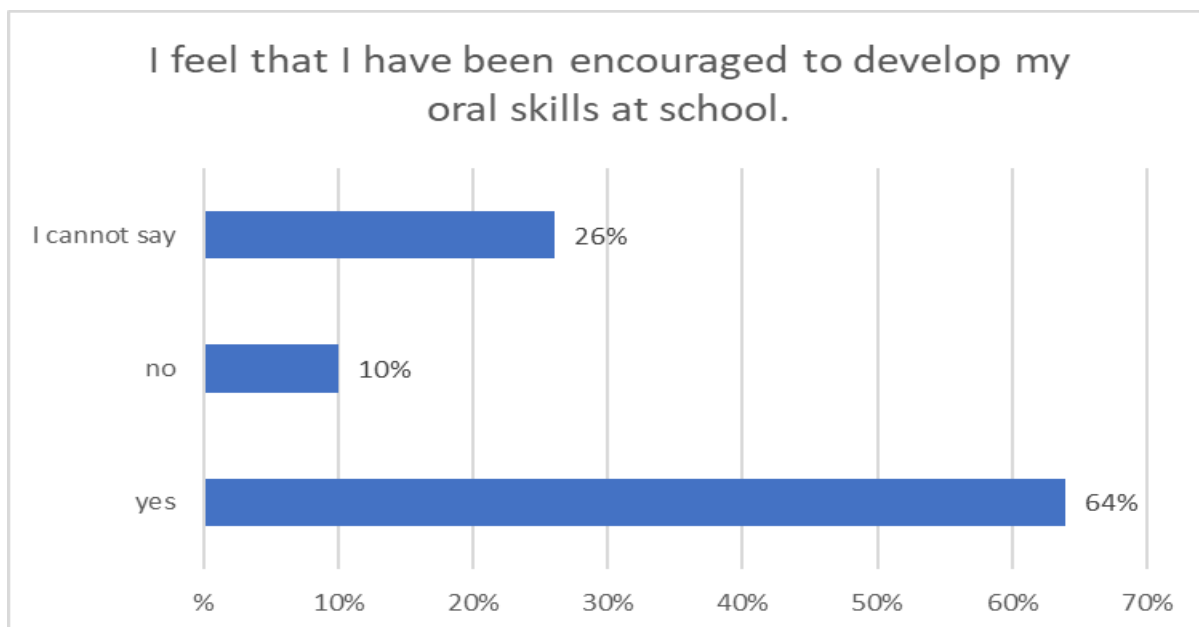


FIGURE 2 Students being encouraged to develop oral skills at school

6.3 The participants' perceptions of their own English pronunciation

This section investigates in detail how the participants perceive their own English pronunciation from the viewpoints of skill level, perceived anxiousness to speak English in the classroom and the learning models and goals they have adopted. The section is divided into two subsections, the first of which focuses on the participants' skill level and classroom related phenomena. The second subsection introduces the participants' learning goals and models.

6.3.1 Students' oral proficiency and anxiousness to speak English

First, the results to question number 12 will be presented, in which participants were to react to a statement regarding their English oral proficiency. To this statement, there was a strong agreement: 20 respondents (40%) agreed with the statement strongly and 19 respondents (38%) somewhat agreed with the statement. The responses can be seen in Figure 3 below. In contrast to Leppänen and others' research (2009: 81), the participants of this study had more positive views of their oral skills, which may be explained by the differences of educational background and age of the participant groups.

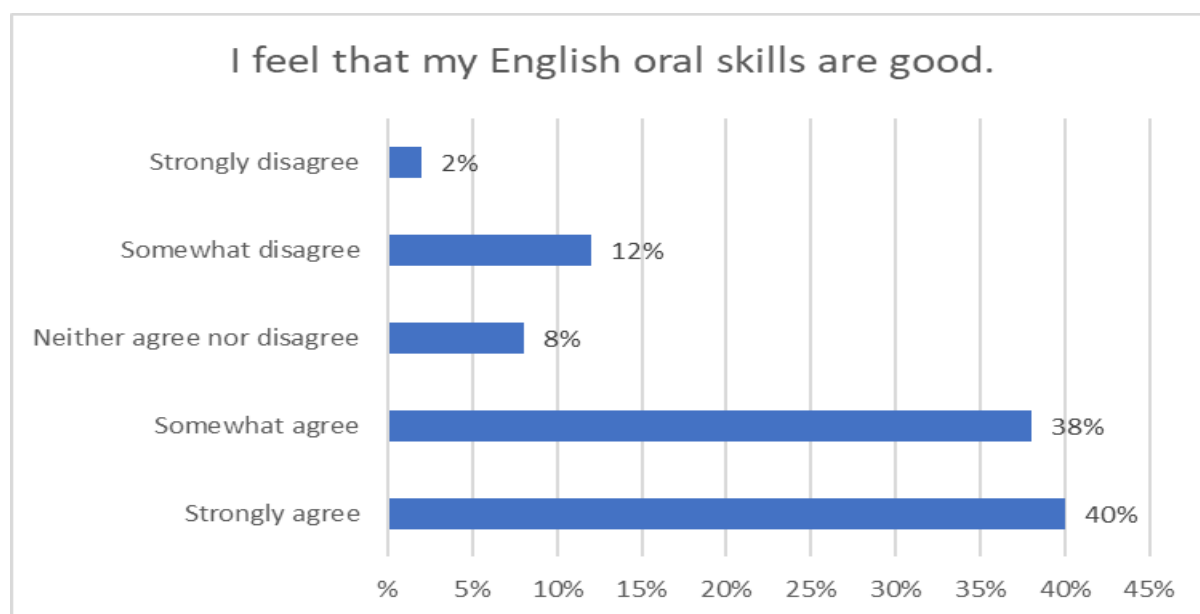


FIGURE 3 Perceived English proficiency

Question 13 dealt with the perceived easiness of English pronunciation. In total, 39 of the participants agreed with the statement, either strongly or slightly, amounting for 78% of the responses. The number of respondents disagreeing were in a minority, with

9 participants (18%) either strongly or slightly disagreeing. The responses are depicted in Figure 4 below.

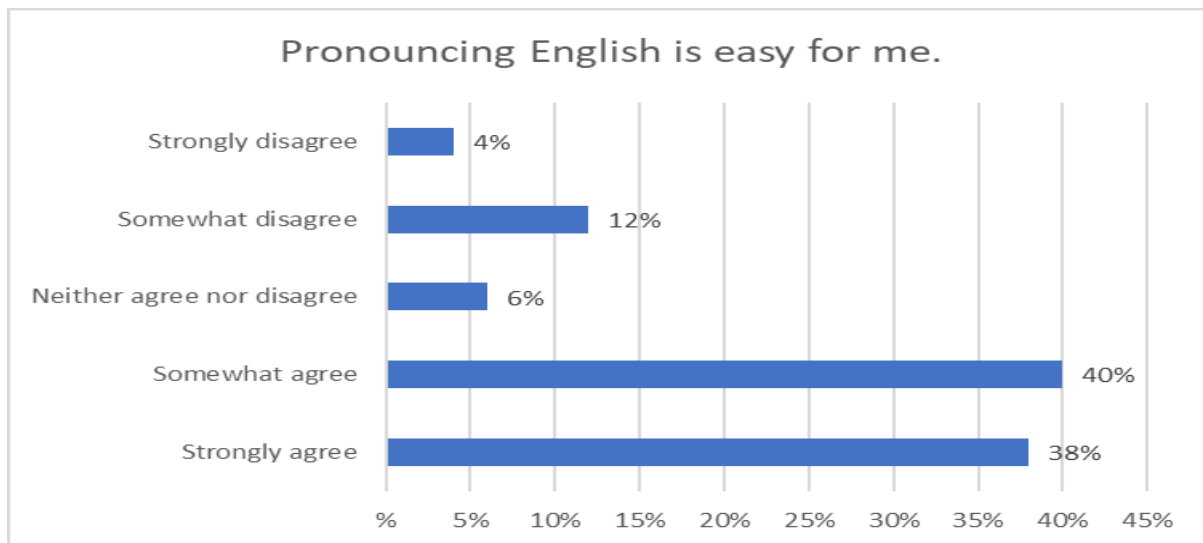


FIGURE 4 Perceived ease of English pronunciation

Question 14 examined how easy it was for the participants to understand different spoken varieties of English. The national core curriculum states the goal of gaining some knowledge about different varieties of English (NCCBE 2014: 597) so the students should be familiar with at least some of them. This can be seen in their responses, but it seems that there is some room for improvement on the matter. The most popular response was agreeing to some degree, answered by 22 participants (44%), followed by the group strongly agreeing with 18 responses (28%). However, it should be noted that 16% of the students or 8 of them somewhat disagreed with the statement. This question divided the participants slightly more than the other questions already presented. The responses are presented in Figure 5.

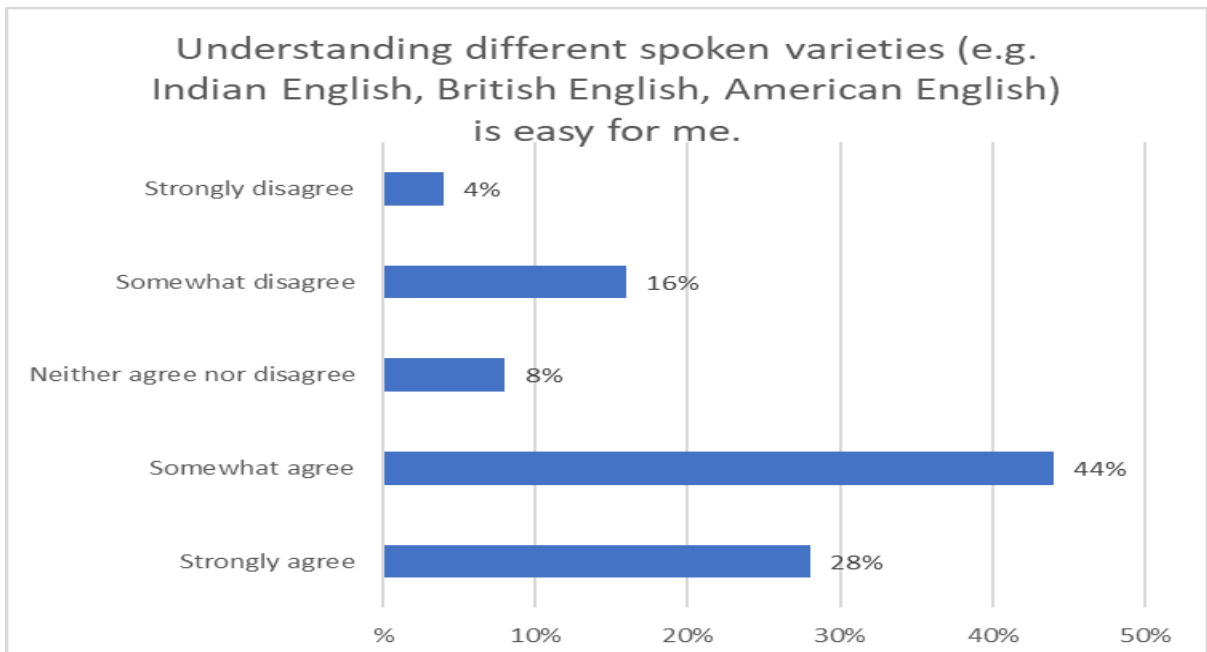


FIGURE 5 Understanding different spoken varieties of English

In question 15, the students were asked if they have sometimes felt anxious to speak English in the classroom due to their pronunciation. The question seemed to stir different kinds of views among the students as there was dispersion between the answers. The biggest group consisted of the 15 students that strongly agreed with the statement (30%), followed by 12 students who somewhat agreed (24%). However, the third biggest group were the students that strongly disagreed with the statement, with 11 responses (22%). The answers are depicted in Figure 6.

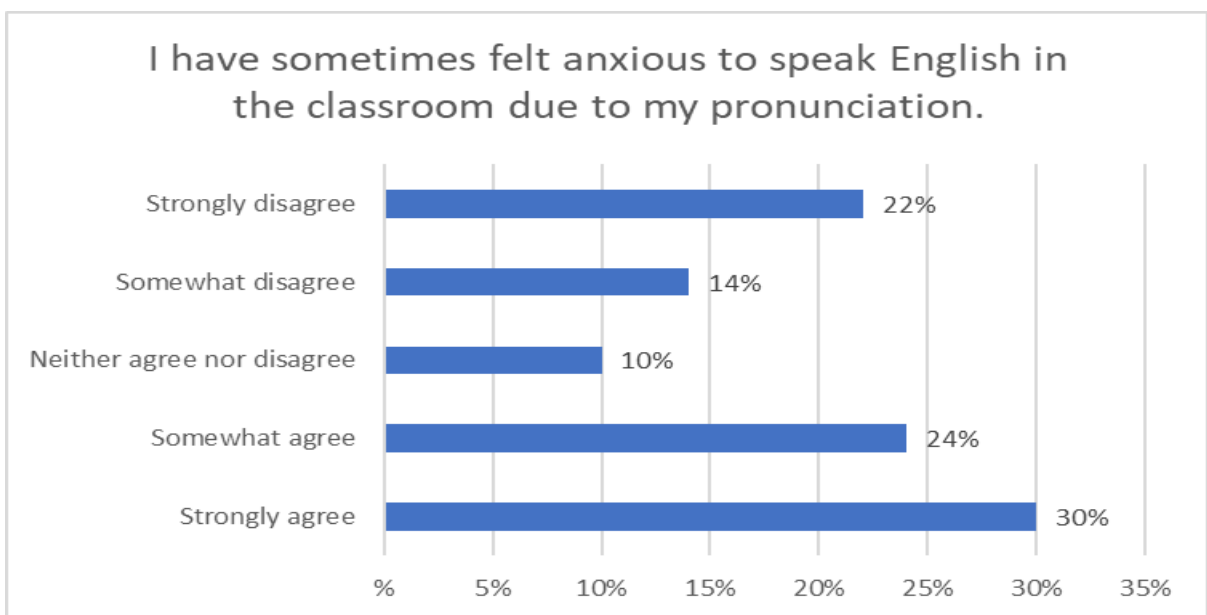


FIGURE 6 Anxiousness to pronounce English in the classroom

6.3.2 Students' pronunciation learning models & goals

This subsection discusses the learning goals and models the students have adopted. Firstly, Question 16 and its results are introduced. Thereafter, Question 17 and the goal towards comprehensibility is investigated. Question 16 concerned the learning goal of native-like English pronunciation, presented in Figure 7. 19 or 38% of the students somewhat agreed with the statement and 15 of them (30%) strongly agreed. To note, 20% or 10 of the students neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Targeting native-like pronunciation was also noticeable among Ilola's participants (2018: 141).

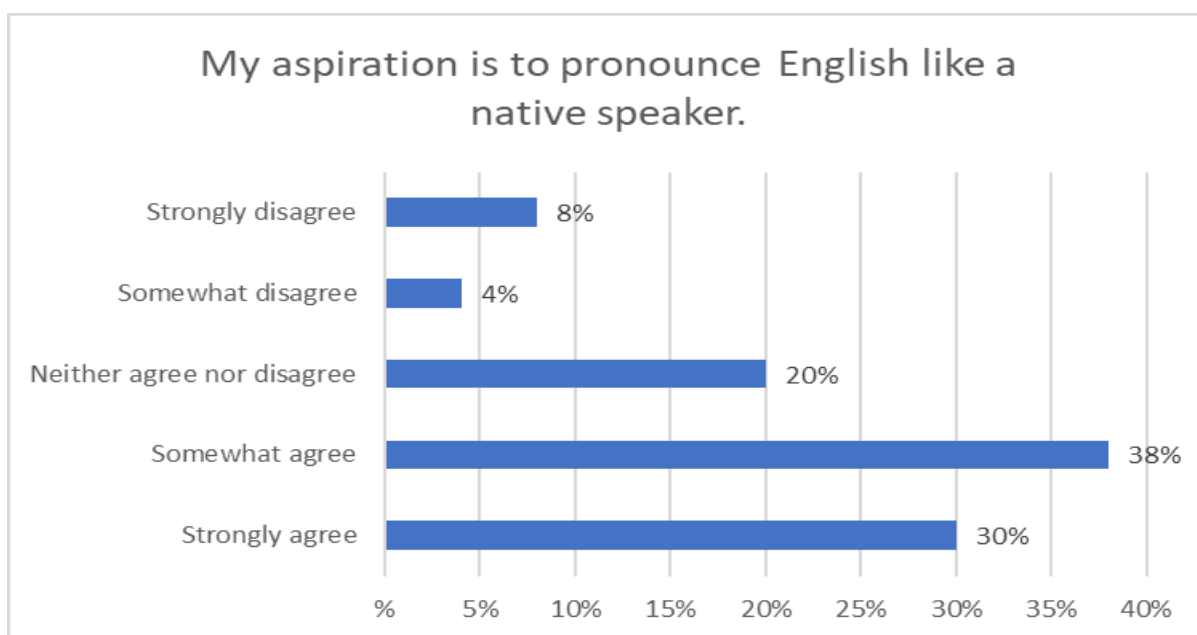


FIGURE 7 Native-like English pronunciation as a learning goal

Comprehensibility is a key element in the core curriculum and thus, the students' views about their pronunciation learning goals was worth investigating. Figure 8 presents their views on the matter; 36% of the students (n=18) strongly agreed with the statement, followed by those 15 (30%) who somewhat agree. Those who disagreed on some level with the statement were a margin group, with only five people (10% in total) either disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing. This was a fairly surprising finding, indicating that some of the students agreed with both of the statements.

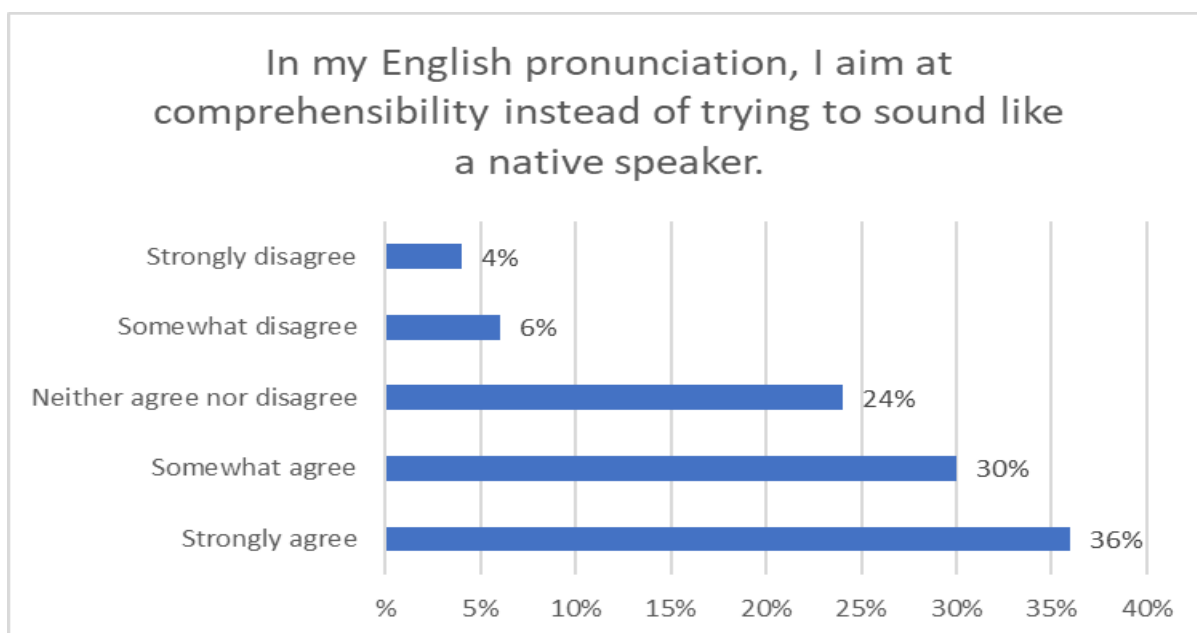


FIGURE 8 Comprehensibility as a pronunciation learning goal

6.4 The contexts of using or encountering Rally English

This section presents the questions that are related to research question three, which seeks to find out if the students use Rally English deliberately. More specifically, the section investigates the reasons for using Rally English and in which contexts this occurs. In question 7, the participants were asked if they use Rally English deliberately. If they answered yes, a text box appeared where they were asked to specify the context of using Rally English. In total, 28 of the participants or 56% recounted using Rally English. 17 participants (26%) did not recount using Rally English deliberately. The answer options and their percentages are presented in Figure 9.

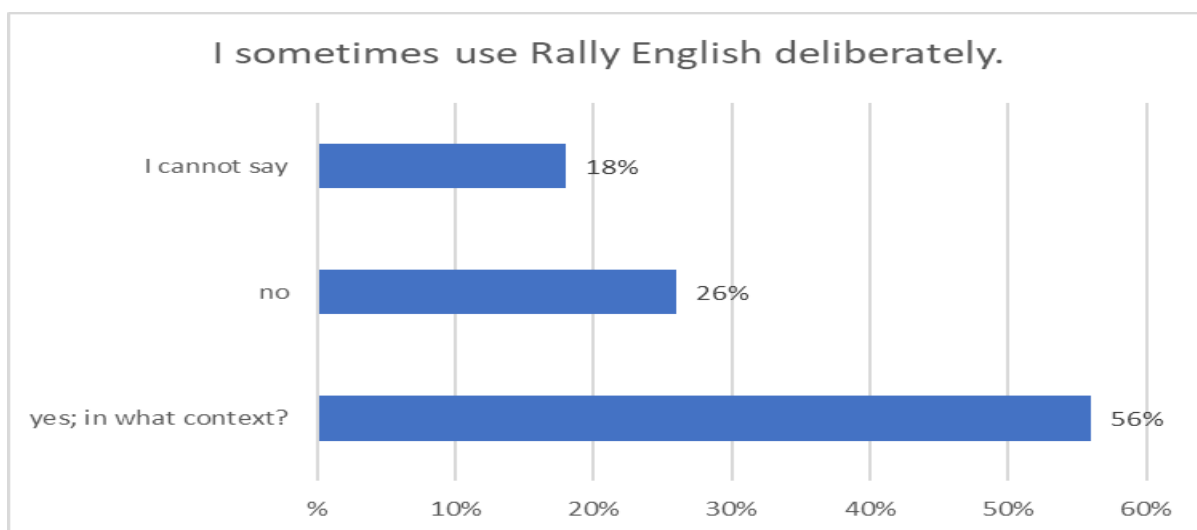


FIGURE 9 Deliberate use of Rally English

The contexts of using Rally English were diverse, though some recurring themes were noticeable. The most common context to use Rally English was related to humour and playful use of language. This context was mentioned by 12 of the 28 participants (42% of them). Another common theme was using it with friends (6 mentions or 21%) or family members (4 mentions or 14%). One of the participants summarised it as follows: *"Kun tiedän että tulen ymmärretyksi"* or in English 'when I know that I will be understood'. This idea of using a more first language influenced way of English pronunciation among others sharing that first language was also noted in Kong and Kang's research (2020). Other recurring contexts were when one did not want to bother oneself with pronunciation or if one felt unsure of one's oral skills or how the word should be pronounced, both of which gathered three mentions. Four of the participants (14%) stated that they use Rally English always or all the time.

Question 8 offered a specific context for the students. In it, students were to react to the statement of using Rally English deliberately if one were unsure how the English word should be pronounced. 60% of the participants (n=30) stated that they had used a more Finnish-like pronunciation of a word when they did not know how to pronounce an English word. However, those who had not done so amounted to 28% or 14 of the respondents. This question and its answers are presented in Figure 10.

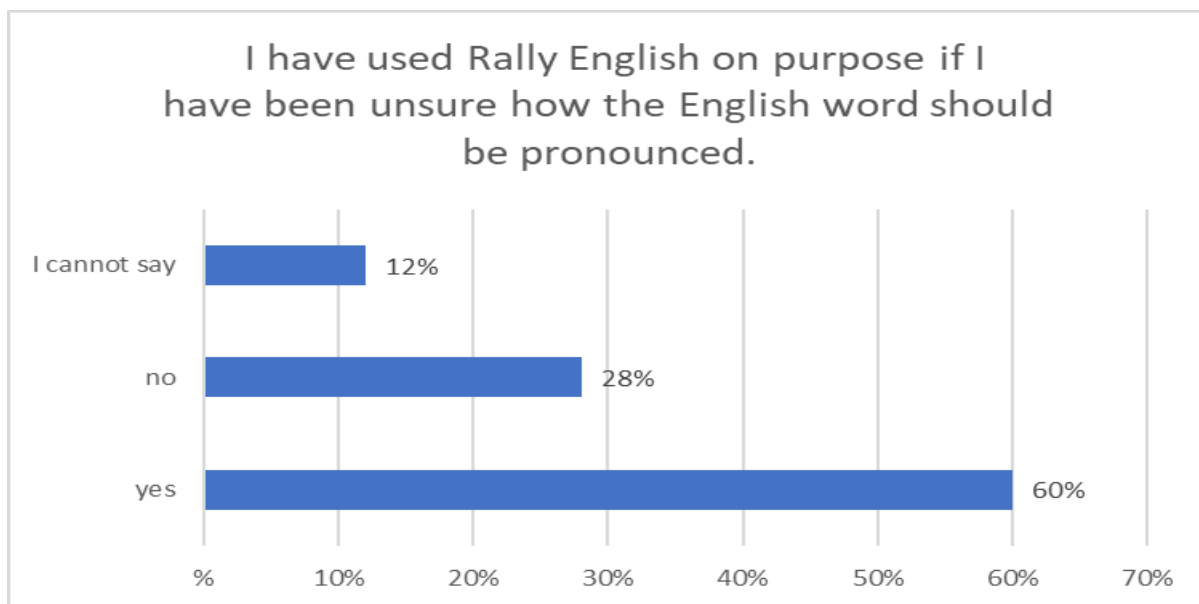


FIGURE 10 Deliberate use of Rally English when one is unsure of the word's pronunciation

As seen in the questionnaire item 7, using Rally English in a joking manner is fairly common. This was also visible in question 10, which investigated the humorous use of Rally English. The answers are presented in Figure 11 below. In this question, the majority of the participants, 72% in total (n=36), recounted encountering Rally English related humour. The most popular contexts for this were encountering it on the internet (8 mentions or 22%), with friends (6 mentions or 16%) and in social media (4 mentions or 11%). Others had encountered Rally English related humour at school, in rally competitions and in commercials. Rally English related humour seems to partly rely on the Finnish letter sound-correspondence and its use applied to speaking English. Ilola's (2018) participant explained it as follows:

.... et siitähän ne vitsitki tulee että ku sanotaan suoraan se mikä lukee niiku.

English translation: the thing is that that's where the jokes come from when it's like said just as it's written.

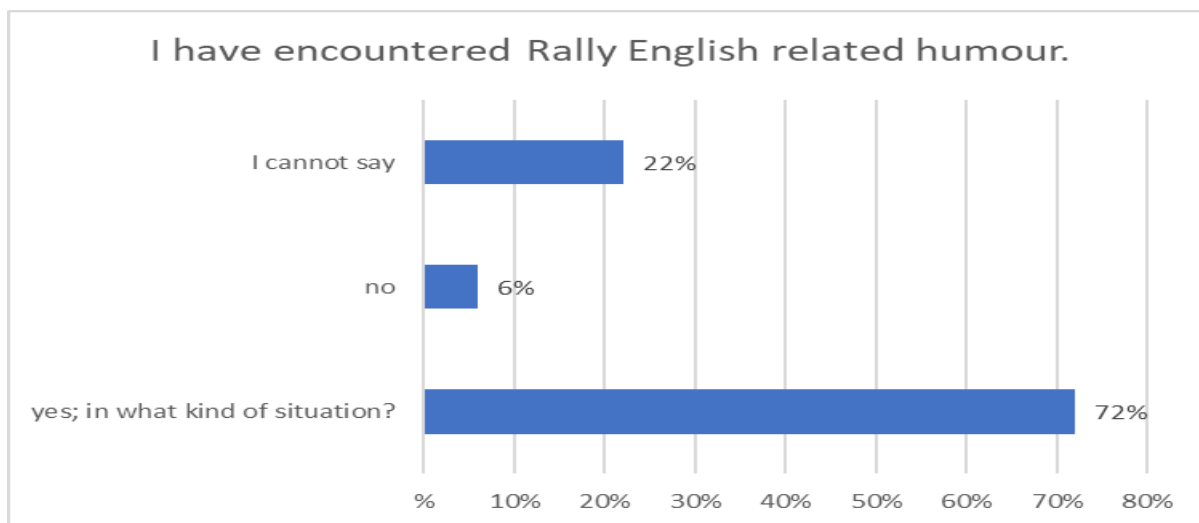


FIGURE 11 Encountering Rally English related humour

6.5 Rally English from the perspectives of intelligibility and perceived oral proficiency

This section presents the results to questionnaire items related to the intelligibility of Rally English and whether people using Rally English can be considered having good oral skills in English. In question 9, the participants were expected to answer whether they felt that understanding Rally English is easy for them. As seen in Figure 12, 37 participants (74%) claimed that understanding Rally English is easy for them. However, 6 participants (12%) disagreed with the statement. The questionnaire did not ask for clarification so the reason for this remains unclear.

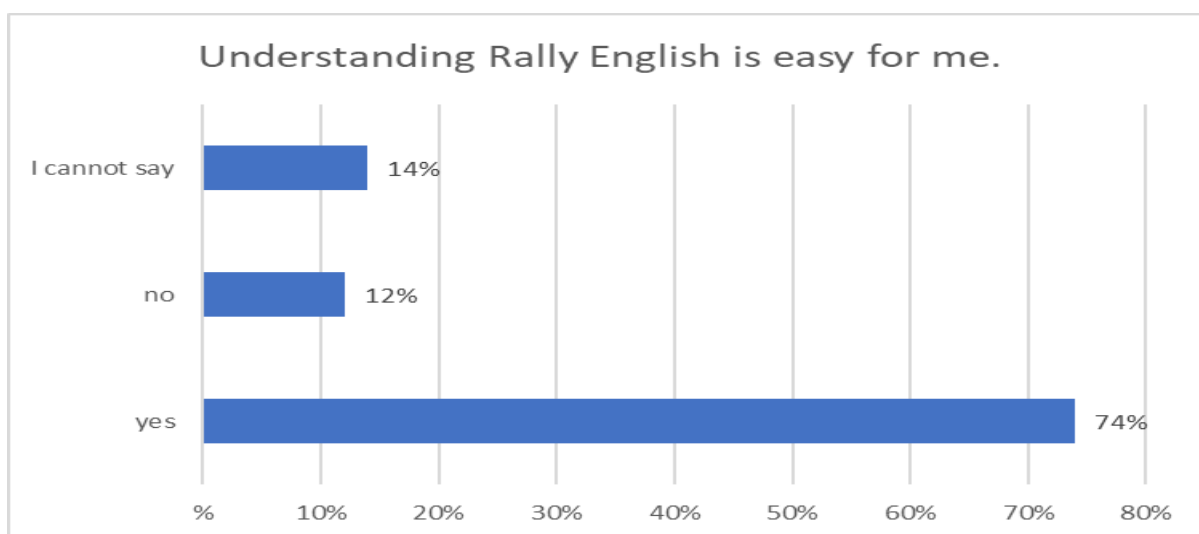


FIGURE 12 The perceived intelligibility of Rally English

Question 18 approached the same theme, but from a different angle. In it, the participants answered in a Likert scale to the statement: “I have trouble understanding someone who speaks English with a strong Finnish accent.” The answer options of somewhat disagreeing and neither agreeing nor disagreeing were the most selected options, both of which consisted of 24% of the participants (n=12 in both). Those who strongly disagreed with the statement amounted to 22% or 11 of the respondents. The answers are presented below in Figure 13.

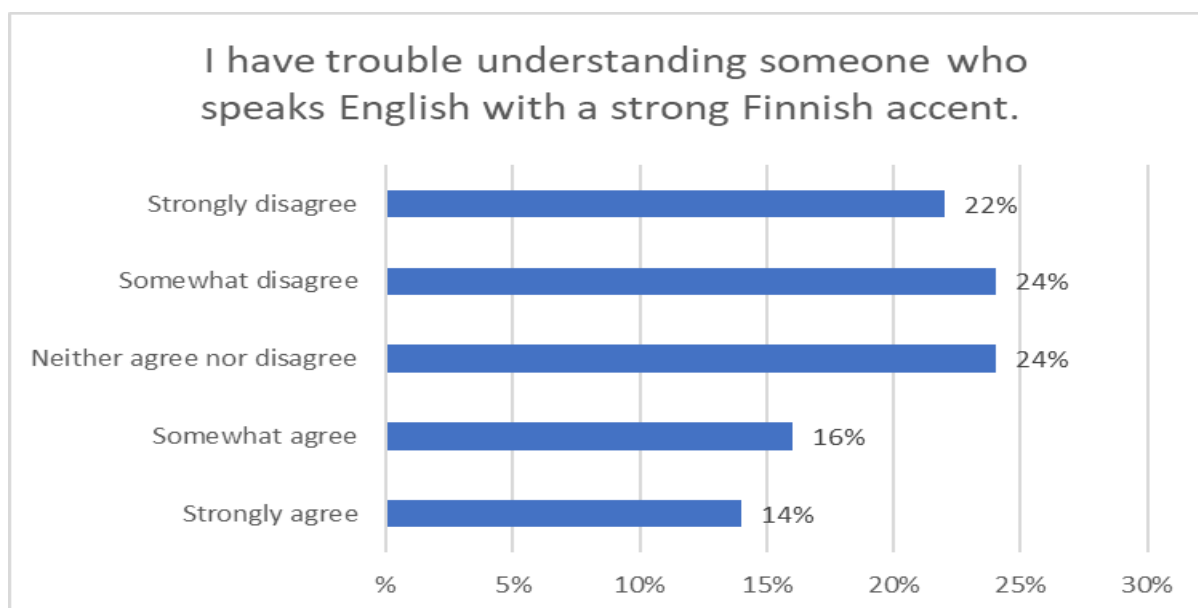


FIGURE 13 Understanding a person speaking English with a strong Finnish accent

Based on the results presented above, understanding Rally English was fairly easy for the students. However, this may be explained by the fact that Finnish is the first language for many of them. Even though gathering watertight results of the intelligibility of Rally English to non-Finnish speaking people is not possible solely by inquiring the students of this study, question number 20 aimed at finding some preliminary information on the matter. In this question, the students were to express their agreement with the following statement: “I believe that for a non-native Finnish speaker understanding Rally English can be difficult”. The most chosen Likert scale option was to “somewhat agree”, which gathered 42% of the answers with 21 respondents. The second most chosen option was strongly agreeing, which was chosen by 32% of the participants (n=16). Those disagreeing to some level were a minority consisting of 8 participants (16%). These results are presented in Figure 14. The intelligibility of Rally English as a phenomenon should be researched more deeply and among non-Finnish speaking participants.

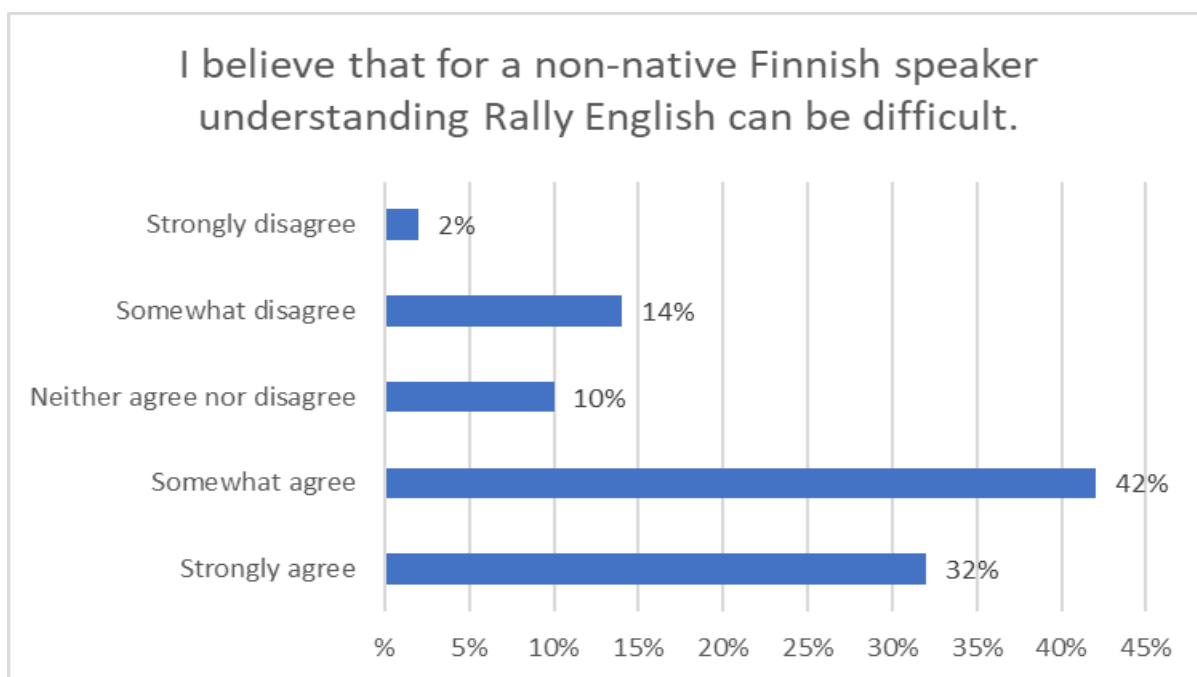


FIGURE 14 The assumed intelligibility of Rally English to non-Finnish speaking people

Lastly, the results related to the perceived oral proficiency of a person speaking English with a Finnish accent are introduced. In question 19, the participants were to express their agreement in a Likert scale to the following statement in Finnish: “A speaker can have good oral skills even though they pronounce English as they would pronounce Finnish”. The answers depict how the curricular ideal of the message coming across has been adopted by the participants. In total, 78% or 39 of the students agreed to some degree with the statement. Nine participants (18%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The percentages of responses are depicted in Figure 15. To note, this was the only question to which none of the participants strongly disagreed. As mentioned earlier, pronunciation is only a part of oral proficiency, which might explain why speaking English with a Finnish accent was not perceived as incompetence among the participants. However, due to the small sample size of the current study, making generalisations based on this finding would be incautious.

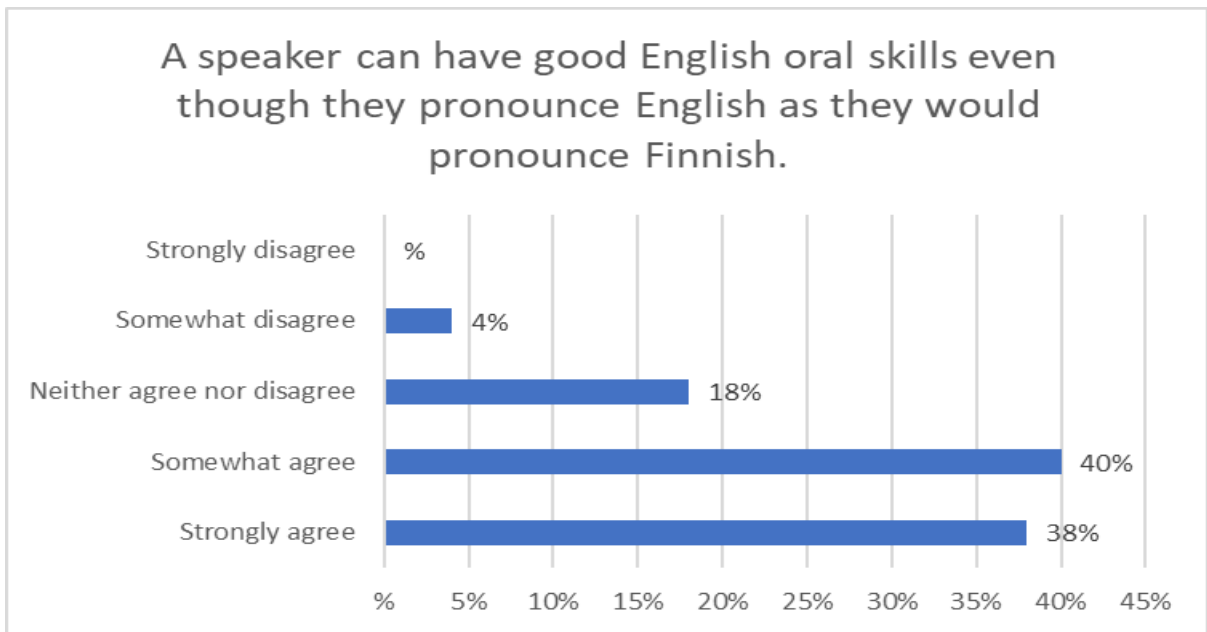


FIGURE 15 Perceived oral proficiency of a person speaking English with a Finnish accent

7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The final chapter of the thesis summarises the main aims of the present study and evaluates the results in the light of the research questions. Moreover, the implications of the present study will be discussed. Lastly, some suggestions for future research are introduced.

The purpose of this study was to explore Finnish-speaking secondary school students' views about English pronunciation, and more precisely, their views about the Finnish-influenced way of pronouncing English. The study was conducted by distributing a research questionnaire to Finnish secondary school students in their ninth grade. The data consisted of questionnaire responses given by 50 consenting students. The data was analysed through thematic analysis and descriptive statistics depending on the answer type.

7.1 Summary of the results

In this section, the results of the present study are presented in relation to the research questions. The first research question investigated the participants' own English pronunciation and its learning.

1. How do the participants perceive their own English pronunciation and its learning?

The question had two focus points: the participants' experiences of learning English pronunciation and their views about their own English pronunciation. The participants recounted many personally relevant and rewarding ways to learn pronunciation, both in their free time and in the language class. Some dispersion among the

participants was noted in relation to pronunciation learning difficulties. To some participants, nothing in particular felt difficult to learn while others offered examples of matters which they considered hard to learn. The examples offered are mostly aligned with the previous research of Horslund and Van Nostrand (2022), Ilola (2018) and Morris-Wilson (1999). However, learning English pronunciation did not seem overly complicated or an insurmountable feat for the participants. One of the research findings indicated that receptive skills to understand different spoken varieties of English could be enhanced. Due to the scale of this research, this finding should be investigated in further research.

From the viewpoint of their own pronunciation, 78% of the participants felt that their oral skills in English are good or quite good and that to many of them, pronouncing English is fairly easy. In comparison, the participants of Härmälä et al. (2014) also had mostly positive views about their English language skills. However, there were some participants to whom pronunciation felt difficult. Moreover, the anxiousness to speak English in the classroom due to one's pronunciation gathered diverse opinions. When it comes to pronunciation models chosen by the participants, the results were somewhat contradictory. Many of them targeted native-like English pronunciation while at the same time stating to target comprehensibility. This finding should be investigated further to explain and to confirm its reliability.

The second research question explored the intelligibility of Rally English. It was formed as follows:

2. What kinds of views do the participants have about the intelligibility of Rally English?

The participants felt that to them, understanding Rally English was quite easy. Moreover, the participants assumed that understanding Rally English might be difficult to non-Finnish speaking people. This assumption should be tested more rigorously among participants that are unfamiliar with the Finnish language. Morris-Wilson's research (1999: 275) indicated that the British participants did not seem to have much difficulty understanding English spoken in a Finnish accent, but there were some features in the speech samples the British participants were displeased with. Based on the research conducted by Tergujeff (2021), the link between foreign-accentedness and the experienced ease of understanding were just loosely connected. This connection was especially weak between oral proficiency and accentedness. Thus, Rally English may not be so difficult to understand as the participants' views suggest. However,

more research should be conducted in order to find more information about the intelligibility of Rally English.

The third research question investigated whether the participants recounted using Rally English deliberately or had they noticed someone else doing so. The question also aimed at finding contexts where participants had experienced Rally English being used.

3. Do the participants recount using Rally English deliberately or have they noticed others using it deliberately? If yes, in what kinds of contexts?

A majority of the participants were familiar with the phenomenon and recounted scenarios where Rally English was used, either by themselves or by others. Popular contexts where Rally English was used were among friends and family members or in social media or on the internet, especially in a humorous or playful way. In addition, some participants recounted using a more Finnish-influenced way of pronouncing an English word if they were unsure of how the word should be pronounced in English. These preliminary results indicate mostly positive ideas associated with Rally English.

7.2 Review of the research process and concluding remarks

This section reviews the research process in terms of validity and reliability. Suggestions for improving the research are presented. Moreover, some suggestions for future research are introduced. All in all, the research aims were achieved, and the chosen research methods were fitting for the aims. In addition to descriptive statistics, the answers to open-ended questions could have been analysed by qualitative content analysis. Conducting the pilot study among different people before the actual research questionnaire seemed to have a beneficial effect on adjusting the phrasing of the questionnaire items. A similar study researching attitudes towards Rally English could be conducted with different data collection and analysis methods, for example with student interviews and qualitative content analysis.

Even though the research aims of this study were fulfilled, one should be aware of its limitations. Due to the small sample size of the study and the fact that the participants all attended the same Finnish secondary school, the results of the study are not generalisable. Thus, the study should be regarded as an introduction to investigate the topic of Rally English in more detail, with different research methods and among different groups of people. Moreover, the participants may not be aware of their beliefs or may

be inconsistent with their answers (Woods 2003: 207). Adding the “I cannot say”-option to the research questionnaire tried to mitigate this issue. This study did not gather much background information of the participants so that enough willing participants could be found to complete the study in a suitable time frame for a Master’s thesis. Gathering some background information of the participants could be beneficial for future research and in that case, a dialogue with Härmälä, Huhtanen and Puukko’s research (2014) or the national survey by Leppänen et al. (2009) presented in the theoretical background could be insightful. Bearing in mind the aforementioned limitations of the study, its results could offer some insight to the language education field and foreign language teachers of Finland.

The research conducted has offered some ideas for future research. For example, researching the views about Finnish-accented English among different age groups in Finland could be worthwhile. From the contrastive linguistic perspective, there has been some previous research about the sound systems of Finnish-accented English (e.g. Dufva & Sajavaara 2001; Horslund & Van Nostrand 2022), but the extent to which the topic has been researched is still limited. The research project “Intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness of English spoken by Finns” led by Tergujeff has produced information about the intelligibility of Finnish-accented English albeit some of the papers related to this project are still being processed. Rally English remains a fairly unexplored topic, especially from the sociolinguistic perspective. As the status of English and its use in Finland are currently being researched with governmental funding (University of Eastern Finland 2022), it would be essential to explore Finnish-accented English in more detail.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. The original Finnish questionnaire



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Pupils' views on English pronunciation & Rally English

Tiedote tutkittavalle

Tämä kysely toteutetaan osana englannin kielen pro gradu-tutkielmaa.

Tässä kyselytutkimuksessa kartoitetaan Sinun kokemuksiasi englannin suullisesta kielitaidosta ja englannin kielen käytöstä. Kysely koostuu avokysymyksistä, "asteikolla 1-5"-tyyppisistä kysymyksistä sekä "kyllä-ei"-kysymyksistä. Kyselyn täyttäminen kestää noin 5-10 minuuttia. Kiitos osallistumisestasi!

1. Minua on tiedotettu tutkimuksen tarkoituksesta ja annan suostumukseni kyselyvastauksieni käyttöön ja keräämiseen. *

Kyllä

Ei, en halua osallistua tutkimukseen.

2. Millaisissa vapaa-ajan tilanteissa kohtaat englantia? *

3. Mikä on sinulle mielekäs tapa oppia englannin kielen ääntämistä? (esim. laulujen laulaminen, keskustelu englanniksi, podcastien tai videoiden

katsominen..) *

4. Millä tavoilla englannin ääntämistä on sinun peruskouluajanasi opetettu? *

5. Mikä englannin ääntämiseen liittyvä asia on ollut sinulle vaikea oppia? *

Tässä osuudessa kysymyksiin vastataan joko "kyllä" tai "ei". Joissakin tilanteissa sinulta odotetaan tarkennusta, jota varten avautuu lyhyt teksti-ikkuna.

6. Koen, että koulussa kannustetaan suullisen kielitaidon kehittämiseen. *

- kyllä
- ei
- en osaa sanoa

7. Käytän joskus tarkoituksellisesti rallienglantia eli suomivaikutteista englannin ääntämistapaa. *

kyllä; missä tilanteessa?

ei

en osaa sanoa

8. Olen käyttänyt tarkoituksella rallienglantia, jos olen ollut epävarma englannin sanan ääntämisestä. *

- kyllä
- ei
- en osaa sanoa

9. Rallienglannin ymmärtäminen on minulle helppoa. *

- kyllä
- ei
- en osaa sanoa

10. Olen kohdannut rallienglantiin eli suomivaikutteiseen ääntämistapaan liittyvää huumoria. *

kyllä; missä tilanteessa? _____

ei

en osaa sanoa

Tässä viimeisessä osuudessa vastaaminen tapahtuu asteikolla "täysin samaa mieltä - täysin eri mieltä" välivaihtoehtoineen.

11. Englannin suullisen kielitaidon opetuksessa on mielestäni käsitelty ääntämistä tarpeeksi paljon. *

Täysin samaa mieltä

Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

En samaa enkä eri mieltä

Jokseenkin eri mieltä

Täysin eri mieltä

12. Koen, että englannin suullinen kielitaitoni on hyvä. *

Täysin samaa mieltä

Jokseenkin samaa mieltä

En samaa enkä eri mieltä

Jokseenkin eri mieltä

Täysin eri mieltä

13. Englannin ääntäminen on minulle helppoa. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- Täysin eri mieltä

14. Erilaisten englannin puhetapojen ymmärtäminen (Intian englanti, brittienglanti, amerikanenglanti..) on minulle helppoa. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- Täysin eri mieltä

15. Olen joskus jännittänyt englannin puhumista luokassa ääntämiseni takia. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- Täysin eri mieltä

16. Pyrin englannin ääntämisessäni syntyperäisen puhujan tasoon. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- Täysin eri mieltä

17. Pyrin englannin ääntämisessäni ymmärrettävyyteen syntyperäiseltä puhujalta kuulostamisen sijaan. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- Täysin eri mieltä

18. Minun on vaikea ymmärtää vahvalla suomen aksentilla englantia puhuvaa henkilöä. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä

-
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
 - Täysin eri mieltä

19. Puhujalla voi olla hyvä englannin suullinen kielitaito, vaikka hän ääntää englantia suomen tapaan. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- Täysin eri mieltä

20. Uskon, että ei-suomenkieliselle rallienglannin ymmärtäminen voi tuottaa vaikeuksia. *

- Täysin samaa mieltä
- Jokseenkin samaa mieltä
- En samaa enkä eri mieltä
- Jokseenkin eri mieltä
- Täysin eri mieltä

21. Voit halutessasi kertoa lisää tutkimuksen aiheista, siihen liittyvistä ajatuksistasi tai kokemuksistasi. :)

APPENDIX 2. The research questionnaire in English

Open-ended questions:

4. In what kinds of free time situations do you encounter Rally English?
5. What is a rewarding and meaningful way for you to learn English pronunciation? (E.g. singing songs, conversing in English, listening to podcasts, watching videos...)
6. In what ways has English pronunciation been taught to you during your time in basic education?
7. What has been a difficult thing for you to learn that is related to English pronunciation?

Yes-no questions, some of which had the option to specify the answer:

8. I feel that I have been encouraged to develop my oral skills at school.
9. I sometimes use Rally English deliberately. If yes; in what kind of situation?
10. I have used Rally English on purpose if I have been unsure how the English word should be pronounced.
11. Understanding Rally English is easy for me.
12. I have encountered Rally English related humour. If yes; in what kind of situation?

Likert-scale questions: (fully agree - fully disagree)

13. In my opinion, pronunciation has been covered enough in English oral skills teaching.
14. I feel that my English oral skills are good.
15. Pronouncing English is easy for me.
16. Understanding different spoken varieties of English (e.g. Indian English, British English, American English) is easy for me.
17. I have sometimes felt anxious to speak English in the classroom due to my pronunciation.
18. My aspiration is to pronounce English like a native speaker.
19. In my English pronunciation, I aim at comprehensibility instead of trying to sound like a native speaker of English.
20. I have trouble understanding someone who speaks English with a strong Finnish accent.
21. A speaker can have good English oral skills even though they pronounce English as they would pronounce Finnish.
22. I believe that for a non-native Finnish speaker understanding Rally English can be difficult.
23. If you want to, you can tell more about the research topics and your thoughts or experiences related to them. :)