

THOU SHALT NOT WRITE ABOUT...:  
A Study of Taboo Content in Finnish EFL  
Textbooks for Upper Secondary School

Master's Thesis  
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English  
February 2012



## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta - Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos - Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä - Author Suvi Keturi ja Tiina Lehmonen	
Työn nimi - Title THOU SHALT NOT WRITE ABOUT...: A Study of Taboo Content in Finnish EFL Textbooks for Upper Secondary School	
Oppiaine - Subject englanti	Työn laji - Level Pro gradu -tutkielma
Aika - Month and year helmikuu 2012	Sivumäärä - Number of pages 118 sivua + 1 liite
<p>Tiivistelmä - Abstract</p> <p>Tabu on käsitteenä monimuotoinen ja vaikeasti määriteltävä, johtuen sekä niiden jatkuvasta muuttumisesta, valtavasta määrästä että niiden osittaisesta kulttuurisidonnaisuudesta. Tabuja ja tabukielen esiintymistä oppimateriaaleissa on tutkittu erittäin vähän, tutkimuksen keskittyessä lähinnä määrittelemään, mitkä aiheet ovat teoriassa tabuja maailmanlaajuisissa englannin kielen oppimateriaaleissa. Myös mahdolliset riskit, jotka liittyvät tabujen sisällyttämiseen oppimateriaaleihin ovat olleet tutkimuksen kohteena. Varsinainen empiirinen tutkimus tabujen esiintyvyydestä oppikirjoissa on kuitenkin jäänyt vähemmälle huomiolle. Tutkielmamme keskittyikin juuri tähän tutkimattomaan alueeseen.</p> <p>Tutkielmamme päätarkoitus oli selvittää, mitkä aiheet ovat tabuja suomalaisissa lukion englannin kielen oppikirjoissa. Tutkimuksessa analysoitiin kuutta eri tekstikirjasarjaa kolmelta suurimmalta kustantajalta, kirjojen yhteismäärä oli täten 44. Tutkimusta varten haastateltiin myös kahta suomalaista tekstikirjan tekijää.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoitti, että oppikirjojen sisältö vaihteli suuresti ja että hyvin harva asia on tabu suomalaisissa englannin kielen oppikirjoissa, näistä esimerkkinä loukkaavat poliittiset ja uskonnolliset ilmaisut. Haastatteluissa kävi ilmi, että vaikka kustantajat päättävätkin viime kädessä oppikirjan sisällöstä, kirjoittajilla on suhteellisen vapaat kädet aiheiden valitsemisessa. Tiettyjen aiheiden välttelyä tärkeämmäksi asiaksi osoittautuikin sisällytettävän asian pedagoginen arvo.</p>	
Asiasanat - Keywords: Taboo, taboo topic, taboo word, taboo language, euphemism, dysphemism, communicative competence, intercultural competence, textbook, theme interview	
Säilytyspaikka - Depository Kielten laitos	
Muita tietoja - Additional information	



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

As long as there have been humans, there have been taboos. Thus, the fact that taboos have always existed might be one of the main reasons for many authors finding it to be a specifically interesting field of study. Taboos are indeed an intriguing topic of study and they have been examined for a long time and from different perspectives. They, however, are no uncomplicated object of study as they vary from one culture, context and time to another. Therefore, as drawing absolute and permanent conclusions of the area of taboos is challenging and at times even impossible, studying taboos presents many challenges to anyone attempting to examine them. At the same time, the challenges of studying them has been one of the main factors affecting the choice of selecting them to be the focus of the present study.

As mentioned above, taboos exist in a variety of contexts, some of them being known in most societies and others being more context-specific. There are also several different types of taboos, for example, cultural taboos, dietary taboos and religious taboos, only to name a few. Schools also have their own taboos, as do EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbooks and they vary depending on the size, needs, and qualities of the target audience. Nevertheless, with regards to taboos in school environment, no absolute list of taboo topics exists but it is rather the choices of EFL authors and publishers that contribute to the topics being discussed or avoided in learning materials. In other words, decisions made by the textbook authors as well as their publishers are one of the main factors affecting the contents of EFL learning materials.

Although the topic of taboos has been studied by many authors, taboos in EFL textbooks is a scarcely studied area. Nevertheless, of the few studies conducted, two of the most important ones for the purposes of the present study have been that of Crooks (2006), on the importance of including taboo

language in language teaching as well as Allan and Burrige's (2006) study on learners' need to differentiate different connotations words may have. In addition, also studies on students' communicative competence as well as euphemisms and dysphemisms have been of specific importance for the present study since they are quite tightly connected to the teaching of taboos. Nevertheless, although many previous studies have emphasised the need for including taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language in EFL learning contexts, no empirical studies have been conducted on which taboo topics can already be found from EFL textbooks. More specifically, to our knowledge, no studies have been conducted on exploring which topics are taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks, except for our previous study on the topic (Keturi and Lehmonen 2011).

The purpose of the present exploratory study, therefore, was to examine forty-four Finnish EFL textbook series for upper secondary school and draw conclusions on their taboo content in order to attempt to fill the existing void in the present area of study. More specifically, the present study concentrated on defining what the taboos of Finnish EFL textbooks are, if there are any. EFL textbooks for upper secondary school students were chosen to be the focus of study since the taboo content in them was assumed to be the most extensive due to the higher age of students. The interviews with two Finnish EFL textbook authors have also been of specific importance to the reliability and validity of the present paper.

The remainder of the present paper is structured as follows. Following the introduction in section one, section two presents the findings of already existing studies on the field of taboos, euphemisms, dysphemisms as well as communicative and intercultural competence. Section three examines textbooks as an object of study. In section four, in turn, the study methods of the present study are presented in detail, including the research questions, data collection process and the methods of study. In section five the focus is



turned to the distribution of taboos in the examined EFL textbooks for upper secondary school students. In that section, the topics found are further divided into three categories according to their level of tabooeness and multiple examples are provided on the findings. Moreover, the results of the interviews with the two textbook authors will be the focus of section six, of which the aim was to investigate the process of writing an EFL textbook more in-depth, specifically from the point of view of including and excluding certain topics. In section seven, in turn, the main findings of the present study are reported and the results of both the content of the textbooks and the findings of the interviews are synthesised into larger entities. Finally, in section eight, conclusions are made based on the present study, along with the presentation of its implications and limitations.

## **2 TABOOS IN FINNISH EFL TEXTBOOKS FOR UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL**

### **2.1 Taboos**

Taboos have always existed in language and culture even though the term **taboo** was not defined until the year 1777 by Captain James Cook. He reports the word *taboo* (from Tongan *tapu*) as signifying something forbidden (Cook 1812:676). Even though the definition of taboo has remained more or less the same over the years, in today's Western world taboos are nevertheless not such strong social prohibitions as they once were. The concept of taboos is indeed difficult to define, for it is a vast and constantly changing area (Hughes 2006:462). There are many definitions of taboos but for purposes of the present study we chose the definition by Farberow (1963:2), who defines the term *taboo* as follows:

Taboos are primarily backward-oriented, for, by being essentially forbidding and prohibiting, they tend to preserve the past and to control the impingement of the future on the present. Of course, not all taboos are old. New ones constantly appear, taking various shapes and forms as the substance of the culture evolves, but they all serve the same goal - preservation of the status quo.

This definition is the most appropriate for the present study as excluding taboos from learning materials preserves the past instead of reflecting the modern, diverse culture in which the learners currently live in. Moreover, even though the definition by Farberow is over fifty years old, in our opinion it is still applicable today.

Throughout history, there has been a tendency to refrain from naming the fearful and unpleasant (Turner 1975:116). According to Laitinen (2009:5), a taboo can be anything that has a forbidden quality or something that is not spoken of. Calling something taboo, however, does not automatically make it a taboo, as they are born from the cultural and historical practices shared by a social community (Laitinen 2009:5). Moreover, shared taboos are often a signal of social cohesion and, among other common values, they link the community together (Allan and Burridge 2006:9). In the 1870's taboo became a general term used by cultural anthropologists and theologians to describe specific objects and phenomena confronted in different cultures. These objects and phenomena were associated with filthiness and uncleanness and thus members of the culture were forced to avoid them. (Laitinen 2009:5-6.) Furthermore, over the years, the definition of taboo has shifted from meaning "strictly forbidden" to simply "offensive" or "grossly impolite" (Hughes 2006:464). Hughes (2006:462) posits the view that today taboo refers increasingly to "prohibitions against socially unacceptable words, expressions, and topics, especially of a sexual and racist nature". Indeed, Allan and Burridge (2006:27) agree with Hughes in that any behaviour that can be dangerous or cause harm, injury or discomfort to either an individual or the community is often subject to taboo.

As mentioned above, taboos are strongly associated with the dichotomy of cleanness and filthiness. That is, taboos are usually connected with the filthy aspect of an area of life. For example, all food is not considered to be taboo,

only those that are regarded as filthy are taboos, such as pork and blood for Muslims and Jewish people. In addition, the dichotomy of cleanness and filthiness is also visible with taboos relating to sex and sexuality. That is, prostitution, pornography and pedophilia are typically deemed filthy whereas private, reproductive sex between man and woman is regarded as natural. Furthermore, life is often considered to be holy. Death taints the holiness of life and is thus filthy and taboo, as can be seen with abortion, murder and euthanasia. (Laitinen 2009:13.)

As taboos have always been regarded as something forbidden, they have been connected with fear of punishment (Allan and Burrige 1991:7-8). The degree of tolerance shown towards any taboo-defying behaviour varies among different societies (Allan and Burrige 2006:105). Today, some cultures still have severe consequences when taboos are violated. Nevertheless, in many cultures taboos are solely social sanctions placed on distasteful or impolite behaviour shown in certain social contexts (Allan and Burrige 2006:237). For instance, in European and North American societies violations of taboo do not often have dire consequences. Instead, for example, political dissent, blasphemy, and even crimes against persons and property are treated fairly mildly. That is, different cultures have different attitudes towards violations of taboos. (Allan and Burrige 1991:7-8.)

Turner (1975:115) states that the continuous changing of taboos can be considered as a proof of the fact that the meaning of words is not inherent to them by nature or etymology. Laitinen (2009:5) points out that taboos are connected with the limitation of social life and different phenomena connected to it. That is, prohibitions maintain norms and social order, and they become visible in social encounters and institutional practices (Laitinen 2009:5). Andersson and Trudgill (1990:55-56) add that different sorts of taboo are “important elements in the structure and social life of a culture”, not merely isolated facts in a culture. Furthermore, to say that, for example, sex is

taboo does not mean that that area of life is altogether forbidden, but that it is regulated by conscious and unconscious rules.

As societies and cultures are in a state of constant change, so are the taboos linked with culture. Taboos and the topics placed under them change over the centuries (Allan and Burridge 2006:105). Some taboos, such as death, disease and sexuality, are, however, also timeless (Laitinen 2009:9). Attitudes towards certain taboos may differ between cultures and some cultures may seem to have different taboos than others, but essentially the same “parameters” recur in every culture and subculture. That is, all cultures tend to have taboos related to, for instance, disease, death, and bodily effluvia. (Allan and Burridge 1991:8.)

Allan and Burridge (2006:1) define taboo as “a proscription of behaviour that affects everyday life” and state that people usually avoid tabooed behaviour unless they intentionally intend to violate a taboo. Evans et al. (2000:2), agree, stating that taboos have control over our everyday lives and set boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. We feel that this exertion of control can even be seen in schools, for example, as censoring of topics included in textbooks.

The types of taboos are difficult to categorise since they partially overlap. Some taboo topics, for example, have corresponding taboo words, whereas others do not. (Andersson and Trudgill 1990:56.) For instance, cannibalism is a forbidden act, but the word *cannibalism* is not taboo. Furthermore, the act of prostitution and the corresponding word *prostitute* and *whore* are both taboo. Nevertheless, we would like to point out that the tabooeness of words differs, as in the example above. That is, *whore* is considered to be more taboo than *prostitute*, *whore* being a derogatory term while *prostitute* being a profession. Moreover, the word *prostitute* can be used in certain situations, for example in the press, without it being a taboo. For the purposes of the present study,

we decided to divide taboos into three different categories: taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language. Even though these categories may overlap at times, the division into these categories enables us to study each topic in-depth. In the following sections, each of these categories will be examined in the following order: taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language.

### **2.1.1 Taboo topics**

By taboo topics, we refer to forbidden topics that one should not talk about. When discussing taboo topics, as Evans et al. (2000:5) point out, it is essential to remember that although the terms *taboo* and *controversial* are similar in meaning, they are not synonyms. In other words, a topic can be controversial in nature without being taboo. That is to say, the level of taboo depends entirely on the current use of the topic (Turner 1975:115). For instance, Blake and Moorhead (1993:81) note that in England fifty years ago sex was more taboo as a topic than death, the reverse being true today. A variety of topics can be taboo, but historically taboos have had a tendency to move from religious topics to secular ones, especially from sexual to racial. As also mentioned by Turner (1975:115), taboos are apt to change, sex being once taboo, and now replaced by race. As Laitinen (2009:9) states, it is challenging to talk about taboo topics informally as well as formally as they are so in-built in culture that their existence is no longer questioned.

Allan and Burridge (1991:153 and 2006:222-223) mention death as being one of the great taboo topics and that its tabooeness is based on different types of fear; the fear of losing our loved ones, the fear of corruption and disintegration of our body, the fear of death's finality, the fear of possible afterlife; the fear of malevolent spirits or the souls of the dead, and the fear of a meaningless death. The root of most taboos and of these fears is losing control of one's destiny, death being an event that afflicts us all since it is simply another unavoidable body process. Diseases are also taboo and they

often intertwine with death. According to Allan and Burridge (2006:234), in most societies, past or present, any references to diseases are either completely censored or substituted with a less offensive equivalent. Using a milder or more indirect term for a specific disease tends to make it more tolerable to discuss the harshness of reality. Allan and Burridge (2006:235) interestingly note that, although death is almost always a taboo, it is acceptable to talk about killing one's enemies.

Taboos relating to food occur in all societies and cultures. For instance, for Hindus the forbidden meat is beef whereas for Jews and Muslims the meat is pork. For Jewish people it is also forbidden to eat meat and milk products together in the same meal. In addition, the Bible forbids some foods, but the prohibition is often ignored among Christians. Outside of religion, cultural values often dictate what is good to eat and what is not. Reasons for considering certain food to be taboo have been forgotten within time and, as a result, the avoidance has become an unthinking ritual. (Allan and Burridge 2006:177-178) According to Allan and Burridge (2006:178), the strongest of our food taboos, and perhaps society's ultimate taboo, is cannibalism.

Allan and Burridge (1991:52) report that it has been traditionally believed in many communities that bodily effluvia are used to perform black magic, for example voodoo, on other people. It was thought that malevolent magic can be performed on, for instance, a person's blood, spittle, faeces, nail- and hair-clippings, and therefore, to protect people in these communities, there are taboos on bodily effluvia. According to Allan and Burridge (2006:173), although today people are no longer concerned about voodoo, bodily effluvia is often thought of as disgusting or repulsive, which causes embarrassment connected to them.

According to Laitinen (2009:13-14), public and private spheres have their own taboo topics. For instance, it is not deemed appropriate to discuss

personal matters in public. Money and salary can, however, only be discussed as a public issue, such as taxation and benefits as it is inappropriate to inquire after the amount of another person's salary in the Western societies. In Asia, however, the topic of one's salary is a common small talk topic.

As taboo topics are large in quantity, we felt it necessary to include the lists of taboo topics by the most significant researchers on the field. Some of them overlap, but others differ from each other greatly. Below are the most common taboo topics as identified by several researchers:

**Table 1.** A list of taboo topics.

<b>Taboo</b>	<b>Researcher(s)</b>
<b>Abortion</b>	Evans et al. (2000:3); Laitinen (2009:13); Ravitch (2004:21);
<b>Alcohol</b>	Gray (2002)
<b>Bodily effluvia</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:144); Laitinen (2009:13); Neaman and Silver (1983)
<b>Certain body parts (such as breasts and penis)</b>	Allan and Burridge (1991:8); Neaman and Silver (1983)
<b>Cursing</b>	Evans et al. (2000:3)
<b>Death</b>	Allan and Burridge (1991:8, 2006); Feifel (1963:8-21); Laitinen (2009:13); Neaman and Silver (1983) Ravitch (2004:21)
<b>Diseases</b>	Allan and Burridge (1991:8, 2006:203); Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Drink relating to taboo</b>	Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Euthanasia</b>	Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Food relating to taboo (such as pork)</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:175); Gray (2002); Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Incest</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:144); Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Magic</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:161); Ravitch (2004:21)
<b>Murder</b>	Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Narcotics</b>	Gray (2002)
<b>Pedophilia</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:144);

	Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Politics</b>	Gray (2002); Ravitch (2004:21)
<b>Pornography</b>	Evans et al. (2000:3); Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Prostitution</b>	Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Race</b>	Evans et al. (2000:3)
<b>Religion</b>	Evans et al. (2000:3); Gray (2002); Ravitch (2004:21)
<b>Sex</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:144); Evans et al. (2000:3); Gray (2002); Laitinen (2009:13); Neaman and Silver (1983)
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:144); Evans et al (2000:3); Laitinen (2009:13)
<b>Social problems (such as unemployment and poverty)</b>	Allan and Burridge (2006:62); Ravitch (2004:21)
<b>Suicide</b>	Laitinen (2009:13); Neaman and Silver (1983)
<b>Supernatural</b>	Allan and Burridge (1991:8)
<b>Violence</b>	Ravitch (2004:21)
<b>Weapons</b>	Ravitch (2004:21)
<b>Witchcraft</b>	Ravitch (2004:21)

### 2.1.2 Taboo words

Allan and Burridge (2006:237-238) define taboo words as something to be avoided. In other words, a taboo word is censored in a particular occasion due to the speaker's fear of offending the listeners as well as losing one's face. By taboo words we mean words that can be thought of as offensive. It is difficult to distinguish taboo words from taboo language as they often overlap. For the present study, we have interpreted that taboo words mean words that one is forbidden to use whereas taboo language stands for forbidden language use or function, such as cursing. To illustrate this, one might encounter a person of African descent and call him or her *a nigger*. This is an example of taboo language. If one tells a story about *a nigger* without being derogatory, however, that is an example of taboo word usage. A clear division between taboo words and taboo language has not been made in the



field of study. In our point of view, however, the main purpose of using taboo language is to offend whereas a taboo word can be offensive or not depending on the context and the purpose of use.













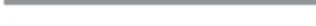















Words regarded as taboo change from one generation and society to another, just like taboo topics. For instance, the word *gay* used to mean “happy and full of fun” and now it stands for “a man sexually attracted to people of the same sex”. (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2005). Blake and Moorhead (1993:81) point out that in England today death is more of a taboo topic than sex, although the reverse was true fifty years ago. Hughes (2006:464) supports this view by stating that the use of sexual terms has increased whereas taboo words relating to religion are less frequently observed. Moreover, Hughes adds that the number of taboo words relating to race is increasing. Another example of the constant change of taboo words is the topic of religion in the speech of politicians in different countries. In England, it is considered to be unsuitable and somewhat crude for a politician to mention religion whereas in the United States, not mentioning religion might be the end of one’s political career (Fox 2005:356-357). In our opinion these examples illustrate the fact that taboo words are an inevitable part of language and reflect social attitudes and ideals.

There are several types of taboo words belonging to different categories, such as words and expressions relating to death, religion, sex, and race are most generally mentioned (Blake and Moorhead 1993:81; Gramley and Pätzold 1992:291; Hughes 2006:464). For example, in the case of discussing death, people may find using the words *to die* and *dead* impolite or inappropriate, preferring to convey the meaning differently by substituting the expression with another, less impolite or inappropriate one such as *to pass away*, as mentioned by Blake and Moorhead (1993:81). Gramley and Pätzold (1992:291) observe that when addressing a person, national and ethnic names, such as *Jew*, *nigger*, *Paki*, and *Yank*, are almost always used as insults.

Furthermore, Blake and Moorhead (1993:81-82) draw attention to the fact that current social attitudes and mores have an effect on one's language use. Allan and Burridge (2006:237) note that age, sex, education and social status also affect what type of behaviour a person considers to be distasteful or impolite. In other words, a younger person may consider the expression *to die* to be more appropriate than *to go over*, an expression that an older person might prefer.

Taboo words vary in terms of their perceived severity. For instance, Allan and Burridge (2006:52) point out that it is generally accepted that the most tabooed word in English is *cunt*. This is supported by a study conducted in Britain on the attitudes people have towards different taboo words. The figure below shows how different taboo words were ranked in terms of their perceived severity. It is composed of the opinions of 1033 adults (Millwood-Hargrave 2000:1). It is to be noted that, however, the tabooeness of a word varies from one person and context to another.

**Table 2.** Ranked order of words according to severity. Taken from Millwood-Hargrave (2000:9).

Figure 1: Ranked order of words according to severity <sup>5</sup>		<i>Position (1997)</i>	
Cunt		1	(1)
Motherfucker		2	(2)
Fuck		3	(3)
Wanker		4	(4)
Nigger		5	(11)
Bastard		6	(5)
Prick		7	(7)
Bollocks		8	(6)
Arschhole		9	(9)
Paki		10	(17)
Shag		11	(8)
Whore		12	(13)
Twat		13	(10)
Piss off		14	(12)
Spastic		15	(14)
Slag		16	(18)
Shit		17	(15)
Dickhead		18	(19)
Pissed off		19	(16)
Arse		20	(20)
Bugger		21	(21)
Balls		22	(22)
Jew		23	(24)
Sodding		24	(23)
Jesus Christ		25	(26)
Crap		26	(25)
Bloody		27	(27)
God		28	(28)

Base: Total sample

### 2.1.3 Taboo language

Taboo language may be defined in many ways. For the purposes of the present study we have chosen that of Allan and Burrige (2006:40), according to whom, taboo language refers to language that contains so-called “dirty words” and is thus a breach of etiquette. The definition of swearing by Andersson and Trudgill (1990:53) also adequately describes the nature of taboo language. They suggest that swearing is a type of language use in which the expression

- 1) refers to something that is taboo and/or stigmatized in the culture;
- 2) should not be interpreted literally; and / or
- 3) can be used to express strong emotions and attitudes.

Andersson and Trudgill illustrate this by examining the word *shit*. *Shit* refers to a tabooed item, excrement, but when used for swearing, however, it is used to express emotions, not to be taken literally. We can use the term to express emotions and attitudes by “freeing [it] from its referential duties”, that is, to understand the difference between literal and emotive meaning. Allan and Burrige (2006:78) note that swearing often intensifies expressions and does so in a manner that inoffensive words cannot achieve. Moreover, inappropriate language is frequently used as a weapon against enemies and is employed as a release mechanism when we are frustrated, angry or hurt (Allan and Burrige 2006:2).

Over the centuries, an extraordinary range of content and style has evolved in taboo language, ranging from religious to heavily taboo utterances (Hughes 2006:xv). While many people argue that one could live without using taboo language, the reason to use taboo language, as Mercury (1995:28) states, is to express one’s meaning more clearly and strongly than non-taboo expressions which do not carry the same significance as their taboo alternatives. Mercury also notes that taboo language can be used without offending anybody. That is, successful taboo language users are often more

adjusted and can more easily adapt to the situation in which they are speaking and thus do not seem to offend their listeners as easily as unsuccessful taboo language users. (Mercury 1995:28.) In addition, one feature of taboo language, according to Hughes (2006:3), is the use of abbreviations as they provide a useful way of substituting or disguising a harsh expression, making it more difficult for one's listeners or the third party to notice it. Examples of abbreviations of this type are *BS* (Bullshit) and *WTF* (What the fuck?).

Taboo language evolves constantly as old expressions are discarded and new expressions take their place. Allan and Burrridge (2006:2) point out that there are two ways in which new taboo expressions arise: either the tabooed expression is changed into another or figurative language use sparks new taboo expressions. These changes are often motivated by the constant censoring of taboo language, which promotes the creation of inventive and playful new expressions or new meanings for old expressions.

Gramley and Pätzold (1992:266-267) note that taboo language has been studied also from the point of view of gender-specific vocabulary. It has been shown that men prefer more obscene expressions than women, who in turn are more likely to use impersonal or neutral terms. In addition, as stated by Gramley and Pätzold (1992:266-267), feminine language use is often viewed as overly positive whereas masculine language use is more abusive and obscene. Overall, men typically employ more taboo language than women, about three times more frequently, and they also use stronger taboo expressions (Allan and Burrridge 2006:78; Gramley and Pätzold 1992:281). Moreover, Allan and Burrridge (2006:78) state that both males and females are more likely to use taboo language in the company of same-sex people. They also note that, regardless of the speaker's gender, swearing is often engaged in from a very early age.

Taboo language has many uses and Jay (1992:1-8) has been able to provide different categories of taboo language corresponding each particular use or purpose. He posits the view that when a taboo expression is used, it usually fulfils a speaker's or listener's specific types of need and intentions, and thus can be divided into different groups. He calls these different categories "curse events". Jay presents the different categories of taboo language as follows:

**Table 3.** Categories of taboo language (adapted from Jay 1992:1-8)

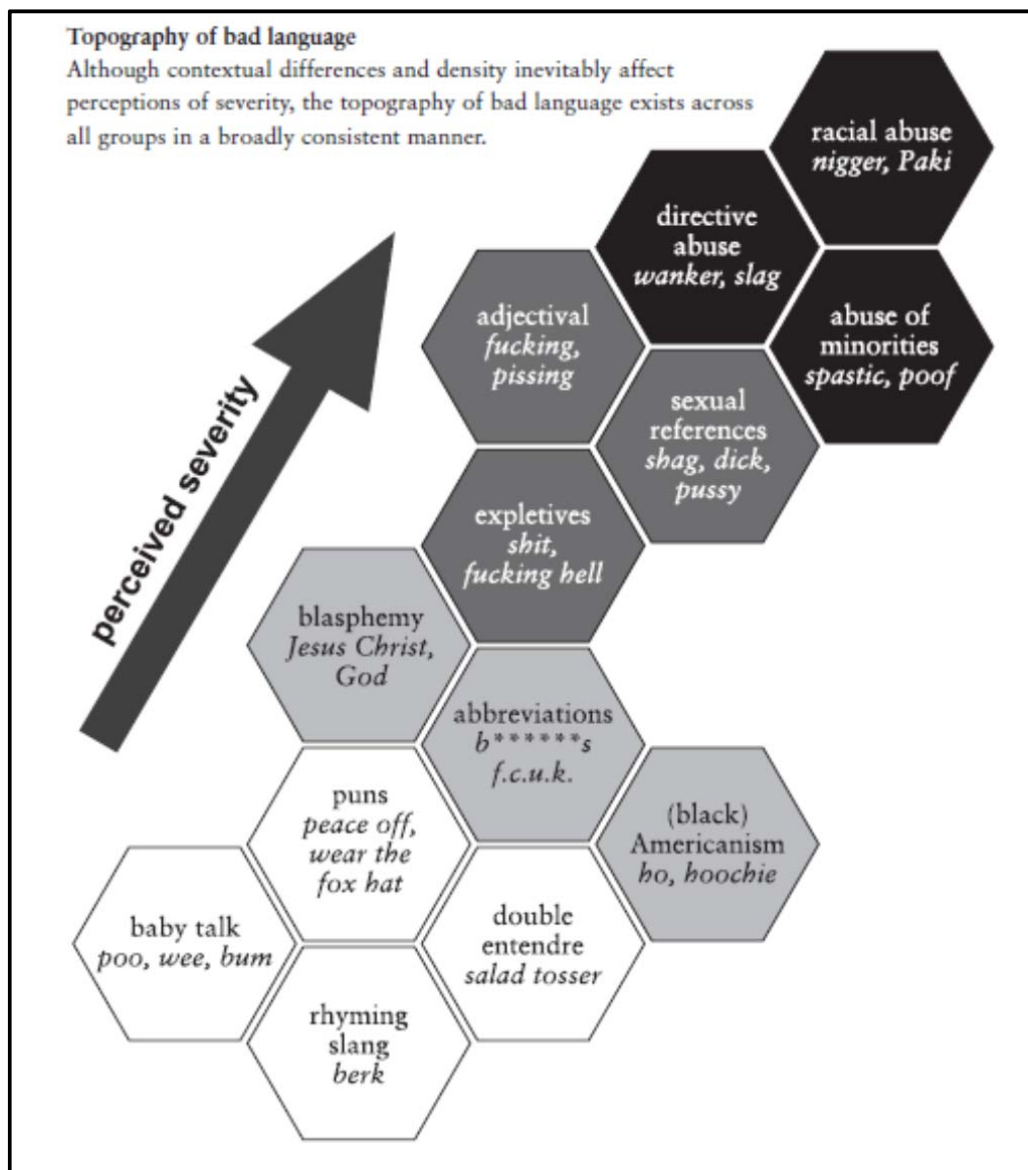
<b>Cursing</b>	The intention behind cursing is to cause harm on another person by using certain words or phrases. These words are condemned by certain institutions such as religion by punishing or penalising the speaker for such usage. Examples: <i>damn you, to hell with you, eat shit and die.</i>
<b>Profanity</b>	To be profane means to be intolerant or ignorant of the guidelines of a religious order. In other words, the speaker would be ignorant or indifferent towards these matters, not intending to denigrate God or religion. Examples: <i>For the love of Christ, get off the phone! Jesus H Christ, I'm hungry!</i>
<b>Blasphemy</b>	A blasphemy would appear as a direct attack on religion, religious figures or religious doctrine. Blasphemy is aimed directly at the church and the speaker would be aware of the direct insult whereas profanity is related to the indifference to religion and the speaker might not be aware of the insult towards religious institutions. Blasphemy has lost its impact as a result of the church losing power over its people during the last century. Examples: <i>Shit on what it says in the Bible! Screw the Pope!</i>
<b>Taboo</b>	The function of taboos is to suppress or inhibit certain thoughts, behaviours and speech. Different cultures use taboos to control members within the group in order to preserve social order of the group. An example of this group is homosexuality, which is still considered forbidden in some cultures.
<b>Obscenity</b>	Obscene words are very rarely used in public media as they are regarded as the most offensive. Obscene words cannot be used freely as they are subject to restriction and using such speech is to risk sanctioning from the courts.

	While the function of taboos is to restrict what speakers do, obscenity's function is to protect listeners from harmful language. Examples: <i>fuck, motherfucker, cocksucker, cunt or tits</i> .
<b>Vulgarism</b>	Vulgarity means the language of the unsophisticated, unsocialised or the under-educated. Vulgarisms reflect the crudeness of street language and thus they are not necessarily taboo or obscene. They are used in order to communicate and do not serve any other particular need or function. Examples: <i>up yours, slut, piss, kiss my ass</i> and <i>puke</i> .
<b>Slang</b>	Slang is vocabulary that is developed to ease communication in certain sub-groups, such as teenagers, drug users, musicians, soldiers or athletes. The function of using slang code is to identify members of the group while misusing or ignoring it identifies non-members, which is especially important if the sub-group is involved in illegal transactions. Examples: <i>pimp, cherry, dweeb, jock</i> and the many street names for drugs.
<b>Epithets</b>	Epithets are simple, loud, forceful one-or two-word outbursts of emotional language. They are often uttered from frustration as when one hits one's hand with a hammer. Examples: <i>shit, damn, son of a bitch, goddamn it, and fuck off</i> .
<b>Insults and slurs</b>	Insults and slurs are verbal attacks on people and they both function to harm the target of the attack directly through using a particular word or phrase. Insults and slurs gain their powers by denoting imagined or real characteristics of the target. Insults are commonly heard on the schools playground and they may denote mental, physical or psychological characteristics of the target. The nature of slurs can be racial, social or ethnic and they may indicate the prejudice or stereotyping of the speaker. Examples: <i>jackass, pig, whore, fag, fatty, four eyes, tattler tale, wimp, fairy, nigger, chink, taco, and grease ball</i> .

Apart from categorising taboo language, the attitudes people have towards it have also been studied. The following figures are taken from a research conducted in Britain that was commissioned by the Advertising Standards

Authority (ASA), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC) and the Independent Television Commission (ITC). The aim of the research was to test people's attitudes to swearing and offensive language as well as to examine the degree to which context played a role in their reactions. Figure 3 represents another type of category of taboo language which has also been ranked according to the perceived severity of the different categories.

**Table 4.** Topography of bad language. Taken from Millwood-Hargrave (2000:8).





#### **2.1.4 Taboos in the classroom**

Learners are generally interested in taboos and taboo language as they encounter them frequently, even daily, in different media. For instance, movies, TV-series and the Internet tend to be rich in taboo content. Dewaele (2004:205) notes that learners' fascination of taboos and taboo language is proven by the high number of websites in several languages that contain taboos and taboo language. Therefore taboos and taboo language can be regarded as an important part of learners' everyday life.

Due to the high occurrence of taboos and taboo language outside the classroom, they tend to be among the first words to be learned in an L2 for young learners of English. Nevertheless, taboos and taboo language are seldom included in textbooks or classroom discussions. Dewaele (2004:205) calls this phenomenon an “interesting paradox”. It is worth noting that the high occurrence of taboos and taboo language is not the sole reason for their popularity among youths. The facts that taboos often fascinate young learners and taboo words are among the first words that natives want to teach to foreign language learners might also contribute to the popularity of taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language. Regardless of the topic's popularity, Dewaele (2004:205) posits the view that taboo content is excluded from textbooks and classroom discussion due to its offensive nature. As a consequence, language learners can have a limited knowledge of taboos and taboo language and thus seldom use them or use them in inappropriate social circumstances.

Teachers have a tendency to be concerned about the bad language of their learners. Andersson and Trudgill (1990:8) comment that this is only natural but they regard the teaching of different types of language, including taboos and taboo language, as the duty of the school. Indeed, they feel that the school is responsible for pointing out that certain types of language use are

inappropriate in some contexts. Dewaele (2004:220) believes that learners can be effectively familiarised with these different types of language use by offering them a wide, preferably authentic selection of learning materials, including written and visual materials. Andersson and Trudgill (1990:179-180) note that teachers who are open-minded and unprejudiced often best succeed in familiarising their learners with different varieties of language use, and thus help developing the learners' linguistic abilities and interests. They state that teachers should not differentiate language use into "good" or "bad" language. Instead, language should be considered in terms of its suitability to different contexts. Treating language in this manner assists both teachers and learners in developing a clearer idea of a language's true nature, and as a result, enhances learners' language repertoire.

According to Dewaele (2004:205, 220), when taboo content is excluded from textbooks and the classroom, learners develop a distorted idea as well as a limited knowledge of using and understanding taboos and taboo language. Indeed, inappropriate use of language can have negative social consequences. Appropriate use of language, in turn, promotes and affirms social bonds between people, as reported by Dewaele (2004:204-205). Consequently, learners can, however, have a limited knowledge of this type of language use, which in turn hinders them from using taboos and taboo language. This can have a negative effect on their social relationships. Nevertheless, learners who have more experience in using language with taboo content in different situations are more likely to have developed "the necessary conceptual representations" of taboos and taboo language and therefore, have the confidence to use them appropriately in varying contexts (Dewaele 2004:220). In order to use language appropriately, learners need both "the skills of fluency and accuracy in the language and the awareness of the cultural significance of their utterances" (Byram 1989:145). That is, learners need the knowledge of the differences between their own culture and that of the target language in order to be successful language users.

## 2.2 Euphemisms and dysphemisms

Since taboo topics, words and language are deemed inappropriate in certain contexts, one might opt for euphemisms instead. The word *euphemism* is derived from Greek and is defined, according to Burchfield (1986:13), as “use of an auspicious word for an inauspicious one” and “fair of speech”. Allan and Burridge (1991:vii) report that euphemisms have existed throughout history and they are used even among preliterate people. This is supported by Hughes (2006:151), who states that all communities from the primitive to the advanced use euphemisms. He points out that they are often defined as the use of “deliberately indirect, conventionally imprecise, or socially ‘comfortable’ ways of referring to taboo, embarrassing, or unpleasant topics”. They are employed as an alternative expression when one wants to avoid losing face or causing annoyance or embarrassment to one's interlocutors (Allan and Burridge 1991:11; Katamba 2006:142). That is to say, as Hughes (2006:151) notes, euphemisms are an essential mode of politeness, and thus a continuous process. He also mentions that they are often self-evident but there are a surprisingly large number of euphemisms that are unconscious and collective. Gramley and Pätzold (1992:21) state that euphemisms result from change in the moral sense of society in certain areas in which society has a shared guilty conscience or is afraid to mention a taboo topic.

Many euphemisms are figurative, the most general type being a metaphor (Allan and Burridge 1991:14; Hughes 2006:152). For instance, as Hughes (2006:152) notes, even though sexually explicit language is common in today's speech, the expressions *sleep with* and *go to bed with* are preferred over *to have sex with*. Indeed, as stated by Gramley and Pätzold (1992:263), association with sex tends to contaminate the expressions and therefore, there is always a need to find new euphemisms as the previous expression takes on a more negative meaning. This finding is supported by Katamba

(2006:190), who reports that unpleasant associations are eventually attached to new words, and therefore a new word is needed. Thus, before a euphemism is replaced, it usually loses its disguise capacity, becoming direct and explicit (Hughes 2006:153).

Allan and Burrige (1991:3; 2006:31) observe that dysphemism is the contrary of euphemism. Dysphemism is associated with being offensive, abusive or alleviate frustration and anger. According to Allan and Burrige (2006:31), dysphemistic expressions contain curses, name-calling and other derogatory comments made in order to insult or wound others. That is to say, dysphemisms are employed when speaking of one's opponents and wishing to show disapproval of or downgrade something (Allan and Burrige 1991:27).

Euphemisms, dysphemisms and taboos are strongly connected in several ways. Allan and Burrige (2006:43) note that a euphemism has a tendency to degenerate into a dysphemism when contaminated by a taboo topic. As mentioned above, dysphemism is also the opposite of euphemism, and therefore usually tabooed. Moreover, Allan and Burrige (2006:31) go on to say that both euphemisms and dysphemisms are motivated by distaste and fear, as well as hatred and contempt. The use of dysphemisms and euphemisms is not solely a response to taboo, but they are used when the speaker wants to avoid using or deliberately chooses to use an expression that is distasteful or embarrassing (Allan & Burrige 1991:3). Indeed, as reported by Katamba (2006:190), euphemisms and dysphemisms are motivated by taboos rather than one's desire to either hurt or not to hurt another person's feelings. According to Hughes (2006:462), the relationship between euphemisms and taboos is symbiotic, since together they enable people to communicate about topics that are normally forbidden. Therefore, we feel that euphemisms and dysphemisms are an important aspect of taboos.

According to Allan and Burrige (2006:54), attitudes towards euphemisms as well as dysphemisms vary in different cultures, in different times and even between people belonging to the same culture. For example, in Europe and North America people's attitudes towards euphemisms are not as strict as in Austronesian societies where violations of taboo can have severe consequences, such as the death penalty (Allan and Burrige 1991:7-8). Moreover, Allan and Burrige (2006:54) note that an expression one considers euphemistic may for others be dysphemistic. They also point out that even though attitudes towards death, disease, bodily effluvia, body parts and supernatural vary between cultures, the same variables occur in every culture (Allan and Burrige 1991:8). That is, certain dysphemisms, euphemisms and taboos are universal.

Hughes (2006:462) observes that some euphemisms are bound in time. For instance, comparatively recent euphemisms are related to obesity, whereas those relating to death recur throughout history. Burchfield (1986:28) emphasises that today, as in the past, euphemisms are used to avoid or take attention away from an embarrassing or problematic topic. He goes on to say that the use of euphemisms is two-fold; On the one hand, euphemisms are used positively as the use of words of good omen. On the other hand, they are employed negatively in order to avoid ill-omened or unfavourable words (Burchfield 1986:28).

Euphemisms are used in many different situations for several purposes. Allan and Burrige (2006:2) observe that people are by default polite, euphemistic and inoffensive. That is, we censor our language use in order to avoid taboo topics for the well-being of ourselves and others. For instance, as noted by Katamba (2006:192), sexually explicit language is usually avoided, since it is regarded as a topic that may cause embarrassment. In the Victorian times, it was customary to refer to a lady's *limb* instead of her *leg* which was

deemed too suggestive. Moreover, today in North America, the word *rooster* is used instead of the embarrassing word *cock*. (Katamba 2006:192.) Katamba adds that euphemisms are also employed when one wishes to make acts of unspeakable brutality seem tolerable or even civilised. For instance, the expression *ethnic cleansing* is used to refer to population purges, pogroms and forced migrations in Bosnia. When speaking of the genocide of the Jewish people, the alternative used by Hitler was the *final solution*. In these cases, euphemisms are used to obscure the reality instead of revealing it. (Katamba 2006: 192-193.) Another example of the use of euphemisms is the politically correct language of newspapers and tabloids. The military, for instance, uses expressions such as *friendly fire* and *collateral damage* to refer to people being killed or injured when hit by weapons or bombs fired by their own people or to civilians being killed in a military attack, respectively. The *Style Guide* (2005:49) advises to avoid using overly euphemistic, politically correct language:

So, in most contexts, *offending* behaviour is probably *criminal* behaviour. *Female teenagers* are *girls*, not *women*. *Living with mobility impairment* probably means *wheelchair-bound*. *Developing* countries are often *stagnating* or even *regressing* (try *poor*) countries. The *underprivileged* may be *disadvantaged*, but are more likely just *poor* (the very concept of *underprivilege* is absurd, since it implies that some people receive less than their fair share of something that is by definition an advantage or prerogative).

Gramley and Pätzold (1992:21) note that, like euphemisms, dysphemistic expressions, that is, offensive words, also change within time. A notable example of this is the terms used for the people originating from Africa who now live in the United States. First the term used of them was *black*, then *coloured*, then *Negroes*, then *black* again, then *Afro-American*, which was later replaced by the expression *African-American*, which is in use today.

Alkire (2002) reports that there have been few studies on euphemisms in the field of EFL research. This is the case despite of two facts: a fluent command of English cannot be achieved without a reasonable knowledge and command of euphemisms, and a great number of euphemistic expressions

are semantically opaque, which in turn makes it challenging for the learner to deduce their meaning. New euphemisms are constantly invented and used. The term used by Gramley and Pätzold (1992:22) of this event is *lexical swap* which means the same meaning expressed by different words. According to Alkire (2002), euphemisms are used daily to express a number of everyday realities, and as listeners and readers, we constantly decode them in order to understand the discourse in different situations, for example the workplace, the business world and the mass media. Therefore, in our opinion, learners should be aware of and taught about the lexical swap in order for them to have a better command of English.

## **2.3 Communicative and intercultural competence**

### **2.3.1 Communicative competence**

The term *competence* was originally introduced by Noam Chomsky in 1965, who claimed that competence is associated exclusively with knowledge of the rules of grammar. Both Campbell and Wales in 1970 and Hymes in 1972, nevertheless, proposed a broader notion of competence, that of *communicative competence*. They described the term as including grammatical, contextual as well as sociolinguistic knowledge, that is, knowledge of the rules of language use. (Canale and Swain 1980:4.) According to Kramsch (2006:249), the notion of communicative competence was introduced into foreign language study as a reaction against a pedagogic tradition favouring the grammar-translation method and an audiolingual instructional approach, also known as drilling. Kramsch points out that the ideal of communicative language teaching favoured dialogue and interaction. Moreover, communicative language teaching pursued social and economic goals; it was meant to facilitate inclusion and access of non-native speakers into communities of native speakers.

According to Rickheit et al. (2010:15), communicative competence is a complex term to define and, in order to define it sufficiently, it needs to be related to subordinated terms such as effectiveness and appropriateness. Effectiveness describes the outcome of communicative competence, whereas appropriateness connects the term with the context of actual social interaction. Rickheit et al. (2010:25) note that:

As any social behaviour, communication skills are not independent of functional and situational influences. It often occurs that people manifest different skill qualities in different situations, be it self-presentation, empathy or conflict management.

Holtgraves (2010:5) points out that the basis of communicative competence is speaking and listening. He emphasises that a successful language user uses a variety of skills and knowledge above and beyond the basic syntactic and semantic competencies. In other words, in order to use language successfully, language users must know exactly what actions can be performed with words and how to construct utterances that are needed to perform those actions. Holtgraves remarks that all interactants need be able to do this in order to avoid offending each other, and thus, successful language use requires coordination. (Holtgraves 2010:5.)

With the pedagogical field changing within time, the definition of communicative competence has drastically changed from its early days, as noted by Kramsch (2006:249). The meaning of communicative competence today no longer refers to grammatical, contextual and sociolinguistic knowledge as it did when introduced by Hymes (1972). As Kramsch (2006:249) states, today communicative competence is reduced to its spoken modality and it has been used as an excuse to do away with grammar and remove the instructional responsibility from the teacher. Consequently, the teacher has become a mere facilitator of the group and pair work while learners work in conversational activities. In addition, as noted by Kramsch (2006:250), in the educational world communication has been resignified to mean the ability to exchange information fast and effectively, as well as to



solve problems, complete assigned exercises and produce measurable results. Therefore, foreign language education, “under pressure to show evidence of efficiency and accountability, has thus diverged from the original pursuit of social justice through communicative competence, as envisaged by Hymes, Breen and Candlin, and others in the 1970s, and is being put to the service of instrumental goals” (Kramsch 2006:250). Nevertheless, it should be remembered that communication in the global world of today requires more skills than solely efficiency. That is, instead of speakers who belong to identifiable national cultures, today language learners are highly likely to encounter multilingual individuals who have grown up in a variety of national and ethnic cultures and consequently hold a vast variety of values and ideologies. (Kramsch 2006:250.)

Communicative competence is problematic to teach and define since communicational requirements vary according to context. Indeed, according to Rickheit and Strohner (2010:207), communication is contextual and context varies for the interlocutors. In addition, language use is intentional as speakers formulate their utterances so that their intentions are recognised and listeners process the speech in order to recognise those intentions. In order to do this successfully, various skills are needed and, as these skills vary according to the context, teaching communicative competence has become even more challenging. Holtgraves (2010:220) also points out that another factor making the development of communication skills challenging is that the perspectives of speakers and hearers vary across cultures. Such differences can complicate cross-cultural communication and thus result in cross-cultural misunderstandings. For instance, even though the effects of distance, imposition and power on politeness are universal, clear cultural differences exist on what constitutes an imposition and how heavily these variables are to be weighed. Hence, in order for cross-cultural communication to be successful, an awareness of relevant contextual variables in social, cross-cultural interaction is required.

Although the term communicative competence was coined a while ago, it is still powerful and appreciated in the field of education. As stated by Lee (2006:349), the concept is one of the most influential developments in language teaching since it has enabled the redefinition of L2 instructions and target language proficiency. Communicative competence is, however, not important solely in the field of education but in other areas of life as well. Rickheit and Strohner (2010:1) emphasise the importance of communicative competence in all areas of life. They believe that the reason there is vast literature on the topic is that it is of great importance in our society. Moreover, as Rickheit and Strohner (2010:1) add, in everyday life it is important to know when one must say something which is adequate in the situation in question or when it is better to remain silent. They believe, therefore, that communicative processes are relevant in almost all situations of everyday life.

Rickheit et al. (2010:25) state that people's ability to reach their goals in social life depends largely on their skills of communicative processes. They note that many problems in our society, may they be individual or social, arise due to the insufficiency in communicative competence. These negative consequences that may result from the lack of competence in certain aspects of communication may affect such areas of life as interpersonal relationships, academic and professional success as well as health and psychological problems. Sufficient communicative proficiency, in turn, facilitates a better physical, social and psychological life. (Rickheit et al. 2010:25.)

The aim of communicative proficiency is included in the national curriculum of Finland. As emphasised in *Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet* (2003:100), learning foreign languages requires skills, knowledge and cultural information. Moreover, one of the aims of foreign language teaching is acquiring skills on how to communicate in a manner that is typical of the target language and culture. Furthermore, learners are to be equipped with

the knowledge and skills on the language and its use. Consequently, learners should begin to appreciate and understand the culture and users of the target language. According to *Lukion opetusuunitelman perusteet* (2003:103), the most demanding types of communication are to be taught in subjects that learners have begun to study in primary school in most cases, including English. Specific attention is to be paid on the differences in language use of one's mother tongue and that of the target language, as well as the reasons behind the existing differences. In order to develop learners' own cultural sensitivity, the teacher should guide them in recognising how their own culture affects their actions and appreciations.

### **2.3.2 Intercultural competence**

The term *intercultural competence* is closely associated with communicative competence and is thus discussed under the main heading 2.3. Meyer (1991:137) describes intercultural competence as follows:

Intercultural competence, as part of a broader foreign speaker competence, identifies the ability of a person to behave adequately and in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures.

By adequacy and flexibility Meyer means a speaker's awareness of the cultural differences between one's own and the target culture, as well as the speaker's ability to deal with cross-cultural problems which may result from these intercultural differences. Lund (2008:2), in turn, defines intercultural competence as simply knowledge about different cultures, as well as respect and understanding for people from other cultures. A foreign language learner needs the ability to use these skills in order to be successful in intercultural communication. According to Lund (2008:2), as aims for foreign language education are concerned, it has become more common in recent years to refer not only to communicative competence but also to intercultural competence.

Language is more than a tool necessary for communication. Seelye (1994:vi) states that in order to be able to face the challenges of the global community, learners should be capable of communicating effectively with people from different cultures. Therefore, he points out that, in intercultural communication, the most essential skill is to understand the cultural context in which communication occurs (Seelye 1994:1). Seelye (1994:275) continues to say that, if the learner hopes to be fluent in a foreign language, knowledge of the cultural roots of the language is essential. Elomaa (2009:108) supports this view, noting that in learning a new language one simultaneously incorporates a new worldview into the pre-existing one.

Byram (1991:29) posits the view that language learning should include and combine language awareness, cultural awareness as well as cultural experience instead of separating them and treating them as different from language learning. Seelye (1994:9) supports the view that ideally language is learned alongside its cultural context. He emphasises that education which enables learners to acquire skills in intercultural communication is essential for all learners as the world is becoming increasingly multicultural (Seelye 1994:267). Seelye (1994:20) adds that the aim of teaching intercultural communication skills is to have learners to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

According to Seelye (1994:6), teachers often naively assume that if learners master the linguistic patterns of a foreign language, they will eventually be able to think like native speakers of that language. He believes that teachers can affect the way learners perceive themselves by planning and structuring the lessons in a way that showcases the effect culture has on actions and thoughts (Seelye 1994:269). Seelye (1994:271) proposes two approaches to make the contents of lessons more global. Firstly, teachers can use existing learning materials and incorporate intercultural knowledge in them.

Secondly, teachers may develop new lesson objectives that include multiculturally oriented elements.

Byram (1991:18) states that language does not simply reflect cultural reality objectively, but through it, reality is shaped and interpreted. He therefore argues that communicative language teaching, which makes use of authentic situations that necessitate communication, is not sufficient in teaching a foreign language as the classroom limits and restricts the communication experience as well as the language used, the main focus remaining on learners' accuracy and fluency (Byram 1991:21-22). Byram (1991:22) proposes that learners' level of language awareness is increased by providing them with opportunities to understand the relationship between language and cultural phenomena. Consequently, learners are able to link their foreign language skills with the knowledge and understanding of the foreign culture and transform their competence skills from monocultural to intercultural. (Byram 1991:22-24.)

Seelye (1994:xii) introduces an intercultural communication model that includes six skills that are essential for learners of intercultural communication. He states that these skills improve the quality of learners' intercultural communication and lists the skills as follows:

1. Cultivating curiosity about another culture (or another segment or subculture of one's own culture) and empathy toward its members.
2. Recognizing that role expectations and other social variables such as age, sex, social class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence affect the way people speak and behave.
3. Realizing that effective communication requires discovering the culturally conditioned images that are evoked in the minds of people when they think, act, and react to the world around them.
4. Recognizing that situational variables and convention shape behaviour in important ways.
5. Understanding that people generally act the way they do because they are using options their society allows for satisfying basic physical and psychological needs, and that cultural patterns are interrelated and tend to support need satisfaction mutually.
6. Developing the ability to evaluate the strength of a generalization about the target culture (from the evidence substantiating the statements), and to locate and organize information about the

target culture from the library, the mass media, people, and personal observation. (Seelye 1994:xiii.)

Seelye (1994:29) posits the view that having these skills enables learners to function appropriately in another society, culture or with people from another culture. Indeed, we feel that communicative competence and intercultural competence are important terms for the present study as they are closely connected to appropriate use of language, a concept that is also associated with taboos.

### **3 TEXTBOOKS AS OBJECTS OF STUDY**

Textbooks are a popular area of study today but textbook research is seldom approached from the point of view of taboos. Due to the lack of previous studies on taboo content in textbooks, the following section will focus on textbooks and previous textbook research in general.

Lähdesmäki (2004:273) states that printed books in general, especially textbooks, still have a strong position in our culture. Thus, they have the power to define several things: firstly, what is the learning of English language and its study. Secondly, what the study of English is comprised of and thirdly, how it describes what the right question and answer to that question are. As textbooks are one aspect that defines what learners actually learn of the target language and culture, we feel that textbooks are an important field of study and, therefore, it is an integral part of the present study.

In the section below, the following aspects of textbook studies will be presented. Firstly, textbooks will be defined and their characteristics discussed. Secondly, the focus will be on the role of textbooks in teaching and criticism towards them. Finally, previous research on the field of textbook studies will be presented, along with the history of textbook

research.

### 3.1 Definition and characteristics of textbooks

The concept of textbook is understood in several different manners, especially as textbooks are no longer limited solely to the physical form of books due to today's technological advances. Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) defines *textbook* as "a book that teaches a particular subject and that is used especially in schools and colleges". Selander (1991:36), in turn, describes textbooks as the place in which real school knowledge is presented. Flanagan (1989:250) understands textbooks as books that are designed for the basis of instructional use, presenting the basic principles of a particular subject. Moreover, the textbook contents tend to be organised to a significant extent and learning activities and suggestions for further study are usually provided. In summary, textbooks can be regarded as an entire course of study in a printed form. This is supported by Pitkänen-Huhta (2003:41), who reports that today's textbooks can be characterised as a type of instructional manuals. That is, textbooks contain many attachments, including exercises, games and audiotapes, which help students learn skills through various different means. In addition to being instructional manuals, textbooks can also be considered as entertainment for varied audiences in addition to providing learners with information and content.

According to Karvonen (1995:12), there are many types of textbooks, such as textbooks that are comprised around either a certain course or topic. In addition, they can resemble a manual. Moreover, a textbook can be either a single volume or a series of books that contain exercise books, readings, teacher's manual and so on. Textbooks also have different dimensions, that is, they contain not only texts, but also exercises, listening comprehension and oral exercises. For the purpose of the present study, when a textbook is being referred to, we mean only a printed book belonging to a textbook

series and every exercise and text type included in that one specific volume.

Textbooks share many types of features. Textbook texts can, for example, be recognised according to certain characteristics. Karvonen (1995:24) notes that textbook texts often include key words, compact sentences, impersonal style and a clear focus on the matter at hand. In addition, typographical conventions, such as using italics, pictures and summaries, are often an integral part of textbooks. As a result of these types of characteristics learners, for example, recognise that words in italics or bold are important and the reason why they are important to learn. Luke et al. (1989:241) state that information in textbooks is presented in such a factual manner that the information provided is rarely criticized or questioned. That is one reason why textbooks tend to have such a significant role in education.

Textbooks also have different characteristics. Luke et al. (1989:241) note that textbooks have a distinctive linguistic register. That is, they have “a particular form of language (archival written prose), a particular social situation (schools) and social relations (author-reader) and a particular form of linguistic interaction (reading and studying)”. In addition, Karvonen (1995:11) reports that, when designing a textbook, it must be considered whether a learner’s previous knowledge is sufficient in understanding the texts. In addition, the curriculum as well as scientific articles of the field must be taken into account. As a result of constantly adding new information and new topics while keeping most of the information already present in the book, textbooks have a tendency to suffer from a mania of inclusiveness. This is also a challenge as textbooks have to remain thin enough in order to be usable for only one course.

In many countries, textbooks are considered to be the de facto curriculum (Apple 1986:12; Selander 1991:36). Karvonen (1995:12) states that this tendency may be due to the textbooks' vital position in teaching. Textbooks



are considered to be an equivalent to the de jure curriculum even to the extent that they have become to direct the course of the lessons, homework and time management of the learners. This is supported by Luke et al (1989:245-246) who state that, when referring to “curricular knowledge”, that is, knowledge transmitted in the classroom, we generally mean the knowledge within textbooks. In other words, textbooks still have a strong position in transmitting society's valid knowledge.

Selander (1991:36) reports that textbooks are vital tools for both teachers and learners. He also notes that the overall dominance of textbooks has been clearly shown in studies. Luke et al. point out (1989:252) that this dominance is visible, for instance, in the fact that classroom discourse is often based on the text or directed by it. In addition, Wallace (1986:60) describes the relationship between the learner and the textbook as a dominant one. Therefore, the learner's motivation and choice are secondary to the text's nature, meaning and task. That is, the learning situation and the text itself control the role and position of the learner. According to Luke et al (1989:239, 247), the dominance of the text is achieved by, for example, the objectivity and impersonality of the text which separates the learner from the written text thus giving it authority and precedence over learners' points of view. Hence, the function of text as a material artefact should not be ignored. By considering the text merely as a written text, we may overlook the text's status as an icon and as a material artefact. (Luke et al. 1989:256.)

Of the many text types available for the learner, textbooks hold a significant and unique social position. That is, they represent “an officially sanctioned, authorised version of human knowledge and culture” (Luke et al. 1989:vii). Luke et al. (1989:233) posit the view that written language plays an important role as a form of archival and preservation of significant information across generations. Karvonen (1995:7) notes that textbooks are indeed written in their ideological and cultural context, and this has an effect on the regulative

activity of the school. This is the reason why textbook texts tend to be alike regardless of the topic.

Lähdesmäki (2004:273) argues that textbooks are first and foremost merchandise that produce cultural and linguistic capital as well as language learning practices. From a commercial point of view, English can be reduced into a simple compact form of cultural and linguistic knowledge. She adds that, in order to be acceptable for as wide a clientele as possible, textbooks should aim at all-round correctness. That is, the presence of sensitive and controversial topics must be minimised in order to guarantee maximum profit. (Lähdesmäki 2004:279.)

Karvonen (1995:12) points out that a typical characteristic of textbooks is that most of them are composed by several creators. In other words, as noted by Johnsen (1993:22), textbooks are collocated and compiled by several parties, including authors, authorities, specialists and publishers. Moreover, they are intended to serve multiple groups of users, that is, teachers, learners and parents. Karvonen (1995:12) reports that prior to distribution of textbooks, they are tested, evaluated and used as a trial sample in a few schools. Consequently, textbook texts are the result of several compromises.

### **3.2 The role of textbooks in teaching: criticism**

Textbooks are characterised by the dichotomy of utility and criticism (Lähdesmäki 2004:271). In other words, even though textbooks have a strong position in classrooms, criticism against them is common. Uusikylä and Atjonen (2000:145) describe textbooks as perhaps the most utilised but at the same time the most criticised form of all teaching materials available. Luke et al (1989:133) support this view by stating that the quality of textbooks is constantly under scrutiny. An increasing number of critics, for instance, feel that many textbooks are “superficial in content, lacking in academic rigor

and written so that they are easy to read but devoid of literary merit” (Luke et al 1989:133). Lähdesmäki (2004:271) points out that although textbooks are one of the most important aids for both teachers and learners as well as tools only few admit they can survive without, textbooks are still at times considered to be frustrating, irritating and even hampering. Furthermore, she argues that this dichotomy may be one of the reasons why the field of textbook research is as vast as it is today.

While it is a fact that textbooks are heavily criticised, the results of many studies show that textbooks are vastly utilised in classrooms. For example, the results of a broad study conducted by Huhta et. al (2008) show that of the total of 740 foreign and mother tongue teachers who took part in the study, almost 98 per cent admit that a textbook is their most utilised and important teaching material. Luukka et al. (2008:94), referring to the same study, showed that despite the development of other teaching media, for example the Internet, Finnish foreign language teachers still rely heavily on textbooks. All in all, the position of textbooks as teaching tools is still strong in Finland.

Elomaa (2009:31) and Johnsen (1993:17) suggest that the popularity of textbooks can be explained by the fact that teachers do not have enough time and resources to prepare learning materials for their students. Textbooks may therefore facilitate and ease the workload of a foreign language teacher. Elomaa (2009:31) adds that teachers may also lack training on how to prepare their own learning material and on how to function as the leaders of a learning process. Nevertheless, not only do teachers depend upon textbooks but, according to Elomaa, also learners appreciate and utilise textbooks. Elomaa believes this finding to stem from the thought that the use of textbooks is regarded as more permanent than the use of any other learning material. That is, the information stored in textbooks is permanent and can always be retrieved from the text itself. (Elomaa 2009:31.)

A teacher's guide, that is, a manual containing ideas for lessons, planned to support the use of the textbook, has its advantages and disadvantages. According to Uusikylä and Atjonen (2000:145), a teacher's guide is important as by using it the teacher is not obligated to invent new teaching material for every lesson but one can rely on the planned material provided by the textbook authors. Regardless of this advantage, teachers' guides also have a few disadvantages. Uusikylä and Atjonen (2000:145), for instance, state that sometimes the advice included in a teacher's guide can be too overpowering and detailed with regards to the course of the lesson. In other words, a teacher's guide may be too prescriptive, especially as the Finnish teachers have an academic education and possess a great deal of pedagogical and creative thinking, which they can use to create learning materials of their own. Uusikylä and Atjonen also report that although a teacher's guide is designed to suit the textbook seamlessly, it may not be suitable for all teachers and for all contexts and situations. Contrary to this, utilising a teacher's guide is not feasible in all classrooms due to the different needs and levels of knowledge in classrooms.

A teacher can overcome some of the shortcomings of textbooks by using additional learning materials. In other words, as stated by Elomaa (2009:31-33), a teacher can use different teaching materials concurrently. That is, the different possibilities offered by textbooks, media and the learning materials developed by the teachers themselves can be combined in order to make lessons versatile enough. Elomaa indeed reports that different types of additional learning materials can complement the learning materials offered by the textbook. For instance, as the development of the learners' interaction skills is concerned, it has been proven beneficial to use both authentic and interactional learning materials, as well as multimedia in one's teaching. Tomlinson (2001:68) emphasises that before developing one's own learning materials, the following points, among other things, should be paid special attention to: whether the materials are to be written based on theory or

practice; on curricula, learners' expectations or on commercial requirements; on the teacher's own occupational development or on language learning per se. Moreover, another essential factor in the process of developing one's own learning materials is the teacher's expertise. That is to say, a teacher should be able to plan learning materials that are suitable for each group of learners in question. Elomaa (2009:48-49), however, reminds the readers that educational politics specify what learners are to be taught and how much, whereas the teachers and authors of learning materials determine how this is to be done.

Lähdesmäki (2004:271-272) points out that foreign language teaching is also comprised of other topics than merely language per se. In other words, foreign language teaching also includes linguistic structures, grammar and different manners of communication. In addition, also thematic, that is, for instance, the characteristics of the target culture and the country's geography should be present in teaching. Lähdesmäki, nevertheless, states that these types of thematic contents are usually excluded from the newest learning materials whereas other types of contents, for example, current social issues such as multiculturalism and tolerance, have taken their place. According to Lähdesmäki (2004:272), also certain types of attitudes can be regarded as belonging to foreign language teaching. Kramsch (1988:65) supports this view and reports that learners derive their understanding of a particular culture from textbooks. Whether different types of attitudes, may they be positive attitudes towards the target culture and the people speaking it, or improving the learners' tolerance towards different kinds of cultures and people, are taught explicitly or implicitly, it is inevitable that attitudes are a part of foreign language teaching. Lähdesmäki (2004:279) reports that the diversity of textbook texts has been narrowed down by the fact that textbook authors beware of stereotypes and inappropriate language use, such as taboos and taboo language. Consequently, as an alternative to the traditional kinds of texts, textbook authors opt for either trivial, funny texts that tend to

be fictional or factual and neutral texts that most typically treat important social topics and questions.

Textbooks tend to be blamed for either avoiding or simplifying controversial topics. Lähdesmäki (2004:279) explains the textbooks' strive for correctness to be the result of economic reasons; in order to be sold as widely as possible textbooks need to be "acceptable" in terms of content. Uusikylä and Atjonen (2000:146-147), however, emphasise that although it is not possible to include all points of view on, for example, all the different means to lessen drug use, in a textbook it is still essential and possible to include texts and exercises that may either broaden or change one's point of view. They remind that different viewpoints should be included in textbooks for the sake of rightfulness and diversity. Otherwise, a text may imply that there is a unified agreement on, for instance, nuclear power, sexuality, social security and refugees (Karvonen 1995:22-23). In such a case, teaching should not be called teaching anymore since it resembles manipulation, propaganda and indoctrination more than teaching. All in all, we argue that learners should be aware of taboos as knowing their rules of use are an important aspect of language use.

### **3.3 Previous research on textbooks**

Elomaa (2009:30) states that throughout the years textbooks and learning materials have been designed for language teaching purposes. The study on the field of language learning textbooks and learning materials is, however, quite new. Learning materials and textbooks have been systematically studied only for the last few decades. In fact, not until the 1990s the design of learning materials has been given more weight as a topic of research and a few publications have been released about the principles and methods concerning the production of textbooks and learning materials.

Tomlinson (2001:69) reports that there have been few published studies on designing learning materials and textbooks in English. Nevertheless, he continues to say that many universities have postgraduates whose studies are focused on learning materials. Some publishers also fund confidential research on learning materials for their own use. Moreover, published studies have mainly focused on macro level analysis on learning materials, pilot studies by publishers and course books' quality analysis. Elomaa (2009:34) states that, with regards to the studies on the design of learning materials and textbooks in Finland, research has been conducted mostly on different areas of language learning materials and their design. To mention a few, Sajavaara (1980) has studied the factors affecting language learning, Takala (1991) has studied interlanguage communication in regards to teaching knowledge of geography and culture in schools and Kaikkonen (2000) has studied authenticity and its meaning in intercultural foreign language teaching.

Lähdesmäki (2004:271) states that textbook research is usually based on the impression that textbooks as learning materials and texts have a powerful effect on teaching and the learners, the effect being positive or negative. Indeed, textbooks may have far-reaching and widespread effects on what types of knowledge, skills and even attitudes and appreciations learners adopt. Moreover, as mentioned by Lähdesmäki (2004:271), studies have questioned the impression of the power of textbooks and have aimed at examining how textbooks are actually used in the classroom. In addition, Elomaa (2009:30) reports that attitudes are changing in the field of textbook design. That is, more effort should be invested in theoretical and applied research in order to assist foreign language teachers in their work. In other words, teachers should be assisted in understanding and applying the theory of language teaching and thus improving their own professional skill set.

Uusikylä and Atjonen (2000:142) point out that learning materials in Finland have drastically changed during the last fifty years. Before comprehensive school, some school subjects did not have textbooks or the same textbooks were used by several generations. During this time, notebooks were used more frequently than textbooks. Today, in turn, learners are surrounded by coloured textbooks, multiple exercise books, on-line materials and additional readings. They can browse through picture books, fill in work books and find information from the internet or from encyclopaedias designed especially for children and adolescents. The use of all these new learning materials requires patience from both teachers and learners and emphasises the goals of language learning as one important criterion for the selection of learning materials.

Johnsen (1993:28) separates the large number of studies on textbooks and learning materials into three main categories:

1. ideology in textbooks,
2. the use of textbooks, and
3. the development of textbooks.

Firstly, studies on the ideology of textbooks focus on the underlying philosophy of the textbooks and have been the main focus of textbook research. An example of this is content analyses which “survey the selection of material and attitudes taken in the presentation” (Johnsen 1993:28). For instance, a study concentrating on stereotypes and gender roles in textbooks would belong to the first category.

Secondly, research on the use of textbook focuses on textbooks as the main instrument used for teaching. It is common in this category that researchers study how textbooks are used by teachers and learners. Textbooks’ authority, accessibility and effectiveness have been frequent topics in studying the use of textbooks. The popularity of this approach has increased even though it is



not as common as the content analyses in the first category. For example, a study belonging to the second category may focus on the suitability of textbooks for disabled learners. (Johnsen 1993:28.)

Thirdly, the development of textbooks is the focus of this category. That is, the process textbooks undergo consists of several phases, including conceptualization, writing, editing, marketing and distribution. The aforementioned areas have been studied both separately and collectively in different contexts and countries, but there have been few studies belonging to this category. An example of this kind of study could be to examine the different types of compromises done by both textbook authors and publishers in different phases of textbook development. (Johnsen 1993:28-29.)

All in all, as Johnsen (1993:29) points out, many studies belong in at least one of the three main categories. Moreover, some studies may touch on the other two categories while belonging mainly to only one of them. The textbook research of the present study belongs to the first category since it contains mainly analysis of the content of several textbook series.

## **4 METHODS**

### **4.1 Research questions**

The aim of the present study is to examine different types of taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language found in Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school. Since taboos in educational contexts have not been extensively studied, more research is required in order to shed light on this controversial topic from a more culturally-specific perspective. Previous research in this area (for example, Gray (2002) has focused on global textbooks and PARSNIP, which is an acronym used by global textbook publishers of topics not to be included in EFL learning materials. PARSNIP

stands for politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork. As a result of previous research focusing on taboo content in global textbooks, sufficient attention has not been given to individual cultures and their textbooks. That is to say, more research is required on culturally-specific taboos to avoid the overly cautious exclusion of all topics which can possibly insult learners in some cultures. For example, some religions may find topics relating to substance abuse and sex offensive and inappropriate in any context, including schools. Including only safe and bland topics can, however, have a negative impact on the meaningfulness of EFL learning materials, which is the reason why more attention should be paid to this area of study (Masuhara et al. 2008:299). For instance, if no references to the real world are included, the learners may find the learning materials irrelevant and uninteresting.

Taboo language and the importance of learning it have also been studied by some researchers. For example Crooks (2006) and Cunningsworth (1984) advocate the importance of learners' communicative competence, which can be significantly enhanced by teaching them about taboo language. That is to say, knowing the demands and limitations of language use as well as the needed register in different situations is beneficial and vital for foreign language learners. Nevertheless, as taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language have been inadequately studied and defined, it may be challenging for a teacher to recognise which topics and expressions actually are taboo in a specific cultural context. As future teachers, we are curious to discover which topics are taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks, especially those intended for upper secondary school students as taboo content in textbooks is the highest in that educational level (Keturi and Lehmonen 2010). Therefore, we believe that examining the textbooks intended for upper secondary school offers the most comprehensive view of the taboo content present in Finnish EFL textbooks. More research is necessary on the appearance of taboo topics, words and language in Finnish EFL textbooks in order to learn what topics

are taboos in Finnish EFL learning materials.

Our research questions are the following:

- 1) What taboos are present in and / or absent from upper secondary school EFL textbooks?
- 2) What taboos should be present in upper secondary school EFL textbooks? Why?
- 3) Should taboo language and euphemisms be taught to upper secondary school students? Why / why not?

## 4.2 Data collection

Our data consists of two different parts: Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school as well as interviews conducted with two Finnish textbook authors who both also work as upper secondary school teachers. The textbook series in question are the following (abbreviations used of the series are presented in brackets): *Culture Café* (CC, eight textbooks published in 2002-2007), *Open Road* (OR, six textbooks published in 2008-2010) and *Blue Planet* (BP, eight textbooks published in 2003-2005) by Otava, *In Touch* (IT, eight textbooks published in 2002-2005) and *Profiles* (P, seven textbooks published in 2009-2010) by WSOY as well as *English United* (EU, seven textbooks published in 2006-2007) by Tammi.

A large number of series was chosen in order to provide accurate and current results. Namely, the series chosen for the study are published in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are currently in use in Finland. Moreover, all the series examined are from the three biggest textbook publishers in Finland; Otava, WSOY and Tammi. Textbooks from three different publishers were chosen in order to enhance the reliability of the present study. The number of series from Otava is three, from WSOY two and from Tammi only one. It should be noted that at the time of the data collection, Tammi offered only one EFL

series for upper secondary school and therefore the number of series per publisher is uneven. This factor, however, did not affect the results as the aim of the present study was not to examine the differences between textbook publishers.

The taboos that were searched for included death, politics, sex, religion, taboo language, food and drink, narcotics and tobacco as well as violence and weapons to name a few. These topics were chosen from Table 1, which is featured above (see pages 9-10), that lists several topics that are regarded as taboo by multiple researchers. Furthermore, the represented topics are taboos that we regard as possibly forbidden or avoided topics in Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school.

The textbooks were selected in order to get as representative a sample as possible of Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school for the present study. It must be noted that some textbooks have a specific topic of concern; therefore we felt that complete series of textbooks were needed in order to avoid any sort of involuntary bias towards books concentrating on taboo topics related to our study topic. It is also noteworthy that the present study is a case study as we do not have a textbook series to use as a control group to which to compare our results.

The data collection method for the present study was the following: Firstly, every textbook in every series examined was read thoroughly page by page. When a taboo topic or a taboo word appeared, the whole sentence in which the word appeared was copied as such, given that the word appeared in a sentence. The complete sentences were needed in order to provide the reader with the understanding of the context in which the word appeared. Secondly, after collecting the data from the textbook series, the findings were divided according to different themes, for example alcohol, narcotics and sex. Due to the similarities of certain themes, some topics were handled under the

same heading, as was the case with violence, weapons and death. Thirdly, the topics were further divided into three different taboo categories, non-taboo, borderline taboo and taboo, according to the relative strength of each topic and how the textbooks handled the topic.

Part B of the data consists of face-to-face interviews conducted with two Finnish textbook authors, who have participated in the making of Finnish EFL textbooks aimed at upper secondary school. Both of the authors also work as teachers. The interviews were conducted in December 2011. The textbook authors were inquired about their opinions regarding the use and usefulness of taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language as well as euphemisms in Finnish EFL upper secondary school textbooks. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. The interviews were conducted in Finnish for two main reasons: firstly, Finnish is the interviewees' mother tongue and secondly, the interviewees' English language skills did not play any significant role for the present study.

Of the different types of interview methods available, theme interview was chosen as the most appropriate for the present study since it allows interviewees to express their opinions freely while keeping the discussion on topic. Hirsjärvi et al (2009:208) describe the theme interview as a half-structured form of interviewing that is a mixture of open interview and form interview. With theme interviews it is typical that the themes of the interview are clear but the exact form of the questions and their order is unimportant.

Interviewing as a method of study was employed for the present study as the method has many advantages. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:35) report that interview is especially well suited for the examination of topics that are sensitive or difficult in nature, such as taboos. In addition, when the topic in

question is seldom studied, interviewing is a suitable method as the researcher may not know the nature of the answers beforehand. In addition, interviewing is not a prescriptive method since it allows complex and versatile answers, and therefore, it is not required to know the nature of the answers beforehand. Another benefit of an interview is its flexibility. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:73), the interviewer has the possibility to repeat a question, correct misunderstandings, clarify expressions used and have a conversation with the interviewee.

Open interview and form interview were not appropriate for the purposes of the present study as form interview would have significantly limited the diversity of the answers given as well as inhibited the interviewees from expressing their own opinions. That is to say, as the topic of the present study has not been sufficiently studied, it was important that both the interviewers and the interviewees could clarify and elaborate their questions and the answers in the given situation. In order to be able to create a well-functioning form interview one has to know what to expect from the interview, which was not the case in this situation. As open interview, in turn, is a type of interview in which the topic and questions are not limited in any way, the method was not suitable for the present study. Moreover, as the aim of the interviews was specific and clear, theme interview was deemed most appropriate.

### **4.3 Methods of analysis**

The method of analysis chosen for the present study is content analysis. Content analysis is a form of qualitative analysis that focuses on the content, not on the statistics. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:85) emphasise that in qualitative research the aim is to describe a certain phenomenon or event, to understand a certain action and to give a theoretically acceptable explanation to a phenomenon. They point out that content analysis is a method with the

help of which one can analyse documents, that is, any type of written material, systematically and objectively (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009:103). According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:106), the aim of content analysis is to form a general summarised description of the examined phenomenon.

When referring to content analysis, it is worth noting that there are different definitions of content analysis. On the one hand, Berelson (1952:489) defines content analysis as “objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:106) disagree with Berelson’s definition, stating that the analysis of documents including quantitative description of the document is in fact content differentiation. They, on the other hand, define content analysis as an aim to describe the content of documents verbally. For the purposes of the present study, the definition of content analysis by Tuomi and Sarajärvi is used as it allows for a deeper and more meaningful analysis of the content. This is also the reason why this particular analysis method was chosen for the present study. The results of the study will also be displayed in a quantitative form in order to simplify the results and offer them in a more comprehensible and reader friendly manner.

## **5 DISTRIBUTION OF TABOOS IN THE EXAMINED TEXTBOOK SERIES**

Taboos are always personal and they vary according to time, cultures, subcultures and groups inside cultures. Therefore, for the present study it was very challenging to determine the absolute border between taboo and non-taboo topics. Thus, it is noteworthy that, in the absence of previous studies on the present topic, we have been obligated to rely more on our personal experiences and points of view than on previous research. As taboos are forbidden by nature, it is logical to presume that the more a topic is mentioned the less it is taboo, and on the basis of this presupposition as

well as our opinions, we formed the three groups on the basis of which we will introduce our findings.

In the following section, the distribution of taboos in the textbook series examined for the present study will be presented. As mentioned above, the topics found are divided by us into three different groups, non-taboo, borderline taboos and taboos, and thus the section reflects the division of the categories. Due to the unprohibited nature of the topics in the first, non-taboo, group and their high occurrence, we found it unnecessary for the present study to provide a table depicting the distribution and the number of topics found in the textbook series. The last two categories, however, include tables as borderline taboos and taboos are more significant for the purposes of the present study. In addition, multiple examples will be provided in order to enable a more comprehensive understanding of how the topics are referred to in the examined textbooks.

The distribution of both borderline taboos and taboos in all of the textbook series examined is presented numerically in Tables 5 and 6. The data for the tables was collected by adding together the number of each specific taboo found. That is to say, each time a certain taboo word or theme appeared in a text or an exercise, it was counted as one appearance of taboo. There were, however, cases in which one chapter's theme, for example 'Buddhism in Scotland' in *In Touch 4*, concentrated on the topic of religion, thus repeating the term *religion* several times (*In Touch 4:67-68*). In these cases, whether a taboo was included only once or several times in the same text or exercise, it was counted only as one appearance in order to avoid distorting the results.

The following abbreviations are used of the textbook series examined for the present study: *Blue Planet* (BP), *Culture Café* (CC), *English United* (EU), *In Touch* (IT), *Open Road* (OR) and *Profiles* (P).



## 5.1 Non-taboo

The following section deals with the following topics: bodily effluvia, death, violence and weapons, diseases, drink related taboos, food related taboos, narcotics, politics, religion as well as smoking. These topics we did not consider to be taboo as they were widely represented in each of the textbook series examined for the present study and for this reason they could not be categorized as forbidden topics. Furthermore, the aforementioned topics are not taboos in the cultural context of the textbooks, that is, the Finnish society, as they are often discussed openly without fear of prosecution both in everyday life and in the media. Due to the fact that these topics are not taboo, the findings on this section are not presented as in-detail as the topics in the later, more taboo, sections.

### 5.1.1 Bodily effluvia

Several references to bodily effluvia were made in the textbooks studied. The bodily effluvia which were mentioned in the data are diarrhea, urine, vomit, faeces and semen. No references to menstruation, however, were found. Of all of the references made to bodily effluvia, diarrhea and urine were mentioned the most:

- 1) Travelling should be fun... You can survive having your valuables stolen or a few days spoiled by diarrhea. (BP2:38)
- 2) Be on the lookout for unusual loo etiquette. A person who washes his hands *before* having a pee is undoubtedly a chemist. (IT6:34)

Both semen and vomit, however, were being referred to merely two times each and both references to semen were in highly informative contexts.

- 3) Even as we speak, biologists are experimenting with artificial sperm and eggs, or even artificial wombs which fetuses can grow outside of human mothers. (P6:53)

Although faeces were referred to, none of the references were made on

human faeces but merely on animal faeces as in:

- 4) Creations which have won the award in the past include a picture made out of cow dung, and an empty room with the lights going on and off. (IT5:93)

### 5.1.2 Death, violence and weapons

The topics of death, violence and weapons were vastly present in the series examined for the present study. The references to death, violence and weapons can be divided into seven different groups. In the first group, death is often mentioned as a side note. Typical examples were of animals dying out, headlines in which someone was found dead as well as stories and historical facts.

- 5) Several animal species are endangered and about to die out. (EU6:151)
- 6) Her head injuries were so severe that she had been pronounced brain-dead at the hospital, but her heart, uninjured, had gone on furiously pumping. (P6:72)
- 7) "A young girl found dead in Church Street." (EU5:31)
- 8) He died on the same year as his birth, at the age of 52. (CC5:41)

The second group consists of notions about the death penalty. Some references gave facts about the death penalty, as the following example demonstrates:

- 9) The death penalty was finally banned/abolished in Britain in 1965. (IT8:62)

More attention was, however, paid to opinions for and against the death penalty and some exercises enquired after the opinion of students', as in the following examples:

- 10) Personally I feel that no country should have the death penalty, but many people in South Africa, most often those who have recently been robbed or assaulted, want the death penalty to be re-instated. (EU4:11)
- 11) Death penalty is always a crime against humanity. (CC4:82)
- 12) Death penalty – a barbarian practice or a necessity? (CC4:93)

The third group consists of references to violence. The term *violence* was mentioned in every series examined and the most frequent theme was television and video games being too violent. In addition, opinions of violence were expressed and students were asked to think about the need for violence, as the following examples demonstrate:

13) Is violence ever an acceptable way of handling a situation? Are there times when you think it is reasonable to use violence? (IT8:80)

14) Some people claim that violence on TV directly leads to violence in real life. If that was true, I would be a serial killer. I like watching action films, and they obviously feature a lot of violence. Yet, I have never hit anyone, let alone hurt or killed anyone. People who are violent have other problems. (EU5:31)

The fourth group consists of references in which someone had killed or murdered somebody. In most cases, the references were treated objectively and without emotion or vivid details.

15) I first read *Catcher* in my teens, but when it turned out that Mark Chapman's obsession with the book and its main character, Holden Caulfield, was one of the things that had driven him to murder John Lennon, I felt the urge to re-read it as an adult. (P5:42)

16) Do you think that boys are more eager to kill in games than girls? (OR1:73)

Furthermore, the references included no moral dilemmas or discussions on the subject, except for one case that enquired after the students' opinion on whether it is right or wrong to kill people as self-defence:

17) Right or wrong? 1. To defend yourself, your family or your country even if it involves taking up arms and killing people. (BP4:83)

The fifth group has references in which someone had been killed or murdered. The number of references was approximately one third less of the number of references in the previous group. As well as the previous group, no vivid details were mentioned. Most references were of historical facts, nightmares and animals being killed, as in the following cases:

18) someone who has been hurt or killed (IT3:28)

- 19) Another constant nightmare was that I would be assassinated by a sniper.  
(BP4:25)
- 20) Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BC. (O 6:152)

The topic of the sixth group is somewhat more gruesome as the topic is slaughter and massacre. There were few references to the topic, but examples could be found in every series. Many references referred to the past and examples were found of both humans and animals, as can be seen in the following examples:

- 21) The massacre provoked international outrage, and it was widely believed that responsibility lay with the Serbian government led by President Slobodan Milosevic, which was pursuing a policy it euphemistically called "ethnic cleansing". (IT8:87)
- 22) They named it the Peckham murder in the headlines, though Northwood Street, where the old woman was found battered to death, was not strictly speaking in Peckham. (P5:63)

The seventh and final group consists of references to weapons and when someone hurts somebody with weapons. Several different types of guns were mentioned as well as knives, axes, arrows, bombs, biological weapons and knitting needles.

- 23) The spear sliced through a gladiator's neck, killing him instantly. He fell, ungrainly and hard, blood bubbling through his wound. (IT5:70)
- 24) In this episode an elderly widow becomes the prime suspect after her fifth husband is found stabbed with a pair of knitting needles. (P2:97)

Moreover, opinions about weapons and their use were expressed. In addition, students were asked to give their opinions about the global weapons industry and about owning a gun, as is demonstrated in the following examples:

- 25) The Kelly Gang used guns to get social justice. In which situations do you feel gun ownership is justified today? Where should guns be kept? Who should/shouldn't be granted a licence to own a gun? (P4:51)
- 26) I think that many school shootings, impulse shootings, and accidental shootings are the direct result of firearms being too accessible. (EU7-8:200)

### 5.1.3 Diseases

Due to the lack of diseases mentioned in the textbook series examined, the only diseases listed under the present heading are AIDS and HIV. Some may also consider AIDS and HIV somewhat forbidden topics due to their connection with sex. Sexually transmitted diseases are, however, listed under the heading 5.2.7 Sex.

References to AIDS or HIV occurred in four of the series examined, the series being *In Touch*, *English United*, *Profiles* and *Culture Café*. Most of the references occurred in *English United 4*, which featured several texts and exercises, altogether six pages long, with an AIDS/HIV theme. Information was given about AIDS and HIV, how the virus is transmitted, the trouble health officials have with AIDS/HIV in Africa and that India has the second largest HIV population.

27) HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a type of virus that enters the body and can lead to AIDS. AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) (EU4:120)

28) Like the myth of the virgin AIDS cure, ignorance about modern day medicine and disease is furthering South Africa's AIDS crisis. (EU4:121)

29) And health officials have trouble convincing South Africans that condoms can protect against HIV because many believe that evil spirits, not sexual contact, bring on the sickness. (EU4:121)

Whereas all of the other references were mostly scientific and purely informative in nature, one opinion was also given about AIDS. The opinion made a connection with gay couples in want of a child and AIDS orphans:

30) AIDS orphans could be adopted by gay parents. (EU7-8:184)

### 5.1.4 Drink and food related taboos

Drink related taboos, more specifically alcohol, were vastly present in all of the textbook series examined. The vast amount of references to alcohol can be

further divided into six distinct groups. In the first group, alcohol is named by brand in several cases as in:

- 31) Irish drinking culture is also forever linked with Guinness, the dark, velvety drink with the creamy head, which is symbolized by A) an accordion B) a set of bagpipes C) a harp on the glass. (P3:56)
- 32) Spiggy turned up three-quarters of an hour later with his Stanley knife and his metal tape measure and his four tins of Carlsberg. (EU2:23)

In the second group belong the occurrences that referred to the disadvantages of consuming alcohol, that is, for example alcoholism and other problems related to alcohol usage. This second group also includes cases in which alcohol-related problems were only mentioned as side notes, as can be seen in the following example:

- 33) There is a darker side too: soaring rates of serious accident, illicit use of drugs or alcohol, risky sexual behaviours and their consequences and the first signs of emotional disorders that may be lifelong. (EU6:44)

Opinions on using alcohol form the third group of references on drink related taboos. In this group belong any opinions on using alcohol, which includes both the students' own opinions, which is the case in the example 34, as well as somebody else's. Most cases that belong to this particular group include more or less overt education on the negative effects of alcohol consumption, as is the case in the latter example:

- 34) Why do people need to get drunk in order to enjoy themselves? (P1:34)
- 35) 1. Legal limits
  - a) What is the legal age for smoking / buying alcohol / voting / driving a car in Finland?
  - b) Do you think the legal age for buying and consuming alcohol in Finland should be higher or lower? Why?
  - c) Are the drinking habits of Finnish students a problem? IF so, what can be done about it? (EU1:27)

In the fourth group belong all the references made to the combination of drinking and driving, a topic which was quite vastly covered in the data. In

many cases students' own opinion on the matter was enquired after, as is the case in example 37. In almost all the cases that referred to drinking and driving, the act of driving under the influence was heavily criticised, even condemned, as in the following examples:

- 36) What should the drink drive limit be? How can drink driving be discouraged? (OR6:64)
- 37) Drunk drivers should never be allowed to drive again. (OR4:33)

Trivia knowledge of alcohol forms the fifth group of references made on alcohol and this type of references were present in numerous textbooks. In most cases that belong to this particular group, the trivia knowledge on alcohol referred back to history:

- 38) It was illegal in most American states to sell alcohol on a Sunday. (CC4:33)
- 39) Sanitation was practically non-existent in the capital, and everyone, including children, drank ale because the water was undrinkable. (P5:115)

The sixth and last group includes all the references made to Finnish people and their habit of drinking alcohol to excess. The references belonging to this group were quite few, a total of seven, but the references, however, were found in four different textbook series:

- 40) With a little help from intoxicating liquids, a Finn can be most talkative during a long evening in a pub. (IT2:72)
- 41) Finns drink a lot of alcohol to help them cope with depression and shyness. (P1:91)

There was also a case in which a group of adolescents considered drinking alcohol as such a natural part of the Finnish culture that they even offered beer to a Muslim and struggled to understand why the Muslim exchange student does not drink alcohol:

- 42) Have a beer, my friend. Genuine Finnish beer, maybe not as famous as Budweiser or Tuborg but every bit as good as them.
  - Is... is there alcohol in it?
  - Oh, don't worry. Ei tippa tapa, as we say in Finland. (BP1:30)

Food related taboos were almost inexistent in the textbooks examined. In fact, there was only one mention on a food related taboo, of which both were present in the same text. The discussion in the text was between Finnish people and a Muslim. In the text the Finnish adolescents were oblivious of the restrictions of the Islam religion but offered the Muslim exchange student pork and alcohol:

43) Is the sausage made of pork? Pork? Pork? What's that? (BP1:30)

### 5.1.5 Narcotics

In the data narcotics were referred to in four different types of situations. In the first type narcotics were mentioned in an educational context, as a type of covert education, that is, the use of narcotics was either criticised or people were advised to quit using them, as can be seen in example 44. References to drug addictions also belong to the first group as they could be regarded as belonging to the negative consequences of drug abuse, as is the case in example 45.

44) There is a darker side too: soaring rates of serious accident, illicit use of drugs or alcohol, risky sexual behaviours and their consequences and the first signs of emotional disorders that may be lifelong. (EU6:44)

45) What it really means is that the school building is an ugly concrete box, we have a drugs problem and the teachers are doing the best they can. (IT3:37)

The second group of references made to narcotics consists of opinions on drugs, may they be the students' own or somebody else's. Students, for example, were required to select a topic for an essay one of which the title enquired after the legalisation of cannabis, as can be seen in example 46. Moreover, there were exercises in which students were asked to discuss either in pairs or in small groups different drug-related issues, as is demonstrated in example 47.

46) Should cannabis be legalised? (BP4:114)



47) Who is responsible for the use illegal substances? Is it just the athlete in question or also people like the coach, the doctor and other team members? (IT6:101)

The third group of references contains different types of drugs which were mentioned by their own name, for instance heroin and cocaine. An example of these instances can be seen in the following excerpt:

48) Barry: Getting' high? Smokin' pot?  
Kent: Well, yeah, we always smoke.  
Barry: If you always smoke, what do you mean by "getting' high"?  
Kent: Free-base. Smokin' coke. Crack.  
Barry: You've been smoking crack for a couple of days... with your girlfriend. What else... you been doing?  
Kent: And drinkin'- I drank some Wild turkey yesterday 'cause I was getting paranoid. Jill was doin' acid, I think. I'm not sure. Some Valiums.  
(BP4:7)

The fourth and final group of references to narcotics comprises of narcotics mentioned either in a casual conversation or general knowledge, a type of trivia on narcotics. Most of the excerpts belonging to this group were objective in nature, as demonstrated by the following passage:

49) The desire to delve into the subconscious for inspiration may be the reason why so many artists have been drawn to alcohol and drugs, substances that offer freedom from the conscious mind. The stereotype of a hard-drinking artist has been around for centuries and includes such notable figures as... Critics of Pollock's abstract style have claimed that the influence of alcohol is clearly visible in his incomprehensible, chaotic canvases. (IT5:30)

### **5.1.6 Politics**

The topic of politics was a vastly covered area in all the textbooks examined. Therefore, for the purposes of the present study and for the sake of being comprehensive, references to politics are divided into five distinct groups. In the first group, which includes cases of most references, opinions on politics

are included. In these cases either a student was required to discuss his or her opinions or an opinion belonging to someone else was presented:

- 50) Discuss whether you can make a difference in society and influence politicians and decision makers. (CC4:38)
- 51) What kind of political system does Finland have and what role do young people play in it? Is there a party whose work you value more highly than other? What about the media's role in presenting and publicizing political matters? How can citizens be encouraged to take more of an interest in the political issues that affect them and their local community? (P4:81)

In the second group, the importance of being politically active was addressed, especially being politically active by voting, a topic current to upper secondary school students. Examples of the cases belonging to this group are the following:

- 52) Voting in elections should be compulsory by law (P4:106)
- 53) Work in pairs. Student A is a political activist, who argues for the importance of taking part in politics and Student B is a young person who has never voted - and doubts if he/she ever will. Give reasons for your views. (EU4:49)

The third group comprises of criticism towards politics. This criticism was either covert or overt criticism, for example the influence of politicians was quite overtly criticised, as in example 54. The nature of politics was also judged, as is highlighted by example 55.

- 54) [The Members of the European Parliament] don't seem to have a lot of power as individuals. (IT6:128)
- 55) Politics is dirty. (OR5:147)

The fourth group consists on overall trivia on politics and includes for example exercises in which students were required to fill in a table of political systems of Britain and the USA. In other words, most of the cases in this group required students being active.

The fifth group, in turn, includes politics and politicians being mentioned

solely as side notes, that is, without politics or politicians being of any central focus of the text:

- 56) Politicians, pundits and parents have forgotten what it is like to be young. (CC3:33)
- 57) They use authority figures, the very antithesis of what science is about, as if they were priests, or politicians, or parent figures. (EU6:111)

### 5.1.7 Religion

As with politics, the topic of religion was also a vastly covered area in all the textbooks examined. For the purposes of the present study, references to religion are divided into five distinct groups. The first group contains the references when simply the word *religion* or words relating to religion were mentioned, as in the following cases:

- 58) Sport is the Australian religion and central to the country's culture, mass media and entertainment. (IT2:67)
- 59) The ancient cathedral was the perfect setting for the choir. (P5:20)
- 60) Education, medicine, church and charitable work opened up new opportunities for women and girls, especially those from wealthy or middle-class families. (EU4:44)

The topic of the second group is religious sayings, that is, cases in which religion was used in different sayings. The sayings mentioned either God, Jesus or Christ and some of them were profane in nature:

- 61) As performers, we believe it is our God-given right to have people pay attention when we play music. (IT1:36)
- 62) For God's sake, you had me worried, I thought it was something serious. (IT5:19)
- 63) And Father said, 'Christopher is getting a crap enough deal already, don't you think, without you shitting on him from a great height as well. Jesus, this is the one thing he is really good at.' (P3:51)

The third group contains information about different religions. The topic occurred in every series investigated for the present study. The cases

provided names of different religions, explanations for them as well as information about different religions. Two texts in *Profiles* and *English United* focused on the Amish and a text in *In Touch* focused on Buddhism in Scotland while *Open Road* was the only series to mention Satan and the deadly sins. Moreover, negative aspects of religions were not mentioned, except for the link with terrorism and Islam which was later denied, as is demonstrated in the example 66:

- 64) The Amish became one of my frames of reference because they are a religious group who, to all intents and purposes, have embraced the past by turning their backs on the future. (P4:18)
- 65) Before the modern period, Jews, Christians and Muslims all relished highly allegorical interpretations of scripture. (EU7-8:175)
- 66) There are political reasons why a tiny minority of Muslims are turning to terrorism, which have nothing to do with Islam. But because of the way people read their scriptures these days, once a terrorist has decided to blow up a London bus he can probably find scriptural texts that seem to endorse his action. (EU7-8:176)

The fourth group deals with religious ceremonies. The ceremonies that were mentioned by name are church wedding, christening, baptism, confirmation, Sabbath, Sunday service and Bar Mitzvah. As can be seen, the focus was clearly on Christian ceremonies, the only non-Christian ceremony mentioned being Bar-Mitzvah:

- 67) Rebecca and Sue have just been to a christening and are now discussing the name the baby boy was given. (P3:28)
- 68) For many, it's the first time they've had the chance to put on adult finery - outside weddings, christenings and Bar Mitzvahs anyway. (CC3:30)
- 69) A Jewish ceremony where 13-year-old boys are declared 'adults' (CC3:32)

The topic of the fifth and final group is opinions on religion. The group includes some sensitive questions and topics as they deal with personal beliefs. Present in the series examined were discussion topics, essay topics and role playing exercises dealing with different themes, such as personal beliefs, the role of religion in people's lives and society, the existence of God,

going against the Church as well as whether or not the religious beliefs of friends and loved ones matters. The following cases provide some examples of the present group:

70) What part does religion play in people's lives? What about the role of the church in Finnish society? Does Finland have religious minorities whose beliefs are reflected in the way they lead their lives? Or are people finding quite different ways to fulfil their spiritual needs? (P4:81)

71) Like all over the world, young people do not believe in God anymore. (EU7-8:183)

72) Write about it. 1. Is there a God? 2. Worshipping the American way? 3. Atheism – a religion 4. Is Islam here to stay? (BP4:83)

### 5.1.8 Smoking

In the textbooks examined all the references to smoking were of two types. In the first type, smoking is mentioned merely as a side note, that is, for example, there were many cases of someone being told that he or she is not allowed to smoke somewhere, as in a hospital. In turn, in the second type, smoking is discussed for educational purposes, some references being more overt than others, as in the following excerpt taken from a health quiz:

73) Do you smoke? Even if at the moment you just smoke now and then, you could be building up health probs for the future. So stub that gag out at once! (BP2:8)

The more covert references to smoking were usually made in situations where someone was either advised to quit smoking or someone hoped that a person close to them would quit the habit of smoking:

74) I wish Mum would quit smoking. (P7:140)

Even though smoking was referred to quite overtly in many of the textbooks studies, there was only one occurrence of tobacco brand being mentioned:

75) The rugged, out-door, cigarette-puffing Malboro man now appears on rugged, outdoor Malboro clothing. (EU6:56)

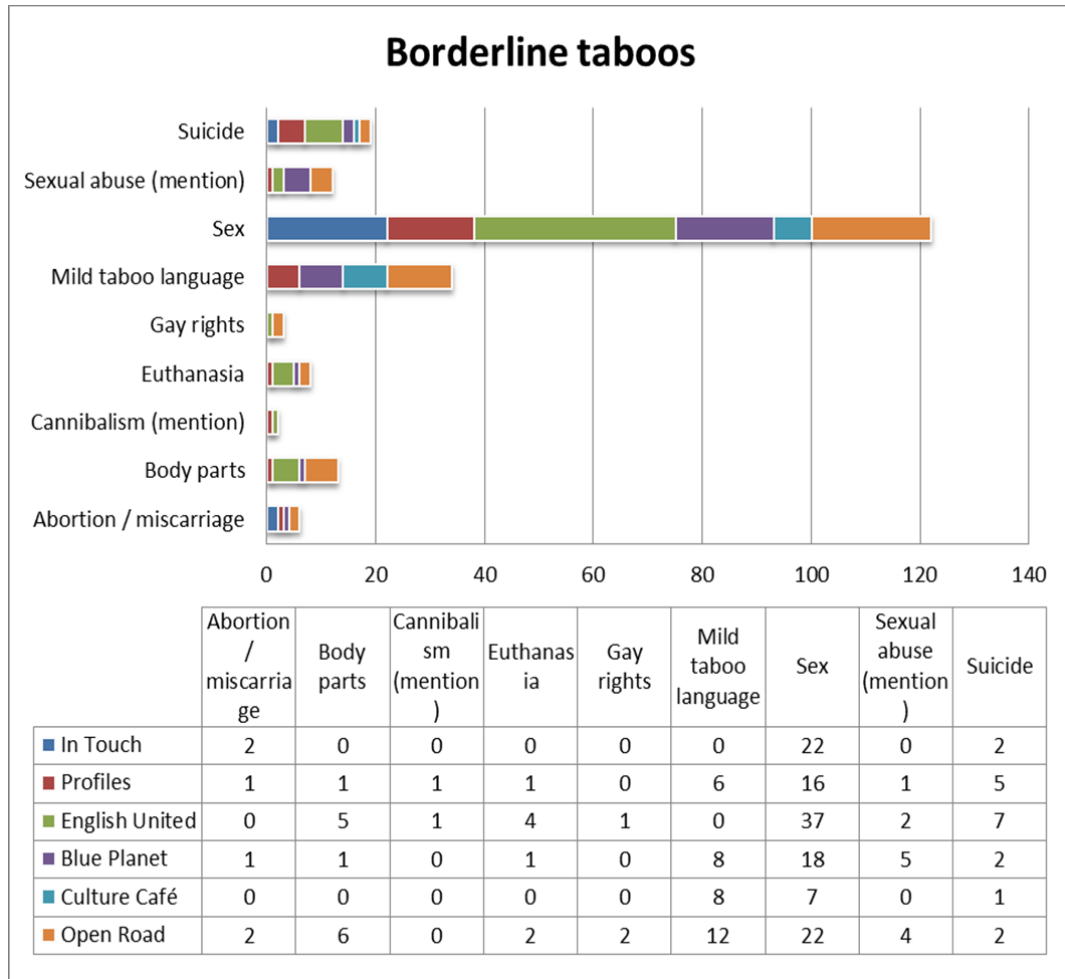
### **5.1.9 A summation of non-taboos**

The topics included in the non-taboo category were bodily effluvia, death, violence and weapons, diseases, drink and food related taboos, narcotics, politics, religion as well as smoking. All of the topics belonging to this group were vastly present in each of the textbook series examined and common denominators to all of the topics were their unoffensive nature and the fact that they were treated in a relatively neutral manner.

### **5.2 Borderline taboos**

The following section deals with the following topics: abortion and miscarriage, body parts such as breasts and buttocks, cannibalism (mention only), euthanasia, gay rights, mild taboo language, sex, sexual abuse and rape as well as suicide. These topics were not as widely represented in the examined textbook series as the previous group and contain topics which in the Finnish society are often subject to controversy. Due to the fairly wide representation of the topics in this category, it can be said that they are not as forbidden in nature as the taboos in section 5.3 but they are more controversial than the topics in section 5.1. That is, the present category exists between the two categories of taboo and non-taboo. Even though the aforementioned topics can be discussed relatively freely in today's society and media, they may be regarded as sensitive considering the age group of 16-18 year olds.

**Table 5.** The distribution of borderline taboos in the textbook series examined.



### 5.2.1 Abortion and miscarriage

Abortion was mentioned in the data in two types of contexts, the first one being in contexts in which students were asked either to share their opinions on abortion with their fellow students or asked to choose a topic for an essay from a list of topics in which one was related to abortion. In one case students were asked to organise a debate among themselves and discuss different topics (example 76) whereas in another task, students were required to ponder if in their opinion different controversial topics are right or wrong, as is the case with example 77.

- 76) Abortion should only be allowed under exceptional medical circumstances.  
(OR4:60)
- 77) Right or wrong?  
2. to have an unborn child aborted? (BP4:83)

The second type of context in which abortion was being referred to was solely as a side note. For example, abortion was mentioned in different types of conversations, the main topic of conversation being something else:

- 78) It's just, we had a number of the ladies afterwards requesting... terminations, when they found out they were carrying girls. (IT8:47)
- 79) She feels Asian women should be supported in terminating their pregnancies. (IT8:49)

Miscarriage, in turn, was present merely in one context, in which the life of the artist Frida Kahlo was being discussed. Nevertheless, in this case, miscarriage was only a side note and thus was not the main focus of the text.

- 80) Drawing on her personal experiences, her troubled two marriages to fellow Mexican artist Diego Riviera, several miscarriages, and her numerous operations, Kahlo's pictures are characterized by pain. (P5:130)

### 5.2.2 Body parts: Breasts and buttocks

The controversial body parts present in the data were related to three different body parts: buttocks, genitals and the female chest area. These references were not many and thus they can be considered as borderline taboo. Mostly the references to these aforementioned body parts were in purely informative phrases, except for the word *ass*, which was used solely when discussing someone being a fool, such as in:

- 81) Don't make an ass of yourself if you do get on TV. (EU1:81)

Also the more formal word *buttocks* was used in an informative phrase, whereas genitals, however, were referred to solely by using the word *genitals*. Examples of these can be seen in the following examples.



- 82) All men were tattooed in the face and most men were also tattooed on other parts of their body, like the thighs and buttocks. (EU1:59)
- 83) Sore skin on his genitals. (BP5:81)

Whenever a woman's chest area was mentioned, the word *breasts* were used in almost all cases, as is the case in example 84. The more controversial words *nipples* and *tits* were also used, the first one in a section that dealt with a person's anatomy and the other one only as a side note. This is illustrated by the latter example.

- 84) Yet these women take the risk because big breasts, a rounded stomach and huge hips and thighs are the symbols of sexiness, beauty and wealth for them. (EU1:49)
- 85) Where politics mix bingo with tits (P4:84)

### 5.2.3 Cannibalism (as a mention)

In the textbooks examined cannibalism was only mentioned, but not dealt with, altogether two times and on both occasions, cannibalism occurred mainly as a side note. There was no reference to cannibalism as an act. Both of the references found, however, relied on humour, the first example being a line from a joke:

- 86) Why don't cannibals eat clowns? (P1:119)

The second, in turn, exaggeratedly compared the Chinese concept of kissing to cannibalism, as visible in the following:

- 87) The Chinese may consider snogging tantamount to cannibalism, but in most cultures kissing is a natural consequence of love and lust. (EU7-8:215)

### 5.2.4 Euthanasia

Euthanasia was one of the few topics which were mentioned almost entirely in assignments that either required a student to share his or her opinion on euthanasia or presented someone else's opinion on the topic. The

assignments consisted mostly of group discussions but there was only one case in which a student was required to write an essay on a controversial topic, euthanasia being an example of a possible topic. The following excerpts were from assignments on debates students were meant to organise among themselves, in which they were required to debate on the following issues:

- 88) The relatives of terminally ill patients should be allowed to help the end their lives. (OR4:60)
- 89) Euthanasia is justified in certain cases. (P6:58)

Contrary to asking students' opinion on euthanasia, other occurrences were purely informative and thus students were not required to either form or voice any opinion on the topic:

- 90) Pro-euthanasia means being in favour of euthanasia. (EU4:143)
- 91) What is Andrew's opinion of euthanasia? (EU7-8:183)
- 92) Why, in particular, is Stuart worried about the legal aspects of euthanasia? (EU7-8:183)
- 93) Why is Chris against euthanasia? (EU7-8:183)

### **5.2.5 Gay rights**

Gay rights were handled similarly to the topic of euthanasia. That is to say, gay rights were mentioned either in phrases that demanded a student's opinion on the topic or presented the opinion of someone else:

- 94) What do you think of the same-sex marriages? (OR4:76)
- 95) Gay couples should be allowed to adopt children. (OR4:33)

Nevertheless, different to the handling of euthanasia, opinions presented on gay rights were in some cases quite strong. That is, all opinions, however sensitive the topic, were not positive towards gay rights, as illustrated by the two following short excerpts. There was also one case in which homophobia was less overtly referred to, as can be seen in the last example:

- 96) There are many reasons why gays should not be allowed to adopt children.  
(OR4:121)
- 97) See that? *Men kissing*. Damned unhealthy, if you ask me." He snorted into his beer, his sense of propriety outraged by such deviant behaviour, so alien to the respectable Anglo-Saxon. (IT4:52)
- 98) "Why is it that, as a country, we are more comfortable seeing two men holding guns than holding hands?" – Ernest Gaines (EU7-8:210)

There were also many cases in which sexual orientation and gay rights were mentioned objectively, that is, by solely mentioning the word *bisexual*, *gay*, *homosexual* or *lesbian*. In other words, there were several cases in which these different sexual orientations were present in the data without any opinion on them being stated or required:

- 99) He invited twenty girls to his party last May / But only two showed up and both admitted they were gay. (P1:138)
- 100) Electric terms referring to 'alternating current' and 'direct current'; a slang word for bisexuals (IT5:28)

### 5.2.6 Mild taboo language

The group of mild taboo language include the words that we feel have become more or less commonplace and have to a large extent lost their taboo value. Most of these mild taboo words were implemented in the texts rather than being in exercises. The mild taboo language in the present group can be divided into four groups of taboo language: epithets, profanities, vulgarities and obscenities.

Epithets are outbursts of emotional language that are usually uttered from frustration, as in the following examples:

- 101) ...bloody Japanese... (BP7:59)
- 102) ...bloody team that can stick the bloody cup... (BP7:59)
- 103) You're a dirty bastard, you are. (BP6:35)

Profanities, in turn, are words that insult religious institutions. That is, by

using profanities one is ignorant or intolerant, although being unaware of this, of the guidelines of a religious order, as is the case in the following:

104) A God damn whale. (P5:69)

Vulgarity is not necessarily considered to be taboo or obscene but they reflect the harshness of street language as is reflected by the following examples. Some of these vulgar words were more vastly present than others, for example the word *hell* being mentioned the most, as in examples 109 and 110.

105) How do I make all my crappy jobs look impressive? (P3:69)

106) And sometimes he says, 'Swindon is the arsehole of the world.' (P3:51)

107) What an ass. (OR1:57)

108) If they're a pretty miserable asshole, OK, they're a pretty miserable asshole with a new Cadillac, a house and a boat. (P4:12)

109) ...though hell should bar the way! (CC5:86)

110) What the hell is wrong with ya (OR1:55)

Obscene words, in turn, are words that are used rarely in the media as they are regarded as the most offensive. Obscenities are often used to describe expressions of a sexual nature, as in the following example, which was also previously mentioned under the heading 5.2.2. Body Parts:

111) Where politics mix bingo with tits (P4:84)

### 5.2.7 Sex

References made on sex were of many types, which have been, for the purposes of the present study, divided into five distinct groups. The first group includes the word *sex*, *sexuality* or *sexy* being mentioned as side notes. Of all the cases found from the data, most belong to the group number one, and were similar to the following excerpts:

112) ...has horror of sex from witnessing his parent's regular copulations. (BP6:31)

113) They [rap listeners] also drive faster and have unsafe sex. (P5:29)

- 114) How *Elvis Presley* shocked adults with his sexy moves. (EU2:12)
- 115) The rules are strict and destroy any ideas that you might have had about the sauna being a good place for sexual foreplay: No alcohol. (IT2:82)
- 116) Sexual behavior in androgynous cultures is also much more permissive, shocking people from more masculine cultures. (EU7-8:156)

The second group that contains the second most references includes implications being made on sex, that is, the word *sex* itself was not mentioned but was merely being implied. This group also includes STDs, that is, sexually-transmitted diseases. In the following are few examples of the cases belonging to the second group:

- 117) It sounded like a translation of one of those Playmate of the month data sheet... Turn-ons... Turn-offs... (CC5:93)
- 118) Should the media tell us if a politician has a lover outside his or her marriage? (BP6:93)
- 119) She discovered her husband's infidelity when she saw "Dave Barmy" 7 making / to make love to the avatar on screen. (P6:194)
- 120) the AIDS virus... had deliberately infected black people... men who had syphilis... (CC8:85)

The third group, in turn, comprises of references to polygamy or virginity. These were not many since there were only four references to polygamy and one to virginity. In all cases in which polygamy was mentioned, the context was highly informal as in the first two examples. Virginity, in turn, was mentioned only once and solely as a side note in a multiple choice task, as illustrated by the third example:

- 121) Polygamy means having several husbands/wives at the same time. Polytheism means believing in several gods. (EU4:143)
- 122) Polygamy has largely disappeared from modern South African society, although there are still some chiefs and kings who have several wives. (EU4:95)
- 123) she is a virgin (EU4:96)

It is noteworthy that all references belonging to the group number three were found from the same textbook, *English United 4*.

Pornography, which is the fourth group of references, was also mentioned on some occasions. Pornography was mostly referred to by its own name as in the first excerpt. It was not judged as wrong or immoral in any of the cases, except for child pornography, which was the case in the latter example:

124) Perhaps not very high in \_\_\_\_\_ merit but definitely popular with some people, pornographic films are blue for English speakers but red-light films (*films a luci rosse*) for Italians. (IT1:73)

125) For instance, there are certain forms of pornography (e.g. child pornography) which should not be allowed in the media. (EU4:110)

The fifth and final group of references made on sex includes exercises in which students' opinions were asked on sex-related issues, as in the following exercise in which students have to decide if one's views on the given topics were public or private things:

126) My views on sexual morality (BP3:70)

Students' opinions were also asked on a more straightforward manner as illustrated by the following three excerpts:

127) Should sex be restricted until you're legally married? (EU1:27)

128) What is the legal age of consent (the age at which you can legally have a sexual relationship) in Finland? (EU1:27)

129) Should sex and violence be considered the same in Finland when it comes to censorship? (EU1:27)

### **5.2.8 Sexual abuse and rape**

The section of sexual abuse and rape includes all the references made on these topics except for pedophilia, which will be presented in section 4.3 as in our opinion and according to the findings of the present study it is more of a taboo than sexual abuse and rape. Nevertheless, the findings included in the present section are of three types: firstly, the topic is only a side note, secondly, opinions on the topic are either presented or required from students and thirdly, the topic of sex slavery is handled as its own group. The first group, including side notes, consists of cases in which sexual abuse

was not the main focus of the text but merely alluded to. The cases were similar to the following:

130) Of course I thought about dying; of course I thought about being raped;  
(BP4:59)

It is noteworthy that in all of the cases of sexual abuse being mentioned, it was not referred to overtly. Contrary to this, some excerpts on rape or sexual abuse did not mention the act by its own name but only implied it:

131) My mum had this boyfriend who tried to sleep with me. (BP1:66)

132) The husband could also use her sexually when he wished, or even beat her. (BP4:73)

The second group, consisting of cases in which either a character of a textbook voiced his or her own opinion or which required students to voice their own opinions on the topic of sexual abuse. This second group contains cases of the following type:

133) Moral dilemmas: raping (OR4:25)

134) What do you think about rape alarms? (BP4:61)

135) Pedophilia and rape ought to be punished more severely. (OR4:33)

The third group, which comprises of references to sex slavery, contains five cases, of which four were from the same textbook, the text reporting a person's experiences on being a sex slave.

136) she would work as a sex slave... (OR4:104-105)

137) Nearly all her clients are victims of human trafficking... women sold into prostitution abroad... (OR4:99)

Nevertheless, sex slavery was not solely referred to from a subjective point of view but there was also one case in which sex slavery was discussed more informatively and objectively as can be seen in the following excerpt:

138) Trafficking in persons - the illegal and highly profitable recruitment, transport, or sale of human beings for the purpose of exploiting their labour - is a slavery-like practice that must be eliminated. The trafficking of women and children into bonded sweatshop labour, forced marriage,

forced prostitution, domestic servitude, and other kinds of work is a global phenomenon. (IT8:68)

Sex slavery and prostitution were also related to the topic of sex but they were nevertheless included under the heading of sexual abuse as nearly all of the references made to them handled prostitution and sexual slavery against one's will. As a matter of fact, there were only two references to prostitution which did not handle prostitution against one's will, of which in the other prostitution was merely alluded to:

139) I don't like living in this area with a child because there is a lot of crime and prostitutes. (IT4:18)

140) According to her covering letter, she's had sex jobs since leaving school. An unfortunate spelling mistake if ever there was one. (P3:85)

### 5.2.9 Suicide

Suicide was mostly mentioned as a side note but nevertheless, the references made on suicide can be divided into three distinct groups. The first group includes the word *suicide* solely on the level of a mention, as in:

141) Having no work... can have catastrophic consequences: drug abuse, suicides, shooting (OR4:41)

142) As they are expecting a number of suicide attempts, the police are on the alert in the Indian city of Ahmedabad. (EU6:150)

The second group, which has the second most cases, in turn, includes general knowledge, that is to say, a type of trivia, on suicides, as illustrated by the subsequent excerpts:

143) Suicide rates are very, very high amongst Australian farmers during times of drought. (EU7-8:40)

144) And suicides dropped by 34% when London's Blackfriar's Bridge was painted green. (IT1:70)

Moreover, the third and final group, which is the group with least cases, consists of cases in which the act of suicide was not referred to by its own



name but was being implied at, as is the case in:

145) If you're faced with someone who you feel will kill themselves... (CC1:63)

146) One night in 1963, while her children were asleep, Sylvia took her own life. (IT3:81)

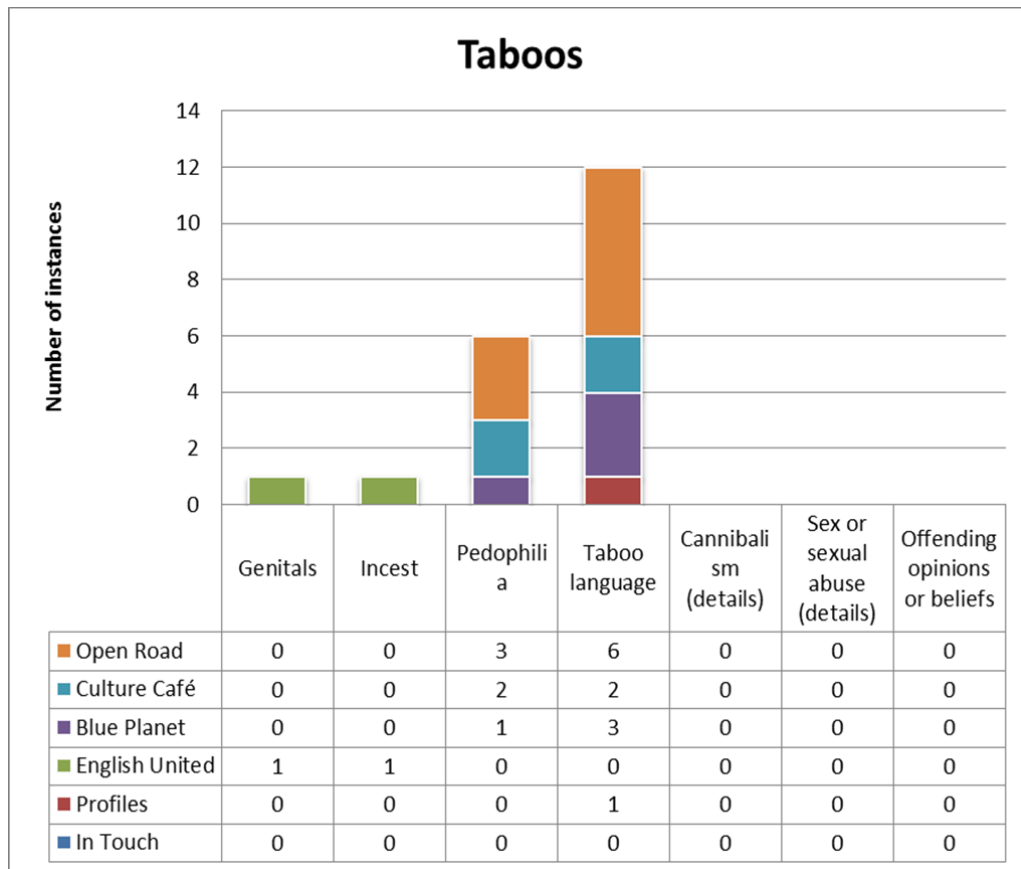
### **5.2.10 A summation of borderline taboos**

The topics included in the borderline category were abortion and miscarriage, body parts such as breasts and buttocks, cannibalism as a mention, euthanasia, gay rights, mild taboo language, sex, sexual abuse as well as suicide. All of the topics belonging to this group were present in some textbook series examined, but to a lesser degree than the topics in the non-taboo category. A common denominator to all of the topics in this group was the fact that some people may consider them to be taboo whereas others may regard them as unoffensive, thus being controversial and borderline in nature.

## **5.3 Taboo**

The following section deals with the following topics: body parts such as genitals, incest, pedophilia, taboo language as well as cannibalism as an act, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse and offending political opinions or religious beliefs. The last group consisting of cannibalism as an act, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse and offending political opinions or religious beliefs will be analysed together under one heading as none of the aforementioned topics appeared in the gathered data. Since these taboo topics were either scarcely present or completely absent from the series examined, they can be considered as taboo in textbook context. Moreover, their existence, although scarce, in the textbook context can also be questioned since they bear little significant educational value.

**Table 6.** The distribution of taboos in the textbook series examined.



### 5.3.1 Body parts: genitals

Taboo body parts, that is, genitals, were mentioned only once in the series examined. The reference in question was used as a side note in a text dealing with tigers, and is as follows:

147) Most infamously, and most persistently of all, there is a belief that a tiger's penis acts as a powerful aphrodisiac. (EU7-8:24)

As can be seen, the reference to genitals was purely informative, not sexual, and did not even refer to human genitals. In other words, in this case the penis of a tiger was treated more as a medical ingredient than a sexual organ.

### 5.3.2 Incest and pedophilia

Both incest and pedophilia were present in the examined data. Nevertheless, only one reference was made to incest and the reference was a comparison, as can be seen in the following example:

148) it would be like incest (EU4:96)

The reference did not give any information about or explanation of incest and treated the matter objectively.

Pedophilia was mentioned altogether six times in the series examined for the present study. On two occasions, pedophilia was only mentioned briefly, as side notes, as can be seen in the examples:

149) child molester, child molestation (CC4:75)

150) Say you were sexually assaulted as a child... (BP5:36)

In addition to this, two references to pedophilia were made which provided information on vocabulary related to the act of pedophilia, as illustrated by the following two examples:

151) a child molester... assaults children sexually (CC4:74)

152) molesting children - i.e. touching underage boys or girls in a sexual way (OR4:27)

Surprisingly, although pedophilia was mentioned six times in the examined data, there was only one instance in which pedophilia as an act was seriously condemned, as can be seen in the following example:

153) Pedophilia and rape ought to be punished more severely. (OR4:33)

The last reference to pedophilia was a discussion exercise, which dealt with the moral dilemmas included in molesting children.

### **5.3.3 Taboo language**

Taboo language was also present in the data examined. In order to present the findings more comprehensively, the cases in the present category can be divided into four different groups: cursing, profanity, obscenity as well as vulgarism, and slurs.

The first group is cursing. The intention behind cursing is to cause harm on another person by using certain words or phrases. These words are condemned by certain institutions such as religion by punishing or penalising the speaker for such usage. There were altogether two examples of cursing found from the data:

154) to tell him to shut the fuck up. (BP6:35)

155) Fuck off, slaggin' (BP6:35)

The second group consists of profanity. To be profane means to be intolerant or ignorant of the guidelines of a religious order. In other words, the speaker would be ignorant or indifferent towards these matters, not intending to denigrate God or religion. Altogether two examples of profanity were present in the series examined, both of which can be seen in the following examples:

156) oh my fucking God (OR2:83)

157) "Holy shit." "Do as you're told or I will kill you." ... But the unwavering barrel of his .25 semi-automatic made it clear to me that... (BP4:58)

The third group includes obscenity and vulgarism. The examples share characteristics of both groups and therefore are examined together. Obscene words are very rarely used in public media as they are regarded as the most offensive. Obscene words cannot be used freely as they are subject to restriction and using such speech is to risk sanctioning from the courts. While the function of taboos is to restrict what speakers do, obscenity's function is to protect listeners from harmful language. Vulgarity means the language of the unsophisticated, unsocialised or the under-educated. Vulgarisms reflect the crudeness of street language and thus they are not necessarily taboo or obscene. They are used in order to communicate and do not serve any other particular need or function. Five examples of obscenity and vulgarism were found in the series examined, all of which are presented in the following:

158) They fuck you up (OR5:74)

- 159) And Father said, 'Christopher is getting a crap enough deal already, don't you think, without you shitting on him from a great height as well. Jesus, this is the one thing he is really good at.' (P3:51)
- 160) Bullshit (CC 8:70)
- 161) they have not done shit (OR1:27)
- 162) Why don't y'all get your shit together (OR1:55)
- 163) oh shit (OR2:83)

The fourth group consists of slurs. Slurs are verbal attacks on people and they both function to harm the target of the attack directly through using a particular word or phrase. The nature of slurs can be racial, social or ethnic and they may indicate the prejudice or stereotyping of the speaker, as in the following examples:

- 164) I heard Allison say, "get out of here, nigger" "I said get out of here, nigger, or I'll beat you up." I don't play with niggers." "Niggers are stupid..." (CC4:12-13)
- 165) Nigger (OR4:28)

It should be noted that all of the EFL textbooks examined *Profiles* was the only series to have an exercise concentrating on taboo language and thus provide some pedagogical value to expressions of taboo language, as can be seen in the following:

- 166) The extract contains some examples of bad language and some offensive terms. Why do you think the writer uses such expressions? What was your reaction when you read them? (P3:54)

#### **5.3.4 Cannibalism as an act, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse, and offending political opinions or religious beliefs**

No findings on the following topics were made in the textbook series examined for the present study: cannibalism as an act, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse, and offending political opinions or religious beliefs. Thus, they are all under the same heading.

### **5.3.5 A summation of taboos**

The topics included in the taboo category were genitals, incest and pedophilia, taboo language, cannibalism as an act, detailed description of sex and sexual abuse as well as offending political opinions or religious beliefs. All of the topics belonging to this group were either scarcely present in or completely absent from the textbook series examined. Common denominators to all of the topics were their offensive nature and the fact that many may find these topics inappropriate in school environment.

## **5.4 Summary**

One of our research questions for the present study enquired after the presence or absence of taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school. This section is provided to answer the first research question. In the beginning of our research, we formed the list of possible taboo topics according to the literature on the matter and according to our own opinions. Many topics included in the list of possible taboo topics were found, which we, based on our findings and our views, further divided into three distinct groups: non-taboo, borderline taboos and taboos. It is to be noted, however, that this division of topics into three distinct groups of non-taboos, borderline taboos and taboos is done by us and opinions may differ on this matter. Other divisions are also possible. The decisions on which group each topic belongs to was made both on the basis of how often each topic occurs in the data and according to our personal opinions. The reliability of the categorisation was enhanced by having the views of two people on the matter.

The first group, non-taboos, included all the topics with such a vast occurrence and unprohibited nature that we came to the conclusion that they cannot be referred to as taboos. Therefore, as such, the first group does not provide answers for our first research question.

The second group, borderline taboos, contained topics such as sex, sexual abuse and euthanasia. This group presented some difficulties as the topics contained do not belong clearly to either of the two other groups. Thus, the decision of including topics in the present group was mainly personal as none of the examples of the topics belonging to the borderline taboos group can be clearly dismissed as not taboo, but they were also not as harsh as the taboos in the third group. That is, while the topics themselves may be considered as taboo, the examples present in the textbook series examined were not harsh or forbidden in nature. Therefore, the present group does not clearly provide answers to our research question as the topics included in the group are borderline cases and the decision of treating them as taboo or not is mostly personal.

The third group, taboos, included for example pedophilia, incest and taboo language. We consider the topics presented in the group as taboo as they are harsh in nature, and they are topics one should avoid discussing of in most situations. Expectedly, few examples of these taboo topics were found in the textbook series examined for the present study. To answer our first research question, the taboo topics present in the series examined were taboo language, pedophilia and incest. The taboo topics absent from the series were detailed description of cannibalism, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse as well as offending political opinions and personal beliefs.

The challenge of the present study is that we are examining topics that are naturally absent or avoided. Thus, in a sense, we are searching for topics that are usually absent, especially in textbook materials. Moreover, it is difficult to notice the absence of a topic without a taboo list to refer to. Furthermore, no definitive list of taboo topics exists, and thus some topics might be left unmentioned in the present study.

## **6 INTERVIEWS WITH TEXTBOOK AUTHORS**

Two Finnish textbook authors were interviewed for the present study in order to gain a more comprehensive outlook on the challenges and restrictions of writing an EFL textbook series for Finnish students. Both of the authors interviewed have quite recently been involved in writing a textbook series for Finnish upper secondary school students and both authors were interviewed separately by utilising the method of theme interview, and the interview form in its entirety can be found in the Appendix 1. The interviewees will be referred to as Author 1 and Author 2. No direct translations of the interviews are included since both the coherence and the dialogic nature of the text were considered more important than direct translations. Moreover, in our opinion, we were able to express the opinions of the authors better without direct translations. In the following section, the answers of the interviewees will be presented in detail.

### **6.1 Taboo topics according to textbook authors**

The interview began by the interviewer reading aloud a list of possible taboo topics and the interviewees responding if the topic, in their own opinion, is either a non-taboo, a borderline taboo or a taboo in Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school students. Since borderline taboos and taboos are of the greatest interest for the purposes of the present study, the topics that both authors considered to be non-taboo, will not be paid attention to in this section. The answers of both authors can be seen in Table 7 presented below.

The topic that both interviewees regarded as borderline taboo was bodily effluvia. Both authors felt that the inclusion of some bodily effluvia is sensible in textbooks whereas some of them should be excluded. Indeed, Author 2 pointed out that references to, for example, vomit and diarrhea may be present in texts that handle travelling and it can, therefore, be



beneficial for students to recognise these words. Author 2 also pointed out that although references to bodily effluvia are not censored, no toilet scenes are included in EFL textbooks.

Contrary to Author 2, Author 1 considered also alcohol, smoking, sex and menstruation to be borderline taboos. Author 2, in turn, regarded body parts, such as breasts and buttocks, mild taboo language, and harsh taboo language as borderline taboos. Author 2 mentioned that although breasts and buttocks are borderline taboos, pictures of especially woman's breasts are not included in textbooks, and thus can be regarded as taboo. Author 2 emphasised that if, for instance, mild taboo language fits into the context in which they are present and in case they are not vulgar or insulting, there is no valid reason to censor them from the text.

The topics that both authors considered to be taboo are sexual abuse, incest, pedophilia, detailed descriptions of sex or sexual abuse, detailed description of cannibalism as well as offending political opinions and religious beliefs. Author 2 pointed out that sexual abuse, incest, pedophilia and detailed descriptions of sex or sexual abuse are particularly sensitive topics since, in addition to them being sensitive topics to students, teachers often lack the tools of handling the aforementioned topics any further. Therefore, introducing such topics might be more harmful than beneficial.

Contrary to Author 2, Author 1 also regarded genitals and harsh taboo language as taboos in textbooks. Author 2, in turn, considered sex to be taboo in EFL textbooks for upper secondary school students. As a general rule of thumb both authors mentioned that if a topic is considered as banned from minors, such as detailed description of sex or cannibalism, there are no reasons for including it in EFL textbooks.

Although, according to Author 2, violence, politics and religion are non-taboos in EFL textbooks for upper secondary school, the author emphasised

that violence is taboo if it is explicitly described and the main point of the text. Politics and religion, in turn, are taboo if one's own opinions on the matter are declared to such an extent that a textbook begins to resemble more a pamphlet than a textbook.

**Table 7.** Borderline taboos, marked (x), and taboos, marked x, according to the interviewed authors. The topics not marked were considered to be non-taboos.

<b>Taboos</b>	<b>Author 1</b>	<b>Author 2</b>
Bodily effluvia	(x)	(x)
Death		
Violence		
Weapons		
Diseases		
Alcohol	(x)	
Pork		
Narcotics		
Politics		
Religion		
Tobacco	(x)	
Abortion and miscarriage		
Body parts, such as breasts and behind		(x)
Cannibalism		
Euthanasia		
Gay rights		
Mild taboo language, such as <i>bullshit, asshole</i> and <i>hell</i>		(x)
Sex	(x)	x
Sexual abuse	x	x
Suicide		
Genitals	x	(x)
Incest	x	x
Pedophilia	x	x
Taboo language, such as <i>fuck</i>	x	(x)
Menstruation	(x)	
Detailed description of sex and sexual abuse	x	x
Detailed description of cannibalism	x	x
Offending political opinions or religious beliefs	x	x

## 6.2 Publisher's influence and working in teams

When the textbook authors were inquired the extent of which publishers affect the inclusion or exclusion of certain topics and their own opinions of the possible guidelines given by the publishers, it became evident that publishers do not have any specific guidelines on forbidden topics. Author 1 noted that instead of supervising the contents, publishers remind the authors of the different contexts in which the textbook series will be utilised. In other words, students in Helsinki are different from students in Ostrobothnia. For example, some of the students in Ostrobothnia are Laestadians, which is the largest revival movement in Scandinavia within the Evangelic-Lutheran church (lestadiolaisuus.info 2011). Due to their religion, the Laestadians may consider for example sex to be a sensitive topic of discussion and that is one reason why its and some other topics' inclusion in textbooks should be considered when writing a textbook.

Author 2 shared Author 1's experiences on the freedom of choosing topics to be included in the final product. As noted by Author 1, the freedom authors have is not to say that publishers do not supervise the process of textbook writing but it is indeed the publisher that makes the final decision of what to exclude or include in a textbook. Indeed, the one clear guideline given by the publisher to Author 2's team was: "holding hands and perhaps slight kissing but nothing more". Nevertheless, the publishing editors differed, with some having stronger opinions than others. Author 2 pointed out that the freedom given to their author team might have been due to the relative small size of the publishing company since, as a result of its small size, there was no specific company line of doing things. Indeed, Author 2 felt that, as the company was somewhat small, the authors were able to trust their own common sense and experiment on what works and what does not. Nevertheless, Author 1 worked for a bigger publisher but it was also evident that freedom was given to their author team as well.

Author 1 pointed out that the question of excluding or including taboo topics was seldom discussed. Author 2, however, noted that taboo topics were not discussed in the process of writing. According to Author 1, the emphasis of the discussions in the team meetings was more on the text's level of difficulty, the quality of vocabulary and the grammatical correctness of the text than on any taboo topics.

Author 1 reminded of the role of upper secondary school in providing the students with general education. Thus, both the role of upper secondary school as providing general education and the contents of curriculum, which include, among others, themes that are related to students' identity and sexuality, inevitably affect the topics that are included in textbooks. Author 2, in turn, reminded that not all teachers have such liberal views as the author team has and therefore it is essential to remember to follow the golden mean and not to include any controversial topics purely for the sake of including them. That is, one should always keep in mind the pedagogical reasons for including certain topics, and, for instance, if there are no pedagogical benefits in including bodily effluvia, they should not be included.

### **6.3 Possible dangers and problems of including taboos**

The authors were asked of possible dangers and problems of including so called taboo topics in EFL textbooks for upper secondary school. Author 1 commented that it is difficult to define taboos today as students believe that they can discuss anything with anyone. Teachers, however, often feel differently and the limit of what is a taboo and what is not differs between teachers. That is, some may allow more than others.

Both authors noted that some topics are forbidden in the context of upper

secondary school due to laws. That is, topics such as detailed descriptions of sex and sexual abuse as well as senseless violence are often considered unsuitable for anyone under the age of 18. The authors thought that these K-18 (the Finnish equivalent of NC-17) topics do not belong in school environment and thus should not be dealt with at all.

When contemplating on the possible dangers, Author 2 remembered a text in one of the textbooks about a school shooting. The shooting was not the main of focus of the text and was, therefore, included in the textbook. After the two school shootings in Finland in 2007 and 2008, the author wondered if the series was used in the two schools in which the shootings occurred during or after that event as well as could a textbook text act as a trigger for such an act (MTV3: Jokela 2010 and MTV3: Kauhajoki 2010).

Author 2 noted that some issues might be too personal for students to handle in a classroom. That is to say, if a student has encountered pedophilia, incest or sexual abuse in person, discussing these themes in the classroom may cause painful memories and be all in all unbeneficial in terms of learning. Moreover, both of the authors noted that if some topics, for example cannibalism, are dealt with in detail, it can lead to the misunderstanding that the topic is admired and valued.

Author 2 commented that it is more important to consider the usefulness of including taboo topics rather than the dangers of including them. The benefits of teaching about, for example, pedophilia or sexual abuse can be questioned. Moreover, the texts need to be coherent and consistent entities that are of the wanted length. If the text needs to be shortened in order to maintain the necessary length, some topics are easier to leave out than others. For instance, references to sex are easy to cut if the consistence and coherence of the text does not suffer.

## 6.4 Informing the students of taboo language

The authors were asked if they thought that teaching or giving information about taboo language is necessary in the upper secondary school and why / why not. They were also asked if they felt there is a difference between mild taboo language and harsh taboo language in the case of teaching taboo language. Both authors felt that there is no need to actually teach different expressions to students as they are already familiar with them. As a matter of fact, different expressions of taboo language are often among the first words students learn of a foreign language.

Both authors regarded giving information about taboo language as important. That is, teachers should give information about the use of taboo language in different situations, registers and contexts. Moreover, one should not use taboo language in public situations. Both of the authors felt that it is important to get students to consider the kind of an impression a person who uses taboo language gives of himself/herself. Furthermore, the use of, for example, the word *fuck* can have serious consequences, which are often not dealt with in media. All in all, students should know that the place of taboo language is very limited and one easily gives a bad impression of himself/herself when using taboo language.

Both of the authors thought that information should be given both about mild and harsh taboo language. Even though it is difficult to define which expressions belong to the mild category and which expressions to the harsh, both categories are, nevertheless, encountered in popular culture and in media.

The authors were also asked about teaching euphemisms relating to taboo topics. Author 2 noted that being explicit is often unnecessary and thus giving information about euphemisms is needed in order for students to

understand this. That is, in some situations, for example, it is more appropriate to use the expression “to powder one’s nose” than “to go to the toilet”. Author 2 also listed some euphemisms related to death, such as “pushing daisies”, that may be more appropriate. The influence of culture is also important as euphemisms vary between cultures.

## **6.5 Opinions about discovered example sentences**

For the final part of the interview some examples from the examined textbook series were listed. The examples chosen were the ones we considered to be the most taboo and controversial in nature. That is, they were chosen to discover if the authors would personally not include some of the examples in textbooks. The authors were asked what they thought about the following examples and if they were surprising in some way. Moreover, they were asked if the examples belong to upper secondary school textbooks.

The authors had some difficulty commenting on the examples given as they had been taken out of context and thus may give a harsher impact than they may have when being a part of a longer text. In order to avoid distorting the results the authors were not told the textbook series of which the examples were drawn from until after the interview. Thus the authors were not biased towards the series from which the examples were found.

Altogether fourteen examples were listed. Eleven of them the authors thought were acceptable to include in textbooks depending on the context, two were borderline cases and one the authors would not include. Table 8 lists the first eleven examples, Table 9 the two borderline cases and Table 10 the one example both of the authors felt is taboo, all of the tables also including the most important comments made by the authors.

**Table 8.** Examples authors considered to be acceptable to include in upper secondary school textbooks.

Taboo examples:	Comments:
<p>1) Kent: You know, having sex... getting high            167) Barry: Getting' high? Smokin' pot?            168) Kent: Well, yeah, we always smoke.            169) Barry: If you always smoke, what do you mean by "getting' high"?            170) Kent: Free-base. Smokin' coke. Crack.            171) Barry: You've been smoking crack for a couple of days... with your girlfriend. What else... you been doing?            172) Kent: And drinkin'- I drank some Wild turkey yesterday 'cause I was getting paranoid. Jill was doin' acid, I think. I'm not sure. Some Valiums. (<i>Blue Planet 4:7</i>)</p>	<p>Author 1 thought the example was okay. Author 2 thought it was acceptable depending on the context.</p>
<p>2) If they're a pretty miserable asshole, OK, they're a pretty miserable asshole with a new Cadillac, a house and a boat. (<i>Profiles 4:12</i>)</p>	<p>Author 2 thought it was okay as a part of a larger text.</p>
<p>3) The rules are strict and destroy any ideas that you might have had bout the sauna being a good place for sexual foreplay: No alcohol. (<i>In Touch 2:82</i>)</p>	<p>It is acceptable to describe rules.</p>
<p>4) ...has horror of sex from witnessing his parents regular copulations. (<i>Blue Planet 6:31</i>)</p>	<p>Depends on the context.</p>
<p>5) The husband could also use her sexually when he wished, or even beat her. (<i>Blue Planet 4:73</i>)</p>	<p>The situation is reality for some.</p>
<p>6) My mum had this boyfriend who tried to sleep with me. (<i>Blue Planet 1:66</i>)</p>	<p>The act is only an attempt.</p>
<p>7) Most infamously, and most persistently of all, there is a belief that a tiger's penis acts as a powerful aphrodisiac. (<i>English</i>)</p>	<p>Acceptable.</p>



<i>United 7-8:24)</i>	
8) it would be like incest ( <i>English United 4:96)</i>	Incest is okay when only mentioned.
9) Say you were sexually assaulted as a child...( <i>Blue Planet 5:36)</i>	Difficult to say without context, but is acceptable as such.
10) molesting children - i.e. touching underage boys or girls in a sexual way ( <i>Open Road 4:27)</i>	Explaining a word is acceptable.
11) to tell him to shut the fuck up. ( <i>Blue Planet 6:35)</i>	Depending on the context; a phrase students have heard multiple times.

**Table 9.** Examples authors would think carefully before including in upper secondary school textbooks.

<b>Borderline examples:</b>	<b>Comments:</b>
12) And Father said, 'Christopher is getting a crap enough deal already, don't you think, without you shitting on him from a great height as well. Jesus, this is the one thing he is really good at.' ( <i>Profiles 3:51)</i>	The example contains colourful language, but is all right in a longer text. Author 1 thought that the expression "shitting on him" is a bit harsh for a textbook.
13) I heard Allison say, "get out of here, nigger" "I said get out of here, nigger, or I'll beat you up." I don't play with niggers." "Niggers are stupid..." ( <i>Culture Café 4:12-13)</i>	Authors thought that in a historical context the example is okay, but still questionable. Author 1 noted that students know the difference if a black person calls another black person a nigger and if a white person calls a black person a nigger.

**Table 10.** Examples authors would not include in upper secondary school textbooks.

<b>Taboo example:</b>	<b>Comments:</b>
14) oh my fucking God ( <i>Open Road 2:83)</i>	Both authors thought that this example would probably have been censored by their publishers as the reference is so profane.

After shown the sources of the examples, both authors noted that some differences between publishers can be found in the examples. That is, nine of the examples were found in series by Otava, three by WSOY and two by

Tammi. Author 1 commented that Otava invests more in fiction and literature than the other two publishers, which may be the reason for the large number of taboo topics. WSOY and Tammi, according to Author 1, resemble each other more. Author 2 noted that even though the topics are sensitive, their existence can still be discussed in the classroom. All in all, both authors thought that context is the key in these types of situations.

## 6.6 Summary

Our first research question for the present study enquired after the presence or absence of taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school and was answered in section 5.4. The second research question was the following: What taboos should be present in and upper secondary school EFL textbooks? Why? Our third research question asked if taboo topics, taboo words and taboo language as well as euphemisms should be taught to upper secondary school students and why or why not. This section is provided to answer the second and third research question from the textbook authors' point of view, whereas our point of view will be provided in the discussion section of the present paper.

Topics that both of the authors felt were taboo in the context of upper secondary school textbooks in Finland and thus should not be included in textbooks were sexual abuse, suicide, incest, pedophilia, detailed description of sex and sexual abuse, detailed description of cannibalism as well as offending political opinions and religious beliefs. Topics that both authors felt were either taboo or borderline taboo were bodily effluvia, sex, genitals as well as taboo language. Moreover, topics that one of the authors thought were borderline taboo were alcohol, tobacco, body parts such as breasts and buttocks, mild taboo language, such as *bullshit*, *asshole* and *hell*, as well as menstruation.

The three reasons that were discussed in the interviewing process for not including the topics that the authors considered to be taboo were firstly the fact that something is K-18 (NC-17) material, as is the case with, for instance, detailed description of sex and sexual abuse and detailed description of cannibalism. Secondly, the contents of a textbook ought not to offend anyone and be as neutral as possible, which is the reason for not including for example offending political opinions and religious beliefs. Thirdly, the sensitivity of a topic might also be one reason to exclude it from a textbook. This is the case with, for example, sexual abuse, suicide, incest and pedophilia. As these topics are highly sensitive in nature, a teacher might lack the tools to handle them. Moreover, if a student has for instance been sexually abused, she or he might not feel comfortable when such things are discussed in classroom.

The authors thought there is no need to teach taboo language to upper secondary school students as they already know different expressions of taboo language. The authors noted, however, that information should be given about the use of taboo language in different situations, registers and contexts. Different expressions of taboo language are encountered in media and popular culture and students should be aware of the fact that using taboo language can have serious negative consequences. Information about euphemisms should be given as well as some situations do not require the use of explicit expressions.

## **7 DISCUSSION**

Defining the word *taboo* is complex but one of the most appropriate definitions for the purposes of the present study is that of Allan and Burridge (2006:27), who note that any behavior that can be dangerous or cause harm, injury or discomfort to either an individual or the community is often subject to taboo. As taboos today cause more discomfort than danger or harm, of this

definition by Allan and Burrige, the word *discomfort* is the most important word to consider with regards to the present study. Evans et al. (2000:2), in turn, state that control of taboos exerts to our everyday life and sets boundaries for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. As shown by the results of the present study, this exertion of control manifests itself in textbooks, where some topics, for example religion, are acceptable topics of discussion whereas other topics, for instance pedophilia, are not as openly discussed, if discussed at all.

Taboos are a somewhat understudied field of study and this might be explained by the challenges any person studying taboos inevitably encounters. Indeed, an important factor that both makes it difficult to study taboos and define which topics are taboos in today's world is, as pointed out by Hughes (2006:462-464), that over the years, the definition of taboo has shifted from meaning "strictly forbidden" to simply "offensive" or "grossly impolite". Thus, as the word *taboo* today refers to "prohibitions against socially unacceptable words, expressions, and topics, especially of a sexual and racist nature", it is increasingly challenging to determine any absolute taboos (Hughes 2006:462-464). This was especially visible during the writing process of the present paper as it soon became evident that only a few of the topics we initially considered to be taboo were taboos in reality. Indeed, an interesting notion was that, instead of a topic being a taboo, a more important factor to be paid attention to is the question whether there is a risk that a topic may offend someone or not.

Another important notion in this field of study is that simply calling something taboo does not automatically mean that it is a taboo. As taboos are born from the cultural and historical practices shared by a social community, it is evident that taboos differ from one social community to another and from one time to another (Laitinen 2009:5). As there are many communities inside these bigger social communities, with every one of these communities

having their own taboos in addition to the shared taboos of the community as a whole, it is obvious that drawing any absolute conclusions of which topics are taboos and which are not is a great challenge for anyone studying them.

On the basis of the aforementioned information, one might easily conclude that as EFL textbook authors are usually teachers and therefore belong to the same social community of EFL teachers, they share the same values and thus consider same topics as offending or taboo as the rest of the EFL teachers do. Nevertheless, as these people come from different backgrounds, from different parts of the country, have different religions and so on, it is inevitable that the values they share are not the same. On the contrary, every teacher, as is the case with every person, has their own worldview and thus regard different topics as offending than some others may do. After stating this, it becomes clear that as all of the examined EFL textbook series for upper secondary school students have their own team of authors and publishers, they are as unique as the people using them. In the following section, we will attempt to draw conclusions on our findings and discuss the implications of these findings.

## **7.1 Implications of the findings from EFL textbooks**

In the beginning of the process of writing the present paper our preconception was that the process of excluding certain topics from or including them in EFL textbooks is paid much attention to in Finland. Nevertheless, our theory soon was proven wrong by not only the large number of topics found that we regarded as taboo but also by the opinions of the two textbook authors interviewed. It became clear that rather than strictly determining that a certain topic is taboo, it is more important to pay attention to the nature and the manner of handling topics. In the following section, we will ponder the implications of the data from the textbooks examined and

attempt to relate our findings to previous research.

A large number of topics deemed to be taboo by both us and several authors who have studied taboos (see Table 1) were present in the textbook series under scrutiny. Indeed, the amount of topics found from the textbooks was so large that we were forced to further divide them into three different groups: non-taboos, borderline taboos and taboos. After dividing them into their respective groups according to the number of occurrences, it soon became clear that from the vast list of possible taboo topics the topics of suicide, sexual abuse, sex, mild taboo language, gay rights, euthanasia, cannibalism as a mention, body parts (excluding genitals) and abortion or miscarriage were of such nature that they could not be referred to neither non-taboo or taboo and therefore had to be called borderline taboos. On the contrary, only the topics of genitals, incest, pedophilia, taboo language, cannibalism as an act, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse and offending political or religious opinions seem to be taboo in the context of Finnish EFL textbooks.

Although it may seem to be a rather simple process to conclude which topics are taboo and which are not on the basis of the number of occurrences, the task is, nevertheless, not a simple one. On the contrary, regarding both the presence or absence of the topics and the number of occurrences of a certain topic, there are some differences between the textbook series examined. As a result, it cannot be concluded that the absence of one topic in one series automatically means that it is also absent from the others. Neither does the low occurrence of references to one topic in one textbook mean that the number of occurrences is as low in another series. Moreover, there are some differences between the textbooks belonging to the same series. The EFL textbooks for course number five, for example, concentrate on cultures of the world and thus have many references to different religions, whereas the EFL textbooks for course number six have less since the course's main topics of

concern are science, economy and technology. Furthermore, as the taboos of society and school environment differ, the matter is complicated even further. All of the aforementioned differences naturally affect the results as well as complicate the process of drawing conclusions from the data.

Some topics that researchers considered to be taboo turned out to be non-taboo in the present study. Allan and Burridge state (1991:153, 2006:222-223, 2006:234) that death and diseases are the greatest taboos of our time. Blake and Moorhead (1993:81) and Hughes (2006:464) support this view, by noting that today death is more of a taboo topic than sex. The findings of the present study, nevertheless, prove otherwise, at least in the context of Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school. That is, many references were found to both death and diseases but since the examples found were relatively neutral in nature, we and the interviewed authors regarded them as non-taboos. Therefore they cannot be considered to be taboo in educational contexts. This was also the case with bodily effluvia, violence and weapons, drink related taboos, food related taboos, narcotics, politics, religion as well as smoking. According to Allan and Burridge (2006:173), bodily effluvia are often thought of as disgusting or repulsive, which often causes embarrassment connected to them. On the basis of the results of the present study, this, however, seems not to be the case with all types of bodily effluvia since references to, for example, vomit, urine and diarrhea were quite vastly present in the data.

An important factor to remember when discussing taboos is that the types of taboos are difficult to categorise since they partially overlap. For instance, some taboo topics have corresponding taboo words, whereas others do not. (Andersson and Trudgill 1990:56.) Moreover, when attempting to categorise topics into taboo or non-taboo, it is essential to bear in mind that, as stated by Evans et al. (2000:5) although the terms taboo and controversial are similar in meaning, they are not synonyms. In other words, a topic can be controversial

in nature without being taboo. This was found to be true in the present study, with the interesting notion that while a specific word might not be a taboo word, as a topic or an act it is a taboo. For instance, cannibalism is a forbidden act, but the word cannibalism is not taboo, the case being the same with the word sex and the act of sex.

Some researchers argue that taboo language has no place in the classroom and thus taboo language is often absent from learning materials. Dewaele (2004:205) states that since taboos and taboo language are vastly present outside the classroom, they are usually among the first words to be learned by a language learner. Nevertheless, taboos and taboo language are seldom included in textbooks or classroom discussions, a phenomenon that Dewaele (2004:205) calls an “interesting paradox”. In the present study, however, it was discovered that EFL textbooks in Finland do carry taboo content and taboo language. For instance, there were several taboo words present in the data that also appear in Table 2, which ranks the order of words according to their severity. As an example, the taboo words *nigger*, *bastard*, *arsehole*, *shit*, *arse*, *crap* and *bloody* all appeared in the textbooks examined. Surprisingly, although the word *fuck* is ranked as the third severe of the taboo words, there were altogether four cases in which the word is mentioned.

The difficulty of examining taboos is that taboos tend to be absent due to their forbidden nature. That, in turn, signifies that the aim of the present study was to search for content that is absent by nature. Therefore, it would be simpler to determine the topics which definitely are not taboos in EFL textbooks for upper secondary school. Nevertheless, since the main purpose of the present paper is to examine which topics are taboo in EFL textbooks, it is essential to provide an answer to our first research question. According to our findings it is our opinion that the following topics are taboo in EFL textbooks for upper secondary school: genitals, incest, pedophilia, taboo language, cannibalism as an act, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse

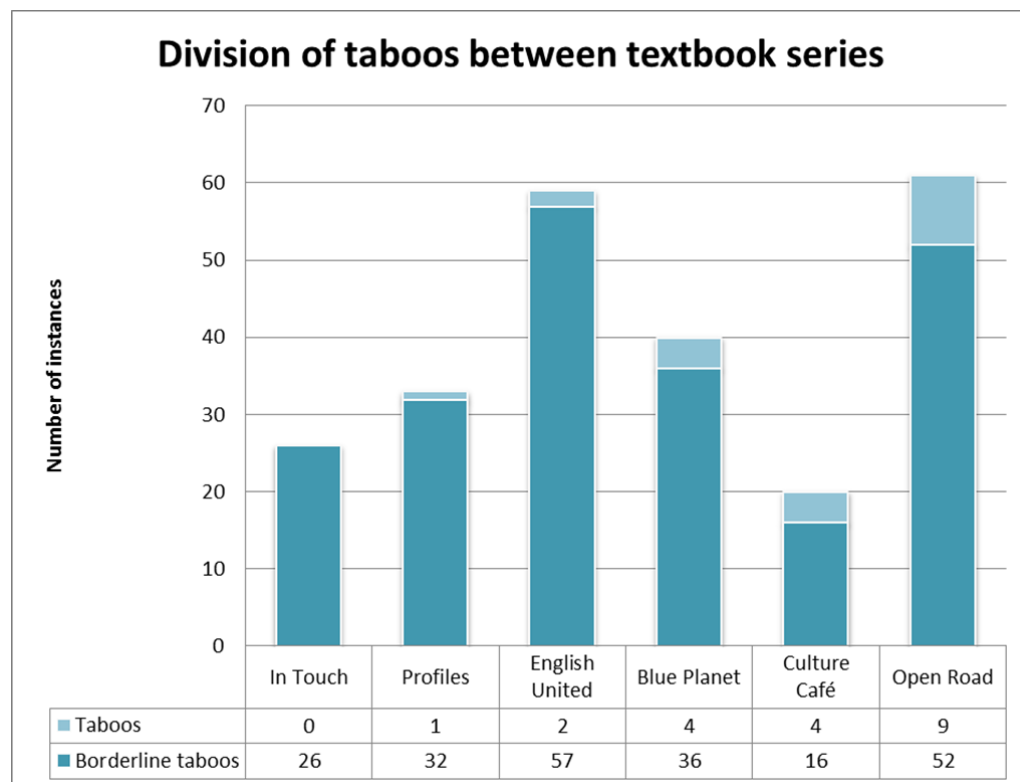


and offending political or religious opinions. We base this opinion on not only the number of the occurrences but also on our own opinion of the topics we feel are not suitable for textbooks.

## 7.2 Differences in content and possible reasons for them

Even though all of the examined textbook series are intended for the same target group, the group being upper secondary school students, and produced in a relatively small country as Finland, there were differences between the textbook series examined for the present study. The following chart depicts the number of taboos in each of the series:

**Table 11.** The division of taboos between the textbook series examined for the present study.



The first two series, *In Touch* and *Profiles* are by WSOY, the third, *English United*, by Tammi, and the last three, *Blue Planet*, *Culture Café* and *Open Road*, by Otava. As can be seen from the table above, WSOY has the least taboos

per textbook series when compared to the other two publishers. Furthermore, the number of taboos per series differs between the series by Otava quite significantly. *Open Road* focuses on authentic texts, which can explain the high occurrence of taboos. On average, however, Otava has the second most taboos per series. Tammi has the highest number of taboos per textbook series of all the series examined for the present study. Tammi is, however, a smaller publisher than the other two and offers only one EFL textbook series for upper secondary school.

The size of the publisher may affect the content of a textbook. This was noted by one of the authors interviewed, who pointed out that as Tammi is a smaller publisher, there were not as many guidelines regarding taboos to follow and thus the authors were not as restricted as possibly in bigger publishing companies. Moreover, larger publishers, who have more experience on designing learning materials, may have practices that are deemed good with regards to the successfulness and popularity of a textbook series. That is, the size and the experience of the publisher may affect both the textbook's writing process as well as the final content of a textbook.

Some publishing companies may have several EFL textbook series and there can be some divergence in content between the different series. Based on our findings, Otava's *Blue Planet*, *Culture Café* and *Open Road* series differ in taboo content. Possible reasons for such divergence may be is to target the series for different consumers and thus have different emphasis on different series. For example, *Open Road* focuses on authentic materials more than the other two series. The focus of *Open Road* of authentic materials might also reflect the publisher's want to experiment and willingness to offer textbooks that differ from the already available learning materials.

### 7.3 Implications of the interviews with textbook authors

Two Finnish EFL textbook authors were interviewed for the purposes of the present study. Indeed, the answers provided by them were essential in order to link the findings of our study to the reality of writing an EFL textbook series for upper secondary school students. Without the opinions of the authors and their reports on the process of writing a textbook, the present study would lack validity and be notably less comprehensive.

An effective way to teach students about proper, unoffending language use is to acquaint them with the offensive side of language. Nevertheless, due to the forbidden and offensive nature of taboo content, it tends to be excluded from textbooks and classroom discussion. Consequently, there is a great risk that language learners acquire a limited knowledge of taboos as well as taboo language. After all, as there are situations that are either suitable or unsuitable for certain type of language, students need information of taboos and taboo language in order to be able to distinguish these situations and the register used in them. Mercury (1995:28) supports this view and notes that taboo language can be used without offending anybody. That is, successful taboo language users are often more adjusted and can more easily adapt to the situation in which they are speaking and thus do not seem to offend their listeners as easily as unsuccessful taboo language users. Both of the authors interviewed also posited the same view, pointing out that they feel that in order to not to offend anybody, it is essential for students to be aware of the topics and language that is taboo in the target culture. Moreover, students should be made aware of the fact that the same words used in two different languages may not carry the same meaning, which is the case with, for instance, the word *fuck*, of which counterpart in Finnish is more commonplace and milder than in English.

With regards to the topic of the present study, one of the most important

notions provided for us by our interviewees was that there is no clear list of taboo topics when writing an EFL textbook. Contrary to our presupposition, although publishers are the ones who approve the final content of the textbook, they do not have any lists containing possibly offending topics. On the contrary, rather than striving for keeping the textbooks clear of possible taboo topics, the authors rely on their own common sense of what to include and what to exclude, the main objective being neutrality of topics. This finding may be linked to the fact that there are no common, strict taboo topics in today's society, especially among adolescents who, as noted by one of our interviewees, consider only few topics to be taboo and thus not to be mentioned or discussed.

In relation to the aforementioned aim for neutrality, another fundamental matter when writing a textbook is, as noted by one of our interviewees, to follow the golden mean. That is to stay, as long as the topics included in textbooks are neutral in nature and carry some educational value, that is, there is a valid, pedagogical reason for including it in the textbook, their presence is justified. In other words, even if a topic might be somewhat controversial in nature, as long as it has educational value, it is less likely to be censored than topics that are present merely for the sake of shock value.

#### **7.4 Opinions compared**

In this section, the opinions of the interviewed authors and the categorisation used in the present study are compared. As the categorisation used is based on the findings from the textbooks, in essence this section compares the opinions of the authors to the contents of the textbooks examined.

Similarities with regards to the categorisation used in the present study and the opinions of the interviewed authors occurred on several topics. For instance, there was an overall agreement on that incest, pedophilia, sexual

abuse, detailed description of sex or sexual abuse as well as offending political or religious opinions are taboo in Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school students. Moreover, one of the authors agreed with our categorisation on that also body parts such as genitals are taboo whereas the other one considered them to be a borderline taboo as their presence can be justified as a medical term. One of the authors also agreed with the categorisation of the present study on that taboo language is taboo, whereas another interviewee regarded its presence as acceptable if it has educational value. Surprisingly, sex was a topic that only one of the authors considered to be taboo as the topic is controversial in nature. In addition, an interesting difference was that whereas sexual abuse is treated as a borderline taboo in our categorisation, both of the authors considered it to be taboo, mostly because there is no valid reason to include sexual abuse in EFL textbooks.

There was some divergence in opinions with regards to the borderline taboos, as both of the authors considered bodily effluvia to belong to that group, whereas in the categorisation used in the present study it is not a taboo. Furthermore, only one of the authors agreed with our categorisation on that body parts, such as breasts and buttocks, sex and mild taboo language are borderline taboos. Moreover, the categorisation used in the present study listed suicide, sexual abuse, gay rights, euthanasia, cannibalism as a mention and abortion or miscarriage as borderline taboos but neither of the authors shared the same opinion. On the contrary, one of the authors thought that menstruation, alcohol and tobacco are borderline taboos, whereas the other one thought the same on body parts, such as breasts and buttocks as well as genitals, mild taboo language and taboo language.

The group of non-taboos had the most topics when compared to borderline taboos as well as taboos, and the category had the most differing opinions regarding the placement of the topics in groups. Our categorisation listed

bodily effluvia and smoking to the group of non-taboo, whereas both of the authors considered bodily effluvia to belong to the group of borderline taboo. On the topic of smoking the authors disagreed with each other, Author 1 considering it to be borderline taboo, whereas Author 2 regarded it as non-taboo. Nevertheless, the topics that all parties regarded as non-taboo were death, violence and weapons, diseases, drink related taboos, food related taboos, narcotics, politics and religion. Surprisingly, with regards to the group of non-taboos, the authors' opinions were somewhat similar, as both of them also listed euthanasia, gay rights and suicide in this group, topics that the categorisation used in the present study considered to belong to the group of borderline taboo.

The differences in opinions and our categorisation may be caused by several reasons, some of them being a result of different backgrounds and worldviews. Taking account of the differences in opinions that exist between only three parties, one can easily conclude that, as mentioned before, taboos indeed are personal and that people differ in their opinions on the taboo level each topic has. Moreover, it is difficult to categorise any of these topics on the basis of the word alone as it evokes different associations for different people. For instance, with regards to the topic of sex, one might think of acts, such as foreplay, while the other of synonyms, such as *sleeping together*.

## **7.5 Taboos: teaching challenges**

Byram (1989:145) states that in order to use language appropriately, learners need both “the skills of fluency and accuracy in the language and the awareness of the cultural significance of their utterances”. Even though this opinion dates a while back, it is still valid today. Students indeed need to be aware of how to use appropriately the language they are learning according to different situations and changing interlocutors. After all, knowing a language does not merely entail knowing the words and grammar but also

being able to communicate efficiently, a skill which is referred to as communicative competence.

It is the duty of school to teach different types of language use and point out inappropriate types of language, even though Andersson and Trudgill (1990:8) note that it is only natural that teachers tend to be concerned about the bad language of their students. Although many teachers may refrain from teaching about taboos and taboo language, knowing different types of language is a part of student's communicative competence. Nevertheless, as taboos, taboo words, taboo language and euphemisms change constantly and may be different in different places, it is impossible to compile a comprehensive guide to students on taboos. It is, however, possible, recommendable and necessary, as noted by the interviewees, to raise the awareness of students on the topic and give them some universal rules of the target language use. That will assist them in realising that even regardless of the globalisation, there still exists some differences in language use between different language environments.

There may be several reasons why teachers choose not to teach about taboos and taboo language. For instance, teachers may refrain from teaching their students about taboos as it is complicated to teach without ready-made materials, such as EFL textbooks. Nevertheless, as told by one of our interviewees, awareness can be raised even without ready-made materials by, for instance, seizing the opportunity of a student cursing in class. A student can be asked, for instance, the meaning of the word and where it is suitable to use that word. Dewaele (2004:220) also notes that learners can be effectively familiarised with different types of language use by providing them with a wide, authentic selection of learning materials, including written and visual ones.

According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990:179-180), a teacher should be open-minded and unprejudiced in order to succeed in familiarising their students with different varieties of language use. Instead of differentiating language use into good or bad, attention should be paid to the suitability of language to different contexts, a notion also pointed out by our interviewees. Treating language in this manner will assist both teachers and students in developing a more comprehensive idea of the true nature of a language. Language, after all, in itself is not good or bad, but it is the context that might be suitable or unsuitable for that specific type of language.

Mercury (1995:33-34) reports that English speakers consider taboo language to belong to their private domain, not to a public setting, such as a school. There are, however, different manners of implementing taboo language in teaching, as presented by Claire (1998:197-198). Claire discusses some important aspects to bear in mind when familiarising learners with certain aspects of taboo language. First of all, the teacher should take learners into consideration by informing them beforehand of the upcoming taboo content and give students possible alternative tasks if they feel uncomfortable with handling taboos. Secondly, if the teacher feels uncomfortable with the topic at hand, he or she should be honest with the students and admit being uncomfortable or, if possible, assign a different teacher for the lesson. Thirdly, if it is impossible to inform students about taboo topics in the classroom, the teacher should advise how students can learn about taboos and their appropriate use independently outside the classroom. In addition to Claire's guidelines, Mercury (1995:35) believes that learners should have a chance to discuss taboos and taboo language in order to give learners a comprehensive idea of their correct usage.

One of the challenges teachers may face when discussing taboos is the different world views teachers and students may have. That is, as students and teachers are often born on different decades, teachers' conception of



taboos may be somewhat stricter than those of his or her students. Moreover, another challenge that teachers may encounter is that taboos change over time. Indeed, students may feel that no actual taboos exist and that they can discuss any subject with anyone. Thus, it is the teachers' role to share their knowledge on taboos and inform students of their use.

## **7.6 To include or to exclude a topic: importance of pedagogical value**

One of the challenges that publishers and textbook authors face is taking into account different types of learner groups. Even though Finland is not as culturally diverse as, for example, the US and the UK, there are more people from different religious and cultural backgrounds in Finland today than ever before. By censoring sensitive and controversial topics, textbooks are better suitable for different contexts. That is, taking account of different types of learner groups in Finland enables textbooks to be sold to a wider market and is thus beneficial for publishers. Including only safe and bland topics can, however, have a negative impact on the meaningfulness of EFL learning materials, which is the reason why more attention should be paid to this area of study (Masuhara et al. 2008:299). That is, if no references to the real world are included, learners may find the learning materials irrelevant and uninteresting, thus affecting their learning negatively.

If learning materials are censored too much, learners can be left unaware of facts that can improve their communication skills. Andersson and Trudgill (1990:55-56) state that different sorts of taboo are "important elements in the structure and social life of a culture", not merely isolated facts in a culture. Taboo language, for instance, is often among the first things that foreign language learners learn of a language. What they do not learn, however, is the suitable context in which taboo expressions can be used. Moreover, taboos and taboo language are seldom included in textbooks or classroom discussions, which is a phenomenon already mentioned previously that

Dewaele (2004:205) calls an “interesting paradox”. One of the authors interviewed noted that if expressions of taboo language, such as *fuck*, were to be included in textbooks, it would be partly censored as *f\*\*\** so that students know what expression is used and that it is forbidden. The present study, however, found several milder and harsher expressions of taboo language and none of them were partly censored.

According to the results of the interviews with textbook authors, pedagogical value of a topic was often mentioned. Indeed, both of the authors interviewed for the present study expressed the view that the pedagogical characteristics of a text are most important when deciding whether or not to include texts in textbooks. That is, a topic’s controversial nature may be ignored if the topic has pedagogical characteristics that are of value to students. It may often be thought that for taboo topics this pedagogical value is often absent, which may explain the reason for the absence of taboo topics from textbooks.

We, nevertheless, feel that taboos and taboo language should be included in EFL textbooks for two main reasons: for the sake of students’ communicative competence and upper secondary school’s aim to educate students in general knowledge. With regards to the first reason, communicative competence is one of the main aims of foreign language learning and in order to communicate successfully, learners should be made aware of appropriate and inappropriate language. Secondly, the main aim of upper secondary school in Finland is to provide students with general knowledge that prepares them for further studies. Controversial subjects should be, therefore, included in learning materials as they enable students to broaden their general knowledge and encourage discussion. We feel that politics, religion, human rights and violations of them are a part of general knowledge. We, nevertheless, agree with the authors we interviewed in that laws should be respected and that authors and publishers should use

common sense when deciding which topics and texts to include in or exclude from EFL textbooks.

The reasons for including taboos and taboo language in EFL textbooks are the same for euphemisms. According to Hughes (2006:462), the relationship between euphemisms and taboos is symbiotic, since together they enable people to communicate about topics that are normally forbidden. Moreover, as is the case with taboos, using euphemisms also depends on the context. That is, while it is acceptable to use the expression “go to the toilet” in many different contexts in Finnish, the same expression in English can be thought of as harsh and inappropriate in certain contexts. We agree with both of the interviewed authors in that students should be given information about euphemisms and their use for them to be able to communicate proficiently.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

Communicative competence and knowledge of cultural taboos are increasingly important in today’s global world, and in order to communicate successfully, learners should be made aware of the use of appropriate and inappropriate language. Little research, however, has been conducted on the topic of taboos and taboo language in EFL learning materials, especially concerning local EFL learning materials. The purpose of the present study was therefore to investigate which topics are taboo in Finnish EFL textbooks for upper secondary school as well as which taboos should be present in them. Moreover, the question if taboo language and euphemisms should be taught to upper secondary school students was also investigated.

The present study found that it is very difficult to determine what topics are taboos and what are not as taboos are such a personal topic and context often determines the tabooeness of a topic. Nevertheless, topics that we and both of the authors interviewed regarded as taboo were incest, pedophilia, detailed

description of sex and sexual abuse, detailed description of cannibalism as well as offending political opinions or religious beliefs. Moreover, both of the authors thought that sexual abuse was a taboo whereas we regarded it as borderline taboo. Furthermore, topics that one or both of the authors thought were borderline taboos were bodily effluvia, alcohol, tobacco, body parts such as breasts, buttocks and genitals, mild and harsh taboo language, sex as well as menstruation. Based on previous studies, we thought that abortion and miscarriage, cannibalism as a mention, euthanasia, gay rights and suicide would be borderline taboos, but the authors did not agree with us, perceiving them as non-taboos. Topics that we and both of the authors did not regard as taboos were death, violence and weapons, diseases, pork, narcotics, politics and religion. In addition, both of the authors agreed with us in that students should be given information about taboo language and euphemisms in order to enhance their communicative proficiency. Moreover, it was found out that Finnish publishers do not have a list containing topics that should not be included in Finnish EFL textbooks.

The results of the present study show that textbook content varied significantly between the textbooks examined for the present study. In addition, altogether relatively few topics are taboos in Finnish EFL textbooks. On the basis of the interviews it was discovered that textbook authors are given quite free hands in deciding what to include in textbooks and they rely on their common sense when handling controversial topics. Nevertheless, publishers have the final say in what is included in or excluded from textbooks. All in all, it was discovered that the pedagogical value of the text is more important than avoiding certain topics.

All in all, the most important implications of the present study are the following: firstly, only few topics are truly taboo in Finnish EFL textbooks. Secondly, as today only few taboos exist, students usually are already aware of taboos and taboo language at some level and teachers should not feel

insecure and embarrassed when dealing with these topics. Thirdly, it should be remembered that even though students know different taboo expressions, that does not mean that they know how to use them in appropriate contexts. To sum up, the main objective should be to provide students with the information needed on the appropriate use of language.

The present study, nevertheless, has its limitations. Firstly, only two authors were interviewed. In order to receive results that can be generalised, a larger scale study must be conducted on the matter and the number of interviewees should be higher. That would allow comparison in order to determine if the same opinions are held by a wider audience. Secondly, another limitation is that no publishers were interviewed for the present study, and thus the study offers no information on the decisions publishers make when determining which topics to include in and which to exclude from textbooks. Finally, students' opinions were not asked on the matter, and therefore there is no knowledge on the topics students perceive as taboo.

More research should be conducted before the results can be generalised, due to the fact that there are few studies on the subject of including taboos and taboo language in EFL learning materials. More specifically, more publishers and textbook authors should be interviewed in order to move away from personal opinions on what is taboo and what is not to generally held views of taboos. Moreover, students' opinions on the matter should be taken into account and enquired after. In addition, further research should be done on the benefits and disadvantages of including taboo topics in learning materials. On the whole, more studies should be conducted on such an interesting and current topic, which has a great effect on learners' communicative competence.

All in all, the question of whether taboos should be included in or excluded from EFL textbooks should not be oversimplified. Rather, it should be asked

which is more advantageous for learners; that their ability to function in different cultural contexts is increased, or that they learn the use of a foreign language by trial and error, possibly insulting other people in the process. In other words, it is to be questioned whether it is more important that learning materials are safe and thus do not insult anyone, or that learning materials are actually beneficial for the learner in terms of enhancing their communicative competence. In the words of Andersson and Trudgill (1190:180):

We believe that children need to acquire the fullest range of language skills possible. Like adults, they need to be able to use language to be precise and vague, friendly and unfriendly, uninhibited and controlled, explicit and implicit, happy and angry, impolite and polite, refined and vulgar, amusing and serious, expressive and inexpressive, abstract and concrete, clear and obscure. None of these ways of using language is inherently good or bad in itself. Those human beings who can use their language to do and say whatever they want to do and say with it, regardless of what self-appointed pundits may think about how they do and say it, are the ones who speak and write language that is truly good.

The message of the quotation is indeed essential for the purposes of the present study as it both summarises and clarifies the true nature of knowing a language. In other words, by truly knowing a language and being aware of its different dimensions are we able to utilise it to the extent that will enable us to feel secure as language users and confident in our own abilities to survive in a foreign language.

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## APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW FORM

### HAASTATTELULOMAKE

Mitkä seuraavista aiheista ovat mielestäsi tabuja lukion tekstikirjoissa?

<b>Eritteet</b>	
<b>Kuolema</b>	
<b>Väkivalta</b>	
<b>Aseet</b>	
<b>Taudit</b>	
<b>Alkoholi</b>	
<b>Sianliha</b>	
<b>Huumeet</b>	
<b>Politiikka</b>	
<b>Uskonto</b>	
<b>Tupakointi</b>	
<b>Abortti ja keskenmeno</b>	
<b>Ruumiinosat, kuten rinnat ja takamus</b>	
<b>Kannibalismi</b>	
<b>Eutanasia</b>	
<b>Homojen oikeudet</b>	
<b>Lievät kiro sanat, kuten <i>bullshit</i>, <i>asshole</i> ja <i>hell</i></b>	
<b>Seksi</b>	
<b>Seksuaalinen hyväksikäyttö</b>	
<b>Itsemurha</b>	
<b>Sukupuolielimet</b>	
<b>Insesti</b>	
<b>Pedofilia</b>	
<b>Rankat kiro sanat, kuten <i>fuck</i></b>	
<b>Kuukautiset</b>	
<b>Yksityiskohtaiset kuvaukset seksistä tai seksuaalisesta väkivallasta</b>	
<b>Yksityiskohtaiset kuvaukset kannibalismista</b>	
<b>Loukkaavat poliittiset tai uskonnolliset mielipiteet tai kannanotot</b>	

Mitä kustantajilta saadut ohjeistukset sanovat kyseisistä aiheista lukion konstekstissa? Mitä aiheita saa / ei saa sisällyttää lukion oppikirjoihin? Sulkevatko kustantajat ylipäättänsä joitakin aiheita tekstikirjojen ulkopuolelle?

Mikä on oma mielipiteesi kustantajilta saaduista ohjeistuksista? Ovatko ne esim. tarpeeksi joustavia tai liian tiukkoja?

Mitä vaaroja voi olla, jos / kun ns. tabuaiheita sisällytetään oppikirjoihin?

Kuinka iso asia kokemuksesi mukaan tabuaiheiden sisällyttäminen / pois

jättäminen on englannin oppikirjoja tehdessä? Oliko asiasta keskustelua tiimeissä? Entä eriäviä mielipiteitä?

Onko tarpeellista opettaa tai antaa informaatiota oppilaille tabukielestä (ts. kiroilusta) lukiossa? Jos on, minkä verran? Jos ei, miksi? Missä menee raja (lievät vs. rajut tabut)? Entä eufemismit?

Mitä mieltä olet seuraavista esimerkeistä lukion kirjasarjoista? Onko niissä yllätyksiä? Kuuluvatko em. esimerkit oppikirjoihin? (Otetaanko esimerkkejä vain rajuista tabuista vai myös borderline-tapauksista?)

- 1) Kent: You know, having sex... getting high  
Barry: Getting' high? Smokin' pot?  
Kent: Well, yeah, we always smoke.  
Barry: If you always smoke, what do you mean by "getting' high"?  
Kent: Free-base. Smokin' coke. Crack.  
Barry: You've been smoking crack for a couple of days... with your girlfriend. What else... you been doing?  
Kent: And drinkin'- I drank some Wild turkey yesterday 'cause I was getting paranoid. Jill was doin' acid, I think. I'm not sure. Some Valiums. (*Blue Planet 4:7*)
- 2) If they're a pretty miserable asshole, OK, they're a pretty miserable asshole with a new Cadillac, a house and a boat. (*Profiles 4:12*)
- 3) The rules are strict and destroy any ideas that you might have had about the sauna being a good place for sexual foreplay: No alcohol. (*In Touch 2:82*)
- 4) ...has horror of sex from witnessing his parents regular copulations. (*Blue Planet 6:31*)
- 5) The husband could also use her sexually when he wished, or even beat her. (*Blue Planet 4:73*)
- 6) My mum had this boyfriend who tried to sleep with me. (*Blue Planet 1:66*)
- 7) Most infamously, and most persistently of all, there is a belief that a tiger's penis acts as a powerful aphrodisiac. (*English United 7-8:24*)
- 8) it would be like incest (*English United 4:96*)
- 9) Say you were sexually assaulted as a child...(*Blue Planet 5:36*)
- 10) molesting children - i.e. touching underage boys or girls in a sexual way (*Open Road 4:27*)
- 11) to tell him to shut the fuck up. (*Blue Planet 6:35*)

- 12) And Father said, 'Christopher is getting a crap enough deal already, don't you think, without you shitting on him from a great height as well. Jesus, this is the one thing he is really good at.' (*Profiles* 3:51)
- 13) I heard Allison say, "get out of here, nigger" "I said get out of here, nigger, or I'll beat you up." I don't play with niggers." "Niggers are stupid..." (*Culture Café* 4:12-13)
- 14) oh my fucking God (*Open Road* 2:83)