Teaching varieties of English and English as a lingua franca in upper secondary school

University of Helsinki
Department of Applied Sciences of Education
Subject teacher education
A pedagogical product as part of the seminar
Teacher as a Researcher

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16 May 2015

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1. Introduction

This study concerns the issue of varieties of English and English as a lingua franca (ELF), and, more specifically, how these could be taught in Finnish upper secondary school. Two facts of the present day seem contradicting: on the one hand, English is spreading across the globe with a speed and scope unprecedented by any language before, and on the other hand, students in Finnish basic and secondary education still study English as if it were spoken by native British and American speakers only. Almost a decade ago David Crystal stated that the number of first (L1) and second (L2) speakers of English were at that time the same, but due to the higher growth rate in countries with L2 speakers there may be 50% more L2 than L1 speakers in a couple of decades (Crystal 2007, 141). Thus, in order to prepare the students in upper secondary school for communicating in English with interlocutors of linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds I here present an outline for a course in upper secondary school focusing on varieties of English as well as ELF.

The need for such a course is evident also because of the conflict both teachers and students seem to experience when it comes to the emphasis of, on the one hand, native speech norm dependency, and, on the other hand, efficient communication over native-like speech (Ranta, 2010; Nylund, 2014). However, the teaching material provides few opportunities to familiarize the students with different accents, native or non-native, since the audio material consists predominantly of British Received Pronunciation, or RP (Kopperoinen 2011). In my own experience, after discussing with editors at major Finnish textbook publishers such as Sanoma Pro and Schildts & Söderströms, there is a growing awareness of the need to expand the skills when it comes to varieties of English, but when, and if, the textbook companies translate that awareness into practice is still to be seen.

Meanwhile, the English speakers, who the students will encounter in their lives are in many cases or perhaps even in most, neither native speakers nor American. This issue is highly topical not only in real-life situations, but also in education. In 2014, The Matriculation Examination Board gave a first indication of adjusting the tests in the direction of including also non-native speech. The listening comprehension test took a, to many, surprising turn when one of the voices in the test belonged to a speaker with a clearly non-native (French) accent. This stirred criticism

from students, who found the accent hard to understand (Helsingin Sanomat 22.11 2014, Hufvudstadsbladet 8.9 2014). Given the present situation, I find it interesting as well as important to design a pedagogical product that prepare the students in Finnish upper secondary school to best meet the demands of the heterogeneous world of English.

2. Theoretical framework and previous studies

2.1. Varieties of English and English as a lingua franca

In Finnish schools, English has the unquestionable status of being *the* foreign language everyone has to learn. There is good reason for that: Never before has a language spread so fast and so widely as English is doing today. The number of English second-language speakers is continuously growing, a fact that will inevitably affect the notion of ownership of English (Crystal 2007). In other words, English cannot be considered the property of the native-speakers anymore; the language is rapidly assuming the status that the constructed auxiliary language Esperanto never managed to achieve, that of a global lingua franca.

What is a lingua franca, then? I here leave the general concept of lingua franca aside and focus on the language of interest, English, or rather ELF. ELF is often regarded as a contact language between people who neither share a first language nor a culture, but it can also be defined by its function as a means of intercultural communication (Hülmbauer et al, 2008, p. 27). Accordingly, the effectiveness of ELF is to a great extent independent of native speaker norms. The nature of intercultural communication conducted in English is changing at the same rate as the number of speakers of English is growing worldwide. According to Graddol (2006), this makes the traditional division of English speakers into native speakers, second language speakers and foreign language speakers outdated. Instead, he points to the need of defining English speakers according to their level of proficiency rather than to whether they have learned English as their first, second or third language.

In the same vein, Jenkins (2006) points out that teachers and learners need to learn more about Englishes, intelligibility and identity, rather than focusing on a specific native variety of English, a change of viewpoint that could be considered a

logic consequence of the global nature of English. However, a major hindrance for taking a global stance to learning English is the washback effect, i.e. teachers teaching only what they know the learners need in order to pass national or international tests. As long as the test makers as well as the examination boards take the native speaker as the norm there will not be a change in this practice. The same holds true for teaching material as long as the textbook publishers do not recognize the need for a broader competence than the NS norm permits. International textbooks are often published by British publishers, but also in the case of nationally published teaching material there is an incline towards British speech. In another study Jenkins (2009) sees one of the reasons for the persistent global fascination with the British speech norm of RP in the fact that the variety is promoted as the "authentic" English in materials for learners.

2.2. Culture and language learning

Language and culture are by default intertwined, and thus, it is hardly possible to teach language completely out of a cultural context. However, the global use of English as a lingua franca places the language in a multitude of cultural contexts, and limiting the language to only certain nations or cultures is therefore problematic. Hence the scope of linguistic competence has to be broader than including only lexis, grammar and phonology. Baker (2012, p. 62-69) states that it also has to comprise an understanding of sociocultural contexts beyond native-speaker communities like those of United Kingdom or the United States. He advocates the significance of moving away from what he calls the "problem of naively associating the English language with a specific culture or nation". Instead, in order to teach successful communicative competence and prepare the learners for global communication, he emphasizes that an awareness of the multilingual and multicultural settings of English should be raised. Also Mauranen (2012, p. 239) recognizes the need for intercultural sensitivity and adaptation skills, and declares: "more often than not they [the adaptation skills] bear no reference to Anglo-American presuppositions".

3. The present situation

As for the teaching material today, Kopperoinen (2011) conducted a study in which she counted the share of non-native speech in audio material for two textbook series used in Finnish upper secondary schools. The results show that native speaker accents are represented almost exclusively. Out of between eight and nine hours of spoken material in the two series, non-native accents amount to three and one percent respectively. Kopperoinen states that this is not in line with the new status of English as a true world language, but that a change in the direction of more ELF voices in teaching material should start with the National Core Curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as well as among the ESL teachers (Kopperoinen 2011, p. 91).

The standpoint of the teachers is however not completely straightforward. Studies in Finnish upper secondary schools have shown that teachers show contradictory attitudes to native vs. non-native spoken language. Ranta (2004) found that although teachers were aware of ELF it did not translate into teaching practices. Also Majanen's (2008) study pointed in the same direction: the teachers were reluctant to integrate non-native accents in their teaching, although they approved of non-native accents in international communication. These results correlate with the results of my study (Nylund, 2014): the teachers seem to feel ambivalence between encouraging uninhibited and effective communication and advocating native speech norms. In conclusion, native speech norms still seem to hold an indisputable position in the Finnish classrooms even if they in practice hold a minority position in global communication.

4. Guidelines for teaching in upper secondary school

The National Core Curriculum is the primary instrument for providing guidelines for teaching as well as setting up learning goals for all upper secondary schools in Finland. Before considering how linguistic variety in the case of English is regarded in the core curriculum the CEFR can be briefly discussed. Being the prominent European guideline for a coherent and comparable establishment of levels of skills for language learners, CEFR has impact on language teaching in Finland. Here, the

guidelines are followed, for example, in the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (YKI) and at universities. The paramount idea of CEFR is to help learners identify their own position within different learning stages according to their abilities to use the language in question, i.e. it stands for a "can do" attitude rather than pointing out what the weaknesses of the learners are. The self-assessment grid presents criteria for listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing for each stage, and only in one instance can a reference to a native speaker be found. According to this particular criterion a learner at level B2 should be able to "interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible" (Council of Europe 2001, p. 26-27). However, taken from the learner's point of view, this can refer to the learner's need to be able to rapidly produce language in a fast-moving discourse rather than to requiring the learner to produce native-like speech.

The guidelines for basic and secondary education in Finland are given by the Finnish National Board of Education in the National Core Curriculum. The curriculum for both stages is at present being reformed, and the new versions will be effective as of 2016. Thus, in the current curriculum there is still no explicit stance on varieties of English and ELF in upper secondary school; the only statement that even comes close is the introduction to foreign language teaching in which it is stated that instruction should develop students' intercultural communication skills, and that achievement of these skills require diversified practice in communication (Finnish National Board of Education 2003, p. 108).

However, when turning to the new core curriculum for lower secondary school a notable change has taken place. Whereas the 2003 version uses wordings as "can interact regularly with native speakers without amusing or irritating them" when setting criteria for spoken skills, the new curriculum moves in quite different spheres. As for the areas of cultural variety and linguistic awareness one of the goals are to support the students' ability to reflect on the varieties of English and the status and values connected to them as well as provide possibilities for the students to develop their ability to interact in multicultural environments. Another goal is to encourage the students to take part of English material that broadens their view of the globalizing world and their place within it. Furthermore, the students should develop their understanding of multilinguism in the world, examine the development of English into a global lingua franca and look for information on the varieties of English. In the

area of linguistic understanding the content should be chosen bearing in mind the spread of English and its position as global means of communication (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2014, p. 400-402, my translation). Thus, the future students in upper secondary school will have studied English from a more pluralistic viewpoint than today.

There is also a draft version of the core curriculum for the upper secondary school available, even if it the content is still in progress. Given the fact that the curriculum for upper secondary school is always much less detailed than for lower secondary school there is still one change pointing towards a new stance on linguistic variety to be found also here. One of the learning goals for English as an A-level language is to develop as a citizen of a multicultural world, acting in local, national, European and international environments (Opetushallitus 2015, p. 117-119, my translation).

5. Implementation of a course for upper secondary school

5.1 General goals

Firstly, it is important to point out that the purpose of the course is not to teach the students to use any specific variety of English, including ELF. Quite on the contrary, the goal is to open up their senses to the multi-faceted creature English is.
Sung (2013, p. 351) points out that students, who are offered a range of varieties, may get confused as to which variety they should use. The goal for this course is not to cause confusion, but to promote acceptance of and a willingness to understand any variety or accent of English the students might encounter, and, at the same time, increase the students' confidence in their own, personal way of speaking English. There should not be a conflict between learning to speak English in a way that is widely understood by both ELF speakers and native speakers and keeping an open mind towards variety. The risk of confusing the students regarding what constitutes intelligible English is not likely to be very high considering the fact that this is a course in upper secondary school, where students mostly are quite accomplished speakers of English already.

Within the framework of the current curriculum the course could constitute course number 8, a specialization course named Globalisation and Internationalisation (ENA8). However, the draft of the new curriculum offers no such course, and course number 8 is here called Viesti ja vaikuta puhuen (Spoken communication and impact, my translation). The content of the course presented in this paper would easily meet the criteria of the new course 8 given that the focus lies on spoken communication, also for the part of the students, who are expected to actively participate in group and class discussions as well as give presentations. Preferably the course would also include discussions with class visitors and/or online chats with peers in another country.

5.2. Varieties of English

A way to start this course could be to make the students aware of their own preconceptions of what native speech is and is not. This could be done by letting them listen to a number of accents in an auditory blind study. The accents would include native speakers with accents likely to be familiar to the students, such as American or Australian, native speakers with accents perhaps not so familiar, such as Scottish, Caribbean or Indian, second-language speakers from areas essentially bi- or multilingual (English + other languages), like Singapore or Kenya, and a variety of non-native speakers with different first languages. The students' task would be to rank the accents according to certain criteria, for example status (native or non-native), agreeability, competence, credibility and social attractiveness. This task would provide an opportunity for the students to analyse their attitudes to different accents as well as for identifying and discussing reasons for stereotyping and for hosting positive and negative attitudes to certain accents. There is also a number of academic studies using this method, and some of these could provide interesting material to study in class.

There is no possibility to acquaint the students with a large number of varieties of English within the timeframes of a single course, and therefore a selection has to be made. What to be included in the course is up to the teacher and probably also dependent on the availability of appropriate material. It would however be important to include a number of accents of first and second language speakers found beyond the British Isles and in North America. Areas for exploration could include African

countries such as South Africa, Cameroon and Tanzania, and Asian countries such as Pakistan, Singapore and Burma, as well as Caribbean states and autonomous territories. Ideally, this could be realized through introductory classes followed by group work, in which the students explore the accents as well as the linguistic and cultural circumstances of each location, and also the historical facts that have affected the variety. The students would share their findings in the form of presentations, which would lead up concluding discussions and comparisons of the accents and their cultural circumstances with the whole group. If time permits, also dialects of the British Isles and North America could be included in this around-the-globe exploratory learning experience.

In order to better visualize the spread of English a world map, physical or digital, could be used during the course. The different accents explored could be marked and information about the accent, its speakers and the culture could be linked in the shape of additional posters, again physical or digital.

The map could also include the students' own evaluations of the accents: were they easy or hard to understand, and which were the essential characteristics. To be able to characterize accents, and also to distinguish unfamiliar phonological characteristics, the students may need a brief introduction to phonology. This would provide them with tools for recognizing and describing the processes that take place in the vocal apparatus and result in different sounds, such as differences in how vowels and consonants are produced as well as in prosody. The Internet provides many opportunities to listen to examples of phonological differences of which an example is found in the screenshot from Wikipedia below. It provides audio examples of a common North American sound merger.

Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonological_history_of_English_low_back_vowels#Cot.E2.80.93caught_merger

The Speech Accent Archive is a potentially useful audio source for getting students acquainted with different accents of English, especially non-native ones. This website, administrated by George Mason University, Fairfax, USA, offers an extensive free-to-use archive of global accents of English, both native and non-native, the latter obviously in majority. It offers great comparability, since the speakers all read the same text sample. The archive offers detailed background information about the speakers, e.g. their native language and age of English onset. The speakers are all residents of an English-speaking country, but the length of residence varies between one year and many decades. There are several ways in which the samples could be used depending on at what point of the course this task is performed. For example, the students could be asked to listen to samples and then decide whether the accents are native or non-natives, or, alternatively, try to decide where the speakers come from. The speech samples could also be used for the introductory blind study as well as for tasks related to discovering phonological differences of accents.

Along with tuning in the students ears to better recognize and understand different accents of English as well as discovering the scope of the language in a global perspective, comes the concept of English as a lingua franca. Therefore, it would be beneficial to place an introduction to what ELF is quite early in the course. This would include the basics of ELF, including discussions on what the implications

of ELF might be for the development of English internationally as well as for learning English. Research about ELF is continuously expanding and sources of information is easy accessible, for example at the University of Helsinki. This mini-theory part would constitute the introduction to exploring different non-native accents, using for example the Speech Accent Archive mentioned above.

5.3 Cultural awareness

To familiarize students with more than a fraction of all sociocultural contexts in which English is used is of course not possible within the framework of one course. However, already having familiarity with a few helps raising awareness of diversities and cultural relativism. As for studying ELF in upper secondary school, the students' cultural awareness could be raised from a basic level of awareness of culture as a set of shared behaviors, beliefs and values, to a more advanced level in which the students understand the possibilities of communication and miscommunication whenever cultures meet, and a capacity to move beyond cultural stereotypes.

Regarding raising the students' cultural awareness Baker (2012, p. 68-69) suggests some applications for the EFL classroom. A discussion about cultures and sub-cultures represented among the students is a fruitful starting point for discovering the diversities that can be found also in a quite monocultural group. In order to raise awareness of the cultural contexts of English, critical exploring of the representations of culture in the students' textbooks can be both useful and feasible, since the books are readily available and the students are familiar with them, but probably not from this perspective. Also, film, music, TV series, novels and magazines offer a range of possibilities to investigate, for example, whether different stereotypical characteristics are attributed to different speakers of English or cultural groups. Internet sources can be used in a similar way, but also for interaction. Through teacher contacts, for example, it could be possible to set up chat rooms with students in other countries, and by this provide an opportunity to afterwards reflect on both the cultural encounter as well as on the ELF communication. Inviting guest speakers to the class to talk about their experiences of intercultural communication is another way to bring life to theoretical concepts. This would provide a good opportunity to have a live experience

of an accent, native or non-native. Even better would be to arrange a live meeting with a group of non-local students, but that is of course not always possible.

6. Assessment

Since the overall goal of the course is not only to help the students to become more proficient and efficient communicators of English, but also to raise their awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, a traditional end-of-course test does not fill the purpose of assessment. Instead, formative assessment is needed in order to direct the students' attention to the process of learning. Defining it briefly, formative assessment aims at promoting effective future learning by identifying difficulties and offering guidance for improvement (Kyriacou 2001, p. 107). For the feedback to be effective it should in some way provide the student with a recipe for future action, in other words, focus on what the student should do in order to improve his or her performance (William 2011, p. 122). As for the type of feedback, William (2011, p. 109) states that giving feedback in the form of comments alongside scores will most likely lead to the students ignoring the comments, since the score effectively subdues any beneficial message the teacher wishes to convey through the comments. Thus, it can prove wise not to give a numerical score before the final course grade, but instead use oral and/or written commentary to guide the students on how they are progressing. This type of assessment is particularly useful for this course, since there is no mandatory chunk of grammar or vocabulary that the students need to master in order to pass the course.

An important goal of the course is to raise the students' awareness of how their attitudes to diversity of the English language develop throughout the entire course. This can be implemented e.g. by having the students reflect on their knowledge and opinions about varieties of English and how English is used around the globe in an essay right at the start of the course as well as at the end. Another alternative is keeping a learning diary, in which the students write a passage after each or every other session, preferably according to a given topic. The essays and the learning diary would be handed in to the teacher for grading and/or commenting, and they would constitute a certain percentage of the final course grade.

The nature of the course topic requires, as all language learning does, active student participation rather than teacher-fronted lessons. Accordingly, the engagement

the students show in the different course projects can and should be assessed and/or graded. In order to provide an extra incentive to actively participate in group work, such as presentations, the group members could also assess one another. If this option is chosen, the teacher has to carefully instruct the students as for how to assess and also give clear criteria for assessment in order to ensure fairness. The peer assessment could make up a certain percentage of the final course grade.

An interesting and intriguing aspect of assessing this course is the question of normativity: which norms should be followed? Since the very foundation of the course is fostering open-mindedness towards diversity and emphasizing communicative effectiveness over native speech norms, it may require a different approach to assessing than the regular school course, in which the focus tends to be on right or wrong. However, I do not propose an everything-goes approach, but it could be useful to distinguish between registers and the correctness they require. For example, written language requires a level of accurateness, which almost always surpasses that of spoken language. Thus, in the case of writing essays or a learning diary the teacher could require correct spelling and syntax (according to whichever national standard the students prefer). However, the teacher should also point out to the students that the content, i.e. their ability to reflect and reason in a mature and complex way, weighs equally much in the grading of written tasks. On the other hand, before grading any oral performance, be it presentations or discussions, the teacher could make it clear to the students that making mistakes will not affect their grade adversely. Instead, active and constructive contribution to discussion as well as a display of well-grounded argumentation will contribute to a better course grade. In other words, the assessment is there for content rather than form. As for oral production, the students should be made aware already before choosing this optional course that they will be expected to speak both in small groups and before the group in order to prevent participants from dropping out because of dread of speaking in public.

In summary, the assessment of the course would focus on development of thinking rather than production of correct language.

7. Evaluation of the pedagogical product

The course has many positive sides from a pedagogical perspective that hopefully outweigh the more problematic sides. First and foremost, it comprises a topic that takes a learning-for-life perspective rather than drilling the students for the matriculation exam. They will most likely gain a new and deeper understanding of English as a language that in essence belongs to everyone and that encompasses a multitude of varieties, far beyond those presented in the regular student material. Along with these discoveries the students may develop a more refined and complex understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity as well as preparedness for ELF communication. Thus, the course offers opportunities to mature and grow as an individual, and because of the forms in which it is realized, substantial practise of oral communication. Due to the lingua franca stance, the students will also gain confidence in their own way of speaking English and, hopefully, by that a more uninhibited approach to communication. As for teaching methods, there are many possibilities to active student participation including the chance to work creatively, which is not a too common feature of EFL courses in upper secondary school.

There are also possible downsides to the course. From a student perspective, it may prove demanding for some, since it requires readiness to independent work and public speaking, but, on the other hand, these are features that the new curriculum clearly emphasizes. However, the greatest demands fall on the teacher. In essence, there is no traditional teaching material available, so the teacher has to produce and/or find everything herself as well as modify it to fit the purposes of the course. Luckily, the Internet provides many good sources of information, as does also academic research. The first time the course is held will of course require thorough preparations. In the end, the course could be worthwhile the strains of planning, since it has every possibility to turn into a rewarding experience for both the teacher and the students due to its focus on exploration, communication and personal growth.

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