

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**PRACTISING, TESTING AND ASSESSING ORAL SKILLS IN
FINNISH UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS'
OPINIONS**

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

Maija-Liisa Huuskonen and Mirva Kähkönen

**Department of Languages
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Maija-Liisa Huuskonen ja Mirva Kähkönen
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Tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää, mikä rooli suullisella kielitaidolla on Suomen lukioissa eli kuinka sitä harjoitellaan, testataan ja arvioidaan. Lisäksi tutkimme englannin kielen opettajien mielipiteitä aiheesta. Halusimme muun muassa saada selville kuinka systemaattista suullinen harjoittelu on ja kuinka opettajat suhtautuvat siihen. Lisäksi tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa kuinka yleistä suullisen kielitaidon testaaminen ja arviointi on ja kuinka tärkeäksi opettajat kokevat nämä lukiossa; tutkimme myös, mitä mieltä opettajat ovat suullisen kokeen sisällyttämisestä ylioppilastutkintoon. Keräsimme tutkimusaineiston kyselylomakkeella, jonka lähetimme 150 opettajalle Länsi-Suomen läänin alueella ja 50 opettajalle Oulun läänissä. Kyselylomakkeista palautui 80, jotka muodostivat tutkimuksemme aineiston.

Vieraiden kielten suulliseen osaamiseen on viime vuosikymmeninä kiinnitetty yhä enemmän huomiota. Aiheesta keskustellaan monilla eri tahoilla, esimerkiksi suullisen kielitaidon kokeen liittäminen ylioppilastutkintoon on noussut jälleen ajankohtaiseksi. Suullisen kielitaidon asemaa lukioissa kuitenkin pidetään varsin alisteisena, kun päähuomio kiinnittyy usein kirjallisiin taitoihin ja niiden testaamiseen.

Tutkimuksessamme tuli ilmi, että opettajat suhtautuvat positiivisesti suulliseen kielitaitoon ja sen harjoitteluun. Suullinen harjoittelu ei kuitenkaan suju monien mielestä ongelmitta, sillä esimerkiksi ajan puute, suuret ryhmäkoot ja ylioppilastutkinnon negatiivinen vaikutus tekevät harjoittelusta opettajien mielestä toisinaan ongelmallista. Hyvät kurssikirjat ja opettajan ja opiskelijoiden myönteinen suhtautuminen harjoitteluun kuitenkin usein kannustavat kehittämään puhetaitoja englanniksi. Monet opettajat tosin suhtautuivat varovaisemmin suullisen kielitaidon testaamiseen ja arviointiin, eivätkä monet olleet valmiita liittämään pakollista suullista koetta osaksi ylioppilastutkintoa. Jos suullista kielitaitoa testattaisiin pakollisena osana ylioppilastutkinnossa, näiden taitojen harjoitteluun ja opettajien koulutukseen pitäisi panostaa vielä enemmän. Tutkimuksessamme kävikin ilmi, että monet opettajat kokivat koulutuksen riittämättömänä ja olisivat kaivanneet enemmän täydennyskoulutusta sekä suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelemisesta, testaamisesta että arvioimisesta. Koulutuksen vähyys näkyikin opettajien mielipiteissä epäilevänä suhtautumisena suullisen kielitaidon testaamiseen ja arviointiin.

Asiasanat: oral skills/proficiency, practising, testing, assessment, upper secondary school, the Matriculation Examination

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1 INTRODUCTION

Speaking is considered to be the main function of language, and today the language learners' ability to speak in the target language is emphasized in foreign language teaching. Teaching is often followed by testing and oral language skills ¹⁾ (namely, production of speech and practising interactive communication skills) are tested as well. However, the emphasis of teaching in Finnish upper secondary schools has remained on written skills (i.e. reading and writing), and unlike the school-leaving examinations in many other countries, the Finnish Matriculation Examination does not include an oral test.

Furthermore, demand for the oral test has increased lately. Society at large expects people to be able to communicate in foreign languages since international contacts have increased. One would think that the teachers would be eager to provide their students with skills that meet the current needs. However, some teachers in upper secondary schools in Finland do not agree with these needs of the students and they would like to keep the upper secondary school as more theoretically oriented where the written skills are the focus.

In the present study, we want to receive recent information on what is the role of oral skills in upper secondary school. Lately assessment of oral skills in upper secondary schools has not been widely examined; therefore our study contributes to the fields of language teaching, testing and assessment. Moreover, we want to give the teachers an opportunity to express their views on oral skills and on testing them. We feel this is particularly important at the present time when the inclusion of an oral test in the Matriculation Examination is strongly under consideration. Therefore, in this study we will examine how oral skills are taught, tested and assessed and what kinds of opinions English teachers have on these issues. The study is conducted with a questionnaire in the counties of western Finland and Oulu, and the results of the two

¹⁾ The terms oral (language) skills, oral proficiency, oral ability, and speaking skills will be used interchangeably.

counties will be compared with each other in order to find out whether they differ and in what respects. The results will be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, with an emphasis on the statistical analysis.

Practising, testing and assessing oral skills in Finnish upper secondary schools have been studied by for instance Yli-Renko (1989, 1991), Romo (1991), Huttunen et al. (1995) and Tattari (2001). These studies indicated that both the upper secondary school teachers and students view practising oral skills important. However, especially the teachers tend to be doubtful about the significance of testing oral proficiency. Furthermore, even though the need for oral proficiency is great, teaching and testing these skills in upper secondary schools is rather unsystematic. Due to the emphasis on written practice, the students do not get enough oral practice for their oral proficiency to develop as an active skill. It has also been argued that oral skills' testing is a prerequisite for changing the focus of instruction from written to spoken skills. However, several problems connected with administrating the tests (such as lack of time and resources, group size, etc.) have been recognized as problems in introducing these tests into Finnish upper secondary schools.

The lack of an oral test in the Matriculation Examination is seen as the main reason for neglecting oral skills. What is more, the teachers are considered to be the strongest opponents for such a test. The opponents argue that testing oral skills would be too demanding and time-consuming from the teachers' point of view. Moreover, since oral skills have not been taught and tested systematically from the early stages on, it would be difficult to start testing them in the Matriculation Examination. On the other hand, those who are for assessing oral skills in upper secondary schools state that the current Matriculation Examination does not measure the student's language ability well enough since it only tests written and listening skills.

The results of the previous studies were supported by the findings of the present research. Indeed, the teachers view speaking skills as a significant part of language proficiency, and they think that practising these skills in upper secondary school is important. Nevertheless, the teachers were not that supportive of oral skills' testing.

In fact, testing oral proficiency turned out to be even less common than what was assumption based on the results from the earlier studies.

In this research report we will first discuss oral skills and foreign language ability (chapter 2). Then we will examine how oral proficiency has been taught in Finland in the past, and what is the role of it in upper secondary school today (chapter 3). The final background chapter (4) deals with the methods of testing speaking ability as well as takes a look at the assessment of these skills. The methodological choices of this study will be reported in chapter 5. Finally, the results will be presented along with the discussion on them (chapters 6 and 7).

2 ORAL SKILLS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE ABILITY

Oral skills are one part of foreign language ability and it is argued that speaking is the most important part of language proficiency. Consequently, if teaching and testing oral proficiency are part of the curriculum (for instance in upper secondary school), it is essential to know what is involved in oral proficiency. In the following chapter we will examine what the concept of foreign language ability entails and therefore language proficiency, communicative competence, speech communication and oral skills will be defined. Moreover, a few selected models of language proficiency will be discussed. Secondly, foreign language ability will be dealt with from the perspective of second language learning (SLL) in order to illustrate the value of speaking in learning a second language.

2.1 Defining language proficiency and communicative competence

The traditional view divided language proficiency into four skills, namely reading, writing, listening and speaking (see e.g. Carroll 1961, cited in Huhta 1993a: 80). However, this rather simplistic model became soon outdated when the term communicative competence was introduced as some kind of a substitute for language proficiency. According to Mäkelä (2005: 11), communicative competence has been the primary aim of foreign language teaching since the early 1970s. Several quarters, such as Chomsky, Hymes, Canale and Swain, Bachman and Palmer, and the Common European Framework of Reference, have contributed in defining communicative competence. To begin with, the term **competence** was first introduced by Chomsky in his linguistic theory where he defined it as the speaker's or listener's knowledge of the deeper structure of language (Chomsky 1965: 4). With **performance** Chomsky meant the actual use of language in real situations. In other words, Chomsky regarded language competence merely as linguistic competence which was not influenced by such factors as memory, distraction or how attention was directed. What is more, he argued that performance does not reflect competence directly. What he meant was that there is a great deal of hesitation, false starts, deviation from rules etc. in everyone's spontaneous speech even though language users know the rules of language.

In sum, competence for Chomsky meant knowledge of language while performance referred to the actual language use. He seemed to be mainly interested in knowledge of language use and he did not pay much attention to the capacities facilitating performance. Indeed, his theory seems a little too straightforward; it for instance does not take into consideration the fact that speaking situations are affected by several factors (such as the setting, the participants etc.) which all have their bearing on the communication situation.

Indeed, Chomsky's ideas about competence and language use were further developed by Hymes (1971) who coined the term **communicative competence**. He described it as native speakers' ability to produce and to understand sentences which are appropriate to the context in which they occur. According to Hymes,

a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. (Hymes 1971: 277)

In other words, Hymes thought that the ability to speak competently included both knowing the grammatical rules as well as knowing what to say to whom and how to say it etc. Hymes noted that this kind of competence is acquired through social interaction with other people.

In short, unlike Chomsky, Hymes' definition of communicative competence encompasses both knowledge and performance. Even though Hymes' model was still rather simplistic, his ideas about communicative competence can be seen to underlie the current perception of what it includes. Furthermore, he argued that language is acquired through social interaction, which seems to be the right interpretation of first language learning. Indeed, it has been proved that children with no access to social interaction with other people do not learn to speak (see e.g. Yule 1996: 171 – 172). Even though Hymes considered communicative competence mainly from the native speaker's point of view, his model has been utilized in second language acquisition

context as well. Consequently, practising speaking skills in formal education as well (e.g. in schools) is necessary in order to learn the foreign language.

In brief, Chomsky's and Hymes' definitions of language ability and communicative competence served as a stepping stone for later definitions by Canale and Swain, Bachman and Palmer, and the Common European Framework, which will be discussed in detail in the following.

2.1.1 Canale and Swain

The present perception of communicative competence is to a large extent based on the model introduced by Canale and Swain in the early 1980s (Canale and Swain 1980). According to their early model communicative competence contains three main competences. Firstly, **grammatical competence** includes knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, semantics and phonology. Canale and Swain argued that grammatical competence has to be included in teaching in order to provide language learners with the ability to use language accurately. Secondly, their framework of communicative competence includes **sociolinguistic competence** which contains sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse. According to Canale and Swain, these rules are important when interpreting utterances for social meaning. For instance, certain discussion topics might not be appropriate among certain participants in particular situations. In this framework sociolinguistic competence refers to the actual language use. The third competence in the framework is **strategic competence** which refers to the ability to compensate for a lack of knowledge of vocabulary or grammar in a communicative situation.

Canale and Swain noted that their model for communicative competence is intended to be applied to second language teaching and testing (1980: 29). They claimed that in the framework

Emphasis is on preparing second language learners to exploit – initially through aspects of sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence acquired through experience in communicative use of the first or dominant language – those grammatical features of the second language that are selected on the basis of, among other criteria, their grammatical and cognitive complexity, transparency with respect to communicative function, probability of use by native speakers, generalizability to different communicative functions and contexts, and relevance to the learners' communicative needs in the second language. (Canale and Swain 1980: 29)

Moreover, they emphasized that the three competences in the model are on an equal footing. In other words, grammatical competence is as essential for successful communication as sociolinguistic or strategic competence.

Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence is more sophisticated than the previous ones by Chomsky and Hymes. Communicative competence is explained in more detail and it is divided into three components (later into four by Canale). Moreover, unlike Chomsky's and Hymes' models, this one was clearly developed with second language teaching and testing in mind, and thus it is more usable in these contexts than the previous two which were developed to explain first language knowledge and use. Indeed, Canale and Swain claimed that the sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence acquired when using the **first** language serve as a foundation for learning the grammatical features of the **second (or foreign)** language. Nevertheless, the model by Canale and Swain is by no means perfect either. For instance, the model does not explain very well how the knowledge (i.e. communicative competence) relates to the actual language use.

2.1.2 Bachman and Palmer

Bachman and Palmer began to develop their model of communicative competence at the same time with Canale and Swain. Even though Bachman and Palmer's model was mainly developed for testing purposes, it has become one of the most influential descriptions of language ability. According to Bachman (1990: 81), it is necessary to have a theory of language proficiency in order to develop and use language tests

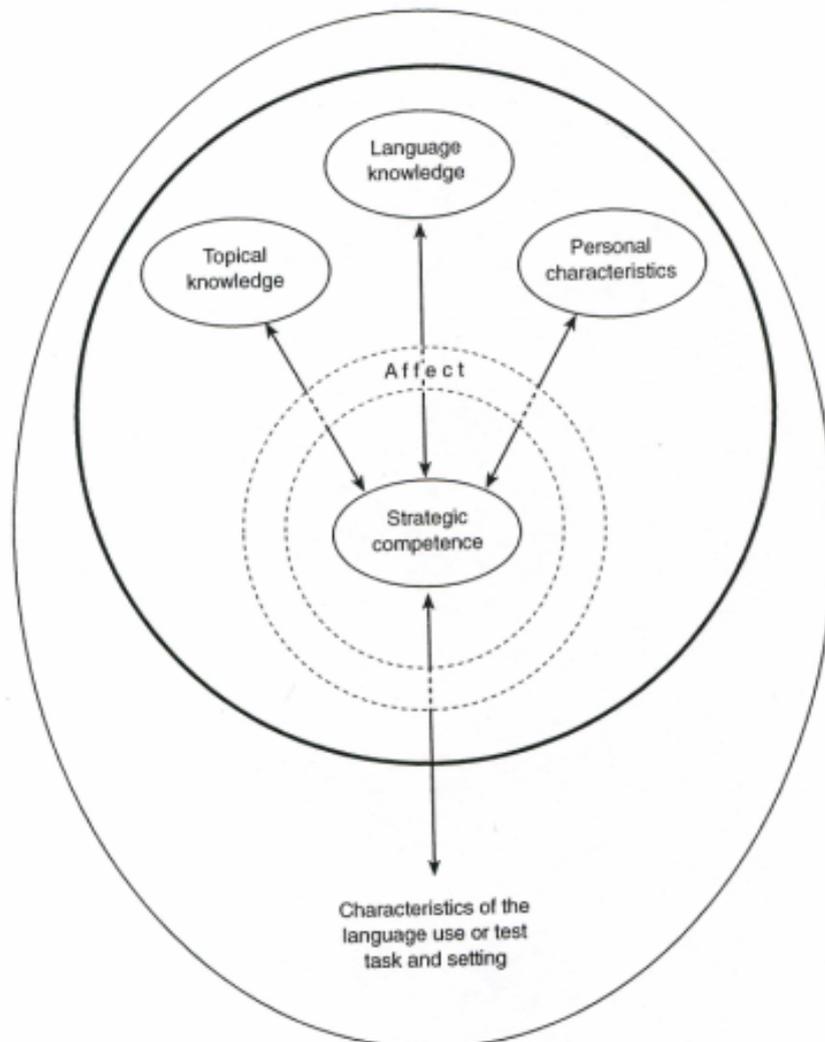
appropriately. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61) claimed that in order to make decisions about individuals or inferences about their language ability, the tester has to be able to show how test performance corresponds to language use in other situations. For this purpose they designed a framework of language use which includes characteristics of language use tasks and test tasks and characteristics of language users or test takers. Bachman and Palmer argue that language ability is the main characteristic of interest in language testing since language ability is what testers want to make conclusions about. Moreover, one has to take into account such individual features as personal characteristics, topical knowledge and affective schemata, since these characteristics can effect language use as well as test performance.

To begin with, Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61 – 62) define language use

as the creation or interpretation of intended meanings in discourse by an individual, or as the dynamic and interactive negotiation of intended meanings between two or more individuals in a particular situation.

When language users express, interpret or negotiate meanings, they create discourse. Meaning of discourse comes partly from utterances or texts themselves and partly from the ways in which utterances and texts are connected to the characteristics of a certain language use situation. In consequence, since language use is a rather complex net of interactions between various factors, Bachman and Palmer introduce the framework of language use which is illustrated in Table 1 below.

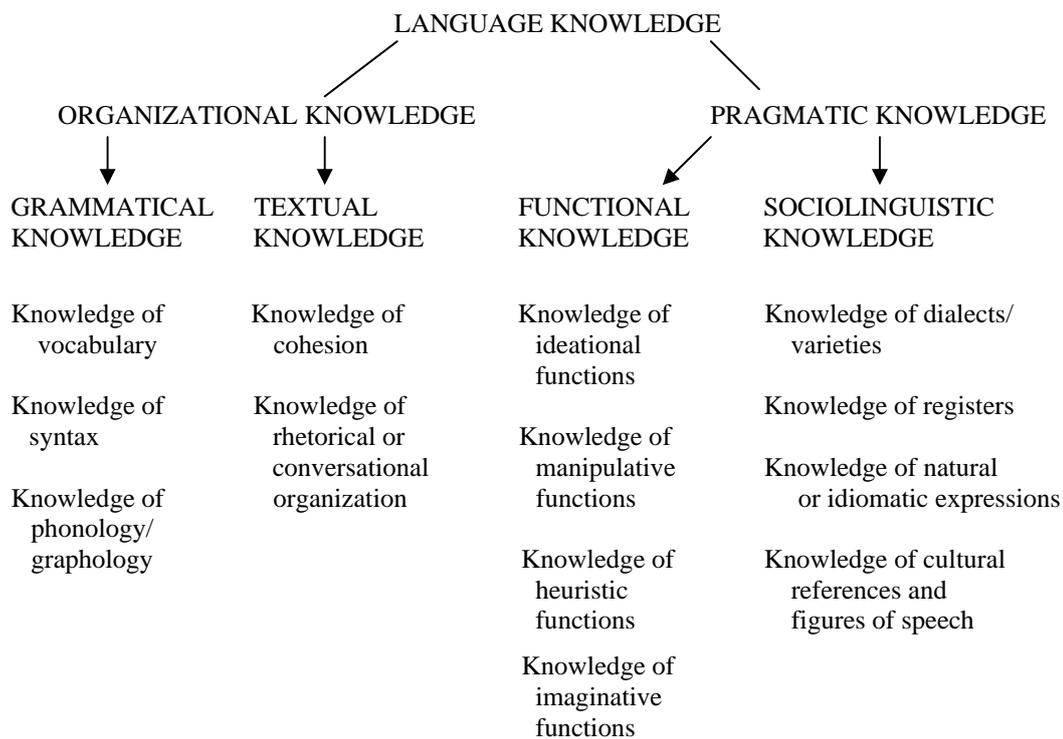
Table 1 Some components of language use and language test performance (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 63)



Topical knowledge (real-world knowledge), **language knowledge** (see also Table 2) and **personal characteristics** (e.g. age, sex, and personality) are components within the smaller circle and they represent characteristics of individual language users, which naturally affect both language use in real life situations as well as test performance (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 62 – 65). The outer circle in turn comprises characteristics of the language use or test setting with which the language user interacts. The double-headed arrows represent interactions between the different components. As can be seen in the model, strategic competence connects other components within the individual and also serves as a link between the characteristics of the language use task and setting.

As Bachman and Palmer themselves point out (1996: 62), this framework is by no means all-encompassing but rather illustrates some of the components involved in language use. Indeed, they have explained in some detail the concepts of topical knowledge, language knowledge and personal characteristics but have not elaborated on what exactly are the characteristics of the language use or test task which influence the language use or test performance. However, despite the shortcomings of their framework, it still gives some kind of an idea of what factors have an effect on language use or test performance, and may thus help teachers when they test and assess foreign language (oral) ability. For instance, it is important for the teacher to realize that such factors as the test-taker's personal characteristics (e.g. shyness or talkativeness) as well as the test situation itself will have an effect on the test performance.

As mentioned above, in order to make inferences about language ability based on the performance in language tests, one has to first define what language ability is (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 66). According to Bachman and Palmer, **language ability** includes two components, namely language knowledge (they use the term language knowledge instead of language competence) and strategic competence, which is described as a set of metacognitive strategies, such as goal setting and planning. Both language knowledge and strategic competence are important components in language use discussed above. Table 2 below illustrates Bachman and Palmer's model of language knowledge.

Table 2 Areas of language knowledge (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 68)

In this model **language knowledge** is a domain of information which together with the metacognitive strategies enable language users to create and interpret discourse (Bachman and Palmer 1996: 67 – 70). Language knowledge is divided into two categories: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. **Organizational knowledge** determines how utterances or texts are organized. It includes grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge. *Grammatical knowledge* is needed when producing or comprehending formally accurate utterances or sentences, and this includes knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, phonology and graphology. *Textual knowledge* comprises cohesion, rhetorical and conversational organization which are used when utterances and sentences are joined to form texts.

Pragmatic knowledge makes it possible to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences to the communicative goals of the language user and to the features of the language use setting. Pragmatic knowledge is further divided into two areas: functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge. *Functional knowledge* enables us to interpret how utterances and sentences are related to the communicative

goals of language users, and this knowledge includes four subcategories: ideational, manipulative, instrumental and imaginative. *Knowledge of ideational functions* is used when expressing or interpreting meaning in terms of our experience of the real world around us while *knowledge of manipulative functions* makes it possible to use language in order to influence the world around us. *Knowledge of heuristic functions* is used when we extend our knowledge of the world, for instance when language is used for learning and teaching. *Knowledge of imaginative functions* enables us to imagine things and to extend the world for humorous or esthetic purposes for instance when telling jokes. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 67 – 70) point out that even though functions are divided into four categories, language is often used for several purposes at a time.

Finally, *sociolinguistic knowledge* enables language users to create or interpret language appropriately according to a certain situation. This includes knowledge of appropriate use of registers, knowledge of cultural references etc.

Bachman and Palmer's model of language knowledge is far-reaching and it explains more specifically than the previous models the different components of language knowledge. They have, for instance, identified subcategories of knowledge within the broader categories. It should be noticed that strategic competence, which was a part of Canale and Swain's model, is not included as a component of language knowledge any more. However, strategic competence still appears in Bachman and Palmer's framework as well, but it has been reconceptualized.

As mentioned above, Bachman and Palmer's model was meant for testing purposes. Indeed, it could be used as a starting point when designing tests and when assessing language performance in test situations. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that this model is not perfect either. Since the model seems rather theoretical and Bachman and Palmer do not give much practical advice on how to use it, it may be difficult to make use of the model as such.

2.1.3 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Today one of the most influential perceptions of language proficiency is based on the model presented in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001). CEF was developed in order to promote and facilitate co-operation among educational institutions in Europe. It defined language use and learning (also language proficiency) as follows:

Language use, embracing language learning, comprises the actions performed by persons who as individuals and as social agents develop a range of **competences**, both **general** and in particular **communicative language competences**. They draw on the competences at their disposal in various contexts under various **conditions** and under various **constraints** to engage in **language activities** involving **language processes** to produce and/or receive **texts** in relation to **themes** in specific **domains**, activating those **strategies** which seem most appropriate for carrying out the **tasks** to be accomplished. The monitoring of these actions by the participants lead to the reinforcement or modification of their competences. (CEF 2001: 9)

When carrying out tasks and activities that are needed in the communicative situations they are involved in, language users take advantage of several competences that they have developed during their previous experiences. What is more, learner's competences are further developed when they take part in communicative situations. Here a theoretical distinction is drawn between general competencies and communicative competence (CEF 2001: 11 – 14, 101 – 130). **General competencies** are the combination of knowledge, skills and characteristics which enable individuals to function in a community. These competences are not language specific; they are utilized in all kinds of situations, including language activities.

General competencies are divided into declarative knowledge, skills and know-how, 'existential competence' and ability to learn. *Declarative knowledge* means knowledge that we gain from experience (empirical knowledge) and from formal education (academic knowledge). Declarative knowledge contains general

knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge (knowledge about the society and culture of the community in which a language is spoken) and intercultural awareness, which refers to the knowledge, awareness and understanding of similarities and discrepancies between different communities. *Skills* are used when applying the knowledge about the world in everyday situations. *'Existential' competence* consists of language user's personal characteristics such as their attitudes, motivation, cognitive styles, personality factors etc. Existential competence in turn mobilises the declarative knowledge and skills. In other words, whether a person is quiet or talkative, meticulous or careless will have a great effect on the other parts of general competences. *Ability to learn* refers to the ability to observe and take part in new experiences and to integrate new knowledge into the knowledge one already has.

In order to communicate successfully, one has to draw upon both general competences described above and special communicative competences that are more closely related to language use (CEF 2001). This **communicative competence** is language specific, and it is divided into linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. *Linguistic competence* comprises factors connected with the language: lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic and orthoepic competences. *Lexical competence* means both knowledge of and ability to use the vocabulary of a language, and it consists of lexical elements (fixed expressions and single word forms) and grammatical elements. *Grammatical competence* is defined as knowledge of and ability to use the grammatical resources of a language. In other words, it refers to the ability to understand and express meaning by producing or recognizing phrases and sentences that are formed according to the grammatical rules. *Semantic competence* involves the learner's awareness and control of the organisation of meaning. *Phonological competence* deals with the knowledge of and skill in the production and perception of the sound-units (phonemes), sentence phonetics (prosody) and of the phonetic features which distinguish phonemes etc. *Orthographic competence* refers to knowledge and skill concerning the symbols of which written texts are produced. *Orthoepic competence* involves the ability to produce a correct pronunciation from the written form when for instance reading aloud a text.

Sociolinguistic competences refer to the sociocultural conditions of language use. Issues such as linguistic markers of social relations (use and choice of greetings, use and choice of address forms etc.), politeness conventions, expressions of folk wisdom, register differences, dialect and accent are part of sociolinguistic competence (CEF 2001). Sociolinguistic competence is regarded as the connecting factor between communicative competence and other competences.

Pragmatic competence involves knowledge of the principles according to which messages are 1) organized and structured (discourse competence), 2) used to perform communicative functions (functional competence) and 3) sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata (design competence).

In the CEF language proficiency is viewed in relation to other factors concerning language learning and teaching (see e.g. CEF 2001 and Mäkelä 2005). For instance, the CEF categorizes learning environments according to their physical, social and mental levels. **The physical level** comprises for instance the teaching material and equipment at the teacher's disposal. **The social level** is concerned with the teacher's and learners' roles in the language learning situation. **The mental level** in turn has to do with the teacher's way of perceiving the world and her views on what language proficiency is and how languages are learnt etc. What follows is that the teacher should be able to guide her students and provide them with the best possible opportunities for learning. The learner is also encouraged to take responsibility for her own learning. Moreover, the interaction between the teacher and the learner is stressed.

The model of language use and language proficiency described in CEF is thus yet another attempt to explain the features included in language use. It contains similar components to the models of Canale and Swain, and Bachman and Palmer summarized above, but it also comprises features that these models did not explain. For instance, the orthoepic and orthographic competences are included as features of linguistic competence. However, these two competences are only minor additions, and their role in language proficiency is not of fundamental importance.

Today CEF is seen as some kind of a guide for language teaching, testing and assessment in Europe, and thus its description of language proficiency has become one of the most influential ones. Indeed, the descriptions of the competences needed in communication situations provided in CEF are rather extensive and profound. Nevertheless, it has to be kept in mind that it is not just one (and not the one) model of language proficiency.

As can be deduced from the summary above, different quarters at different times have attempted to define language proficiency and they have introduced their models on what they think should be included in the definition of language proficiency. The three different models discussed above are to a great extent similar to each other but they also differ from one another in some respects. To sum up the current perception of communicative competence, it is defined as the ability to use L2 accurately, appropriately and flexibly (Yule 1996: 197). Accuracy refers to the ability to use words and structures according to the grammatical rules of the L2 (grammatical competence). Grammatical competence, however, does not suffice alone but one also has to be able to use the language appropriately in the communication situation, for instance to choose the right words according to the social context (sociolinguistic competence). In addition to grammatical accuracy and appropriateness, the ability to organize a message effectively and to overcome possible communication problems (strategic competence) is part of communicative competence as well.

However, to date no one has been able to produce a *final* model of foreign language proficiency (Saleva 1997: 18). It is important, although, that teachers (when teaching and testing) base their teaching or tests on some definition of language proficiency. Doing so will help them to design oral exercises and tests in a way that they correspond to language use in real life situations. For instance, if the purpose of the test is to measure the test-taker's oral proficiency, the test should be designed so that it resembles language use in other settings other than the test itself. Additionally, McNamara (2000: 13) points out that the test designer's view on language is reflected, for instance, on the 'look' of the test. In other words, if the test designer emphasizes grammatical accuracy in language use, this will have its effect on what kinds of tasks the test contains. Furthermore, McNamara argues that reporting of scores in the test will change depending on what aspect of language use is stressed.

Thirdly, the test performance will be interpreted according to the perception of language the test designer has adopted.

2.1.4 Speech communication and oral skills

After examining communicative competence and language proficiency above, the terms speech communication and oral skills will be the topic of the following section. To begin with, all communicative functions in which the language user produces, receives or transmits speech are in one way or another part of **speech communication** (Hildén 2000: 172). Speech communication occurs often in face-to-face situation. However, also leaving voice mail and receiving a reply to it is considered to be speech communication as well. Speech communication proficiency consists of **linguistic skills** (the ability to choose grammatically and phonetically correct utterances), **functional skills** (corresponds to the pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences above) and **strategic skills** (the skills that are needed in planning and controlling the interaction process and the ability to make use of ones' competences in order to achieve the communicative goal).

Oral skills, on the other hand, are part of speech communication proficiency (Hildén 2000: 173). They are one of the four traditional language skills, namely speaking, listening, writing and reading (Hammerly 1991). Oral skills are language specific, and refer to the knowledge and skills needed in situations where spoken text is produced in order to interact or transmit in the target language (Hildén 2000: 173). A person can have oral skills in several different languages and improving oral skills in one language increases speech communication proficiency as a whole. Table 3 illustrates oral skills in the domain of communicative competence discussed below.

Table 3 Foreign language oral skills in the domain of competence (adapted from Hildén 2000 and CEF 2001)

General competences

- declarative knowledge
 - knowledge about the world
 - sociocultural knowledge
 - intercultural awareness
- skills and know-how
 - practical skills and know-how
 - intercultural skills and know-how
- existential competence
- ability to learn
 - awareness of language and communication
 - general phonetic awareness and phonetical skills
 - learning skills
 - heuristic skills

Sociolinguistic competence

- conventions about politeness
- differences between registers
- dialects and accents

Pragmatic competences

- discourse competence
- functional competence
- design competence

Oral skills

(for instance in English)

Linguistic competences

- lexical
- grammatical
- semantic
- phonological
- orthographic
- orthoepic

Strategies

- reception
- production
- interaction
- transmission

In order to speak a foreign language, one has to have a basic knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary as well as the pronunciation rules of the target language (Salo-Lee 1991). However, it should be noted that the syntactic structure of speech is less complex than of writing (Gibbons 2001: 260). What is more, it should be remembered that speaking is not writing but it has its own set of rules. Secondly, the

vocabulary used when speaking tends to be less specific and limited when compared to writing (Luoma 2004: 17). Thirdly, knowledge of how to pronounce the target language is particularly important when L1 and L2 have a differing phonological system, such as between Finnish and English.

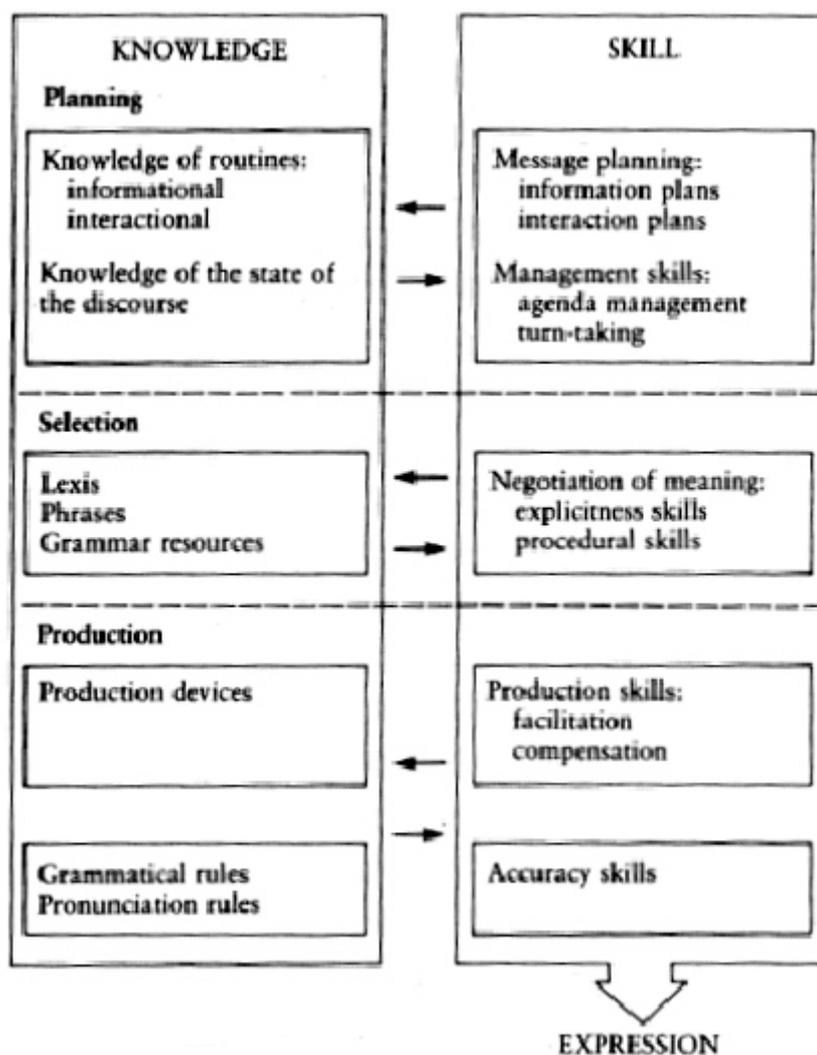
To sum up the description of oral skills, knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are the foundation for the ability to speak a foreign language. Furthermore, one also needs interaction skills (e.g. turn-taking, how to interrupt politely etc.) in order to communicate. In addition to verbal communication oral skills also include non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, body movements and gestures. In consequence, all these aspects included in oral skills should be taken into consideration in teaching as well. In other words, in addition to focusing on grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation as the foundation of oral proficiency, interaction skills should also be practised. What is more, since non-verbal communication differs from one culture to another, the students should be provided with information on this issue as well. It may of course be difficult to change one's own gestures or facial expressions since they to a large extent are learnt in the cultural context one lives in; however, it will help the students to know that non-verbal communication is part of oral skills, and that it has its function in communication.

Another point of view to oral skills is provided by Martin Bygate (1987). He notes that oral skills involve both motor-perceptive skills as well as interaction skills. **Motor-perceptive skills** refer to perceiving, recalling and articulating sounds and structures of language in the correct order. In other words, these skills have mainly to do with the production and perception of language. **Interaction skills**, on the other hand, are utilized when using knowledge and motor-perceptive skills in order to communicate. These skills are needed when deciding, for instance, what to say and how to say it in a given communication situation.

Bygate (1987: 50) presents a model of oral skills where he describes them from the perspective of knowledge and skills (see Table 4 below). With **knowledge** he refers to grammar and pronunciation rules, and vocabulary as well as knowledge about how these are typically used. **Language skill** is seen as the ability to manipulate grammar

and vocabulary and to pronounce language properly. In addition to this, oral skills involve using production skills, namely facilitation and compensation devices. Moreover, speech involves the skill of resolving certain kinds of communication problems, i.e. negotiation of meaning (explicitness and procedures) and the management of interaction (turn-taking and agenda management).

Table 4 A summary of oral skills (Bygate 1987: 50)



Bygate notes that his model includes two features (1987: 49). First, skills depend on suitable knowledge. They involve using recognized principles for communicating certain meanings. Bygate points out that practising the skills can add to the knowledge store. The second feature of the model is that the skills are interdependent. Skills comprise decision-making processes for choosing the

messages, planning them and implementing them while monitoring the entire process at the same time. In other words, oral skills involve the ability to manage all the sub-skills from the top of the model to the bottom.

The description of oral skills by Bygate thus considers these skills from the viewpoint of knowledge and skill which are intertwined. Even though this model is almost twenty years old, it is still referred to as one of the most influential descriptions of oral skills. One of its contributions is that it includes the motoric side of the production process, referring to the ability to articulate sounds and structures.

2.2 Second language learning

After discussing language proficiency and speaking skills in particular above, we will now take a brief look on speaking as a part of second language learning. To begin with, knowing more than one language is part of everyday lives for a large number of people in the world's population. What is more, the importance of knowing and being able to speak foreign languages has increased with the growing number of international contacts and the world turning into more multilingual. Cook (2001: 1 - 4) states that helping people acquire second languages more efficiently is one important mission of this century. For over a hundred years it has been assumed in language teaching that students learn best through spoken, not written language. Indeed, lately the teaching methods have begun to emphasize spoken language. Cook claims that communication in the communicative method takes place usually through spoken language rather than writing. Moreover, many linguists have supported the fact that speech is significant by stating that speech is the principal form of language and that writing depends on speech. However, Cook also argues that the written skills should not be forgotten by second language learners, since they are needed as well.

One of the general theories of second language learning proposed by Cook (2001: 194 - 197) is the **multi-competence model**. The term **multi-competence** means the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind. The question Cook presents is: should all second language learners aim at achieving the same level as those who

acquire the language as their first. After all, second language learners can never be native speakers of the language that they are learning. Cook argues that people learning a second language indeed differ from those who use only one language. She notes that students and teachers are frustrated by their inability to speak like native speakers, few are ever satisfied. Second language learners ought therefore to be regarded as their own distinct group with their own second language achievements rather than trying to cluster them as people who are able to imitate the natives.

Moreover, Cook (2001: 196) states that the goal in language teaching should be that the learners will not try to appear as native speakers but they could convey their exceptional position as people who can function in two (or more) cultures. One of the major consequences for language teaching of this model is, according to Cook, that the teaching goals should be goals for second language users, not for native speakers. However, this model should not direct the teaching as only a single method in teaching since it merely represents one view and one piece of the wide field of second language learning and teaching. Additionally, it could function as a guide leading the teachers and students on the way of second language learning. There are several other theories of second language learning as well but many of them do not explain or even recognize the importance of speaking in the learning process. The multi-competence model in turn underlines the significance of the spoken language, and therefore it supports the current trend, which emphasises oral skills in language proficiency. Indeed, Finnish (upper secondary school) students as second language learners should not worry about sounding like native speakers when speaking English; they ought to aim at learning how to communicate, and not being afraid of making errors in their speech. Furthermore, they should be content with themselves as learners when those goals are accomplished.

3 CONSIDERATIONS ON TEACHING ORAL SKILLS

It is a well-known fact that written skills are given emphasis at the expense of oral skills in upper secondary school (see e.g. Yli-Renko 1991; and Saleva 1997). What is more, speaking skills are not tested in the Matriculation Examination even though including such a test in it has been under consideration for decades. Even though oral skills are acknowledged in the national curriculum and teaching these skills is stressed, the reality in many upper secondary schools tends to be different. Thus, in this chapter oral skills will be discussed from the viewpoint of teaching. First teaching oral skills will be examined briefly and its history in Finland will be summarised. Secondly, the national curriculum of English teaching in upper secondary school will be viewed. Thirdly, the structure of the current Matriculation Examination will be described.

3.1 Teaching the spoken language

Teaching the spoken language has a fairly short history; its effect on foreign language teaching started to show only after the Second World War (Brown and Yule 1983: 2). Nunan (1991: 5) mentions that the interest in spoken language was kindled, among other things, by the development of tape recorders, which made it possible for researchers to record, transcribe and study oral interactions between people. In the beginning of spoken language teaching the focus was on teaching the correct pronunciation but later on it expanded to include exercises on listening (the students were for example required to discriminate between sounds or words spoken in isolation or to identify stressed words in taped sentences read aloud) and using the target language spontaneously instead of simply uttering written language sentences. In other words, the ability to communicate in the foreign language was recognized, which is stressed even more strongly today (Brown and Yule 1983: 2).

Lately the importance of the social and cultural foundation for learning has become more and more important (Gibbons 2001: 260). **Interaction** – defined by Lynch (1996: 162) as ‘reciprocal communication, normally spoken, to which both (or all) participants actively contribute’ - is considered to be an important part of learning;

the classroom is seen as an environment in which understanding and knowledge are jointly constructed. In other words, people collaborate in order to communicate with each other. This **negotiation of meaning** is regarded as an efficient way to learn since it engages the learners in a process where they work together to achieve communication, to understand and to be understood by using comprehension checks, clarification requests etc.

Lynch (1996: 105 - 122) points out that allowing the learners to practise freer talk in which learners themselves take the responsibility for the interaction will improve their competence in speaking. Tasks where the learners take the initiative of communication and which lead to negotiation of meaning are seen as particularly important because they resemble the kinds of communication situations one is probably going to encounter in real-life situations.

In sum, today the teaching of oral interaction includes much more than merely pronunciation. Nunan (1991: 7) points out that in addition to the ability to pronounce comprehensibly, the learners of a foreign language need to know the stress, rhythm and intonation patterns, and they have to acquire skills in taking short and long speaking turns. Additionally, learners need skills in the management of interaction, and they need to know how to negotiate meaning as well as how to listen in a conversation. Moreover, they have to acquire skills in knowing about and negotiating purposes of conversations. Finally, the learners need the ability to use suitable conversational formulae and fillers. In short, speakers of foreign languages need various skills when interacting and therefore teaching oral skills is a rather complex issue. Furthermore, acquiring these skills does not occur overnight but is a life-long process.

However, it is controversial whether all the above mentioned aspects of teaching the spoken language are covered in Finnish upper secondary schools. Due to the well-established tradition to focus on the written language, speaking tends to be in an inferior position in the lesson plans and perhaps not much energy is spent on making sure that the oral skills are practised in most efficient ways. In the following we shall examine how has the role of oral language teaching changed over the course of time.

3.2 A history of oral language teaching in Finland

During its history, language teaching has changed periodically between a formalistic and a functionalistic tradition (Takala 1993: ii). There have been periods when language use has been the focus of teaching, and times when the command of structures has been emphasized. Changes in language teaching methods tend to echo the changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning (Richards and Rogers 1986: 1). They are also effected by what kind of language aptitude is considered important at a given time; for instance, during the past few decades there has been movement towards oral proficiency instead of reading comprehension. Along with the Reform Movement in the late 19th century, the Direct Method, the Audiolingual method and the more recent Communicative Language Teaching, oral skills have gained more and more emphasis in official curricula. Saleva (1993: 2) points out, however, that the interest towards developing oral skills has fluctuated over time. Finland has often followed the example of other countries; when there has been an interest to develop oral skills in other parts of the world or when the school system has otherwise been changing, new ideas in teaching have been implemented in Finland as well. Saleva distinguishes three different phases of reform concerning teaching oral skills in Finnish context: at the end of the 19th century (the Reform Movement), the years after the World War II (the Oral Approach) and at the birth of comprehensive school (Fi. peruskoulu) before and after the year 1970.

3.2.1 The Reform Movement

At the end of the 19th century Finland followed the example of other European countries concerning language teaching, and new ideas coming from Europe were rather quickly adopted (Saleva 1993: 3 - 4). At this point the ruling perception of language teaching included the idea that by examining grammar and by doing translation exercises one would be able to develop one's personality and logical skills. The so called **Grammar-Translation Method** began in Germany (or Prussia) which was considered to be the model of advanced educational thought (Howatt 1984: 131 - 146). This method dominated because studying such classic foreign languages as Latin and Greek was considered important (Knight 2001: 148). This

method was supported by the new humanistic education method which emphasized the development of thought – something which was to be achieved by examining the Greek and Latin literature. The goal of studying a foreign language was ‘to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign-language study’ (Richards and Rogers 1986: 3 – 5). The teaching method applied by the Grammar-Translation trend was to concentrate on examining the grammatical rules, memorizing the vocabulary and translating texts both from the target language and into the target language. It was typical of this method that classes were taught in the mother tongue and the use of target language was limited to a minimum. Moreover, vocabulary exercises in the form of lists of isolated words were also characteristic of the Grammar-Translation Method.

It is obvious thus that spoken language and communicative teaching had only little space in a classroom following the Grammar-Translation Method. Nevertheless, evidently it was considered the best way to learn a foreign language at the time it was introduced, but in the light of the current perception of language and language learning the methods used for teaching a foreign language seem hopelessly out-fashioned. Despite the shortcomings of this method it is still in use in some parts of the world.

When the first major reaction against Grammar-Translation Method came, it rapidly evoked a response in Finland as well (Saleva 1993: 3 - 4). The opponents of the Grammar-Translation method argued that language learning is more than merely learning the grammatical rules and the acquisition of translation skills (Direct Method). The reaction against the Grammar-Translation method was also affected by the changes in the society at large. Industrialization changed the entire society, and people with non-academic professions also needed foreign languages in their work. However, their needs were often more practical. Thus, in the light of this development **the Reform Movement** was born with the publication of Wilhelm Viëtor’s pamphlet *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!* (Language teaching must start afresh!) in 1882 in which he criticized the Grammar-Translation Method (Howatt 1984: 169 – 191). The fundamental idea behind the Reform Movement was that a foreign language can be learned directly without the mother tongue as a

mediator, by listening and imitating – just as a child does when learning the mother tongue (see e.g. Richards and Rogers 1986: 7 – 8; and Saleva 1993: 6). In other words, the idea was that second language learning should resemble first language learning and the foreign language should be used as the normal language for communication in the classroom (Howatt 1984: 135). Howatt (1984: 171) outlines three key principles of the Reform Movement when he writes that

the primacy of speech, the centrality of the connected text as the kernel of the teaching-learning process, and the absolute priority of an oral methodology in the classroom.

Therefore, the Reform Movement emphasized spoken language and the use of the target language above anything else. Only little time was invested in analysing the grammar and there was no translation between first and second languages.

It is clear then that the teaching methods of the Reform Movement were entirely different from that of the Grammar-Translation Method. Translation from one language to another was discarded altogether and the new focus of interest was the spoken language. However, even though this appears rather promising from the viewpoint of speaking proficiency, it is important to note that the methods for teaching were not that efficient in all respects. As mentioned above, the idea was that the students would learn the foreign language just like they learn the mother tongue – by listening and imitating – which simply is not the case. In other words, even though the emphasis was on the spoken language, it does not mean that the ability to interact in the foreign language was the outcome of learning.

It is uncertain how popular the methods following the Reform Movement were in Finland (Saleva 1993: 3 - 4). This movement had its supporters as well as its opponents. In any case, it is clear that it was not that widely spread. Even though languages had a major position in the school schedule, it was thought to be an unrealistic goal to learn to speak a foreign language. Moreover, it was also thought that doing oral exercises took too much time from the most important, namely grammar and the development of thought. In other words, even though this new

method was adopted by some teachers in Finland, some still believed in the primary importance of teaching and learning grammar.

3.2.2 The Oral Approach

At the end of the 1930s many started to pay attention to developing pronunciation, and at the same time new technical equipment was introduced in language teaching (Saleva 1993: 5 - 8). In 1941 the secondary school (Fi. oppikoulu) received a new curriculum and it emphasized the importance of oral skills in intermediate school (Fi. keskikoulu). The linguists took the idea of the Reform Movement further, and they developed new teaching methods focussing on oral skills all over the world, for instance in the United States of America, France and England. Of these the method developed in England by such applied linguists as Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby in the 1920s and 1930s (**The Oral Approach**) had the most extensive effect in Finland, and it emphasized speech as the priority (Richards and Rogers 1986: 31 – 43). It differed from the Direct Method (a method derived from the Reform Movement) in that it was scientifically and systematically developed.

The main aspects of the Oral Approach were that language teaching always began with the spoken language and that the target language was the language in the classroom; reading and writing were included in teaching as soon as an adequate lexical and grammatical foundation was established (Richards and Rogers 1986: 31 - 43). Grammar, on the other hand, was taught inductively, which meant that the meaning of words and structures was to be induced from the way it is used in a situation; no explanations by the teacher were given. Moreover, it was stressed that knowledge of structures had to be linked to those situations in which they can be used. In short, as the name of this method suggests, the spoken language was strongly emphasized, and speech was considered to be the basis of language.

Even though the Oral Approach appears to be similar to the methods derived from the Reform Movement, there is one important point of distinction; one no longer believed that the foreign language would be learnt by merely mimicking the teacher. This approach was still rather far from the ideal when it comes to oral proficiency,

but it is obviously one step closer to the current perception of how languages are learnt and how speaking skills develop.

It should be noted that already at this time, in 1958, there were plans to include an oral test in the Matriculation Examination (Saleva 1993: 5 - 8). At this stage it would have concerned the first foreign language and the second domestic language. It was thought that since the Matriculation Examination has such a major effect on teaching, it is important to have a test controlling oral skills as well. However, even though teachers viewed oral skills as important, they were against the implementation of an oral test in the Matriculation Examination.

3.2.3 Shifting towards the comprehensive school

Creating the comprehensive school system at the end of the 1960s occurred at a time when the international language teaching was changing again (Saleva 1993: 8 - 12). The need for both qualitative and quantitative language proficiency had grown a great deal. There were immigrants pouring into Europe and their language needs were mostly oral. The development and growth of mass media brought about the need (particularly among young people) for a medium for creating international contacts. Additionally, tourism was increasing, and working life and science became more international. These changes meant that the ability to speak foreign languages became even more important. In consequence, the Council of Europe set joint goals for language teaching already at the end of 1960s.

In the 1970s the international cooperation became closer and more concrete, which meant for instance developing new methods for language teaching. At the same time, **the Communicative Teaching Method** or **Communicative Language Teaching** started to spread in Finland. It was felt that the Oral Approach is no longer sufficient and there was a need for a more humanistic approach towards teaching (Richards and Rogers 1986: 64 – 86). Theory of communicative competence, emphasizing language use and communicative proficiency instead of focusing on structures (see 2.1 above), was the ideology behind this approach. The Communicative Teaching Method is described

as an approach (and not a method) that aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. (Richards and Rogers 1986: 66)

Fluency in the target language and acceptable language were considered to be the main aims of this approach. What is more, it was thought to be important to provide the student with opportunities to use language to communicate with others.

Obviously the Communicative Teaching Method worked better than any of the previous ones in providing the students with the ability to communicate in the foreign language. It was strongly linked to the theory of communicative competence, which still is the aim of foreign language teaching today. Thus, for the first time, the goal of teaching was to facilitate the students with the ability to use the target language when communication situations.

Nevertheless, even though oral skills were emphasized in the Finnish curriculum, it did not necessarily mean that the same was happening in the classrooms as well. According to Saleva (1993: 8 - 12), many upper secondary school teachers did not know what the curriculum included or they decided not to follow it. However, oral skills of the students were apparently improving, owing to two facts: the National Board of Education acted in support of the reforms and new learning material was introduced. According to Saleva (1993: 8 - 12), the oral skills of students in comprehensive school would have been even better, if the teachers had been willing to go along with the reforms. In other words, practising oral skills received insufficient attention in upper secondary schools regardless of the curriculum and the hopes of the students who would have wanted to pay more attention to improving their oral skills.

3.2.4 Current trends in oral skills teaching

Today the emphasis of foreign language teaching has thus clearly changed from examining language as linguistic structures (linguistic competence) to using language in different kinds of communication situations (communicative competence) (Kaikkonen and Kohonen 2000: 8). What is more, communication between cultures is also paid attention to more than before, and thus intercultural competence has become one of the main aims of foreign language teaching.

However, even though communicative competence is emphasized in the official curriculum for language teaching, in upper secondary school classrooms the reality tends to be different. Written skills and learning the grammar still remain at the focal point in upper secondary school despite the ideal of emphasizing the spoken language. This fact was also found by Salo-Lee and Yli-Renko (1991) who took part in a research project the purpose of which was to promote oral skills in foreign language teaching in upper secondary schools. The results of this project are presented in a joined research report by Liisa Salo-Lee and Kaarina Yli-Renko. Salo-Lee's part of the report discusses oral communication from the viewpoint of foreign language teaching. According to Salo-Lee, Finnish people know the grammatical rules but not the rules of speaking (rules which are utilized when starting a conversation, interrupting someone etc); she claims that it is especially problematic for a Finnish speaker to speak in a way that is typical of the target language. Salo-Lee argues that one of the reasons to this is that the communication skills are not taught enough. That is why she claims that foreign language teaching should be seen as learning of communication skills instead of learning a language. She suggests that conversational skills should be practised more systematically so that the speakers would become more aware of the rules concerning communication skills.

It should be noticed, however, that there has been some development in the Finns' ability to communicate in the foreign language since this study was published. Today the teacher's are to discuss the rules of speaking with their students, and the text books used in class often include information on these issues. Nevertheless, it still remains true that most Finns know the grammatical rules far better than they

know the rules concerning communication, and this could be one explanation for the prevailing stereotype of the Finn who knows how to be silent in several languages.

In the second part of the report Yli-Renko (1991) discusses her research that aimed to find out upper secondary school students' opinions on learning foreign languages and on the teaching practices. Moreover, Yli-Renko wanted to find out what the students' attitudes were on an oral test as a part of the Matriculation Examination. The data was collected with a Likert-type questionnaire from 236 third-year students in central and southern Finland. The results indicated that the students were satisfied with the foreign language teaching in upper secondary schools. Additionally, they stated that they received good written skills, enough grammatical knowledge and good pronunciation skills in English, Swedish and German. However, many students claimed that they had not acquired good oral communication skills and as many as 90% said that they were afraid of speaking foreign languages. This is a clear sign that the amount of oral practice in upper secondary school does neither suffice nor meet the needs of the students. In addition, the results indicated very clearly that the students would like to learn oral, not only written, skills. However, many students were against the implementation of an oral test in the Matriculation Examination because they felt that oral skills were not practised enough to make it possible to test these skills. Yli-Renko concludes her report by stating that because many Finns have trouble in intercultural communication, communication skills should be emphasized from the more elementary grades in the comprehensive school onwards, which does not seem to be the case at the moment.

Even though many years have passed since the publication of this study, it seems that there has not been much development concerning practising oral skills. Nevertheless, today the upper secondary school students seem to be more for the oral test in the Matriculation Examination than before. In 2005 the organization of the Finnish upper secondary school students (Suomen Lukiolaisten Liitto) demanded that an oral skills test should be part of the Examination (Savon Sanomat February 15th, 2005). Thus, the students at least support the oral test.

In addition to Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee, Huttunen et al. (1995) have also studied teaching of oral skills in upper secondary schools. They examined assessing oral skills and the possibility of taking the oral skills test as a part of the Matriculation Examination. Their conclusion was that oral skills are not practised enough although an extensive demand for it exists. Huttunen et al. noted the viewpoint from the business world that some of the Finnish people's greatest flaws in speaking foreign languages are the lack of intercultural communication skills and passivity in communication situations. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that students do not practise oral skills enough; therefore these skills should be practised systematically and continuously. However, it is also claimed that due to the Matriculation Examination, the big class sizes and the teacher's attitudes, there is not enough motivation for it. As a result of the fact that the Matriculation Examination emphasizes written skills and listening, it is not encouraging to practise oral skills. According to Huttunen, however, the situation does not necessarily have to be that desperate: for instance, the big class size does not have to be a problem as the teacher's positive attitudes and experience may have a positive effect on practising oral skills.

In her pro gradu Tattari (2001) made a survey of comprehensive and upper secondary school English teachers' attitudes on practising and testing oral skills. She also gathered information on how common testing of oral skills is. In addition, her purpose was to find out how and why oral skills are tested at the moment. The data was collected with a questionnaire which was sent to 147 upper comprehensive schools and upper secondary school teachers of English in seven municipalities in Southern and Middle Häme. The results from her study support the point made by the earlier research in this field discussed above. In other words, the results indicate that the teachers consider practising oral skills very important and according to the teachers, the students are also motivated. However, lack of both time and suitable teaching material along with the big class sizes make it difficult to practise these skills during lessons.

In sum, the findings from the studies discussed above show that the role of oral skills in upper secondary schools is not as strong as the official curriculum suggests. In short, learning written skills still prevails as the primary goal and more time is

spent on these skills than on oral skills. In other words, even though teaching of oral skills is emphasized in theory, it is commonly held that the teaching of oral skills is not that systematic in Finland. This applies both in mother tongue teaching and foreign language teaching. It is often claimed that the primary reason for this is that the Matriculation Examination at the end of upper secondary school does not include a section testing oral skills. Indeed, the Matriculation Examination – or any other test for that matter - has a great effect on what is taught. According to Michael West (cited in Saleva 1993: 2 - 3)

Perhaps the chief importance of examinations in Language-work is not their effect in testing the pupils' learning, but their effect upon the teachers' teaching. Departments of Education may issue syllabuses and 'Suggestions to Teachers', but what the teacher actually does is always what the examination demands. Regardless of syllabuses, suggestions, or his own ideas, he must do so; he has no choice (West 1952: 60)

What is tested naturally affects what is taught; one has to teach what is tested. In consequence, since oral skills are not tested that often in Finland, teaching those skills is not very systematic.

3.3 Oral skills in upper secondary school

Written skills are laid more emphasis on in Finnish upper secondary schools than oral skills because the teaching aims at the final exam, the Matriculation Examination, at the end of upper secondary school. Written skills and listening comprehension are the only skills tested in the national school-leaving exam, which is why these skills are emphasized to a greater extent in teaching as well. In other words, the Matriculation Examination in fact serves as a hidden curriculum in the upper secondary schools. However, lately the discussion on the emphasis of language teaching has turned towards the importance of students' communicative language skills (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003). Therefore it is significant to reconsider the skills presently tested in the Matriculation Examination and perhaps think about adding a new test measuring speaking skills into it. Research has indicated that the washback effect of the Matriculation Examination can be seen in

the fact that the Matriculation Examination guides foreign language instruction in upper secondary schools more than the official curriculum (see e.g. Hellgren 1982: 67).

3.3.1 National curriculum of English

Upper secondary school continues the work of teaching begun in the comprehensive school (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003). Among the most important tasks of the upper secondary school is to give students a wide general education and a sufficient amount of readiness for further studies. The values of teaching in the upper secondary schools in Finland are based on the history of education, which is part of the Nordic and European cultural legacy. Two of the goals in teaching are that the student will get to know her rights and responsibilities in society as well as she will prepare herself to take responsibility of her choices and actions in the future.

Moreover, the aims set for foreign language teaching include that the students achieve a certain level of language proficiency. For instance if English is studied as the first foreign language (i.e. English as an A language), listening comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension and writing should be at the level of B2.1 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (see appendix 1). What is more, the aims incorporate such a goal that the student is able to communicate in a manner that is considered relevant in the language being learned and to its culture. In addition, the learner should be able to evaluate her own language skills in relation to the goals. Moreover, another objective in foreign language teaching is that the students should be able to recognize their own strengths and areas of improvement as communicators and as learners of foreign languages. Additionally, it is declared that one aim is that the student will be able to extend her language proficiency whenever the need for it exists, for instance in developing herself with suitable means according to her personal needs and according to the communication assignments in question (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003).

However, the curriculum comments on the assessment of foreign languages merely (fairly) briefly. The National Board of Education (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003) only mentions that in the assessment of each subject all the different

aspects of language proficiency must be taken into account based on the emphases in the course descriptions. Whether this means that oral language skills should be assessed as well as the written skills, depends to a great extent on each teacher. There was indeed no wording in the curriculum that oral skills have to be assessed as part of the course grade. It is no surprise that oral skills' testing can therefore be easily neglected under the workload that the written skills' testing generates.

It is stated in the curriculum that many topics within the courses will be dealt with in such a way that opportunities will be provided for students to make comparisons between their native country and the target language and –culture (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003). Additionally, the students must be offered opportunities to listen, to read, to speak and to write for different purposes even though the emphases differ from one course to another. Furthermore, within each language under study the structures, expanding the vocabulary and making more use of it will be paid attention to in all language courses according to the aims of each course of study. The most demanding forms of communication are practised in the courses of those languages, which have been studied since the comprehensive school. The first foreign language that the students have begun studying in the elementary school (during grades 1 to 6) is most often English in Finland. What is more, attention is paid to the differences between the native language and the foreign language, and also the cultural reasons explaining these. In order to develop a cultural sensitivity the students should be guided towards acknowledging that their behaviour and values are strongly connected with the culture.

When it comes to foreign language teaching in the Finnish upper secondary schools, the National Board of Education sets the criteria for the requirements. The present curriculum has been valid since the beginning of August in 2005 (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003). The upper secondary school curriculum in Finland is established on a course-based system and the study year is usually divided into either five or six equally long periods. As Ylipoti (1982: 37 - 38) mentions, the periodic teaching scheme together with the course-based system enable that all the advantages of the course-typed teaching can be utilized in the best possible way. For instance, all the exams do not have to be held at the end of the school year but rather they are taken at the end of each period throughout the school year which means that

the students can concentrate better on the subjects (6 at the maximum, 3 to 5 usually) they are examined on at a time.

Indeed, teaching English in upper secondary school consists of eight courses specified in the curriculum. In addition, different schools may have extra, applied courses in English. It is stated in the curriculum that in general the foreign language teaching develops students' intercultural communication skills since it provides them with know-how concerning language and language use. Moreover, it offers the students possibilities to enhance their knowledge, understanding and respect for the linguistic area or culture involved. What is more, the European identity, European multilingualism and multiculturalism are specifically underlined in the curriculum. Furthermore, Ylipoti (1982: 37 - 38) remarks that the curriculum states that learning foreign languages enables the students to study independently by facilitating them to acknowledge that learning how to communicate in a foreign language requires a long-lasting work and versatile communicative practice.

The curriculum remarks briefly about the emphases of each of the six compulsory courses and the two advanced courses (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003). To begin with, during the first course ('A Young Person and Her World') the emphasis lies on discussions, expressing opinions and on the central strategies of oral communication. On the second course, called 'Communication and Leisure Time', oral skills are practised in a variety of ways. Furthermore, the knowledge and control of grammatical structures are expanded and strengthened, and writing skills are practised with the help of communicative tasks. Moreover, during this course the management of speaking skills is underlined and more attention is paid on the level of certainty in expressing oneself. Topics to do with well-being and safety as well as communication and media are highlighted throughout this course.

On the third course, 'Studies and Work', topics and situations associated with studying and working life are emphasized. During the course the kinds of practices of written and oral communication that are typical of both studying and working life are paid attention to. The fourth compulsory course, 'Society and the Surrounding World', underlines speaking and reading comprehension on a rather complex level. The topics of the course deal with subjects such as being an active citizen, which

gives perspective on how to handle different issues. Moreover, different strategies of understanding reading are introduced and practised (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003).

The fifth course, namely the 'Culture Course', concentrates on culture in its diversity. One of the main topic entities of this course is communication and media, which will be further developed into a fairly extensive project to be presented in class. Another grouping of topics deals with the cultural identity and the knowledge of cultures. The course number six is called 'Science, Economy and Technology', it being the last compulsory course. It highlights the comprehension of language on a demanding level. The subjects handled during this course are the various branches of science, accomplishments in technology, different forms of communication and the economy life. In short, technology and society are the major topics on this course.

It was additionally stated in the curriculum that during the advanced courses the practice is concentrated on the versatile development of language proficiency. The following two courses are only briefly characterized. The seventh course, 'Nature and Durable Development', offers learning opportunities in understanding and using language concerning nature, natural sciences and long-term development. During the eighth course, 'Our Common World and Internationalisation', the topics to be dealt with include globalisation and current events (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003).

All in all, having looked at the curriculum with the aspect of communicative teaching in mind, it could be summarized that teaching and practising oral skills are emphasized in at least some of the course definitions. In the descriptions of nearly all of the compulsory courses in the curriculum oral communication is mentioned, with some more extensively than with others. In fact, in the compulsory courses one, two, three and four it is clearly spelled out that speaking skills are practised and emphasized at least to some extent. Indeed, especially during the first four courses in upper secondary school the importance of rehearsing these skills is noticeable. The description of the course number five states indirectly that there might be a possibility for oral practice within the presentation in class. Course six highlights strongly the practice of the written skills, i.e. reading and writing, which suggests

that not much time is left for rehearsing speaking skills. In neither of the descriptions of the two advanced courses (seven and eight) was it mentioned that oral skills are underlined at all. Altogether another thing is to what extent the teacher values these skills in her teaching and how great an emphasis, if at all, she decides to give them in the students' course grades. In the very end, it is up to the teacher to decide whether she takes these skills into account when grading the students.

3.3.2 The English test in the Matriculation Examination

The function of the Matriculation Examination is to find out whether the upper secondary school students have acquired the knowledge in the subjects the curriculum requires and the maturity to apply to the universities and colleges (Ylioppilastutkinto Suomessa). In the examination the candidates are tested in four compulsory subjects as a minimum, of which the exam in the mother tongue is the only compulsory one. The other three exams can be freely chosen of the following: the second official language (i.e. usually Swedish in Finland), a foreign language, mathematics and the general studies test. Moreover, in mathematics, in foreign languages and in the second domestic language the candidate may choose the level of difficulty of the test independent of the level she has been studying the subject during her studies in upper secondary school. Nevertheless, she has to pass at least one of the compulsory tests in the advanced level. She is allowed to take only one test in the same subject in the examination. Besides the four compulsory tests, the candidate is allowed to add one or more optional tests in her examination.

The Matriculation Examination Board takes full responsibility for managing the tests: they conduct the preparation of the tests, carry out the administration and perform the assessment of the answers (Ylioppilastutkinto Suomessa). The Matriculation Examination was first introduced in Finland in 1852. It functioned originally as the entrance exam to the University of Helsinki and measured among other things the candidates' affirmation of comprehensive schooling. Passing the present examination offers possibilities for further studies in the universities and colleges.

Foreign language tests in the Matriculation Examination include listening and reading comprehension as well as written sections, which exhibit the abilities of the learner to express themselves in writing in the foreign language (Ylioppilastutkinto Suomessa). The listening comprehension consists of twenty multiple-choice questions and five open-ended questions. When it comes to reading comprehension, there are twenty multiple-choice questions, and the structures and vocabulary are tested with fifty cloze questions. The section testing writing contains an essay of 150-200 words. As can be seen, the Matriculation Examination does not include any test on oral proficiency.

Lately the importance of speaking skills in foreign languages has been underlined and thus, the testing and assessment have to be taken into more careful consideration. Indeed, a working group was set up in 1989 to investigate the possibility of including an oral skills' test in the Matriculation Examination (Takala 1993: 35 - 42). They reported several matters concerning testing oral proficiency at the end of the upper secondary school. To begin with, testing oral skills should greatly affect the curriculum with heavier emphasis on practising oral skills than had been the case until then. It was proposed that oral skills have to be taken into consideration during individual courses as well and not only in broad outlines of the curriculum. Secondly, it was suggested that the teachers need to be further trained on testing and assessing oral skills. Next, the students should be encouraged to achieve communicative language skills. Moreover, including an oral test obviously would affect the length of the other sections in the Exam. The reasons for advancing the Examination into this direction were several. It was thought that we would need to adapt to the world becoming more international by obtaining better language skills for upper secondary school students. Furthermore, the requirements for higher education would be more adequately met this way.

In his article Takala (1993: 27 - 34) discussed the significance of an oral exam and stated that if an oral test is seriously considered to be a part of the examination, there are several things to be taken into account first. For instance, the aspects of testing have to be clarified. The testing should be carried out reliably and inexpensively which may be problematic. Furthermore, it must be considered whether to give a separate certificate for each skill of language tested if oral skills are to be assessed

alone as well. On the other hand, Takala questioned the idea of testing each language skill separately since they all work together in real life too. Moreover, in his opinion the emphases in different foreign languages could be varied, for instance in Swedish studies the emphasis could lie on the communicative aspect, namely on the listening comprehension and speaking skills. Since Finns are in such a close connection with the other Nordic countries that have languages related to Swedish and as Swedish is the second official language in Finland, this is a well-grounded point. Nevertheless, in today's world it is not enough to be able to communicate only with the people in the neighbouring countries; thus teaching communication skills should not be limited in this respect.

Furthermore, Takala (1993: 27 - 34) suggested that if the oral test became a part of the Matriculation Examination, in addition to the student herself both the teacher and possibly fellow students would participate in giving the grade. Moreover, it is necessary to compose explicit instructions for each part of the assessment. The testing in practice would help in standardizing the assessment conventions as well. As Takala proposed, the oral test's result would be worth approximately ten per cent of the final grade of the exam. As a matter of fact, he proposed fairly distinctly what the oral skills' test would be like. His idea was that the tests would be accomplished with the help of tapes which comprise of certain standardized parts and the candidates' answers could be recorded. What is more, there should be a part in the test which is based on a discussion or an interview, and which could be recorded either as an entity or in parts.

There is also a more recent working group, set up by the Ministry of Education on March 18th, 2005, to investigate the possibility of organizing the assessment of oral proficiency attained in upper secondary school (Lukiokoulutuksessa saavutettavan suullisen kielitaidon arvioinnin selvittäminen, työryhmä (käynnissä)). The term of the working group ends on June 30th, 2006 and after that they are supposed to bring out the conclusions of their work. They have to take a stand on three issues: 1) how the national assessment of oral skills is reliably organized; 2) to what languages and to what levels of study the assessment would apply; and 3) what would be the total expenses of carrying out the assessment. Thus far no results of the progress have been published by the working group.

All in all, testing oral proficiency requires consideration of many different components. Firstly, teachers as testers and assessors of oral skills must be trained in the field of oral skills measurement. Secondly, the standardizing of the tests will not happen overnight; it takes time and adjustment of all parties to get acquainted with the system. Thirdly, the ultimate aim should not be the oral test being a part of the Matriculation Examination but the respected position oral language proficiency deserves among other language skills practised, tested and assessed in the upper secondary schools.

4 TESTING AND ASSESSING ORAL SKILLS

Testing and assessing speaking skills differ distinctively from those of other aspects of language proficiency. In this section we shall first examine different testing methods of oral language proficiency. Testing methods are divided into three categories (i.e. direct, semi-direct and indirect methods) according to how direct the communication that takes place in the test situation is considered to be, and each category is discussed in detail below. We will also summarize some general aspects of assessment and discuss the assessment criteria in more detail.

4.1 Oral language testing

Oral language testing has gained much interest during the past few decades, partly because teaching is more than ever directed towards the speaking and listening skills, particularly in the early stages (Underhill 1987: 3). Indeed, the ability to communicate genuinely in a second language is stressed in language testing (McNamara 1996). Underhill claims that to free oral tests from the weight of traditional language testing conventions, they should be regarded as a distinct category. Unfortunately oral language skills have not been highly valued in the literature of language skills' testing. According to Underhill, one of the reasons for this is that there are certain difficulties in treating oral tests in the same way as the more conventional language tests. Madsen (1983: 147) admits that both preparing, administering and marking oral tests is considered to be harder than of any other language tests. In fact, this can be one of the main reasons for not testing oral skills at all.

Tests are claimed to have a wash-back effect on the teaching program that leads up to tests (McNamara 1996: 23). In other words, what is tested tends to determine the contents of teaching as well. What is more, McNamara points out that communicative tests would be a positive wash-back on teaching since then the teaching would concentrate on preparing the students for the communicative tasks in the test. This, in turn, would indirectly prepare the language learners for communicative tasks they are likely to encounter in real-life situations.

It is a recognized supposition, presented in the literature of language testing, is that the test itself is important whereas the people who take the test or mark it seem less significant (Underhill 1987: 3 - 4). Conversely, the situation in oral tests is the opposite: what should be paid attention to are the people who take part in the test and what goes on between them, not the test instrument itself. Furthermore, it is claimed that the oral tests should be designed around people who will be involved in them as well. The test designers have wanted to make the tests as natural as possible, so that people can talk to each other in a natural way. Indeed, when a person's aptitude to perform in a foreign language is tested, we want to know how well she actually can communicate with other people, not how she communicates with an unnatural item called a language test. In other words, the purpose of the oral test is to evaluate the learner's ability to function with her foreign language skills (Underhill 1987: 5, Madsen 1983: 7). It is important to test these skills since communication skills and thus communicative competence are, without a doubt, main goals in teaching foreign languages.

Underhill (1987: 1 - 2) defines an **oral test** as a test in which a person is supported to speak, and is then assessed on the basis of that speech. Underhill identifies characteristics of speech by stating that it is comparatively rare that speech would be a one-way communication system, i.e. one person speaking when others listen. In fact, speech is normally a two-way system of communication. Moreover, this feature of interactive role-switching distinguishes good oral tests from other language tests, such as listening and writing tests. Usually in an oral test one person is needed to assess speech, and this is normally done by the tester; thus, the process of assessment turns the communication situation into a test. However, there are tests where three people are not necessary to fill the roles of speaker, listener and assessor, such as self-assessment where only one person is needed.

Numerous attempts have been made to test oral proficiency in various ways; some of the tests have been fairly close to a real-life communication situation and some far from it (Huhta and Suontausta 1993: 227 - 228). Usually the tests involve some parts where the participant has to speak at least a little. One characterization of oral testing methods is dividing them into direct and indirect methods, based on whether the measurement is considered to take place directly or indirectly.

Indirect tests mean those tests that contain parts where the learner does not have to produce any English at all, such as in written cloze tests, and furthermore, parts where the learner has to speak according to recorded or printed stimuli (see e.g. Huhta and Suontausta 1993; and Weir 1990). Semi-direct tests do require active speech by the learner, although it is produced by “nonhuman” methods, such as tape recordings or printed test booklets. Direct methods include methods such as interview and role-play, whereas strictly written tests are indirect. Semi-direct tests include for instance using a picture to elicit a story-method. The direct, semi-direct and indirect test methods will be discussed in more detail in the following. However, Huhta and Suontausta (1993: 228) argue that all oral tests are indirect in a way since they only measure the language produced by students and not the skills or processes that underlie the spoken (or written) product.

4.1.1 Testing methods

The following sections are revised according to categorisations of Underhill’s (1987) oral language testing methods and Luoma’s (2004) speaking task types, with an emphasis on Underhill’s work where the different testing methods were discussed in greater detail and more comprehensively. Luoma categorises the tasks into three groups of open-ended, semi-structured and structured speaking task types, differing somewhat from the lists Underhill provides. Bachman (1990: 77) states that with the great number of different testing methods it is impossible to compile a comprehensive list of all the methods used. As Underhill (1987: 44) reveals there are over sixty methods with which to test oral skills. According to Weir (1990: 42) test methods are used to formulate tests but they are not in themselves tests. He continues that it is possible to talk about a good test or a bad test, or a valid or invalid test, but this is not possible for methods. For instance, using a multiple-choice procedure might produce a valid test in one context but not in another.

Some of the most often used techniques are summarized here and, as mentioned above, they are grouped into the three categories of direct, semi-direct and indirect methods. It has to be noted here however that for instance Bachman (1990: 77) does not consider certain methods listed here, such as sentence completion and multiple choice, as “methods” at all but rather as combinations of various features of task types, instructions and types of input. What is more, as stated before, according to Weir (1990: 42) different methods are used to construct tests but they are not in themselves tests. There are indeed different interpretations of testing methods.

4.1.1.1 Direct methods

To begin with, the so-called **direct methods**, or **open-ended speaking tasks**, (Luoma 2004: 48), measure speaking skills directly and the test situation resembles a real-life communication situation (Underhill 1987: 44 - 45). Luoma claims that even though the open-ended speaking tasks direct the discussion, they allow the test takers a certain freedom to utilize their cognitive skills in performing the tasks.

One of the direct methods is **discussion/conversation**, which of course encourages the learner into a communicative approach. Indeed, conversation is perhaps the most natural way for two people to communicate. The interviewer gives the learner a chance to speak his mind but at the same time has an important role as a perceptive person leading the conversation. Additionally, the interviewer’s job is to generate an appropriate atmosphere for a successful dialogue to take place. When considering different types of personalities a disadvantage of this testing technique may be that a shy learner might feel underprivileged compared to an outgoing co-learner (McNamara 2000: 82). Indeed, a successful conversation method in testing oral skills requires the learners’ willingness to propose new topics for discussion, ask questions, and articulate disagreement when they are aware they are being evaluated. As Underhill (1987: 44 - 45) states, the learners need to be ready to take certain risks in the communication. The conversation can also take place in groups, which contains its own challenges as a method, for instance the question of how all the participants can equally be taken into account (Huhta and Suontausta 1993: 243).

Secondly, **interviewing** is claimed to be the most common of oral testing methods (Underhill 1987: 54). It is a direct method, demanding the presence of both the learner and the interviewer. It is a structured method but at any rate permits both parties to express their opinions freely. Underhill argues that it can be placed between two other categories, namely discussion/conversation and question and answer. The interviewer has a list of questions and/or topics to be brought up in the dialogue. However, superior to the question and answer-method (see 4.1.1.2) the interview provides the learner a better chance to illustrate one's foreign language ability by explaining and justifying one's opinions more deeply. The questions should be designed in such a manner that the learner's speech in the interview is as representative of the stage of her language skills as possible.

However, it is argued that the interview method is not quite suitable for measuring advanced learners' oral skills because the rating scales do not measure up to the highly developed learners' skills (Underhill 1987: 56). On the other hand, with better matching rating scales, it is a more appropriate method with the beginners and with learners on the intermediary level. Moreover, with the same structured interview questions, the results are more comparable between various learners (Huhta and Suontausta 1993: 236).

Despite the shortcomings of the interview, it seems to be a fairly good method for testing oral proficiency. The test taker has to both understand what the interviewer is saying and to respond understandably. In other words, this method measures communicative skills and is therefore suitable for assessing speaking skills from a communicative point of view.

Thirdly, Underhill (1987: 58 - 59) introduces **form-filling** as another oral language testing technique. Within this method, the interviewer and the learner cooperate in order to fill in a form inquiring information on for instance personal matters. The authenticity of this method is obviously one of its strengths since in real life one often has to fill out several types of forms for various official purposes. In addition, it is a communicative way to bring forth new knowledge. Nevertheless, there are disadvantages to this method as well. Huhta and Suontausta (1993: 240) remark that

the learner may for instance feel uneasy with the tester and thus influence the situation in an undesired way.

Fourthly, the idea in a **learner-learner joint discussion/decision making technique** is that only two or more learners are present in the test situation, i.e. the assessor does not take part in it. Thus, it is completely up to the learners to keep up the conversation. Often the participants get to read certain information from various sources beforehand and then discuss that in the test. The importance of conversation is underlined in this technique, not the conclusion of the group discussion. Indeed, the participants of the test are told in advance that they will be assessed on the basis of the way they communicate their own opinions, reason them and examine those of the others (Underhill 1987: 49). These conversations can be recorded for later evaluation. This method, for instance, lets the learners be more in charge of what takes place in the situation than how it usually is when learning foreign languages in the classroom. Thus, as Underhill (1987: 50) claims, free conversation skills need to be taught and practised in classrooms since not all learners could manage in authentic discussions.

This method could function well for instance with the upper secondary school students since their language ability is at such a level that they should be able to keep up a conversation by themselves. Indeed, the advantage of this method is that the test takers discuss the topic on their own and the assessor does not take part in the conversation. This is a particularly gratifying method with such students who are not comfortable with talking with an outside assessor who most likely has better speaking skills than the test takers.

Fifthly, in **role-play** the student is to a certain extent an actor in a programmed drama rather than a representative of herself (Underhill 1987: 32). The learner therefore uses her own expressions to fill in the preset parts to complete the play in her part. For a shy person this can offer opportunities to boldly express herself as someone else than who she really is but on the other hand, it can be an uncomfortable experience for an outgoing individual who would like to communicate views of her own. On the other hand, if the participant is more outgoing a personality and more eager to act, then she has an advantage in this testing method (Huhta and Suontausta

1993: 241). Before the test takes place, the participant is provided with simple instructions on what she is to accomplish in the test: which role and situation she is given, who she is and where. Often asking questions is a useful skill in the types of tasks this method supplies. Moreover, Underhill (1987: 51 - 53) introduces possible problems concerning this technique such as lack of enthusiasm of the participant, for instance on cultural grounds, in which case other testing methods are preferred.

Finally, **learner-learner description and re-creation** is a method in which two learners work in co-operation and support one another. One learner describes for instance a model for the other, and she builds the model according to the instructions she gets. The one who is giving the directions cannot see the outcome of her advice. Their language skills are evaluated on the basis of the accuracy of the language, which can be measured in the quality of the form produced, and the time taken in the process (Underhill 1987: 56 - 57). The description task can also be profiled so that the other learner building the model could ask specifying questions from the former. Underhill summarizes that this method is especially appropriate for evaluating the ability of the learner to give thorough description and to follow instructions. Furthermore, he states that this mode suits well for testing communication skills for the reason that the learners transfer information to one another.

This method is useful in a sense that the test-takers have to try to come to a mutual understanding of the task by both explaining and understanding what the other is trying to convey. However, the authenticity of this method may not be very high; it is not very often that one has to construct something based on the verbal instructions given by someone else.

Luoma (2004: 144 - 148) adds to this list **the instructional tasks** where the learner is to tell her partner for instance what to do in a certain situation. Furthermore, comparing and contrasting tasks can include such an assignment that the pair of students will see various pictures of different circumstances and they are to compare, contrast and speculate a specific aspect in them, such as protective clothing. These tasks are generally considered to be more challenging than the description tasks since they involve analysing the details and recognizing the similarities and variation.

Pictures are not always used in this type of testing; also concepts that the learners are familiar with may be compared.

What is more, **explaining and predicting tasks** engage the students in giving details and interpreting for instance a graph. This task is very suitable for tape-based testing since explaining does not require feedback from a partner. However, if this test is conducted with a pair of students, it offers a possibility for further discussion on the possible wider effects of the contemporary situation (Luoma 2004: 148 - 150). The graphs should be fairly easy to find but it has to be kept in mind that they must be up-to-date. The disadvantages of this task method are that it is cognitively challenging and thus best suitable for adults. Indeed, it might not be a good idea to use this method with upper secondary school students since their language and cognitive skills may not suffice. However, if this method is used, the test-maker has to ensure that the graph used in the test is not too difficult to understand in the test situation.

4.1.1.2 Semi-direct methods

Firstly, **semi-direct methods**, or **semi-structured speaking tasks** as Luoma (2004: 49) names them, include features of both of the indirect and direct methods, for instance using a picture to tell a story is an example of such a method. In other words, the learner communicates meanings of an unauthentic communication situation. According to Luoma (2004: 49), a semi-structured task is one where the examinee must react in situations, i.e. she either reads or hears about the social situation where she should picture herself to be in and she is then asked to utter what she would say in that situation.

To begin with, **using a picture or a picture story** as an oral language testing method means that the learner is given one picture or a series of pictures and she is to describe them in her own words in a free manner. After the learner's speaking turn, the interviewer may ask questions about unclear points or things that the learner had left unmentioned. Often this leads into a discussion. In Underhill's words (1987: 66 - 67), utilizing a visual stimulus is an effective way to give a topic for conversing. Indeed, the pictures are quick to understand and every learner is expected to

comprehend the message and thus the possible inadequate reading skills will not get in the way of comprehension. A good picture can be encouraging and motivating for discussion. Nevertheless, for instance cultural reasons may inhibit the learner from making judgements that the interviewer expected in the situation. Additionally, deficiencies in vocabulary may play a negative and a demotivating role in the overall procedure.

Moreover, **giving instructions/description/explanation** represents a technique in which the learner is to describe a familiar object or a routine occurring frequently in everyday life, such as describing how to prepare a favourite dish from her country or explaining how she would advise someone to look for a job (Underhill 1987: 69). The learners are provided with a list of topics where to choose one. Furthermore, they are given a little time for getting ready to talk. As Underhill states, a known topic may serve as an incentive for a fruitful production of speech in a foreign language.

This method resembles the direct method of learner-learner description and recreation where the test-taker must explain something to another test-taker. Indeed, it is somewhat difficult to see how giving instructions/description/explanation is categorized as a semi-direct method while learner-learner description and recreation was seen as a direct method. However, the former method seems to be more connected to real life situations.

Furthermore, **re-tell story or text from aural stimulus** is a testing technique where the learner hears a text on a tape and after listening to it once she is to re-tell it or to summarize it (Underhill 1987: 71). Indeed, ability to paraphrase the key aspects in one's own words is the main thing to be assessed here. This method measures one's capability in comprehension-processing-production skills, even though the texts are relatively short.

In addition, **re-telling a story from written stimulus** invites the learner to re-tell in her own words what she has read only a moment ago (Underhill 1987: 73 - 74). This calls for reading skills as well as speaking skills from the learner. This technique can be used at various learner levels by adjusting for instance the instructions for the

task. A major difference to the previous method of re-telling a story from aural stimulus is that the learner may return to passages she has already read and usually has more control over the use of time.

Although these techniques require both listening/reading and speaking skills, they are hardly very useful methods of testing communicative language skills. The test-takers do not have to produce language on their own but it is possible that they only repeat what they have just heard or read.

The last discussed semi-direct method here is **question and answer** –method which proceeds from simple questions to more demanding ones (Underhill 1987: 61- 63). The questions presented to the learner are relatively unconnected and thus do not normally build up into a conversation. However, if adjustments are allowed in the time frame, this might happen. Indeed, the interviewer must be observant and note if there are any such points, i.e. answers, where the learner would like to share some more of her experience if requested. This method of testing is especially suitable for lower levels of language proficiency. As a disadvantage of this technique, it is rather unauthentic as it offers little communicative approach to the learners.

4.1.1.3 Indirect methods

Indirect testing methods, or Luoma's (2004: 50) category of **structured speaking tasks**, stand for those methods where the learner is not in direct communicative contact with the tester and the real world (Underhill 1987: 76). Moreover, they firmly lead the test taker to say exactly what she is supposed to say (Luoma 2004: 48). The most indirect methods are those which indeed test oral skills indirectly, for instance in written mode.

To begin with, **reading aloud** is perhaps one of the easiest ways accessible to assess foreign language oral skills (Underhill 1987: 76 - 77). The learner is given one or more passages of text five or ten minutes before the test takes place. She must then read the texts aloud to the interviewer. If a dialogue has been chosen for this task, the interviewer reads the other part aloud. Different types of passages may be chosen to

increase the variety of the texts in the test. An advantage of this technique indeed is that it can be adjusted to different levels of oral language skills, i.e. more difficult texts are administered to the more advanced learners. Moreover, this method produces a great comparability between learners if they are to read exactly the same passages. As a disadvantage, this is neither an authentic nor a communicative task. In fact, this technique is fit for measuring mechanical skills of a learner, such as pronunciation and intonation patterns.

Secondly, a **cloze test** (Hellgren 1982: 98) is a method where the learner must fill the blanks in the text with appropriate words. The cloze test is said to match up with real communication since it in a way involves some disturbing noises on the line altering parts of the message being conveyed. Consequently, it can be stated that to perform a cloze test, the learner is required to take applicable action. These tests are simple to construct and easy to evaluate. As a disadvantage Weir (1990: 47) mentions that cloze tests do not correlate well with productive tests of speaking. On the other hand, they are said to be of better use in tests of syntax for instance. Certainly, the central issue is that it is difficult to correlate the test scores of cloze tests with what the learner can do in real life communication situations.

Thirdly, **reading a blank dialogue** is a technique where the learner is provided with a discussion with only one part written in (Underhill 1987: 64 - 65). The learner can prepare in advance and make up the omitted lines of the dialogue. Together with the interviewer they read the conversation aloud. This method is particularly valuable in making the learner ask questions. Underhill proposes that at higher levels, learners may be demanded to perform more challenging language functions, such as persuasion or polite disagreement. However, this method seems rather unsuitable for testing the language ability of upper secondary school students who should already have capabilities to produce more free conversation.

Fourthly, **giving a verbal essay** means that the candidate is asked to speak for a few minutes on either one or more specified general topics (Weir 1990: 74). The advantage of this method is that the candidate has to speak at length which enables a wide range of criteria to be applied to the output. However, the topic may not be interesting to the candidate, which may make it difficult for her to talk about it.

Additionally, performing well in such a test may be dependent on background or cultural knowledge and draw upon factors such as creativity or imagination. Moreover, the use of tape recorders might distress some of the candidates and thus affect their performance.

Finally, **translating/interpreting** is a technique in which the interviewer asks the learner to translate bits of a native language text into the foreign language (Underhill 1987: 79). As a testing technique it is quick to be administered and fits into the sequence of many other testing techniques; it could for example take place after reading aloud test. Nevertheless, translating/interpreting seems as one the least usable oral language testing methods since what it measures are certainly not communicative skills. If the purpose of the test is to assess pronunciation or grammatical accuracy, they can be assessed through other, more sensible methods.

In brief, as can be seen, there are various methods for assessing oral skills; some of them are more usable than others. The lack of testing methods is thus not a hindrance for testing oral proficiency. It is rather a question of choosing the most appropriate method according to what aspects of oral skills are tested. However, if the purpose of the test is to measure communicative competence, the direct methods are the most suitable.

4.2 Assessment

Testing and assessment are intertwined issues. According to Huhta (1993b: 147), the assessment of language proficiency includes several phases, such as defining what foreign language proficiency is, planning the test itself, and choosing the assessment criteria. To begin with, language assessment as well as testing should be based on some kind of a model of language (Mincham 1995: 75). However, since there are several different kinds of models of language proficiency (see e.g. Saleva 1997: 17; and CEF 2001: 21) and no single right model exists, one has to choose one of the existing models and use it as a foundation for testing and assessment. Secondly, before choosing the testing methods one has to decide what exactly is to be tested, i.e. one has to select the assessment criteria. When it comes to assessing oral

proficiency, the most common criteria are pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency. In the following we shall first examine the assessment of oral proficiency from a more general viewpoint and then discuss the assessment criteria in more detail.

4.2.1 Considerations on assessment of oral skills

According to Brindley (2001: 137), **assessment** is a concept referring to ways of gathering information on learner's language ability or achievement. He notes that even though testing and assessment are often perceived as synonyms,

the latter is an umbrella term encompassing measurement instruments administered on a 'one-off' basis such as tests, as well as qualitative methods of monitoring and recording student learning such as observation, simulations or project works. (Brindley 2001: 137)

In short, assessment refers to both tests and other forms of assessment, such as continuous assessment. Moreover, assessment also differs from **evaluation**, which is a broader term than assessment and is concerned with the language programme as a whole and not merely the individual learners' proficiency (see e.g. Brindley 2001: 137; and CEF 2001: 177). For instance, the materials used or the effectiveness of teaching can be evaluated.

Language assessment tends to be in accordance with what is considered to be the nature of language (Brindley 2001: 138). Assessing oral proficiency was generally considered to be rather difficult and unreliable until 1970s (Huhta 1993b: 143). This rather negative attitude towards assessing oral skills reflected the prevailing perception of what language is and what is important in language teaching; the emphasis was on written skills. However, gradually the importance of assessing oral skills was recognised and the doubts concerning the reliability of oral tests were diminished. The **communicative movement** in the 1970s and its idea of language as communication has replaced the traditional test types such as pencil-and-paper tests with multiple-choice questions with more direct assessment methods (see e.g. McNamara 1996: 1; and Brindley 2001: 138). Some still consider assessing oral

skills more difficult than the assessment of other language skills but assessing these skills is considered to be so important that most tests measuring the learners' overall language proficiency contain an oral component as well (Huhta 1993b: 143).

Today language tests and assessment comprise tasks which are similar to real-life language-use situations. In this context McNamara (1996: 1) talks about **performance assessment**, in which the test takers 'have to demonstrate practical command of skills acquired' (emphasis added). In short, today the assessment of language proficiency is more connected with the communication skills the learner needs in real-life, and the tests are characterised by their relationships with reality (McNamara 1996: 11). The relationships of performance tests to reality, for instance, is said to be close and direct, and the tasks are authentic.

Among the first decisions to be made when assessing oral skills is to decide between a holistic and analytic method of assessment (Luoma 2004). In **holistic** assessment oral proficiency is assessed as a whole (as one skill) while in **analytic** assessment oral proficiency is divided into sub-skills which are assessed separately. The advantage of using the analytic method is that oral proficiency can be examined in more detail and the assessor can choose the criteria she wants to assess in the student's performance. In other words, using an analytic method gives a more detailed picture of the student's oral skills. However, the analytic method can be problematic as well since it has been claimed that it is impossible for the assessor to concentrate on more than four to five different criteria (Luoma 2004: 80). In any case, if the purpose of assessing the student's speaking skills is to provide her with a mere overall account of her proficiency in this area, perhaps the holistic method would suffice. Nevertheless, if there is a need for a more detailed description of her oral proficiency, the use of analytic assessment is more appropriate.

The assessment of oral proficiency is most often **criterion-referenced** testing, which means that the learner's performance in the test is compared to an explicitly stated standard (Brindley 2001: 137). When it comes to testing oral skills this often means that the performance is compared to verbal proficiency scales instead of ranking the learners in relation to each other (norm-referenced assessment). **Norm-referenced** assessment, in turn, is used for instance in the Finnish Matriculation Examination

since it is suitable for testing a large number of learners. It is assumed that the results should be divided so that there are only a few very good or bad scores while most of the test-takers would be placed in the middle level (Huhta 1993b: 145). However, one of the main defects concerning this type of assessment is that the result of the test does not tell much about the testee's skills but it merely reveals her standing compared to other candidates (Brindley 2001: 137). Therefore criterion-referenced assessment is more useful at least when assessing speaking proficiency since it reveals more about the learners' skills.

The information collected by assessment about the learners' language proficiency and/or achievement can be used for several purposes (Brindley 2001: 138). For instance, it can be used to provide people with proof of their language proficiency when applying for a job (**certification**) or to determine whether the learner has adequate language proficiency in order to continue her studies to the next level (**selection**). What is more, information about the learner's language ability can be used in order to inspire the learner to study harder (**motivation**).

Indeed, the information on learner's language proficiency can be used for several purposes, and sometimes this can have long-lasting effects on a person's life. For instance, if oral skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination (which has a great deal of significance in the Finnish society), the results of such a test can be a decisive factor in further studies or in employment. What is more, many have argued that testing oral skills would motivate students to concentrate on practising these skills in class. Moreover, the results of such a test would give the students information on their strengths and weaknesses concerning their speaking skills and might encourage them to work to improve their skills.

4.2.2 Assessment criteria

One phase of planning an oral proficiency test is to decide what aspects of proficiency one wants to test (McNamara 1996: 19). In other words, one has to choose the assessment criteria against which the performances will be assessed. The term **criteria** in this context is defined by McNamara (2000: 132) as ‘an aspect of performance which is evaluated in test scoring, e.g. fluency, accuracy etc.’. The advantage of analytic assessment based on rating scales with clearly defined levels of achievement is that it increases the reliability of ratings. The most often used and traditional criteria are pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency. In the following we will briefly describe what the most often used assessment criteria entail.

Firstly, **pronunciation** is one of the most often assessed features of speaking skills (Huhta 1993b: 163). According to Seidlhofer (2001: 56), pronunciation means ‘the production and perception of the significant sounds of a particular language in order to achieve meaning in contexts of language use’. This includes the production and perception of segmental sounds, of stressed/unstressed syllables and of intonation. In addition to these, our pronunciation is affected by such aspects as voice quality and loudness. When it comes to assessing pronunciation, one can assess two different aspects: on one hand, the ability to pronounce single sounds correctly and according to a chosen standard, and on the other hand, the ability use the prosodic features (such as intonation, rhythm and stress) correctly (Huhta 1993b: 163 – 165; and Huhta 1997: 32 – 33).

However, assessing pronunciation contains several problems (Huhta 1993b: 163 – 165). To begin with, it might be difficult to decide on what is the ‘correct’ way to pronounce the language one is assessing. This is a problem especially concerning languages such as English which is spoken all around the world and there are several accepted ways to pronounce it. Thus, the assessor has to decide whether she accepts different ways of pronunciation or whether she expects the testee to pronounce according to the American standard or the British standard or something else. A problem connected to this is that some learners might not want to drop their accent

even if they had the capacity to sound like a British person. There can be several reasons for this but one plausible explanation is that they feel that pronunciation is such a major part of their identity which would be demeaned if they pronounced like a Brit would. Indeed, Seidlhofer (2001: 56) points out that

Pronunciation plays a central role in both our personal and our social lives: as individuals we project our identity through the way we speak, and also indicate our membership of particular communities.

In the light of this, it is understandable why some people may choose not to sound like an American, for instance, because they would feel that it would be a threat to their identity as a part of the Finnish community. Another problem concerning assessment of pronunciation is that it might be difficult to keep fluency and pronunciation apart as assessment criteria. For instance, it might be problematic to tell whether a person speaking slowly, one word at a time without changes in rhythm or stress has difficulties in pronunciation or fluency. Nevertheless, it is a well-known fact that most second or foreign language learners do not reach a native-like level of pronunciation and therefore assessors cannot expect 'perfect' pronunciation of the test-takers.

Despite the problems one may encounter when assessing pronunciation, it is important to remember that pronunciation plays a major part in whether we are understood or not. If the way we pronounce words differs to a great extent from the 'norm', our speech might be unintelligible for our interlocutors. Thus, in order to convey our meaning, we have to be able to at least reach a level of understandable pronunciation. In the light of this, testing and assessing pronunciation as one part of oral proficiency is reasonable.

In addition to pronunciation, **vocabulary** is one often used assessment criterion when it comes to assessing oral proficiency (Huhta 1993b: 165 – 166; and Huhta 1997: 34-35). Assessment of vocabulary can be divided into three aspects: accuracy, adequacy and range. Accuracy refers to the ability to use words in same meanings as the native speakers do. Range, in turn, means the range of the entire vocabulary. Adequacy of vocabulary can be assessed in relation to a certain context or topic.

Assessing vocabulary as well contains a few problems that need to be taken into consideration (Huhta 1993b: 165). Speaking tests do not last very long and thus it might be hard to assess reliably the test-taker's vocabulary as a whole. However, if one wants to test the learner's command of the vocabulary of a certain topic or field, the test can be designed so that the test taker has to demonstrate whether she masters it or not. Indeed, when it comes to speaking tests, it seems reasonable to assess the accuracy and adequacy of the test-taker's vocabulary since it is easier to assess these aspects based on one performance in the test. However, as Huhta pointed out (see above) it can be difficult – if not unreasonable - to make conclusions about the test-taker's entire vocabulary based on one test performance.

Accuracy is another often used criterion in testing speaking skills (Huhta 1993b: 156 – 158; and Huhta 1997: 35). Accuracy refers to the grammatical aspect of speech – whether speech is grammatically correct or not. Often the rating scales differentiate between systematic errors and slips. All speakers (including natives) make slips and thus they are not considered to be mistakes as such. If the speaker, on the other hand, makes systematic errors, it often indicates that she does not control the grammatical structure in question. The CEF (2001: 28 – 29; see also appendix 2) describes a person on level B2 as follows:

Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.

Huhta points out that since there are written norms and rules of what is correct and what is not in most languages, it is relatively easy for assessors to agree upon what is grammatically accurate language use.

However, assessing accuracy in speaking tests is a rather controversial issue since some argue that being grammatically correct is not needed in order to get one's message across in communication situations. It might be relatively easy to assess the accuracy of the test performance but it is another thing altogether whether it reveals much of the test-takers oral proficiency. In any case, whether or not to assess accuracy reflects the assessor's perception of the nature of language and what she considers to be important aspects of communicative competence.

The last of the four most often utilized assessment criteria is **fluency** (Huhta 1993b: 158 – 159; and Huhta 1997: 34). This criterion is considered to be rather difficult to define, and thus there are many different definitions of it. Huhta notes that the main difference between the different interpretations of fluency is in the viewpoint from which fluency is assessed: one can either emphasize merely the speaker's performance, or one can also take the listener's perspective into account. In the latter one, the listener's interpretation of the speaker's fluency is stressed. One example of fluency defined as a criterion can be found in the Common European Framework of Reference (2001: 28 – 29; see also appendix 2). It is stated that a learner on level B.2

Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo; although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions. There are a few noticeably long pauses.

As one can see from the extract, here the fluency is defined according to the tempo of speech; also hesitation and pausing are considered as aspects of fluency. It is understandable why this criterion is so commonly used when assessing oral proficiency; it is perhaps most closely related to speaking as interaction from the four assessment criteria discussed above since it more clearly is a feature of speaking than the other three criteria. Nevertheless, assessing this aspect can be problematic unless one carefully defines what exactly fluency is; otherwise it may be difficult to keep the different criteria apart from each other.

In addition to the four most often assessed criteria above, one can also assess such aspects as appropriacy, coherence or interaction of speech. When **appropriacy** is assessed, the assessor pays attention to whether the test-taker uses language so that it fits the social context of the language use situation (Huhta 1993b: 166). This assessment criterion is quite new and relatively rarely used. However, assessing appropriacy is considered important since it often is a crucial factor determining whether the communication situation as a whole is successful or not. For instance, one can know the grammatical rules of a language but lack the ability to use it appropriately.

Nevertheless, there are several problems concerning the assessment of appropriacy of speech (Huhta 1993b: 166 – 167). Huhta notes that since the test situation is only one language-use situation, it is difficult (if not impossible) to predict the appropriacy of the test-takers' language use in other situations. Another danger in assessing appropriacy is that one actually assesses the personality of the test-taker instead of the appropriacy of her language use. In spite of the problems in assessing appropriacy, assessing it in the test performance says more about the test-taker's oral proficiency than for instance assessing pronunciation. The ability to use language that fits the context is far more important in successful communication than for instance pronouncing 'correctly'.

Coherence is also an assessment criteria used when testing oral proficiency. It refers to the ability to construct speech logically so that it is easy to see the connections between what is said (Huhta 1993b: 171). In the CEF (2001: 28 – 29; see also appendix 2) it is said that a person on level B2

Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution.

From this description one can see that coherence in speech is expressed by the use of cohesive devices (such as connectors). If language proficiency is assessed from a communicative point of view, coherence may be used as one criterion. It is clear that coherence of speech is important in order to be understood, and thus it can be seen as an essential factor in communicative oral proficiency.

The last criterion discussed here is **interaction**. This criterion is used when the interactivity of the test performance is paid attention to. In the CEF (2001: 28 – 29; see also appendix 2) interaction is handled as one qualitative aspect of spoken language use, and a language learner on level B2

Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.

Interaction, thus, contains the use of both reception and production strategies (CEF 2001: 73). In addition to these, discourse strategies and co-operation strategies are used in controlling co-operation and interaction such as turn-taking and –giving, proposing and evaluating solutions, summarising what has been said etc.

Interaction as a criterion is perhaps one of the most important in assessing oral proficiency from a communicative perspective. It might, however, be difficult to keep different criteria such as fluency, pronunciation, accuracy etc. apart from interaction as a criteria in itself since fluency for instance can be seen as one part of interaction. Nevertheless, if one pays careful attention to defining the criteria against which the test performance is going to be assessed, one should be able to avoid these kinds of problems in the actual assessment procedure.

In sum, many issues need to be taken into consideration when oral skills are assessed. One of the first decisions is to decide on the assessment criteria, which already can prove to be a difficult task. What is more, Brindley (2001: 141) points out that direct assessment of language performance requires a great deal of time and is thus expensive. For instance, training and retraining the ones who assess the performances – normally teachers in upper secondary schools – is not inexpensive. Brindley notes that due to the costs of such tests and assessments, some major language proficiency tests do not include an oral test. Perhaps the costs of speaking tests are also the reason why the Finnish Matriculation Examination does not contain a speaking component.

Since there are various practical problems concerning the implementation of new tests (as would be the case with the speaking test), institutions need to pay careful attention to the resourcing requirements both when planning and implementing new tests. Brindley (2001: 141) claims that

if teachers are required to construct and administer their own assessment tasks, it is crucial to provide adequate support (e.g. professional development, materials development and rater training) and establish systems for ensuring the quality of assessment tools used.

In Finnish upper secondary schools the decisions of whether to test and assess speaking skills or not and how to test and assess them is often left for the teacher to decide. Therefore, Brindley's claim for support for teachers is vital in the Finnish context as well; since testing and assessing speaking skills is a rather new field, teachers need training on, for instance, how to go about testing and what kinds of assessment methods to use. Further training on these issues might help some teachers to overcome their insecurity about assessing oral skills and might even encourage some to try testing these skills with a separate test.

5 AIMS, DATA AND METHODS

Now we will turn to discussing the methodological choices of the present study. First we will present our research questions and hypotheses that served as a foundation for the whole study. Secondly, we will summarize how the study was conducted and introduce the questionnaire, which was used for data collection. Moreover, the background information of the data subjects will be given, and finally, the methods of analysis will be summed up.

5.1 Research questions

The main goal of the study is to chart the current situation of practising, testing and assessing oral skills in upper secondary schools in the county of western Finland and county of Oulu. We have divided our research questions into five sections and these main sections include several sub-questions. Our main research questions are: 1) how are oral skills practised in upper secondary schools, 2) how are oral skills tested and assessed, and 3) what kinds of opinions teachers have on practicing, testing and assessing oral skills, 4) are there any differences between the county of western Finland and county of Oulu and 5) how do the background variables affect practising, testing and assessing of oral skills. The following are the research questions of our study:

- 1) How are oral skills practised in upper secondary schools?
 - 1.1 What is the importance of practising oral skills in upper secondary schools?
 - 1.2 Which factors influence practising oral skills?
- 2) How are oral skills tested and assessed in upper secondary schools?
 - 2.1 How common is oral testing?
 - 2.2 Which test types are used when testing oral skills?
 - 2.3 What kinds of methods are used when assessing oral skills?
 - 2.4 Are oral skills assessed in other ways than with a separate test?

- 2.5 What kinds of difficulties do testing and assessing oral skills involve?
 - 2.6 Do teachers cooperate with each other when testing and assessing oral skills?
- 3) What are the teachers' opinions on practising, testing and assessing oral skills in upper secondary schools?
 - 3.1 What kinds of opinions do teachers have on oral skills?
 - 3.2 What kinds of opinions do teachers have on testing and assessing oral skills?
 - 3.3 What kinds of factors influence practising oral skills?
 - 3.4 What kinds of factors influence testing and assessing oral skills?
 - 4) Are there differences between the county of western Finland and the county of Oulu when it comes to practising, testing and assessing oral skills?
 - 5) How do background variables, such as sex, age, education (university degree or not), major subject, possible further education training, teaching experience etc. affect the practising, testing and assessing oral skills and the opinions on them?

In addition to these research questions we have a few assumptions concerning the results we wish to obtain. One of our hypotheses is that the practices in teaching oral skills are varied, mainly due to the teachers' individual differences, such as age, teacher training, visits to English speaking countries etc. To begin with, one hypothesis is that if the teacher is qualified (has attended teacher training), she is more likely to pay attention to both practising and testing oral skills since teacher training provides, at least currently, teachers with ideas and methods for practising speaking skills. On the other hand, we expect that the older teachers put less emphasis on oral skills. In other words, we assume that the longer it has been since teacher training, the less the oral proficiency is emphasized. The reason behind this

hypothesis is that oral skills teaching has not been emphasized in teacher training until fairly recently. In consequence, older teachers are more likely to have been in teacher training at a time when the focus has been on other language skills.

We also anticipate that those teachers who have spent more time in English speaking countries will practise and test oral skills more often. Having stayed in an English speaking environment is likely to promote the appreciation of speaking a foreign language. When asking if there are any factors hindering the practice of oral skills we expect the teachers to name factors which have come up in previous studies such as big class sizes, teachers' inadequate English skills, lack of time, students' lack of motivation, the Matriculation Examination and lack of good oral exercises. What is more, our assumption is that most teachers test oral skills on one course or on a few courses but not on every course. Furthermore, some teachers may not test them at all. In other words, we anticipate to find out that testing oral skills is not very common. This hypothesis is based on the fact that teaching in upper secondary school is concentrated on written skills and because of this there is no time left for testing oral ability. Indeed, we presume that lack of time is the most common reason for not testing oral skills.

5.2 Questionnaire

The purpose of the study was to examine what kinds of practices and opinions upper secondary school English teachers have on practising, testing and assessing oral skills. In other words, we wanted to find out what is the role of oral skills in upper secondary school today. A quantitative study conducted with a questionnaire was considered to be the most suitable method for collecting the data since it is the most efficient and economical way of reaching a large amount of recipients (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2004). Using a questionnaire is also quicker than conducting a research for instance by interview. However, the questionnaire study includes problems as well. For instance, it is difficult to know how earnestly the respondents have replied to the questionnaire. Furthermore, the response percentage may be low. Moreover, it can be difficult to know how successful the questions have been; it is not easy to control misunderstandings. Nevertheless, our goal was to establish a

comprehensive picture on practising, testing and assessing oral skills and we wanted to reach as many English teachers as possible. Therefore, other methods such as observation or interview would not have been suitable for present purposes.

Since we decided to use a questionnaire, it was essential to first concentrate on planning and designing the questionnaire. Indeed, compiling the questionnaire, sending them to the recipients and receiving them took a considerably long time; in this study this process took approximately five months. We started the planning of the questionnaire by considering to what kinds of questions we would like to get answers with the questionnaire. After this we consulted other studies in the same field. Therefore our questionnaire is a combination of our own questions accompanied by questions from questionnaires in other studies (Romo 1991 and Tattari 2001). We chose to use Romo's and Tattari's questions since the topics of their studies were similar to ours and many of the questions they had used were relevant and useful for our study. Their questions had turned out to be successful in eliciting information from the subjects; thus we decided to include these ready-made and already tested questions and statements in addition to our own. Furthermore, by using the same questions some results from our study are directly comparable to Romo's and Tattari's studies. Questions 1, 3 - 4.1, 8 - 18.1, and statements 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 28, 33, 39 and 42 were of our own. The question 2, and statements 22 - 24, 31 and 36 were originally used in Tattari's pro gradu. Moreover, questions 5 - 7, and statements 26, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40 and 41 were adapted from the study of Romo.

In order to increase the validity of our study we aimed at constructing the questions so that they would be as unambiguous as possible in order to avoid misinterpretations. What is more, when the first version of the questionnaire was ready, we pre-tested it with three teachers from the teacher training school of Jyväskylä (Jyväskylän Normaalikoulu). In addition to feedback from these three pre-testers and our supervisor we consulted Ari Huhta who works as a researcher at Centre for Applied Language Studies in the University of Jyväskylä and who has specialized in language testing and assessment. We then refined the questionnaire based on the feedback we received (see appendix 3).

The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of the research questions (see chapter 5). It consists of nine pages and is divided into four sections. The first part contains seven main background questions which also function as the variables, namely sex, age, university degree, major subject, teacher training, time of teacher training, further education training, official position, teaching experience as an English teacher and time spent in English speaking countries. The second section has four main questions about practising oral skills and the third section includes seven main questions on testing and assessing oral skills. Sections 1 - 3 include both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions. However, there are more multiple choice questions since they are easier and quicker to answer. Open-ended questions (4.1, 10, 11, 14.1, 16, 17.1, 18.1 and 43) are primarily used to receive further information on the topic inquired in the multiple choice questions. Nevertheless, some open-ended questions (10, 11, 16 and 43) are main questions in which we wanted to give the respondents more freedom to express their opinions on certain topics. The fourth part includes twenty-four Likert-type statements concerning oral skills which the teachers had to evaluate by ticking the most suitable alternative based on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (1 - 5). The statements were placed in a thematic order for the respondents to follow the idea behind the statements. Our themes were 1) opinions on oral skills, 2) practising oral skills, 3) factors affecting oral skills, and 4) opinions on testing and assessing oral skills.

5.3 Data collection

The technique we used to collect the data was cluster sampling. The original idea was to include every Finnish upper secondary school in our research. However, such an extensive study would have been too demanding for a pro gradu research; it would have required a great deal more of time and resources and thus we decided to limit the survey to two areas in Finland. Moreover, Soile Tattari (2001) has conducted a study on testing and assessing oral skills in Southern and Middle Häme (which are parts of the county of southern Finland) and therefore we decided to exclude this area from our research.

In order to increase the significance of our study we decided to find partners to cooperate with and to assist us with posting the questionnaires. We decided to turn to the county administrative boards and we sent them e-mails asking whether they would be interested in cooperation with us. Three of them gave us a negative answer but two of them replied positively, namely the county administrative boards of western Finland and Oulu. In the administrative board of the county of western Finland our contact person was Educational Advisor Matti Kangasoja and in the county of Oulu Educational Advisor Veijo Kosola. They were extremely helpful and without their assistance the implementation of our study would have been difficult.

These two county administrative boards kindly agreed to assist us with finding the addresses of the upper secondary schools and in all practical issues concerning postage. Providing us with their help in these practicalities was indispensable. The questionnaires were sent with enclosed self-addressed envelopes including cover letters (see appendix 4). The data was collected in the county of western Finland in November 2005 and in the county of Oulu in January 2006. The reason for collecting the data a little later in the county of Oulu was that they expressed their interest in taking part in our study later than the county of western Finland. In our opinion it was a more suitable time to send the questionnaires at the beginning of the new term rather than right before the Christmas break. We thought that teachers are quite busy right before Christmas, and they probably would not have had time to fill in the questionnaire.

5.4 Subjects

The questionnaires were sent to one English teacher per upper secondary school. 150 questionnaires were sent to the English teachers in the county of western Finland and fifty questionnaires to the county of Oulu. Sixty (39, 3 %) of the delivered questionnaires to the county of western Finland were returned in time but we had to exclude one response because of a misunderstanding. Two questionnaires were returned after the analysis had already started and thus we could not include them in the study. We received twenty-one (42, 0 %) replies out of fifty questionnaires sent to the county of Oulu.

In the data from the county western Finland, most of the subjects were females (81, 4%) and the most common age group was 36 - 45 years (35, 6 %). 28, 8 % were in the category of 46 - 55. Only 15, 3% of the teachers were over 55 years. All subjects had a university degree and most of them (81, 4 %) had English as a major subject. The most common other major subject was another language than English, such as Russian and French. Moreover, every teacher had attended teacher training and the most common decade of attending it was the 1980s (37, 3 %). The second most common time was in the 1990s (28, 8 %). However, up to 23, 7 % had attended teacher training in the 1970s. Only a little over half (52, 6 %) of the teachers had had further education training on oral skills. The most common status among the teachers was upper secondary school teacher (89, 8 %). 6, 8 % of the subjects were extra teachers working full-time. 33, 9 % of the teachers had been working as English teachers over twenty years; 23, 7 % had teaching experience from five to ten years and 22, 0 % between sixteen and twenty years. Approximately a half of the subjects (50, 8 %) had spent from one to six months in English speaking countries and 22, 1 % more than twelve months.

In the county of Oulu 71, 4 % of the respondents were female. The majority of teachers were over 46 years old (85, 8 %) and only 4, 8 % were under 35 years. All the respondents had a university degree, 95, 2 % had a Master's degree and one teacher had a degree of Licentiate of Philosophy. Moreover, almost all (90, 5 %) had had English as their major subject; although, Russian and Swedish were both mentioned once. 90, 5 % of the respondents reported to have attended teacher training, and the slight majority of teachers (55, 0 %) had completed the training in the 1970s. 35, 0 % attended teacher training in the 1980s and only a few (10, 0 %) in the 1990s or later. Furthermore, two thirds of the teachers (66, 7 %) had attended further education training on oral skills at some point during their career while the rest (33, 3 %) had not. Almost all (90, 5 %) teachers worked as upper secondary school teachers; there was one extra teacher working full-time and one teaching in adult upper secondary school. 71, 4 % of the teachers had more than twenty years of teaching experience as English teachers and 14, 3 % been working for less than sixteen years. 42, 9 % had spent from one to six months in English speaking countries and as many as 33, 4 % over twelve months. Moreover, 14, 3 % of the respondents had spent six to twelve months in English speaking countries.

When comparing the subjects from the two counties, the number of male teachers as well as older teachers was larger in the county of Oulu. In addition, more teachers in the county of Oulu had attended further education training on oral skills. Teachers in the county of western Finland had less teaching experience which is connected with the age of the respondents; teachers in this county were younger. There were more teachers in the county of Oulu who had spent more than 12 months in English speaking countries.

When the respondents of the two counties were combined into one group, 78, 8 % were women. The largest age group was between 46 - 55 years (32, 5 %), the second biggest group was 36 - 45 years (28, 8 %) and the teachers over 55 years were the third most common. All respondents had a university degree, and 97, 4 % had a Master's degree. Most teachers had had English as their major subject, while some had had Russian, Swedish, French or German. 97, 5 % had attended teacher training and the most common decades for taking part in it were the 1980s and the 1970s. A little over half (56, 4 %) had had further education training on oral skills. Most respondents (90, 0 %) were upper secondary school teachers and a few were extra teachers working full time (6, 3 %) or substitute teachers (2, 5 %). 43, 8 % had English teaching experience for more than 20 years, 25, 0 % had been working as English teachers for less than 10 years and 20, 0 % had been working for 16 – 20 years. Nearly a half (48, 8 %) had spent from 1 to 6 months in English speaking countries and almost a fifth (18, 8 %) from 6 to 12 months. 25, 1 % of the teachers had spent more than 12 months in English speaking countries and only 1, 3 % not at all.

From the above mentioned background variables university degree, teacher training and official position cannot be used as valid variables since the subject group was too heterogeneous in these aspects to draw any differentiating conclusions.

5.5 Data analysis

The questionnaires were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively and they were both completed and treated anonymously. We used a statistical computer program (SPSS) for the quantitative analysis to which we received help from the Computing Centre of the University of Jyväskylä. We computed the results in the program in numeric form. The data were analyzed with the help of frequency tables, crosstabulations, Chi-square and Pearson correlation coefficients. Frequency tables showed us how the answers were divided in percentages. With the help of crosstabulations we examined the relationships between the background variables and the Likert-type statements and the Chi-square test was used to study the statistical significance of the crosstabulations. Pearson correlation coefficients as well were used in order to find connections among the statements. Some of the open questions were analysed only qualitatively (questions 4.1, 8.1, 14.1, 17.1 and 18.1). Moreover, the comments at the end of the questionnaire were also analyzed only qualitatively.

6 RESULTS

The main purpose of this study was to examine how English oral skills are practised, tested and assessed in Finnish upper secondary schools today; moreover, we wanted to find out what upper secondary school English teachers' attitudes are towards these issues. The data was collected in the county of western Finland and in the county of Oulu. In this chapter we will examine the results in the following order: firstly, the teachers' opinions on oral skills and on practising them will be handled (6.1.1). Furthermore, we will explore how speaking skills are practised (6.1.2), and which factors influence practising them (6.1.3). Secondly, we will look into the teachers' opinions on testing and assessing of oral proficiency (6.2.1), and examine the practices of testing and assessing oral skills (6.2.2). Moreover, factors affecting testing and assessing will be handled in 6.2.3. Thirdly, the statistical significance of the background variables will be discussed (6.3). Finally, the results of the two counties will be compared with each other and the possible discrepancies will be discussed in 6.4.

The following results are frequencies of the results. However, results of the correlations among the statements will be presented side by side with the frequencies since they brought out relationships among the statements. The relationships were examined with the help of Pearson correlation coefficients (r). Appendix 5 shows figures that indicate either positive or negative correlation between the statements. We have excluded all statements from the discussion whose correlation figure was between $-,300$ and $,300$ since they are not considered to be statistically significant. Positive correlation means that the informants have responded similarly to the statements, for instance they agreed with statements 33 and 39. Negative correlation, on the other hand, means that the informants have responded differently to the statements; for instance, they agreed with statement 22 but disagreed with 26. When interpreting the results, it has to be taken into consideration that there is no cause-effect relationship between the statements, i.e. one cannot state which one influences the other.

6.1 Oral skills and practising them

Teachers' opinions on oral skills affect what kind of a position these skills have in a foreign language classroom; the amount of time spent on practising oral proficiency is directly connected with how important the teacher considers this proficiency to be. As mentioned above, one of the objectives of this study was to find out how oral skills are practised in upper secondary school and which factors have an effect on practising oral skills. Additionally, we wanted to discover what the teachers' opinions are towards these issues. The following section will handle these.

6.1.1 Opinions on oral skills

Firstly, we will take a look at what kinds of opinions the teachers had on speaking skills in general. The subjects were asked, for instance, to what extent they value oral skills as part of language proficiency and whether they see teaching these skills as significant in upper secondary school by using a set of statements. Table 5 below illustrates the respondents' reactions to the statements on opinions on speaking proficiency. The letter *n* indicates the number of informants who agreed with the statements, and the figures under the Likert-scale 1-5 show how many per cent of the respondents chose the respective alternative (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree to some extent, 3 = not sure, 4 = disagree to some extent and 5 = strongly disagree).

Table 5 Opinions on oral skills

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
19. When I attended teacher training, teaching oral skills was emphasized.	80	8,8	30,0	17,5	35,0	8,8	3,05	1,168
20. Teaching oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	80	63,8	31,3	2,5	2,5		1,44	,672
21. Teaching written skills in upper secondary is more important than teaching oral skills.	79	19,0	41,8	13,9	19,0	6,3	2,52	1,186
22. My students are shy about speaking English.	77	9,1	27,3	13,0	45,5	5,2	3,10	1,142
23. I use the target language in my lessons whenever possible.	80	66,3	26,3	5,0	2,5		1,44	,709
24. Student's oral skills affect the course grade.	79	10,1	46,8	11,4	21,5	10,1	2,75	1,203
25. Oral skills are an important part of language proficiency.	80	81,3	17,5	1,3			1,20	,433
26. The majority of my students will manage in everyday speaking situations in English after finishing upper secondary school.	80	55,0	35,0	6,3	2,5	1,3	1,60	,821
27. The majority of my students will have achieved sufficient written skills (both in writing and in reading) after finishing upper secondary school.	80	27,5	56,3	13,8	2,5		1,91	,715

Table 5 shows that 38,8 % of the respondents agreed that teaching oral skills had been emphasized when they attended teacher training. On the other hand, up to 43,8 % stated the opposite. Additionally, 17,5 % of all respondents were not sure of their opinion. In other words, the teachers' views were quite evenly divided. A plausible explanation for the different views could be that teacher training has only recently started to lay emphasis on the importance of oral skills in language teaching. Indeed, younger teachers tended to be the ones who agreed with this statement while the older respondents were inclined to disagree (see 6.3, p. 106).

Virtually all of the teachers (98,8 %) agreed with the statement that oral skills are an important part of language proficiency. There was only one respondent out of 80

who was not sure of this. What is more, the majority (63, 8 %) agreed strongly that teaching oral skills is important in upper secondary school. Indeed, 95, 1 % agreed with this statement. It is therefore clear that the teachers generally regarded speaking skills as an inseparable part of language proficiency and they recognized the importance of practising these skills as well. However, there were still some in the county of western Finland who did not agree teaching of oral skills to be essential. Furthermore, over half of the respondents (60, 8 %) thought that teaching written skills in upper secondary school is more important than teaching oral skills, and as many as 13, 9 % were not sure which of these skills was more important. This did not come as a surprise since teaching written skills has traditionally been the focus in upper secondary schools and mainly these skills are tested in the Matriculation Examination. Nevertheless, 25, 3 % of the respondents did not consider written skills to be any more important than speaking skills. What is more, the correlations (see appendix 5) indicated that teachers who claimed teaching of written skills in upper secondary school to be more essential than teaching oral skills also tended to think that testing oral skills makes teachers' work more difficult.

However, even though it is a well-known fact that Finnish upper secondary schools lay more emphasis on written skills than on oral skills in their curriculum, it was an unexpected result that as many as 31, 6 % of the teachers reported that the student's oral skills do not have an effect on the course grade. Then again, 59, 0 % stated that they never test speaking proficiency which may explain why many teachers do not take the students' oral skills account in the course grade (see 6.2.2, p. 97). However, the majority of the teachers (56, 9 %) took the students' oral skills into account when giving them course grades. As we will see later (6.2.2), our respondents used both tests and other methods, such as continuous monitoring and language laboratory exercises, for assessing their students' oral ability. It seems that even though oral skills are considered to be an important part of foreign language proficiency and it is thought to be essential to teach these skills in upper secondary school, there are many teachers who do not pay attention to the actual speaking proficiency of the students nor do they assess it.

Today language teachers are encouraged to use the target language for all interaction in the classroom. Most of the teachers (92, 6 %) claimed that they use English

whenever it is possible during their lessons. One has to keep in mind though that every teacher has their own interpretation of the phrase “whenever possible”; for some it may mean using English literally for all kinds of interaction with the students and for others it may mean saying only a few words in English per lesson. Moreover, this result may either reveal teachers’ attitude to using English in their English lessons or it could indicate to what extent they would actually like to use it.

Finns have conventionally been considered as rather timid about speaking foreign languages (see e.g. Yli-Renko 1991: 60). In the light of this it was not surprising that 36, 4 % of the respondents estimated their students to be shy about speaking English. However, approximately half of them (50, 7 %) did not consider their students to be timid English speakers. It is notable that many teachers (13, 0 %) were not able to estimate their students’ shyness of using the target language. Even though a considerable number of teachers regarded their students as shy English speakers, almost all of the teachers (90, 0 %) thought that their students will manage in everyday speaking situations after finishing upper secondary school. Still there were a few who disagreed with this (3, 8 %). Indeed, there was a negative correlation between whether the teachers considered their students to be shy English speakers and whether they believed in their students’ ability to cope in everyday speaking situations. In other words, those who regarded their students as timid tended to feel that they would not be able to handle day-to-day conversations.

What is more, a significant majority of the respondents (83, 8 %) believed that their students will have sufficient written skills when leaving upper secondary school. Indeed, this statement correlated positively with the above mentioned one (see appendix 5). In other words, those who viewed that their students will manage in everyday speaking situations after finishing upper secondary school also thought they will attain adequate written skills as well. However, it was fairly surprising that the teachers believed so strongly that their students’ oral skills are sufficient enough to handle day-to-day communication situations when they finish upper secondary school. We anticipated instead that the teachers would have more faith in the students’ written skills than in their speaking skills since the written skills are paid so much attention in upper secondary school. It seems that the teachers trust that the

students will achieve both adequate written and oral skills by the end of upper secondary school, whether in school or elsewhere.

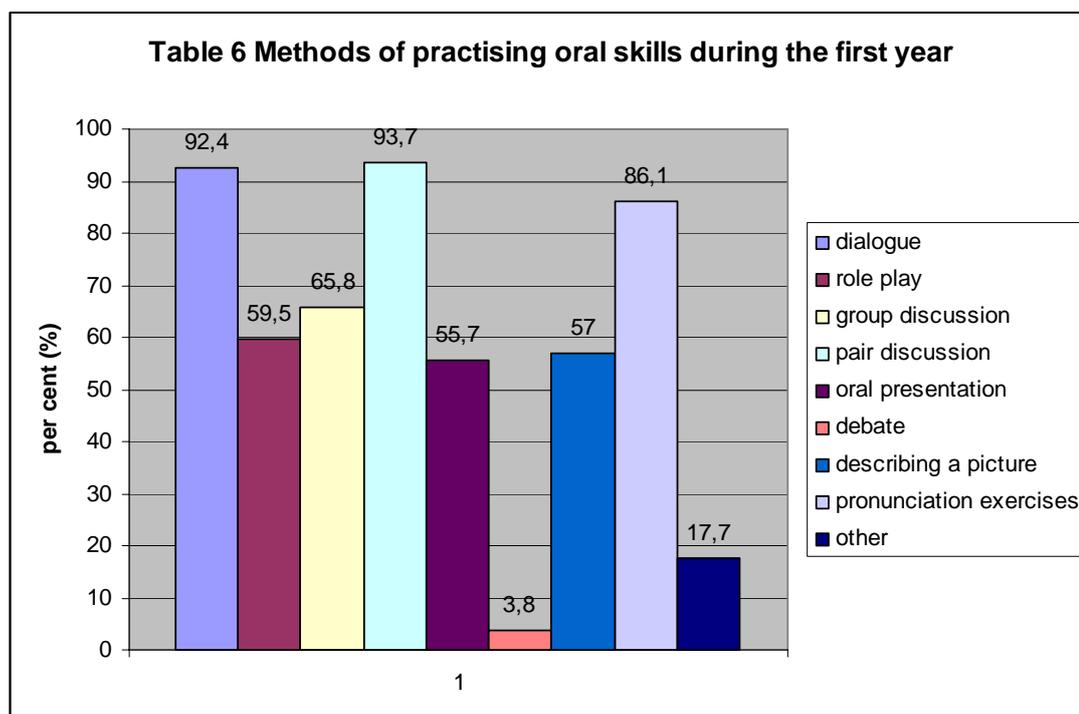
All in all, teachers seemed to have a positive attitude towards practising oral skills and almost everyone agreed that these skills are an important part of language proficiency and that these skills ought to be taught in upper secondary school. Moreover, most teachers reported to use English whenever possible in their lessons. The majority of teachers noted however that teaching written skills in upper secondary school is more important than teaching oral skills. What is more, there was a considerable number of respondents (mainly older ones) who stated that speaking skills had not been particularly emphasized when they were in teacher training. Additionally, it was surprising that over a third stated that oral skills do not have an effect on the course grade; on the other hand, a slight majority mentioned they do. Furthermore, teachers seemed to be confident about their students acquiring both written and oral skills in upper secondary school even though many considered their students to be shy English speakers. This result indicates that teachers believed in the ability of upper secondary school to provide students with adequate written and oral skills.

6.1.2 Practising oral skills

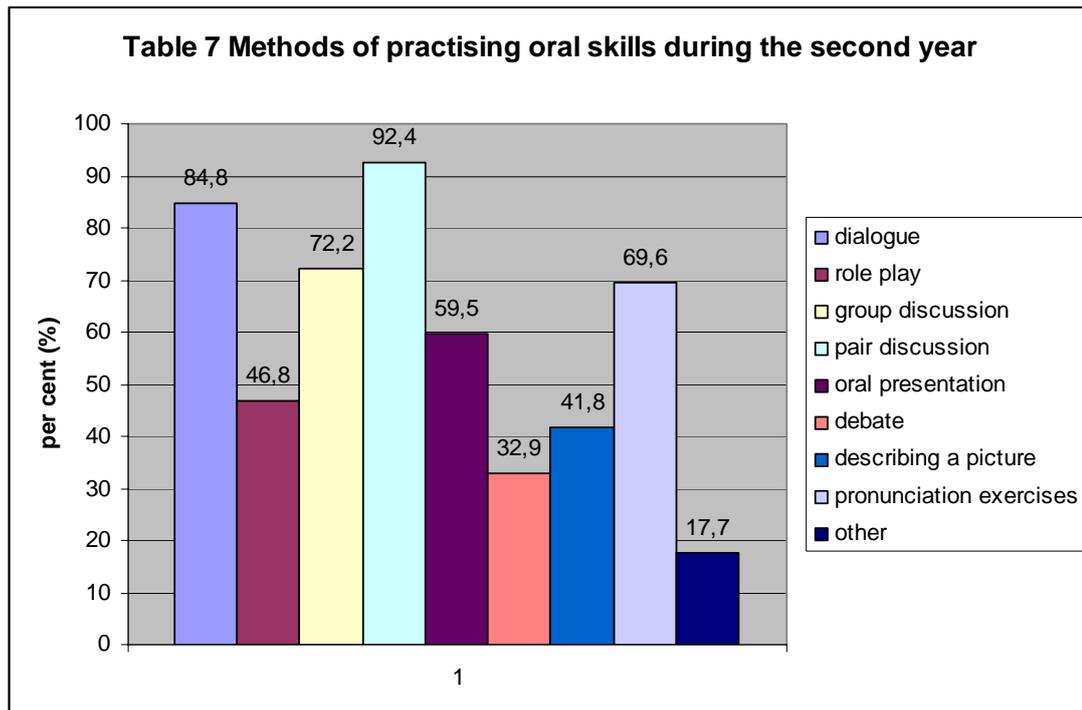
In addition to inquiring the teachers' opinions on oral skills, they were asked about how they teach and practise these skills. The majority of the respondents (80, 0 %) reported that the upper secondary school where they teach offers a course specifically on oral skills. Moreover, most of the teachers (83, 9 %) taught such a course if it was offered. Many schools thus provide their students with a course in which speaking skills are the main focus and where they can improve these skills. Nevertheless, since the special course is optional, it is clear that not all students decide to take it.

Furthermore, practically every teacher (one had left this question unanswered in the county of western Finland) claimed that they practise oral skills in English lessons. The teachers were given a list of methods for practising speaking skills and they

were asked to choose which of them they use during the first year (courses 1, 2 and 3), during the second year (courses 4, 5 and 6) and in the third year (courses 7 and 8). Table 6 shows which of these methods were used during the first three courses (first year) in upper secondary school.



As Table 6 indicates the most often used ways of practising oral skills were pair discussions (93, 7 %), dialogues (92, 4 %) and pronunciation exercises (86, 1 %). In addition to these, almost all of the given methods were widely used with the exception of debates; only a few (3, 8 %) teachers said they used debates with the first year students. Perhaps this is because debating would be too demanding for them. Some (17, 7 %) teachers mentioned other methods as well, such as interviews, explaining words, games, summarizing the contents of the text they are working on, reading aloud, discussions with the entire class, songs, dictating in pairs etc.



As one can see in Table 7, the most common methods of practising speaking skills during the courses 4, 5 and 6 (second year) were pair discussions (92, 4 %), dialogues (84, 8 %) and group discussions (72, 2 %). All the other methods were often used as well. It is noticeable that while teachers had not used debates with the first year students, up to 32, 9 % of them mentioned using this method with the second year students. The other methods used during the courses 4 - 6 were games, recordings, explaining words, interviews, songs etc. The methods were thus similar to the ones used during the courses 1 - 3. One teacher mentioned that her 'students can teach if they want' and she offers this chance during the course 5. Nevertheless, she did not specify what this meant nor did she mention how many take this opportunity. The same teacher also mentioned using a 'speaker's corner' where the students can defend their opinion. Unfortunately, she did not explain this further either.

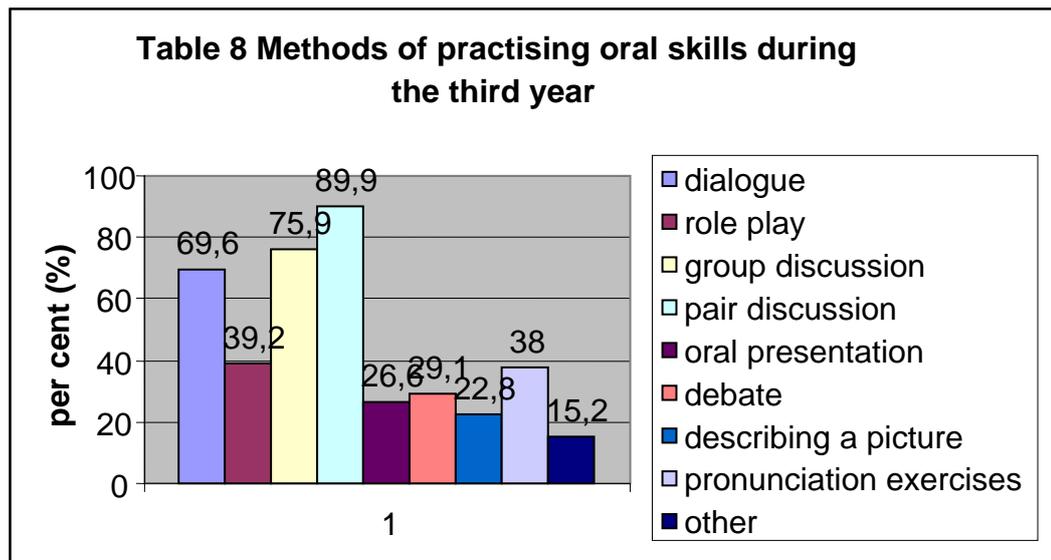
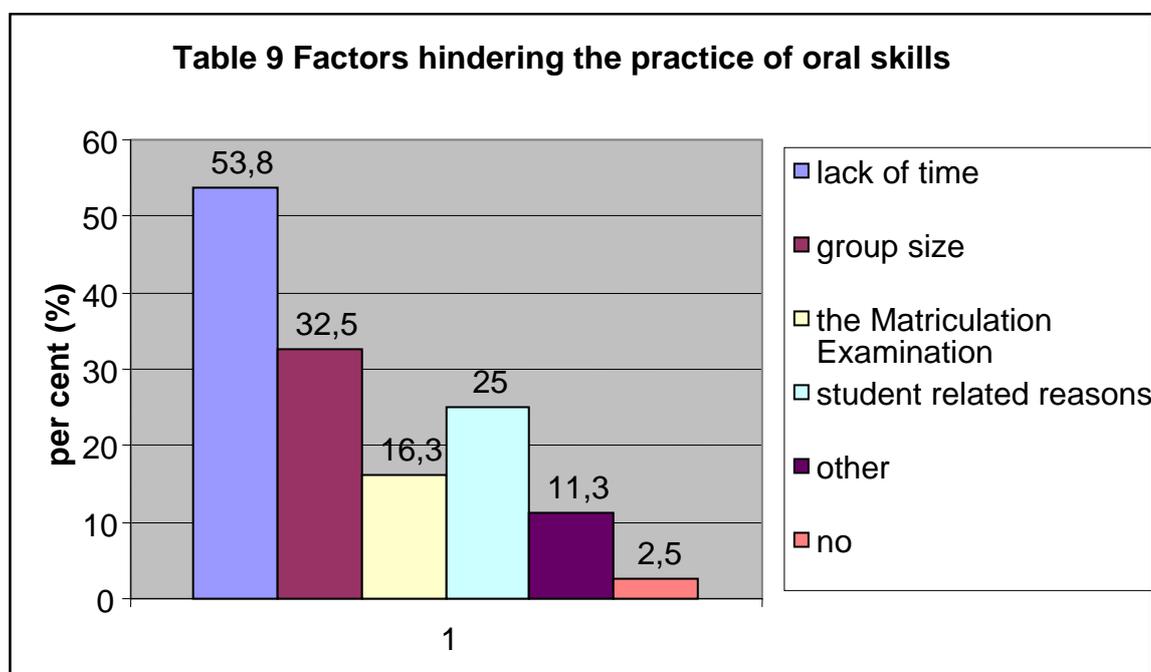


Table 8 shows which ways of practising oral skills were used during the voluntary courses 7 and 8 (third year). Again pair discussion (89, 9 %) seemed to be the most popular method. Group discussions (75, 9 %) and dialogues (69, 6 %) were also commonly used while such methods as role plays (39, 2 %), oral presentations (26, 6 %) and debates (29, 1 %) were less popular. The other methods (15, 2 %) used included explaining words, interviews, class discussions, using English in real life situations etc. Nevertheless, the percentages indicate that teachers practise oral proficiency less during the courses 7 and 8. Indeed, as one teacher mentioned, during the third year the emphasis is on written skills due to the nature of the Matriculation Examination and teachers tend to use even less time on practising oral skills.

In sum, most schools offered a specific optional course on oral skills and most respondents taught such a course. What is more, practically all the teachers reported to practise speaking skills during the obligatory courses. The methods used to practise these skills with during the first year were discussions, dialogues and pronunciation exercises. During the second year oral skills were practised with pair discussions, dialogues and group discussions and during the third year with pair discussions, group discussions and dialogues. The methods used were thus alike throughout the upper secondary school. However, it seems that oral skills were not practised as often during the third year as during the first two years.

6.1.3 Factors influencing practising oral skills

Even though the respondents reported to practise oral skills and they seemed to use various kinds of methods for this purpose, practising speaking skills is claimed to be particularly problematic (see e.g. Huttunen, I., Paakkunainen, R. and Pohjala, K. 1995: 12 – 13). One of the reasons for this may be that the classroom is considered to be a challenging environment for practising oral skills. Therefore we asked the teachers (with an open-ended question) whether they thought there were any factors which hinder the practice of speaking proficiency in their classes. They were asked to give examples of such factors if they thought there were any.



As expected, Table 9 shows that the most common factor hindering the practice of oral skills was lack of time (53, 8 %). In addition to this, several teachers mentioned group size (32, 5 %) as a hindering factor. These two factors were often mentioned in relation to each other. In other words, lack of time was often caused by big group sizes. Furthermore, one respondent complained that she is disturbed by the noise which oral exercises produce. Additionally, many respondents stated that it takes so much time to practise written skills (= the skills that are tested in the Matriculation

Examination) that they simply do not have time for practising speaking skills. Yet another teacher pointed out that ‘Having enough time is always a problem. The lower the course [the less advanced] ²⁾, the more time is spent in oral practise. In courses 7 – 8 reading comprehension plus grammar takes most of the time’. Moreover, according to one teacher the ‘unrealistic expectations in the national final exams’ are a difficulty – only written and mostly passive language skills are tested. We assume that with the national final exams this teacher was referring to the Matriculation Examination. One of the respondents noted that it is best to prioritize those aspects that produce concrete results more quickly. He did not give any further explanation on this. However, our interpretation of his argument was that he feels it is difficult to see any actual improvement in the students’ skills when practising oral skills.

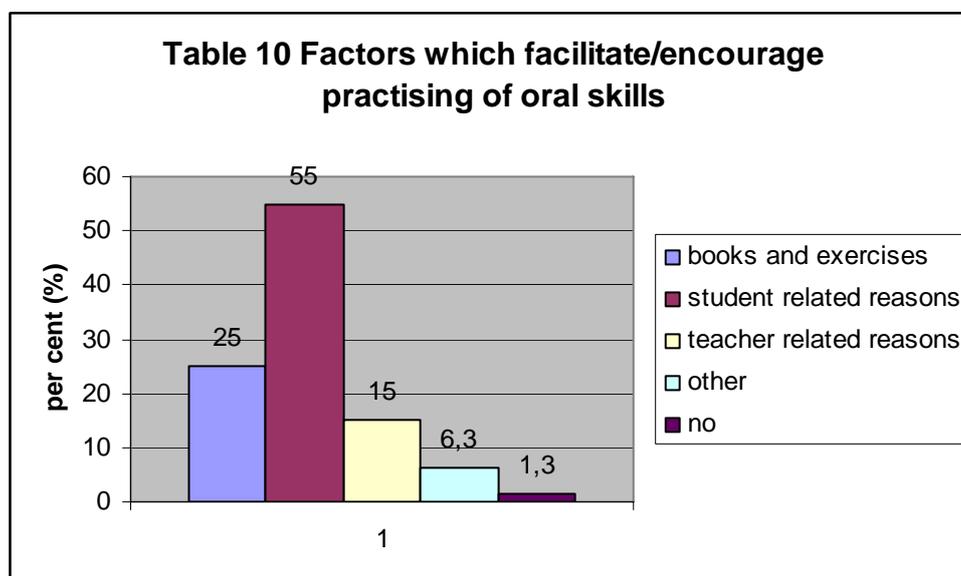
Student related reasons (25, 0 %) such as students’ shyness, lack of motivation, complicated social relations in class, students’ poor oral skills etc. were the third most often occurring reply. For instance, several teachers complained that their students suffer from general inefficiency and that students do not believe in their own skills to speak English. One teacher claimed that some of her students are so restless that there is no point even to try to do speaking exercises with them since they will end up doing everything else except talking in English. What is more, another respondent stated that ‘The students seem to have no earlier practice (in comprehensive school) and the fact that so many seem to be too shy to say a word’. Moreover, according to one respondent, students coming from families with no TV or no access to computers or films tend to be timid and shy as regards speaking. For instance, students with such a religious conviction that does not allow TV or computers can be problematic since their exposure to English is limited. Moreover, some teachers blamed heterogeneous groups for making practising speaking skills difficult. In other words, some students have better English skills than others and thus it can be difficult for instance to find exercises that suit everyone. Furthermore, one of the respondents introduced an important teacher related problem. He stated that

²⁾ authors’ comment

(1)

the previous teacher had a destructive influence on the students' motivation. If I give them a conversation exercise, they ignore it and talk about their own affairs in Finnish. It seems wiser to spend the precious little time we have on something where I can see what they are doing, eg. written vocabulary exercises.

Indeed, it can be problematic to get students to accept new or different ways of doing things. It is worth noticing that there were only two teachers out of 80 who mentioned that there are no factors hindering practice of oral skills. It is thus obvious that numerous teachers view practising oral skills challenging.



Nevertheless, even though there are factors hindering the practice of oral skills, it does not mean that there are not any factors which encourage teachers to practise them. Table 10 shows what kinds of answers the respondents gave to an open-ended question asking whether there were any factors facilitating or encouraging them to practise speaking skills with their students. The most frequent mentioned factors were either student related, such as students' motivation, and good books and exercises. For instance, one teacher wrote that 'students are aware of the importance of oral skills in English in their future studies and careers so they are motivated to practise'. Other teachers as well pointed out that their students realize the importance

of speaking proficiency and thus they are eager to learn to speak English. Moreover, many teachers thought that students like talking and thus enjoy lessons with oral exercises. Some teachers noted that when speaking the students learn just as well as when doing written exercises. In addition, students with good oral skills often encourage others to speak.

Some teachers noted that the course books and exercises in them encourage the teachers to practise speaking skills. According to many they provide plenty of inspiring material that the teachers can use in order to practise oral skills. Many respondents also pointed out that other sources in addition to course books provide a great deal of material for practising oral proficiency.

Teacher related factors, such as the teachers' attitude, were often reported as well. For instance, a few teachers mentioned that they believe in learning by doing, which encourages them to teach oral skills. Another respondent stated that she has adopted a method through which almost everything can be dealt with through oral practice in class. Furthermore, one respondent pointed out an important point of view by noting that 'the teacher can encourage or discourage a lot by her own personality!'. In other words, an inspiring teacher is more likely to get her students to practise oral skills. Moreover, when the teacher feels that her workload is reasonable, she has more energy to encourage the students as well. In short, teacher's positive attitude towards oral skills affects positively practising these skills. Indeed, the correlations between the Likert-type statements indicated that if oral skills were regarded an important part of language proficiency, it was also deemed essential to teach these skills in upper secondary school. In other words, if the teachers valued oral skills, they tended to feel that these skills should be taken into consideration in teaching as well (see appendix 5).

Moreover, four teachers mentioned relaxed atmosphere in class to be a factor which makes practising oral skills easier. On the other hand, many respondents also claimed that doing oral exercises creates an unconstrained atmosphere. Some mentioned exchange students, visitors, radio, TV, youth culture and school trips as positive incentives. For instance, one teacher had taken her students to a cottage for one weekend where they talked in English. Other factors mentioned were a special course

on oral skills and relaxed atmosphere in class. In short, most teachers reported factors that encourage them to practise speaking skills; only one teacher out of 80 stated that there are no such factors encouraging her to practise oral skills.

In addition to the two open-ended questions handled above, factors influencing practising oral skills also came up in the statements. Thus in Table 11 one can see how the teachers responded to the statements concerning factors affecting practising speaking skills.

Table 11 Factors influencing practising oral skills

	N	1	2	3	4	5	x	S
39. I have received enough training on how to teach oral skills.	80	10,0	36,3	17,5	30,0	6,3	2,86	1,145
40. A sufficient amount of good oral exercises in English is included in the teaching material at my disposal	80	38,8	45,0	6,3	8,8	1,3	1,89	,955
41. The size of classes is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	80	31,3	40,0	8,8	17,5	2,5	2,20	1,141
42. The Matriculation Examination serves as a hidden curriculum (it dominates teaching) in upper secondary school.	79	48,1	44,3	5,1	2,5		1,62	,704

Even though the majority of the respondents agreed that practising oral skills in upper secondary school is important (see 6.1.1, p. 77), it is notable that less than half of our respondents (46, 3 %) stated they had received enough training on how to teach oral skills and as many as 36, 3 % claimed they had not (see Table 11). Moreover, the correlations between the Likert-type statements revealed that those teachers who reported to have received enough training on teaching speaking skills claimed they had had sufficient training on testing and assessing as well (see appendix 5). On the other hand, teachers who were not satisfied with the amount of training they had had on teaching oral skills, tended to feel they had not received enough training on how to test and assess these skills either. Additionally, the

respondents with enough training on teaching oral skills thought that when they had attended teacher training, oral skills had been emphasized. Furthermore, teachers who were content with the amount of training on oral skills tended to feel that they have enough oral exercises at hand. In other words, they probably know better where to look for additional teaching material to practise oral proficiency with and how to develop their own exercises than teachers who had not received enough training on teaching oral skills. It seems thus that training on teaching, testing and assessing go hand in hand. It is plausible that if oral skills are a topic in teacher training or in further education training, all the aspects concerning it (teaching, testing and assessing) are dealt with. In short, it seems that training on oral skills has reached some of the teachers while some have been left out.

In many Finnish upper secondary schools the size of groups is big (up to forty students) and many teachers (71, 3 %) agreed that class size hinders the development of students' oral proficiency. However, as many as 20, 0 % said that the size of classes is not a problem. This issue also came up in the answers to one of the open-ended questions (see 6.1.3, p. 83). Moreover, a significant majority (83, 8 %) agreed that they had enough good oral exercises at hand which they could use. Only one in ten (10, 1 %) stated they did not have enough good exercises at their disposal. Indeed, many respondents seemed to be content with the amount and quality of oral exercises (see also 6.1.3, p. 86).

It is argued that language teachers focus too much on teaching and practising written skills since only these skills are tested in the Matriculation Examination (see e.g. Huttunen et al. 1995). Indeed, almost every teacher (92, 4 %) agreed that the Matriculation Examination serves as a hidden curriculum in upper secondary school. There were only two respondents who disagreed to some extent with this statement. In other words, teachers are to a great extent affected by what is tested; it is only natural that the focus of teaching is on those skills that are actually tested. What is more, the correlations showed that teachers who stated to have received enough training on how to teach oral skills were inclined to think that the Matriculation Examination does not serve as a hidden curriculum in upper secondary school (see appendix 5). Perhaps teachers with sufficient training on oral skills do not consider the Matriculation Examination as a restricting factor in teaching oral skills.

To conclude, it is not the lack of good exercises that inhibit teaching oral skills since the majority reported that they have enough oral exercises at their disposal. It seems that many teachers are insecure of how to teach and practise speaking skills, which could have a negative effect on practising these skills. Indeed, there were many teachers who claimed they had not received enough training on practising oral skills. In fact, training on oral skills (or lack of it) seemed to have an effect on several issues concerning practice of these skills. For instance, those teachers who had had enough training on oral skills were also content with the amount of good oral exercises at hand. Moreover, if the Matriculation Examination serves as a hidden curriculum in upper secondary school (many teachers agreed with this), it is logical that it affects practising oral skills because the written skills are underlined to such a large extent. Indeed, oral skills are practised less in courses 7 and 8 (third year) when written skills are stressed even more and the Matriculation Examination is drawing closer. However, even though all teachers claimed they practise oral skills with their students, their opinion does not reveal exactly how much time they spend on it. In any case, teachers told about problems in practising oral skills such as lack of time, big groups and several student related reasons. Nevertheless, they also mentioned factors, such as good books and exercises and students' motivation, that encourage them to practise oral skills with their students.

6.2 Testing and assessing oral skills

When certain skills are taught, it is natural that they are also tested and assessed. However, when speaking skills are concerned, the history of testing and assessing them is rather short compared to those of written skills. This has its implications on how and how often oral skills are tested and assessed presently. Thus, in addition to examining issues concerning practising speaking proficiency in upper secondary school, we also wanted to find out how this proficiency is tested and assessed. Moreover, another aim was to discover what kinds of opinions English teachers have on testing and assessing oral skills. In the following, we will therefore first concentrate on the respondents' opinions and then we will discuss factors which influence testing and assessing oral skills. Furthermore, the practices of testing and assessing will be examined.

6.2.1 Opinions on testing and assessing oral skills

We wanted to find out how the teachers felt about testing and assessing oral skills, for instance, if they were of the opinion that speaking skills should be tested in the Matriculation Examination. Thus Table 12 presents teachers' opinions on these issues. As mentioned above, the Likert-scale was as follows: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree to some extent, 3 = not sure, 4 = disagree to some extent and 5 = strongly disagree.

Table 12 Opinions on testing and assessing oral skills

	N	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
28. Testing oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	80	15,0	38,8	23,8	20,0	2,5	2,56	1,054
29. The present Matriculation Examination adequately tests students' foreign language ability	80	2,5	40,0	23,8	30,0	3,8	2,93	,978
30. A section testing foreign language oral skills should be included in the Matriculation Examination.	80	16,3	33,8	23,8	11,3	15,0	2,75	1,288
31. Students would be more motivated to practise oral skills if these skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination.	80	40,0	38,8	11,3	5,0	5,0	1,96	1,084
32. If foreign language skills are tested at the end of upper secondary school, the test should be optional for students.	80	18,8	31,3	30,0	17,5	2,5	2,54	1,067
34. The present Matriculation Examination is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	80	10,0	31,3	18,8	25,0	15,0	3,04	1,257
35. If a section testing foreign language oral skills is included in the Matriculation Examination, the test will become more stressful for students.	80	42,5	31,3	16,3	10,0		1,94	,998
36. Testing oral skills makes the teachers' work more difficult.	80	46,3	30,0	11,3	11,3	1,3	1,91	1,070
37. The assessing of oral skills is more difficult than the assessing of other language skills.	79	22,8	36,7	10,1	22,8	7,6	2,56	1,278

First of all, only a little over half of the respondents (53, 8 %) believed that testing oral skills in upper secondary school is important, and there were a considerable number of teachers (22, 5 %) who disagreed with this idea. It should be noticed that as many as 23, 8 % of respondents were not sure what their opinion was on this matter. Moreover, one of the most revealing statements was statement 30, which was designed to find out whether the teachers would like to have a test on speaking skills included in the Matriculation Examination. Half of the respondents (50, 1 %) agreed with this. Here as well there were teachers (23, 8 %) who could not state their opinion. It seemed that approximately half of the teachers do not find testing oral skills important nor do they want such a test in the Matriculation Examination.

In fact, relatively high correlations were detected between whether the teachers considered teaching and testing oral skills to be important and whether they thought that a test on these skills should be included in the Matriculation Examination. In other words, teachers who viewed teaching and testing to be significant were also of the opinion that an oral skills test is needed in the Matriculation Examination. What is more, teachers who wanted an oral test in the Matriculation Examination thought that it would motivate the students to practise oral skills more, and that it should be an obligatory part of the exam. Moreover, these teachers believed that an oral test in the Matriculation Examination would neither increase the stress of the students nor make the teachers' work more difficult (see appendix 5).

Nevertheless, 42, 5 % of the teachers agreed that the current Matriculation Examination adequately tests students' foreign language ability. In other words, they felt that the present Matriculation Examination testing merely written and listening skills is good enough. On the other hand, there were quite many (23, 8 %) who were not sure of their opinion. As many as 33, 8 % disagreed; in their opinion the present Matriculation Examination is not sufficient in testing students' language aptitude. Moreover, teachers who felt that the present Matriculation Examination is sufficient in testing students' foreign language skills, tended to see that there is no need for an oral test in the Matriculation Examination or if such a test is included it at least should be optional for the students (see appendix 5). In their opinion the current Matriculation Examination is adequate as it is and they are not eager to include an oral test in it.

Furthermore, there was a great deal of deviation in the answers to the statement whether the present Matriculation Examination is considered to hinder the development of students' oral skills. 41, 3 % of teachers agreed with this statement while practically as many (40, 0 %) disagreed. Furthermore, the correlations indicated that teachers who claimed that the present Matriculation Examination is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills believed that students would be more motivated to practise oral skills if these were tested in the Matriculation Examination (see appendix 5).

What is more, including a section testing oral skills in the Matriculation Examination is argued to increase the stress of the students, and the majority of our respondents (73, 8 %) agreed with this claim. Some of the teachers (16, 3 %) were not able to take a stand and only one in ten (10, 0 %) thought a test on speaking skills would not increase the students' stress. Correlations indicated that the teachers who were for an optional oral test in the Matriculation Examination also viewed that such a test would make the students more stressed (see appendix 5).

Furthermore, most teachers (78, 8 %) believed that students' motivation for practising speaking skills would increase if these skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination. Only 10, 0 % disagreed with this statement. This finding could indicate that at present the students are not motivated enough to practise oral skills since these skills are not tested in the Matriculation Examination. Furthermore, a half of the respondents (50, 1 %) thought that a test on oral skills should be optional for students while 20, 0 % were for an obligatory test. Many teachers (30, 0 %) had not formed an opinion on this matter. Half of the respondents seemed to think that it should be the student's decision whether she wants to take a test on oral skills or not. In addition, correlations indicated that the teachers who thought testing oral skills would increase the students' stress tended to be for an optional oral test instead of a compulsory test. It is obvious that teachers who were afraid that an oral skills' test would increase the stress of students were of the opinion that such a test should not be included in the Matriculation Examination. It seemed, thus, that teachers who were not that keen on the idea of testing oral skills seemed to have their reasons for their opinion. However, they appeared to think that if testing oral skills is necessary, it at least should be optional for students (see appendix 5).

Similarly, many teachers (76, 3 %) viewed that testing oral skills makes teachers' work more difficult and only 12, 6 % disagreed that testing oral skills would have such an effect. In addition, six out of ten respondents (59, 5 %) claimed that assessing oral skills is more difficult than assessing other language skills. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why so many of them did not test oral skills or take these skills into consideration when giving their students the course grades (see 6.1.1, p. 77 and 6.2.2, p. 97). However, there were still many (30, 4 %) who disagreed. Moreover, correlations showed that the teachers who were of the opinion that testing oral skills makes their work more difficult were inclined to think that assessing oral skills is more demanding than assessing other language skills; additionally, they also thought that an oral skills' test in the Matriculation Examination would make the examination more stressful for the students (see appendix 5).

However, if testing speaking proficiency in upper secondary school was considered important, it was also believed that testing does not make teachers' work more difficult; similarly, it was thought that the possible test on oral skills should not be optional. What is more, if testing of oral skills was regarded as important, the assessment of oral skills was not deemed to be any more difficult than assessing of other language skills.

At the end of the questionnaire we provided the teachers with an opportunity to write any comments they wished to express about oral skills, the questionnaire etc. Many respondents used this chance and they gave many interesting and insightful comments mainly on testing and assessing speaking skills. To begin with, several teachers claimed that lack of money is a central problem when it comes to testing and assessing oral skills. According to one respondent,

(2)

the only problem in that is the huge amount of work an oral test in the Examination will create for teachers. We won't do that without proper pay! Who is going to provide the money needed? Assessing and training the pupils is not the problem. Money is, and also the question on how to create equal test conditions for all the pupils taking the oral examination at the same time.

Quite many respondents expressed their worry about the increasing workload that testing oral proficiency would bring. They felt that teacher's work is already too time-consuming as it is and testing oral skills would make the situation even worse. To quote two female respondents,

(3)

Oral testing is a good idea if the YTL [The Matriculation Examination Board] take care of designing it, collecting the student data and evaluating it. That could keep a few people occupied for a whole semester... Language teachers in general are not in to it. I personally feel that the matriculation exam could be entirely evaluated by YTL, too much extra work for us with a ridiculous compensation of about 1 €h.

(4)

Language teachers have enough work already so I do hope that there won't be a test on oral skills in the matriculation examination in the near future. Separate tests and someone, not me, testing oral skills. Students like oral exercises, why take the fun out of it, why make it compulsory?

Indeed, there were other teachers as well who were afraid that testing oral skills would turn practising these skills into something compulsory and thus boring in the eyes of students.

There were some teachers who commented on the difficulties concerning testing. For instance, a few teachers argued that it is difficult create authentic and natural test situations. Moreover, the lack of national guidelines concerning testing and assessing oral skills is also viewed problematic. Two male teachers put it like this:

(5)

Including the testing of oral skills in the Matriculation Examination would, of course, make the examination results more reliable as far as students overall language skills are concerned. However, as long as there are no reliable national assessing principles and an agreement on how to compensate the extra work to the teachers involved in the testing, I see no reason to suggest testing oral skills as part of the Matriculation Examination.

(6)

Oral skills will be learned after school in real life situations. The school must give the starting point and when students need the oral skills in practice they have no bigger problems. At school the situations are not natural, students practise oral skills after classes, too.

Among the respondents there were a few who said that they want their students to do well in the Matriculation Examination and to prepare them for university studies, and thus they want to concentrate on written skills. In one respondent's words: 'students and parents emphasize the importance of the Matriculation Exam, that's why teaching oral skills will be considered of minor importance as long as it is not tested there'. Another teacher claimed that

(7)

Making the testing of speaking skills into a compulsory part of the Matriculation Exam would place languages in an unfair position. If you think it should be done, then do you also think that the biology exam should include a trip to the forest, or the chemistry exam – a set of lab experiments, etc.? I think it is the skills of abstraction, rather than practical skills, that should be tested in the Exam. I think the lukio should be preserved as an academically-oriented school, in contrast to the practically-oriented vocational schools.

This comment was rather surprising; is it indeed so that the upper secondary school should be academically oriented and does this include that oral skills and testing them have no room in lesson plans? Moreover, there were some teachers who simply thought that testing speaking proficiency is neither important nor necessary. Many were of the opinion that there are too many tests in upper secondary school as it is and no additional ones are needed. Some of the respondents believed that when one has learned the written skills, one can easily manage with oral skills as well. There was one teacher whose opinion was that the benefits of taking the test seem marginal. Testing oral skills can, according to one teacher, lead to limiting the types and occasions of oral activities. He was afraid that teachers would just arrange oral tasks in the way oral skills are tested in the final exam; as a consequence the students might not appreciate and enjoy oral activities any longer.

Even though the majority of the respondents seemed to have a rather sceptical perception of testing and assessing oral proficiency, there were some who had a different view. One respondent claimed that oral skills can have a positive effect on students' written skills. She stated that

(8)

I have found that teaching oral skills has improved writing skills as well because once a student learns how to express him/herself orally it is easier to put the same thoughts into writing. Several of my students who have been on the brink of failing English have improved their overall English skills after attending the oral skills course and have ended up in succeeding quite nicely in the Matriculation Examination with the composition part being their strongest part of the exam! They have learned to "talk" through the composition making it fluent and very readable.

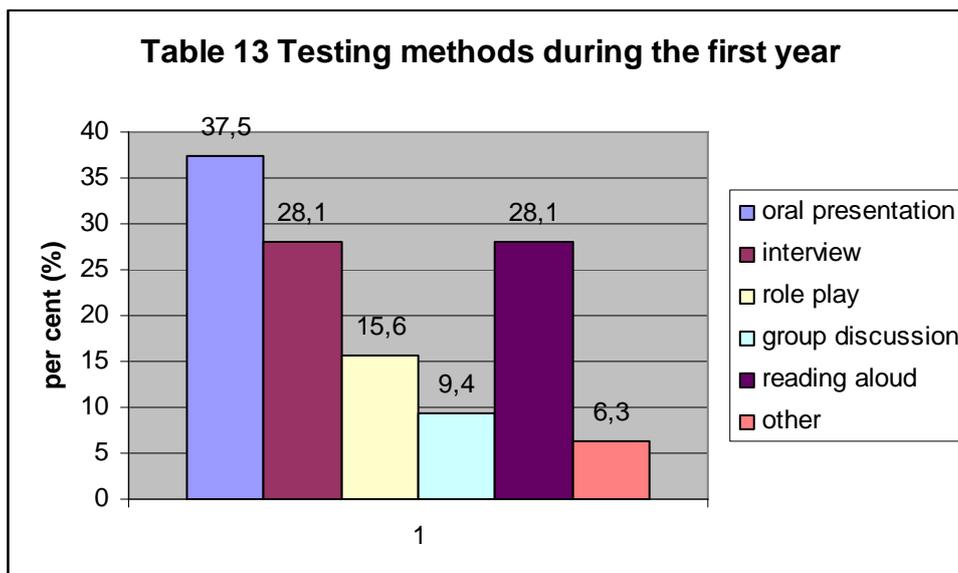
Whether it is that testing oral skills is an unknown field or whether it is teachers' individual differences which cause the great variation in teachers' opinions, is difficult to estimate. It seemed difficult for several teachers to form their opinion on oral skills testing. One reason for this might be that there are neither official national guidelines for testing speaking skills nor past experience of it. However, half of the respondents were of the opinion that testing oral skills is important and that such a test should be part of the Matriculation Examination. Many seemed to think that students would be more motivated to practise oral skills if these skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination. In addition, several teachers considered the present Matriculation Examination to hamper the development of the students' oral proficiency. Nevertheless, many were of the opinion that the present Matriculation Examination serves well in testing the students' language ability and if oral skills were tested at the end of upper secondary school, it should be every student's individual choice whether they want to take the test or not. The majority thought that testing oral skills as a part of the Matriculation Examination increases the stress of the students and would also make teachers' work more difficult. What is more, many teachers thought that assessing speaking proficiency is more difficult than assessing other language skills.

6.2.2 Practices of testing and assessing

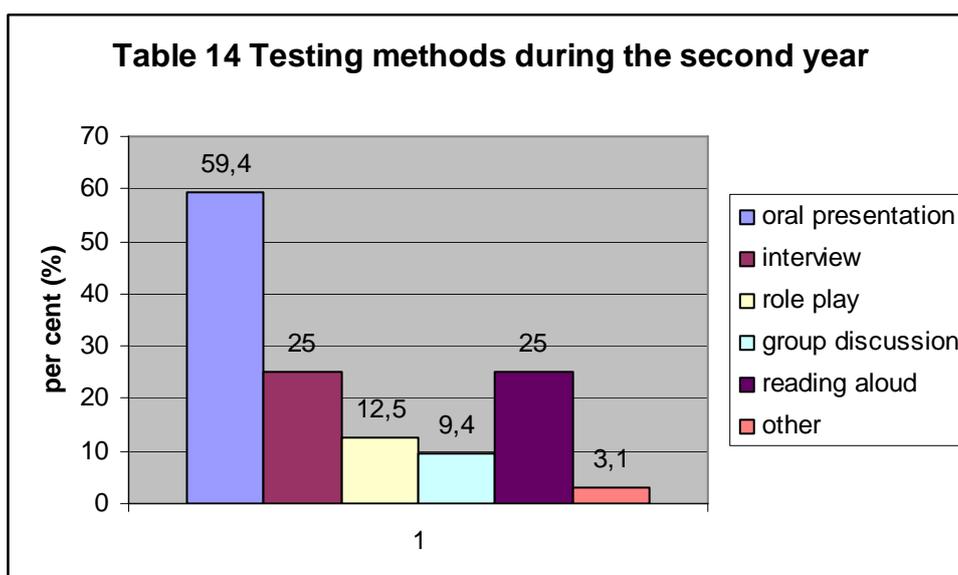
We also asked the respondents about how they test and assess oral skills. To start with, 62, 0 % of the respondents reported that their upper secondary schools organize a voluntary oral skills test at the end of the third year. Consequently, while approximately six out of ten students had the opportunity to take the voluntary test, there were a considerable number of students who did not. There could be several reasons for not organizing the voluntary test, such as lack of resources. It is obvious, however, that students are not on an equal footing concerning this issue.

Furthermore, we were surprised by the fact that as many as 59, 0 % reported they never tested students' speaking skills with a separate test. This may be due to many reasons. For instance, one teacher mentioned that in their school they had decided not to test nor assess oral skills, which was rather interesting information. Another teacher stated that she would like to test and assess oral skills but had not done it yet because she was uncertain of how to do this. She claimed, though, that she uses oral exercises and different activities during lessons. 24, 4 % of the teachers reported testing oral proficiency on one course during the upper secondary school. Some (16, 7 %) mentioned that they test oral skills on a few courses. The tests were held in all possible courses. Moreover, it was common that if the student studied the course independently, they had to do some kind of an oral test in order to complete the course. Furthermore, one teacher reported that if the student wants to improve her grade during the third year of upper secondary school, she can do that by taking an oral test. In short, the teachers viewed testing oral skills differently; the majority did not test oral skills at all while some tested them a few times during the upper secondary school.

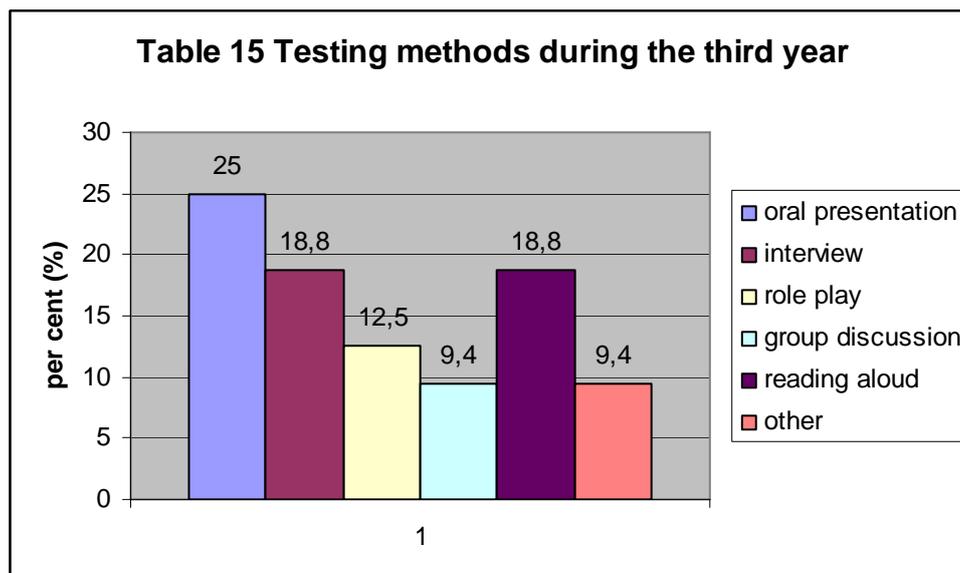
Next the teachers were given six alternatives of which to choose the methods they use for testing oral proficiency; the alternatives were oral presentation, interview, role play, group discussion, reading aloud and other techniques of their own.



When oral skills were tested during the first three courses (first year), oral presentation (37, 5 %) was the most widely used method (see Table 13). Interviews (28, 1 %) and reading aloud (28, 1 %) were often used methods as well. Role plays (15, 6 %) and group discussions (9, 4 %) were not that popular. Few had used other methods to test oral skills with, such as language laboratory tests, and oral presentations and reading aloud recorded in language laboratory.



Furthermore, Table 14 shows that during the courses 4 to 6 (second year) oral presentation was again the most often used method (59,4 %). Interview and reading aloud (25,0 %) had taken the second position as testing methods. Again, role plays (12,5 %) and group discussions (9,4 %) were not that often used. One teacher had taken advantage of other testing methods.



During the courses 7 and 8 (third year) oral presentations (25,0 %) were the most popular testing method (see Table 15). Interview (18,8 %) and reading aloud (18,8 %) were the second most often utilized methods. Other ways of testing mentioned were reporting and retelling a story. It seemed thus that teachers preferred more indirect testing techniques rather than direct methods such as pair and group discussions.

Nearly half (42,9 %) of the respondents who reported they test oral skills with a separate test stated that they use a language proficiency scale when assessing the students' performance. We asked them to send us copies of both language proficiency scales and oral tests but unfortunately we received only a few examples (see appendix 6). Common criteria of assessment in the examples of language proficiency scales were for instance spoken production, interaction, accuracy, fluency and pronunciation. The tests we received included tasks such as reading a

text and reporting it, role plays, dialogues and interviews. Furthermore, even though peer-assessment and self-assessment have become more general as assessment methods, they were not that popularly used. 23, 3 % used self-assessment and 26, 7 % took advantage of peer-assessment.

However, testing is not the only way to assess. The majority (65, 8 %) stated they used other methods of assessment than a separate test. These methods were most often continuous assessment, oral presentation, language laboratory exercises, listening to pair or group discussions, interviews etc. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings was that as many as 28, 8 % of the teachers did not test oral skills with a separate test nor did they assess these skills in any other way either. In other words, students' oral skills were not assessed at all. Although oral proficiency are emphasized in the national curriculum, there are teachers who do not take this aspect of language proficiency into account when assessing (see 6.1.1, p. 77). One female teacher mentioned that she used to assess her students' oral presentations but it took too much time and thus she did not do that any more. Instead of teacher assessment she used peer-assessment and self-assessment.

Even when the teachers tested the oral skills with a separate test, they tended to emphasize other ways of assessment in the course grade. The majority of the respondents (64, 0 %) claimed they emphasized other assessment methods. Perhaps this was because they thought that an oral test alone is not sufficient in assessing the students' overall performance in foreign language oral skills.

Furthermore, we asked whether the teachers co-operate with other English teachers when testing and assessing oral proficiency and the majority (59, 0 %) reported that they did not. If they did, we asked them to specify what kind of co-operation they have, and many said that they for instance work together with colleagues when assessing the voluntary oral skills test. Moreover, several teachers wrote that they plan tests and assess the student's performance together with a colleague. Some mentioned that they simply exchange ideas concerning testing procedure and evaluation with another teacher.

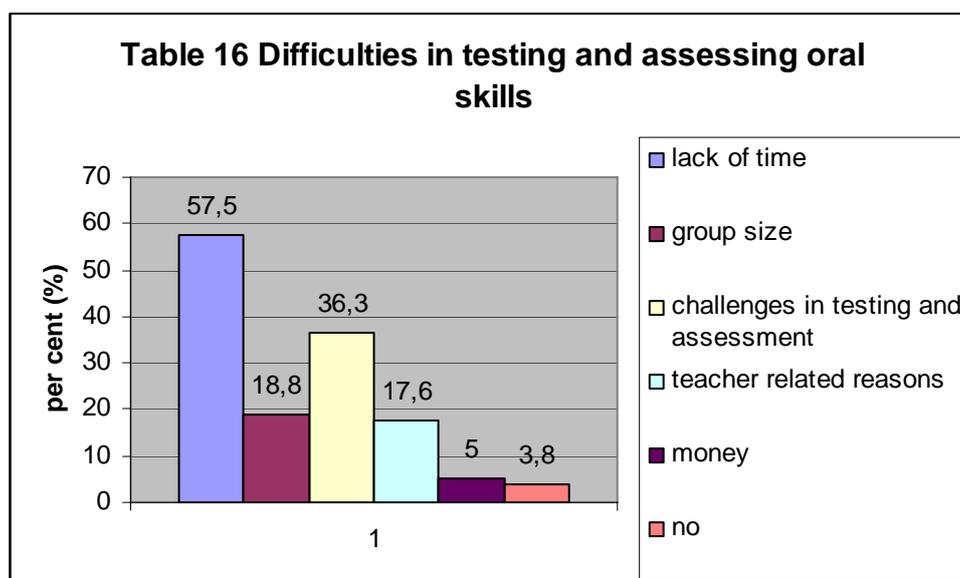
What is more, a considerable majority (80, 0 %) of the respondents reported that their school did not have a common agreement for testing speaking skills (for instance written in the school curriculum or an oral agreement). Many schools had an agreement that they would arrange the voluntary oral skills test if there were students willing to take it. Some teachers mentioned getting paid for organising the test on oral skills. One teacher reported that the school had an agreement that a special oral course is always provided for students during their second year in upper secondary school. There were a few teachers who reported that they did not know or could not remember whether their school has an agreement for testing speaking skills, which indicates that testing seems to be neglected to some extent.

In short, it was surprising to find out that as many as over a quarter of the respondents did not use a separate test or assess oral skills in other ways either. Furthermore, nearly six out of ten stated they never tested oral proficiency with a separate test. Nevertheless, if oral skills were tested, oral presentation, interviews and reading aloud were the most often used testing methods. Less than a half of the respondents used a language proficiency scale when assessing their students' oral skills. If oral skills were tested, self-assessment and peer-assessment were used unexpectedly little even though they could make teachers' work easier. What is more, most of the teachers reported they used other methods of assessment than a separate test, such as continuous assessment and that they emphasized other assessment methods than a test. Most of the teachers reported not to co-operate with colleagues when testing and assessing oral skills. The majority also mentioned that their schools did not have a common agreement for testing oral proficiency. However, over a half of the upper secondary schools organized a voluntary test on oral skills at the end of upper secondary school.

6.2.3 Factors influencing testing and assessing oral skills

There are various factors that affect testing and assessing oral skills. For instance, it is often claimed that testing oral skills is more problematic than testing written skills (see e.g. Madsen 1983: 147). Therefore, yet another aim of this study was to seek an

answer to the question of what kinds of factors affect testing and assessing oral skills. With an open-ended question we inquired whether there were any difficulties in testing and assessing speaking proficiency, and Table 16 shows the results. The teachers were asked to give examples if such difficulties existed.



Lack of time (57, 5 %) was the most often reported problem. Various challenges in testing and assessing, such as technical problems, lack of equipment and resources, and setting criteria were mentioned in many replies (36, 3 %). For instance, one teacher reported that testing requires two teachers, which in her case was a problem. Furthermore, it was stated as a problem that the testing situation itself is artificial. There were teachers who pointed out that they are not quite sure even of how to test oral skills. Moreover, group size was considered to be a problem by 18, 8 % of the respondents. Teacher related reasons (such as their attitude towards testing and assessing oral skills and the fear that the teacher is biased) were mentioned in 17, 6 % of the answers. Some teachers were worried about their own well-being under the workload. They claimed that teachers' work is demanding, and testing oral skills would only increase their stress. Another respondent mentioned that speaking skills are only one part of language learning and questioned whether it has to be tested at all. 5, 0 % saw lack of money as a hindrance which means that the teachers are not

compensated economically for organizing the tests. Only three teachers reported no difficulties in testing and assessing oral skills.

In addition to the open-ended question above, we also asked about factors influencing testing and assessing oral skills with the help of statements. Table 17 shows how the teachers responded to these.

Table 17 Factors influencing testing and assessing oral skills

	N	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
33. I have received enough training on how to test and assess oral skills	80	10,0	27,5	20,0	27,5	15,0	3,10	1,249
38. When assessing oral skills, an outside assessor (for instance another teacher) is better than the student's own teacher.	80	21,3	31,3	25,0	18,8	3,8	2,53	1,136

In order to be able to test and assess oral skills, the teacher needs to feel that she is competent to do so. One of the factors affecting whether the teacher feels competent, is whether she considers to have received enough training or not. Indeed, 37, 5 % reported they had received enough training on how to test and assess oral skills while 42, 5 % thought they had not.

In addition, half of the teachers (52, 6 %) agreed that an outside assessor assessing oral proficiency would be better than the student's own teacher, but many (22, 6 %) thought that the student's own teacher is better for this task. When the correlations were examined, it was found that the teachers who considered their students to be shy English speakers tended to think that their own teacher would be better in assessing their oral skills than an outside assessor. Perhaps these teachers feel that since their students are shy, they would be more at ease in testing situation with their own teacher (see appendix 5).

To summarize, answers were divided quite equally when teachers were asked if they had received enough training on how to test and assess oral skills. Moreover, over a

half of the respondents stated that an outside assessor for assessing oral skills would be better than the student's own teacher. Additionally, in teachers' opinion there were several obstacles, such as lack of time and various challenges in testing and assessing, for testing and assessing oral proficiency which most likely were the main reasons why testing oral skills in upper secondary school was relatively rare. For instance, two very concrete worries among teachers were the amount of work testing oral skills causes and that they would not get paid for their work when testing speaking skills, which requires time, effort and planning.

6.3 Statistical significance of the variables

One aim of the present study was to find out whether certain background variables (sex, age, major subject, further education training, teaching experience and time spent in English speaking countries) had an effect on practising, testing and assessing oral proficiency as well as on teachers' opinions on these issues; the possible relationships were examined with crosstabulation. Crosstabulation can be used when it is important to find out whether one variable has an influence on another variable's values (Karjalainen, L. and Ruuskanen, A. 1994: 30). It is important to notice, however, when interpreting the results that crosstabulation do not show cause-effect relationships between the variables.

One of our hypotheses was that older teachers with more teaching experience would practise, test and assess these skills less often and that their attitude towards oral skills would be more neglectful. Another hypothesis was that teachers with further education training and teachers who have spent more time in English speaking countries would have a more positive attitude towards practising, testing and assessing oral skills.

The statistical significance (p) of the results is indicated in the table by using following symbols:

$p < .001$	highly significant	***
$p < .01$	significant	**
$p < .05$	almost significant	*

Since every background variable was crosstabulated with every answer, there were about 70 pages of printed results. Therefore we present only the results that had statistical significance in Table 18 where *n* stands for the number of answers. The other results can be found in appendix 7.

Table 18 Statistical significance of the background variables

	Significance p Number n	Sex	Age	Further education training
13. Do you test students' oral skills with a separate test?	p n		**,010 79	
17. Do you co-operate with other English/language teachers when testing and assessing oral skills?	p n			*,022 76
19. When I attended teacher training, teaching oral skills was emphasized.	p n		**,002 80	
22. My students are shy about speaking English.	p n	**,004 77		
24. Student's oral skills affect the course grade.			*,030 79	
30. A section testing foreign language oral skills should be included in the Matriculation Examination.	p n			*,038 78
34. The present Matriculation Examination is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	p n			*,016 78
35. If a section testing foreign language oral skills is included in the Matriculation Examination, the test will become more stressful for students.	p n		**,005 80	
41. The size of classes is a hindrance to the development of the students' oral skills.	p n	*,044 80		

Table 18 shows that with crosstabulation we were not able to find many cases where the relationship between the background variables and practising, testing and assessing of oral skills would have been statistically important. Indeed, age, sex and

further education training were the only background variables which seemed to have statistical significance. Next we will present the results so that the statistically most significant ones will be discussed first.

To begin with, the respondents' age seemed to be the most influential background variable. Age had an effect on whether oral skills were emphasized when the teacher attended teacher training. A significant majority (84, 6 %) of teachers under 35 reported that oral skills had been emphasized. On the other hand, the majority of teachers of over 46 years (61, 4 %) were of the opposite opinion. This finding is in accordance with the fact that speaking skills have not been emphasized in teacher training until recently.

Secondly, sex had an effect on whether the teachers considered their students to be shy about speaking English. The majority of male teachers (73, 3 %) seemed to view their students as timid English speakers whereas most women (58, 1 %) were of the opposite opinion.

Furthermore, age affected the views on whether the possible oral test in the Matriculation Examination would cause stress for the students. The prominent majority (92, 3 %) of the youngest teachers (under 35 years) and of teachers between 46 and 55 years (92, 3 %) seemed to view that the inclusion of an oral test in the Matriculation Examination would increase the students' stress. On the other hand, of teachers between 36 and 45 years less than a half (47, 8 %) were of the opinion that the Matriculation Examination would become more stressful if oral skills were tested in it. Furthermore, in this age group there were a considerable number of teachers (39, 1 %) who were not sure of their opinion on this issue.

The teacher's age also affected whether they tested oral proficiency with a separate test. Teachers under the age of 35 years were most often the ones to test students' oral skills on one course while the oldest age group (over 55 years) tested these skills on a few courses. It is noteworthy that the majority of teachers aged over 55 (55, 5 %) tested oral skills at least occasionally while of teachers between 46 and 55 only 29, 2 % tested these skills. In other words, the oldest age group seemed to test oral

skills more than the younger ones, which was rather unanticipated since the latter have received more training on this matter.

What is more, the majority (55, 9 %) of teachers without further education training did not view the present Matriculation Examination as a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills. In contrast, only 29, 5 % of teachers who had attended further education training thought that the present Matriculation Examination does not hinder the development of students' speaking skills. Perhaps it is possible that this is discussed in further education training and without it one may not come to think of these matters.

Moreover, further education training seemed to influence whether the teacher cooperated with colleagues when testing and assessing oral skills. Those with further education training on oral skills tended to have more cooperation with colleagues (52, 4 %). On the other hand, the majority of teachers with no further education training did not work together with other English/language teachers (73, 5 %). It is plausible that in further education teachers are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues.

Furthermore, the teacher's age influenced views on whether the students' oral skills had an effect on the course grade. Most of the teachers in all age groups stated that they take students' speaking skills into account when giving them course grades. However, it should be noticed that a third of teachers over 55 (33, 3 %) could not tell whether they take students' oral skills into account or not. This was interesting since one would think that teachers have a rather good idea of what they are assessing.

In addition, the majority (59, 1 %) of those teachers who had attended further education training, tended to agree that a section testing foreign language oral skills should be included in the Matriculation Examination while those without further education tended to agree with this to a lesser degree (38, 2 %). Moreover, among last mentioned teachers there were many (38, 2 %) who were not sure of their opinion on this issue.

Additionally, sex also influenced the teachers' views on whether the respondents stated that the size of classes hinders the development of students' oral proficiency. Most of the female teachers (73, 0 %) and 64, 7 % of males considered class sizes as a hindrance. It is difficult to find out reasons for this discovery. It is possible that this is due to psychological factors with women having a different perception of space than men.

In sum, the background variables that had a statistically significant effect were sex, age and further education training. The majority of the older teachers were of the opinion that oral skills had not been emphasized when they were in teacher training. Furthermore, most of the male teachers seemed to consider their students shy English speakers whereas the majority of the female teachers tended to disagree with this statement. Moreover, the teachers of the highest age group tended to test oral skills more than their younger colleagues. In addition, teachers without further education training did not consider the current Matriculation Examination as a hindering factor to the students' oral skills while those with further education training considered it as a hindrance more often. Teachers with no further education training tended not to collaborate with their colleagues when it comes to testing and assessing oral skills. Furthermore, a third of teachers over 55 were not able to state whether they take students' oral skills into account in the course grade. The results also indicated that most teachers who had attended further education training seemed to think that an oral test should be a part of the Matriculation Examination whereas teachers with no further education training were not so strongly for a speaking test. Additionally, more female teachers than male teachers considered class size as a hindering factor for the development of students' oral skills.

6.4 Comparing the results of the two counties

Yet another aim of this study was to compare the two counties with each other and to examine whether there were any differences between them concerning teaching, testing and assessing oral skills. Next we will take a look into whether we were able to detect any discrepancies. However, we will only discuss those dissimilarities that were of greater importance, i.e. when the differences in the percentages were notable.

In the discussion the results from the county of western Finland will be given in round brackets and the results from the county of Oulu with square brackets.

6.4.1 Differences in opinions on oral skills and in practising them

First we will look at the dissimilarities in the results concerning opinions on oral skills and practising them. In Tables 19 and 20 one can see the teachers' responses in the two counties respectively.

Table 19 Opinions on oral skills in the county of western Finland

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
19. When I attended teacher training, teaching oral skills was emphasized.	59	10,2	28,8	20,3	30,5	10,2	3,02	1,196
20. Teaching oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	59	61,0	33,9	1,7	3,4		1,47	,704
21. Teaching written skills in upper secondary school is more important than teaching oral skills.	59	18,6	40,7	13,6	20,3	6,8	2,56	1,207
22. My students are shy about speaking English.	57	10,5	26,3	14,0	43,9	5,3	3,07	1,163
23. I use the target language in my lessons whenever possible.	59	69,5	25,4	3,4	1,7		1,37	,641
24. Student's oral skills affect the course grade.	59	8,5	47,5	8,5	22,0	13,6	2,85	1,257
25. Oral skills are an important part of language proficiency.	59	78,0	20,3	1,7			1,24	,468
26. The majority of my students will manage in everyday speaking situations in English after finishing upper secondary school.	59	54,2	33,9	6,8	3,4	1,7	1,64	,886
27. The majority of my students will have achieved sufficient written skills (both in writing and in reading) after finishing upper secondary school.	59	33,9	47,5	15,3	3,4		1,88	,790

Table 20 Opinions on oral skills in the county of Oulu

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
19. When I attended teacher training, teaching oral skills was emphasized.	21	4,8	33,3	9,5	47,6	4,8	3,14	1,108
20. Teaching oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	21	71,4	23,8	4,8			1,33	,577
21. Teaching written skills in upper secondary is more important than teaching oral skills.	21	20,0	45,0	15,0	15,0	5,0	2,40	1,142
22. My students are shy about speaking English.	21	5,0	30,0	10,0	50,0	5,0	3,20	1,105
23. I use the target language in my lessons whenever possible.	21	57,1	28,6	9,5	4,8		1,62	,865
24. Student's oral skills affect the course grade.	21	15,0	45,0	20,0	20,0		2,45	,999
25. Oral skills are an important part of language proficiency.	21	90,5	9,5				1,10	,301
26. The majority of my students will manage in everyday speaking situations in English after finishing upper secondary school.	21	57,1	38,1	4,8			,148	,602
27. The majority of my students will have achieved sufficient written skills (both in writing and in reading) after finishing upper secondary school.	21	9,5	81,0	9,5			2,00	,447

As one can see in the Tables 19 and 20 above, there are no major differences between the county of western Finland and the county of Oulu; the results of both counties were similar to a great extent. However, it seems that there were more teachers in the county of Oulu [52, 4 %] than in the county of western Finland (40, 7 %) who thought that oral skills had not been emphasized when they were in teacher training. What is more, in the county of western Finland as many as 20, 3 % of the respondents were not sure of their opinion while in the county of Oulu only 9, 5 % chose this alternative. As mentioned above, in the county of Oulu there were more teachers of older age which could be the reason behind this result. In other words, older teachers are likely to have attended teacher training at a time when oral skills were not yet given so much emphasis.

Moreover, the teachers from the county of Oulu were more strongly of the opinion that teaching oral skills is important in upper secondary school; 71, 4 % agreed strongly with this statement whereas in the county of western Finland the percentage was slightly lower (61, 0 %). However, approximately 95 % agreed with this statement in both counties (94, 9 %) [95, 2 %].

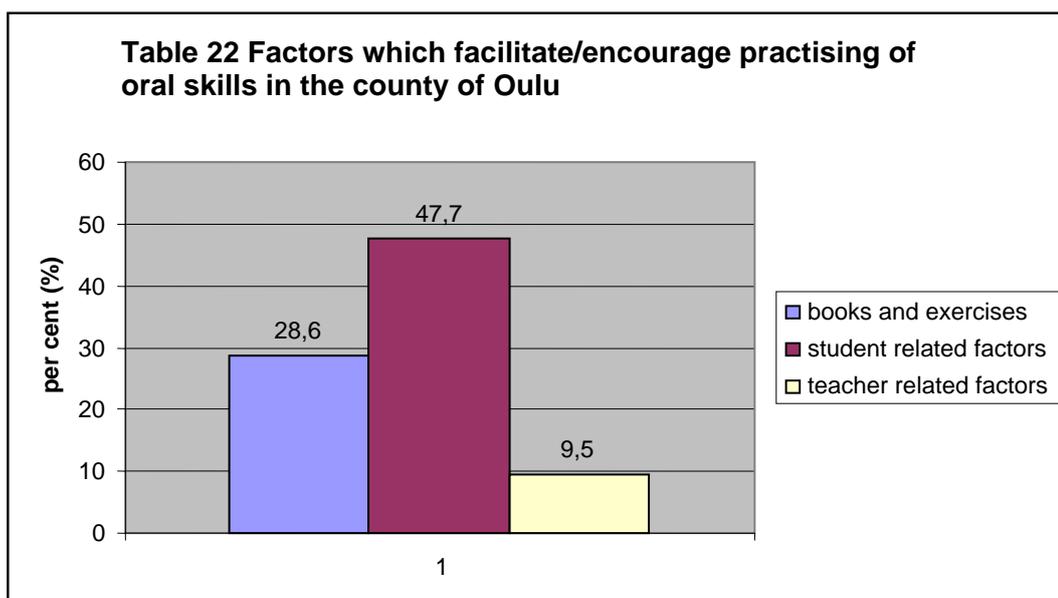
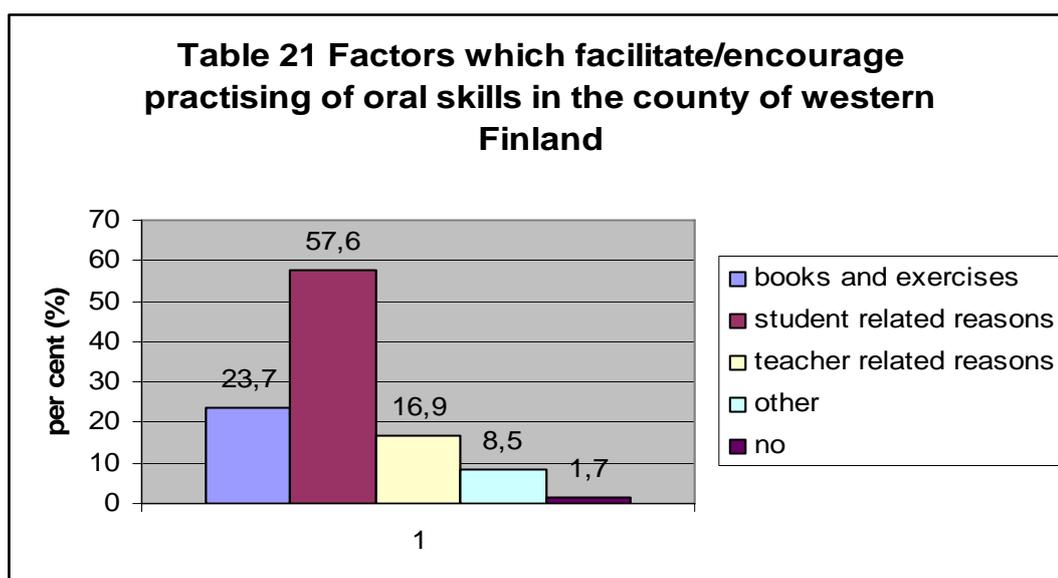
Most of the teachers (94, 9 %) [85, 7 %] claimed that they use English whenever it is possible during their lessons. As one can see, however, there were more teachers in the county of western Finland who estimated to use the target language as often as possible. Nevertheless, 90, 5 % of respondents in the county of Oulu were of the opinion that their students will have achieved adequate written skills when leaving upper secondary school at the same time as 81, 4 % of teachers in the county of western Finland agreed with this statement. Similarly, even though a significant majority of the respondents in both counties (88, 1 %) [95, 2 %] thought that their students will manage in everyday speaking situations after finishing upper secondary school, one can see that in the county of Oulu there were slightly more teachers who agreed with this.

In addition to inquiring about the teachers' opinions on oral skills, we asked them how they teach and practise these skills. 83, 1 % of the respondents of the county of western Finland reported that the upper secondary school they teach at offers a course specifically on oral skills. It is noticeable that somewhat fewer teachers in the county of Oulu [71, 4 %] reported this. Moreover, as many as 89, 4 % of the teachers in the county of western Finland taught such a course if it was offered while merely 66, 7 % of the teachers in the county of Oulu stated to teach a course on oral skills. Additionally, we asked about the methods used for practising oral skills but since these were similar to a great extent in the two counties, we provide the results only in appendix 8.

We asked the teachers with an open-ended question whether they thought there were any factors which hinder the practice of oral skills in their classes. They were asked to give examples of such factors if they thought there were any. The results from the two counties were very compatible, and thus we shall not analyze them separately (see appendix 8). Nevertheless, in the county of western Finland 3, 4 % of the 59

respondents wrote that there are no factors which would hinder practising speaking skills whereas in the county of Oulu there were no such comments.

Moreover, Tables 21 and 22 show what kinds of answers the respondents gave to an open-ended question asking whether there were any factors facilitating or encouraging practising of oral skills.



In the county of western Finland the two most often mentioned factors were either student related, such as students' motivation or good books and exercises (see 6.1.3, p. 86). In the county of Oulu, student related factors and good books and exercises were also the most often reported ones. Only one teacher out of 59 in the county of western Finland stated that there are no such factors encouraging her to practise oral skills. It is worth noticing that in the county of Oulu no one mentioned other factors, such as relaxed atmosphere or special course on oral skills as facilitating factors for practising oral skills. Moreover, not one teacher declared that there are no facilitating factors.

Another way to find out what factors the teachers considered to influence practising speaking skills was to use the Likert-type statements, and in Tables 23 and 24 one can see how the teachers responded to the statements concerning factors affecting practising oral skills.

Table 23 Factors influencing practising oral skills in the county of western Finland

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
39. I have received enough training on how to teach oral skills.	59	11,9	37,3	15,3	30,5	5,1	2,80	1,156
40. A sufficient amount of good oral exercises in English is included in the teaching material at my disposal	59	40,7	44,1	5,1	8,5	1,7	1,86	,973
41. The size of classes is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	59	32,2	40,7	8,5	15,3	3,4	2,17	1,147
42. The Matriculation Examination serves as a hidden curriculum (it dominates teaching) in upper secondary school.	58	50,0	43,1	3,4	3,4		1,60	,724

Table 24 Factors influencing practising oral skills in the county of Oulu

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
39. I have received enough training on how to teach oral skills.	21	4,8	33,3	23,8	28,6	9,5	3,05	1,117
40. A sufficient amount of good oral exercises in English is included in the teaching material at my disposal.	21	33,3	47,6	9,5	9,5		1,95	,921
41. The size of classes is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	21	28,6	38,1	9,5	23,8		2,29	1,146
42. The Matriculation Examination serves as a hidden curriculum (it dominates teaching) in upper secondary school.	21	42,9	47,6	9,5			1,67	,658

Approximately half (49, 2 %) of the respondents in the county of western Finland stated they had received enough training on how to teach oral skills whilst 38, 1 % reported this in the county of Oulu. In other words, the teachers in the county of Oulu were more often of the opinion that oral skills had not been emphasized when they attended teacher training.

6.4.2 Differences in testing and assessing oral skills, and in opinions on them

In addition to examining differences in practising speaking skills we also looked at teachers' opinions on testing and assessing as well as their practices concerning testing and assessing. First of all, Tables 25 and 26 present the teachers' opinions on testing and assessing oral skills in the two counties respectively.

Table 25 Opinions on testing and assessing oral skills in the county of western Finland

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
28. Testing oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	59	13,6	40,7	22,0	22,0	1,7	2,58	1,037
29. The present Matriculation Examination adequately tests students' foreign language ability	59	3,4	37,3	23,7	32,2	3,4	2,95	,990
30. A section testing foreign language oral skills should be included in the Matriculation Examination.	59	16,9	39,0	20,3	11,9	11,9	2,63	1,244
31. Students would be more motivated to practise oral skills if these skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination.	59	44,1	37,3	8,5	3,4	6,8	1,92	1,134
32. If foreign language oral skills are tested at the end of upper secondary school, the test should be optional for students.	59	18,6	30,5	32,2	15,3	3,4	2,54	1,072
34. The present Matriculation Examination is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	59	10,2	33,9	13,6	27,1	15,3	3,03	1,286
35. If a section testing foreign language oral skills is included in the Matriculation Examination, the test will become more stressful for students.	59	40,7	30,5	18,6	10,2		1,98	1,008
36. Testing oral skills makes the teachers' work more difficult.	59	44,1	33,9	10,2	11,9		1,90	1,012
37. The assessing of oral skills is more difficult than the assessing of other language skills.	58	20,7	37,9	12,1	22,4	6,9	2,57	1,244

Table 26 Opinions on testing and assessing oral skills in the county of Oulu

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
28. Testing oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	21	19,0	33,3	28,6	14,3	4,8	2,52	1,123
29. The present Matriculation Examination adequately tests students' foreign language ability.	21		47,6	23,8	23,8	4,8	2,86	,964
30. A section testing foreign language oral skills should be included in the Matriculation Examination.	21	14,3	19,0	33,3	9,5	23,8	3,10	1,375
31. Students would be more motivated to practise oral skills if these skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination.	21	28,6	42,9	19,0	9,5		2,10	,944
32. If foreign language oral skills are tested at the end of upper secondary school, the test should be optional for students.	21	19,0	33,3	23,8	23,8		2,52	1,078
34. The present Matriculation Examination is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	21	9,5	23,8	33,3	19,0	14,3	3,05	1,203
35. If a section testing foreign language oral skill is included in the Matriculation Examination, the test will become more stressful for students.	21	47,6	33,3	9,5	9,5		1,81	,981
36. Testing oral skills makes the teachers' work more difficult.	21	52,4	19,0	14,3	9,5	4,8	1,95	1,244
37. The assessing of oral skills is more difficult than the assessing of other language skills.	21	28,6	33,3	4,8	23,8	9,5	2,52	1,401

To begin with, in the county of western Finland a slight majority (55, 9 %) agreed that a section testing foreign language oral proficiency should be included in the Matriculation Examination while 23, 8 % did not want to have a test on oral skills. In the county of Oulu, on the other hand, merely 33, 3 % were for the test on oral skills and as many [33, 3 %] were against it. In both counties there were many teachers (20, 3 %) [33, 3 %] who could not state their opinion on this.

What is more, 81, 4 % of the teachers in the county of western Finland believed that students' motivation for practising speaking skills would increase if these skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination. On the other hand, a slightly smaller number of teachers [71, 5 %] in the county of Oulu thought so.

Moreover, in the county of western Finland 44, 1 % of the respondents were of the opinion that the Matriculation Examination hinders the development of students' oral skills whereas in the county of Oulu 33, 3 % agreed with this statement. Nevertheless, as many as 42, 4 % [33, 3 %] disagreed. Furthermore, the majority of our respondents (71, 2 %) [80, 9 %] agreed with the statement that including an oral skills tests in the Matriculation Examination increases the stress of the students. As one can observe, the teachers in the county of Oulu were more inclined to agree with this claim than teachers in the county of western Finland.

Tables 27 and 28 show factors influencing testing and assessing speaking skills, and as one can see, there were a few differences concerning these issues between the two counties.

Table 27 Factors influencing testing and assessing oral skills in the county of western Finland

	n	1	2	3	4	5	X	s
33. I have received enough training on how to test and assess oral skills	59	11,9	28,8	18,6	23,7	16,9	3,05	1,305
38. When assessing oral skills, an outside assessor (for instance another teacher) is better than the student's own teacher.	59	23,7	27,1	28,8	16,9	3,4	2,49	1,135

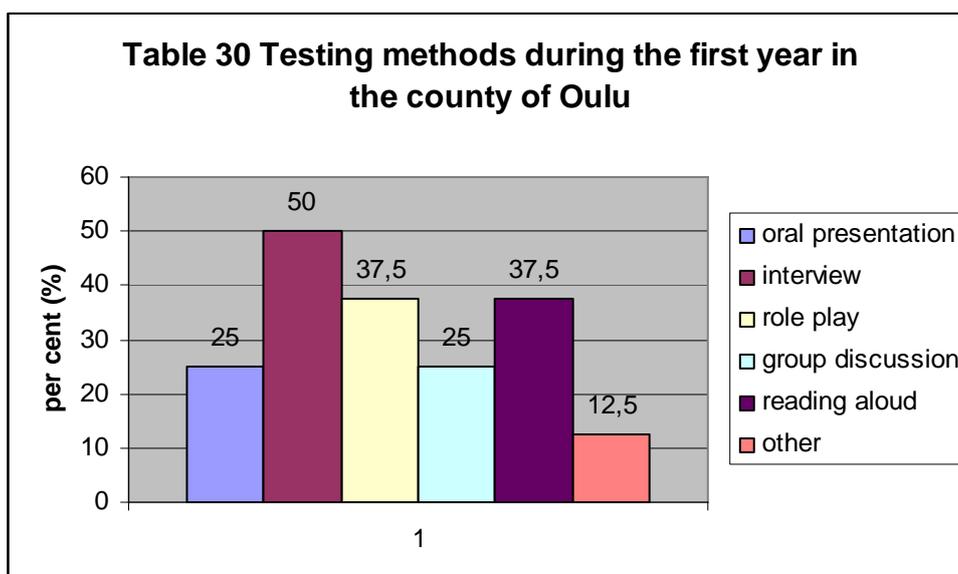
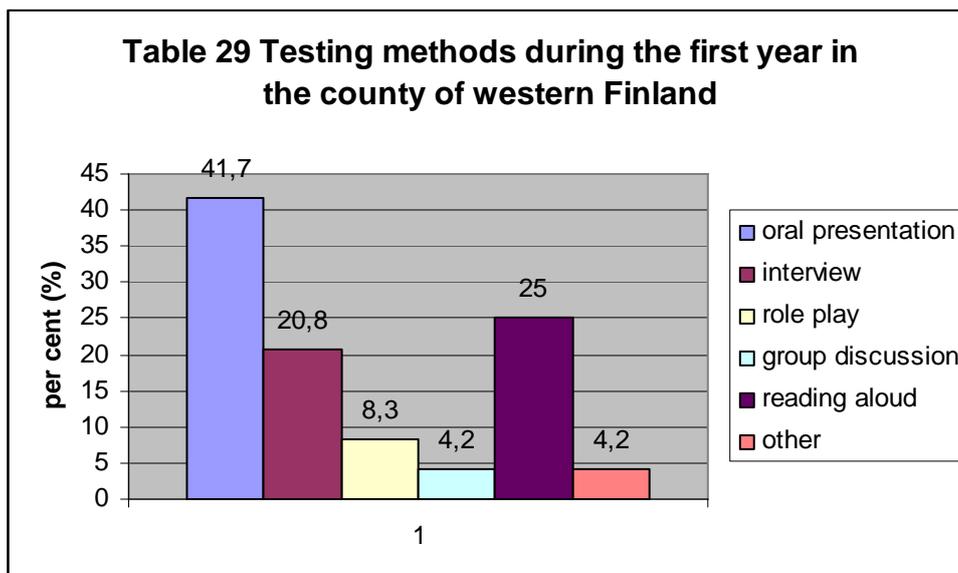
Table 28 Factors influencing testing and assessing oral skills in the county of Oulu

	n	1	2	3	4	5	x	s
33. I have received enough training on how to test and assess oral skills.	21	4,8	23,8	23,8	38,1	9,5	3,24	1,091
38. When assessing oral skills, an outside assessor (for instance another teacher) is better than the student's own teacher.	21	14,3	42,9	14,3	23,8	4,8	2,62	1,161

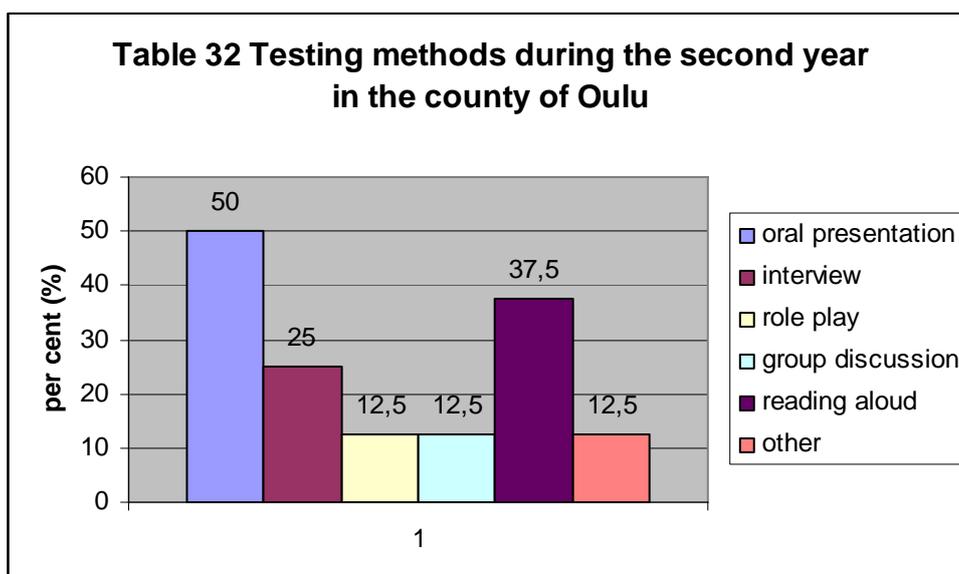
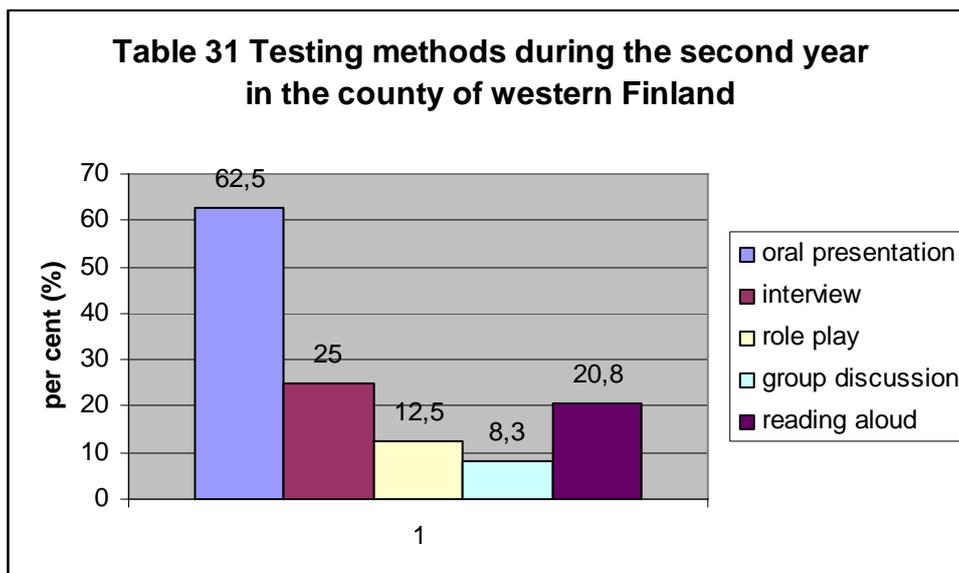
40, 7 % [28, 6 %] reported they had received enough training on how to test and assess oral skills while 40, 6 % [47, 6 %] thought they had not. In other words, in the county of Oulu there were considerably fewer of those who claimed that they had had sufficient training on testing and assessing. It is noteworthy that there were also more teachers in the county of Oulu who asserted that they had not received enough training on teaching oral skills and that oral skills had not been emphasized when they were in teacher training (see 6.4.1, p. 110 and 114). As mentioned earlier, it is likely that the reason behind this is the higher age of the teachers in the county of Oulu.

We asked the respondents about how they test and assess speaking proficiency and were able to detect some differences between the two counties. To start with, more upper secondary schools in the county of Oulu [71, 4 %] organized a voluntary oral skills test at the end of the third year. In the county of western Finland less than a sixth (58, 6 %) of upper secondary schools arranged such a test.

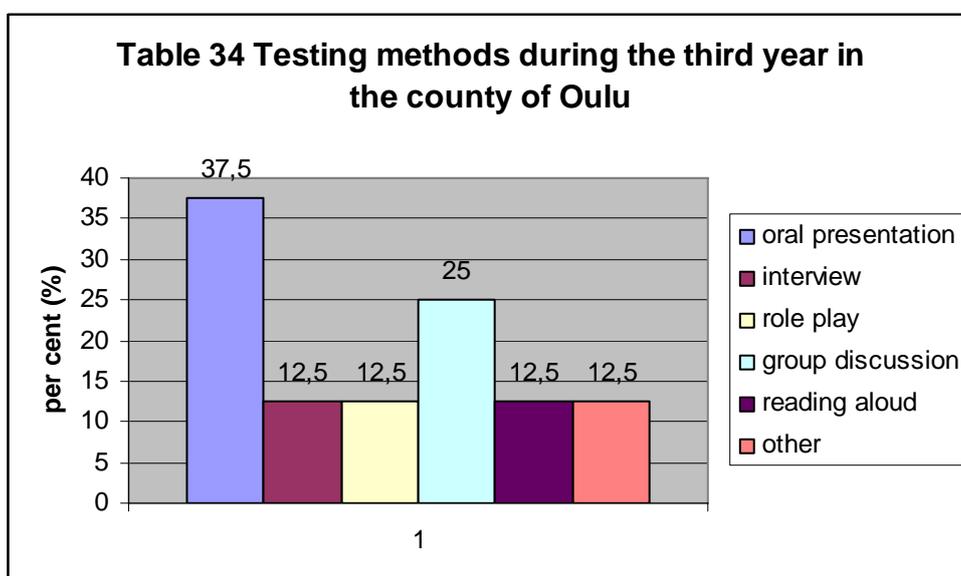
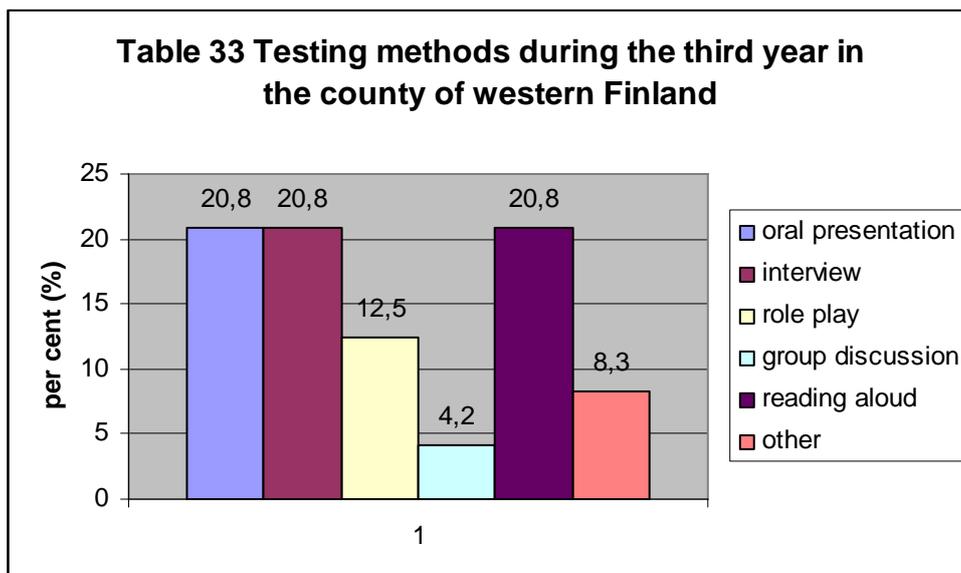
When the teachers were asked about oral skills testing methods, they were given six alternatives of which to choose the methods they use for testing oral skills; the alternatives were oral presentation, interview, role play, group discussion, reading aloud and other techniques of their own.



When oral skills were tested during the first three courses (first year), in the county of western Finland oral presentation was the most common testing method (41, 7 %) and reading aloud the second most often used (25, 0 %) (see Table 29). Interviews were often used as well (20, 8 %). However, role plays, group discussions and other methods were not used that often. In the county of Oulu (see Table 30), on the other hand, the most often used methods were interviews [50, 0 %], role plays [37, 5 %] and reading aloud [37, 5 %]. Oral presentations and group discussions were also frequently used.



Furthermore, during the courses 4 to 6 (second year) oral presentation was again the most often used method (62, 5 %) in the county of western Finland (see Table 31). Interview as a testing method had taken the second position (25, 0 %) while role play was the third most common (12, 5 %). In the county of Oulu (see Table 32) the most common methods for testing oral skills during the second year were oral presentations [50, 0 %], reading aloud [37, 5 %] and interviews [25, 0 %].



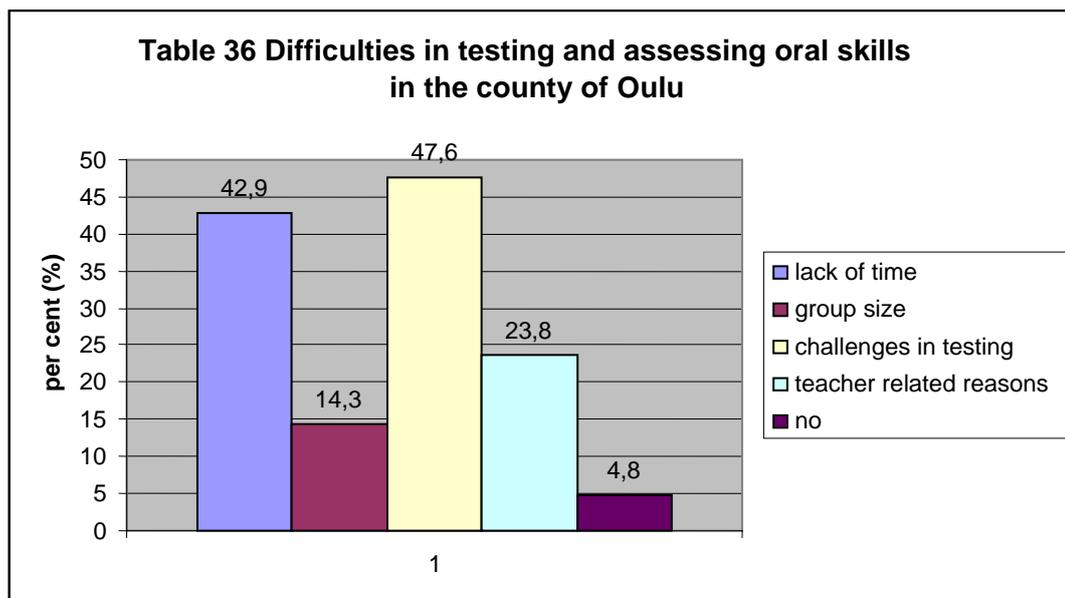
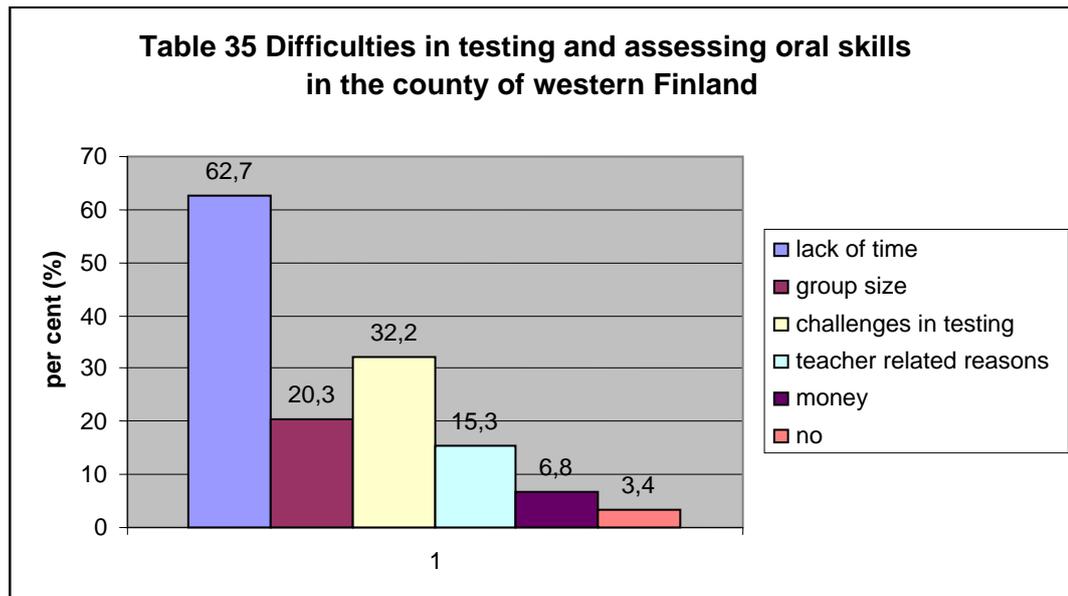
Moreover, in the last two courses 7 and 8 (third year) reading aloud, interview and oral presentation were used equally often (20,8 %) in the county of western Finland (see Table 33). Other ways of testing mentioned were reporting and retelling a story. In the county of Oulu (see Table 34) oral presentations [37,5 %] were again the most popular method while group discussions came second [25,0 %].

In the county of western Finland half of the respondents (50,0 %) who reported they test oral skills with a separate test stated that they use a language proficiency scale when assessing the students' performance. In contrast, in the county of Oulu merely

25, 0 % reported to use a language proficiency scale. Furthermore, self-assessment as an assessment method was more common in the county of Oulu [37, 5 %] than in the county of western Finland (18, 2 %). What is more, the teachers were also inquired whether they emphasize other ways of assessment than a test for assessing oral skills. The majority of the respondents (57, 1 %) [72, 7 %] claimed they emphasized other assessment methods. As one can observe, in the county of Oulu it was more common to lay emphasis on other assessment methods.

With an open-ended question we inquired whether there were any difficulties in testing and assessing oral skills, and Tables 35 and 36 show the results. The teachers were asked to give examples if such difficulties existed. In the county of western Finland lack of time (62, 7 %) was the most often reported problem. Various challenges in testing (see also 6.2.3, p. 102) were often reported (32, 2 %). Moreover, group size was considered to be a problem by 20, 3 % of the respondents. Teacher related reasons (see also 6.2.3, p. 102) were mentioned in 15, 3 % of the answers. 6, 8 % considered lack of money as a hindrance. Only two teachers reported no difficulties in testing and assessing oral skills.

In the county of Oulu the most frequently mentioned problem concerning testing and assessing speaking skills was challenges in testing [47, 6 %]. Lack of time was the second most often reported difficulty [42, 9 %] and various teacher related reasons came third (23, 8 %). The size of groups was less often mentioned (14, 3 %) in the answers from the county of Oulu, and money did not seem to be a problem for these teachers since no one reported it as a difficulty. Again only one of the respondents claimed that there were no difficulties what so ever.



To conclude, there were more teachers in the county of Oulu who were of the opinion that oral skills had not been emphasized when they attended teacher training and that they had not had enough training on teaching, testing or assessing oral skills. Moreover, the majority of the teachers in the county of Oulu agreed to a greater extent that teaching oral skills is important in upper secondary school. Furthermore, there were more teachers in the county of Oulu than in the county of western Finland who considered their students to have achieved adequate written skills when

finishing upper secondary school. However, there were fewer schools in the county of Oulu who offered a special course on oral skills or organized the voluntary speaking skills test at the end of upper secondary school. Furthermore, teachers in both counties mentioned similar factors facilitating practising oral skills; however, in the county of western Finland the teachers additionally pointed out other factors, such as relaxed atmosphere and a special course on oral skills, as facilitative factors. What is more, the majority of the teachers in the county of western Finland were of the opinion that speaking proficiency should be tested in the Matriculation Examination while in the other county only the minority agreed. Language proficiency scales and self-assessment were more often used in the county of Oulu than in the other county. What is more, teachers in the county of Oulu tended to emphasize other assessment methods instead of tests when giving the course grade.

7 DISCUSSION

The purpose of our study was to find out how English oral skills are practised, tested and assessed in Finnish upper secondary schools. This study was inspired by the common claim that the tight schedule in upper secondary school does not allow much time for practising oral skills. Moreover, testing speaking ability is considered to be difficult and time consuming. Therefore, our intention was either to prove or disprove these arguments. In this chapter we will discuss our findings and compare them with those of previous studies.

Indeed, one of the most encouraging findings was that the teachers seemed to have a positive attitude toward speaking skills and this result corresponds to that of Tattari's (2001) and Romo's (1991) studies. To begin with, the teachers appeared to value oral skills and they mentioned that practising them in upper secondary school is important, more so in the county of Oulu than in the county of western Finland. One explanation for the fact that the teachers in the county of Oulu regarded practising oral skills more important could be that these teachers had received more further education training on oral skills. Indeed, speaking skills and practising them are dealt with in further education training which in our interpretation increases the awareness of how important practising oral skills is. This positive attitude towards oral skills can have an encouraging effect on teaching; this could mean that oral skills are emphasized and practised a great deal in class and a large amount of time is spent on developing these skills. Nevertheless, valuing oral skills could be a mere ideology which is not fulfilled in practice.

In addition, most teachers stated that they use English in their lessons whenever possible. What is more, the teachers in the county of western Finland claimed this more often than in the county of Oulu. This could be explained by the fact that the teachers in the county of Oulu were generally older than in the other county could explain this; older teachers have most likely attended teacher training at a time when oral skills were not emphasized and they were probably not strongly encouraged to use the target language in teaching, which is the case at present. The teachers claiming to use the target language as often as possible indicates that the teachers

recognize the significance of input in language learning and that they at least try to speak the target language as often as possible. However, since we did not ask the teachers how often and in what kinds of situations they use English, it is impossible to know the amount of actual input in practice.

The teachers believed their students to achieve both adequate written and oral skills by the time they leave upper secondary school. It should be noticed that the respondents in the county of Oulu seemed to be more inclined to think so. This piece of information is difficult to explain. It is unlikely that the quality of teaching is poorer in the county of western Finland. Therefore, the only plausible explanation we can think of is that for one reason or another, the teachers of the county of Oulu are more optimistic about their students' written and oral skills. Thus, even though oral skills are in an inferior position in upper secondary school, the students are assumed to acquire these skills in one way or another (in school or elsewhere). This could either mean that the teachers view upper secondary school education as adequate for attaining both written and speaking skills, or that they believe in the students' abilities to master both of these skills. However, in her study, Romo (1991) found out that the students themselves reported that out of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) they are least proficient in speaking skills. The students may not believe in their own ability to speak the target language even though the teachers seemed to have faith in it.

Even though practically every teacher appreciated oral skills and deemed practising oral skills important, it was surprisingly common that teachers did not assess oral skills as part of the course grade. There can be several reasons for this and one of them may be that the big group sizes hinder the teachers to assess the oral proficiency of an individual student. Another reason for not taking oral skills into account could be that teaching and assessing written skills take so much time that the teachers do not have time for assessing oral skills. An interesting point concerning assessing oral skills came up; there were teachers, mainly older ones, who were not able to state whether they took oral skills into account in the course grade. One would think that the teachers would know what they assess.

Whatever the reason for not taking oral skills into consideration in the course grade might be, it is not congruent with the fact that the importance of oral skills is widely recognized by both teachers, students and everyone associated with foreign language learning. For instance, it is stated in the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003) that reading, writing, listening and speaking skills should be on the same level (B2.1) when finishing upper secondary school. However, if oral skills (speaking) are not assessed at all, how is it possible to determine the level of the student's skill in this matter?

Some teachers seemed to have a traditional view on language and what should be taught in upper secondary school. A few teachers argued that speaking is a practical skill and thus it should not be paid much attention to in "theoretically" oriented upper secondary school. This was an unexpected comment which one would not anticipate to encounter in the 2000s. Presently language learning is seen as a social phenomenon in which the practical side, i.e. speaking is considered to be the main factor. In the light of this, it was not surprising that many teachers were of the opinion that written skills should be emphasized in upper secondary school instead of oral skills. It seems that even though oral skills are generally valued, many upper secondary school teachers consider teaching written skills more important. In short, written skills seem still to be in a dominating position in the curriculum. This is directly connected with the fact that the Matriculation Examination tests only written and listening skills. It is natural that teaching concentrates on what is actually tested. However, there were a large number of teachers who did not value written skills over oral skills. This could be a sign of a positive change in the attitudes to oral skills and to what should to be taught in upper secondary school.

Our results also showed that most upper secondary schools organized a specific voluntary course on oral skills and thus offered their students an opportunity to improve their oral skills while other courses concentrate on practising written skills. Nevertheless, arranging such a course was more common in the county of western Finland than in the county of Oulu. A possible reason for this could be that there are fewer resources to organize such a course in the county of Oulu. The fact that not every upper secondary school offers a course on oral skills is not fair for the students.

However, not every student takes the course even though it is offered. If this kind of a course was obligatory for all, it would benefit the general level of oral proficiency.

Nevertheless, every teacher seemed to practise oral skills in their normal courses (in courses 1 to 8) as well. Various methods for practising oral skills were used, and pair discussions, group discussions and dialogues were the most common methods. These methods were also reported to be among the most often used in Tattari's research (2001). More demanding exercises were used on more advanced courses, for instance debates were not often used until the second year courses. Nonetheless, we did not ask how much time the teacher spends on practising oral skills; even though teachers claimed to practise oral skills, it is impossible to know how much these skills are actually practised. Moreover, it became evident that less time is invested in oral skills during the third year when even more time is spent on preparing the students for the Matriculation Examination.

As mentioned above, oral skills are practised throughout the upper secondary school. Nevertheless, several problems concerning practising oral skills came up. For instance, lack of time, group size, the Matriculation Examination, lack of training and student related reasons were the most evident problems. Many of these problems were noted in other studies as well (see e.g. Huttunen et al. 1995; and Tattari 2001). To begin with, lack of time in upper secondary school seemed to be a real problem. Since only written skills are tested in the Matriculation Examination, the lessons (a little over 30) allotted to languages per one course are spent on rehearsing the skills that are needed in the Matriculation Examination. Indeed, if oral skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination, it is clear that lack of time would not be such a problem in practising these skills as it is presently. Since not every teacher saw lack of time as a problem, it shows that it does not necessarily have to be one. It is up to each teacher to decide what they want to spend their time on. If the teacher regards practising speaking skills important, they will find the time for it.

Moreover, group size seemed to be directly connected with lack of time. In other words, since groups tend to be big (up to 40 students) in many schools, the teachers felt that rehearsing oral skills in such big groups takes too much time. Additionally, the noise produced by students performing oral exercises seemed to be a problem for

a number of teachers. Furthermore, the want to constantly monitor the students made practising oral skills difficult for some teachers. Indeed, in big groups it is impossible to control and listen to every student. However, group size does not have to be a discouraging factor for oral skills' practice. If the teacher's attitude is positive toward practising oral skills, the big group size will not prevent her from organizing speaking activities. In any case, the dominant view was that group size hinders the development of oral proficiency.

The teachers also listed various student related reasons hindering the practice of oral skills. One of the most often mentioned factors was that students are too restless or unmotivated to rehearse oral skills. Some students apparently do not recognize the value of oral exercises but consider them to be pointless and waste of time. One reason for this might be that the students are not used to oral exercises and thus they do not understand that those are as important exercises (if not more) as the written ones. A possible solution for motivating the students would be that the teacher explains explicitly why oral skills are significant. Furthermore, several teachers mentioned that some of their students are shy (speakers of English) and their skills are inadequate, which make practising oral skills difficult. Increasing the number of oral exercises could be an answer for this challenge. This way the students would become more accustomed to oral practice and gain more self confidence in expressing themselves in English.

The Matriculation Examination is often seen as a hidden curriculum in upper secondary school (see e.g. Romo 1991). In other words, it guides to a great extent what is taught. Since only written and listening skills are tested, teaching is focused on these skills. Indeed, almost all of our respondents agreed with this claim. The teachers seemed to think that the Matriculation Examination restricts them from concentrating on teaching the issues they would possibly like to. For instance, some teachers may want to spend more time on oral skills but – due to the Matriculation Examination - they feel inclined to prepare the students for the goals set in the exam. Indeed, the Matriculation Examination is claimed to inhibit a more versatile teaching in upper secondary school.

Yet another factor in hindering rehearsing oral skills was that many teachers felt they had not received enough training on how to practise these skills. Especially older teachers (in the county of Oulu) claimed that this topic was not strongly underlined in teacher training. Indeed, previously teacher training has concentrated on other issues than speaking skills.

In other words, it seems to be the teacher's personal opinion whether she finds practising oral skills problematic and on what grounds. It was obvious that people had different views on this matter; some people expressed several problems while others saw none. Many of the above mentioned obstacles could be overcome by providing teachers with more training on this issue since lack of training seemed to be the reason behind many of the difficulties concerning practising speaking skills.

Even though there were many problems concerning practising oral skills, there were also several factors that encouraged the teachers to practise these skills with their students. Indeed, as the factors facilitating practising oral proficiency have not been paid much attention to in previous studies, it was interesting to hear the teachers' opinions on these as well. The most frequently mentioned factors were student related. Even though many teachers blamed their students for being unmotivated and lazy to practise oral skills, there were also a large number of teachers who expressed a counter-argument. They reported that their students are aware of the importance of oral skills and are motivated to learn. Furthermore, many teachers wrote that the students simply enjoy oral activities and doing them relaxes the atmosphere in class. In sum, students' attitude towards oral skills and rehearsing them can have a crucial effect on whether practising oral skills is successful or not. It is easy to practise these skills with enthusiastic students while it may be particularly problematic with students who lack the motivation and interest; motivating the unmotivated is difficult (if not possible).

What is more, one of the main facilitating factors seemed to be the availability of good books and exercises. Today course books include more oral exercises which are versatile and offer opportunities for practising communicative skills. Even grammar books contain oral exercises; although learning grammar is traditionally considered as an aspect of language proficiency that is practised in written mode, also grammar

exercises can be taken up orally. Our results showed that the teachers who felt they had received enough training on oral skills tended to agree more that they had enough good oral exercises at hand. This could signify that training affects positively teachers' ability to take advantage of the oral exercises in the course books and also look for exercises elsewhere. For instance, the internet provides an immense number of material and ideas that can easily be utilized in teaching. In short, finding useful exercises should not be a problem today.

The third most common group of factors that facilitated practising oral skills was teacher related. For instance, the teacher's attitude and personality play a major part in rehearsing oral skills. The teacher's attitude is directly reflected in the classroom; if she appreciates oral skills, she is more likely to spend time on them in class. On the other hand, if she does not feel that these skills are that important, it influences both teaching and students' motivation. It appears that students are prone to sensing their teacher's outlook on oral proficiency (or on other things for that matter) and adopting her opinions. What is more, the teacher's inspiring personality can encourage and motivate the students to practise oral skills. On the other hand, if the teacher lacks the characteristics of an inspiring teacher, it can have a negative effect on teaching and she might not be able to encourage her students.

Despite the problems concerning practising oral proficiency in a classroom setting, it is vital that oral skills are practised systematically and regularly (Paakkunainen 1994: 56). This entails that concrete goals are set and that rehearsing communication situations progress from guided exercises to more free conversation. One can also increase the amount of oral practice by taking up orally such exercises that are not initially meant to be speaking exercises. Paakkunainen also notes that producing correct spoken utterances and correcting students' speech is not important; the main point should be that the students have a chance to practise their communication skills.

Issues concerning testing were another point of interest in this study. To begin with, testing oral skills was considered to be important according to half of the teachers. They felt that testing these skills is as easy as that of other language skills. Moreover, every second teacher wanted these skills to be tested in the Matriculation

Examination. These teachers tended to think that such a test would motivate the students to practise oral skills and that it should be obligatory for all. Furthermore, they were not afraid that this would cause extra stress to either students or teachers. In addition to motivation, another reason for including a test on oral skills was that the current Matriculation Examination was not considered to support the progress in oral proficiency.

However, one of the main findings of this study was that only half of the respondents agreed that testing oral skills is important and many were not sure of this. This reflects that the teachers feel insecure of testing and that they may lack knowledge of how to test oral proficiency. There are several explanations for not appreciating the importance of speaking tests. To begin with, some teachers argued that oral skills are not such skills that should be tested. They claimed that due to the practical nature of speaking it cannot be reliably tested. The question about what to assess (whether it is fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, or the communicative aspect in speech) seemed difficult to determine. What is more, some merely stated that not all skills ought to be tested. There are already a great number of tests in upper secondary school, and many felt that no additional ones are needed. The teachers feared that carrying out the procedure of oral proficiency testing would cause them extra work. Not seeing the importance of testing oral skills could indicate that these skills are not regarded as significant.

Half of the teachers wanted an oral test as part of the Matriculation Examination. Over a fourth, on the other hand, did not agree with this and many were not sure of their opinion. In the county of western Finland the support for the oral test was stronger than in the county of Oulu. This could be explained by the fact that the teachers in the county of Oulu were older and perhaps were more accustomed to certain routines, which they are not willing to abandon. Moreover, teachers with further education training inclined to be for the test more often. Further education training seems to enhance positive attitudes towards testing and helps to dispose of doubts and prejudices, and encourages the teachers at least to try testing. One reason for supporting testing is that students would be more motivated to practise oral skills if these skills were tested. Furthermore, testing oral skills would make practising these skills more systematic and goal-oriented. Therefore, testing would also help in

encouraging the students in improving speaking skills if these skills were graded. Those teachers who wanted an oral test also considered teaching and testing oral skills to be significant. These teachers seem to feel that skills that are taught should also be tested.

Nonetheless, a considerable number of teachers thought that the present Matriculation Examination is sufficient in testing the students' foreign language proficiency. In other words, they seem to think that it is enough to test only written and listening skills. This result reflects the view that oral skills are not to be tested and suggests a negative attitude towards oral skills as a whole. It also indicates reluctance to changes and innovations in the examination. It is understandable that teachers who are used to certain routines and ways of doing things are suspicious about innovations. Innovations are often considered as threats to existing routines which leads to a sense of insecurity among teachers (Prabhu 1987, cited in Ellis 2001: 61). Markee (1994, cited in Ellis 2001: 63) states that those kinds of innovations which entail reform in methodological practices and in teachers' fundamental pedagogical values are particularly difficult to implement. Nevertheless, there were a considerable number of teachers who regarded the present Matriculation Examination as insufficient, and some even claimed it slows down the development of students' oral skills. This implies that they consider the present school-leaving examination as one-sided since it does not test all aspects of language proficiency.

The majority of the teachers were afraid that including an oral test in the Matriculation Examination would make the test even more stressful for the students. Indeed, many students feel the pressure of taking the exam as it is, not to mention having to take an additional speaking test. Such a test would be particularly demanding for students who are shy by nature. Some teachers would solve this problem by keeping the possible oral test in the Matriculation Examination optional. The teachers wanted to give the responsibility of deciding whether to take the test or not to the students. In other words, students who do not want to take the test should not be forced to do so. Nevertheless, if the oral test was optional, it is not on an equal footing with listening and written tests which are obligatory.

Moreover, the majority of the teachers were of the opinion that their work would become more difficult if they were to test oral skills. Indeed, adding another test in addition to the already existing ones would definitely require more time and resources from the teachers. What is more, the fact that the teachers view the assessment of oral skills more difficult than that of other skills also contributes to the fact that testing speaking skills would make teachers' work more demanding. Indeed, assessing oral skills can be viewed as demanding because it is a relatively new phenomenon and no testing tradition on oral skills has developed so far. Moreover, some teachers argued that it is difficult to define what fluency means or what correct pronunciation actually is. However, for instance Huhta (1993b) has claimed that testing oral skills need not to be any more difficult than testing other language skills. If the assessor (i.e. the teacher) defines carefully before testing what she means by e.g. fluency, one can avoid these kinds of problems.

It was surprising that forming an opinion on oral skills testing seemed to be demanding for the teachers. Indeed, testing oral skills is a fairly unfamiliar area. A conclusion drawn from this could be that oral skills testing is neither systematic nor are all teachers committed to it. The teachers' opinions give an impression that they are not ready to accept an oral test in the Matriculation Examination unconditionally. A great deal should be done before an oral proficiency test can be included in the exam.

The fact that not all schools organize the voluntary oral skills test at the end of upper secondary school causes inequality to the students – arranging the test was more common in the county of Oulu. Thus, the students' position depends on the stand of the school; if the school does not even arrange the test, the student does not have a chance to choose whether she would like to take the test or not. Furthermore, if the oral test can be used as an asset, for instance in further studies, everyone should be entitled to take it. On the other hand, if the student cannot use the oral test as an asset, the purpose of such a test is questionable.

One of our hypotheses was that there are teachers who do not test oral skills at all. Indeed, one of the main findings of this study was that the majority of the teachers never test these skills; there were thus considerably more teachers now who did not

test oral skills with a separate test than in Tattari's data in 2001. Nevertheless, the results from her study are not directly comparable to the results of the present study since Tattari's study included both comprehensive school and upper secondary school teachers. Indeed, it could be that the schedule in comprehensive school is more flexible than in upper secondary school and thus there is more time for testing oral proficiency. Moreover, it was unanticipated that older teachers tended to test oral skills more often than the younger ones; since the younger teachers reported to have more training on this issue, it would have been logical that they had also tested these skills more frequently.

The teachers reported various difficulties concerning testing such as lack of time, group size, challenges in testing and assessing, teacher related reasons, money, lack of training etc. Some teachers were of the opinion that time should not be spent on something which is not tested. This argument is reasonable; if oral proficiency were tested, practising these skills would not be considered as waste of time. Moreover, a few teachers claimed that teaching oral skills should not be part of upper secondary school teaching or that speaking skills are not the kinds of skills that are worth testing. Some teachers justified their opinion by stating that oral proficiency is such a practical skill that it should not be tested. These opinions could be seen as rather conventional in today's world. What is more, some schools had an agreement that they would neither test nor assess oral ability at all.

A compulsory oral test in the Matriculation Examination can be difficult to implement since so many teachers do not test these skills at present and it is plausible that many have not even tried testing. Therefore, more further education training on oral proficiency is crucial. It is argued that testing would increase the appreciation of oral skills among both teachers and students.

What is more, there were teachers who never test or assess oral skills in other ways either. Oral skills are recognized in the National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003) and it is stated that English as a first foreign language should be on level B2.1 (based on the speaking scales in the Common European Framework of Reference). In the light of this, it is odd that oral proficiency is not assessed at all. This echoes these teachers' negative

attitude to testing and assessment of oral skills, and shows neglect towards these issues.

When testing oral ability, oral presentation, interview and reading aloud turned out to be the most often used test methods. As can be seen, the methods used were mainly indirect. In other words, these methods do not test communication skills well but they are more suitable for testing such aspects as pronunciation and accuracy. The methods used reflect the teachers' view on what should be tested and what is important in oral proficiency. They seem to prefer testing the students' pronunciation or their ability to produce grammatically correct language, which indeed perhaps are easier to test than communicative skills. However, assessing only correct pronunciation and grammatical accuracy does not reveal much about the students' communicative competence.

Our results indicated that there were several challenges in testing and assessing oral skills. To begin with, lack of time was one of the most frequently mentioned difficulties. As discussed above, lack of time was seen to hinder practising speaking skills and thus it is understandable that it affects testing and assessing negatively. Planning, carrying out and assessing oral tests of big groups are time-consuming and therefore it is easy to comprehend why so many teachers claimed that they do not have time for this. Lack of time as well as lack of resources were also the most often mentioned difficulties in testing and assessing speaking proficiency in Tattari's study (2001). Both of these problems thus seem to be constant since they are brought up consistently. Cooperation with colleagues could be the key to solving this problem; one could for instance ask a colleague to assist in planning and assessing the tests in order to decrease one's workload. Moreover, one could work together with any language teacher – it does not have to be another English teacher with whom to exchange ideas. However, most teachers did not collaborate with colleagues, and those who did were often those who had attended further education training on oral skills. In other words, training had a positive effect on whether the teachers cooperated with their colleagues.

In addition to lack of time and group size, various challenges in testing were reported to make testing and assessing difficult. The teachers mentioned for instance technical

problems, lack of equipment and resources, and setting the criteria for assessment as problems. Some schools lacked the kinds of technical equipment that are needed in oral testing, such as recorders and language laboratories. Lack of equipment in today's upper secondary schools seems odd. After all, one should be able to test and assess the students' oral performance with the help of one tape recorder.

Moreover, setting the criteria can be difficult if the teacher does not have a clear perception of what oral proficiency is or what they consider to be important in it. What is more, the teachers expressed their concern that they are expected to carry out testing and assessing oral skills in addition to all the other work they have, and that they would not be compensated for the extra work. Another challenge mentioned was that it is difficult if not impossible to create authentic and natural testing situations. In our view, the authenticity of the testing situations could be influenced by for instance choosing more direct testing methods and selecting suitable discussion topics.

Some teachers argued that one reason why they opposed to testing oral skills was that if these skills were tested, practising would become too goal-oriented and would thus not be as enjoyable as before. Indeed, the teacher's attitude towards practising has a major effect on how the students perceive speaking exercises. If the teacher does not strongly stress that the oral exercises are carried out for the sake of tests, perhaps the students would be able to enjoy them more.

Not having enough training proved to be one of the difficulties in testing and assessing. The teachers in the county of Oulu were more often of the opinion that their training was not sufficient. Training on testing and assessing in general would help in reducing some of the problems concerning these and would modify teachers' opinions into a more positive direction. This was a conclusion drawn by Romo (1991) as well when she investigated upper secondary school English teachers' attitudes to spoken language testing.

Furthermore, training would provide the teachers with new ideas. Firstly, the use of language proficiency scales would unify the assessment and make it more reliable. Nevertheless, our results showed that drawing on language proficiency scales when

assessing was rather rare which implies that the teachers do not see the relevance of scales in testing and assessing. Not using the language proficiency scales implies that oral skills are assessed holistically, i.e. as a whole. Secondly, making use of peer- and self assessment would make the teachers' work easier because the responsibility for assessment would rest on more than one pair of shoulders. This would also motivate the students since they would have an opportunity to affect both their own and their peers' grades. However, according to our results these assessment methods were not that often used. Again, training on these issues would point to the teachers that they can share responsibility of assessment with the students.

We wanted to find out whether there were differences between the teachers, and therefore the significance of the background variables was examined by using crosstabulation. We assumed that the teachers' age, sex, education, official position etc. would have an effect on how they view practising oral skills, and testing and assessing them. However, only age, sex and further education training were such variables which had statistical significance. All respondents had a university degree and most of them had English as a major subject. Moreover, almost all had attended teacher training and their official position was upper secondary teacher. Furthermore, teaching experience and time spent in English speaking countries did not prove to be as statistically significant in this study. It could be that our sample was too small for more statistically significant findings to occur. On the other hand, it could be that the teachers' official position or university degree etc. simply do not have an effect on opinions on oral skills.

In general our study was successful but a few problems were also encountered. To begin with, finding the two partners in the counties of western Finland and Oulu was a great help in carrying out this study. Additionally, the questionnaire proved to be an effective means of gathering information. With the help of it, we were able to gather a large amount of information from English teachers which we could use in order to answer our research questions. Moreover, the decision to include a general question for comments at the end of the questionnaire was a good idea since here the teachers were able to express their views freely. Indeed, many had used this opportunity and we received a great deal of additional information which helped us to interpret the teachers' thoughts and ideas more profoundly.

The number of replies was fairly good (80 out of 200) which is a little more than what is normally the case in questionnaire studies. Furthermore, it was a more economical and quicker way to conduct the study than for instance interview. Pre-testing the questionnaire with three English teachers and consulting researcher Ari Huhta were good ideas because their feedback indicated that the questionnaire could be revised in order to improve intelligibility and reduce the risk of misunderstandings. The final version of it turned out to be successful; it was comprehensible and only few misinterpretations occurred. Moreover, it was easy to process the data with a statistical computer program (to which we received help from the Computing Centre in the University of Jyväskylä) and analyze it once it was computed.

On the other hand, there were a few defects concerning the study which should be taken into consideration in future studies. First of all, it would have been useful to show the questionnaire to a person who is familiar with the field of statistics and who knows how to use the SPSS statistical analysis program. It turned out that a few of our questions in the questionnaire were formed in such a way that we were not able to analyze them statistically.

What is more, if the questionnaire had not included so many questions, the percentage of replies might have been greater. Since it comprised nine pages, some teachers may have thought that they do not have time for such a long questionnaire. Another defect concerning the questionnaire as a means of gathering data was that it was impossible to ask for further explanations on the teachers' answers and comments. At times it would have been useful if the teachers had been more elaborate in their answers; in many cases we had to interpret the teacher's answers based on what we assumed they meant.

Furthermore, even though the questionnaire was understandable, we had to exclude one reply altogether due to a misunderstanding. The questionnaires in the county of western Finland were addressed to the headmasters, and one headmaster had answered the questionnaire himself even though he did not teach English at the time. This misunderstanding was entirely our own fault; we did not indicate clearly enough

in the cover letter that the questionnaire is addressed to an English teacher who presently teaches in the upper secondary school.

In sum, it is important to understand that written and spoken languages differ from each other since they are mainly used for different kinds of purposes. In other words, there is no use in presenting one through the lens of the other; written texts do not sound good or natural when read aloud, and transcribed speech seems disorderly and even incomprehensible. Therefore, foreign language teaching should cover both the written as well as the spoken language and they should be practised separately. Moreover, it is essential that these language forms are practised authentically so that spoken language is used in interactional situations, which resemble real life situations as closely as possible.

What is more, since the production of spoken language is claimed to be fairly undemanding as far as structure and vocabulary are concerned, students should be encouraged to talk from a very early stage onwards (Brown and Yule 1987: 9). Furthermore, it is important that the students have the courage to speak in a foreign language; the mistakes they make should not be paid too much attention to. Indeed, it is no use in knowing the grammatical rules if one can not express oneself or understand others in the foreign language (see eg. Reijula and Huttunen 1998: 7).

In addition, even though there are various challenges to be tackled in testing and assessing, they can be overcome. Indeed, one of the most important discoveries was that the reason behind many of the problems seemed to be lack of knowledge and skills of how to test and assess speaking proficiency. However, this obstacle can be defeated by providing more training on these issues. Furthermore, there is no reason why teaching in upper secondary schools could not be developed into a more communicative direction. It has been argued that testing oral skills would have a positive washback effect on practising these skills; more time and effort would be spent on these skills if they were tested. In the light of this, including an oral test in the Matriculation Examination would be a positive development.

8 CONCLUSION

The teachers in upper secondary schools had a positive outlook on oral skills and on practising them, and this was reflected in the fact that oral exercises were part of the lessons. However, practising oral skills involved many problems, such as lack of time and big group sizes. Many teachers could not state their opinion on testing oral skills, which could be due to this being a fairly new field that the teachers are not accustomed to. This is one of the reasons why testing oral skills is quite rare and why there is so much resistance towards it. It is fairly understandable that teachers did not want to welcome the oral test with open arms because they are generally not used to it and some even lack the know-how to carry it out. Indeed, the teachers saw various difficulties in testing oral proficiency which should be overcome before the inclusion of the oral test in the Matriculation Examination is possible. A conclusion could be drawn that by increasing the amount and quality of training on these issues would be necessary to change the teachers' attitudes on oral skills into a more positive direction and for the teachers to dispose of some of their insecurities and suspicions concerning testing and assessing oral proficiency.

Our aim was to view the role of oral skills in the whole country but for practical reasons we had to limit the study to take place only in two counties. However, the statistical significance of the background variables was examined, and some cases of statistical significance were found. This indicates that the results are generalisable to some extent even though only two counties were studied. Moreover, since our data was collected in two out of five counties in Finland (and the questionnaires were sent to 150 upper secondary schools of which 40 % were returned in time), the results represent fairly well the situation in Finland as a whole. Additionally, even though there were some differences concerning practising, testing and assessing oral skills between the counties of western Finland and Oulu, they were not fundamental. Since there were no major differences between the two counties examined, it could signify that the results represent the situation in the whole country.

Our study thus gives recent information on practising, testing and assessing oral skills in two different counties in Finland. It is useful both for teachers and for planners of education to know how varied the practices of testing oral skills are in

different upper secondary schools. This information can be used to standardize testing in order to avoid inequality between students. Moreover, English teachers can use the knowledge gained by this research of the whole area of oral skills, for instance to compare their views of those of other English teachers. Furthermore, the summary of the testing methods in the study could be utilized in testing oral proficiency. Even though our respondents preferred indirect testing methods, they could start using more direct methods. In addition to this, our study gave the teachers an opportunity to express their opinions on oral skills and their testing and assessment. Since the oral test in the Matriculation Examination seems inevitable, the results of the teachers' opinions in our study give an insight into the teachers' views and attitudes. For instance, many teachers still seem to oppose oral testing and do not want to include such a test in the Matriculation Examination. As indicated in the study, the need for further education training on how to practise, test and assess oral skills is evident. Consequently, this piece of information can be utilized when planning further education training in the future.

The present study aroused many ideas for further research. The topic of oral skills in teaching could be studied further by approaching it from a more practical point of view, for instance by observing classrooms and by interviewing teachers. Observing could be conducted by a researcher entering a classroom and making observations of, for instance, how much time teachers spend on oral exercises and how much they use the target language in their lessons. Observation study would give a more all-encompassing and profound picture of the situation. Moreover, observation could be used to accompany the questionnaire study in order to result in a more truthful view on practising oral skills. Secondly, interviewing as well could be used together with the questionnaire study. As was discovered when carrying out the present study, it would have been useful to receive further information and explanation on many of the questions.

Thirdly, since the need for the oral test seems obvious, it could be studied how an oral test could be included in the Matriculation Examination as a compulsory component. A working group is already examining this but their methodological choices have not been published. Therefore, this issue could be examined with different methods than those of the working group. Fourthly, the training of English

teachers (both teacher training and further education training) could be one topic for further research. Arranging further education training could be studied, and how many teachers take part in it and how often. Our results revealed the need for this kind of study since many teachers reported of lack of training on oral skills.

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APPENDIX 1 Levels of language proficiency and the explanation for level B2.1
(Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2003: 91, 201)

Kieli ja oppimäärä	Puhuminen	Puheen ymmärtäminen	Kirjoittaminen	Tekstin ymmärtäminen
6. luokan lopussa				
Englanti A	A1.3	A2.1	A1.3	A2.1
Muut vieraat kielet A	A1.2	A1.3	A1.2	A1.3
Ruotsi A	A1.2	A1.3	A1.2	A1.3
9. luokan lopussa (kriteeri arvosanalle 8)				
Englanti A	A2.2	B1.1	A2.2	B1.1
Muut vieraat kielet A	A2.1	A2.2	A2.1	A2.2
Ruotsi A	A2.1	A2.2	A2.1	A2.2
Ruotsi B	A1.3	A2.1	A1.3	A2.1
Englanti B	A1.3	A2.1	A1.3	A2.1
Valinnainen vieras kieli B2	A1.1 – A1.2	A1.2 – A1.3	A1.1 + A1.2	A1.2 – A1.3
Lukion lopussa				
Englanti A	B2.1	B2.1	B2.1	B2.1
Muut vieraat kielet A	B1.1	B1.1 – B1.2	B1.1 – B1.2	B1.2
Englanti B1	B1.2	B1.2	B1.2	B1.2
Englanti B2	B1.1	B1.1	B1.1	B1.1
Muut vieraat kielet B2	A2.1 – A2.2	A2.2	A2.1 – A2.2	A2.2 – B1.1
Englanti B3	B2.2	B1.1	B1.1	B1.1
Muut vieraat kielet B3	A2.1	A2.1 – A2.2	A1.3 – A2.1	A2.1 – A2.2
Ruotsi A	B1.2	B2.1	B1.2	B2.1
Ruotsi B1	B1.1	B1.2	B1.1	B1.2

Taitotaso B2 Selviytyminen säännöllisessä kanssakäymisessä syntyperäisten kanssa				
	Kuullun ymmärtäminen	Puhuminen	Luetun ymmärtäminen	
B2.1 Itsenäisen kielitaidon perustaso	<p>* Ymmärtää osittain ja kielellisesti kompleksisen puheen pääajatuksot, kun se käsittelee konkreetteja tai abstrakteja aiheita. Pystyy seuraamaan yleisesti kiinnostavaa yksityiskohtaista kerrontaa (uutiset, haastattelut, elokuvat, luennot).</p> <p>* Ymmärtää puheen pääkohdat, puhujan tarkoituksen, asenteita, muodollisuustasetta ja tyyliä. Pystyy seuraamaan laajaa puhetta ja monimutkaista argumentointia, jos puheen kulku on selvästi merkitty erilaisin jäsentäminen (sidesanat, rytmitys). Pystyy tiivistämään tai ilmaisemaan kuulemastaan avainkohdat ja tärkeät yksityiskohdat.</p> <p>* Ymmärtää suuren osan ympärillään käytävästä keskustelusta, mutta voi kokea vaikeaksi ymmärtää useamman syntyperäisen välistä keskustelua, jos nämä eivät mitenkään helpota sanottavaansa.</p>	<p>* Osaa esittää selkeitä, täsmällisiä kuvauksia monista kokemuksiinsa liittyvistä asioista, kertoo tuntemuksista sekä tuoda esiin tapahtumien ja kokemusten henkilökohtaisen merkityksen. Pystyy osallistumaan aktiivisesti useimpiin käytännöllisiin ja sosiaalisiin tilanteisiin sekä melko muodollisiin keskusteluihin. Pystyy säännölliseen vuorovaikutukseen syntyperäisten kanssa vaikuttamatta tahattomasti huvittavalla tai ärsyttävällä. Kielellinen ilmaisu ei aina ole täysin tyylikästä.</p> <p>* Pystyy tuottamaan puhejaksoja melko tasaiseen tahtiin, ja puheessa on vain harvoin pitempiä taukoja.</p> <p>* Ääntäminen ja intonaatio ovat selkeitä ja luontevia.</p> <p>* Osaa käyttää monipuolisesti kielen rakenteita ja laajahkoa sanastoa mukaan lukien idiomattinen ja käsitteellinen sanasto. Osoittaa kasvavaa taitoa reagoida sopivasti tilanteen asettamiin muutovaatimuksiin.</p> <p>* Kieliopin hallinta on melko hyvää, eivätkä satunnaiset virheet yleensä haittaa ymmärrettävyyttä.</p>	<p>* Pystyy lukemaan itsenäisesti muutaman sivun pituisia tekstejä (lehtiartikkeleita, novelleja, viihde- ja tietokirjallisuutta, raportteja ja yksityiskohtaisia ohjeita) oman alan tai yleisistä aiheista. Tekstit voivat käsitellä abstrakteja, käsitteellisiä tai ammatillisia aiheita, ja niissä on tosiasioita, asenteita ja mielipiteitä.</p> <p>* Pystyy tunnistamaan kirjoittajan ja tekstin tarkoituksen, paikantamaan useita eri yksityiskohtia pitkästä tekstistä. Pystyy nopeasti tunnistamaan tekstin sisällön ja uusien tietojen käyttöarvon päättääkseen, kannattaako tekstiin tutustua tarkemmin.</p> <p>* Vaikeuksia tuottavat vain pitkien tekstien idiomit ja kulttuuriviittaukset.</p>	<p>Kirjoittaminen</p> <p>* Osaa kirjoittaa selkeitä ja yksityiskohtaisia tekstejä monista itseään kiinnostavista aihepiireistä, tutuista abstrakteista aiheista, rutiniluonteisista asiaviesteistä sekä muodollisempia sosiaalisia viestejä (arvostelut, liikekirjeet, ohjeet, hakemukset, yhteenvedot).</p> <p>* Osaa kirjoittaessaan ilmaista tietoja ja näkemyksiä tehokkaasti ja kommentoida muiden näkemyksiä. Osaa yhdistellä tai tiivistää eri lähteistä poimittuja tietoja omaan tekstiin.</p> <p>* Osaa laajan sanaston ja vaativia lauserakenteita sekä kielelliset keinot selkeän, sidosteisen tekstin laatimiseksi. Sävy ja tyyliin joustavuus on rajallinen, ja pitkässä esityksessä voi ilmetä hyppäyksiä asiasta toiseen.</p> <p>* Hallitsee melko hyvin oikeinkirjoituksen, kieliopin ja välimerkien käytön, eivätkä virheet johda väärinkäsityksiin. Tuotoksessa saattaa näkyä äidinkielen vaikutus. Vaativat rakenteet sekä ilmaisu ja tyyliin joustavuus tuottavat ongelmia.</p>

APPENDIX 2 Common Reference Levels: qualitative aspects of spoken language use (CEF 2001: 28 – 29)

Table 3. Common Reference Levels: qualitative aspects of spoken language use

	RANGE	ACCURACY	FLUENCY	INTERACTION	COHERENCE
C2	Shows great flexibility reformulating ideas in differing linguistic forms to convey finer shades of meaning precisely, to give emphasis, to differentiate and to eliminate ambiguity. Also has a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others' reactions).	Can express him/herself spontaneously at length with a natural colloquial flow, avoiding or backtracking around any difficulty so smoothly that the interlocutor is hardly aware of it.	Can interact with ease and skill, picking up and using non-verbal and intonational cues apparently effortlessly. Can interweave his/her contribution into the joint discourse with fully natural turntaking, referencing, allusion making, etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse making full and appropriate use of a variety of organisational patterns and a wide range of connectors and other cohesive devices.
C1	Has a good command of a broad range of language allowing him/her to select a formulation to express him/herself clearly in an appropriate style on a wide range of general, academic, professional or leisure topics without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare, difficult to spot and generally corrected when they do occur.	Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only a conceptually difficult subject can hinder a natural, smooth flow of language.	Can select a suitable phrase from a readily available range of discourse functions to preface his remarks in order to get or to keep the floor and to relate his/her own contributions skilfully to those of other speakers.	Can produce clear, smoothly flowing, well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
B2+					
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints on most general topics, without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make errors which cause misunderstanding, and can correct most of his/her mistakes.	Can produce stretches of language with a fairly even tempo, although he/she can be hesitant as he/she searches for patterns and expressions. There are few noticeably long pauses.	Can initiate discourse, take his/her turn when appropriate and end conversation when he/she needs to, though he/she may not always do this elegantly. Can help the discussion along on familiar ground confirming comprehension, inviting others in, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link his/her utterances into clear, coherent discourse, though there may be some 'jumpiness' in a long contribution.

B1+					
B1	Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used 'routines' and patterns associated with more predictable situations.	Can keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production.	Can initiate, maintain and close simple face-to-face conversation on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm mutual understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, discrete simple elements into a connected, linear sequence of points.
A2+					
A2	Uses basic sentence patterns with memorised phrases, groups of a few words and formulae in order to communicate limited information in simple everyday situations.	Uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically makes basic mistakes.	Can make him/herself understood in very short utterances, even though pauses, false starts and reformulation are very evident.	Can answer questions and respond to simple statements. Can indicate when he/she is following but is rarely able to understand enough to keep conversation going of his/her own accord.	Can link groups of words with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.
A1	Has a very basic repertoire of words and simple phrases related to personal details and particular concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns in a memorised repertoire.	Can manage very short, isolated, mainly pre-packaged utterances, with much pausing to search for expressions, to articulate less familiar words, and to repair communication.	Can ask and answer questions about personal details. Can interact in a simple way but communication is totally dependent on repetition, rephrasing and repair.	Can link words or groups of words with very basic linear connectors like 'and' or 'then'.

APPENDIX 3 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS

Fill in the questionnaire by circling the most suitable alternative.

You can answer the open questions in this questionnaire either in English or in Finnish! At the end of the questionnaire (see question 43) you can write your comments (e.g. on the questionnaire itself, on oral skills) and please feel free to add any comments you may have on the margins or on the back of the paper as well.

Please notice our request to send us a copy of one English language proficiency scale (=arviointiasteikko) you use for assessment and of one oral skills test (see question 13.2).

1 INFORMATION ON TEACHERS' BACKGROUND

1 Sex

- A. female
- B. male

2 Age

- A. under 35 years
- B. 36 – 45 years
- C. 46 – 55 years
- D. over 55 years

3 Do you have a university degree?

- A. Yes
- B. No (*if you chose this alternative, move to question 3.3*)

3.1. If yes, do you have

- A. a Bachelor's degree (kandidaatin tutkinto)
- B. a Master's degree (maisterin tutkinto)
- C. other, which? _____

3.2. If you have a university degree, what did you study as your major subject?

- A. English
- B. Finnish
- C. French
- D. German
- E. Russian
- F. Swedish
- G. other, which? _____

3.3. Have you attended teacher training?

- A. Yes
- B. No (*if you chose this alternative, move to question 4*)

3.3.1. If you have attended teacher training, when was this?

- a. 1950s
- b. 1960s
- c. 1970s
- d. 1980s
- e. 1990s
- f. 2000 or later

4 Have you attended further education training (=täydennyskoulutus) on oral skills?

A. Yes

B. No (*if you chose this alternative, move to question 5*)

4.1. If yes, what kind of training (e.g. what was the topic, how long did it last) and where?

5 Official position

- A. upper secondary school teacher
- B. extra teacher working full-time (*päätoiminen tuntiopettaja*)
- C. extra teacher working part-time (*osa-aikainen tuntiopettaja*)
- D. substitute teacher
- E. other _____

6 Teaching experience as an English teacher

- A. less than five years
- B. 5-10 years
- C. 11-15 years
- D. 16-20 years
- E. over 20 years

7 Time spent in English speaking countries

- A. not at all
- B. not more than one month
- C. 1-6 months
- D. 6-12 months
- E. 12-24 months
- F. over 24 months

2. QUESTIONS CONCERNING TEACHING ORAL SKILLS

In this section we would like you to answer the following questions about teaching oral skills. With the term *oral skills* we mean production of speech and practising interactive communication skills.

8 Does your upper secondary school offer a course specifically on oral skills?

A. Yes

B. No (if you chose this alternative, move to question 9)

8.1. If yes, do you teach such a course?

a. Yes

name of the course: _____

b. No

9 Do you practise oral skills in English lessons? (Please notice that the following questions in this questionnaire concern other than possible extra courses in oral skills.)

A. Yes

B. No (if you chose this alternative, move to question 10)

9.1. If yes, how do you practise oral skills?

1st year (courses 1,2,3)

- a. I don't teach courses 1, 2 and 3.
- b. dialogue
- c. role play
- d. group discussion
- e. pair discussion
- f. oral presentation
- g. debate
- h. describing a picture
- i. pronunciation exercises
- j. other, which?

2nd year (courses 4,5,6)

- a. I don't teach courses 4,5 and 6.
- b. dialogue
- c. role play
- d. group discussion
- e. pair discussion
- f. oral presentation
- g. debate
- h. describing a picture
- i. pronunciation exercises
- j. other, which?

3rd year (courses 7,8)

- a. I don't teach courses 7 and 8.
- b. dialogue
- c. role play
- d. group discussion
- e. pair discussion
- f. oral presentation
- g. debate
- h. describing a picture
- i. pronunciation exercises
- j. other, which?

10 Do you think there are any factors which hinder the practice of oral skills in your classes? If yes, give specific examples.

11 Are there any factors which facilitate/encourage practising of oral skills? If yes, give specific examples.

3. QUESTIONS CONCERNING TESTING AND ASSESSING ORAL SKILLS

In this section we would like you to answer the following questions about testing and assessing oral skills. Remember that these questions deal with other than possible extra courses on oral skills.

12 Does your school organize a voluntary oral skills test (Opetushallituksen englannin kielen suullinen koe) at the end of upper secondary school?

A. Yes

B. No

13 Do you test students' oral skills with a separate test?

A. on every course

B. on one course, which? _____

C. on a few courses, which? _____

D. never (*if you chose this alternative, please move to question 14*)

13.1. What kinds of tests do you use for assessing oral skills? You may choose more than one alternative.

1st year (courses 1,2,3)

- a. oral presentation
- b. interview
- c. role play
- d. group discussion
- e. reading aloud
- f. other(s), which

2nd year (courses 4,5,6)

- a. oral presentation
- b. interview
- c. role play
- d. group discussion
- e. reading aloud
- f. other(s), which

3rd year (courses 7,8)

- a. oral presentation
- b. interview
- c. role play
- d. group discussion
- e. reading aloud
- f. other(s), which

13.2. Do you normally use an English language proficiency scale (=arviointiasteikko) when assessing the performance?

A. Yes

B. No

We would appreciate it if you could send us a copy of one (1) English language proficiency scale (=arviointiasteikko) and of one (1) oral skills test that you have used. We would find these examples very useful in our research.

13.3. Do your students normally assess their own performance in the test?

A. Yes

B. No

13.4. Do your students normally assess their peers' performance in the test?

A. Yes

B. No

14 Do you assess students' oral skills in some other way than a separate test?

A. Yes

B. No (if you chose this alternative, please move to question 16)

14.1. If yes, give examples of your methods of assessment.

15 If you use both a separate test and other ways of assessing oral skills, which of these do you emphasize in the course grade?

- A. The separate test B. Other ways

16 In your opinion, are there any difficulties in testing and assessing oral skills? If yes, what kinds of difficulties?

17 Do you co-operate with other English/language teachers when testing and assessing oral skills?

- A. Yes. B. No (*If you chose this alternative, move to question 18*)

17.1. If yes, what kind of co-operation?

18 Does your school have a common agreement for testing oral skills (for instance written in the school curriculum or an oral agreement)?

- A. Yes B. No (*If you chose this alternative, move to question 19*)

18.1. If yes, what kind of agreement?

3. OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES

In this section we would like to have your opinion on teaching, testing and assessing oral skills. Use the following scale. Tick the most suitable alternative.

1 = strongly agree
 2 = agree to some extent
 3 = not sure
 4 = disagree to some extent
 5 = strongly disagree

	strongly agree				strongly disagree
19 When I attended teacher training, teaching oral skills was emphasized.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
20 Teaching oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
21 Teaching written skills in upper secondary school is more important than teaching oral skills.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
22 My students are shy about speaking English.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
23 I use the target language in my lessons whenever possible.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
24 Student's oral skills affect the course grade.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
25 Oral skills are an important part of language proficiency.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
26 The majority of my students will manage in everyday speaking situations in English after finishing upper secondary school.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
27 The majority of my students will have achieved sufficient written skills (both in writing and in reading) after finishing upper secondary school.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
28 Testing oral skills in upper secondary school is important.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
29 The present Matriculation Examination adequately tests students' foreign language ability.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
30 A section testing foreign language oral skills should be included in the Matriculation Examination.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree to some extent
3 = not sure
4 = disagree to some extent
5 = strongly disagree

	strongly agree				strongly disagree
31 Students would be more motivated to practise oral skills if these skills were tested in the Matriculation Examination.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
32 If foreign language oral skills are tested at the end of upper secondary school, the test should be optional for students.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
33 I have received enough training on how to test and assess oral skills.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
34 The present Matriculation Examination is a hindrance to the development of students' oral skills.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
35 If a section testing foreign language oral skills is included in the Matriculation Examination, the test will become more stressful for students.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
36 Testing oral skills makes teachers' work more difficult.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
37 The assessing of oral skills is more difficult than the assessing of other language skills.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
38 When assessing oral skills, an outside assessor (for instance another teacher) is better than the student's own teacher.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
39 I have received enough training on how to teach oral skills.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
40 A sufficient amount of good oral exercises in English is included in the teaching material at my disposal.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
41 The size of my classes is a hindrance to the developing of students' oral skills.	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree to some extent
3 = not sure
4 = disagree to some extent
5 = strongly disagree

**strongly
agree**

**strongly
disagree**

42 The Matriculation Examination serves as a hidden curriculum (it dominates teaching) in upper secondary school.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

43 Other comments (e.g. on oral skills, on the questionnaire...)

Thank you for cooperation!

Maija-Liisa Huuskonen
mahuusko@cc.jyu.fi
 044-3049634

Mirva Kähkönen
mihekahk@cc.jyu.fi
 040-5110863

APPENDIX 4 Cover letters for upper secondary school English teachers in the county of western Finland and in the county of Oulu

Hyvä englanninopettaja

Teemme Jyväskylän yliopiston Kielten laitokselle Pro Gradu –tutkielmaa, jossa selvitämme kuinka suullista kielitaitoa harjoitetaan, testataan ja arvioidaan Länsi-Suomen läänin lukioissa. Lisäksi kartoitamme opettajien näkemyksiä aiheesta. Ohjaajana toimii professori Arja Piirainen-Marsh.

Vieraiden kielten suulliseen hallitsemiseen kiinnitetään yhä enemmän huomiota. Aiheesta keskustellaan eri tahoilla, ja pohditaan kuinka tätä kielen osa-aluetta voisi kehittää. Suullisen kielitaidon testaus- ja arviointikäytänteitä ei kuitenkaan ole kovin paljon tutkittu. Nyt Sinulla on tilaisuus osallistua tutkimukseemme, jossa voit myös tuoda omat mielipiteesi esille. Tutkimuksemme tarkoitus on nimenomaan kartoittaa nykytilannetta suullisen kielitaidon saralla.

Teemme tutkimuksemme yhteistyössä Länsi-Suomen lääninhallituksen kanssa, jossa yhteyshenkilömme on sivistystoimentarkastaja Matti Kangasoja. Toivomme, että ehdit vastata kyselyymme, sillä jokainen vastaus on tärkeä kattavan kokonaiskuvan muodostamiseksi. Tutkimusaineisto tullaan käsittelemään ehdottoman luottamuksellisesti ja raportoimaan niin, että yksittäiset vastaajat tai lukiot eivät ole tunnistettavissa.

Pyydämme Sinua palauttamaan kyselylomakkeen postitse oheisessa vastauskuoressa 30.11.2005 mennessä. Jokainen vastaus on tärkeä!

Vastaamme mielellämme kyselylomakkeeseemme tai tutkimukseemme liittyviin mahdollisiin kysymyksiisi.

Jyväskylässä 7. marraskuuta 2005

Maija-Liisa Huuskonen
mahuusko@cc.jyu.fi
044-3049634

Mirva Kähkönen
mihekahk@cc.jyu.fi
040-5110863

Hyvä englanninopettaja

Teemme Jyväskylän yliopiston Kielten laitokselle Pro Gradu –tutkielmaa, jossa selvitämme kuinka suullista kielitaitoa harjoitetaan, testataan ja arvioidaan Oulun läänin ja Länsi-Suomen läänin lukioissa. Lisäksi kartoitamme opettajien näkemyksiä aiheesta. Kyselylomake lähetetään yhdelle opettajalle per koulu. Tutkielmamme ohjaajana toimii professori Arja Piirainen-Marsh.

Vieraiden kielten suulliseen hallitsemiseen kiinnitetään yhä enemmän huomiota. Aiheesta keskustellaan eri tahoilla, ja pohditaan kuinka tätä kielen osa-aluetta voisi kehittää. Suullisen kielitaidon testaus- ja arviointikäytänteitä ei kuitenkaan ole kovin paljon tutkittu. Nyt Sinulla on tilaisuus osallistua tutkimukseemme, jossa voit myös tuoda omat mielipiteesi esille. Tutkimuksemme tarkoitus on nimenomaan kartoittaa nykytilannetta suullisen kielitaidon saralla.

Teemme tutkimuksemme yhteistyössä Oulun lääninhallituksen kanssa, jossa yhteyshenkilömme on koulutoimentarkastaja Veijo Kosola. Toivomme, että ehdit vastata kyselyymme, sillä jokainen vastaus on tärkeä kattavan kokonaiskuvan muodostamiseksi. Tutkimusaineisto tullaan käsittelemään ehdottoman luottamuksellisesti ja raportoimaan niin, että yksittäiset vastaajat tai lukiot eivät ole tunnistettavissa.

Pyydämme Sinua palauttamaan kyselylomakkeen postitse oheisessa vastauskuoressa 31.01.2006 mennessä. Jokainen vastaus on tärkeä!

Vastaamme mielellämme kyselylomakkeeseemme tai tutkimukseemme liittyviin mahdollisiin kysymyksiisi.

Jyväskylässä 15. marraskuuta 2005

Maija-Liisa Huuskonen
mahuusko@cc.jyu.fi
044-3049634

Mirva Kähkönen
mihekahk@cc.jyu.fi
040-5110863

APPENDIX 5: CORRELATIONS

		k19	k20	k21	k22	k23	k24	k25	k26	k27	k28
k19	Pearson Correlation	1,000	,020	-,029	-,034	,065	,091	,080	,034	,081	-,054
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,859	,798	,768	,567	,426	,480	,762	,475	,634
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k20	Pearson Correlation	,020	1,000	-,179	-,148	,151	-,076	,522	,115	,133	,256
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,859	,000	,115	,200	,181	,506	,000	,311	,238	,022
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k21	Pearson Correlation	-,029	-,179	1,000	,198	-,143	,090	-,132	-,012	,002	-,213
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,798	,115	,000	,086	,209	,433	,247	,917	,988	,060
	N	79	79	79	76	79	78	79	79	79	79
k22	Pearson Correlation	-,034	-,148	,198	1,000	-,123	,084	-,096	-,429	-,246	-,080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,768	,200	,086	,000	,287	,466	,406	,000	,031	,488
	N	77	77	76	77	77	77	77	77	77	77
k23	Pearson Correlation	,065	,151	-,143	-,123	1,000	,160	,165	,044	,151	-,029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,567	,181	,209	,287	,000	,160	,143	,701	,180	,801
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k24	Pearson Correlation	,091	-,076	,090	,084	,160	1,000	,050	,050	,063	,070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,426	,506	,433	,466	,160	,000	,660	,659	,584	,540
	N	79	79	78	77	79	79	79	79	79	79
k25	Pearson Correlation	,080	,522	-,132	-,096	,165	,050	1,000	,086	-,025	,167
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,480	,000	,247	,406	,143	,660	,000	,451	,829	,140
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k26	Pearson Correlation	,034	,115	-,012	-,429	,044	,050	,086	1,000	,393	,015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,762	,311	,917	,000	,701	,659	,451	,000	,000	,897
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k27	Pearson Correlation	,081	,133	,002	-,246	,151	,063	-,025	,393	1,000	,016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,475	,238	,988	,031	,180	,584	,829	,000	,000	,890

	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k28	Pearson Correlation	-,054	,256	-,213	-,080	-,029	,070	,167	,015	,016	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,634	,022	,060	,488	,801	,540	,140	,897	,890	,000
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k29	Pearson Correlation	,014	-,104	,118	,009	,066	,041	-,144	-,022	,027	-,290
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,899	,361	,302	,941	,560	,722	,204	,846	,814	,009
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k30	Pearson Correlation	-,067	,318	-,239	-,046	,038	-,030	,250	,048	,127	,599
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,553	,004	,034	,694	,737	,793	,025	,673	,261	,000
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k31	Pearson Correlation	-,138	,023	-,009	,155	-,077	-,013	-,065	-,145	-,037	,274
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,221	,841	,936	,179	,496	,912	,568	,199	,745	,014
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k32	Pearson Correlation	-,062	-,156	,194	-,022	,137	-,123	-,044	,075	,029	-,351
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,582	,168	,087	,849	,225	,281	,699	,507	,797	,001
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k33	Pearson Correlation	,083	,113	-,036	-,047	,021	,177	,009	,237	,123	-,043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,463	,318	,755	,686	,850	,119	,934	,034	,276	,703
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k34	Pearson Correlation	-,217	,145	-,005	,036	-,132	-,058	-,060	,125	,060	,194
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,053	,199	,967	,757	,242	,613	,594	,269	,597	,084
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k35	Pearson Correlation	,079	-,091	,282	-,041	,111	-,032	-,059	-,062	-,132	-,231
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,488	,423	,012	,721	,328	,779	,606	,586	,243	,039
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k36	Pearson Correlation	,105	-,034	,314	,095	-,049	-,244	-,098	,133	-,109	-,416
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,355	,764	,005	,409	,666	,030	,385	,241	,334	,000
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80
k37	Pearson Correlation	-,096	-,037	,256	,091	,038	-,065	-,067	-,207	-,177	-,317
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,401	,746	,024	,436	,739	,573	,557	,068	,118	,004

	N	79	79	78	76	79	78	79	79	79	79	79
k38	Pearson Correlation	-,134	,126	,007	-,332	,026	-,134	,170	,092	-,114	,025	,025
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,234	,264	,952	,003	,822	,239	,132	,415	,313	,825	,825
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80	80
k39	Pearson Correlation	,346	,030	,021	-,143	,216	,214	,056	,197	,171	-,197	-,197
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002	,793	,857	,216	,055	,059	,620	,080	,130	,079	,079
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80	80
k40	Pearson Correlation	,209	,038	,041	-,195	,167	,063	,208	,168	,208	-,264	-,264
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,062	,736	,718	,090	,138	,578	,064	,136	,064	,018	,018
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80	80
k41	Pearson Correlation	-,027	-,083	,138	,057	,047	,059	,097	-,143	-,133	-,221	-,221
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,815	,467	,224	,623	,679	,606	,390	,205	,238	,049	,049
	N	80	80	79	77	80	79	80	80	80	80	80
k42	Pearson Correlation	-,076	-,046	,080	,014	-,069	-,194	,045	-,158	-,058	,029	,029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,507	,686	,485	,905	,544	,090	,693	,164	,610	,797	,797
	N	79	79	78	76	79	78	79	79	79	79	79

		k29	k30	k31	k32	k33	k34	k35	k36	k37	k38
k19	Pearson Correlation	,014	-,067	-,138	-,062	,083	-,217	,079	,105	-,096	-,134
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,899	,553	,221	,582	,463	,053	,488	,355	,401	,234
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k20	Pearson Correlation	-,104	,318	,023	-,156	,113	,145	-,091	-,034	-,037	,126
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,361	,004	,841	,168	,318	,199	,423	,764	,746	,264
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k21	Pearson Correlation	,118	-,239	-,009	,194	-,036	-,005	,282	,314	,256	,007
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,302	,034	,936	,087	,755	,967	,012	,005	,024	,952
	N	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	78	79
k22	Pearson Correlation	,009	-,046	,155	-,022	-,047	,036	-,041	,095	,091	-,332
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,941	,694	,179	,849	,686	,757	,721	,409	,436	,003
	N	77	77	77	77	77	77	77	77	76	77
k23	Pearson Correlation	,066	,038	-,077	,137	,021	-,132	,111	-,049	,038	,026
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,560	,737	,496	,225	,850	,242	,328	,666	,739	,822
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k24	Pearson Correlation	,041	-,030	-,013	-,123	,177	-,058	-,032	-,244	-,065	-,134
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,722	,793	,912	,281	,119	,613	,779	,030	,573	,239
	N	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	78	79
k25	Pearson Correlation	-,144	,250	-,065	-,044	,009	-,060	-,059	-,098	-,067	,170
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,204	,025	,568	,699	,934	,594	,606	,385	,557	,132
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k26	Pearson Correlation	-,022	,048	-,145	,075	,237	,125	-,062	,133	-,207	,092
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,846	,673	,199	,507	,034	,269	,586	,241	,068	,415
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k27	Pearson Correlation	,027	,127	-,037	,029	,123	,060	-,132	-,109	-,177	-,114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,814	,261	,745	,797	,276	,597	,243	,334	,118	,313
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k28	Pearson Correlation	-,290	,599	,274	-,351	-,043	,194	-,231	-,416	-,317	,025

	Sig. (2-tailed)	,009	,000	,014	,001	,703	,084	,039	,000	,004	,825
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k29	Pearson Correlation	1,000	-,407	-,134	,318	,120	-,296	,255	,260	,003	,059
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,236	,004	,288	,008	,023	,020	,976	,605
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k30	Pearson Correlation	-,407	1,000	,347	-,454	,094	,264	-,475	-,374	-,293	-,125
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	,002	,000	,405	,018	,000	,001	,009	,267
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k31	Pearson Correlation	-,134	,347	1,000	-,070	-,165	,400	-,119	-,177	,093	-,015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,236	,002	,000	,538	,142	,000	,292	,115	,413	,897
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k32	Pearson Correlation	,318	-,454	-,070	1,000	,092	-,279	,436	,319	,183	,088
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,004	,000	,538	,000	,416	,012	,000	,004	,106	,438
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k33	Pearson Correlation	,120	,094	-,165	,092	1,000	-,131	-,046	-,031	-,155	-,064
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,288	,405	,142	,416	,000	,245	,687	,783	,172	,571
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k34	Pearson Correlation	-,296	,264	,400	-,279	-,131	1,000	-,240	-,139	,055	,048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,008	,018	,000	,012	,245	,000	,032	,220	,632	,672
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k35	Pearson Correlation	,255	-,475	-,119	,436	-,046	-,240	1,000	,434	,295	-,038
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,023	,000	,292	,000	,687	,032	,000	,000	,008	,740
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k36	Pearson Correlation	,260	-,374	-,177	,319	-,031	-,139	,434	1,000	,473	,142
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,020	,001	,115	,004	,783	,220	,000	,000	,000	,207
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	79	80
k37	Pearson Correlation	,003	-,293	,093	,183	-,155	,055	,295	,473	1,000	,221
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,976	,009	,413	,106	,172	,632	,008	,000	,000	,050
	N	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79	79
k38	Pearson Correlation	,059	-,125	-,015	,088	-,064	,048	-,038	,142	,221	1,000

		k39	k40	k41	k42
k19	Pearson Correlation	,346	,209	-,027	-,076
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002	,062	,815	,507
	N	80	80	80	79
k20	Pearson Correlation	,030	,038	-,083	-,046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,793	,736	,467	,686
	N	80	80	80	79
k21	Pearson Correlation	,021	,041	,138	,080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,857	,718	,224	,485
	N	79	79	79	78
k22	Pearson Correlation	-,143	-,195	,057	,014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,216	,090	,623	,905
	N	77	77	77	76
k23	Pearson Correlation	,216	,167	,047	-,069
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,055	,138	,679	,544
	N	80	80	80	79
k24	Pearson Correlation	,214	,063	,059	-,194
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,059	,578	,606	,090
	N	79	79	79	78
k25	Pearson Correlation	,056	,208	,097	,045
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,620	,064	,390	,693
	N	80	80	80	79
k26	Pearson Correlation	,197	,168	-,143	-,158
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,080	,136	,205	,164
	N	80	80	80	79
k27	Pearson Correlation	,171	,208	-,133	-,058
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,130	,064	,238	,610
	N	80	80	80	79
k28	Pearson Correlation	-,197	-,264	-,221	,029

	Sig. (2-tailed)	,079	,018	,049	,797
	N	80	80	80	79
k29	Pearson Correlation	,160	,167	-,009	,013
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,155	,138	,936	,907
	N	80	80	80	79
k30	Pearson Correlation	,054	-,147	-,112	,031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,636	,194	,323	,788
	N	80	80	80	79
k31	Pearson Correlation	-,147	-,139	-,117	,256
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,193	,220	,303	,023
	N	80	80	80	79
k32	Pearson Correlation	,103	,334	,087	,029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,364	,002	,441	,797
	N	80	80	80	79
k33	Pearson Correlation	,718	,211	,066	-,300
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,060	,562	,007
	N	80	80	80	79
k34	Pearson Correlation	-,128	-,186	-,085	,130
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,257	,098	,455	,252
	N	80	80	80	79
k35	Pearson Correlation	-,030	-,034	,044	,137
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,793	,764	,695	,230
	N	80	80	80	79
k36	Pearson Correlation	-,062	,040	,284	,131
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,587	,726	,011	,249
	N	80	80	80	79
k37	Pearson Correlation	-,129	-,136	,062	,199
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,255	,234	,588	,081
	N	79	79	79	78
k38	Pearson Correlation	-,022	,195	-,043	-,140

	Sig. (2-tailed)	,849	,083	,705	,219
	N	80	80	80	79
k39	Pearson Correlation	1,000	,322	,089	-,235
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,004	,431	,037
	N	80	80	80	79
k40	Pearson Correlation	,322	1,000	,079	-,230
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,004	,000	,486	,042
	N	80	80	80	79
k41	Pearson Correlation	,089	,079	1,000	,071
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,431	,486	,000	,533
	N	80	80	80	79
k42	Pearson Correlation	-,235	-,230	,071	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,037	,042	,533	,000
	N	79	79	79	79

APPENDIX 6 Samples of proficiency scales (samples 1 – 2) and tests of oral assessment (samples 3 – 6)

Sample 1

ASSESSMENT INSTRUCTIONS

5 Excellent

The student uses language naturally and is easy to understand. The student speaks fluently and there are only a few unnatural pauses. The student can speak for extended periods. He/she takes initiatives in conversation and interacts well.

The student uses a wide variety of language structures and makes only minor errors. He/she has a large and varied vocabulary. The student uses idioms and nuances naturally.

4 Very good

The student uses language fairly naturally and is easy to understand. Speech is relatively fluent. There are some short pauses and there may be some hesitation. The student can speak for extended periods, takes initiatives and can interact well.

The student is able to use a variety of language structures and has a good vocabulary. However, word choice is not always appropriate.

3 Good

The student manages well in everyday speaking situations. He/she is easy to understand in most cases. The student is able to use short expressions fairly fluently, but pauses or hesitates in difficult situations and when the topic is a little unfamiliar.

The student has a command of basic grammar. He/she uses basic vocabulary relevant to the topic of conversation. There are some errors in more demanding language structures. Vocabulary is insufficient when talking about unfamiliar topics.

2 Fair

The student is able to talk about everyday topics. However, limited language proficiency restricts communication. As a whole, speech is slow and hesitant. The student can take some initiatives in conversation.

There are mistakes, even in basic structures. Errors in pronunciation and choice of words and structures hinder communication. The student's vocabulary is large enough to cope with easy tasks and situations, but restricts choice of topic.

1 Pass

The student's ability to communicate is poor and requires special attention from the interlocutor. There are problems of understanding, even in quite simple situations. As a whole, speech is slow and hesitant. The student does not take initiatives. The student can speak for short periods only and the interlocutor's help is needed.

The student makes a lot of mistakes in both basic language structures and vocabulary. Speech consists of unconnected phrases and single words. Limited vocabulary and/or the number of mistakes hinders understanding.

Sample 3

Oral test 1 Discussion

Summer employment

A näki edellä olevan ilmoituksen englantilaisessa lehdessä. Hän etsii kesätyöpaikkaa, ja ilmoituksen nähtyään hän kiinnostui. Hän oli joka tapauksessa aikonut viettää pari viikkoa ystävänsä luona Englannissa ja olisi valmis jäämään sinne pitemmäksikin aikaa. Jospa sieltä järjestyisi työtä kesäksi!

Looking for a summer job?

The social, educational and technical sector
of the Town of Broome is looking for

bright and enthusiastic young people

to join them as trainees from June to August.

There are both full-time and part-time
vacancies available. Foreign applicants
are also welcome.

We offer varied, interesting and challenging
work including an excellent atmosphere
with qualified co-workers.

For further details and an application form
please phone Mr. Taylor, Personnel Manager,
on 03-547 775 876.

Sample 4

1. Phone call

A päättää soittaa Broomen kaupungin henkilöstöpäällikölle ja kysellä vähän lisää harjoittelupaikoista. Tutustu parisi kanssa työpaikkailmoitukseen ja valitse ala, joka sinua kiinnostaisi. Käy seuraava keskustelu parisi kanssa. B on Mr Taylor, henkilöstöpäällikkö, joka vastaa A:n kyselyihin. Kuuntele, mitä parisi haluaa tietää ja mitä hän sanoo.

A = Harjoittelupaikan hakija, B = Henkilöstöpäällikkö, Mr Taylor

B: Vastaa puhelimeen.	A: Esittele itsesi ja kerro nähneesi lehdessä kaupungin ilmoituksen, jossa etsittiin työharjoittelijoita. Kysy, kenen kanssa voisit asiasta keskustella.
B: Kerro, kuka olet, että olet juuri oikea henkilö kertomaan työpaikoista. Kysy, miten voisit olla avuksi.	A: Kerro ikäsi, ja mistä olet. Kerro, että olet lopettanut peruskoulun ja käynyt vuoden lukiota. Kysy, haluavatko he tietynikäisiä harjoittelijoita, oletko kenties liian nuori.
B: Kerro, että harjoittelijan tulee olla vähintään 16, että yleensä he ovat olleet 17-22 -vuotiaita, osa juuri koulunsa päättäneitä, osa opiskelijoita. Muodollinen pätevyys ei ole välttämätön. Kysy, minkä alan harjoittelupaikasta A on kiinnostunut. Tekniseltä osastolta, opetus- vai sosiaalitoimesta?	A: Vastaa ja kerro, että sinulla on vähän kokemusta ko. alalta, noin 4 viikkoa edellisenä kesänä.
B: Kerro, että työkokemus on aina eduksi. Kerro myös, että työ ko. alalla saattaa olla hyvinkin erilaista kuin Suomessa.	A: Olet samaa mieltä, ja kerro, että juuri siitä syystä työskentely Englannissa voisi olla kiinnostavaa.
B: Kerro myös, että ulkomailta tulevan harjoittelijan kielitaidon tulee olla ainakin kohtalaisen.	A: Kerro, kuinka kauan olet opiskellut englantia. Kerro, että pärjää. Kysy, tarvitsevatko he ulkomaalaiselta työhakijalta todistusta kieliopinnoista ja -taidosta.
B: Vastaa, että sellainen olisi hyvä olla.	A: Kysy, mitä muita dokumentteja he haluaisivat. Koulun päästötodistuksen, työtodistuksia?
B: Kerro, että ne on hyvä liittää mukaan. Samoin CV. Kysy, voisiko A tulla haastatteluun, jos sellainen järjestetään.	A: Vastaa myöntävästi. Olet tuolloin ystävääsi tapaamassa Englannissa. Kerro myös, että työpaikka on juuri sellainen, joka sinua kiinnostaisi. Kysy, milloin haku aika on.
B: Vastaa.	A: Kysy, voisivatko he lähettää hänelle hakemuslomakkeen.
B: Vastaa ja pyydä A:n yhteystiedot.	A: Kerro nimesi.
B: Et saa selvää. Pyydä tavaamaan.	A: Tavaa nimesi ja kerro osoitteesi. Tavaa se myös.
B: Kiitä.	A: Lopeta puhelu. Kiitä avusta ja ajasta.
B: Miten reagoit?	

Sample 5

2. Interview

Sinulla on toivoa saada harjoittelijan paikka, sillä sinut kutsutaan haastatteluun! Ajankohtakin on hyvä, sillä olet tuolloin ystäväsi luona Englannissa. Käy keskustelu paris kanssa. Katsokaa työpaikkailmoitusta ja sopikaa, minkä alan työpaikkaa haastattelu koskee. Voisiko työ olla esim. kouluavustajan, keittiöapulaisen, harjoittelijan työtä teknisessä virastossa? A on harjoittelijapaikan hakija ja B haastattelija. Kuunnelkaa tarkoin toisianne, ja jos ette kuule tai ymmärrä jotakin, pyytäkää kohteliaasti toistamaan.

A: Astut sisään huoneeseen, tervehdit ja esittelet itsesi.	B: Tervehdit ja pyydät A:ta istuutumaan. Kysy, saako puhutella häntä etunimeltä.
A: Vastaa.	B: Mene suoraan asiaan ja pyydä A:ta kertomaan itsestään.
A: Kerro. Muista myös harrastukset.	B: Kerro lukeneesi A:n CV:stä, että hänellä on ollut osa-aikatyö. Pyydä kertomaan siitä.
A: Kerro työstäsi. Mainitse myös, kuinka pitkän aikaa, montako tuntia, monenako päivänä/iltana viikossa jne.	B: Kysy, miksi A on kiinnostunut ko. harjoittelijan paikasta.
A: Kerro. Mainitse myös, että haluat kehittää englanninkielen taitojasi.	B: Kerro, että englanninkieltä hän joutuisi puhumaan paljon. Työssä joutuu tekemisiin ihmisten kanssa. Kysy, onko A mielellään tekemisissä ihmisten kanssa.
A: Kerro.	B: Sano, että olet ymmärtänyt, että A jatkaa syksyllä kouluaan. Kysy, kuinka kauan hän voisi olla työssä harjoittelijana.
A: Vastaa, että ainakin koulun alkuun asti eli elokuun puoliväliin saakka. Kerro myös, että voisit aloittaa kesäkuun alussa.	B: Sano, että se olisi hyvä, sillä loma-aikana on puutetta työvoimasta. Kysy tulevaisuuden suunnitelmista.
A: Kerro.	B: Sano, että keskustelu on ollut kiinnostava. Kysy, haluaisiko A puolestaan tietää jotakin.
A: Kysy työtehtävistä.	B: Kerro.
A: Sano, että selviäisit niistä. Kysy työajoista, onko työaika säännöllinen.	B: Vastaa kieltävästi ja mainitse, että joskus voi olla töitä iltaisin ja myös viikonloppuna.
A: Sano, että se ei olisi ongelma. Kysy palkasta.	B: Kerro, että kaupunki maksaa harjoittelijan palkan. Kerro myös luontaiseduista, joita ovat edullinen lounas ja halpa asunto. Kaupunki avustaa myös työluvan hankkimisessa ulkomaalaisille.
A: Sano, että vaikuttaa todella hyvältä.	B: Kiitä haastattelusta. Sano, että työpaikasta ilmoitetaan parin viikon kuluttua.
A: Kiitä ja hyvästele.	

3. The first day at work

A sai kesätyöpaikan kaupungintalon lounasravintolasta! Esittele itsesi muille työntekijöille. Kerro kuka olet, mistä tulet, mitä olet opiskellut ja tehnyt, ja kerro myös odotuksistasi kesätyöpaikassasi.

B on henkilöstöpäällikkö, joka esittelee työpaikan, kertoo työtehtävistä, jotka vaihtelevat vihannesten pilkkomisesta ja tiskaamisesta asiakaspalveluun ja siivoukseen. Hän kertoo myös työajoista ym. työhön liittyvistä asioista.

Sample 6

Oral test 2 Introduction

1. Introduce your school to a group of students on a visit to Finland

You can include the following topics in your introduction:

- number of students
- school system
- subjects
- school rules

2. Tell about studying and describe an ordinary school day to a new exchange student in your school

You can include the following topics in your introduction:

- time you start and finish your school day
- how many lessons a day
- subject(s) you find interesting and challenging
- subject(s) you find uninteresting or difficult
- time you spend on homework

3. Describe an ideal upper secondary school

You can include the following topics in your introduction:

- size of the school
- curriculum
- study options (compulsory and/or optional subjects)
- exams or continual assessment or both?
- ways in which teaching is organized

Oral test 3 Tell a story

You have met an incredibly interesting person. Tell the (wo)man's life story to your friend. You are given some information on the person, which you should include in the story of his/her life. Think what might have happened in his/her life and make him/her as vivid a personality as you can.

1. He was raised in a middle class family in Croatia. After leaving school, he went to university but he wasn't able to finish his studies because the war broke out. Now he is in Finland. He is married with two children. Things are going quite smoothly in his life now, but he misses his country. He isn't desperate though. He has plans for the future.
2. She was an active and talented student, but she decided to drop out of school at the age of 17 after she had met a group of animal-rights activists. Her parents and teachers were worried, but she was determined to do what she felt was right. Now she is in her early thirties. She is an independent woman who has experienced a lot. She knows definitely what she wants.
3. He wasn't keen on going on to higher education but went straight out to work after he had finished secondary education. In 1989, he decided to stand for Parliament as a non-aligned* MP. He never got into Parliament but nevertheless he has done very well in his life.

(*non-aligned = sitoutumaton)

APPENDIX 7 Crosstabulations and Chi-square Tests

lk22 * sex

Crosstab

			sex		Total
			female	male	
lk22	agree	Count	17	11	28
		% within sex	27,4%	73,3%	36,4%
	not sure	Count	9	1	10
		% within sex	14,5%	6,7%	13,0%
	disagree	Count	36	3	39
		% within sex	58,1%	20,0%	50,6%
Total		Count	62	15	77
		% within sex	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11,030(a)	2	,004
Likelihood Ratio	10,765	2	,005
Linear-by-Linear Association	9,894	1	,002
N of Valid Cases	77		

a 1 cells (16,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,95.

lk41 * sex

Crosstab

			sex		Total
			female	male	
lk41	agree	Count	46	11	57
		% within sex	73,0%	64,7%	71,3%
	not sure	Count	3	4	7
		% within sex	4,8%	23,5%	8,8%
	disagree	Count	14	2	16
		% within sex	22,2%	11,8%	20,0%
Total		Count	63	17	80
		% within sex	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,251(a)	2	,044
Likelihood Ratio	5,224	2	,073
Linear-by-Linear Association	,009	1	,923
N of Valid Cases	80		

a 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,49.

Ik19 * age**Crosstab**

Age			under 35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years
Ik19	agree	Count	11	9	7
		% within age	84,6%	39,1%	26,9%
	not sure	Count	1	7	3
		% within age	7,7%	30,4%	11,5%
	disagree	Count	1	7	16
		% within age	7,7%	30,4%	61,5%
Total		Count	13	23	26
		% within age	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

over 55 years	Total
4	31
22,2%	38,8%
3	14
16,7%	17,5%
11	35
61,1%	43,8%
18	80
100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20,630(a)	6	,002
Likelihood Ratio	20,835	6	,002
Linear-by-Linear Association	13,836	1	,000
N of Valid Cases	80		

a 4 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,28.

lk24 * age**Crosstab**

			age				Total
			under 35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	over 55 years	
lk24	agree	Count	7	13	15	10	45
		% within age	53,8%	56,5%	60,0%	55,6%	57,0%
	not sure	Count	0	2	1	6	9
		% within age	,0%	8,7%	4,0%	33,3%	11,4%
	disagree	Count	6	8	9	2	25
		% within age	46,2%	34,8%	36,0%	11,1%	31,6%
Total		Count	13	23	25	18	79
		% within age	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13,987(a)	6	,030
Likelihood Ratio	13,954	6	,030
Linear-by-Linear Association	1,163	1	,281
N of Valid Cases	79		

a. 5 cells (41,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,48.

lk35 * age**Crosstab**

			age				Total
			under 35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years	over 55 years	
lk35	agree	Count	12	11	24	12	59
		% within age	92,3%	47,8%	92,3%	66,7%	73,8%
	not sure	Count	0	9	0	4	13
		% within age	,0%	39,1%	,0%	22,2%	16,3%
	disagree	Count	1	3	2	2	8
		% within age	7,7%	13,0%	7,7%	11,1%	10,0%
Total		Count	13	23	26	18	80
		% within age	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18,625(a)	6	,005
Likelihood Ratio	22,972	6	,001
Linear-by-Linear Association	,002	1	,968
N of Valid Cases	80		

a 8 cells (66,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,30.

do you test students oral skills with a separate test * age**Crosstab**

			under 35 years	36-45 years	46-55 years
do you test students oral skills with a separate test	on one course	Count	5	5	7
		% within age	38,5%	21,7%	29,2%
	on a few courses	Count	1	4	0
		% within age	7,7%	17,4%	,0%
	never	Count	7	14	17
		% within age	53,8%	60,9%	70,8%
Total		Count	13	23	24
% within age			100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

over 55 years	Total
2	19
11,1%	24,4%
8	13
44,4%	16,7%
8	46
44,4%	59,0%
18	78
100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16,908(a)	6	,010
Likelihood Ratio	18,615	6	,005
Linear-by-Linear Association	,239	1	,625
N of Valid Cases	78		

a 6 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,17.

lk30 * further education training

Crosstab

			further education training		Total
			yes	no	
lk30	agree	Count	26	13	39
		% within further education training	59,1%	38,2%	50,0%
	not sure	Count	6	13	19
		% within further education training	13,6%	38,2%	24,4%
	disagree	Count	12	8	20
		% within further education training	27,3%	23,5%	25,6%
Total	Count		44	34	78
	% within further education training		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6,538(a)	2	,038
Likelihood Ratio	6,578	2	,037
Linear-by-Linear Association	,795	1	,372
N of Valid Cases	78		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8,28.

lk34 * further education training**Crosstab**

			further education training		Total
			yes	no	
lk34	agree	Count	19	13	32
		% within further education training	43,2%	38,2%	41,0%
	not sure	Count	12	2	14
		% within further education training	27,3%	5,9%	17,9%
	disagree	Count	13	19	32
		% within further education training	29,5%	55,9%	41,0%
Total		Count	44	34	78
		% within further education training	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8,246(a)	2	,016
Likelihood Ratio	8,903	2	,012
Linear-by-Linear Association	2,258	1	,133
N of Valid Cases	78		

a 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6,10.

cooperation with colleagues * further education training**Crosstab**

			further education training		Total
			yes	no	
cooperation with colleagues	yes	Count	22	9	31
		% within further education training	52,4%	26,5%	40,8%
	no	Count	20	25	45
		% within further education training	47,6%	73,5%	59,2%
Total		Count	42	34	76
		% within further education training	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,223(b)	1	,022		
Continuity Correction(a)	4,205	1	,040		
Likelihood Ratio	5,337	1	,021		
Fisher's Exact Test				,034	,019
Linear-by-Linear Association	5,154	1	,023		
N of Valid Cases	76				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13,87.

APPENDIX 8 Tables 37 - 44

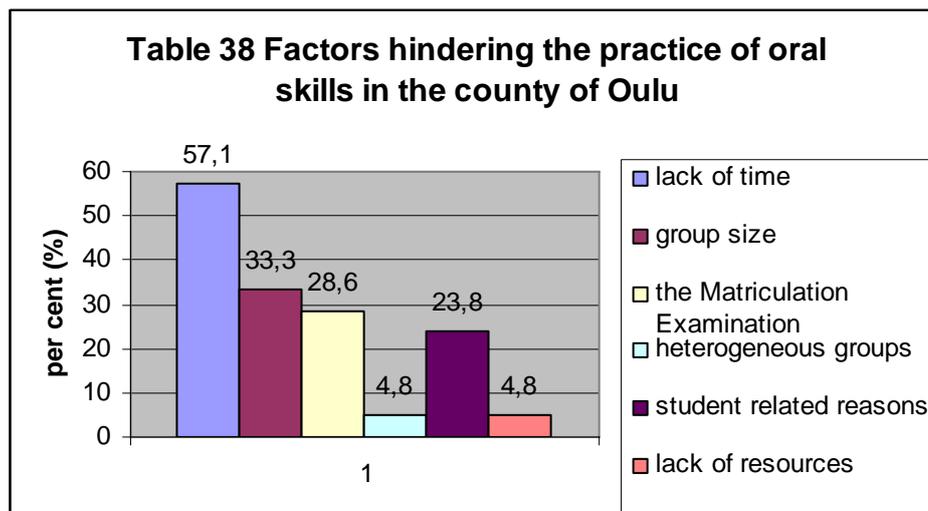
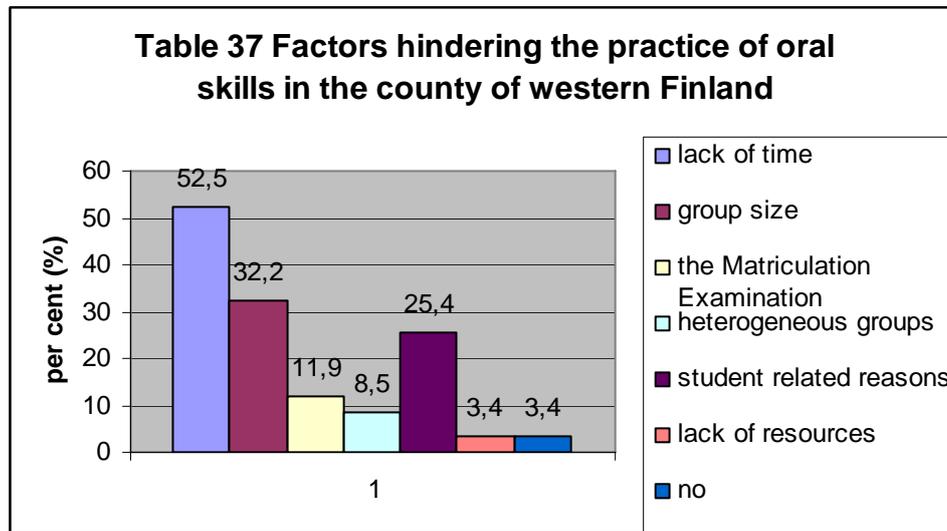


Table 39 Methods of practising oral skills during the first year in the county of western Finland

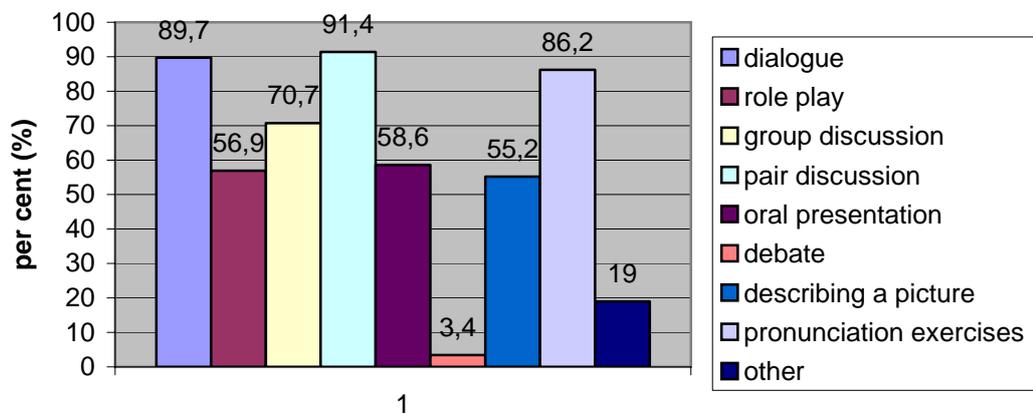


Table 40 Methods of practising oral skills during the first year in the county of Oulu

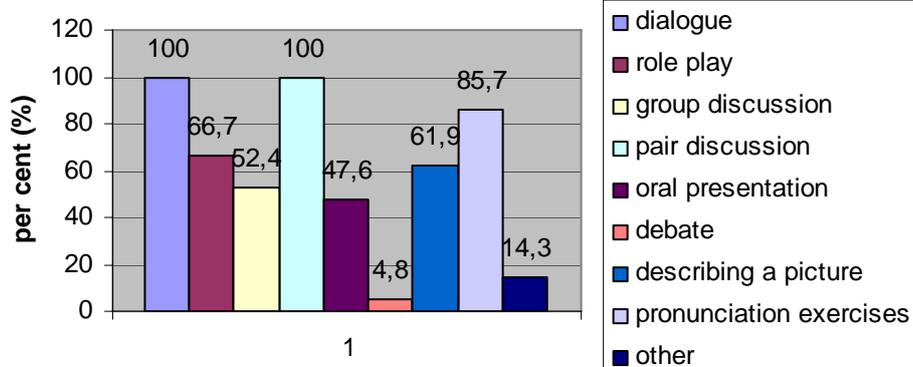


Table 41 Methods of practising oral skills during the second year in the county of western Finland

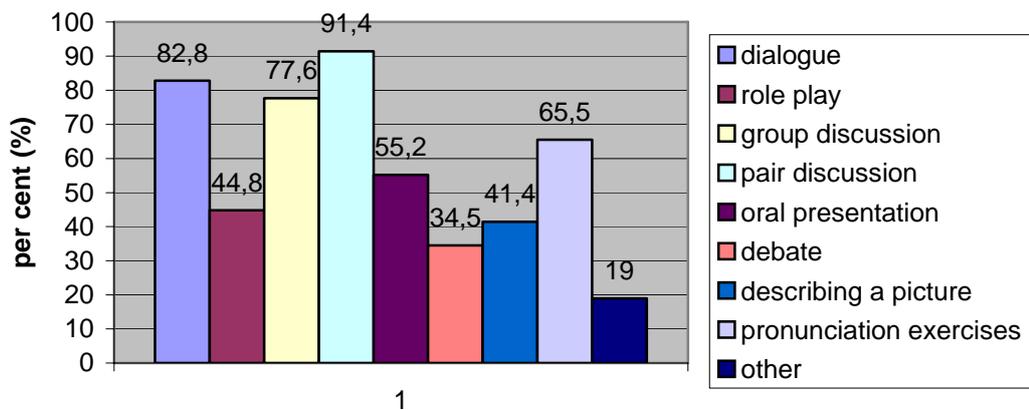


Table 42 Methods of practising oral skills during the second year in the county of Oulu

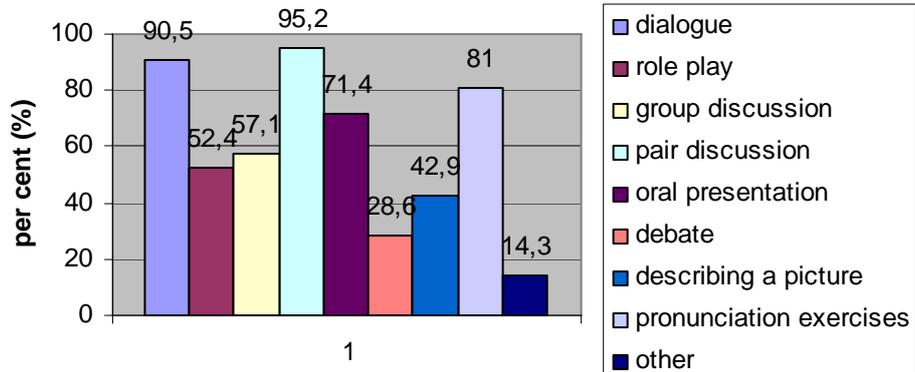


Table 43 Methods of practising oral skills during the third year in the county of western Finland

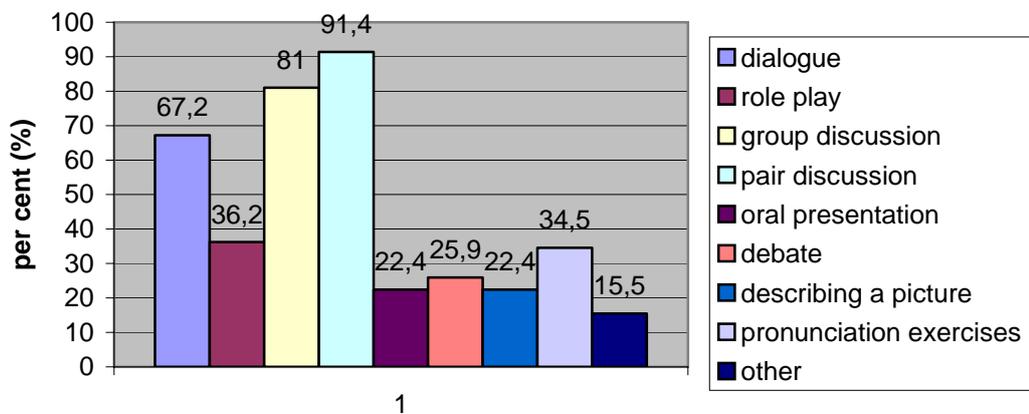


Table 44 Methods of practising oral skills during the third year in the county of Oulu

