

**The role of speaking skills in EFL classrooms in Finland:
A survey of teachers' opinions and practices**

Felicia Järnström, 35836
Pro gradu-avhandling i engelska språket och litteraturen
Handledare: Martin Gill
Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi
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Master's thesis abstract

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Author: Felicia Järnström	
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Supervisor: Martin Gill	
<p>Speaking is often considered one of the most essential skills to acquire when learning a language, but this has not always been reflected in language teaching. The current Finnish curriculum establishes that all four language skills should be developed in foreign language teaching, but how exactly this is done depends on the choices of individual teachers, who have a great deal of autonomy in the classroom. The aim of this study was to gain a preliminary overview of the role of speaking skills in the teaching and assessment of English as a foreign language in Finland today.</p> <p>Data for the study were collected in 2016 and 2017 through an online questionnaire sent out to English teachers at different educational levels in the bilingual regions of Ostrobothnia and Nyland. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 21 questions in both multiple-choice and open-ended formats, offering opportunities for quantitative analysis of differences between groups while also providing more qualitative insights into the respondents' thoughts. The survey eventually received responses from 64 teachers.</p> <p>The results suggest that teachers generally consider speaking skills important, but are not always able to prioritise them accordingly. They feel that they do not have enough time to fulfil all the requirements of the demanding curriculum, and in upper secondary schools, the lack of an oral component in the matriculation exam affects teaching. Target language speaking is encouraged by creating a comfortable, safe environment and by providing various opportunities for practice, but some students are still unwilling to speak due to anxiety, especially in lower secondary schools.</p> <p>Regarding assessment, some teachers prefer to maintain a focus on encouragement and avoid evaluation, whereas others think speaking skills should be assessed like any other part of language proficiency. The methods used for assessing speaking vary, but teachers generally agree that comprehensibility and communication skills are more important in student speech than accuracy of pronunciation or grammar. However, about half of the teachers still use native-like models for pronunciation, despite the fact that these are largely unrealistic based on research on age of onset and the relationship between language and identity.</p> <p>The findings suggest that the teachers have actively reflected on the role of speaking in their teaching, but more research is needed for a more comprehensive picture of their opinions and practices. It seems like the role of speaking in teaching and assessment could be improved through more awareness of central issues, and by including an oral component in the matriculation exam.</p>	
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1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a complex process and language knowledge consists of several different skills, usually divided into the general areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking. All of these skills should, of course, be given attention in language teaching in order for learners to gain a comprehensive command of the target language. However, speaking is sometimes considered the most central skill, which students often use to evaluate how far they have come in their learning (Alderson & Bachman 2004: ix; Richards 2012: ix). Also, when we meet new people, our oral skills in the language we speak tend to affect people's first impression of our general language skills, with a good pronunciation sometimes even making up for potential shortcomings in other areas of proficiency (Lintunen 2014: 167). Therefore, it is essential for learners of a language to learn how to speak it.

Traditionally, however, language teaching has mostly been concerned with written language and areas such as grammar and translation. When speaking eventually became part of classroom practice, a number of questions were raised about the best way of teaching and assessing this complicated skill. Speaking a language requires advanced cognitive processing along with communicative competence in order to produce output that is accurate and fluent but also socioculturally appropriate. Furthermore, spoken language is not as standardized as written language, and it has its own patterns of grammar and vocabulary which varies between different registers. Teachers need to find ways of supporting all these aspects of speaking development, and to evaluate the results in a consistent way. Assessment of speaking can be problematic for several reasons: for instance, errors are common in normal spoken production, and standards for pronunciation can be difficult to define, especially for English since there are countless varieties spoken around the world.

The present thesis is set in the Finnish context, where every student learns English in school from a young age and studies the language for at least six or seven years in comprehensive school. After that, more than 90% of them move on to upper secondary education, where English is also taught (Finnish National Agency for Education 2017: 17-18). The national curriculum for basic education emphasizes that studies in English and

other foreign languages should develop the students' communicative competence in various situations, and as part of the goal to help students communicate and produce texts, it notes that several aspects of speaking should be practiced, like pronunciation, stress and rhythm (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014a: 221-222). Beyond this, however, there are no directives for how speaking should be taken into account in teaching.

Students' oral skills in English are also not assessed on a national level. The only standardized test in the Finnish educational system is the matriculation exam, taken by students aged 18-19 at the end of upper secondary school (see Ylioppilastutkintolautakunta, N.D.). Government officials, education professionals and school representatives are currently discussing the addition of a speaking component to the language tests in this exam (Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet 2017), but so far, the English test only assesses listening, reading and writing skills. Due to the washback effect (cf. Nation & Newton 2009: 169), the lack of emphasis on speaking skills in this formal high-stakes test may lead to less focus on these skills in the classroom.

Ultimately, the extent to which oral skills are practised and assessed in EFL classrooms in Finland depends on the choices of individual teachers, who have a fair amount of autonomy to make decisions about their own teaching. However, there has been little research about the amount of attention given to speaking in these classrooms and about the assessment procedures used. In the light of this, it seems relevant to look into practices in different schools. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the role of speaking skills in the teaching and assessment of English as a foreign language in Finland. Through an online survey sent out to teachers, the present study aims to give a preliminary overview of the respondents' thoughts and opinions on the topic, and their ways of applying them in the classroom.

The thesis starts with the theoretical background, which describes the central characteristics of spoken language and the various requirements for mastering the skill of speaking. Variations between speech in different registers and individual differences affecting learner speech are also taken into account. Furthermore, the background outlines influential theories, methods and concepts relevant to the teaching and assessment of speaking. After that, the methods and materials used for the study are presented, describing the questionnaire and the process of data collection, and explaining the method of

quantitative and qualitative analysis. Finally, the results of the study are outlined, and various interpretations and implications of them are discussed in relation to the research questions. First of all, however, the role of the English language in Finland will be explained, since the thesis is set in the Finnish context.

1.1. English in Finland

Today, English is generally acknowledged and accepted as a lingua franca, which is used across the world by speakers of different mother tongues who need to communicate with each other. In fact, there are now more speakers of English as a foreign language than speakers of English as a first language (Lintunen 2014: 170). In Finland, English is quite a prominent language: almost everyone learns it in school, many people also continue using it in their working life, and it is very visible in various forms of media. The sections below outline the role of English within the Finnish educational system as well as outside of it.

1.1.1. The Finnish school system and the role of English

In Finland, most children go to comprehensive school for nine years (those who do not are legally required to be homeschooled according to the same curriculum). Although the basic education provided in comprehensive school is nowadays considered a unit, it used to be divided into two phases: *primary school* (grades 1-6) and *lower secondary school* (grades 7-9). This difference is still present to some extent; in practice, many school buildings were built to house just one of the two units and many children still change schools between grades 6 and 7 (cf. Björklund 2008: 33). Furthermore, in grades 1-6, the students (aged 7-12) are taught by class teachers teaching more or less all subjects, while in grades 7-9, the students (aged 13-15) are taught by subject teachers specialized in one or two subjects (Finnish National Agency for Education¹ 2017: 15). Although the terms are no longer official, I will refer to the grades 1-6 as *primary school* and grades 7-9 as *lower secondary school* throughout this thesis. There are no national standardized tests in basic education;

¹ The same agency appears elsewhere in this section under its Swedish name Utbildningsstyrelsen and its Finnish name Opetushallitus, depending on the language used in the source text.

instead, continuous assessment is carried out by the teachers based on objectives in the curriculum, and the grades in the certificate given at the end of lower secondary school (9th grade) are also given by the teachers (Finnish National Agency for Education 2017: 16-17). The curriculum states that language teachers are expected to use the Common European Framework of References (CEFR) when assessing students' skills (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014a: 222, 351).

After comprehensive school, the majority of students (more than 90%) move on to *upper secondary education* for another three years (Finnish National Agency for Education 2017: 17-18). This upper secondary education can be either general, with more theoretical courses in many subjects, or vocational, with a more practical approach. The only standardized test in the Finnish school system is the matriculation exam taken at the end of general upper secondary school, which provides eligibility for higher education. However, students who have completed vocational education are also eligible to apply to universities (Finnish National Agency for Education 2017: 18, 22). Higher education will not be discussed in more detail here, since this thesis is mainly concerned with English teaching in comprehensive school and general upper secondary school.

Students in Finland study more languages than students in Europe on average (Opetushallitus 2011: 7). This may be due to the fact that Finland is a bilingual country with both Finnish and Swedish as official languages, and all pupils have to study the second national language in school: those who go to Finnish-language schools study Swedish as a second language, and vice versa. Apart from this, all pupils are required to study at least one foreign language, which has been the case ever since the comprehensive school system was introduced in Finland in the 1970s (Leppänen et al. 2011: 19). Pupils usually start studying this first foreign language between grades 3 and 5 (at the age of 9-11) in primary school (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014b).

In theory, Finnish pupils can choose any language as their first foreign language, but in practice, options are limited by the availability of teachers and the number of students in a school (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014c). Especially in smaller municipalities, it can be difficult to form groups for classes in a more unusual language (a certain number of interested students is required), and teachers need to be qualified for teaching those groups (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014c). In most places, English becomes the default choice for all

pupils; according to official statistics, 99.5% of the pupils in lower secondary school studied English in 2015, and the majority of them had started studying the language in primary school (Statistikcentralen 2015). Some bigger cities offer other languages as the first foreign language, such as German or French, but in practice, the number of pupils studying these languages in primary school is very small (Statistikcentralen 2015). It is more common to start studying German or French as an optional language later, in either lower or upper secondary school (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014b).

In other words, English is the most commonly studied foreign language in Finland, with most young people learning it for 5-7 years within the frames of compulsory basic education. Most 15-year-olds then move on to upper secondary education where the studies in English continue, and students in general upper secondary school eventually take a national exam that tests their skills in the language. For an account of how the teaching of English in Finland has developed throughout the years, see Leppänen et al. (2011: 17-22).

1.1.2. The role of English in Finland outside of schools

English is prominent in Finland also outside of the education system. Already twenty-five years ago, Phillipson (1992: 24-25) argued that English was becoming more of a second language than a foreign language in the Nordic countries. He pointed out that in Scandinavia and Finland, a command of English is more or less necessary for higher education, and an essential professional skill for certain jobs (Phillipson 1992: 25). The development has definitely continued in the same direction since then. Leppänen et al. (2011: 63) state that “the demands of the increasingly global knowledge economy are reflected in the increasing use of English in working life”. According to their study, 40.5% of Finnish people use English at work (Leppänen et al. 2011: 57).

Leppänen et al. (2011: 24) also argue that “English may be one of the everyday languages that Finnish young people (or at least some of them) need and use without experiencing the communication as distinctively ‘foreign’”. The media is part of the reason why the English language is perceived as an “everyday language”: music in English is played on the radio, and Finnish television channels show movies and TV-series in their original languages rather than dubbing them (Leppänen et al. 2011: 20). In addition, due to

the widespread use of the internet, people encounter the English language online on a daily basis. Even the national core curriculum brings up the fact that most students come into contact with the English language in their free time, and that this informal learning should be taken into account when planning teaching in English (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014a: 220, 349). It seems likely that students mostly practice receptive skills like listening and reading outside the classroom, for example through watching videos and TV series, but they may have the opportunity to practice writing or speaking skills as well, for example through online interaction and social media (cf. Järnström 2015).

The English language also has a relatively high status in Finland: people generally have positive attitudes to English and think it is an important language to learn. According to the study conducted by Leppänen et al. (2011: 65), for example, 60% of the respondents found English either very important or moderately important in their daily lives; among young people aged 25-44, the figure was as high as 80%. While only 23% of Finns thought that elderly people needed to know English, 80% said it was important for people of working age to know the language, and 97% said it was important for young people (Leppänen et al. 2011: 89-90). Attitudes were also generally positive to the use of English as the general language of instruction in schools (i.e. in other subjects than English) and as the internal language of Finnish companies (Leppänen et al. 2011: 74-75).

1.1.3. Cross-linguistic influence

When studying foreign languages, learners may benefit from prior linguistic knowledge, primarily based on their first language, but also on any other language(s) they have previously acquired (Ringbom 2007: 1-2). The extent of these benefits depends on the relationship between the target language and the first language (or any other language the learner knows well). If the target language is closely related to a language the learner already knows, the learner will find it easier to acquire the target language due to similarities in e.g. vocabulary and grammar (Ringbom 2007: 1-3). This effect of prior linguistic knowledge on the acquisition of a foreign language is termed *cross-linguistic influence*.

This is perhaps especially important to consider in the Finnish context, due to the two national languages of the country: Finnish and Swedish. Swedish is part of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, along with several other European languages, including English. Finnish, on the other hand, belongs to the entirely different Finno-Ugric language family with Estonian as its closest relative. In other words, Swedish and Finnish are linguistically very different, with Swedish being much closer to English. (For an account of the historical background of the bilingualism in Finland, and the relationship between the languages, see Ringbom 2007: 34-37.)

Due to these differences, Swedish-speakers often have an advantage over Finnish-speakers when learning English because of cross-linguistic influence. Ringbom (2007: 41-51) cites a number of studies carried out at all stages of the Finnish educational system, from primary schools to universities, showing that Swedish-speaking students consistently seem to outperform their Finnish-speaking peers of the same age. This happens despite the fact that Finnish-speaking students often start studying English earlier than Swedish-speaking students, which indicates that “the positive transfer effect of having a mother tongue related to the target language is more significant than a few more years of English at school” (Ringbom 2007: 51). However, it also seems to be the case that the differences between the language groups become smaller as the proficiency level increases, with university students of English being on the same level regardless of language background (Ringbom 2007: 48-49, 51).

Nevertheless, for students in primary and secondary schools, previous linguistic knowledge from the first language may impact their performance in English. One of the studies cited by Ringbom (2007: 48) also indicated that Swedish-speakers were more willing than Finnish-speakers to use English orally. This finding is relevant for the present study, where the extent of English use in the classroom, among other things, will be investigated.

1.2. Research questions, aims, hypotheses

As mentioned previously, the aim of this thesis is to gain a preliminary overview of teacher views on the role of speaking in teaching and assessment of English as a foreign language in Finland. My research questions are the following:

- (i) How important are speaking skills considered to be in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Finland?
- (ii) To what extent is the target language spoken in English classrooms in Finland (as opposed to the ordinary language of instruction, i.e. Finnish or Swedish)?
- (iii) How do English language teachers in Finland encourage spoken production among their students?
- (iv) To what extent, and how, do English language teachers in Finland assess students' speaking skills?
- (v) What differences, if any, are there in the teaching and assessment of English speaking skills between
 - a) teachers in Finnish-language schools and teachers in Swedish-language schools?
 - b) teachers on different levels of the education system (primary school, lower secondary school and general upper secondary school)?

Based on my experience from my own time in school and from my teacher training, my hypothesis is that while spoken production is probably encouraged, focusing on speaking skills might not be the top priority of English language teachers. Especially in upper secondary school, the preparation for the matriculation exam takes a lot of time, and since this exam does not yet contain an oral part, the primary focus is likely to lie on vocabulary, grammar and working with written texts instead. At lower levels, on the other hand, my hypothesis is that speaking skills are given more attention, especially in primary schools where students have just started learning English.

Regarding differences between the language groups, my hypothesis is that the extent of target language use and the amount of speaking practice needed may differ, since

English is likely to be more difficult for Finnish-speakers than for Swedish-speakers due to cross-linguistic influence (see section 1.1.3). I also assume that methods for teaching and assessment will vary between educational levels, with teachers taking the proficiency level of their students into account in their amount of target language use and in their methods of teaching and assessment.

2. Theoretical background

Speaking is one of the four sub-skills commonly discussed within the field of language learning, along with listening, reading, and writing. These four skills are usually considered equally important to practise in order to develop a comprehensive command of the target language. However, speaking can be considered particularly essential for a number of reasons. Alderson and Bachman (2004: ix) describe the skill of speaking as being “at the very heart of what it means to be able to use a foreign language”. Whenever someone talks, they create an image of themselves by speaking, whether they want to or not; listeners, in turn, make judgements about speakers based on what their speech sounds like (Luoma 2004: 9-10; Lintunen 2014: 167). According to Lintunen (2014: 167), a speaker’s skills in pronunciation are very important for these first judgements and may even make up for shortcomings in other areas of proficiency. In addition, when learners evaluate their own success in a foreign language, they tend to focus on the development of their speaking skills, which is often a priority for them (Richards 2012: ix).

However, despite being such a central language skill, speaking has not always been given the attention it deserves in language teaching and learning. The nature of spoken language might have contributed to this: the lack of explicit rules for speech, the variation between different registers, and the complexity of the skill of speaking may have made it difficult for teachers to define what exactly to focus on when teaching this crucial aspect of the target language. Various influential theories about language learning and methods for language teaching have approached speaking in different ways, and classroom practice has varied accordingly.

This chapter explores these issues. It starts by describing the features of natural spoken language, which may differ across registers and genres, and continues by outlining components involved in the skill of speaking, including cognitive processes and communicative competence. Potential consequences for teaching and assessment are discussed continuously. The final section then lists theories and methods that have been influential in the field of language teaching, discussing the role of speaking within them. Various concepts related to assessment are also outlined, and a few central issues in the assessment of speaking are discussed.

2.1. The nature of speaking

2.1.1. Features of speech and spoken grammar

In order to be able to speak any language, one needs to have certain knowledge of what natural speech sounds like. Goh & Burns (2012: 75-94) compare features of speech and features of writing, which is, in their opinion, a useful way of distinguishing typical features of spoken language. Although the two modes of communication are clearly related and draw on the same linguistic resources, they utilise these resources in different ways, for different social purposes, and for different audiences (Goh & Burns 2012: 77-78). Written language is usually monologic, planned and redrafted, and permanent, while spoken language is dialogic, unplanned and negotiated, and impermanent (Goh & Burns 2012: 79). Spoken language is also context-embedded and makes use of informal language, in contrast to written language which is context-removed and uses formal language (Goh & Burns 2012: 79). These features are of course not set in stone, though, and the nature of spoken language may vary depending on the context in which it is produced. Such different registers, genres, and situations will be discussed in section 2.1.2.

Generally, however, spoken language is characterised by certain linguistic features. For example, speakers do not usually speak in complete sentences, but in short phrases and clauses which Luoma (2004: 12) calls “idea units”. Since listeners need to process speech in real time, utterances cannot be too complex: they usually consist of seven words or less and take about two seconds to produce (Luoma 2004: 12). Because of the context-embedded nature of speech, where speakers usually possess shared knowledge, *ellipsis* often occurs. This means that certain words, phrases, or even whole clauses become redundant and are left out (Goh & Burns 2012: 89-90), which helps make the idea units shorter.

To connect utterances to one another, written language usually makes use of embedded or subordinated clauses separated by punctuation. Spoken language, on the other hand, usually links its idea units using common conjunctions such as *and*, *but*, or *so*, which makes it possible to construct longer utterances by “piling clauses one on top of the

other” (Goh & Burns 2012: 85, 87). Goh and Burns (2012: 87) refer to this as the “add-on” strategy. This complexity of weaving clauses together means that speech generally has higher *grammatical intricacy* than writing (Goh & Burns 2012: 85).

On the lexical level, however, speech is less complex than writing. While written language typically demonstrates high *lexical density* (many content words compared with function words in a clause), spoken language is lower in content with less compact packaging of information (Goh & Burns 2012: 84). The vocabulary of speech is often quite simple, generic, or vague: words like “this one”, “that round thing” or “whatsit” are often used instead of specific nouns (Luoma 2004: 16-17). Words that “point out outwards into the linguistic and situational context”, such as *you*, *it*, or *there*, are called *deictic*; they “respond to the personal, spatial, and temporal ‘here and now’ nature of the talk” (Goh & Burns 2012: 90-91). The referents of these words are obvious to the speakers in the interaction, but difficult to identify for a person not present in the situation. Furthermore, personal pronouns are more common in speech than in writing, and spoken language often relies on verbs to carry meaning, while written language relies on nouns to a greater extent (Goh & Burns 2012: 86).

Lexical variety is also lower in speech than in writing: the same key content words are often repeated, either verbatim or through relexicalization, i.e. by using synonyms or paraphrases (Goh & Burns 2012: 84, 93). Certain *fixed conventional phrases* or *formulaic expressions* are also regularly used in spoken language, such as the greeting “Hi, how’s it going?” (Luoma 2004: 18; Goh & Burns 2012: 94). These chunks are “prefabricated” and thereby alleviate some of the pressure on speakers to produce speech in real time; since speakers do not have to formulate these expressions on their own, they gain some extra time for planning what to say next (Goh & Burns 2012: 94; Luoma 2004: 18). Otherwise, it is common for speakers to use different phrases to keep the floor, such as fillers or hesitation markers (e.g. *ah*, *kind of*, *you know*) (Luoma 2004: 18). Due to its real-time nature, spoken language also typically includes slips and errors of different kinds (Luoma 2004: 19).

Finally, speech often makes use of non-standard word order in order to give extra emphasis to a clause at the beginning or the end of an idea unit, and to orient listeners to the main part of the message (Luoma 2004: 15-16; Goh & Burns 2012: 91). Goh and Burns

(2012: 91-92) call these grammatical structures *heads* and *tails*. Heads are nouns or noun phrases inserted before the main message for emphasis and for establishing a shared frame of reference (Goh & Burns 2012: 91; Luoma 2004: 15). Luoma (2004: 15) prefers to call this phenomenon *topicalisation* or *thematic fronting* and uses the following utterance as an example: “*That house in [sic] the corner*, is that where you live?” Tails, on the other hand, are expressions added at the end of idea units “to reinforce, extend, elaborate, or clarify the main message” (Goh & Burns 2012: 92). These may be question tags (“You don’t like him much, *do you?*”) or phrases serving interpersonal or evaluative functions (“So that was how it ended, *awful*”) (Goh & Burns 2012: 92).

Naturally, these features of natural speech need to be taken into account when teaching and assessing speaking. Learners should be made aware of the differences between speaking and writing, so that they do not end up speaking as they write (or writing as they speak, for that matter). Goh and Burns (2012: 75-76) point out that course books are often inadequate for raising this awareness, since they usually contain inauthentic, scripted dialogues; this issue was already mentioned by Brown and Yule (1983: 32-33) several decades ago. These dialogues usually contain complete sentences, formal and standardized language forms, and unnatural repetition of grammatical structures, while overlaps, hesitations or errors are not present at all (Goh & Burns 2012: 76). More authentic materials would be preferable in order to give learners a more realistic view of speech. However, Brown and Yule (1983: 33) emphasize that authentic conversations are often quite boring for people other than the participants, and that too much time should not be spent listening to them; rather, learners should be instructed to pay attention to relevant features in them, and then start practising to use these features as soon as possible.

Furthermore, teachers could assist learners in their speech by not only providing models of natural speech, but also by consciously directing their attention to specific features. For example, learners who do not have the opportunity to use the language outside the classroom may find it difficult to notice and learn to use generic and vague words (Luoma 2004: 17), and studies have shown that ellipsis barely occurs in non-native speaker speech (Goh & Burns 2012: 90). In other words, these features could be explicitly taught in the foreign language classroom. Awareness of lexical repetition and relexicalization may also be helpful: a dialogue often has a limited number of keywords

that can be pre-taught to help learners understand what is said, and learners can expand their vocabulary by trying to identify relexicalized items (Goh & Burns 2012: 93-94).

In assessment of speaking, it is vital to make sure that these features of speech are taken into account. Speech needs to be assessed as speech, not as writing; “the grammar that is evaluated in assessing speaking should be specifically related to the grammar of speech” (Luoma 2004: 12). This may sound self-evident, but it has been shown that assessors tend to rate certain features of spoken language negatively, such as the use of fillers or hesitation markers (Luoma 2004: 18). Luoma (2004: 17-19) disagrees with this practice, stating that learners should be rewarded for using typical features of speech in their spoken output in the target language. In fact, studies have shown that learners who use fillers, fixed phrases and other spoken-like expressions tend to be perceived as more fluent than those who do not (Luoma 2004: 18-19).

2.1.2. Different registers, genres, and situations

Although it can be useful to distinguish features of spoken language by comparing the modes of speech and writing, Luoma (2004: 13) points out that they should not be seen as a rigid dichotomy, but “as a continuum, with highly oral language at one end and highly literate language at the other”. There is, in fact, a lot of systematic variation within spoken language use. According to Fulcher (2003: 24), some researchers have argued that “the difference between speaking and writing is not as great as has often been suggested”, precisely because some of the typical features of speech that are often discussed mostly apply to casual conversation, but not necessarily to other registers, genres, and situations. Such different speech events will be briefly outlined in this section.

First of all, the features of speech produced in any given situation are usually affected by its underlying purpose. Two broad categories are usually identified: *transactional speech* and *interactional speech* (Goh & Burns 2012: 113; Brown and Yule 1983: 13). Interactional speech may also simply be referred to as *chat*, and its function is to create and maintain social relationships; it is listener-oriented and the speakers use it to get to know one another (Brown & Yule 1983: 11-12; Luoma 2004: 22; Goh & Burns 2012: 113). Turns are usually short in interactional speech, and the language is characterized by

short phrases and simple grammar (Luoma 2004: 13). Transactional speech, on the other hand, is more message-oriented with the function of transferring information (Brown & Yule 1983: 11); Luoma (2004: 23) therefore calls it *information-related talk*. Details are more important here than in interactional speech, and the language becomes clearer with more specific vocabulary (Brown & Yule 1983: 13-14).

On a related note, Nation and Newton (2009: 120-122) discuss the difference between *formal speaking* and *informal speaking*, which tend to be transactional and interactional in nature, respectively. They state that most of our speaking is informal with the goal of maintaining social relationships (Nation and Newton 2009: 120-121). Such speech is usually unplanned, and contains the previously mentioned short idea units and incomplete sentences (Luoma 2004: 13). Formal speaking, on the other hand, is not dialogic, but takes the form of planned and structured long turns with influences from written language, including academic vocabulary (Nation and Newton 2009: 122; Luoma 2004: 12-13).

However, despite the fact that interactional and transactional speech seem to be opposites, it is not unusual for them to appear in the same speech event. For example, social chats may turn into serious discussions, and formal business meetings usually contain some interpersonal talk (Luoma 2004: 22; Goh & Burns 2012: 113-114). In other words, just like speech and writing, interactional and transactional talk do not form a clear-cut dichotomy, “but rather a dimension along which different types of talk will be situated” (Luoma 2004: 22).

Instead of classifying speech events with the help of broad categories, it may therefore be helpful to analyse each speaking situation, in order to figure out why it contains certain features. Luoma (2004: 24-25) uses the acronym SPEAKING originally created by Hymes (1974: 53-62) to list potential social and contextual factors that may influence speech. The letters in the acronym stand for the following (Hymes 1974: 53-62; Luoma 2004: 24-25):

Situation: the setting and scene of a speech event (time and place, physical circumstances, the nature of the event)

Participants: the interlocutors present in the speaking situation (speaker, addressee, audience, etc.)

Ends: goals and outcomes of the speech event

Act sequence: the form and content of speech acts used to convey the message (what exactly is said, how it is said, and in what order)

Key: the tone, manner, or spirit in which speech acts are performed (friendly, formal, serious, etc.)

Instrumentalities: the channel or mode in question (spoken, written, pre-recorded, etc.) and the forms of speech involved (languages, dialects, and varieties)

Norms: social rules of interaction and interpretation (right and responsibility to initiate topics, ask questions, etc.)

Genre: categories of speech (lecture, storytelling, joke, etc.)

The concept of *genre* is also brought up by Goh and Burns (2012: 116), referring to different *text types* or types of talk. Genres are typically structured in a way that is “culturally, socially, and institutionally known” (Goh & Burns 2012: 116) and are more commonly discussed within the frames of literature. Indeed, the concept of genre has mostly been applied to written language, because spoken language has been considered difficult to analyse due to its interactive and context-dependent nature (Goh & Burns 2012: 117); however, certain genres are identifiable also in speech. In relation to this, the difference between *chat* and *chunks* is relevant. It may indeed be difficult to label chat segments of talk as a certain genre, because “speakers exchange turns frequently, there is high competition for turns, and the discourse is managed locally turn by turn” (Goh & Burns 2012: 118). Chunk segments, on the other hand, consist of talk with a more predictable structure beyond the turn, where a primary speaker follows an identifiable discourse pattern to, for instance, tell a story or to joke (Goh & Burns 2012: 119). These chunks are easier to identify as belonging to a certain genre: common speaking genres include narratives, anecdotes, and recounts, and they all follow their own structure with their own typical patterns of vocabulary and grammar (Goh & Burns 2012: 119-123).

Since speech is produced in so many different situations outside the classroom, various registers and genres need to be taken into account in teaching and assessment. Learners need opportunities to familiarise themselves with different kinds of text types, such as interactional and transactional speech, colloquial and formal speech, and monologues and dialogues (Nation & Newton 2009: 117). When assessing speaking, the criteria that are used need to be adapted to fit the task, so that, for instance, formal features

like advanced vocabulary are not required in a task that consists of informal chatting (Luoma 2004: 13-14).

Not all registers are equally easy to teach, however. For example, the kind of chat segments of talk mentioned by Goh and Burns (2012: 118) may be difficult to handle in the classroom due to the high competition for turns and the quick changes from speaker to speaker. In fact, interactional language in general tends to be regarded as difficult to teach directly; Brown and Yule (1983: 23) argue that it may be more helpful to make learners aware of the way in which interactional speech works in their native language, and apply this knowledge to the target language. They instead recommend focusing on transactional language in the classroom, partly because it is methodologically more feasible, but also because it is important to master for example when travelling and looking for information (Brown and Yule 1983: 23-24). Nation and Newton (2009: 121-122) express a similar opinion, pointing out that formal speaking develops learners' skills to a greater extent than informal speaking, because it is not part of typical language use.

However, Luoma (2004: 17) points out that while informal talk may be easy to acquire in a second-language context, where learners constantly hear the target language in their surroundings, learners in a foreign-language context may need more assistance in order to notice and learn to use informal features like generic and vague words, for example. Other features that are helpful to discuss in the classroom in relation to interactional language are conversational strategies, common multi-word units and basic phrases for chatting (Nation & Newton 2009: 121; Luoma 2004: 22-23). In addition, teachers can educate their learners about the typical stages and key vocabulary of common spoken genres in order to help them produce such types of talk (Goh & Burns 2012: 123-124).

2.2. The skill of speaking

In contrast to listening and reading, which are so-called receptive or passive skills, speaking (along with writing) is a productive or active skill (Nation & Newton 2009: 3-4). While learners “only” need to understand input in order to master a receptive skill, productive skills require them to produce language of their own (Nation & Newton 2009:

3-4). In order to produce speech, learners need to control certain processes and master certain skills. These processes and skills, and their consequences for teaching and assessment, are illustrated in the following sections.

2.2.1. The cognitive processes of speech production

As mentioned previously, speaking is an extremely complex skill, and the production of speech requires information processing at a cognitively very demanding level, whereby ideas and intentions are transformed into articulated overt speech (Levelt 1989: 1). As native speakers, we rarely consciously think about how our speaking skills work, however, because many of the processes involved function at a largely automatic level (Levelt 1989: 2, 20-21). For language learners, on the other hand, the cognitive activities involved in speech production may require significantly more processing capacity, because learners need to actively search for words or recall rules for pronunciation (Goh & Burns 2012: 38).

Levelt's (1989: 9) model illustrates the different processing components involved in speech production and how they relate to one another. The model applies to spoken language in general; however, Goh & Burns (2012: 35-39) take it one step further by explaining how these processes affect language learners' speech in particular. The production of speech starts in the so-called *conceptualizer*, where a communicative intention is formed based on the speaker's needs and beliefs and on previous turns in the conversation (Levelt 1989: 3-4, 9). This first step might be difficult for learners depending on how well they have understood the input provided; also, they need to ensure that their selected content and discourse structure are relevant and appropriate for the target language context (Goh & Burns 2012: 37).

Next, the conceptual structure or communicative intention is transformed into a linguistic structure in the so-called *formulator* (Levelt 1989: 10-11). This happens in two steps: first, there is *grammatical encoding*, a process which retrieves the relevant words from the mental lexicon and activates syntactic building procedures to form a surface structure of the utterance (Levelt 1989: 11). After that, a phonetic plan for the articulation of each word and for the utterance as a whole is made through *phonological encoding* (Levelt 1989: 12). These processes, which are usually automatic for native speakers, are

perhaps the most challenging ones for language learners, who have to make a number of choices related to vocabulary and grammar on a conscious level (Goh & Burns 2012: 37-38). If a learner needs to take a long turn, he or she also needs to pay attention to the overall coherence of several consecutive utterances (Goh & Burns 2012: 38).

Finally, the phonetic plan (also called *internal speech*) works as input for the articulator, which executes the plan with the help of the relevant musculature (vocal tract, larynx and lungs) and produces overt speech (Levelt 1989: 12-13; Goh & Burns 2012: 38). Just like the process of formulation, articulation is largely automatic for first-language speakers, but challenging for learners because they consciously have to recall how to produce the sounds involved (Goh & Burns 2012: 38). Other aspects, such as stress and intonation patterns, also require attention.

Throughout the process of speech production, the so-called speech-comprehension system monitors what the speaker is doing, detecting potential errors at various stages (Levelt 1989: 13-14). The function of the speech-comprehension system is most obvious when a speaker makes a mistake in his overt speech and then corrects himself by, for instance, halting or repeating the utterance (Levelt 1989: 14). Goh and Burns (2012: 39) note that self-monitoring is an important strategy for language learners, as long as they have sufficient metalinguistic knowledge to evaluate their speech. However, sometimes the other processing components involved in producing speech are cognitively too demanding for learners to simultaneously engage in conscious monitoring (Goh & Burns 2012: 39).

According to Goh and Burns (2012: 46), teachers should recognize the complexity of the processes required to produce speech, and let learners focus on different cognitive demands separately. Another option is to provide support during one or more of the processes, and to teach the learners communication strategies for buying more processing time. It is also important that performances are assessed realistically based on the demands of the task (Goh & Burns 2012: 46).

2.2.2. Communicative competence

Although the cognitive processes just described are complex in themselves, they are only one aspect of successful spoken production. Spoken language is not produced in isolation:

speakers use it to communicate with others, and doing this effectively requires mastery of several skills. A central concept that is often discussed in this context is that of *communicative competence*, which can be briefly described as a person's "ability to use language effectively in actual communication" (Goh & Burns 2012: 51).

Hymes (1972) is often considered to be "the father of the notion of communicative competence" (Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović 2007: 95), since he was the first person to clearly define the concept. Hymes (1972: 271-272) criticizes Chomsky's (1965) theory of competence versus performance, arguing that it fails to take the inherently sociocultural dimension of language into consideration. According to Chomsky (1965: 3-4), the ideal language user's underlying linguistic competence consists of "perfect" knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and any imperfections in performance are due to grammatically irrelevant factors, such as distractions. Hymes (1972: 271-279), however, argues that speech is not only constructed based on grammaticality, but also appropriateness, and that imperfections in production are quite normal in most social contexts. He started using the term communicative competence, which consists of not only knowledge but also *ability for use* in different contexts (Hymes 1972: 281-283).

One of the first models for communicative competence is that of Canale and Swain (1980), later modified by Canale (1984), which is still widely used as a point of reference. According to this model, communicative competence consists of four components: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain 1980: 28-31; Canale 1984: 112-113). Grammatical competence includes knowledge of vocabulary and rules of grammar and pronunciation. Sociolinguistic competence, on the other hand, consists of knowledge of sociocultural rules in different communicative events, taking into account the appropriateness of meanings (e.g. attitudes and speech acts) and of forms (e.g. register and intonation) (Canale & Swain 1980: 29-30; Canale 1984: 112). Discourse competence was part of sociolinguistic competence in the original model, but added as a separate component by Canale. It includes the ability to "combine and interpret forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres", using cohesion and coherence to make the text well-structured and understandable (Canale 1984: 112). Finally, strategic competence consists of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which can be used to

compensate for breakdowns in communication, or to make the communication more effective (Canale & Swain 1980: 30; Canale 1984: 112).

Following this “original” model by Canale and Swain, other researchers have developed further models of communicative competence. One of the most influential ones is the model of communicative language ability first developed by Bachman (1990: 81-108) and further adapted by Bachman and Palmer (1996: 61-79). This model divides language ability into two main components: language knowledge and strategic competence. Language knowledge, in turn, consists of two categories: organizational knowledge, which includes grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge, and pragmatic knowledge, which includes functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge (Bachman & Palmer 1996: 66-70). The different components are thus fairly similar to those of Canale and Swain, with a few exceptions, such as the addition of functional knowledge. This component “enables us to interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and the intentions of language users”, helping us to recognize four categories of language functions: ideational, manipulative, heuristic, and imaginative functions (Bachman & Palmer 1996: 69-70). Bachman and Palmer (1996: 63, 70-75) also structure the components differently, seeing strategic competence as separate from the other parts.

Bagarić and Mihaljević Djigunović (2007: 98) argue that the model of Bachman and Palmer is preferable due to the fact that it is more comprehensive, but they assume that the reason why many researchers still continue using the model of Canale and Swain is the fact that it is more easily applicable. There are, naturally, also many other varieties of models of communicative competence, although they are not as widely referenced or discussed. For instance, see Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) or Goh and Burns’ (2012) model of speaking competence.

2.2.3. Fluency, accuracy, and complexity

The quality of the speech that is eventually produced when learners have mastered the aforementioned processes and skills can be described in terms of three central characteristics: fluency, accuracy, and complexity. Briefly put, fluency focuses on meaning

while accuracy focuses on form; complexity focuses on both (Goh & Burns 2012: 43). A high degree of fluency means that the speaker's message is communicated coherently with few pauses; it can be measured by speed of access or production, and by the number of hesitations that occur (Goh & Burns 2012: 43; Nation & Newton 2009: 152). A high degree of accuracy, on the other hand, means that the message is communicated using correct grammar (some definitions also include pronunciation) and it can be measured by the number of errors made by the speakers (Goh & Burns 2012: 43; Nation & Newton 2009: 152). Finally, complexity means that the speaker can communicate meaning precisely, using more advanced grammatical forms, and it can be measured by the presence of more complicated constructions (Goh & Burns 2012: 43; Nation & Newton 2009: 152).

According to Lintunen (2014: 166) and Fulcher (2003: 26-27), accuracy and fluency can be seen as two separate ends of a continuum: one of them usually decreases when the other increases. For example, if a speaker makes an effort to pronounce each sound clearly and accurately, he or she will usually speak slower and therefore come across as less fluent. Similarly, Goh and Burns (2012: 42) argue that learners' cognitive resources may not be able to cope with the demands of producing speech that is both fluent and accurate. If that is the case, they usually sacrifice accuracy for fluency: meaning usually takes priority over form (Goh & Burns 2012: 42-43). However, there are also learners who aim for accuracy and being grammatically correct, and come across as hesitant and slow in their speech instead (Fulcher 2003: 26-27).

Despite appearing to be opposites in spoken production, fluency and accuracy often develop together, according to Nation and Newton (2009: 152): research has shown that activities for increasing fluency often result in higher accuracy, as well as higher grammatical complexity. This may be because fluency development activities help increase automation of certain cognitive processes; automaticity is a central requirement for learners to be able to produce language that is high in fluency as well as complexity (Fulcher 2003: 30; Goh & Burns 2012: 43-44). In other words, once learners become more fluent in using their target language and production becomes more automatic, they are also able to pay more attention to their spoken language, including its accuracy (Fulcher 2003: 30; Nation & Newton 2009: 152).

Pietilä and Lintunen (2014: 23) point out that complexity, which was not originally part of the fluency/accuracy distinction, was a welcome addition to the framework. Previously, language learners could intentionally avoid complicated constructions, replacing them with simple words and structures that they had better control over, and still receive a high rating for their language skills (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014: 23). This is more difficult to get away with when complexity is also assessed. However, Goh and Burns (2012: 44) point out that although complexity works as an important measurement of second language development, it is not always present in all kinds of oral communication. The type of advanced constructions required for complexity, such as subordinate or relative clauses, are rarely present in spontaneous speech, which is usually constructed using the add-on strategy (cf. section 2.1.1.) (Goh & Burns 2012: 44). In other words, “the extent to which complexity is seen in speech will depend on various aspects of the sociocultural context where talk is produced”, and it is usually more common in formal speech (Goh & Burns 2012: 44).

In order to develop both fluency, accuracy, and complexity in learners, teachers should plan activities that cover all three aspects. However, learners should be allowed to focus separately on meaning (fluency) and form (accuracy); as mentioned previously, they may not be able to cope with both at the same time (Goh & Burns 2012: 42, 47). According to Nation and Newton (2009: 9-10), teachers should focus on fluency development activities, not only because they also simultaneously develop accuracy and complexity, but because learners need them to truly become good at the things they already know.

2.2.4. Individual differences affecting learner production

Learners of a foreign language have different starting points, which may affect their learning results in general, as well as their skill of speaking in particular. Some of these factors that affect language learning are considered more or less “fixed”, whereas others can change with time, or possibly even with training (cf. Robinson 2002: 7-8; Vatz et al. 2013: 274-275). This section will briefly introduce these individual differences and discuss potential ways of taking them into account in the classroom.

The variable that accounts for the largest proportion of variance in language learners' ultimate attainment, according to Granena and Long (2013: ix), is “the age at which learners were first meaningfully exposed to the L2”. This is also known as *age of onset*, or AO for short. There is a general consensus among researchers that early AO yields better learning results, presumably due to cerebral plasticity in younger brains (Long 2013: 3). Much research has been conducted on the topic of *critical* or *sensitive periods*, during which the brain is especially sensitive to environmental stimuli and therefore acquires new language more easily (Long 2013: 4-5), but the exact age limits for such periods are still debated. However, it is usually assumed that peak sensitivity goes on from birth until around the age of 6; after that follows a gradual period of offset where sensitivity declines, until the critical period ends sometime around puberty (Long 2013). Studies indicate that the end of the critical period differs between different aspects of language knowledge; for example, offset ends earlier for pronunciation than for morphology and syntax (Long 2013: 5-6, 9-13). When learning starts after the critical or sensitive period, it is considered extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve native-like language proficiency.

However, age of onset does not necessarily tell the whole story of how well a learner will do, and later AO can be partly compensated for by other factors. Some learners have an innate “natural talent” for languages called *language aptitude* (cf. Skehan 2002; Granena & Long 2013; Pietilä 2014), which is considered the second strongest predictor of learner achievement after AO. In cases where learners with late AO have achieved native-like proficiency, aptitude has often been referred to as the mitigating variable (Granena and Long 2013: ix). Language aptitude is usually seen as a concept consisting of rather stable cognitive abilities within an individual, which may help them excel in learning under particular conditions (cf. Vatz et al. 2013: 274-275; Skehan 2002: 79). The concept was first introduced and explained by Carroll and Sapon (1959, cited in Pietilä 2014: 46-48 and Skehan 2002: 70-71), who divided language aptitude into four different subcomponents: phonemic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, inductive language learning ability, and memory.

Phonemic coding ability refers to the ability to connect the unfamiliar sounds of a foreign language with their corresponding symbols and meanings in order to retain them (Pietilä 2014: 46; Skehan 2002: 71). This capacity to process sound, if impaired, has turned

out to be similar to the deficit implicated in mild dyslexia (Skehan 2002: 75). Grammatical sensitivity refers to the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words in a sentence, while inductive language learning ability refers to the more active ability to generalize and draw conclusions about grammar rules based on examples (Pietilä 2014: 46-47; Skehan 2002: 71). In other words, these two abilities both deal with the structure of the language, and are often called analytical abilities (Pietilä 2014: 46). Finally, memory has an important role to play in learning, since it facilitates storing new information and remembering it later. In language learning, it is especially helpful in the context of learning vocabulary, and facilitates making links between lexis in the first language and the target language (Pietilä 2014: 47; Skehan 2002: 71).

Pietilä (2014: 47-48) points out that individual learners have different aptitude profiles; for some, all aptitude components are equally strong (or weak), whereas others rely heavily on just one of the components. According to Skehan (2002: 76), some studies have managed to see a connection between learners' age of onset and the aspects of language aptitude most relevant for these learners' achievement. For learners with early AO, the memory component of aptitude was more involved in foreign language achievement, whereas learners with later AO made more use of the analytic components (Skehan 2002: 76). Indeed, children generally benefit from learning based on memory, because their cognitive abilities are not developed enough for a more analytical way of thinking. However, Pietilä (2014: 48) emphasizes that even regardless of age, aptitude profiles can be different (e.g. adults with more developed cognitive abilities may still prefer memory-oriented learning).

Other individual differences that have been discussed in research are for example intelligence and personality. Since these are also considered more or less "permanent" traits, they will not be discussed in detail here. There are, however, other factors that influence learning which fluctuate and can be changed over the course of learning. Two of these are the affective factors of motivation and anxiety, which have been given considerable attention in research.

Motivation is a broad topic, which has been studied from many angles, covering a vast amount of different aspects. In fact, MacIntyre (2002: 55) claims that it would be impossible for any model of motivation to include all potentially relevant variables.

Consequently, there is no precise, “universal” definition of motivation. Generally, however, this area of study examines what gives our behaviour energy and direction, asking two questions: “(1) why is behavior directed toward a specific goal, and (2) what determines the intensity or effort invested in pursuing the goal” (MacIntyre 2002: 46). Furthermore, it is relevant to investigate why the amount of motivation differs between learners in the same learning situation (MacIntyre 2002: 46).

One of the most influential frameworks in motivation research for language learning has been the social psychological model by Gardner and Lambert (1972, cited in Pietilä 2014: 50-51 and Dörnyei 1994). This model emphasizes the fact that language learning differs from other types of learning because of its social, communicative nature (Dörnyei 1994: 274) and because it is influenced by cultural stereotypes and personal identity (Pietilä 2014: 50). Two key components of the model are *integrative motivation* and *instrumental motivation* (Gardner & Lambert 1972, cited in Dörnyei 1994: 274 and Pietilä 2014: 50). Integrative motivation refers to the learner’s interest in the target language, including the culture and speakers associated with it, and the learner’s desire to interact and identify with this community. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, refers to the learner’s desire to learn the target language in order to achieve practical goals, like passing a test or getting a job.

A somewhat similar divide between two kinds of motivation, originating in cognitive theories of motivation, is that of *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation* (Pietilä 2014: 51-52). As the name suggests, intrinsic motivation comes from within the learner; the learner is motivated by a genuine interest or curiosity about the topic and by the joy that he or she gains from learning (Dörnyei 1994: 275; Pietilä 2014: 51). A learner with extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, engages in learning to receive external rewards (such as good grades or praise from parents) or to avoid punishment (Dörnyei 1994: 275; Pietilä 2014: 51). Generally, intrinsic motivation is considered more effective than extrinsic motivation, leading to better learning results (Pietilä 2014: 51).

The cognitive view of motivation, as the name suggests, generally sees motivation as “a function of a person’s thoughts rather than of some instinct, need, drive, or state” (Dörnyei 1994: 276). Part of this view of motivation is also attribution theory and self-efficacy theory. According to attribution theory, motivation will vary depending on how

learners explain past successes and (especially) failures to themselves (Dörnyei 1994: 276; Pietilä 2014: 52). If a learner thinks he failed a test because he is simply not good at English, his motivation is likely to decrease, whereas if he ascribes his failure to bad luck, his motivation will probably remain intact (Dörnyei 1994: 276).

These attributions play an important role in shaping learners' *self-efficacy*, defined as “an individual's judgement of his or her ability to perform a specific action”, and by extension also their *self-confidence*, or “the belief that one has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals or perform tasks competently” (Dörnyei 1994: 277). In the context of language learning, self-confidence is considered to include two components: self-evaluation of target language proficiency, and language use anxiety (Dörnyei 1994: 277; MacIntyre 2002: 64). Anxiety in itself, and its impact on language learning, has been studied extensively in different contexts.

As a variant of fear, anxiety is essentially a strong emotion, causing tension, nervousness, and worry. While emotional factors in general are considered closely related to motivation, and consequently to learning results, anxiety is the only emotion that has been studied in detail in relation to language learning (MacIntyre 2002: 63-64). There are several possible sources of anxiety: the emotion may stem from certain classroom procedures (such as presentations) or from testing situations, but also from the learner's own thoughts and beliefs about learning (such as perception of mistakes and fear of failure) (Goh & Burns 2012: 28). Anxiety is especially relevant when discussing oral skills, because the spontaneous nature of speaking means learners have to engage in language production with little time to plan for their contribution (Goh & Burns 2012: 26).

While mild levels of anxiety may lead to increased effort and therefore benefit the learner, higher levels are likely to disrupt cognitive and physiological processes, ultimately having a negative impact on performance (MacIntyre 2002: 61, 66). Anxiety typically makes learners focus narrowly on the negative aspects of their performance and worry excessively about failure or about others' opinions (Goh & Burns 2012: 26-27). Eventually, they may withdraw from communication altogether as a consequence of their anxiety. This may turn into a vicious cycle: anxious learners typically underestimate their language proficiency, and risk creating a self-fulfilling prophecy by not participating in activities that could improve their proficiency (MacIntyre 2002: 67). Indeed, there tends to

be a negative correlation between anxiety levels and language course grades, although it is not clear whether poor performance is caused by anxiety or anxiety is caused by poor performance (MacIntyre 2002: 66).

Dörnyei (1994: 280-282) gives examples of things teachers can do to improve classroom conditions for learners, in order to increase motivation and decrease anxiety. He divides this advice into three categories, based on his own model of three levels of motivation: the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level (Dörnyei 1994: 279-280). The language level involves “orientations and motives related to various aspects of the L2” (Dörnyei 1994: 279), and this type of motivation may be enhanced by including sociocultural components in the syllabus, developing students’ cross-cultural awareness, promoting student contact with speakers of the target language, and emphasizing the usefulness of knowing the TL. Motivation on the learner level, on the other hand, involves “a complex of affects and cognitions that form fairly stable personality traits” (Dörnyei 1994: 279) and can be furthered by helping students set attainable subgoals, promoting favourable perceptions of competence and realistic attributions, setting confidence-building tasks, and creating a supportive learning environment. Related to this, Goh and Burns (2012: 29) also point out that teachers should be aware of the consequences of anxiety, and not automatically assume that a silent learner is uninterested.

Finally, the learning situation level involves motives relating to three areas: the course, the teacher, and the group (Dörnyei 1994: 280). Motivation related to the course can be enhanced by making the syllabus relevant for the learners, using authentic and interesting teaching materials, selecting varied tasks and activities, and matching task difficulty to students’ abilities (Dörnyei 1994: 281-282). Motivation related to the group can be developed by creating and following up on classroom norms, developing group cohesion, and using cooperative learning (Dörnyei 1994: 282). Finally, teachers themselves and the way they act can play an important role in improving motivation. Empathy, congruence and acceptance are particularly important factors (Dörnyei 1994: 282).

2.3. Teaching and assessing speaking in a foreign language

This section will attempt to give an overview of the role of speaking in the field of language teaching and learning. First, some influential theories about language learning (2.3.1) and methods for language teaching (2.3.2) will be outlined, indicating how the importance of speaking has changed and the ways in which the skill has been taught. Then, assessment of language learning in general and speaking in particular will be discussed, bringing up central issues relevant for the present study, such as the definition of successful performance and different standards used for assessment.

2.3.1. Theories about language learning

Historically, there have been many different theories about language learning, which have contributed to the development of various methodologies for the best way to teach foreign languages. The theories can generally be divided into two types: psycholinguistic theories, which emphasize the process of activity in the mind of the individual learner, and sociolinguistic theories, which stress the importance of the environment in language learning (Järvinen 2014a: 69).

A well-known researcher who has emphasized various psycholinguistic aspects of learning is Krashen (2009), whose five hypotheses about second language acquisition have been widely discussed. For instance, he points out that language proficiency can be gained in two different ways: through *acquisition* or through *learning* (Krashen 2009: 10-11). Acquisition is similar to the way children acquire their first language; it is largely automatic and subconscious and happens through natural, meaningful interaction. Learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process, where language knowledge (rules of grammar, etc.) is explicitly learned (Krashen 2009: 10). These two processes coexist, and both of them can be used by language learners in different contexts.

According to Krashen's monitor hypothesis, the processes are used differently in performance. The acquisition component is responsible for initiating interaction and producing fluent language, whereas the learning component acts as a monitor, or editor, of the language produced (Krashen 2009: 15). In other words, these two processes can be

related to the concepts of fluency and accuracy discussed in section 2.2.3. Some learners over-use monitoring, resulting in hesitant speech with constant self-correction, while others under-use it, relying completely on the acquired system (Krashen 2009: 19). For an optimal result, monitoring should be used whenever appropriate, but without interfering with communication. In speaking, monitoring is usually difficult because of time constraints, but it is more feasible in planned speech (Krashen 2009: 19).

Furthermore, Krashen presents the input hypothesis, according to which a vast amount of comprehensible input is needed in order for acquisition of new language to occur (Krashen 2009: 20-22). In order for learners to “move from stage i , where i represents current competence, to $i + 1$, the next level”, this input should contain a certain amount of unfamiliar linguistic structures, which are still possible for the learners to understand based on context and previous knowledge (Krashen 2009: 20-21).

The importance of input in language learning has indeed been widely recognized, but Krashen has also been criticized for claiming that speaking can be taught simply by providing comprehensible input, as input is not sufficient to develop productive language skills (Järvinen 2014a: 74). This is mentioned by Nation and Newton (2009: 115), for instance, who emphasize the notable difference between the processes of reception (semantic decoding) and production (syntactic processing). Language knowledge is not automatically transferred from reception to production, but learners have to actually practise speaking and produce output in order to acquire the relevant knowledge (Nation & Newton 2009: 115). Nation and Newton (2009: 115-119) discuss the concept of *pushed output*, which involves making learners “produce spoken language in unfamiliar areas”. This can involve unfamiliar topics, unfamiliar types of discourse, or unfamiliar performance conditions.

In order for students to learn from the input they are exposed to, the functions of memory are essential, which is emphasized in cognitive theories of learning (Järvinen 2014a: 75-76). Järvinen compares components of memory to a bottle, where the bottleneck represents working memory and the bottom of the bottle represents long-term memory; only a small amount of the stimuli around us can be processed by working memory and transferred into long-term memory. Repetition is essential to this process, since the short-term nature of working memory will otherwise make us forget the material. Multifaceted

skills, like language, need to be divided into smaller subskills for learning. Each element is then learned by repeating it in working memory, combining it with previous knowledge to facilitate retention and to organise the knowledge in the mind (Järvinen 2014a: 75). Gradually, the skills are transferred into long-term memory, and once they become automatic, working memory capacity is freed up for further processing.

While cognitive processes taking place in individual learners are of course important to understand, language is fundamentally communicative and interactional, which makes the environment important for learning. This is taken into account in sociolinguistic theories of learning, one of the most influential of which is sociocultural theory (Järvinen 2014a: 83-85). According to this theory, individuals learn in interaction with others, and knowledge is then gradually internalized from the interpersonal level to the intrapersonal level (Vygotsky 1978: 56-57; Järvinen 2014a: 83). A central concept discussed by Vygotsky (1978: 79-91) is the *zone of proximal development*, defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky 1978: 86). In other words, together with others, learners can achieve more than they can alone, and this indicates stages of development within their reach. Help from other language users, either teachers or students, is essential; this is often called scaffolding (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014: 21).

Naturally, there are plenty of other theories about language learning, but for the purposes of this thesis, this brief overview is sufficient. Next, different models for language teaching will be discussed, outlining some traditional approaches and the role speaking has been given in them. Furthermore, some current ideas about teaching speaking in the foreign language classroom are examined.

2.3.2. Methods for language teaching and the role of speaking

Throughout time, various methods have been used for language teaching, each emphasizing different aspects of learning. The role of speaking has varied, as has its definition: a few methods have emphasized speaking, but some of them have neglected the

communicative aspects of the skill, and others have ignored speaking altogether. Models can be categorized in various different ways. Järvinen (2014b: 90-91) uses two general categories for models: those focusing on learning about the language system, and those focusing on using language for communication.

Historically, language teaching has mostly focused on written language. One of the most traditional methods for teaching languages is the grammar-translation method, which focused on the structure of language and on learning grammar and vocabulary by heart (Järvinen 2014b: 91). The method was based on the use of texts, and reading was the main skill that was taught, whereas writing was only used when producing text translations (Järvinen 2014b: 91-92; Bygate 2002: 34-35). Speaking was completely left out of this approach.

According to Bygate (2002: 34), “the teaching of speaking began to emerge as a concern in its own right only in the 1940s”. By this point, it had been recognized that speech should be part of language teaching, and it had been implemented for instance in the direct method (Bygate 2002: 35). The aim of this approach was to teach through the target language with no use of translation, using various creative methods to convey meanings of words, and using inductive methods for teaching grammar (Järvinen 2014b: 98-99). While parts of this method are still relevant today, such as vast amounts of target language input, it was generally too time-consuming (Järvinen 2014b: 99).

The next popular approach was the audiolingual method, which also emphasized learning through speaking and listening. This method was based on behaviourist learning theories, assuming that “accurate speaking depended on habit formation, which was taken to imply a need for substantial practice at responding to oral stimuli” (Bygate 2002: 35). In other words, drills were used to memorize language content, with an emphasis on accuracy of pronunciation and grammar (Järvinen 2014b: 94-95). In the beginning, the drills were mostly based on grammatical structures, but these were later deemed “inadequate for real-world needs” and a more functional approach was introduced, using dialogues imitating real-life situations (Bygate 2002: 35).

Still, up until this point, all language teaching models failed to include genuine communication: “these approaches, on the whole, omitted to develop the interactive grammar and discourse patterns of typical speech” (Bygate 2002: 36). Referring to the

cognitive processes of speaking discussed by Levelt (1989) (see section 2.2.1), Bygate (2002: 36) states that learners were mostly given a chance to practice formulation and articulation in these models, but the conceptual planning and spontaneous decision-making required for interaction were left out. Awareness of these issues led to the development of communicative language teaching, or CLT, in the 1970s.

CLT was based on the concept of communicative competence (see section 2.2.2), and the approach thus included sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and strategic competence in addition to the traditional grammatical competence which had formed the basis of so many other methods (Järvinen 2014b: 101). The aim was to develop fluency as well as accuracy in all four language skills by using the language in authentic communicative situations (Järvinen 2014b: 102-103). Usually, accuracy would be given priority in the beginning while developing the skill (*skill-getting*), with fluency becoming more important when the skill had been automatized (*skill-using*) (Järvinen 2014b: 104). Tasks were usually based on different types of problem-solving carried out in pairs or groups (Bygate 2002: 36).

Tasks in themselves became the focus of a particular approach usually considered a branch of CLT, namely task-based language teaching (TBLT). In this approach, tasks are seen as extensive and independent wholes with a particular goal, and they are meant to be predominantly meaning-focused, developing thinking and problem-solving skills (Järvinen 2014b: 105-106). Tasks consists of three stages. The teacher first introduces the task and gives the students relevant information and vocabulary (*pre-task stage*), and then the students carry out the task in pairs or groups, also producing a written or oral report about their progress (*task cycle*) (Järvinen 2014b: 105). During the task cycle, the teacher mostly observes the students and helps them when needed. In the final stage (*language focus*), the teacher brings up linguistic aspects that need repetition or clarification, bringing focus from meaning to form (Järvinen 2014b: 105-106).

To summarize the role of speaking in particular, it has been addressed in some of the popular theories and models, although the importance of authentic interaction was only introduced with the communicative approach. Even after this, however, Goh and Burns (2012: 133, 151) argue that actual *teaching* of speaking has often been neglected: speaking is often *practiced* in classrooms, but rarely explicitly taught, leading to learning that is not particularly effective but rather incidental. While teachers often follow either a “direct

approach”, aiming to develop isolated speaking skills like pronunciation, or an “indirect approach”, aiming to develop fluency in communicative activities, neither of these approaches supports all the processes involved in speaking development in a foreign language (Goh & Burns 2012: 134-135). For example, awareness of typical discourse patterns and registers needs to be included, along with sensitivity to sociocultural, situational, and interpersonal appropriateness (Goh & Burns 2012: 137). Teachers also need to pay attention to cognitive and affective factors impacting their students’ learning.

Although different theories and methods can be helpful and have been largely influential in the field of language teaching, Kumaravadivelu (2003: 28) points out that teachers have usually found them difficult to implement in practice. He argues that the concept of method is flawed because “methods are based on idealized concepts geared toward idealized contexts” but “no idealized method can visualize all the variables in advance in order to provide situation-specific suggestions that practicing teachers sorely need to tackle the challenges they confront every day of their professional lives” (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 28). Since the best way of teaching depends so much on context, teachers have often ended up relying on intuition and experience rather than on specific methods.

Kumaravadivelu (2003: 33) suggests that teaching has now entered a “post-method” era, characterized by a recognition of teacher autonomy, where individual teachers are trusted to shape their own “theory of practice” and continuously self-evaluate and change the way they work. In his view, this post-method pedagogy is characterized by three parameters: *particularity*, *practicality*, and *possibility* (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 34). Particularity refers to the adaptation of teaching approaches to specific contexts and locations; practicality concerns the relationship between theory and practice, allowing teachers “to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize”; and possibility is about the relationship between language, society and identity and the way these issues need to be recognized and taken into account in the classroom (Kumaravadivelu 2003: 37).

Since the present study aims to investigate teachers’ classroom practices based on their own beliefs and opinions, they are not expected to follow a particular theory or method. However, it may be possible to see similarities and differences to various methods

in their approaches. The following section will outline central concepts in the assessment of speaking, also discussing important issues of rating criteria and standards.

2.3.3. Assessment of speaking

Assessment of speaking can be carried out in various different ways, and the choice of approach depends on the purpose of the assessment and the intended use of the results. For instance, a distinction is usually made between external high-stakes tests, “imposed” on the school from policy makers on the outside, and internal low-stakes tests, usually created or selected by teachers (Fulcher 2010: 1-3). A related distinction is the one between *formative assessment* and *summative assessment*: the former refers to evaluation used throughout the process of learning to make informed decisions about progress in relation to learning goals, whereas the latter refers to tests measuring proficiency, typically against a particular standard, at the end of a period of study (Fulcher 2010: 2-3). High-stakes tests are usually summative, whereas low-stakes tests can be formative as well as summative.

Since this thesis is concerned with classroom practice, and the only high-stakes test in Finland (the matriculation exam) does not contain an oral part, external tests will not be discussed in any great detail here. However, it should be noted that tests in general, and perhaps especially high-stakes tests, can have a considerable impact on what happens in the classroom: this effect of the form and content of a test on teaching is termed *washback* (Nation & Newton 2009: 169; Fulcher 2010: 6). Nation and Newton (2009: 169) specifically use speaking as an example, saying that schools that do not test oral proficiency usually end up using more classroom time for reading and listening, since these skills are part of the test.

Regarding classroom assessment, the traditional approach used to follow a predictable structure where teachers set goals for their learners, constructed activities to help learners achieve those goals, and finally evaluated how well they had succeeded (Fulcher 2010: 68). However, this summative approach was later contested by more formative versions, aiming to identify individual learners’ needs and improve progress throughout the course of learning, thereby providing all learners with a sense of achievement and increasing motivation (Fulcher 2010: 68-69). This type of assessment

focuses on bridging the gap between learners' current level and the ultimate goal, or alternatively identifying the zone of proximal development, and progressing to this next level of learning (Fulcher 2010: 72).

Classroom assessment does not have the same restrictions as external standardized tests, making it possible to use open-ended task types that take longer to complete, and making use of collaborative learning in pairs or groups (Fulcher 2010: 70). This type of alternative assessment can be an extension of normal classroom procedures, taking place in a natural context, and focusing on process rather than product (Douglas 2010: 73). However, teachers can of course also use more traditional speaking tests for internal assessment, such as the oral proficiency interview, which was among the first methods used when assessment of speaking was introduced (Luoma 2004: 35). Traditionally, the teacher would interview one student at a time, but paired interviews also became common later on (Luoma 2004: 36-37). Another alternative is using tape recordings for assessment (Luoma 2004: 44).

Regardless of the chosen approach, speaking assessments, like any other tests, need to be reliable and valid. *Reliability* is usually defined as score consistency, meaning that there should not be any large differences in scores if the same student takes the same test two days in a row (Luoma 2004: 176). In other words, scores from a reliable test are not influenced by circumstances of the testing situation, but based on the student's actual ability (Luoma 2004: 176). *Validity* is about the relationship between the contents and activities of the test, on the one hand, and the goals and purposes of the test, on the other hand (Luoma 2004: 184). Validity tends to be considered the most important aspect in test development overall: it is essential that the test actually assesses the construct it is supposed to assess.

Defining the construct for assessment of speaking is no easy task. As we have seen in sections 2.1 and 2.2, speaking is an extremely complex skill, and Fulcher (2003: 19) points out that "[n]o operational construct definition can ever capture the richness of what happens in a process as complex as human communication". Therefore it is impossible to include every single aspect of spoken language in one test; the range of the test construct needs to be based on the purpose of the assessment (Fulcher 2003: 19). Luoma (2004: 162-163) lists three main frameworks for construct definition: linguistically oriented

frameworks, focusing on concepts of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation; communication-oriented frameworks, focusing on functions in communicative activities; and situation-based frameworks, focusing on communication needs in specific situations. While linguistically oriented frameworks are more traditional, communication- and situation-oriented frameworks are more relevant to current views on language learning (Luoma 2004: 163).

Task types should be selected based on what is most relevant for the construct. Luoma (2004: 139-162) lists several possible tasks based on the different construct frameworks. Constructs based on communicative activities may require tasks involving particular types of talk, such as description tasks, narrative tasks, instruction-giving tasks, and so on (Luoma 2004: 139-151). If the construct is situation-based, relevant tasks will include role-playing and reacting in these specific situations (Luoma 2004: 139, 151-158). Constructs focusing on linguistic competence may lead to more structured speaking tasks, such as reading aloud or answering short questions, with the aim of eliciting learners' knowledge of linguistic features like pronunciation and grammar (Luoma 2004: 139, 158-162).

Apart from choosing tasks relevant to the construct, efforts should also be made not to let external aspects that are irrelevant to the construct influence the scores (Fulcher 2003: 47). Luoma (2004: 22-23) discusses the possible impact of personality, especially when testing interactional speech: tasks involving chatting, for instance, may inadvertently test not only linguistic skills or communication skills, but also sociability, rewarding extroversion and talkativeness. Furthermore, in interviews, the two interlocutors can affect each other's performance due to personality or sociability factors (Luoma 2004: 37-38). Whether it is necessary or justified to assess such aspects is debated, and up to individual teachers and assessors (Fulcher 2003: 49; Luoma 2004: 23).

Once the assessment has been carried out, feedback needs to be given. This is usually done either in the form of a grade or as verbal feedback. Grades have traditionally been used, especially in high-stakes assessment, but verbal feedback indicating strengths and weaknesses is more helpful to students (Luoma 2004: 173-175; Fulcher 2010: 69). The most useful feedback is related to learning goals, making learners aware of what they have learned, and suggesting areas for improvement with clear examples of how this can be

done (Fulcher 2010: 69; Luoma 2004: 174-175). Luoma (2004: 189) defines shorter feedback such as “good job” as insufficient, stating that useful feedback needs to be concrete and descriptive.

Learners should be given time to digest and respond to the feedback, in order for them to develop metacognitive awareness about their learning (Fulcher 2010: 69). In addition to traditional teacher feedback, self- and peer assessment can also be used, involving learners in the evaluation process. This makes the learning goals and criteria for success more transparent, and gives learners partial responsibility to decide what is “good work”, which increases motivation and learner autonomy (Fulcher 2010: 71; Douglas 2010: 75). Students can also be involved by letting them give feedback on the assessment itself (Luoma 2004: 175).

Classroom assessment is generally *criterion-referenced*, meaning that students’ results are not compared to each other, but rather to a certain target performance (Fulcher 2010: 79-80). However, defining the criteria for what characterises a good performance can be challenging. Various rating scales are usually developed for formal assessment (cf. Luoma 2004: 59-79), describing levels of achievement for a particular test. A scale commonly used in Finnish classrooms, and also referred to in the curriculum, is the Common European Framework of References (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001), which is not based on any particular test but rather aims to help teachers and learners in general set goals for learning (Luoma 2004: 71-75). Fulcher (2010: 114-115) points out that this framework should not be used as such to grade tests; rather, it should serve as a guideline for creating more specific assessment criteria adapted to a particular situation. Individual teachers and assessors have to define what a good performance looks like.

Various aspects of the skill of speaking are usually included in criteria for assessment. Isolated skills like vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, which have traditionally been valued in tests of linguistic competence, are still assessed. However, Luoma (2004: 11-13, 16-17) points out that vocabulary and grammar should be assessed related to typical patterns in speech, taking into account the use of “simple” words and spoken grammar. In addition to these aspects of accuracy, fluency is generally also assessed, but the definition of this term varies and needs to be explicitly specified by individual assessors (Luoma 2004: 87-89). Additional assessment criteria include

communicative effectiveness and comprehensibility, but these can also refer to many different aspects, and need to be clearly defined (Brown & Yule 1983: 112-114, 121; Luoma 2004: 11).

The CEFR, for example, has several different scales for various aspects of speaking, such as interaction, production, and speaking in specific situations (Council of Europe 2001). There is also a general scale with “qualitative aspects of spoken language use”, which contains verbal descriptors for five different areas: range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence (Council of Europe 2001: 7). The descriptors explain what learners *can do* with the language at various proficiency levels, rather than focusing on what they cannot do (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014: 23). Although the latter might be easier to formulate for lower proficiency levels, focusing on positive aspects is generally considered a better approach, especially if criteria are to be shared with learners (Luoma 2004: 83; Pietilä & Lintunen 2014: 23). This is an improvement from previous approaches, where the ideal goal used to be near-native proficiency, and assessment often ended up focusing on errors (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014: 22-23).

The treatment of errors is still a problematic issue in assessment. Even with more tolerant approaches to mistakes in learner production, assessment may sometimes place unfair weight on errors made by learners. Luoma (2004: 19) points out that normal speech contains a fair number of errors in areas like word choice and pronunciation, but while native speakers are usually forgiven for these mistakes, they tend to “mysteriously acquire special significance” when made by language learners. A general approach used to address this problem is correcting errors in the early stages of learning in order to prevent automatization, but once learners achieve a more advanced proficiency level focus shifts from accuracy to fluency, only correcting errors if they inhibit understanding (Bygate 2002: 38; Järvinen 2014b: 104). The *error gravity* also matters, however: errors that would not be made by native speakers (such as violations of simple word order rules) or errors of pragmatic appropriacy (relating to rules of politeness etc.) are considered more severe than a slip of the tongue in pronunciation (Luoma 2004: 19; Fulcher 2003: 27-31, 39-40).

A final noteworthy issue in assessment of speaking, which also affects what is considered an error, is the standards used for assessing pronunciation. Traditionally, certain native varieties of English, notably British and American English, have been used as

models in classrooms (cf. Leppänen et al. 2011: 70-71). However, this approach has been questioned in recent years, for several reasons. First of all, as has already been discussed, a native-like pronunciation can be difficult if not impossible to acquire if one has started studying the target language after the end of the sensitive period (cf. Long 2013; see section 2.2.4). Lintunen (2014: 167-168) argues that native accents can still be used as ideal *models* for learners, but that the actual *goal* should be something more realistically achievable. In fact, the idea that Finnish learners should aim for the pronunciation of a proficient Finnish speaker of English was recognized in Finland already in the 1970s (Lintunen 2014: 170).

A related issue is the fact that language in general, and accent in particular, is closely tied to personal identity, which means that learners do not necessarily even want to sound like native speakers (Nation & Newton 2009: 77; Luoma 2004: 10). Conveying non-native status through an accent can also have other benefits, such as recognition for having learned a foreign language well. An accent indicating that a person comes from a different background may also serve as an excuse in case of any mistakes related to politeness or other cultural factors (Luoma 2004: 10).

One final reason for questioning the authority of native-like accents is the fact that native speakers of English are now outnumbered by second- and foreign-language speakers, using the language as a *lingua franca* around the world (Lintunen 2014: 170). It has been argued that learners should therefore aim at developing an accent that is understood by as many speakers as possible, rather than focusing on native-like pronunciation (Lintunen 2014: 170; Luoma 2004: 10). The exact properties of such an accent have been investigated and summarized by Jenkins (2007: 23-24) in the so-called *lingua franca core*.

In order to investigate Finnish teachers' opinions and practices relating to the teaching and assessment of speaking, the present study used an online questionnaire, the responses to which were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The construction of this survey and the methods used to analyse the responses will be outlined in the following chapter.

3. Methods and materials

The aim of the present study is to investigate teacher opinions on the role of speaking skills in teaching and assessment of English as a foreign language in Finland, and to gain a preliminary overview of their related practices in the classroom. In order to achieve this goal, I decided to develop an online questionnaire to be sent out to English teachers via e-mail. In the following sections the construction of the survey is outlined, along with information on pilot testing procedures and the process of data collection. The method of analysis used in the study is also described.

3.1. The questionnaire

3.1.1. General information about the questionnaire

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was developed based on my research questions (see section 1.2) and it was split into four parts. The first part of the survey covered the use of the target language in the classroom, asking how often English is used (as opposed to the ordinary school language, i.e. Finnish or Swedish), in what situations the teachers use the different languages, and how the teachers encourage the students to speak English. The second part focused on how English speaking skills are prioritised in the classroom, with questions on the perceived importance of speaking skills, the amount of classroom time devoted to speaking, and the kinds of tasks used for practising the skill. The third part covered the topic of assessment, asking about the teachers' views on assessment of speaking skills, methods of assessment and assessment criteria. Finally, the fourth part gathered background information about the participants, such as gender, number of years in the teaching profession, and teaching qualifications.

In order to enable comparisons between Finnish-language schools and Swedish-language schools, the background information section also asked about the language of instruction in the respondents' schools. For comparisons between different educational levels, the questionnaire also asked the teachers in what type of school they were teaching. Since one teacher may teach at several different levels, especially in smaller municipalities,

this question encouraged the teachers to answer the survey based on the level on which they teach the most (rather than enabling more than one answer through the use of “check boxes”). This was done in order to avoid a potential need for constant clarification, in case the same teacher would use different teaching methods or assessment criteria at different educational levels. This question was the first one in the entire questionnaire, in order to ensure that the teachers answered the rest of the survey with only one level in mind.

The questionnaire consisted of a total of 21 questions, and all parts of the questionnaire had a mixture of multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. This format was chosen in order to enable quantitative analysis of some of the answers, making it possible to see patterns of similarities and differences between groups, while providing some more qualitative insight into the teachers’ opinions as well. At the end of each part of the survey, there was also a comment box, in order to make sure that the informants had the chance to further expand on their answers if needed. The questionnaire was deliberately written in a rather informal style, not specifically asking teachers about any theoretical concepts or methodological frameworks, but rather waiting to see to what extent various topics came up in the responses. The questionnaire was written in English, but the introduction clarified that the respondents could also answer in Finnish or Swedish, if they felt that they expressed themselves better in one of those languages.

In exchange for helping me with my research, the informants were given the opportunity to enter their e-mail address at the end of the survey if they wanted to receive a summary of the results once the research was finished. In addition, the informants could tick a box if they agreed to be contacted with potential follow-up questions to the survey. I chose to include this option in case of unclear answers or particularly interesting opinions that I might want to investigate further; however, it was not necessary to contact anyone.

3.1.2. Pilot testing

The questionnaire went through two rounds of pilot testing before being sent out to the target group of the study. The first pilot questionnaire was almost entirely open-ended, except for one yes/no question, one Likert-scale question and the questions in the background part. The purpose of this first pilot-test round was to decide which questions

needed to be in multiple-choice format and which ones should stay open-ended, and to develop more realistic answer options for the former. In addition, I also wanted to receive general feedback about the survey in its preliminary form. In order for the pilot to be as helpful as possible when developing realistic multiple-choice alternatives, I decided to get authentic responses by sending this version of the questionnaire to six English teachers at different educational levels. They were chosen because I knew them personally and assumed they would be willing to assist me in my research. Five of them replied, and their responses were very helpful for the development of multiple-choice alternatives to certain questions.

The second pilot version of the survey was more similar to the final version, with multiple-choice questions as well as open-ended ones. This second pilot questionnaire was sent out to all participants and teachers of the English department's joint BA and MA seminar on language and society topics. Seven people responded to the survey and the seminar participants also commented on it in a session devoted to pilot testing. As a result of suggestions received at this stage, the wording of several questions was modified, and some technical issues regarding obligatory questions were resolved. The seminar participants also confirmed that the set time for the questionnaire (15-20 minutes) was reasonable.

3.1.3. Data collection

When both rounds of pilot testing had been conducted and the final version of the questionnaire was ready, the link was sent out to English teachers around Finland through e-mail. Since I wanted to compare teachers in Finnish-language schools with teachers in Swedish-language schools, I decided to focus on two bilingual target regions: the Nyland region in the south, and the Ostrobothnia region in the west. I also wanted to make comparisons between teachers at different educational levels, but taking every single type of school into account was deemed too extensive. Therefore, I decided to contact teachers in comprehensive schools (i.e. primary schools and lower secondary schools) and general upper secondary schools; vocational schools and higher education institutions were left out. Contact information to the English teachers was obtained by going through the

websites of all the municipalities in the two regions to find information on schools, and then browsing through the schools' own websites.

It turned out that some schools only published contact information to their head teachers, but not to any other staff, and some schools did not provide information on who was their English teacher in the first place. This seemed to concern Swedish-language primary schools in particular. Since I wanted replies from teachers in both language groups at all levels, I chose to send out e-mails not only to English teachers that were listed, but to head teachers in Swedish-language primary schools as well, asking them to pass on the information to the right people.

When every school's website had been examined, the list of e-mail addresses included a total of 1137 teachers: 800 English teachers, 22 language teachers (whose language was not specified), and 315 head teachers. Since about 100 responses were considered enough for a study of this size, it was decided that the link to the study would first be distributed to around 300 teachers, expecting a response rate of about 33%. Additional recipients could be added later if necessary.

When selecting the recipients from the list of addresses, the language distribution had to be taken into account, since a roughly similar number of responses was needed from both language groups in order to enable comparisons. Despite the bilingual status of most of the municipalities involved, the number of Finnish-language schools was considerably higher than the number of Swedish-language schools. In order to balance the language groups, every single English teacher listed in the Swedish-language schools was chosen as a recipient of the first round of e-mails (64 teachers in total), along with every fourth English teacher listed in the Finnish-language schools (188 teachers in total). In addition, every other head teacher in the Swedish-language primary schools (66 head teachers in total) was selected. In other words, a total of 318 e-mails were sent. 15 of them bounced back due to incorrect addresses or spam filters, which means that a total of 303 teachers should have eventually received their e-mails.

Some of the head teachers replied, letting me know that they had passed on the information. However, there is no way of knowing the exact number of teachers that the survey eventually reached, since the same school can have several English teachers. The teachers were given roughly ten days to respond to the questionnaire. When the deadline

approached, it could be established that expecting a response rate of 33% had been rather optimistic. Only 42 responses were submitted, which gives a response rate of about 14%, assuming that each head teacher passed on the questionnaire to one English teacher. Thinking that the timing may have affected the response rate, since the survey was sent out just before Christmas, reminders were sent out to the same teachers at the beginning of the new year. This raised the response rate to 16.5%, with a total of 50 responses.

Since this was still considered a rather low number, a third round of e-mails were sent out, this time to a new group of teachers. Since teachers from Swedish-speaking primary schools were already overrepresented in the responses, no more e-mails were sent out to head teachers. Instead, English teachers from Finnish-language schools were selected from the list. Based on the distribution between levels in the previous responses, every fourth primary school teacher was chosen, while two out of three secondary school teachers were chosen. Two municipalities were excluded, including the capital of Helsinki, because a permit was needed to carry out research there (head teachers had informed me about this during the first round). E-mails were thus sent to 214 new recipients, seven of which bounced back, so 207 teachers should have received theirs. The response rate was disappointing, however: only 14 teachers (7%) filled in the questionnaire, reducing the overall response rate to 12.5%. Considering that reminders were not very productive for the first group of respondents, and that this second group seemed even less likely to respond, no more e-mails were sent out. Instead, the total of 64 replies was considered to be enough for this study, even though the number was smaller than originally expected.

3.2. Method of analysis

The responses to the survey were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to give an overview of teachers' opinions and practices in general, as well as provide insight into the more specific thoughts and ideas of individual teachers. Due to the relatively small data set, the quantitative findings should be treated with a degree of caution, but they still offer useful insights about trends among the respondents. The qualitative analysis of individual teachers' comments further illuminates the quantitative findings.

3.2.1. Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis was carried out in order to distinguish patterns in the responses and to compare groups of respondents to each other, identifying similarities and differences between teachers from different educational levels and different language groups. Quantitative analysis was mainly carried out for the closed questions, which gave the respondents predetermined alternatives to choose from, enabling statistical analysis. However, the data from the open-ended questions, while largely qualitative in nature, also underwent a process of quantification where common topics were identified and differences between groups could be distinguished. This process is further explained in section 3.2.2.

Statistical analysis for the structured questions was carried out with help of the programme IBM SPSS Statistics 24. The purpose of the statistical analysis was to determine whether there were significant differences in the responses given by various groups of teachers in certain questions. This type of comparison of two independent samples can be carried out through the parametric independent samples *t*-test, or through its non-parametric equivalent, the Mann-Whitney *U*-test (Brace, Kemp & Snelgar 2003: 62-63, 71-72). Parametric tests assume that the data in question are collected using an interval or ratio scale, and that the data are normally distributed, whereas nonparametric tests work better for data that are not normally distributed and/or collected through ordinal scales (Brace, Kemp & Snelgar 2003: 9). The data to be analysed in the present study were collected using ordinal Likert scales, and therefore the use of nonparametric tests was required (cf. Brace, Kemp & Snelgar 2003: 5, 10, 71). Consequently, the Mann-Whitney *U*-test was used for statistical analysis, in order to indicate potentially significant differences between teachers from different educational levels and teachers from schools with different languages.

Since the Mann Whitney *U*-test requires the data to be collected using ordinal scales, answers from yes/no questions did not qualify for this type of analysis. These responses were instead analysed by calculating how many per cent of the respondents in the different groups selected a certain alternative. Comparing these proportions of respondents, it was possible to see differences between groups, although it was not possible to tell whether

these differences were significant. The same approach with percentages was used to identify patterns among the open-ended responses, the analysis of which will be further discussed in the following section.

3.2.2. Qualitative analysis

The participants' responses to the open-ended questions in the survey were analysed qualitatively. Each question was analysed separately. To begin with, all the answers to a certain question were read through multiple times in order to gain an overview of all the answers and identify common themes. Then, each answer was shortened down so that it only consisted of a number of keywords, illustrating the main themes brought up by each respondent. After that, these keywords were read through once more, and themes that were considered related were grouped together, in order to form a final list of categories that was comprehensive but not too long.

After this, a separate Excel worksheet was made, where the main categories were inserted into their own columns. Each response was then coded with a number in each column, indicating whether the theme was mentioned (1) or not mentioned (0) by each respondent. The most common themes could then be observed by calculating the sum for each column, and differences between language groups and educational levels could be observed through the kind of quantitative analysis mentioned above, calculating percentages which indicate the proportion of teachers in each group who mentioned a certain topic.

This overview, then, was complemented by individual respondents' comments, illustrating their thoughts and opinions on the issues brought up in each question. Again, all comments were read through multiple times, and grouped according to central issues mentioned. In the report of the results in the following chapter, the major themes that were brought up in each open-ended question are reported, along with related comments and quotes. Less common themes are of course also included, and efforts have been made to account for every single opinion in the report of the results.

It should be noted that not all open-ended questions were directed at all respondents. For instance, the question about standards used for assessing pronunciation was only

directed at teachers who actually assess pronunciation; teachers who do not assess pronunciation did not answer that question. In these cases, when calculating how many per cent of the respondents mentioned a certain topic, the calculations were based on the number of teachers who actually answered the question. Consequently, when the report of the results mentions that 50% of the respondents mentioned a certain topic in a certain question, this refers to 50% of the respondents who actually answered the question, not 50% of all respondents participating in the survey.

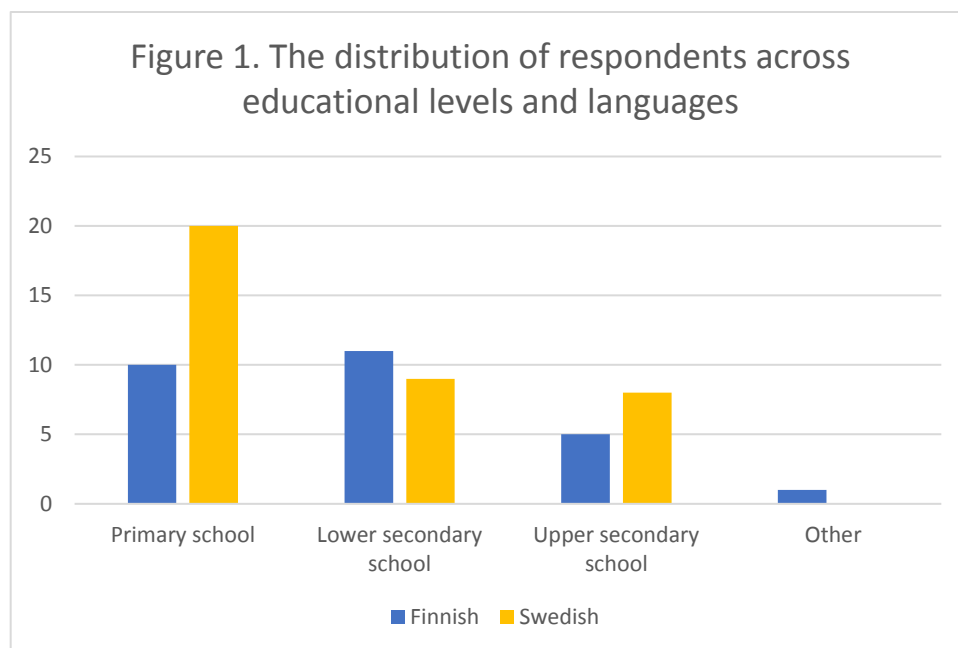
4. Results

This chapter outlines all the results found in the present study. The report is divided into sections based on the structure of the survey and the topic of the questions. First, the participants are introduced based on the background information they provided in the questionnaire. Next, the reported use of the target language (English) versus the school language (Finnish or Swedish) in the classroom is outlined. After that, the teachers' opinions on encouragement and practice of speaking skills are reported, and finally, views on assessment of speaking skills are outlined.

Although the results are mainly presented question by question, the answers given in the boxes for further comments at the end of each part of the questionnaire will be included in the discussion of the questions they are relevant to. Furthermore, answers given by teachers to certain questions occasionally include thoughts on issues that were not part of that particular prompt. In that case, if the response is more relevant for another question in the survey, it will be included in the discussion wherever it is deemed more appropriate.

4.1. The participants

As mentioned previously, the questionnaire eventually received 64 responses. Out of the 64 teachers that responded, 27 were teaching in Finnish-language schools and 37 were teaching in Swedish-language schools. 30 were teaching in primary schools (grades 1-6), 20 were teaching in lower secondary schools (grades 7-9) and 13 were teaching in upper secondary schools. One teacher chose the "Other" option and specified that he or she was teaching in both lower secondary and upper secondary school, despite the fact that the question asked the teachers to choose the level on which they teach the most, in case they teach at several levels. Due to this misunderstanding, the teacher in question was later left out from the statistical analysis where educational level was relevant. The distribution of teachers between educational levels as well as languages is illustrated in Figure 1.



As can be seen in the figure, Swedish-speaking primary school teachers are rather overrepresented in the responses. This may be due to the fact that these teachers got the information about the survey from the head teacher at their school, rather than straight from me. It seems probable that people are more likely to comply with a request if it comes from a figure of authority that they know, than if it comes from a complete stranger.

63 out of 64 respondents (98%) were qualified teachers. 50 of them said that they were qualified foreign language teachers, while 13 said that they were qualified teachers, but not of foreign languages. 12 of the 13 teachers who were qualified for something other than foreign languages worked in primary schools; we may thus assume that they are qualified class teachers for primary schools, who are teaching most school subjects, but are not specialized in English. 57 of the qualified teachers specified where they got their education in teaching: 56 of them were educated in Finland, including five who had also partly been educated in other countries. One teacher was educated in Sweden.

The majority of the informants (56 respondents, 88%) were female, seven (11%) were male, and one participant preferred not to say. In the rest of this thesis, all respondents will be referred to as female, in order to avoid the cumbersome construction “he or she” and to avoid clear identification of the male respondents. On average, the respondents had worked as teachers for 15 years (mean: 15.14, median: 15, mode: 15). The

person who had been in the profession the longest had taught for 37 years, while the most recently graduated teacher had taught for 6 months.

The opportunity to answer the questionnaire in Finnish or Swedish was consistently used by ten respondents: eight teachers answered in Swedish only, and two answered in Finnish only. In addition, two teachers answered mostly in English but changed languages once or twice. In the following report of the results, comments in other languages will be translated into English, with the original comment in Finnish or Swedish in a footnote.

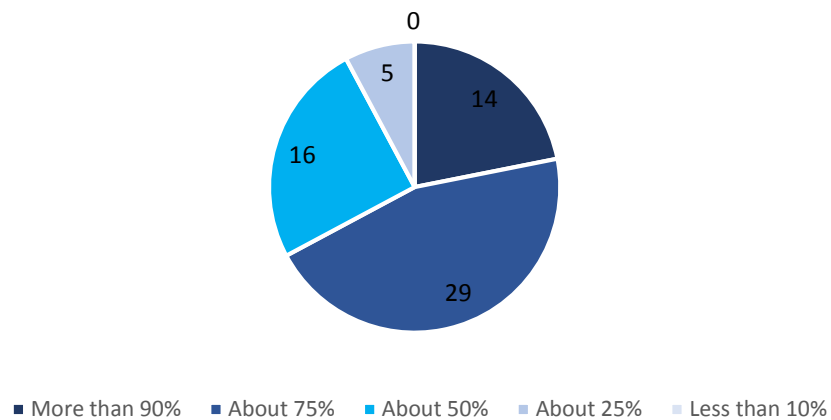
4.2. The use of the target language in the classroom

4.2.1. The extent of target language and first language use

The first part of the questionnaire asked the participating teachers to indicate how often they speak English in the classroom (question 2), as opposed to the school's normal language of instruction (i.e. Finnish or Swedish). This was indicated on a 5-point Likert scale, with options ranging from always or almost always speaking English (more than 90% of the time) to rarely speaking English (less than 10% of the time). The teachers also indicated how often their students speak English as opposed to Finnish or Swedish on the same scale (question 5). Both questions were obligatory, and thus received answers from all respondents.

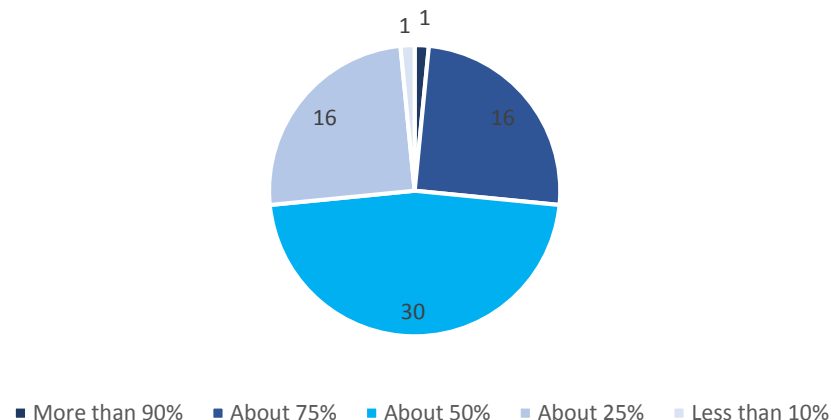
The results show that teachers generally speak English most of the time; the most common answer was “about 75% of the time”, chosen by almost half of the respondents (45%). Always or almost always speaking English was almost as common (22%) as doing so about half of the time (25%). A minority of the teachers (8%) answered that they speak English about 25% of the time, but none of them said they spoke the target language less than 10% of the time. The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Share of classroom time that teachers speak English rather than Swedish/Finnish



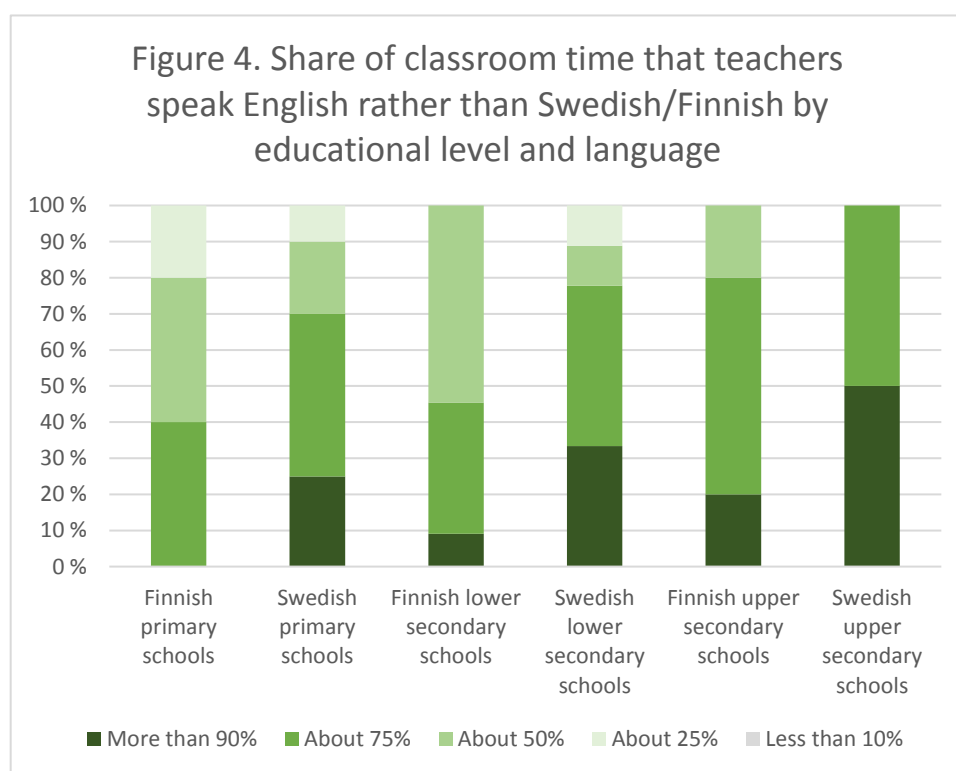
The pattern looks slightly different for the students, according to the teachers' answers. In this question, almost half of the respondents (47%) indicated that their students spoke English "about 50% of the time", with "about 75% of the time" and "about 25% of the time" being equally common (each of these options was chosen by 25% of the respondents). Only one teacher answered that her students spoke English more than 90% of the time, and only one teacher said that her students spoke English less than 10% of the time. These results are illustrated in Figure 3.

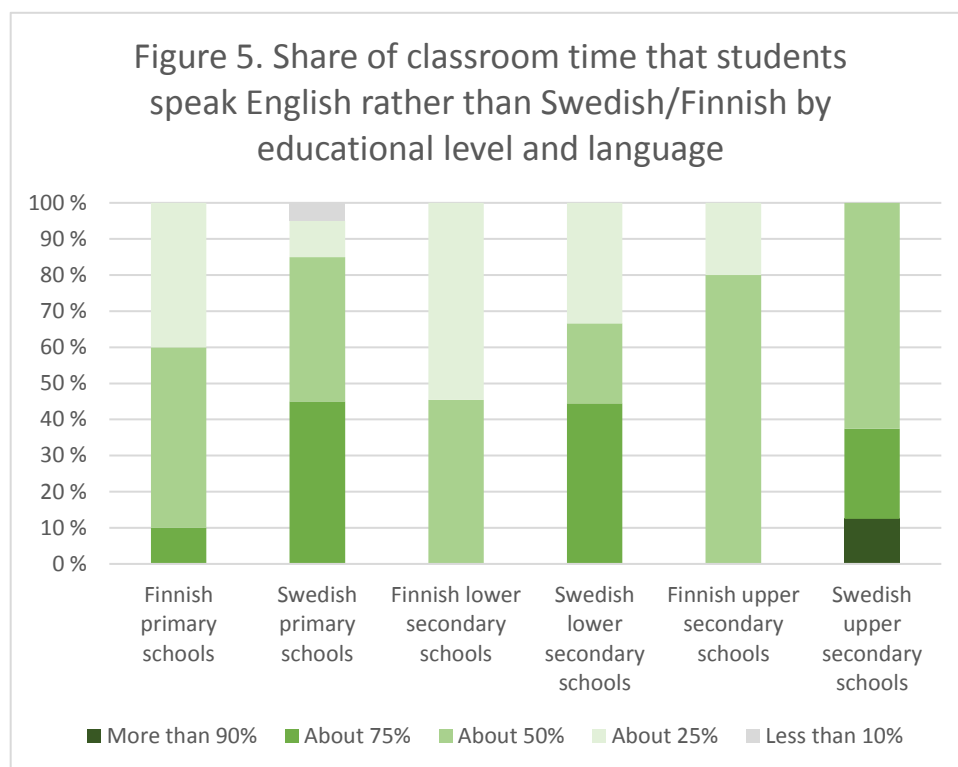
Figure 3. Share of classroom time that students speak English rather than Swedish/Finnish



A few small differences were found when comparing the results for target language use at different educational levels. For instance, the amount of target language use among teachers seems to increase at higher levels, whereas students seem more eager to speak the target language in primary school and upper secondary school but revert to their first language more often in lower secondary school. However, the only significant difference that could be found was between primary school teachers and upper secondary school teachers; the latter group speaks English significantly more often to their students ($U = 115.0, p < 0.05$).

Comparisons between the two school languages showed clearer trends: English was used significantly more often in Swedish-language schools than in Finnish-language schools. This applied to the language use of both teachers ($U = 323.5, p < 0.05$) and students ($U = 269.5, p < 0.01$), with a slightly stronger connection for the students. Figures 4 and 5 below illustrate the differences in use of English between the educational levels as well as languages, for teachers and students, respectively.





Some respondents used the box for general comments to point out that the extent of English use can vary considerably from classroom to classroom. Many teachers stressed the differences between groups of students (“in some groups students are highly motivated to speak English when in other groups it’s impossible”) and also between individuals (“talented students and students who are interested in the language use English more [than those who are not]”²). One teacher commented that “it’s difficult to get everyone on board” and “students who are not comfortable with speaking English tend to drop out quite quickly”. A couple of teachers also mentioned that the amount of spoken English used by students varies depending on the lesson and the types of tasks that are set.

Several respondents also indicated that there is a tendency for students to stick to English while on task but to use the first language while planning for the task and/or switch back to the first language when the task is finished. Comments included that “[t]he impulse to fall back on Swedish or Finnish is incredibly strong”, “Swedish dominates when they are addressing each other” and “[the students] rarely speak English spontaneously”³. One

² “Englannin käyttö on oppilaskohtaista, lahjakkaat ja asiasta innostuneet käyttävät enemmän”

³ “spontant pratar de väldigt sällan engelska”

teacher hypothesized that it would be easier for students to remember to stick to English if they were learning the language with a different group of peers than all other subjects; as it is, they speak Swedish to each other in all other classes, and thus do so “by default” also in English class. On the other hand, a few other teachers had more positive experiences, saying that “the pupils love to speak English” and “most students use English as much as they can”⁴.

A few teachers indicated that they themselves also change the amount of English they speak depending on the group of learners, using progressively more English as the students become more fluent. For example, one teacher said that she uses English less than 50% of the time with insecure groups in year 7 but more than 90% of the time with high-level groups in year 9.

4.2.2. Situations where the target language or the first language dominates

The teachers were also asked to specify in what situations they usually use English (question 3a), and in what situations they opt for the ordinary language of instruction instead (question 3b). These open-ended questions were not obligatory, but still received answers from most of the respondents: all 64 teachers reported situations in which they use Finnish or Swedish instead of English, while 56 of them told about situations where they usually use English (i.e. eight respondents left question 3a unanswered). Both questions were accompanied by a “why”, inviting the respondents to explain the reasons for their choice of language in the situations they mentioned. Not everyone gave reasons, however: out of the 56 respondents who answered question 3a, only 20 (36%) explained their reasons for using English, while 31 out of 64 respondents (48%) motivated their use of the school language in question 3b.

Of the 56 respondents who answered question 3a, 13 did not actually mention any specific situations. Six of them said that they use English more or less all the time (answers like “nearly always” and “in all situations”). Another teacher said that she tries to speak “as little Swedish as possible”, and yet another one answered that she uses English “whenever I can”; while these answers are vaguer, it sounds like these teachers also use English in

⁴ ”De flesta elever använder engelska så långt de kan”

most situations, especially considering that they answered “more than 90% of the time” in the question on their frequency of using English. Three respondents wrote that they use English in all situations except when teaching grammar. A fourth respondent seemed to be thinking along the same lines; however, she answered both questions 3a and 3b by saying that she uses Swedish to teach grammar, without clarifying whether English is used in all other situations or not. In general, most of the teachers who said that they always or almost always use English in this question came from Swedish-language schools. The final respondent who did not mention any situations in her answer said that she does not use English in any specific contexts, but tends to use Finnish more and more overall.

The remaining 43 respondents gave examples of a variety of classroom situations in which they usually use English. More than half of these respondents (24 teachers) mentioned situations that could be grouped together as a category of “off-task situations”: they reported using English at the beginning and the end of the lessons, when they greet the students, when they talk about the weather or current events, or generally when they make small talk with the students. Several reasons for this were mentioned: for example, using English at the beginning of a lesson works as a sort of warm-up and reminds the students that it is time to speak English, small talk in English comes naturally, and the phrases used in greetings and small talk are useful and easy to learn due to the fact that they are repeated every lesson. These off-task situations were mentioned more often by respondents from Finnish-language schools (70%) than by respondents from Swedish-language schools (40%). Furthermore, only one upper secondary school teacher brought up off-task situations, whereas they were mentioned much more often by primary school teachers (57%) and lower secondary school teachers (75%).

Another almost equally popular situation where teachers use English instead of Finnish or Swedish are instructions: again, more than half of the respondents who specified situations (23 respondents) mentioned giving some form of instructions in English. Some specified that they give the “basic”, “everyday” classroom instructions in English, and gave examples such as “sit down, please” or “open your books, please”. Comments included that this type of instructions should be routine, and that they serve to make English “an everyday means of communication”. Others said that they give instructions for

certain types of exercises in English. Some teachers pointed out that they start giving instructions in English, but may repeat them in Finnish or Swedish if needed.

Several teachers also mentioned using English in different types of discussions (14 respondents), when working with textbook texts and their contents (10 respondents), and when doing and checking exercises (especially oral ones) (6 respondents). Discussions were mentioned more often by respondents from Swedish-language schools (55%) than by respondents from Finnish-language schools (13%). The teachers did not offer any detailed reasoning about why they use English in these specific situations; not everyone gave a reason in the first place, and those who did mostly thought it was the “natural” thing to do. One teacher pointed out that students are expected to answer questions in the same language as they are asked, and that she thinks it is easier for the students to speak English for example when discussing texts.

A few teachers also mentioned using English when introducing new topics or texts, when working with vocabulary, when giving feedback, when answering questions, when “drilling” the class in a certain topic, when practicing pronunciation, and when they want pupils to pay attention. Each of these situations, however, was only mentioned by three or fewer respondents. Regardless of the situations they mentioned, though, many teachers expressed the same sentiment of wanting their students to hear as much English as possible during classroom time. A general goal is, as one respondent put it, “to familiarize the students with the foreign language in a natural way and in real situations”.

There was a much clearer trend in the responses to question 3b, about situations in which teachers use Finnish or Swedish instead of English. 51 out of 64 respondents (80%) mentioned that they teach grammar using the ordinary language of instruction. Seven of these teachers specified that they use the school language for new grammar theory, without specifying which language they use for revising. Three teachers clarified that they use Finnish or Swedish for “tricky” or “demanding” grammar, with one of them specifying that easier grammar topics are usually dealt with in English. Looking at the different educational levels, almost all lower secondary school teachers (95%) mentioned teaching grammar in Swedish or Finnish, while only 70% of primary school teachers did the same; upper secondary school teachers were closer to the overall average with 77%.

The most common reason for teaching grammar using Finnish or Swedish seems to be that teachers want to make sure that everybody understands the terms and concepts involved. Several teachers mentioned that their students already know the grammar terms in their mother tongue, and it is easier to use familiar ones rather than learn a new set of terms in English, especially for the students who might struggle with grammar in general. A couple of teachers also mentioned that books and other materials used in the classroom mostly bring up the grammar parts in Finnish or Swedish, as opposed to English.

Some teachers mentioned that they use the school language for explaining difficult concepts in general, not necessarily only for grammar. Teachers also reported using Finnish or Swedish instead of English when repeating or clarifying instructions (especially for weaker students), when giving important information or instructions about for example tests and homework, and when working on texts by e.g. translating or checking reading comprehension. There were not too many answers to the question of why; those who did explain their choice said that they use the school language to facilitate understanding for everyone regarding the topic in question, whether that is a new text or instructions for homework or tests. None of these situations were mentioned by teachers in upper secondary schools, however, and all respondents who mentioned using English to check understanding of the text came from primary schools.

Less commonly mentioned situations, mentioned by three or fewer teachers, included discussing the meaning of words, explaining assessment criteria, and answering questions from students in the same language they were asked (which is usually the school language). Quite obviously, a couple of respondents also said that if the students have done exercises in the school language, the same language is used when going through them. One teacher said that she uses the school language if she needs to get everybody's attention. A few teachers also mentioned prioritizing the school language over English when giving instructions. However, most respondents seemed to prioritize English for instructions, and only use the school language for repetition or clarification, as mentioned earlier.

One teacher used the box for general comments at the end of the first part of the survey to emphasize that taking all students into account requires some sacrifices to be made regarding the languages used: "There are usually appr. 20 students with varying linguistic skills in the classroom. To make sure that even the weakest ones won't fall

behind you have to use Finnish when explaining the grammar rules, and giving instructions.” The same teacher also pointed out that “[t]here are also students who wouldn’t be able to show that they understand English, if they weren’t allowed to give comments in Finnish”.

4.3. Encouraging and practising speaking

4.3.1. Encouraging students to speak the target language

Question 4 in the survey asked the teachers how they encourage their students to speak English in the classroom. The question was obligatory, and thus received answers from all respondents. This question yielded a wide variety of responses, suggesting that many different ideas, actions, and activities can be interpreted as encouragement. Some teachers simply listed different types of activities that are used to stimulate spoken production, while others described more specific methods for creating a supportive environment for speaking.

Simply reminding the students to use English in the classroom, and asking them to translate or rephrase if they answer a question in the school language, is a common way to encourage spoken production: about one third of the respondents included something along these lines in their answer. A couple of teachers mentioned that they explicitly emphasize the importance of speaking skills at the beginning of the school year. Furthermore, a few teachers said that they declare the classroom an “English zone” where only the target language is allowed; one respondent said that she pretends not to understand if the students speak to her in their first language.

On the other hand, some teachers expressed that they value any kind of contribution in the classroom regardless of language, and therefore encourage answers also in the mother tongue, especially from shy or insecure students who would usually stay silent. A couple of respondents also mentioned allowing code-switching when a student cannot remember the English version of a certain word. A few teachers also said that they help students find the right target language vocabulary if needed. One teacher specifically explained that she encourages shy students to speak by talking to them one-on-one while

the rest of the class are busy with other exercises, in order to minimize the risk of other students overhearing. Most of the comments along these lines came from teachers in Swedish-language schools.

About a quarter of the respondents mentioned some form of “leading by example”, hoping that their own use of English has an encouraging effect on the pupils. Some teachers said that they always reply to questions in English, regardless of the language in which they were asked, and translating student utterances into English was also mentioned. One teacher stated that she speaks English to her students not only in the classroom but also elsewhere at school, for example when meeting them in the corridors.

Different types of activities as forms of encouragement were mentioned by about a quarter of the respondents. Several of them emphasized the quantity of spoken exercises, saying that they carry out “all oral exercises that can be found in the study book”, “a wide range of speaking activities”, or “some form of oral exercise every lesson”⁵. Some teachers also specified what kinds of activities they use to encourage speaking. For example, one respondent said that she always starts off with short, simple, and easy exercises, while another respondent stated that she uses problem-based team projects. One teacher emphasized that one should use speaking activities that allow learners to “go into a role” so they “don’t need to act as themselves”⁶.

The most commonly mentioned types of activities, however, were exercises done in pairs or groups, such as dialogues and discussions. In addition, several respondents simply answered that they encourage speaking by having students work in pairs or groups, without specifying what types of tasks are usually set. One teacher reflected that while pair work may not be “strictly encouraging”, it does urge the students to talk: “I don’t give them a choice [*sic*] just to sit quietly and ignore the speaking activities: they MUST speak. Or they end up with me as their pair”. A few other respondents pointed out that pair work lowers the threshold to speak, as opposed to speaking in front of the whole class, which may be difficult for shy students. One teacher commented that students in her classroom are paired up by drawing lots, in order to get them used to talking to different people.

⁵ ”Varje lektion har vi någon muntlig övning”

⁶ ”teettämällä tehtäviä joissa mennään rooliin eli ei tarvitse olla omana itsenään”

Finally, several teachers emphasized the importance of the atmosphere in the classroom for encouraging speaking. Only one primary school teacher (3%) mentioned this topic, however, whereas it was a much more common issue in lower secondary schools (35%) and upper secondary schools (46%). The ideal environment was described with adjectives such as “safe”, “comfortable”, “easygoing” and “relaxing”. Several respondents pointed out that mistakes are allowed in their classrooms; some mentioned that they explicitly bring this up with the class, telling them that “everyone, even native speakers, make mistakes” and “what counts is getting the message across”. Some respondents reported encouraging students by giving positive feedback; others said that they avoid correcting errors in student speech in order to not discourage them. A few teachers also mentioned that they do not tolerate students criticizing or laughing at their peers: “[w]hen the loudmouth in the group (there is always one) cracks a joke when somebody misspeaks I always hit back with a measured reprimand”.

Other ways of encouraging students to speak include playing games, working with iPads, using body language, teaching pronunciation of each new word, and giving the students examples of sentence starters and key vocabulary. Each of these methods were only mentioned by three or fewer teachers, but they are still worthwhile considering.

4.3.2. The perceived importance of speaking skills

Question 6 was constructed to investigate teachers’ views on the importance of teaching speaking as opposed to other aspects of language learning. The question was preceded by an introductory sentence about different skill areas: “Classes in foreign language learning can usually be divided into parts of reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary learning and grammar learning.” The question itself was then divided into two subquestions, one about the perceived general importance of speaking compared to other skills (Question 6a) and one about the amount of classroom time that should be devoted to speaking (Question 6b). Both questions were obligatory, and thus received answers from all respondents.

When asked about the general importance of teaching speaking compared to other aspects of language learning, teachers generally gave short answers describing speaking as

anything between “the most important part” and “as important as the other parts”. Roughly half of the respondents then expanded on their answers to justify their reasoning or to describe what they do in the classroom to reflect their beliefs.

Based on the answers, it was possible to create a five-point importance scale, on which the majority of the responses (58 out of 64) could be categorized. 11 respondents considered speaking the most important aspect in language teaching, while 5 other respondents thought it was one of the most important skills. A majority of 27 respondents described speaking as very or extremely important in language teaching, whereas 7 respondents simply said it is important. The final 8 respondents stated that all skills are equally important, including speaking. Two respondents pointed out that speaking is becoming more and more important, with one of them expressing happiness about this fact; however, they are not included on this scale since it was not clear from their responses whether they now perceive speaking as “the most important” skill area or simply “somewhat important”. Looking at different educational levels, teachers at lower levels generally seem to find speaking more important than teachers at higher levels, with a higher tendency to label it the most important aspect in language teaching. On the other hand, the idea that all aspects are equally important was barely expressed at all among primary school teachers.

A couple of respondents pointed out that they found it unnecessary or irrelevant to compare the different skills, since they overlap. In a similar vein, some teachers emphasized that students get to apply their previous knowledge of vocabulary and grammar while speaking, and that this improves their general proficiency. However, a few teachers specifically compared the importance of speaking with other skill areas. For example, vocabulary was described as one of the most important parts in language teaching, which is also needed in order to speak; one teacher also pointed out that you cannot speak without basic grammar. A couple of teachers said that it is essential to practice listening and understanding along with speaking. Writing skills, on the other hand, were described by one teacher as “secondary” skills that “develop during time”; however, another teacher said that her students are already good at speaking and therefore need more practise in writing in order to avoid informal constructions in compositions. Interestingly,

both these teachers were teaching in similar environments (Finnish-language primary schools).

Most of the remaining additional comments to question 6a emphasized reasons why practising speaking is important. Many referred to the learners' future, stating that speaking is "the skill they'll most likely need", for example in international situations. One teacher pointed out that most communication takes place in spoken form; similarly, another teacher concluded that although all parts of language proficiency are important, "students will benefit the most if they become confident speakers of English".

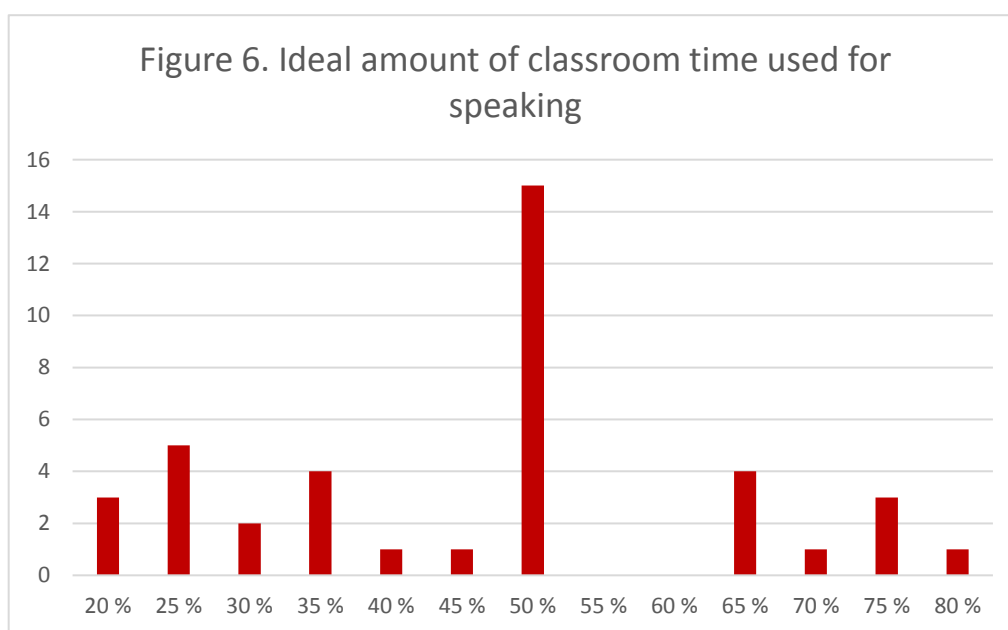
Another commonly mentioned reason for needing to practise speaking is that students often feel anxiety or even fear at the prospect of talking in front of others. Making sure that the students *dare* to speak from the very beginning of their English studies is a priority mentioned by two primary school teachers. Later on, during the first teenage years in lower secondary school, speaking can be especially difficult, according to one teacher. Another respondent stated that Finnish people in general "can be quite shy to speak in a foreign language" and therefore struggle and need encouragement (cf. the comment about "speaking culture" at the end of section 4.3.4).

Other less commonly mentioned reasons for practising speaking include improving learners' social skills, practising pronunciation, and achieving key learning goals. In addition, rather than mentioning reasons for teaching and practising speaking, some respondents described particular ways of doing so. Examples include practising pronunciation through total physical response and emphasizing typical speaking patterns of English. One teacher said that many exercises are done orally, while another said that even homework is often submitted in spoken form as recordings. One respondent, however, reflected on her practice as follows: "Actually, I rarely TEACH speaking, but keep all conversations and questions in English, so I lead with my own example".

Next, in question 6b, teachers were asked how much time, overall, they think should be devoted to practising speaking. This question seems to have been interpreted slightly differently by different respondents; some teachers gave a rough estimate of an ideal general amount ("70-80%", "More than 50%", "A fourth perhaps"), others spoke in terms of lessons ("it should be a part of every lesson", "maybe 15min during a 75min lesson would be a realistic goal"), and still others said it varies or is difficult to estimate. Some

respondents gave additional comments to explain their thoughts and opinions in more detail. A couple of respondents also gave general comments without directly addressing the issue of time.

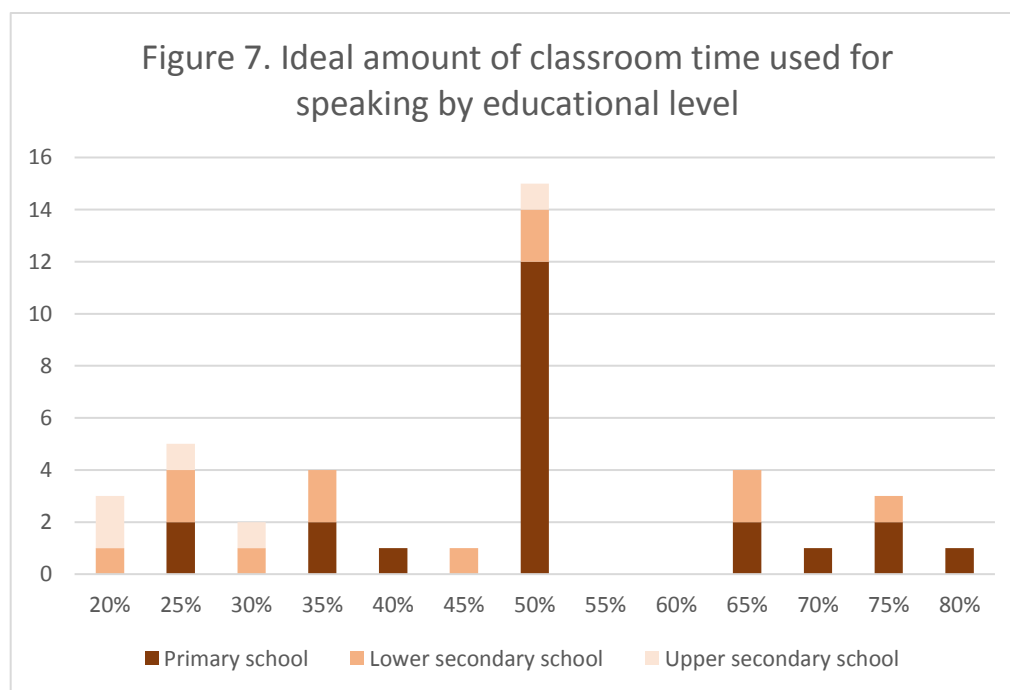
In total, 40 respondents included a measurable amount of time in their answer, presented either as a percentage, as a rational number, or as something along the lines of “half the time”, “a third of the time”, etc. These numbers were all converted into percentages in order to illustrate what the ideal speaking time looked like for the teachers participating in this survey. For respondents that indicated an interval, such as “30-40%” or “50-75%”, the average of the two given percentages was used, rounded up or down to the nearest 5%. The results are presented in Figure 6 below.



As indicated by the figure, the majority of the respondents that answered this question thought that speaking practice should ideally take up about half of the classroom time. Several of these teachers also formulated their responses to indicate that 50% was the minimum amount they found acceptable (“at least half of the time”, “more than 50%”, “ideally more than that”). Among the remaining respondents, who positioned themselves further towards either end of the scale, the ideal amount of time used to practise speaking ranged from 20% to 80%. Answers on the lower end of the scale were slightly more common than answers on the upper end of the scale.

However, there are some interesting differences in this pattern when comparing the responses given by teachers at different educational levels. The primary school teachers, generally dominating among the respondents, also dominate in the “50%” category: out of the 15 respondents who said that half of the classroom time should be used for practising speaking, 12 taught in primary schools. The remaining primary school teachers spread out rather evenly: five of them gave answers between 25 and 40%, while six of them positioned themselves between 65 and 80%.

Teachers in lower secondary schools, on the other hand, tended to lean towards the lower end of the scale: three of them said 65 or 75%, and two of them stayed around the 50% average, but seven of them gave answers between 20 and 45%. This trend is even stronger among teachers in upper secondary schools: only one teacher at this level thought that 50% of the time should be devoted to practising speaking (and added that this goal is rarely reached), while four teachers gave answers between 20 and 30%, and none gave answers that fit in higher categories. In other words, teachers at different educational levels seem to have different ideals for how much classroom time should be used to practise speaking, with the amount steadily reducing as the educational level becomes more advanced. These differences are illustrated in Figure 7.



The respondents who did not specify their ideal amount of speaking time were divided as follows: seven primary school teachers (23% of all respondents in this category), eight lower secondary school teachers (40% of all respondents in this category), and eight upper secondary school teachers (62% of all respondents in this category). In other words, teachers at higher levels not only prioritize speaking differently, but also seem to find it more difficult to specify the ideal time that should be used. In fact, while Figure 7 make it look like the majority of upper secondary school teachers thought the ideal speaking time was 20-30%, the majority of them actually did not specify an ideal speaking time at all.

The additional comments given in this question provide some possible explanations for why the pattern looks like this, and also other insights into teachers' thoughts on the amount of time that should be spent practising speaking. Instead of specifying a certain time limit, several of the respondents simply commented that speaking "should be an on-going thing in the classroom", used all the time, practised whenever possible, and included in all forms of exercises. A couple of them pointed out that because English is spoken most of the time, including when practising grammar or vocabulary, it is difficult to define how much time should be devoted to speaking "as such". One teacher pointed out that spoken communication also includes nonverbal aspects such as gestures and facial expressions, which may make it even more difficult to decide what counts as speaking.

Another common comment was that speaking should be practised to some extent during every lesson, but that the exact amount varies, due to variations in content and types of exercises: "[s]ometimes a full lesson is spent talking, sometimes reading, writing, listening etc get more emphasis". A couple of upper secondary school teachers also said that the amount of speaking depends on the course they are teaching: in creative writing courses, for instance, there would obviously be little speaking involved. One teacher mentioned that regardless of when and how speaking is practised, it is important to give the students time to prepare for their contribution.

A few respondents also brought up the use of spoken versus written exercises in class versus at home. The idea of using classroom time mainly for spoken exercises, and instead giving written exercises as homework, was mentioned by several primary school teachers and one lower secondary school teacher. One of them justified this reasoning as follows:

“[the students] can practise reading and writing at home as well but speaking is more fun and easier to do when you can actually speak to someone and there is the teacher there to help them with the pronunciation”. Another teacher explained that, when assigned a number of tasks during class, some students “tend to focus on getting all written work done and then skip the verbal activities, just because they want to get the ‘compulsory’ homework done”. In this case, the teacher in question sometimes assigns homework where students have to record their speech, to make sure that aspect is also practised.

Finally, a few respondents expressed that their own goals for practising speaking are not always met for different reasons. A couple of the teachers who said that spoken English should be used at all times in the classroom also admitted that this does not always work in practice, because it is easier to communicate in the mother tongue, especially when tired or stressed. Several teachers also expressed that they do not feel they have enough time to focus on speaking as much as they would like: “[i]n real life, there is too much other stuff you have to teach, too”; “unfortunately there is not enough time for everything”⁷. One of the upper secondary school teachers, who said she would ideally use half of the classroom time for speaking practise, said that this goal is rarely reached due to the matriculation exam being a written test. These issues will be discussed further in section 4.3.4.

4.3.3. Speaking activities used in the classroom

Question 7 asked the respondents what types of activities they most commonly use to practise speaking in the classroom, presenting a list of task types and asking the teachers to select the 1-5 kinds they use most often. The activities on the list ranged from more structured task types, such as pronunciation practice and reading aloud, to open task types, such as spontaneous discussions and problem-solving tasks. The respondents were also invited to add any other tasks they use that were not on the list. The question was obligatory and thus received answers from all respondents; the majority of them selected as many activities as possible (i.e. five), but seven teachers only chose four activities, while one teacher only chose three.

⁷ ”Det finns tyvärr inte tillräckligt med tid för allting”

Out of the 16 listed activities, the most popular one was reading texts aloud, which is among the most common tasks used by 42 of the respondents (66%). Almost as popular were dialogues or role plays, such as practising going to the restaurant or buying tickets, which were chosen by 40 of the respondents (63%). In shared third place came pronunciation practice with individual words or sentences, along with going through written exercises orally in class, each ticked by 29 teachers (45%). 26 teachers (41%) indicated that their students often practise speaking in the form of interviews, while 23 respondents (36%) said that they commonly use spontaneous discussions or brainstorming.

21 teachers (33%) indicated that they commonly ask their class questions in English, with the students taking turns answering. 20 teachers (31%) often set tasks where their students explain words or describe pictures to each other. 19 respondents (30%) regularly use choral repetition or singing for practising speaking, while 17 respondents (27%) often use communication games or problem-solving tasks. Prepared presentations were also fairly common, but they seem to be given in front of the whole class (12 respondents, 19%) more often than in smaller groups (6 respondents, 9%). Less common activities for practising speaking were drama or improvisation (10 respondents, 16%), storytelling using pictures or cards (9 respondents, 14%), instruction giving (5 respondents, 8%), and prepared discussions or debates (2 respondents, 3%).

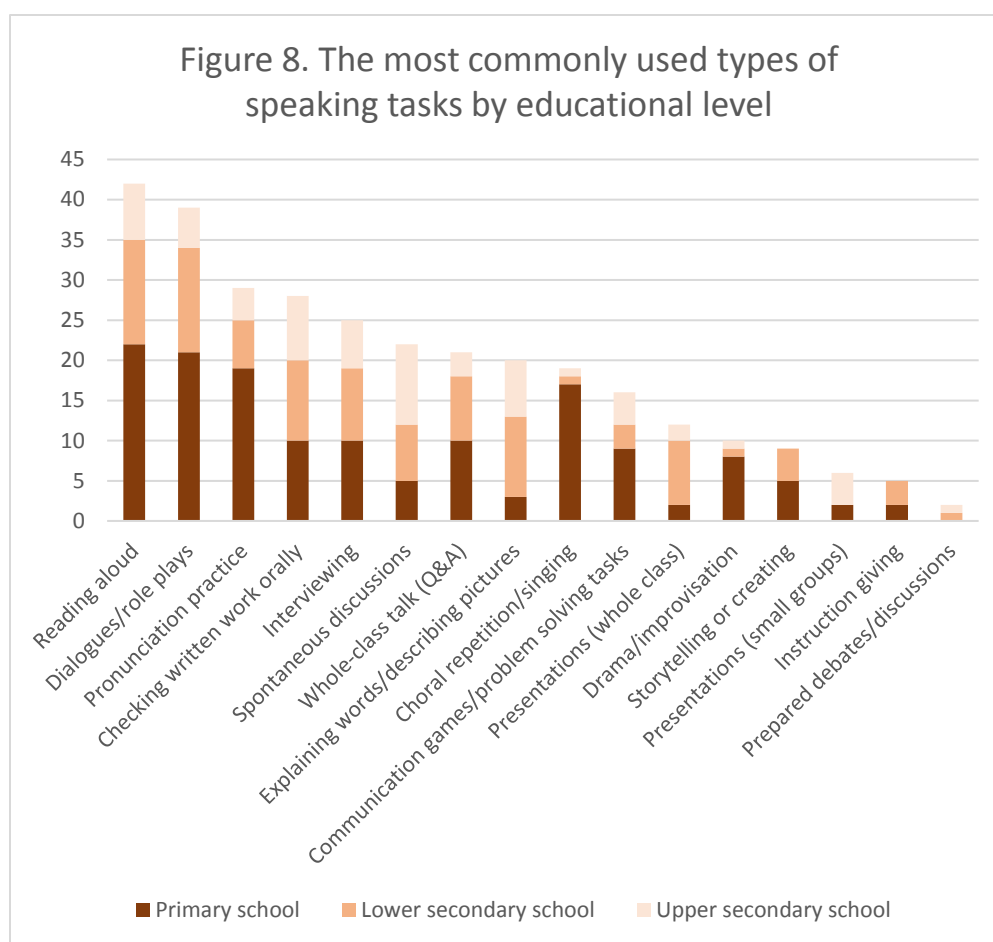
Only one respondent ticked the “other” box, indicating that there is a further activity not present on the original list that she uses often: this turned out to be speed-dating with prompts, which she described as energising and confidence-building. A few other teachers, while not ticking the “other” box, still gave examples of further activities in the comments (the structure of this question may have been slightly unclear). One teacher said that her students practice speaking by “repeating after the CD” (probably referring to the tape accompanying the textbook); this seems to be related to the option of “choral repetition”, which this teacher had also indicated as one of her most common activities. Another teacher said that she invites international visitors to her classroom and that the students ask them questions in English; however, she did not indicate how regular these visits are. Finally, one teacher said that she refreshes her students’ knowledge of the phonetic script to facilitate speaking. Two further respondents also used the comment box, not to list any further activities, but to clarify that they use most of the activities on the original list; one

of them said that she found it difficult to estimate which ones are the most common ones in her classroom.

It is possible to distinguish some differences between the activities used by teachers at different educational levels. For instance, primary schools and lower secondary schools followed the general trend where the most popular activities were reading aloud (selected by 73% of primary school teachers and 65% of lower secondary school teachers) and dialogues or role-plays (70% and 65%, respectively). Upper secondary school teachers, while also using these activities to some extent, had some different priorities: their favourite activity was spontaneous discussions, commonly used by 77% of the respondents at this level. On the other hand, spontaneous discussions were used considerably less often by lower secondary school teachers (35%) and primary school teachers (17%).

A few other differences stand out as well. For instance, 17 out of the 19 respondents who said that they commonly use choral repetition or singing came from primary schools; in other words, this activity was used much more often in primary schools (57% of the respondents) than in lower secondary schools (one respondent, 5%) or upper secondary schools (one respondent, 7%). Pronunciation practice was also among the most common activities in primary schools (63%), whereas it was not as common in lower secondary schools (30%) or upper secondary schools (31%). On the other hand, activities requiring more advanced language were not as common at the lower level: for instance, explaining words and describing pictures was not used too often in primary schools (10%), but much more often in lower secondary schools (50%) and upper secondary schools (54%).

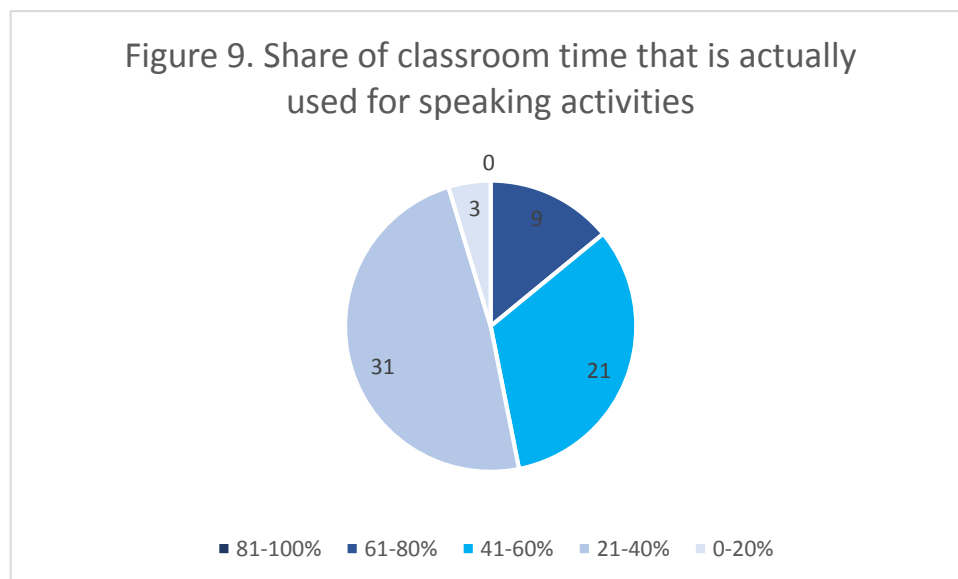
Furthermore, there were a few differences in the use of presentations. Presentations in front of the whole class were commonly used by eight of the lower secondary school teachers (40%), whereas only two of the primary school teachers (7%) and two of the upper secondary school teachers (15%) commonly used them. Small-group presentations were more popular than whole-class presentations in upper secondary schools, but they were still only commonly used by four teachers (31%). Again, only two of the primary school teachers (7%) used small-group presentations, whereas they were not among the most common tasks for a single lower secondary school teacher. For further illustration of the differences between educational levels, see Figure 8.



Respondents from schools with different languages largely seemed to use the same types of activities, although they prioritized them somewhat differently. However, a couple of task types stood out. The type of whole-class talk with the teacher asking questions and the students taking turns answering was used considerably more often in Swedish-language schools (46%) than in Finnish-language schools (15%). On the other hand, interviewing was used considerably more often in Finnish-language schools (63%) than in Swedish-language schools (24%).

4.3.4. The actual time used for speaking and perceptions of “enough”

Question 8 asked respondents how much time they actually use for speaking activities in the classroom, this time using a 5-point Likert scale with alternatives ranging from 0-20% of classroom time to 81-100% of classroom time. The question was obligatory and thus received answers from all respondents. The results are illustrated in Figure 9.



As can be seen, almost half of the respondents (48%) said that they use 21-40% of classroom time for speaking practice, while about a third of the respondents (33%) indicated that they devote 41-60% of the time to speaking activities. Three teachers (5%) said that they practice speaking 0-20% of the time in the classroom. The remaining nine respondents (14%) used 61-80% of classroom time for speaking, which is the largest amount indicated in the survey; none of the teachers said that they use 81-100% of the time for speaking.

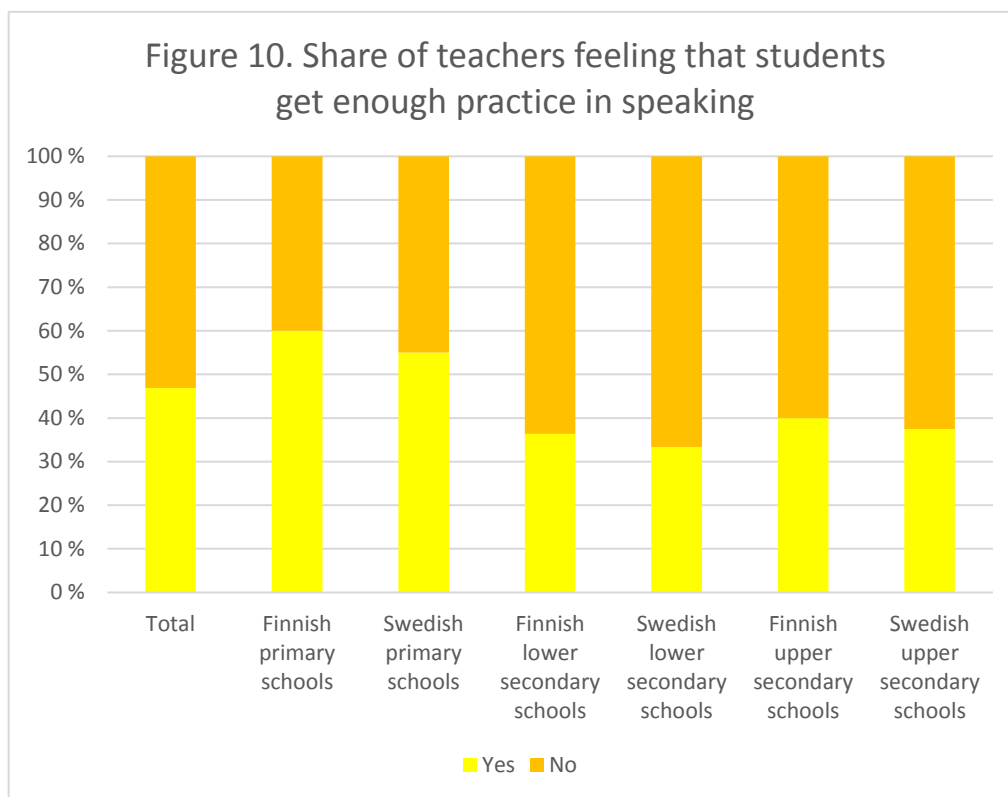
A couple of respondents used the box for general comments for this part of the survey to state that they found it difficult to estimate the time spent practising speaking; one of them said that it varies and the other one pointed out that “[a]lthough the students speak, not everyone speaks at the same time, so the active speaking time per person is probably a lot less”. One upper secondary school teacher pointed out that on that level, the

amount of speaking time varies between courses (some courses explicitly focus on speaking, while others do not).

A few differences can be observed between the different educational levels as well as between schools with different school languages. For instance, the amount of time used for speaking activities is smaller at higher educational levels, and more time seems to be used for speaking in Finnish-language schools than in Swedish-language schools. However, none of these differences were statistically significant.

Next, in question 9a, teachers were asked whether they think their students get enough practice in speaking, with simple answer options of either “yes” or “no”. This was an obligatory question and thus received answers from all respondents. Furthermore, in question 9b, teachers who said “no” were invited to explain their perceived reasons why their students do not get enough practice. Since this was only directed at some respondents, it was not an obligatory question, but all but one teacher who answered “no” in question 9a also explained their reasoning in question 9b. Two teachers who answered “yes” in question 9a also gave further comments in question 9b.

In total, about half of the teachers (47%) seem to agree that their students get enough speaking practice, with a slight majority (53%) thinking their students do not. Looking at the different educational levels, it seems like teachers in primary schools have a slightly more positive outlook on this issue than their colleagues at other levels. The majority of respondents (56%) in primary schools answered “yes”; while this number is not overwhelming, it is notably larger than in upper secondary schools (38%) and lower secondary schools (35%). Moreover, a slight difference between teachers from schools with different languages could be detected: the respondents in Finnish-language schools were marginally more positive about the amount of speaking practice across all educational levels. For an illustration of these differences, see Figure 10.



The teachers who thought that their students did not get enough practice in speaking gave several different reasons for this. One common issue is time, which was mentioned by almost half of the respondents who answered “no” in question 9a. Some simply stated that “[t]here is no time”, with one teacher emphasizing that the time she does have is not enough to organize “effective practice” which would require “warm-up exercises, vocabulary etc”. Others pointed out that there are too many other things that have to be done as well, and gave examples such as “vocabulary, phrases, understanding the texts and grammar” and “doing written exercises and checking them”. A couple of primary school teachers specifically emphasized the length of the lessons, which they seem to consider too short: “one lesson is 45 minutes long, and at least 10 minutes of that time goes to the general commotion at the beginning and the end”⁸. The number of lessons also seemed to be something of an issue: one respondent stated that there are “[n]ot enough lessons” and another one said that “you do not have time to do more in 2 x 45 minutes”⁹.

⁸ ”Tunnin pituus on 45 min, josta menee alku- ja loppukahinoihin ainakin 10 min.”

⁹ ”Man hinner inte med mera på 2x45 min”

It was also fairly common for teachers to attribute the lack of speaking practice in their classrooms to formal requirements and other circumstances beyond their control. The curriculum, for instance, was explicitly mentioned by a few of the respondents: a lower secondary school teacher, for example, said that their curriculum “includes a huge amount of things that we have to cover” and therefore speaking is sometimes given less priority. Respondents from upper secondary schools also described their curriculum as “demanding” and not leaving enough room for speaking. One of them explained that the structure of upper secondary school is problematic: since subjects are studied on a course basis, and student groups change between courses, teachers have to follow strict requirements of what has to be covered in each course and there is no possibility to leave anything for “later”. For example, each course contains certain grammar concepts, and all of them have to be covered before the students sit their matriculation exam.

This examination was mentioned by several respondents; one of them explained that she sees it as her “duty” to “not only prepare [the students] for future studies and working life, but also for the matriculation exam”. Another teacher pointed out that the lack of an oral part in this examination, combined with the structure of the curriculum, leads to less speaking practice. Yet another respondent said that focus tends to be on grammar and reading comprehension instead.

Complaints about these kinds of circumstances were less common among primary school teachers, but one respondent at this level explained that the organization of her school is sometimes a problem. Although teaching students in three different grades, she teaches all of them together in the same classroom 50% of the time, simultaneously focusing on three different curricula. This makes speaking practice difficult, because the older students are “much better at communicating”, and get bored quickly. While this can be considered a somewhat exceptional situation, it is not unheard of in smaller, rural schools, where group sizes are too small to consistently have separate lessons for each grade in all subjects. One of the upper secondary school teachers in the survey had the opposite problem, where the class size is too big: “there just isn’t time for presenting group projects to the entire class because group sizes are big and presentations would take too long”.

Another comment about the way the teaching is organized came from a lower secondary school teacher, who said that she personally had too many lessons to teach that year. This led to less planning time, which in turn forced her to resort to written exercises from the textbook more often, instead of organizing speaking activities. On the other hand, one of the teachers who said that her students do get enough practice commented that this is the case because she finds speaking really important, and that she has to sacrifice certain other activities in order to make time for speaking.

Finally, a few respondents mentioned student-related factors that affect the amount of speaking practice that is actually achieved. One teacher wrote a long comment on the difficulties of practising speaking in lower secondary school: “with teenagers, discussions sometimes turn into a monologue by the teacher, because the students’ self-control is so strong that it prevents them from engaging in any public speaking”¹⁰. The same teacher emphasized the importance of the general atmosphere and the sense of community in the group for making students comfortable with speaking. A couple of other teachers also attributed the lack of speaking practice to shyness or anxiety in (some of) their students. Furthermore, a few teachers indicated that their students do not seem motivated to speak: “[n]ot all of them seem to find it important”; “students don’t want to do the verbal assignments, or do them very hastily to ‘move on’ quicker”. These issues of anxiety and lack of motivation were mentioned almost exclusively by teachers at the lower secondary level, whereas not a single primary school teacher brought up problems of this kind. In addition, most respondents mentioning these issues worked in Finnish-language schools.

In addition to individual differences, differences between groups were also mentioned, with a few respondents saying that the amount of speaking practice achieved varies a lot: “some classes need more structure and specific instructions”; “[i]n some groups, it’s easy to fit in the speaking exercises, while in others it becomes too messy”. The latter teacher said that generally, students in smaller groups get to practice speaking more. These comments were exclusively made by teachers from lower secondary schools. On the other hand, two further problems were shared by a few teachers at both primary and lower secondary level: students lacking vocabulary in the target language and a tendency

¹⁰ ”Teini-ikäisten kanssa joskus keskustelutehtävät ovat opettajan yksinpuhelua, kun oman itsen kontrolli on oppilailla niin vahva, että se estää kaiken julkisen puhumisen”

among the students to switch over to the first language when they do have the opportunity to practice speaking. One respondent from a primary school also said that some pupils need a lot of time to read and understand texts, which leaves less time for speaking practice.

One final comment from a lower secondary school teacher stated that it is difficult to achieve speaking in the classroom because “there is no speaking culture”¹¹. It is not clear what exactly this respondent means, but it could be a reference to the lack of small talk in Finnish culture, which might make it difficult to force students to talk just for the sake of talking. This is an insightful point that several language teachers would probably agree on, although no other respondents in this survey mentioned it.

4.4. Assessing speaking skills

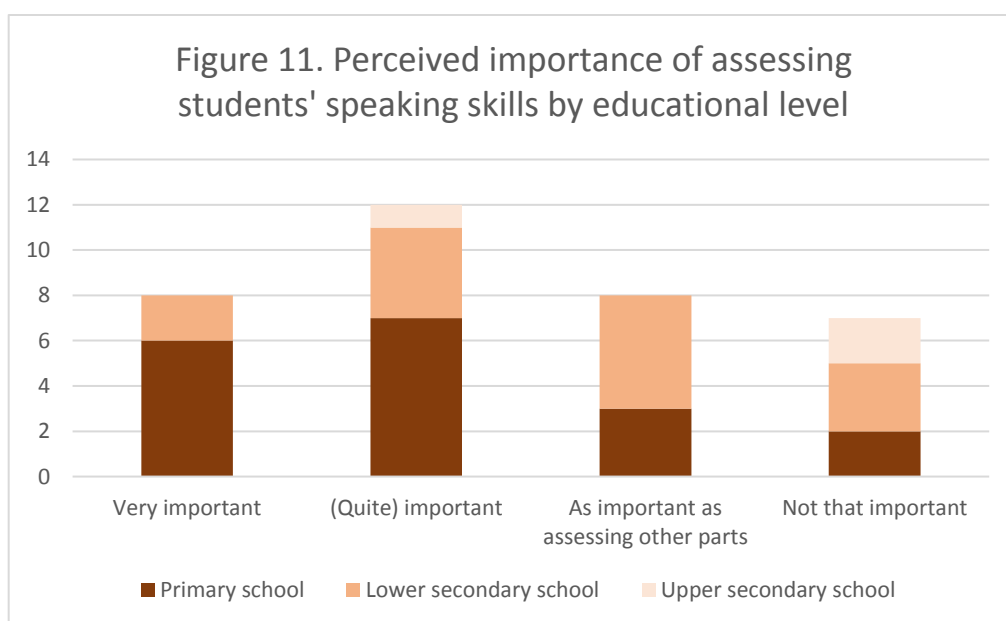
4.4.1. The perceived importance of assessing speaking skills

Moving on to the topic of assessment, question 10 in the survey asked the respondents how important they think it is to assess speaking skills, and why. The question was obligatory and thus received answers from all respondents. Since this was an open-ended question, with no predetermined importance scale, it received a wide variety of responses. Some teachers simply said that assessing speaking is “very important” or “not that important”, while others offered long explanations of how they perceive the issue, sometimes without directly specifying how important they think it is, but rather explaining their usual methods and the reasoning behind them.

About half of the respondents (35 of them, 55%) gave a direct, concise answer to the question of importance. 12 of them stated that assessing speaking is “quite important”, “rather important”, or just “important”, whereas 8 of them said it is “very important”. 8 respondents said it is just as important as the assessment of other skills. On the other hand, 7 respondents thought assessment of oral skills is not too important for various reasons. Most of the respondents who did not give a clear answer still indicated their opinion in other terms, although some comments were somewhat difficult to interpret. Looking at

¹¹ “Puhumisen kulttuuri puuttuu”

different educational levels, primary school teachers seem to consider assessment of speaking skills more important than their colleagues at higher levels, whereas two of the three upper secondary school teachers who gave a direct answer rated assessment as “not that important”. The importance ratings given by the whole group of respondents, and by teachers at different educational levels, are illustrated in Figure 11.



Among the teachers who stated that assessing speaking is important, there seems to be some general consensus about the reasons why they think so. Some of them simply stated that it is only natural to assess speaking, since it is part of the students' language skills just like any other aspect, and “if it's not assessed you ignore part of their skills”. As one teacher noted, “[w]riting skills have traditionally been more important, but in real life, speaking skills are just as important”. A few teachers (all from primary schools) also pointed out that assessment sends out certain signals about this importance, indicating what aspects of proficiency are worth working on: “students are eager to practice those skills that are tested”.

Moreover, several respondents emphasized that the traditionally tested writing skills do not always tell the full story about a students' proficiency in English, especially among students with certain learning difficulties. In order for all students to have equal opportunities to show what they know, assessment of speaking skills is therefore of vital

importance. A couple of teachers pointed out that even if they normally do not focus too much on assessing speaking, they offer supplementary oral assessment to students with reading and writing difficulties, and therefore assess those students' oral skills in more detail. However, these issues were not mentioned by any teachers from upper secondary schools.

Of course, the way assessment is carried out also matters, and several teachers gave comments about their ideal way of evaluating students' oral skills. For instance, a couple of teachers said that they gain an overview of their students' skills through general observation in their classrooms, not necessarily through formal assessment (for further discussion, see section 4.4.2). Several respondents emphasized that their impression of their students' speaking skills is incorporated into the students' overall grade, rather than displayed in a separate grade for oral skills (for further discussion, see section 4.4.4). This overall grade, according to one teacher, should reflect all the skills of the student, and a high grade should therefore not be given unless the students' speaking skills match that grade. One teacher motivated the choice to not give a separate grade for speaking by saying that “[t]he students do not learn much from a number that I give them”; another indicated that the prospect of receiving a direct grade for speaking may further inhibit students who are already afraid to talk.

On the other hand, the importance of other feedback was emphasized by a few of the respondents. Some said that feedback is necessary to help students improve their speaking skills, implying that comments should be constructive and include aspects that the student needs to work more on. However, one teacher pointed out that these comments should “not necessarily” be given in front of the class. At the same time, some emphasized the importance of positive feedback, saying that “students should be praised every time they speak” and that “the feedback should be encouraging, even if the skills leave a lot to be desired”. Some teachers expressed fear that negative feedback may discourage the students from using the target language and that if assessment is “done too harshly” it could “have the opposite effect”.

Encouragement was, in general, a prominent concept in the responses, along with comments stating that practising and using the language is more important than assessing it. Almost one third of the respondents included something along these lines in their

answers. Comments included that “it is most important to get them talking”, “the main thing is to encourage them to use the English they command”, and “[t]he most important thing is that they have the chance to speak, that the [*sic*] realise whether they are able to communicate and enjoy the experience”. These types of responses were especially common among the teachers who did not consider assessment too important, and among the ones who did not specify importance. Notably, also, the majority of these comments came from upper secondary school teachers; 77% of respondents at this level mentioned the importance of encouragement whereas only 20% of respondents at the other levels did the same.

A couple of respondents expressed negative views towards assessment, saying that “less focused [*sic*] should be on assessment in general” and that “[a]ssessment draws too much attention from communication itself”. A closer look at the comments against assessment, however, seem to indicate that some respondents have a rather limited view of the criteria for a good performance in speaking assessment. For instance, teachers stated that “daring to speak is more important than speaking perfect, grammatically correct English” and “[i]t is more important that you can communicate your message than speaking correct English without any grammatical mistakes”. Other comments included that “[e]veryday communication is not assessed, and we’re aiming at communicating effortlessly in English” and that “[a]ssessing could be useful for someone who will speak in public often in the future”. In other words, some respondents seem to assume that speaking assessment mainly evaluates grammar and formal speech, rather than actual informal communication, which may influence their view of its usefulness.

A further category of answers concerned specific situations in which the respondents assess speaking, although they may not do it to the same extent in other contexts. For instance, three of the upper secondary school teachers, who otherwise find encouragement more important than assessment, mentioned assessing speaking in course 8, which is included in the national curriculum as an optional course focusing specifically on speaking skills. A couple of other teachers, both also from upper secondary schools, said that they assess speaking in presentations but rarely in other contexts. A few comments also concerned the different educational levels: one primary school teacher said that speaking should account for 50% of the grade “especially in the lower classes”, while one lower

secondary school teacher said that speaking assessment is particularly important in 9th grade (at the end of basic education). One teacher, teaching in both lower and upper secondary, said that she gives grades for speaking skills in the latter but not the former.

Finally, a few respondents expressed that they think speaking assessment is difficult: one of them said that it is as important as assessment of written skills, “but so much harder to do”, and another one said that “I think we are not used to doing it”¹². What the latter one means by “we” is up for interpretation, but it could refer to teachers in general, either in Finland or in the wider world. Furthermore, the differences in student personalities were mentioned as a potential problem: one respondent said that “[y]ou can’t force a non-talkative student to give a speech” while another respondent pondered how to assess “an active, talkative person with lots of errors versus a quiet introvert with fluent, rich language”.

The following questions in the survey investigate how teachers assess speaking skills more specifically, asking about methods, assessment criteria and forms of feedback.

4.4.2. Methods for assessing speaking skills

Question 11a asked the teachers what methods they use for assessing their students’ speaking skills, giving a list of four alternatives (speaking exams, student recordings, student presentations, and observation of tasks in class) but also allowing the respondents to add their own options or to indicate that they do not assess students’ speaking skills. Respondents could select as many alternatives as they wanted. Some only chose one method, while a few ticked as many as four of them; however, it was most common to select two or three options (mean: 2.25, median: 2, mode: 3). The question was obligatory and thus received answers from all respondents.

The most common way of assessing students’ oral skills was through observations in the classroom: 55 of the respondents chose this option (86%). This was also the most common method of assessment across all groups from different educational levels and languages. Notably, all but one respondent (96%) from Finnish-language schools selected this option, whereas only 78% of the respondents from Swedish-language schools did the

¹² ”jag tror att vi är ovana att göra det”

same. Presentations were also fairly common across all groups of respondents, with 40 teachers indicating that they assess speaking in this way (63%). However, there were some considerable differences between educational levels regarding the use of presentations. Only 40% of primary school teachers used this method, whereas 85% of lower secondary school teachers and 77% of upper secondary school teachers did the same.

Speaking exams were used by almost half of the teachers (31 respondents; 48%). Their prevalence increased slightly for each educational level, but without any substantial differences. However, there was a notable difference between the use of exams in schools with different languages: as many as 74% of the respondents from Finnish-language schools indicated using speaking exams, whereas the corresponding figure for Swedish-language schools was only 30%. Student recordings were the least common method for assessment across all groups, with only 11 respondents (17%) selecting this option. The use of recordings still varied considerably between educational levels: 35% of the lower secondary school teachers used them, but only three primary school teachers did the same (10%), and the upper secondary school teachers did not use them at all.

Four respondents (6%) indicated that they do not assess speaking skills in this question; teachers from all educational levels were represented in this group. However, as we will see in later questions, not all of these teachers were consistent in saying that they do not assess speaking skills.

Only three teachers selected the “other” option, and explained their additional ways of assessment using the comment box. One upper secondary school teacher (who had only worked for 6 months at the time of completing the questionnaire) said that she had so far only assessed one speaking task, which was a speech delivered to the class and recorded. One lower secondary school teacher commented that “[s]tudents can record their speech on iPads” to explain her selection of the “other” option; interestingly, the same teacher did not indicate that she uses student recordings. The final lower secondary school teacher who ticked the “other” option explained that she has constructed her own oral test for year 8 and does job interviews with students in year 9.

A couple of other teachers also used the comment box, despite not selecting the “other” option in the list of methods. One primary school teacher explained that she assesses speaking skills by listening to the students “reading all texts they have prepared as

homework”. The other comments given were not about specific tasks but rather about the assessment system in general. The same teacher who, in an earlier question, explained that students with reading or writing difficulties are offered supplementary oral assessment, brought up the same aspect again. Another teacher, who indicated using presentations and class observations for assessment, clarified that she “include[s] these in [her] general assessment of the students’ oral skills together with tests and exams”. One final commenter, who also uses presentations and class observations, clarified that she does not usually assess speaking skills numerically, and although students receive a grade for presentations, it is not only based on how they speak.

In question 11b, respondents were asked to specify possible variations between their methods of assessment in different courses or groups. The most distinct pattern in these responses comes from the upper secondary school teachers, who refer to the setup of the different courses. This time, six teachers specifically mentioned the optional course 8, which focuses on speaking skills and is assessed differently than other courses. For instance, the students take a national oral proficiency test provided by the Finnish National Agency of Education, and their skills are assessed with the help of the CEFR. Like one respondent said: “[In course 8] I look at all aspects of the students’ oral skills to give a fair assessment. In the ‘normal’ courses I take a more general approach.”

A couple of upper secondary school teachers mentioned that there are differences between other courses, too, with some containing more speaking tasks and others less. These contents are decided by the curriculum, and can therefore not be influenced by the teachers. In courses that are not specifically focused on speaking, the assessment works as follows, according to one respondent: “As for now we assess students based on their work effort during the course and their course exam (incl. essay, listening and reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar).” However, the same respondent added: “We have discussed among colleagues whether we should include some kind of speaking assessment in more courses than one (speaking course) but haven’t reached a decision yet”.

Although primary schools and lower secondary schools do not follow a course-based curriculum in the same way as upper secondary schools, there still seems to be some differences, mostly between year groups. For instance, one primary school teacher, who selected speaking exams, presentations and observation as her methods, specified that

presentations are done in year 4 but not in year 3. Another primary school teacher said that there is generally more speaking in the lower classes and that writing becomes more important in year 6. In lower secondary school, on the other hand, one respondent indicated that she normally does not assess speaking skills, but said that students still give presentations in year 9, which are assessed.

Only two respondents directly mentioned differences between student groups or individual students in this question. Again, the same teacher who was mentioned earlier referred back to her response about supplementary oral assessment for students with reading and writing difficulties. Furthermore, however, a lower secondary school teacher stated that the student group's atmosphere and interest also matters: "if the group enjoys doing presentations and pair work, then oral exercises are easier to assess, and many samples emerge in the natural work"¹³. The same teacher also pointed out that group sizes vary, and that it is usually "impossible" to make speaking exams work in a group of 30 students. Similarly, a primary school teacher used a later comment box to say that she cannot organize speaking exams as often as she would like, because it usually requires special arrangements with the students' class teacher, which becomes especially difficult with big groups. A lack of time was also mentioned by another primary school teacher who said that she rarely assesses her pupils' speaking skills in connection with their exams for this reason.

One final comment from a lower secondary school teacher did not concern differences between courses or groups, but rather the priority of different methods of assessment. She pointed out that although she observes her classes during every lesson, the end-of-year oral exam matters the most for assessment.

Question 12 asked respondents to specify what types of tasks they use, in case they use speaking exams or student recordings for assessment. The question was not obligatory, but received answers from 36 respondents (56%). Five of these respondents had not indicated using exams or recordings in question 11a, but based on their answers to question 12 they still use such assessment methods to some extent. On the other hand, five respondents who earlier said that they use exams and/or recordings did not specify what

¹³ "Jos ryhmä mielellään tekee suullisia esityksiä ja pariharjoituksia, on suulliset tehtävät helpompi arvioida ja näyttöjä tulee luonnollisessa työssä paljon"

types of tasks they use in this question. Only 41% of the respondents from Swedish-language schools answered this question, whereas 78% of the respondents from Finnish-language schools did. It is not too surprising, however, considering the number of respondents from the different language groups who said that they use exams and recordings for assessing speaking in the first place. Furthermore, only 43% of the primary school teachers answered this question, whereas 77% of the upper secondary school teachers did.

Among the upper secondary school teachers, the national oral exam taken in course 8 was once again a hot topic, mentioned by seven of them. Notably, none of these teachers gave any further comments about exam tasks, indicating that the national exam is the only one they use. Two further upper secondary teachers listed exam tasks that sound similar to the ones in the national oral exam (“reading”, “summarising”, “making conversation”, “dialogues”), but they did not clarify whether they were referring to this particular exam or not. Finally, two respondents from upper secondary schools referred not to exams, but to tasks that are recorded for assessment: one of them mentioned creative projects like vlogs and podcasts, while the other one referred to more traditional assignments like text reading and discussions.

The latter, more traditional tasks were mentioned by several teachers at other educational levels as well. Different forms of talk involving more than one student were most common: discussions, dialogues or conversations were mentioned by 18 respondents in total, and seemed to be used both within the frames of speaking exams and for classroom recordings. Most teachers did not give any details about the circumstances or topics of these interactions, although some pointed out that topics for conversation are given to the students by the teacher, and others emphasized that the themes discussed in exams need to be familiar to the students from before. A few teachers said that discussions may cover texts or books that the students have read. Furthermore, a couple of respondents specified that students “create” or “write” dialogues themselves, whereas another respondent said that they “perform” dialogues; the latter may indicate that they base their talk on a given model. One teacher specified that these dialogues cover “various situations”, while another one offered “[r]estaurant conversation” as an example. Dialogues or discussions were mentioned by 75% of the lower secondary school teachers

who answered this question, while only 30% of upper secondary school teachers mentioned the same.

A few respondents also mentioned talking to students individually during exams, usually following some kind of question-and-answer format, but also including other tasks such as describing or explaining pictures. Some teachers also use some form of “free speech” where the students present or talk about a certain topic. Most respondents indicated that this is prepared in advance, and those that specified a topic mentioned, for instance, that the students talk about themselves, their family, or their plans for the weekend.

One final task, which was mentioned in some form by 12 respondents, was reading aloud, which seems to be used in both exams and recordings. All of these teachers simply said that the students read “texts”, without giving any more details about the types of texts. One teacher also said that her students read word lists aloud. Reading aloud as part of a speaking exam or a recording was mentioned more often among respondents from lower secondary schools (58%) than among respondents from primary schools (23%) or upper secondary schools (20%).

The task types mentioned so far (i.e. discussions and dialogues, questions and answers, and reading aloud) seem largely similar to the tasks in a model oral test recommended by the Federation of Foreign Language Teachers in Finland (SUKOL), which I had not heard of until one respondent mentioned it. This respondent said that according to the model, “the teacher gives [the students] the subject matter in advance and asks support questions during the test” and that the test then includes “pair work about the given topic and reading aloud”¹⁴.

A few teachers mentioned using tasks that did not fall neatly under any of the previously mentioned categories. Most of these tasks were not used for exams, but rather for assessment through recordings. For instance, one teacher mentioned recording students’ book presentations in class because of time constraints, while another teacher has recorded students performing drama. One respondent also said that her students have interviewed someone at home and recorded that conversation. A couple of more creative projects were

¹⁴ ”[O]pettaja antaa aihepiirejä ennakoon, kokeessa kysyy apukysymyksiä, pariharjoitus annetusta aiheesta ja ääneen lukeminen”

also mentioned, in the form of recording radio ads and creating short films directed and edited by the students. One teacher had also come up with an exam task that no one else mentioned, namely testing students on the English alphabet.

Finally, one teacher simply stated in her comment that she has used “the material provided by the course books” for speaking exams. This does not say much, since there is no way of knowing what book she is using or what task types are included.

4.4.3. Assessment criteria and pronunciation standards for speaking

Question 13 asked respondents what exactly they assess when evaluating students’ speaking skills. They were given a list of different features and asked to rate the importance of these aspects for the overall grade. The list of features included pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehensibility and communication skills, but the teachers were also invited to add any other aspects they assess. Each feature was rated for importance on a four-point Likert scale with options ranging from “very important” through “important” and “somewhat important” down to “not important”. Again, the respondents were also given the opportunity to answer “I do not assess students’ speaking skills” for each aspect; however, this was only used by one respondent. In other words, three of the teachers who said that they do not assess speaking skills in question 11a still had opinions on the importance of different aspects of speaking skills in question 13. The question was obligatory, and thus received answers from all respondents.

The most important aspect of students’ speaking skills, according to the respondents, is comprehensibility. The answers for each aspect were coded with numbers from 1 (representing “very important”) to 4 (representing “not important”), and on this scale, comprehensibility received a mean rating of 1.52 (median: 1, mode: 1). The aspect of communication skills was rated second highest, not far behind comprehensibility, with a mean score of 1.67 (median: 2, mode: 1). In shared third place came fluency and vocabulary, both with the exact same mean rating of 1.89 (median: 2, mode: 2). Pronunciation was seen as slightly less important with a mean score of 2.24 (median: 2, mode: 2), and the least important aspect, according to the respondents, was grammar, with a mean rating of 2.51 (median: 3, mode: 3).

This order of importance seems to be the same across educational levels and languages, with the exception that fluency and vocabulary are not given identical mean ratings. In primary schools and upper secondary schools, vocabulary is given a slight priority over fluency, while fluency is considered more important than vocabulary in lower secondary schools. Teachers from Swedish-language schools also consider vocabulary slightly more important than fluency, whereas teachers from Finnish-language schools indicate the opposite.

Looking at the individual aspects of proficiency, a few differences can be observed between respondents from schools with different languages. For instance, teachers from Finnish-language schools seem to consider comprehensibility slightly more important (mean score 1.30) than teachers in Swedish-language schools (mean score 1.70). The same thing goes for fluency, which was given a mean rating of 1.70 in Finnish-language schools and 2.03 in Swedish-language schools. However, respondents in Finnish-language schools seem to give higher ratings overall in this question; grammar was the only aspect which respondents in Swedish-language schools rated as marginally more important (with a mean score of 2.47 compared to 2.56). None of these differences were statistically significant, however.

There is a similar trend among educational levels, where respondents from primary schools consistently considered all aspects less important than their colleagues at higher levels, while respondents from upper secondary schools gave the highest importance ratings for four aspects out of six. For example, the mean score for comprehensibility (the aspect rated most important in all groups) was 1.86 in primary schools, making it significantly less important there than in lower secondary schools (mean 1.30) ($U = 181.0$, $p < 0.05$) and upper secondary schools (mean 1.15) ($U = 101.0$, $p < 0.05$). Fluency was also rated as significantly less important in primary schools than in both lower secondary schools ($U = 156.5$, $p < 0.01$) and upper secondary schools ($U = 102.0$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, primary schools and upper secondary schools significantly differed in their ratings of vocabulary ($U = 116.5$, $p < 0.05$), grammar ($U = 117.0$, $p < 0.05$), and communication skills ($U = 116.0$, $p < 0.05$). Pronunciation was the only aspect whose importance was not perceived differently across groups from different educational levels.

Only four respondents mentioned assessing further aspects of speaking beyond the ones on the list. One of them said that she assesses “[o]verall performance”, rating it as “important”. Two respondents added more specific features; one of them mentioned “compensation skills” (oddly rating it as “not important”, but this might have been a misinterpretation of the structure of the question); and another one went beyond the linguistic, saying that she assesses “[b]ody language and conduct” (rating it as “important”). The final respondent mentioned assessing “reaction”, and rated it as “very important”, but did not explain what exactly this entails. Finally, one respondent gave a comment related to this question in the final comment box. She had rated pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and fluency as “very important” whereas she had rated comprehensibility and communication skills as “somewhat important”. She explained this by saying that she does assess the latter two aspects too, but to her, they are included in the concept of the former four options (mostly in fluency).

Next, in question 14, respondents who assess pronunciation were asked what standard they use, or in other words, what they want their students’ pronunciation to be like. Since it was assumed that not everyone would assess pronunciation, the question was not obligatory, but it still received answers from 44 respondents. As indicated by the previous question, pronunciation is not considered the most essential aspect of students’ speaking skills, but it still carries some importance; it was given a mean score between 2.2 and 2.3 across all groups of respondents (on a scale where 2 corresponded to “important” and 3 to “somewhat important”).

19 of the responses about standards mentioned different varieties of English that have typically been used as models in English language teaching, such as British or American English. Very few of these respondents seem to strictly prefer a particular accent over another (except for one teacher who specifically uses British English as her standard) but generally, it sounds like they want their students to aim for a native-like pronunciation, usually British or American. A couple of teachers indicated that these preferred accents are based on the varieties featured in textbooks. Some teachers emphasized that their students get to choose which of these options they want to focus on. Respondents from Swedish-language schools mentioned these “traditional” varieties of English more often (52%) than respondents from Finnish-language schools (32%). They were also mentioned more often

by teachers from upper secondary schools (60%) than by teachers from primary schools (41%) or lower secondary schools (38%).

A few teachers went beyond the traditional divide of British/American English and added further accents to their list of acceptable varieties, such as Australian and Canadian English. These lists were often followed by an “etc.”, for instance “[a]ll English versions are accepted: A.E., B.E., Canadian etc.”. Similarly, one teacher said “I don’t really care if it’s British, American or anything else” and another one stated that she accepts “[a]ny variety of English that [the students] themselves [have] chosen to focus on”. The question is what exactly is included when respondents say “any variety”, and what is entailed in the “etc.”; where do they draw the line for “acceptable”, if they do at all? A couple of other respondents, rather than mentioning specific accents, said that they want their students to speak standard English. One of them added, within parentheses, “not necessarily British”. The question is, then, what the concept of “standard English” means to them.

Another teacher said that she wants her students’ English to sound like “proper English”, which she did not really define further, apart from adding the words “not rally English”. This term, which is generally used to describe the kind of heavily accented English spoken by Finnish rally drivers, was mentioned by a further three respondents, who all indicated that they try to steer their students away from this type of accent. In a previous question, however, one teacher indicated that some students find it amusing to speak rally English and seem to be proud of their ability to sound Finnish. Three other respondents, who did not mention rally English specifically, still said that they do not want their students to mix in their first language in their English accent. They commented, for instance, that the goal is to speak with “as little Finnish transference as possible” or without a “disturbing Swedish accent”.

Not all respondents mentioned specific varieties and accents of English in their answers, however. 15 teachers emphasized comprehensibility as the defining characteristic they wish to see in their students’ speech, without referring to any particular varieties of English at all. They generally described their ideal standards using the words “understandable”, “comprehensible”, and “clear”. An additional five teachers did mention various accents, but still also emphasized comprehensibility; for example, one respondent wanted her students’ speech to be “[c]lear and understandable”, adding that “I don’t care

whether their accent is British, American, Australian etc.”. One respondent specified that she does not mind a hint of a Finnish accent: “I feel Finnish students have a clear, easy to follow pronunciation even when the individual sounds are a bit off key”.

The respondents advocating for comprehensibility gave comments such as “the words should be pronounced in such a way that others understand what is being said” and “I want to be able to understand them with out [*sic*] having to strain”. One teacher stated that “[s]ince all of [the students] study English as a foreign language, they obviously have an accent but it shouldn’t hinder comprehensibility”. Another teacher explained her view as follows: “As English is a global language, I do not prefer one dialect in front of the other. The most important thing is for the students to be understood, develop their fluency and use the language in a natural way.” Respondents from lower secondary schools mentioned comprehensibility most frequently (56%), compared to respondents from primary schools (35%) and upper secondary schools (40%). Teachers from Finnish-language schools also brought it up slightly more often (53%) than teachers from Swedish-language schools (40%).

A few respondents offered more specific answers about features they would like to see in their students’ speech. Pronunciation was the most common topic. For instance, one lower secondary school teacher said that “I’m pleased as long as [the students] have a functioning pronunciation”, whereas another teacher at the same level sounded more strict, saying that “[t]here shouldn’t be obvious mispronunciations”. Yet another lower secondary school teacher said that pronouncing “difficult” sounds gives bonus points (although she did not specify what sounds are perceived as difficult). Only one upper secondary school teacher gave a specific comment about pronunciation, saying that it should ideally be “consistent”.

At a lower level, two primary school teachers agreed that although a good pronunciation is something to aim for, the most important thing for pupils at the beginning of their studies is to have a good enough pronunciation to make themselves understood. On the other hand, another primary school teacher said that she consciously practices the pronunciation of, for instance, voiced and voiceless sounds with her students. Yet another teacher at this level specified that when a student speaks, she wants it to sound like he or

she has at least practiced, and during pronunciation tests, students should use phonetic symbols for support to the best of their ability.

Apart from pronunciation, the topic of fluency was mentioned by a couple of teachers at secondary level. One lower secondary school teacher described her standard as fluent and communicative, adding that “[t]he use of phrases is a plus”. One upper secondary school teacher, who also emphasized fluency, went on to explain that “pauses and some mistakes are OK if [the students] correct themselves”. One respondent said that she emphasizes intonation, stress, and rhythm rather than pronunciation.

Finally, two respondents said that their standard for speaking is based on the curriculum and the CEFR, without explaining this practice further. One of these respondents was teaching in a primary school and the other one in an upper secondary school. A final comment came from a lower secondary school teacher who said that she uses her own standards when assessing speaking. She explained her grading system, saying that she gives grade 8 to speech that is “understandable but heavily influenced by Finnish”, grade 9 to speech that includes “‘proper’ features” (like correct pronunciation of sounds that are difficult for Finnish speakers), and grade 10 to speech that also has correct intonation. This same teacher said that she would like to get more training in the assessment of speaking, since it was not covered when she was studying.

4.4.4. Giving feedback on speaking skills

Question 15 was the final question in the survey, and asked the respondents how they give feedback on their students’ speaking skills. The question provided the respondents with a list of options to choose from, but also invited them to add their own ways of giving feedback, or again, express that they do not assess speaking skills if that is the case. The question was obligatory and thus received answers from all respondents. Respondents could select as many alternatives as they wanted. On average, the teachers give feedback using two of the methods on the list (mean: 1.77, median: 2, mode: 2), but some selected three options, while others only chose one.

The most common way of giving feedback on students’ speaking skills is by incorporating the assessment of these skills into the students’ final grade in English. This

option was selected by 42 respondents (66%), indicating that the majority of teachers keep speaking in mind when giving final grades. On the other hand, giving students a separate grade for speaking skills is not too common; this option was only selected by 14 respondents (22%). The other option in this question was giving verbal feedback, either in shorter form (for example “OK”, “good”, or “excellent”) or in longer form (elaborating on strengths, weaknesses, etc.). Shorter feedback seems to be more common, selected by 33 respondents (52%), while longer feedback is given by 20 respondents (31%).

In this question, two teachers indicated that they do not assess speaking skills, but contradictorily, one of them also said that she incorporates assessment of speaking into the students’ final grade. In other words, only one respondent seems to truly not assess speaking skills at all; this respondent was the only one who consistently answered “I do not assess speaking skills” in all questions in the assessment part of the survey. This teacher explained in the final comment box that she teaches beginners, implying that she does not assess her students’ speaking skills because of their level or age. Interestingly, this was also the only respondent who indicated that she is not a qualified teacher.

Two teachers selected the “other” option, elaborating on their ways of giving feedback in the comment box. A few other teachers also gave additional comments, without necessarily providing other options for giving feedback. One respondent said that “[t]he feedback comes naturally as communication is successful”, possibly meaning that this feedback is given spontaneously in various situations in the classroom; similarly, another respondent also said that “I might say ‘I love the way you speak’, ‘You’re doing great!’ during class”. Yet another teacher mentioned giving feedback on oral skills not only in the classroom environment, but also during personal evaluation discussions with the student.

Other respondents mentioned only giving feedback in certain contexts. For instance, an upper secondary school teacher who had selected several options on the list stated that “I do not regularly give feedback on the students’ oral skills in regular courses”, possibly meaning that the methods she selected are mostly used in the previously mentioned course 8 which is specifically dedicated to speaking. Similarly, three other upper secondary school teachers used the box for further comments at the end of the survey to indicate that their ways of giving feedback (and their ways of assessment in general) vary between courses.

Another upper secondary school teacher, who did not select any of the listed methods except for “other”, said that she only gives feedback on prepared presentations. Presentations were mentioned by a couple of other teachers too, who both indicated that these may receive longer verbal feedback (these respondents had otherwise not selected that option from the list). One final comment came from a teacher who stated that the ways used to give feedback depend on the assignment.

A few differences in ways of giving feedback could be detected between teachers from schools with different languages. For instance, 81% of the teachers from Finnish-speaking schools incorporate feedback into their students’ final grade, whereas only 54% of the teachers from Swedish-language schools do the same. Also, while 37% of the teachers from Finnish-language schools give their students a separate grade for their speaking skills, only 11% of the teachers from Swedish-speaking schools do the same. Regarding verbal feedback, the shorter version seems slightly more common in Swedish-language schools while the longer version seems more common in Finnish-language schools.

There were also a few differences between the methods used at different educational levels. For example, it was more common for lower secondary school teachers (85%) than for primary school teachers (53%) to include speaking assessment in their students’ final grade; upper secondary school teachers were closer to the overall average (61%). Giving a separate grade for speaking skills was more common in both upper secondary schools (46%) and lower secondary schools (30%) than in primary schools (where only two respondents, or 7%, gave separate grades). Regarding the use of verbal feedback, it was noted that only 23% of the respondents in primary schools and upper secondary schools give longer verbal feedback, whereas 50% of the respondents in lower secondary schools do so.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, the present study will be discussed in two parts. First, the results presented in chapter 4 will be examined in relation to the research questions and relevant topics brought up in the background literature. Different interpretations and implications of the results will be discussed. Then, issues related to the methods and materials of the study will be brought up, such as concerns about the feasibility of using questionnaires and the reliability of my method of analysis.

5.1. Discussion of results

In this section, the results presented in chapter 4 will be discussed, bringing up overall trends and particularly interesting topics brought up in the responses. The order of the discussion will be based on the research questions outlined in section 1.2, focusing on related topics brought up in various survey questions and indicating to what degree the research questions have been answered by the study. The final research question of differences between teachers from different educational levels and languages will be addressed continuously throughout the discussion, where applicable. Finally, a few concluding remarks will be made about the teachers' general approach to speaking and to the questions in the survey.

5.1.1. The perceived importance of speaking skills

When setting out to conduct the present study, the first research question asked how important speaking skills are considered to be in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Finland. An attempt to answer this question was made by asking the respondents directly how important they consider speaking compared to other aspects of language learning. Teachers were also asked how much time they think should be devoted to speaking, as well as how much time they actually use for it, and whether they think this is enough. These questions were expected to give an indication of how the respondents actually prioritise speaking in practice in their classrooms.

The results suggest that teachers find speaking quite important. When directly asked about it, most of them defined it as “very important”, with some even labelling it “the most important aspect” of language teaching and learning. Some mentioned that the traditional emphasis on writing skills has started shifting, consequently giving speaking more priority, which is in line with the general development in methods for language teaching (see section 2.3.2). Several respondents emphasized that practising speaking is important to prepare learners for the future, when they are likely to encounter English and be required to use it especially in spoken form (cf. the study by Leppänen et al. 2011 about the role of English in Finland).

However, despite considering speaking skills important, many teachers find that they are not always able to prioritise them accordingly. More than half of the teachers (53%) were of the opinion that their students do not get enough practice in speaking for various reasons; this figure was even larger in lower secondary schools (65%) and upper secondary schools (62%). There were two main explanations for this: some teachers indicated that a lack of time was the main problem, while others perceived themselves restricted by formal requirements beyond their control, such as the curriculum. Generally, the comments about organizational issues and the lack of time seem related; time would not be as big an issue if the curriculum was less demanding, but the demands of the curriculum would not be perceived as problematic if there was more time.

While teachers at all levels brought up time-related issues, problems with formal requirements were more common at higher levels, especially among upper secondary school teachers who referred to the structure of the curriculum and the requirements of the matriculation exam. It was expected that this exam would be mentioned, as tests often influence teaching due to the washback effect (Nation & Newton 2009: 169). Teachers at upper secondary level seem to feel obliged to focus on aspects and skills involved in the exam, especially because it is the only high-stakes national examination in Finland. It seems like the planned inclusion of an oral component in this exam (cf. Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet 2017) will be crucial in order to encourage speaking practice in upper secondary schools.

Question 6b, which asked about the ideal amount of time that should be used for practising speaking, could have been formulated more clearly, using a predetermined scale.

The open-ended format, while enabling teachers to freely express their own thoughts, made it difficult to see any clear trends in the results. (For further discussion of these issues, see section 5.2.) Generally, however, it seems like the higher the educational level, the lower the bar is set regarding the ideal amount of speaking time. This pattern was replicated in question 8 about the actual time used for practising speaking, where less time seemed to be used at higher educational levels. At least, most teachers seem to eventually manage to devote at least 20% of classroom time to speaking: only 5% of the teachers indicated using less time than this. Almost half of the respondents indicated using more than 40% of classroom time for speaking.

Considering certain features of spoken language, focusing on speaking more in the early stages of learning seems to make sense. As mentioned previously, most speaking is informal and interactional (Nation & Newton 2009: 121), and thus does not require very complex language (Luoma 2004: 12-13, 16-18). This makes it feasible for young learners to start engaging in speaking even without a large vocabulary or a steady grasp of grammar. Writing, by contrast, can be tricky for young students, especially in a foreign language with unfamiliar spelling rules. It seems to make sense to shift focus from speaking to writing at more advanced levels, when students have reached a higher proficiency level and are able to use more advanced grammar and vocabulary. Of course, some speaking should still be carried out at this stage, and advanced tasks including formal speaking and more complex language features may become increasingly relevant (cf. Luoma 2004: 12; Nation & Newton 2009: 122). Indeed, this study indicated that structured activities like choral repetition and pronunciation practice were more common at lower levels, while spontaneous discussions and tasks requiring explanation or description were more common at higher levels. The survey questions on tasks will not be discussed in any more detail here, however, since the formulation of the questions made it difficult to draw any reliable conclusions.

It has to be acknowledged that the aforementioned questions about the time used for speaking are somewhat problematic. As some respondents pointed out, it can be difficult to define what counts as “practising speaking”, since spoken language is used not only when actively trying to improve speaking skills, but also when working on other tasks that require speaking to someone else. In addition, students cannot always all speak at the same

time, which means that even though (say) 25% of classroom time is used for speaking, individual students rarely get to speak 25% of the time. In other words, the results should be interpreted with care; future studies may require classroom observations to be carried out for a more accurate overview of the amount of time used for speaking.

One of the respondents also reflected on the difference between just practising speaking and actively *teaching* it. She said that she rarely does the latter, but rather uses the language as frequently as possible, hoping to lead the students by example. This can be related to Goh and Burns (2012: 133), who also emphasized that “setting up contexts for learners to speak in class is not the same as teaching them to speak in a second language ... [t]eaching is a principled and systematic activity”. Looking at the responses overall, very few teachers explicitly described ways of *teaching* speaking, although there were occasional mentions of teaching phonetic scripts and emphasizing typical speaking patterns. Then again, there was no direct question about methods for teaching speaking. In future studies, it would be essential to focus on the extent to which active teaching of speaking is carried out in classrooms, and how this is done.

Overall, the results suggest that English language teachers in Finland consider speaking skills important, but many find that they are not always able to prioritise them accordingly. However, teachers at different educational levels seem to have different starting positions. Many primary school teachers define speaking as the most important skill in language learning, and despite setting the bar the highest when asked how much time should be used for practising speaking, they are also happier with the result (i.e. compared to their colleagues at higher levels, primary school teachers think their students get enough practice in speaking to a larger extent).

5.1.2. The extent of target language use in the classroom

The second research question in this study aimed to find out to what extent the target language of English is used in classrooms in Finland, considering the fact that most learners and teachers in these classrooms have a common first language which can be used to support learning. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they themselves use English (rather than Finnish or Swedish), to estimate how often their students use English

(rather than Finnish or Swedish), and to explain in what situations the different languages are used.

The results suggest that English is used fairly often by these teachers: two thirds of the respondents indicated using the target language at least 75% of the time in the classroom. The students, on the other hand, do not use the target language as much as their teachers: the majority of respondents estimated that their students use English about half of the time in the classroom. This seems understandable and was also expected; most students probably find it easier to express themselves in their first language, and may not be comfortable using English more than necessary. Indeed, the teachers indicated that students have a tendency to fall back on Finnish or Swedish very quickly when they are not actively doing a task that requires English.

The most commonly mentioned situations where teachers use English include off-task situations, for instance when starting and ending the lesson and when making small-talk, and when giving instructions for tasks. However, many respondents did not mention any specific situations, but rather said that English is used by default in most contexts. There seems to be one common exception to this rule, though: 80% of the respondents said that they teach grammar using the ordinary language of instruction. This is an exceptionally large figure, considering the fact that the question was open-ended without any suggested options to choose from; all these respondents *spontaneously* mentioned using Finnish or Swedish for teaching grammar, indicating a fairly stable pattern or trend. They pointed out that this facilitates understanding for students, who generally already know the grammar terms in their mother tongue, and it is also easier because textbooks usually bring up grammar using Finnish or Swedish.

The results indicate some differences in target language use between the groups of teachers in the study. For instance, English is used to a larger extent at higher educational levels, with a significant difference in use between primary school teachers and upper secondary school teachers. This seems to confirm my hypothesis that teachers at different educational levels adapt their teaching approach based on the level of their learners, using the target language progressively more as the students become more fluent. Of course, there is also a possibility that teachers at higher levels are simply more comfortable using English. Many teachers working in Finnish primary schools are so-called class teachers,

who are not necessarily specialized in English, but rather teach several subjects. These teachers are probably used to using the ordinary language of instruction (Finnish or Swedish) most of the time, and may therefore tend to use it also during English classes, either simply out of habit or because they are not as comfortable with the target language.

Furthermore, there was a significant difference in target language use between teachers from schools with different languages: teachers in Swedish-language schools use English significantly more often than their colleagues in Finnish-language schools. Also, the students in Swedish-language schools are estimated to use English significantly more often than their Finnish-speaking peers. These results were expected, considering the fact that English tends to be easier to learn for Swedish-speakers than for Finnish-speakers due to cross-linguistic influence (Ringbom 2007: 1-3, 51-53). Teachers are probably aware of this, having probably experienced learning English as a foreign language themselves, and therefore adapt their use of the target language based on the starting point of their learners, similarly to how they seem to adapt to the learners' age and proficiency level. Regarding the use of the target language among students, the relative similarity between Swedish and English might make Swedish-speaking learners more confident and comfortable with speaking English. In fact, one of the studies cited by Ringbom (2007: 48) also indicated that Swedish-speakers were more willing to use English orally than their Finnish-speaking peers.

5.1.3. Encouraging spoken production among students

The third research question asked how English language teachers in Finland encourage spoken production among their students. Considering the fact that students usually have the opportunity to communicate with their fellow students and their teacher in their mother tongue, it is relevant to investigate what teachers do to prompt them not to take this “easy way out”, but rather make the effort to speak in the target language. This issue was investigated by a direct question about how teachers encourage their students to speak the target language.

The results indicate that teachers commonly lead students by example, by simply speaking English themselves and asking the students to do the same. Some translate

student utterances in other languages into English, others ask the students themselves to rephrase in the target language. A few teachers declare the classroom an “English zone” where only the target language is supposed to be spoken. One teacher also seems to try to make students associate her presence with the language, by speaking English to them not only in the classroom but also elsewhere at school.

Among the responses, there seemed to be two different interpretations of the term “encouragement”. Some indicated providing the students with plenty of opportunities to speak, using a large amount of different speaking activities, and choosing task types according to the learners’ interests. Others focused more on the environment than the tasks, making sure to give learners a comfortable and safe space to practice, where positive feedback is given and mistakes are allowed. Both of these aspects are important, and a combination of both seems ideal. As Nation and Newton (2009: 115) point out, receptive knowledge is not automatically transformed into productive knowledge, but learners have to be pushed to speak; this makes the quantity of spoken exercises important. Making sure the activities are relevant for the learners is in line with Dörnyei’s (1994: 281) ways of improving motivation. On the other hand, not all students are comfortable with speaking, and for them, the kind of supportive, non-threatening environment mentioned by some of the teachers is essential (cf. Goh & Burns 2012: 30; Dörnyei 1994: 281).

Relevant to this discussion is the topic of anxiety, which was mentioned by some teachers in several different questions throughout the survey. Some even describe their students as being “scared” of speaking the target language, and many teachers emphasize the importance of making sure learners *dare* to talk in class. The topic was particularly prominent among lower secondary school teachers, with one of them specifically mentioning the difficulty of practising speaking with teenagers entering puberty. Primary school teachers, on the other hand, did not seem to have any direct problems with anxiety: some indicated that they try to foster a positive attitude in their students from the beginning of their English studies, but encouragement almost seemed to be more of a preventive measure at this level.

Since anxiety is closely related to self-confidence and self-efficacy (cf. Dörnyei 1994: 277), and may stem from problematic thoughts and beliefs about the nature of language learning (cf. Goh & Burns 2012: 28), it seems important to work on these aspects

from the start, to prevent problems later. The results indicate that some teachers clearly make an effort to address these issues, for instance by emphasizing that mistakes are a part of learning and by providing positive feedback (cf. procedures for increasing motivation in Dörnyei 1994: 280-282). However, since there was no direct question about anxiety in the survey, there is no indication of the extent to which the rest of the respondents deal with these issues. This could be an interesting topic for further study.

The responses from some teachers indicate that learners sometimes need to be encouraged not only to speak the target language, but to speak at all. One respondent gave a very interesting comment about the lack of a “speaking culture” in Finland. What exactly she meant is open to interpretation, but she could possibly have been referring to the (fairly true) stereotype of Finnish people appreciating silence, and rarely talking just for the sake of talking, if there is nothing to talk about. In this type of context, making students speak “without reason” can be difficult, especially when they have to use a language they are not fully competent in or completely comfortable with. Furthermore, if the topic of conversation is determined by the teacher and does not feel interesting or relevant to the students, the problem is further increased. In such situations, it would be of vital importance to increase the authenticity of the tasks and make students feel like they gain something from participating in the discussion (Dörnyei 1994: 281-282).

5.1.4. Assessment of speaking skills

The fourth research question in this study concerned the assessment of speaking skills, and how this is carried out in English language classrooms in Finland. The final part of the survey aimed to find answers to these questions by asking teachers about their opinions and methods.

The results suggest that there is a wide variety of different opinions about assessment of speaking skills. When asked directly about the importance of assessing speaking, some teachers seemed to see it as essential, while others considered it unnecessary. The respondents who had a positive attitude towards assessing speaking generally reasoned that speaking skills are a natural part of the students’ English proficiency, and should thus be assessed just like any other aspects. Some also pointed out that students are more eager to

practice skills that are tested. This can be related to the washback effect, as discussed by Nation and Newton (2009: 169), whereby testing affects teaching and learning. A few respondents also pointed out that assessment is important because some students are better at speaking than writing, and everyone should have equal opportunities to demonstrate their proficiency.

Respondents with a more negative attitude towards assessment of speaking, on the other hand, generally found it more important to encourage the practice and use of the language rather than evaluate the results. They seemed to be afraid that negative feedback may discourage the students from using the language altogether, especially if they were already shy or anxious about speaking in the first place. Some respondents also thought that assessment is not useful because it distracts from the goal of communication. These respondents seem to assume that speaking assessment mainly evaluates grammar and formal speech, and that the goal in assessment is for students to achieve linguistic perfection.

Rejecting assessment on these grounds seems understandable, but it is important to remember that evaluation can be done in many ways, focusing on many different aspects of speech, depending on the construct and the purpose of assessment (cf. section 2.3.3). In addition, as emphasized by Luoma (2004: 11-12, 16-17, 27-28), spoken language is characterized by various features which differ from the standard norms of written language, and assessment criteria need to be adapted accordingly. For instance, the prevalence of errors in normal speech makes it unrealistic to expect linguistic perfection from learners (Luoma 2004: 19), and current assessment therefore tends to focus not on identifying problems in student speech, but on describing what the learner can do with language (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014: 23).

Looking at the different educational levels, two thirds of the respondents from upper secondary schools (which were, admittedly, rather few in total) thought that assessment of speaking skills was not particularly important. This is interesting, considering the fact that this is the highest proficiency level included in the study, with many learners from these schools moving on to study at universities. The teachers' views on the importance of speaking assessment may, again, be related to the lack of an oral component in the matriculation exam and the washback effect (Nation & Newton 2009: 169). Again, if an

oral component is added (cf. Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet 2017), opinions might change and speaking may not only receive more attention in the classroom, but also be assessed to a greater extent.

Despite the variety of opinions on the importance of assessing speaking, the vast majority of respondents still seem to engage in it to some extent. The results suggest that the most common method of speaking assessment is to simply observe the students during classes (selected by 86% of the teachers). This is not necessarily the fairest or most consistent method, and organisation is required in order to ensure that all students are treated equally; for instance, talkative learners would naturally display more of their skills in this environment, while shy or quiet students might not utter too many words. Indeed, one respondent wondered how to assess students who are different like this, which is an issue also brought up by Luoma (2004: 22-23). However, observation is otherwise an easy way of assessing samples that emerge “naturally” in the classroom, and requires less preparation and planning time. Furthermore, anxious learners may benefit from not having to perform in an explicit assessment situation where awareness of the importance of the situation may affect performance.

The second most popular way of assessing speaking was presentations. Among lower secondary school teachers, presentations were as common as general classroom observations, whereas they were not as prevalent in primary schools. Some respondents, who otherwise do not assess speaking, said that they sometimes do so based on presentations. This is interesting because the kind of speaking used in presentations is usually rather formal, monologic, and pre-planned, which is quite different from everyday communicative language. Obviously, speaking comes in many different forms (see section 2.1.2), and it is good for learners to be exposed to different registers and practise speaking in different situations (Nation & Newton 2009: 117); however, assessing speaking only in presentations would not give a complete overview of the students’ skills.

An interesting difference in assessment methods was found between teachers from Finnish-language schools and Swedish-language schools: 74% of the former group use speaking exams, whereas only 30% of the latter group do the same. Since teachers were not prompted to explain their reasons for using various methods for assessment, the reason for this difference is unclear, and requires further research.

Criteria for a good performance were examined in question 13, the results of which indicate that the respondents found comprehensibility and communication skills more important than accuracy of pronunciation or grammar. Vocabulary was considered more important than pronunciation and grammar, and in some groups it was rated higher than fluency (looking at all respondents together, fluency and vocabulary were given identical ratings). Generally, it seems like teachers value the ability to convey a message higher than the ability to use “correct” language. This seems to be in line with the general behaviour of learners; according to Goh & Burns (2012: 42-43), learners tend to prioritise meaning over form if they cannot cope with the demands of both at the same time.

When asked about their ideal standard for pronunciation, the respondents largely split into two groups: those who idealise certain varieties of English that have been traditionally used as standards in classrooms (like British and American English), and those who do not really care about accents, but rather emphasize comprehensibility in student speech. While some teachers in the former group ideally wanted features of Finnish or Swedish to be eliminated when students speak, teachers in the latter group said that it is only natural to have an accent in a foreign language, and pointed out that the pronunciation of Finnish students is often understandable even if they have an accent.

Indeed, based on research about the consequences of age of onset, it is unlikely for learners to achieve a native-like accent unless they have started learning the foreign language at a very young age (Long 2013: 5). Lintunen (2014: 167-168) argues that native accents can still be used as ideal *models*, but that actual *goals* set for learners should be more realistic; as Luoma (2004: 10) says, most students will otherwise fail, “even if they are fully functional in normal communicative situations”. The practice of using native accents as a goal in the teaching of English has also been criticized based on the fact that non-native speakers now outnumber native speakers (cf. Lintunen 2014: 170). Furthermore, accents are closely related to personal identity, which means that learners do not necessarily even want to sound like native speakers (Nation & Newton 2009: 77); one respondent explicitly mentioned that some students seem to be proud of their ability to sound Finnish.

Based on the results, it seems like awareness of these issues has only spread to about half of the teachers, while the other half still idealise native accents and expect their

students to aim for a native-like pronunciation. It should be emphasized, however, that this was an open-ended question where respondents got to express their opinions on pronunciation standards freely; the alternatives of nativeness and comprehensibility were not mentioned in the question but rather emerged from the spontaneous responses. The results might have been different if the teachers had been prompted to decide which of the two approaches they agreed with the most. More research is needed for a more detailed picture of teachers' opinions on this issue.

Comparing the language groups, there was a marginal difference in the responses about standards: teachers from Swedish-language schools mentioned the traditional varieties of English slightly more often, whereas teachers from Finnish-language schools emphasized comprehensibility somewhat more frequently. While these differences were not large, they may perhaps be a consequence of the relative similarity of the languages involved: taking cross-linguistic influence (cf. Ringbom 2007) into account, Swedish-speaking students are perhaps expected to do slightly better than their Finnish-speaking peers when speaking English, including achieving a pronunciation more similar to natives.

The results indicate that feedback is given to students in various ways. Two thirds of the respondents incorporate the assessment of students' speaking skills into their final grade for English, while only about one fifth of the respondents give their students a separate grade for speaking. Verbal feedback is also given: about half of the respondents do this in a short form (such as evaluating performance as "OK" or "excellent") while one third of the respondents give longer feedback, outlining strengths and weaknesses. Previous studies have established that more extensive, constructive feedback is more useful for students (Luoma 2004: 173-175, 189), but considering the fact that many teachers indicated having too little time to devote to speaking, they may have to resort to shorter feedback for the same reason.

In summary, it seems like some teachers could benefit from more awareness of central issues in assessment, and more instruction about different methods. One respondent explicitly stated that assessment of speaking was not covered when she got her education in teaching, and that she would like more training in this. The respondents who did not like assessing speaking because it is too focused on "perfection" might benefit from considering the various features of speaking (as discussed in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2),

helping them to define realistic demands and assessment criteria. Perhaps the two distinct opinions on ideal standards for pronunciation can also be related to teacher education: the discussion of standards has evolved with time, and perhaps the concept of “international English” was not as widely discussed when some of the respondents got their education in teaching.

5.1.5. Concluding remarks

Based on responses given in the survey, it seems like the participating teachers have generally reflected actively on the role of speaking in their teaching. Of course, the questionnaire in itself may have prompted some of this reflective thinking, but many respondents gave extensive answers that seemed grounded in a general awareness of the way they approach the skill of speaking.

The questionnaire was deliberately informal in nature; there was no explicit reference to theoretical concepts, and academic vocabulary was not used to any great extent. Instead, teachers were given the opportunity to express themselves rather freely. This made it possible to see to what extent they are aware of certain issues and to what extent concepts of theory or method “naturally” influence their thinking. While answers to many questions may have been different if the respondents had been prompted to consider certain alternatives, the aim of this study was to find out what they think under “normal” circumstances, when their attention is not directed to specific aspects.

Generally, references to “traditional” theories or methods such as those outlined in sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 were absent from the responses. Instead, teachers’ approaches to speaking seem to be largely based on their individual classroom realities, where various circumstances such as time, curricula, and student motivation affect the way things are done. Teachers may, of course, still base their teaching on certain approaches, but they were not explicitly prompted to talk about this, and did not spontaneously bring it up. They may very well have formed their own theories of practice, as discussed by Kumaravadivelu (2003: 33-34), where they largely make decisions based on what is practical in their own individual contexts. Future research could explicitly ask teachers about the impact of theoretical concepts on their teaching.

It should also be mentioned that speaking is obviously a broad term, encompassing many different skills and resulting in varied forms of language characterized by different features. The survey did not define what exactly is meant by speaking, apart from giving the respondents lists of possible speaking activities and assessment criteria in certain questions. It should therefore be acknowledged that respondents may have interpreted the term slightly differently, and more research is needed for a more detailed overview of their thoughts and opinions.

5.2. Discussion of methods and materials

While several interesting trends and illuminating individual comments can be identified in the results discussed above, it is also important to consider how certain features of the methods and materials used may have influenced the results. This will be done in this section, by reviewing the feasibility of using surveys for data collection and the reliability of my method of analysis.

5.2.1. Discussion of the questionnaire as a method for data collection

Naturally, all methods for research have their own pros and cons, and are suitable in different contexts. For the purposes of this study, collecting data using a questionnaire was deemed relevant, since the aim was to provide a first insight into Finnish teachers' opinions and thoughts on the topic at hand (rather than investigate their actual practices in any great detail, which would have warranted other methods, such as classroom observations). The survey gave the participating teachers an opportunity to express their views both in structured, closed questions and in free, open-ended questions, which in turn made it possible to analyse the responses in several different ways.

Questionnaires can collect a large amount of data in a short period of time, which was ideal for the present study, since one of the goals was to distinguish trends in certain groups rather than just focus on a few respondents. With the help of structured survey questions, where answers are given on a numerical or ordinal scale, it is possible to conduct quantitative analysis with a large amount of data and distinguish patterns and

differences between groups, which would be harder to do based on small-scale interviews, for example. At the same time, including open-ended questions in a questionnaire makes it possible to collect another type of data, where respondents can spontaneously express their opinions in more detail without the restrictions of structured questions.

However, the data collected from open-ended questions may pose some problems. For example, the answers may not be as detailed as one would wish, or the amount of detail may vary notably between respondents, with some only giving brief answers and others offering detailed responses. Non-response may also be a problem. There is no possibility to ask respondents for clarification or give them further prompts, like there would be in an interview, and no way of expanding on particularly interesting aspects brought up by the respondent. Similarly, if a question is misinterpreted or misunderstood by the respondent, there is no way for the researcher to correct this mistake.

While these issues were present in this study, their impact was not overwhelming. Most questions seem to have been fairly straightforward, and although some questions seem to have been interpreted differently by different teachers, this mostly resulted in varied and interesting responses which offered further insight into the teachers' thoughts. Of course, some respondents tend to write longer answers than others, giving them a sort of advantage of being represented to a greater extent in the report of the results. However, efforts have been made to include all distinguishable viewpoints on each topic, in order to represent each and every respondent.

There were a few instances of non-response in the questionnaire, but this was mostly in conditional questions only directed at some respondents, for instance questions 9b, 11b, 12, and 14. The only exception was question 3a, which was directed at everyone, asking respondents to write down classroom situations in which they usually use the target language. Eight respondents left this question unanswered, but this might be understandable; after all, many teachers seemed to consider the use of the target language as a given. Seven of these respondents indicated using English at least 75% of the time in the classroom, so perhaps English is present in more or less all situations, and they did not find it relevant to list all these (much like the teachers who answered this question without listing situations, simply saying that they use English all the time).

A more notable issue was the fact that some respondents only partly answered certain questions, ignoring (or just forgetting) part of the prompt. In questions 3a and 3b, for instance, the teachers were asked not only to list situations where they use the different languages, but also to explain why. The latter part of the question was not addressed by all respondents. In hindsight, it might have been a good idea to divide such questions into two parts, giving the “why?” its own comment box to prompt respondents to answer.

Some of the other questions could also have been formulated differently in order to make the analysis easier and more reliable. For instance, a few of the open-ended questions could have been converted into multiple-choice questions to facilitate the identification of trends. For example, question 6b about the ideal amount of time used for speaking could have been formatted in the same way as question 8 about the actual amount of time used for speaking, and questions 7 and 12 about tasks used for practising and assessing speaking could have been made more similar to each other. Then again, as mentioned previously, the open-ended questions enabled more extensive insights, despite being more difficult to analyse.

Of course, one may debate whether teachers are fully aware of their actual classroom practices and whether these are accurately reflected in this type of survey based on self-report. Furthermore, the nature of open-ended questions means that respondents write down whatever comes to mind at the moment of filling in the questionnaire, not necessarily accounting for everything they do, but rather mentioning the aspects that seem most important to them. The fact that only one teacher mentions doing something in a certain way does not mean that they are the only respondent to do so, but rather that that particular theme did not come to mind for the other respondents.

One should thus take the results with a grain of salt, keeping in mind that there may be differences between what the teachers think they do, what comes to mind when filling out a survey, and what they actually do. However, even if not fully accurate, the teachers’ responses give an overview of their thoughts on the topic, which are valuable at this stage, when research into their opinions and practices has not been carried out to any greater extent. The answers given in this survey may be helpful as a basis for further studies, indicating different topics that could be brought up in more detail, and giving ideas for aspects to investigate further in the classroom environment.

5.2.2. Discussion of the method of analysis

The method of analysis, which was partly quantitative and partly qualitative, was chosen based on the type of questions included in the questionnaire. The closed questions were analysed quantitatively, using mean scores and percentages to illustrate the respondents' opinions, and also using statistical tests of significance to identify differences between groups. The open-ended questions, in turn, were constructed to achieve insight into teachers' personal thoughts on the subject, and were analysed qualitatively, identifying common topics but also paying attention to individual comments.

While the quantitative analysis is fairly straightforward, it should be said that there is always a risk that any identified differences (even statistically significant ones) are based on chance. Especially in small studies like this, where certain groups are only represented by a small number of respondents, the impact of the response from one single teacher can be quite large (for example, only thirteen upper secondary school teachers took part in the survey, which means that each of them represents almost 8% of the total group). This should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. It would have been interesting to investigate differences between even more specific groups (for instance, comparing lower secondary school teachers in Finnish-language schools and Swedish-language schools) but this was not considered feasible because of the small sample. Future studies could collect data on similar issues from a larger number of respondents, enabling more detailed quantitative analysis, and making the results more generalisable.

Qualitative analysis gives the survey depth, but can be problematic in the sense that it is largely based on subjective interpretation of the responses. For example, identifying common themes in the responses and defining relevant topics for categorization could yield different results depending on the person carrying out the analysis. In this case, I am solely responsible for the entire analysis, which ensures a certain consistency but also means that a certain bias may be involved. Furthermore, there is always a risk for inconsistencies in the coding of responses due to human error. While these factors can never be fully eliminated, the coding has been double-checked to prevent mistakes.

For the purpose of comparison between different groups of respondents, the participants of the study were divided into groups based on the educational level of the schools they were teaching at (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary) and the language of instruction in these schools (Finnish, Swedish). As mentioned previously, the groups ended up being rather different in size, with an overrepresentation of primary school teachers, especially from Swedish-language schools. This happened despite the fact that efforts were made to recruit respondents from all levels and languages during the process of data collection.

Because of this, the general results can be interpreted as somewhat skewed towards the preferences of the larger groups. For example, in question 6b, the majority of teachers seemed to think that 50% of classroom time should be used for speaking, but a look at the different groups showed that this trend was mostly based on the responses of primary school teachers. Similarly, the groups with more respondents may consequently be represented to a greater degree in the answers to open-ended questions. To counteract this issue, efforts were made during the process of analysis to identify any obvious differences between groups. If certain topics were only mentioned by teachers from a certain group, it has also been indicated in the report of the results.

Since the study is relatively small, with a total of only 64 respondents, it is not possible to claim that the results are representative of all teachers in the target group. This becomes even more problematic when the respondents are divided into smaller groups, where (for instance) only 13 upper secondary school teachers are represented. Again, it is important to remember that the purpose of the study was to gain a first overview of the topic. The results should not be interpreted as any kind of absolute truth, but rather as a first indication of what the teaching and assessment of speaking skills looks like in *some* Finnish EFL classrooms.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to gain a preliminary overview of Finnish teachers' views on speaking skills in the teaching and assessment of English as a foreign language, and their methods for promoting speaking in the classroom. This was investigated through an online questionnaire sent out to teachers at different educational levels from two bilingual regions in Finland. The survey included a variety of questions on topics brought up in the research questions: the perceived importance of speaking skills in language teaching, the amount of time used for speaking activities, ways of encouraging speaking, the use of the target language versus the first language in the classroom, and methods for assessing speaking.

The results of the study demonstrate that although teachers consider speaking skills important, they are practised and assessed in widely different ways. The amount of time used for practising speaking varies, and classroom practices are affected by various factors, some of which are beyond the teachers' control, and others which seem related to the different educational levels and language backgrounds of the students. For instance, teachers often feel restricted by a combination of a demanding curriculum and a lack of time, to the point where half of them think their students do not get enough practice in speaking. This is true for all educational levels, although upper secondary school teachers seem to feel particular pressure relating to the matriculation exam, feeling obliged to prepare the students for this high-stakes test which does not test speaking skills. In lower secondary schools, on the other hand, teachers instead mention student-related issues affecting the extent of speaking in the classroom. These issues include a general reluctance among some students to speak, as a consequence of either anxiety, lack of motivation, or general attitudes among the puberty-entering age group.

Teachers use a variety of methods to encourage their students to speak English. Some focus on providing their students with extensive opportunities to practise, while others find it more important to create a supportive and non-threatening environment. Several teachers also hope that their own continuous use of the target language will have an encouraging effect on the students. Many of them maintain a policy where the target language is expected to be used as much as possible in the classroom, asking students to answer questions in English and translate utterances in other languages into English.

According to the teachers' estimations, their students end up using the target language (as opposed to their first language) about half of the time in the classroom, on average. Meanwhile, the majority of the teachers themselves use English at least 75% of the time. However, both teachers and students from Swedish-language schools use English considerably more often than their colleagues and peers in Finnish-language schools. Furthermore, teachers use the target language more often at higher educational levels.

Assessment of speaking seems to be a somewhat divisive topic: some teachers think that speaking skills should be assessed just like all other aspects of language learning, while others perceive assessment as unnecessary and distracting and would rather focus on encouraging the process of speaking instead of evaluating the results. Most teachers still engage in assessment of speaking to some extent, but not necessarily in an explicit, organised fashion: many simply conduct classroom observations and incorporate their view of students' speaking skills into their final grade. Separate speaking exams are used by less than half of the teachers, although they are considerably more common in Finnish-language schools than in Swedish-language schools. Generally, teachers seem to agree that comprehensibility and communication skills are more important in student speech than accuracy of pronunciation or grammar. When specifically asked about pronunciation standards, however, half of the teachers wanted their students to aim for native-like accents while the other half maintained that comprehensibility was the most important factor.

This study is obviously only scratching the surface of teachers' opinions and practices, and because of the rather small sample size, the results are not necessarily generalizable to the overall target group. However, due to the relative lack of previous research on the topic, the study can still serve as a first indication of the role of speaking skills in EFL classrooms in Finland and as a basis for future studies. Further research could attempt to reach a larger number of respondents with varied amounts of teaching experience from various educational levels and different language environments. Improved questionnaires on the topic could be constructed to collect a larger amount of data, enabling more reliable analysis and providing a more nuanced picture of similarities and differences between groups. On the other hand, various aspects could be explored in more detail by using more qualitative methods, such as interviews and classroom observations.

The results of the present study, while providing some important insights into the respondents' opinions and practices, still raise various questions about the reasons *why* teachers choose certain methods for encouraging, practising, and assessing speaking. In future studies, teachers could be asked about the extent to which various methodological frameworks and theories of language learning influence the way they approach speaking skills in the classroom. They could also be asked about their methods for explicitly *teaching* speaking, rather than just practising it, and about their ways of taking into account typical features of spoken language and various genres of speaking in their teaching.

Several aspects brought up by the respondents in the present study are also worth investigating further, such as the impact of various external factors on their teaching. These ranged from formal requirements beyond the teachers' control (such as the demands of the curriculum) to cultural aspects (such as the lack of a "speaking culture") to issues of student anxiety and motivation. Not all teachers mentioned these issues, but they were also not explicitly prompted to discuss them. Future studies could investigate to what extent these factors impact the role of speaking in classrooms on a larger scale, and what could be done to overcome or at least mitigate the problems they cause.

Svensk sammanfattning – Swedish summary

Det talade språkets roll i undervisningen i engelska som främmande språk i Finland: en undersökning av lärares åsikter och metoder

Inledning

Då man lär sig ett främmande språk delas språkfärdigheten oftast in i fyra områden: läsande, skrivande, lyssnande och talande. Att kunna tala det främmande språket ses ofta som en av de mest centrala färdigheterna, men denna syn har inte alltid reflekterats i språkundervisningen som traditionellt sett har prioriterat det skrivna språket. Nuförtiden fokuserar språkundervisningen i och för sig på att utveckla kommunikativa färdigheter, men exakt vilken roll det talade språket spelar i klassrummet är oklart. Det anses dessutom ofta svårt att lära ut och bedöma muntliga kunskaper eftersom talat språk är kognitivt krävande att producera och inte styrs av lika tydliga regler som skrivet språk.

Den finska läroplanen betonar att undervisningen i främmande språk ska utveckla elevernas kommunikativa kompetens samt deras förmåga att både lyssna, tala, läsa och skriva (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014a: 221-222), men det ges inga noggrannare kriterier för hur det talade språket ska undervisas eller bedömas. Det enda nationella provet i det finländska skolsystemet är studentexamen, vars prov i engelska tillsvidare inte innehåller någon muntlig komponent. I praktiken är det alltså individuella lärares val som avgör i vilken utsträckning talat språk undervisas och bedöms i de finländska klassrummen. Det verkar dock finnas en brist på forskning om detta, vilket är anledningen till att jag har valt att undersöka det talade språkets roll i undervisningen i engelska som främmande språk i Finland.

Målet med studien är att få en preliminär översikt över lärares åsikter och metoder med hjälp av en online-enkät som skickats ut till engelsklärare i både finsk- och svenskspråkiga skolor på olika skolstadier. Mina forskningsfrågor är följande:

- i) Hur viktiga anses muntliga kunskaper vara i undervisningen i engelska som främmande språk i Finland?

- ii) I vilken utsträckning används målspråket i klassrummet (i motsats till det vanliga undervisningsspråket, dvs. finska eller svenska)?
- iii) Hur uppmuntrar engelsklärare sina elever att tala engelska?
- iv) I vilken utsträckning, och hur, bedömer engelsklärare i Finland sina elevers muntliga kunskaper?
- v) Vilka skillnader finns i undervisningen och bedömningen av talat språk mellan
 - a. lärare i finskspråkiga skolor och svenskspråkiga skolor
 - b. lärare på olika skolstadier (lågstadier, högstadier, gymnasier)?

Bakgrund

Talat språk skiljer sig från skrivet språk på flera olika sätt. Till exempel är talat språk nära förankrat i situationen där det produceras: det uppstår oftast spontant och oplanerat i dialog med andra personer, det produceras under tidspress, och det har en temporär karaktär i och med att det sällan dokumenteras på samma sätt som skrivet språk (Goh & Burns 2012: 79). Detta leder till att talat språk har vissa lingvistiska särdrag (Luoma 2004: 12-18; Goh & Burns 2012: 84-94). Det består till exempel sällan av fullständiga komplexa meningar, utan snarare av korta satser som binds samman med hjälp av konjunktioner, och ordförrådet som används är inte lika varierat eller komplicerat som i skrivet språk. Det talade språkets drag kan dock förstås variera mellan olika talsituationer: språkbruket i formella situationer skiljer sig ofta från vardagligt informellt tal (Nation & Newton 2009: 120-122).

Muntlig produktion är en av de största utmaningarna för språkstudier, eftersom det kräver att ett flertal kognitiva processer pågår samtidigt under tidspress (Levelt 1989). Utöver den rent lingvistiska kompetensen, som behövs för att talaren ska hitta relevant vokabulär och korrekta grammatiska strukturer för att uttrycka sitt budskap, så inkluderar den kommunikativa kompetensen också en förmåga att anpassa sitt språkbruk till vad som är lämpligt i den sociala kontexten (Canale & Swain 1980: 29-30). Även modersmålstalare gör ofta fel i muntlig produktion på grund av tidspressen och talets spontana karaktär (Luoma 2004: 19). Detta bör tas i beaktande i bedömningen av talat språk i klassrummet: det är inte realistiskt att en studerande ska klara av felfri språkproduktion, då misstag sker även i alldeles normalt tal (Luoma 2004: 19). De olika särdragen för talat språk som nämndes ovan bör också tas i beaktande i undervisning och bedömning.

Individuella studerande har olika förutsättningar för språkinläring. En av de viktigaste variablerna som påverkar studerandes resultat överlag är åldern då de börjar lära sig det främmande språket: unga hjärnor har högre plasticitet vilket underlättar inläringen (Long 2013). Att möta språket tidigt i livet verkar vara speciellt viktigt för uttalet, eftersom ett modersmålsliknande uttal sällan uppnås om man inte har börjat lära sig språket mycket tidigt. Detta bör betonas i undervisningen, så att studerande inte sätter upp orealistiska mål och misslyckas med att uppnå dem. Det traditionella modersmålsliknande idealet har också kritiserats av andra orsaker. Eftersom språk är nära kopplat till identitet vill studerande inte nödvändigtvis låta som infödda talare överhuvudtaget, och därtill är de infödda talarna av engelska nu färre än dem som talar engelska som främmande språk (Lintunen 2014: 170). Det är värt att undersöka till vilken grad lärare tar dessa aspekter i beaktande i undervisning och bedömning.

Elevers inläring av främmande språk kan också underlättas tack vare deras tidigare språkkunskaper. Detta fenomen kallas tvärlingvistisk influens och har undersökts mycket i Finland på grund av de två inhemska språkens relativa olikheter (Ringbom 2007). Studier har påvisat att svenskspråkiga elever uppnår bättre resultat i engelska än sina finskspråkiga jämnåriga tack vare det nära släktskapet mellan det svenska och det engelska språket. Svenskspråkiga elever har också visat sig vara mer villiga än finskspråkiga att använda det engelska språket muntligt. På grund av detta är det intressant att undersöka huruvida det finns skillnader mellan språkgrupperna i fråga om det talade språkets roll i undervisningen i engelska.

En ytterligare faktor som påverkar inläring, och som är mer föränderlig än de tidigare nämnda faktorerna, är motivation. Motivation kan påverkas av många olika variabler, men har bland annat ett starkt samband med självförtroende och graden av ångest inför språkproduktion (Dörnyei 1994: 276-277). Just ångest har studerats utförligt inom ramen för språkinläring, och tycks påverka eleverna speciellt mycket då det gäller att tala det främmande språket. Ångesten uppstår ofta som en följd av en rädsla för att göra misstag och bli negativt bedömd av andra, och kan leda till att elever helt slutar delta i muntlig produktion (Goh & Burns 2012: 26-28). Lärare kan åtgärda detta genom att skapa en stödjande inlärmingsmiljö, verka för sammanhållning i gruppen och hjälpa sina elever sätta realistiska mål (Dörnyei 1994: 280-282).

Hur exakt lärare lär ut och bedömer talat språk är som sagt oklart. Diverse teorier och metoder för språkinläring har varit populära under olika tidsperioder, och det talade språkets roll i undervisningen har varierat (Järvinen 2014b, Bygate 2002). Under en lång tid baserades undervisningen endast på det skrivna språket och tog främst grammatik och översättning i beaktande. Då det talade språket väl började användas i undervisningen var det först i form av att lära sig grammatiskt korrekta fraser utantill, innan det mer kommunikativa synsättet introducerades på 1970-talet. Kumaravadivelu (2003) påpekar dock att lärare alltid har funnit det svårt att anpassa sin undervisning efter specifika teorier eller metoder, och att de numera ofta skapar sin egen teori baserat på sina praktiska omständigheter (*theory of practice*). Den föreliggande studien utgick inte heller från att någon särskild språkinläringsteori eller -metod används, utan lät snarare lärarna fritt beskriva sitt förhållningssätt till muntliga kunskaper och deras roll i klassrummet.

Metod och material

Studien genomfördes med hjälp av en online-enkät (se bilaga 1) som konstruerades på basen av studiens forskningsfrågor och skickades ut till engelsklärare via e-post. Jag valde att använda en enkät eftersom syftet med studien krävde att material samlades in från ett flertal lärare: målet var att få en överblick över det talade språkets roll i undervisningen på en större skala, samt att kunna jämföra svaren som gavs av lärare på olika skolstadier samt av lärare med olika skolspråk. Enkäten genomgick två rundor av pilottestning innan datainsamlingen påbörjades. Det slutliga frågeformuläret innehöll en blandning av flervalsfrågor och öppna frågor, totalt 21 stycken, samt ett antal rutor för fria kommentarer.

Eftersom jag ville inkludera lärare från både svensk- och finskspråkiga skolor i min undersökning valde jag att skicka enkäten till lärare i två tvåspråkiga regioner: Nyland och Österbotten. Genom att gå igenom kommunernas hemsidor i vardera regionen hittades skolornas hemsidor och därigenom kontaktuppgifterna till engelsklärarna. Vissa skolor, speciellt svenskspråkiga lågstadier, saknade kontaktuppgifter till engelsklärarna, så jag valde att istället kontakta rektorerna i dessa skolor och be dem att skicka enkäten vidare. Totalt hittades kontaktuppgifter till 1137 lärare, och enkäten skickades slutligen till 510 av dem. Mottagarna valdes slumpmässigt från listan, dock med hänsyn till skolstadierna och skolornas språk för att åstadkomma så jämna informantgrupper som möjligt. Enkäten fick

slutligen 64 svar, vilket innebär en svarsprocent på 12,5%. Detta var under förväntan, men ansågs tillräckligt för att kunna utläsa någon form av trender i materialet.

Svaren på enkäten analyserades både kvantitativt och kvalitativt. Den kvantitativa analysen av flervalsfrågorna utfördes delvis i IBM SPSS Statistics 24 med hjälp av Mann-Whitney U-testet, som kan identifiera statistiskt signifikanta skillnader mellan olika grupper i materialet (Brace, Kemp & Snelgar 2003: 71-72). För flervalsfrågor som inte uppfyllde kraven för Mann-Whitney-testet (till exempel frågor där det endast fanns två svarsalternativ) användes enklare uträkningar av hur många procent av informanterna i en viss grupp som valde ett visst svar. Procentandelarna kunde sedan jämföras för att se eventuella skillnader mellan grupperna.

De öppna frågorna analyserades kvalitativt, en fråga åt gången. Alla svar lästes igenom flera gånger för att identifiera vanligt förekommande teman, varefter varje svar kortades ner till ett antal nyckelord. Alla nyckelord som förekom i en fråga grupperades sedan ihop till en slutlig lista över kategorier, och dessa kategorier infördes i en Excel-fil där varje informants svar kodades baserat på vilka teman som förekom i svaret. På detta sätt kunde även svaren på de öppna frågorna kvantifieras till en viss grad, med hjälp av uträkningar av hur många procent av informanterna i olika grupper som nämnde vissa teman. Denna information kompletterades sedan med individuella lärares kommentarer som mer detaljerat belyste tankarna bakom olika svar.

Resultat och diskussion

Bland de 64 informanterna som slutligen besvarade enkäten fanns 30 lågstadielärare, 20 högstadielärare och 13 gymnasielärare. 37 av lärarna kom från svenskspråkiga skolor, medan 27 av dem kom från finskspråkiga skolor. Alla utom en informant hade någon form av lärarbehörighet. 56 informanter var kvinnor, sju var män, och en person ville inte delge sitt kön. Informanterna hade i medeltal jobbat som lärare i 15 år.

Baserat på enkäten verkar det som att de flesta lärare anser att muntliga kunskaper i engelska är väldigt viktiga. Mängden tid som används till att öva på talat språk varierar dock, och många lärare upplever att de inte hinner prioritera muntliga kunskaper så mycket som de skulle vilja. När de tillfrågades om andelen lektionstid som i genomsnitt används för muntliga övningar svarade nästan hälften av lärarna 21-40%, medan en tredjedel

svarade 41-60%. Några lärare använder så mycket som 61-80% av tiden för muntliga övningar, medan ett fåtal endast använder 20% eller mindre. Andelen tid som används för muntliga övningar tycks vara något mindre på de högre skolstadierna, men skillnaderna var inte statistiskt signifikanta.

På frågan om huruvida deras studerande får öva tillräckligt på att tala engelska svarade 53% av lärarna nej, och andelen var ännu större i högstadiet (65%) och gymnasiet (62%). De två vanligaste orsakerna som angavs var en krävande läroplan och tidsbrist. Läroplanen nämndes oftare av lärare från högre skolstadier, och gymnasielärare nämnde även studentexamen, som verkar ha en märkbar effekt på undervisningen. Lärarna upplever att det är deras plikt att förbereda sina studerande för studentprovet och fokuserar därför undervisningen på de språkfärdigheter som ingår i provet. Detta kan relateras till den så kallade washback-effekten, enligt vilken prov påverkar undervisning och inläring (Nation & Newton 2009: 169). Det planerade införandet av en muntlig del i studentprovet i främmande språk (se Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet 2017) verkar väsentligt för att talad engelska ska få mer utrymme i undervisningen på gymnasienivå.

Trots att muntliga övningar inte alltid kan prioriteras i undervisningen så använder lärare i allmänhet målspråket ofta. Två tredjedelar av informanterna svarade att de talar engelska minst 75% av lektionstiden, medan en ytterligare fjärdedel svarade att de talar engelska ungefär hälften av tiden. Eleverna själva använder oftast målspråket ungefär 50% av tiden i klassrummet, enligt lärarnas uppskattning.

Några statistiskt signifikanta skillnader i målspråksanvändning kunde identifieras i materialet. Lärare i gymnasier använder till exempel engelska betydligt oftare än lärare i lågstadier. Detta var väntat, med tanke på att elevernas språkkunskaper i gymnasiet är på en betydligt mer avancerad nivå, som lärarna troligtvis anpassar sitt språkbruk till. Därtill fanns statistiskt signifikanta skillnader mellan språkgrupperna: både lärare och elever i svenskspråkiga skolor använder målspråket betydligt oftare än deras kollegor och jämnåriga i finskspråkiga skolor. Detta resultat är inte heller förvånande med tanke på tidigare forskning om tvärlingvistisk influens (Ringbom 2007): svenskspråkiga har lättare för att lära sig engelska, och ju mer engelska eleverna kan, desto villigare är de antagligen att använda språket. Lärarna i sin tur anpassar troligtvis sin målspråksanvändning efter elevernas kunskapsnivå.

Frågan om hur informanterna uppmuntrar sina elever till att tala engelska fick varierande svar: vissa lärare fokuserar på att ge eleverna gott om möjligheter att öva genom att erbjuda en omfattande mängd varierande uppgifter, medan andra prioriterar att skapa en trygg och bekväm arbetsmiljö där eleverna tillåts göra misstag. Det senare alternativet är ett viktigt steg i processen att minska elevers ångest för att tala målspråket (Dörnyei 1994: 280-282), vilket var ett problem som togs upp flera gånger i lärarnas enkätsvar. Speciellt högstadielärare nämnde att vissa av deras elever inte vill uttrycka sig muntligt i klassrummet. Eftersom enkäten inte innehöll någon direkt fråga om ångest behövs dock mer forskning för att kartlägga hur utbrett detta problem är.

Frågan om hur viktigt det är att bedöma elevernas talade språk delade informanterna: vissa lärare påpekade att muntliga kunskaper är lika viktiga som andra delområden av språkfärdighet och bör därför bedömas på samma sätt, medan andra lärare hellre skulle satsa på att uppmuntra till pratande istället för att utvärdera resultatet. Vissa informanter i den senare gruppen verkade dock ha en något begränsad bild av vad bedömning innebär: de verkade tycka att bedömning fokuserar för mycket på språkets korrekthet utan att ta hänsyn till det kommunikativa målet, och uttryckte en rädsla för att negativ feedback skulle avskräcka elever från att prata överhuvudtaget. Dessa problem skulle troligtvis kunna åtgärdas genom att skapa realistiska bedömningskriterier och ge feedback på ett uppmuntrande sätt (Luoma 2004).

De flesta av informanterna bedömer ändå talat språk i någon mån, även om den mest frekventa metoden (som används av 86% av informanterna) är att iaktta studerandes kunskaper under normal lektionstid. Detta kan ses som en något oorganiserad metod, och det är viktigt att se till att alla elever får en rättvis chans att visa vad de kan. Presentationer används också av relativt många informanter (63%) för att utvärdera muntliga kunskaper, vilket är intressant eftersom det monologiska och relativt formella språket i presentationer skiljer sig från språket i de flesta vardagliga kommunikationssituationer. Muntliga prov används av färre än hälften av lärarna överlag, men är mycket vanligare i finskspråkiga skolor (74%) än i svenskspråkiga skolor (30%). Anledningarna bakom informanternas val av bedömningsmetoder kom inte fram i den här undersökningen, men skulle med fördel kunna undersökas noggrannare i framtiden.

Angående bedömningskriterier för talat språk ansåg informanterna överlag att det är viktigare att studerandenas budskap kommer fram tydligt och begripligt än att det förmedlas med korrekt uttal och grammatik. Då de tillfrågades om hur de bedömer uttal bildades dock två tydliga grupper bland lärarna: de som fortfarande betonade att det ideala uttalet ska vara förståeligt, och de som ville att studerandena skulle sträva efter en accent som liknar en modersmålstalares uttal. Det är intressant att det infödda idealet fortfarande förekom bland nästan hälften av lärarna som svarade på frågan, eftersom det som sagt numera anses något förlegat.

Slutsats

Den föreliggande studien skrapar endast på ytan av lärarnas åsikter och metoder om det talade språkets roll i undervisningen, och resultaten kan inte nödvändigtvis generaliseras eftersom antalet informanter var relativt litet. Eftersom det inte finns någon omfattande forskning om ämnet från tidigare kan studien ändå bidra med en preliminär överblick över ämnet och fungera som en grund för framtida studier. Resultaten antyder att lärarna som deltog i undersökningen har reflekterat aktivt över vikten av muntliga kunskaper, men att de är tvungna att utforma sin undervisning inom ramen för vissa praktiska begränsningar. Framtida studier kunde undersöka vad som kunde göras för att förmildra dessa problem och göra det möjligt för lärare att fokusera mer på muntliga kunskaper i undervisningen. På gymnasienivå verkar det som att införandet av en muntlig komponent i studentexamen skulle uppmuntra till mer fokus på talat språk i både undervisning och bedömning.

Beträffande bedömningen av muntliga kunskaper i finländska klassrum behövs mer forskning för att urskilja trender samt för att ta reda på varför lärare använder vissa metoder. Det verkar även som att lärare kunde dra nytta av mer medvetenhet om vissa aspekter inom bedömning, som till exempel vikten av att anpassa bedömningskriterierna till det talade språkets egenheter och problemen med det traditionella infödda idealet när det gäller uttal. Framtida forskning kunde utföras med hjälp av förbättrade enkäter som kunde samla in data på en större skala, men mer kvalitativa studier baserade på intervjuer eller observationer av undervisning vore också värdefulla för att fördjupa förståelsen av lärares åsikter och metodval.

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Appendix 1: The questionnaire

Teaching and assessment of speaking skills questionnaire

This questionnaire is for teachers of English at all stages of education in Finland. It investigates the teaching and assessment of students' speaking skills.

The questionnaire has five parts, each consisting of a number of questions, either multiple-choice or open-ended. In order for your answers to be registered, you need to fill out all parts. At the end of each part, there is a comment section where you can clarify any of your answers if needed. Feel free to answer any of the open-ended questions in Swedish or Finnish if you find it easier to express yourself in those languages. The questionnaire takes about 15-20 minutes to complete. Please complete the questionnaire on the 5th of February 2017 at the latest.

The results of this questionnaire will be used in my MA thesis investigating teaching and assessment of English speaking skills in Finland. Your answers will be treated with confidentiality and they will only be used for research purposes. It will not be possible to identify individual informants in the report of the results.

If you agree to submit your e-mail address at the end of the form, it will only be used by me to contact you with potential follow-up questions (if you agree to it), and to send you a summary of the results (if you request one). Your e-mail address will not be shared with anyone else.

Should you have any questions regarding the survey, do not hesitate to contact me at the e-mail address below.

Felicia Järnström

*MA student of English Language and Literature at Åbo Akademi University
[e-mail address]*

Speaking English in the classroom

1. On what level of education are you currently teaching? (If you teach on more than one level, please select the level on which you teach the most, and answer the rest of the questionnaire with this level in mind.)

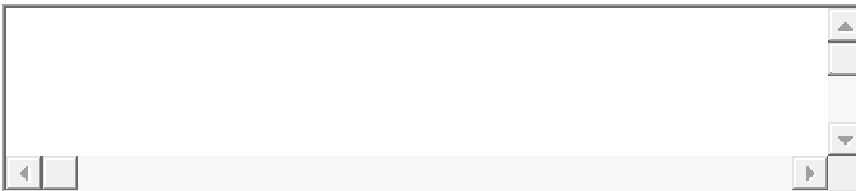
- ☐ Primary school (lågstadiet/ala-aste/grades 1-6)
- ☐ Lower secondary school (högstadiet/yläaste/grades 7-9)
- ☐ Upper secondary school (gymnasiet/lukio)
- ☐ Upper secondary vocational school (yrkesutbildning/ammattikoulu)
- ☐ Higher education (universitet/yliopisto, yrkeshögskola/ammattikorkeakoulu)
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify:

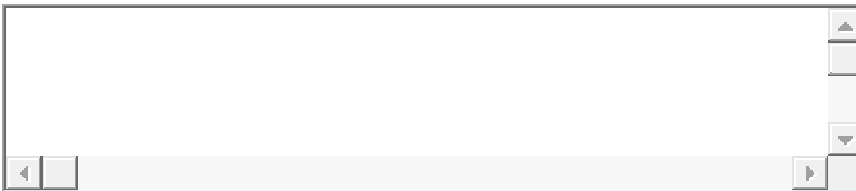
2. When you (the teacher) speak in the classroom, how often do you use English? (As opposed to Swedish/Finnish)

- ☐ I always or almost always use English (more than 90% of the time)
- ☐ I use English most of the time (about 75% of the time)
- ☐ I use English about half of the time (about 50% of the time)
- ☐ I use English less often (about 25% of the time)
- ☐ I rarely use English (less than 10% of the time)

3a. Are there any specific situations or parts of lessons where you always use English? Why?



3b. Are there any specific situations or parts of lessons where you usually use the school's language of instruction (Swedish/Finnish) instead? Why?



4. How do you encourage your students to speak English in the classroom?



5. When your students speak in the classroom, how often do they use English? (As opposed to Swedish/Finnish)

- ☐ They always or almost always use English (more than 90% of the time)
- ☐ They use English most of the time (about 75% of the time)
- ☐ They use English about half of the time (about 50% of the time)
- ☐ They use English less often (about 25% of the time)
- ☐ They rarely use English (less than 10% of the time)

Further comments and explanations: (If your comment refers to a certain question, please write the question number before your comment.)

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Learning to speak English

Classes in foreign language learning can usually be divided into parts of reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary learning and grammar learning.

6a. In your opinion, how important is it to teach speaking (in comparison with the other parts)?

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6b. How much classroom time, overall, do you think should be devoted to practising speaking?

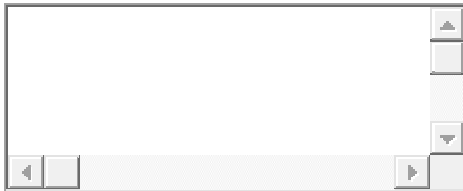
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7. Which of the following tasks do you use in the English classroom? Select the 1-5 activities that you use most often.

- ☐ Students practise pronouncing individual words or sentences
- ☐ Students read texts aloud
- ☐ Students do choral repetition of sentences or sing English songs
- ☐ Written exercises are checked orally (e.g. answering questions on a text)
- ☐ The teacher asks questions on a topic to the whole class and students take turns answering
- ☐ Students interview one another (based on prompts/questions given by the teacher/the book)
- ☐ Students explain words or describe pictures to each other
- ☐ Students create or retell stories based on pictures or cards
- ☐ Students give instructions to each other (how to draw something or how to find their way somewhere)

- ☐ Communication games/problem solving tasks
- ☐ Students practise dialogues/role play in certain situations (e.g. buying tickets, going to the restaurant)
- ☐ Students act out dramas/improvisations
- ☐ Spontaneous discussions or brainstorming, where students talk based on prompts/questions given by the teacher/the book
- ☐ Prepared discussions/debates, where students take a stand on a topic and present arguments
- ☐ Prepared presentations in front of the whole class
- ☐ Prepared presentations in small groups
- ☐ Other

If other, please specify:



8. How much classroom time in English, on average, is devoted to tasks where students get to practise speaking?

- ☐ 0-20%
- ☐ 21-40%
- ☐ 41-60%
- ☐ 61-80%
- ☐ 81-100%

9a. In your opinion, do students get enough practice in speaking during lessons?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9b. If no, what are the reasons they do not get to practise it more?

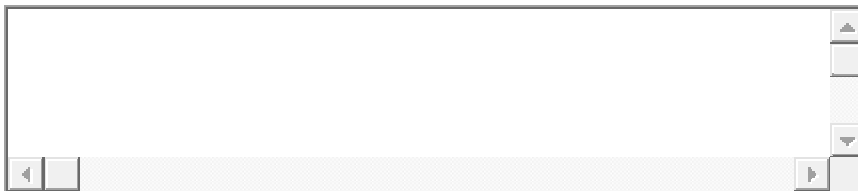


Further comments and explanations: (If your comment refers to a certain question, please write the question number before your comment.)

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Assessing students' speaking skills in English

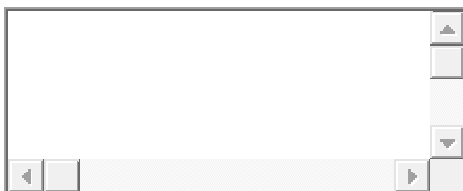
10. In your opinion, how important is it to assess students' speaking skills? Why?

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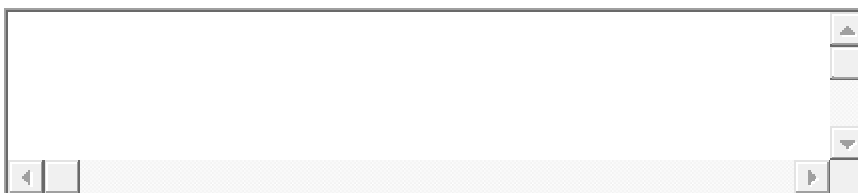
11a. When you assess students' speaking skills, what do you base it on?

- ☐ Speaking exams
- ☐ Recordings of students performing tasks in class
- ☐ Student presentations
- ☐ Observing tasks in class
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I do not assess students' speaking skills

If other, please specify:

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11b. If your methods of assessment vary considerably between courses or groups, please specify:

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12. If you use speaking exams, or have students record themselves in class, what kinds of tasks are used?

13. When assessing students' speaking skills, what exactly are you assessing? Rate how important the different parts are for the overall grade.

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important	I do not assess students' speaking skills
Pronunciation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grammar	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fluency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comprehensibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (if you don't have anything to add, select "Not important")	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please specify:

14. If you assess pronunciation, what standard do you measure it against (i.e. what do you want your students' pronunciation to be like)?

15. How do you give feedback on your students' speaking skills?

- ☐ Assessment of the students' speaking skills is incorporated into their final grade
- ☐ The students get a separate grade for their speaking skills
- ☐ I give short verbal feedback on the students' speaking skills (e.g. OK/Good/Excellent)
- ☐ I give longer verbal feedback on the students' speaking skills (strengths and weaknesses)
- ☐ Other
- ☐ I do not assess students' speaking skills

If other, please specify:

Further comments and explanations: (If your comment refers to a certain question, please write the question number before your comment.)

Background information

16. Are you a qualified teacher (i.e. do you have the degree required to be permanently hired as a teacher)?

- ☐ Yes, I am a qualified foreign language teacher
- ☐ Yes, I am a qualified teacher, but not of foreign languages
- ☐ No, I am not yet a qualified teacher, but I am studying towards a relevant degree
- ☐ No, I am not a qualified teacher

17. If you are a qualified teacher, in what country did you receive your education in teaching?

18. What is the language of instruction in your school?

- ☐ Swedish
☐ Finnish
☐ Other

If other, please specify:

19. If you teach any other languages (or any other subjects) than English, please mention which ones.

20. Gender

- ☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ I do not want to specify

21. For how many years, in total, have you been working as a teacher?

Further comments and explanations: (If your comment refers to a certain question, please write the question number before your comment.)

Additional information

Thank you so much for assisting me in my research. In order to submit your answers, please go to the next page and press "Finish".

Your answers will be used in my master's thesis investigating the teaching and assessment of students' speaking skills in Finnish schools. If you would like to receive a summary of the results once the research is finished, you have the possibility to submit your e-mail address below. Also, please let me know if it is okay for me to contact you with potential follow-up questions to the survey.

Your e-mail address will remain strictly confidential and only be used by me for research purposes.

E-mail address (optional)

- ☐ I would like to receive a summary of the survey results once the research is finished
- ☐ I agree that the researcher may contact me with potential follow-up questions to the survey

If you have any additional comments on the survey, feel free to write them here:



THANK YOU for your participation!

Felicia Järnström
MA student of English Language and Literature at Åbo Akademi University
[e-mail address]

Appendix 2: The e-mail to the English teachers

Hello,

I am writing to you because you are working as an English teacher in [municipality], according to the municipality's website. If you aren't, I'm sorry for disturbing you and you may ignore this e-mail.

My name is Felicia Järnström and I am an MA student of English language and literature at Åbo Akademi University. For my master's thesis, I am investigating the teaching and assessment of English speaking skills in Finnish schools. I am hereby inviting you to assist me in my research by completing a questionnaire on this topic.

The questionnaire asks you about your methods of teaching and assessing students' speaking skills in English. It doesn't matter whether speaking is something you emphasize in your teaching or not. All answers are equally important, interesting, and beneficial for my study! Your answers are also, of course, completely confidential. If you want to receive a summary of the results once the research is finished, you can submit your e-mail address at the end of the form.

I hope you have the time to participate in my study and help me with my research. The questionnaire takes about 15-20 minutes to complete, and it should be completed on [date] at the latest. If you have any questions about the survey, do not hesitate to contact me at the e-mail address below.

The survey can be found here: [link]

Thank you very much for your participation!

Best wishes,

Felicia Järnström

MA student of English Language and Literature at Åbo Akademi University

[e-mail address]

Appendix 3: The e-mail to the head teachers

Hej!

Jag skriver till dig eftersom du är rektor för några skolor i [kommun], enligt kommunens hemsidor. Om jag har hittat fel mejladress så ber jag om ursäkt och du kan ignorera detta meddelande!

Jag heter Felicia Järnström och studerar engelska på lärarlinjen vid Åbo Akademi. För min pro gradu-avhandling undersöker jag undervisning och bedömning av talad engelska i finländska skolor, med hjälp av en enkät som jag har utvecklat. Jag skulle uppskatta det väldigt mycket om du kunde vidarebefordra meddelandet nedan (som innehåller en länk till den elektroniska enkäten) till engelskaläraren/-lärarna i din skola/dina skolor! Varje svar jag kan få är intressant och nyttigt för min studie.

Tack så mycket på förhand!

Med vänliga hälsningar

Felicia Järnström

Studerande vid Engelska språket och litteraturen, Åbo Akademi
[e-mail address]

*

Hello,

My name is Felicia Järnström and I am an MA student of English language and literature at Åbo Akademi University. For my master's thesis, I am investigating the teaching and assessment of English speaking skills in Finnish schools. I am hereby inviting you to assist me in my research by completing a questionnaire on this topic.

The questionnaire asks you about your methods of teaching and assessing students' speaking skills in English. It doesn't matter whether speaking is something you emphasize in your teaching or not. All answers are equally important, interesting, and beneficial for my study! Your answers are also, of course, completely confidential. If you want to receive a summary of the results once the research is finished, you can submit your e-mail address at the end of the form.

I hope you have the time to participate in my study and help me with my research. The questionnaire takes about 15-20 minutes to complete, and should be completed on [date] at the latest. If you have any questions about the survey, do not hesitate to contact me at the e-mail address below.

The survey can be found here: [link]

Thank you very much for your participation!

Best wishes,

Felicia Järnström

MA student of English Language and Literature at Åbo Akademi University

[e-mail address]