



Finnish Accent Worksheet
Scandinavian Accents Panel VASTA 2013
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Finnish Accent Worksheet: General Notes

Oral Posture i.

- Slightly closed jaw relative to pronunciation reference models of English
- Lower jaw very slightly retracted
- Lip corner protrusion: outer ring of orbicularis oris
- Very laminal
- A degree of tongue root retraction

- Back-central tongue arching towards the rear hard palate, just a shade forward of the velum

Oral Posture ii.

- Some tensing of the upper buccinators

Focal, Magnet and Salient Sounds

Focal: One or two phonemes might be touchstones for the Vocal Tract Posture

Laminal [t̪ d̪ n̪] plus laminal realisation of [ð] and [θ] as [t̪ d̪]: *Take time with these things, they're neat and nifty, but deadly difficult.*

Magnet: Sounds toward which other sounds in an accent tend to drift.

Tongue root retraction and lip corner protrusion (outer orbicularis oris) NORTH, FORCE (merged) [ɔ̟],[ɔ̟r]; LOT, CLOTH (merged) [ɔ̟]
I want to get a lot across, but not so it's a chore, and my cohort is bored instead of absorbed.

Salient: Sounds characteristically associated with that accent.

Diphthongs: You might like to take a day-break downtown before you go home alone.

Prosody

1. Changes in length and loudness are generally favoured over those in pitch to signify focal information within the phrase.
2. In the sequence of spoken Finnish itself, speakers exhibit a strong contrast between long and short syllables. The residual effect of this L1 length hierarchy is evident in their relatively high level of mastery of phrase stress in English.
3. On the other hand, what drives the sense of the prosodic uncanny is that this strong contrast between long and short syllables seems more extreme than in native speaker English, and somewhat haphazardly applied in relation to words intended - or unintended - to be prominent.
4. Tendency to elongate filler words more than English native speakers. Of course, this could be a side effect of extemporising in L2.
5. Within individual word stress, first-syllable primary stress is favoured.

| Consonants | | | |
|--|-------------------|--|--|
| English Consonant | Finnish Neighbour | What's the pattern? | Practice Phrase |
| post-vocalic <i>r</i> | [r ^w] | Since most of our Finns are UK based, they only irregularly produce <i>r</i> before a consonant. When it occurs outside US/Canada, this takes the form of a very light tap, with or without accompanying labialisation. | <i>It's hard to be heard above the hordes near Times Square in New York.</i> |
| pre-vocalic and intervocalic <i>r</i> | [r ^w] | Generally we get a tap, but with some lip corner protrusion to produce a secondary effect of lip rounding and release - a half-compromise, perhaps, towards the muscularity for what might broadly be termed a more [US/UK] 'English' <i>r</i> . | <i>It's really rather risky to reach the ring road via this route.</i> <i>Harry had to hurry to get his aromatic coffee, or he'd be very sorry.</i> |
| [s] | [s̥] | [s] is often somewhat retracted, with a wider aperture. Its position might shift around if part of a consonant cluster, for example dentalised due to assimilation in [st]. | <i>Sarah suspected there were some really superb sights to see in Helsinki.</i> |
| Word-final [z] | [s̥] | While devoicing of [z] is very common, Finns tend to preserve distinctions in VOT (voice onset time) when [s] is syllable-final. In other words, they do not make the reduction in VOT associated with a voiceless coda, so rice and rise still sound like distinct entities, despite L1 causing contrast weakening between [s] and [z]. | <i>All I can advise is to use your existing skills base, keep your eyes open, don't arouse suspicion and don't snooze on the job, it annoys others.</i> |

| Consonants | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|---|--|
| English Consonant | Finnish Neighbour | What's the pattern? | Practice Phrase |
| [ʃ ʒ] | [ʃ ʒ] | Post-alveolar fricatives tend to be pronounced with a comparable level of approximation to English, but advanced in placement towards the alveolar zone. | <i>Sean was feeling ship-shape after a shower and a shave before the shindig.</i> <i>This television genre causes measurable divisions in Asia.</i> |
| Word-initial / | [l] | Word-initial / is laminal. | <i>Let me look at those leftover leeks and lemons.</i> |
| Word-medial / | [l] | Word-medial / is laminal. | <i>Billy and Sally gingerly followed the yellow brick road to find a woolly pillow they could mellow out on.</i> |
| Word-final / | [ɫ] | Although Finns do tend to observe a split between Light and Dark / in spoken English, their distinction is less marked. A somewhat dark, or half-dark / is often realised post-vocalically, made by raising the centre rather than back of the tongue to approximate with a zone more palatal than velar. | <i>I chilled out all by myself, gulping almond milk with Malcolm.</i> |
| Word-initial [t] and [d] | [t] [d] laminal | [t] and [d] are laminal, and pre-alveolar in placement, hitting along the dental-alveolar borders. [d] may also be weakly articulated, as it is often pronounced closer to a tap in Finnish. | <i>No, not now, I need to call Nina and Nigel.</i> |

| Consonants | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| English Consonant | Finnish Neighbour | What's the pattern? | Practice Phrase |
| [n] | [n] | [n] seems muscularly equidistant between apical and laminal, and pre-alveolar in placement, hitting along the dental-alveolar borders. | <i>At twenty past two I take my tiny terrier to town. Don't do dangerous diving dares down by the ditch.</i> |
| [ð] | [d̥] | <i>th</i> can present a challenge even relatively late in the speaker's English mastery. A laminal dental plosive is usual. <i>Perhaps in partial accommodation towards the target, it's a more weakly-articulated variant, becoming, in rapid speech, almost a flap.</i> | <i>I want this one, that one, those ones, and that other one over there.</i> |
| [θ] | [θ], [t̥] | <i>th</i> can present a challenge even relatively late in the speaker's English mastery. A laminal dental plosive is usual. | <i>Thelma Thurston was taking deep breaths and thinking thankful thoughts about her maths class on Thursday.</i> |
| [ŋ] | [ŋ̥], [ŋk] | Due to influence of Finnish phonotactics (do I need to say more here?) Finns may slightly elongate the duration of [ŋ] or add a [k] afterwards to make a [ŋk] cluster. | <i>His duties are faxing, filing, copying and tea-making.</i> |
| [tʃ] and [dʒ] | [tʃ̥], [tʃ̥] | Two factors are in play with affricates. The placement of both component is slightly advanced in Finnish, and the latter affricate is likely to be devoiced, particularly in syllable-final position. As before, however, the VOT difference is usually preserved before unvoiced and only-slightly-voiced syllable-final English affricates. | Advancement) of [tʃ]: <i>Charlie chills out by playing chess in his favourite chair.</i> Advancement and devoicing of [dʒ]: <i>Jim, building bridges, told Jake he was just joking but Jim was in a huge rage and holding a grudge.</i> |

| Consonants | | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|---|---|
| English Consonant | Finnish Neighbour | What's the pattern? | Practice Phrase |
| [p k] | [p ^h k ^h] | [p k] are often very weakly aspirated in initial position, therefore somewhat contrast-weakened with [b g]. | Ben has lost his pen. Kate is waiting at the gate. |
| [b g] | [b̥ ɡ̥] | [b] and [g] were not, historically, counted as Finnish phonemes, as they appear only in foreign loan words. However, since many of these loan words are now lexically high frequency, there is increased pressure to display mastery of the [pb] and [kg] phonemic contrasts. Nonetheless, a fully voiced realisation of [bg] continues to be tricky, especially in consonant clusters such as voiceless stop + liquid. | <i>I want a great big glass of brandy and I'll gobble it down with a bag of brazil nuts and grapes.</i> |
| [w] and [v] | [v̥] | In stronger accents, Finns exhibit contrast weakening between [w] and [v], producing allophones of [v̥] when these occur in English. | <i>I want to wind my weary way to Wisconsin. Vernon and Valerie vowed to vote to assure the vice president's victory.</i> |

| Front Vowels | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|---|
| English Lexical Set | What's the pattern? | | Practice Phrase |
| KIT | [ɪ], [ɪ] | Usually somewhat raised and advanced, but not necessarily in unstressed syllables. | <i>I skipped dinner, so I'd love a little biscuit from that tin in the kitchen.</i> |
| FLEECE | [i] | Somewhat open, and often strikingly lacking in any diphthongisation, esp. in unchecked position. | <i>Steve needs to retrieve the keys to the canteen.</i> |
| HAPPY | [ɪ] | Characteristically open, and often at least half-long. | <i>I'm really very happy that Freddie's coming to my party.</i> |
| DRESS | [e] | Advanced and somewhat lowered. | <i>Stella was wed to a very sexy vet whom she met at the pet shop in the next settlement.</i> |
| TRAP | [æ] | Most of our sample speakers exhibit an open and/or slightly retracted front vowel, though English model region could obviously be a factor. | <i>Adam felt happy, glad and amorous listening to acid jazz under the blanket.</i> |

| Central Vowels | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--|---|
| English Lexical Set | What's the pattern? | | Practice Phrase |
| NURSE | [ɚ:], [ɚʳ ^w] | Characteristically a close-mid central vowel, perhaps reflecting the proximity of Finnish vowel [ø]. Finns tend not to struggle much with the English spelling variation with NURSE, but or variants have been kept separate in the practice sentences opposite. | <i>Germans have the most perfect service, but their verbs are absurd and German is murder to learn.</i> <i>These words are hard work, worse than the worst in the world, but worth it!</i> |
| COMMA | [ɜ] | Almost-imperceptibly more open than [ə]. | <i>Stella had an idea that she would love to go to China, India and Australia.</i> |
| LETTER | [ɜ], [ɜr] | Almost-imperceptibly more open than [ə]. Depending on strength of Finnish accent, and distribution of L2 English model accent, some vestige of tapped <i>r</i> may or may not be included. | <i>My mother, brother and sister are all better drivers than my father.</i> |
| STRUT | [ʌ], [ɛ̃] | Usually somewhat fronted in the speakers interviewed, but still on the open side of open-mid. | <i>Justin was dumbstruck by an utterly seductive rush of love*, but ultimately it was just lust.</i> |

| English Lexical Set | What's the pattern? | | Practice Phrase |
|---------------------|---------------------|--|---|
| GOOSE | [ɨ], [ɤ], [ø] | Both [u] and [y] exist in Finnish, as well as [ø]. The speakers here tend to realise GOOSE in the markedly fronted zone, particularly in unchecked position. The main variable is front tongue height. | <i>Keeping a list of who's who in this room is usually a useful thing to do.</i> |
| FOOT | [ø̘] | Usually contrasted with GOOSE by being slightly more open and mid-centralised, though realisations can vary according to spelling. | <i>I pushed and pulled at the woollen hood, but it wouldn't look good like I felt it should.</i> |
| LOT | [ɒ] | Often less rounded, can come with slight tongue root retraction even if this not a constant idiolectal oral posture. | <i>The posh oncology doctor rocked up in dodgy socks.</i> |
| CLOTH | [ɒ] | Merged with LOT for most of our speakers, though occasionally realised with a more open unrounded vowel, possibly due to oft-stated early English influence of US television broadcast in Finland. | <i>She lost the froth on her coffee after treading the wrong way and slipping in the soft moss.</i> |
| NORTH | [ɔ̘], [ɔ̘r] | Open, less rounded CV6, with or without tapped <i>r</i> , and often with some tongue root retraction. | <i>You have four more important chores before you go out that door.</i> |
| FORCE | [ɔ̘], [ɔ̘r] | Open, less rounded CV6, with or without tapped <i>r</i> , and often with some tongue root retraction. | <i>Lord George was born in York, owned a quarter of a fortress and had an enormous horse.</i> |
| THOUGHT | [ɔ̘], [ɔ̘:] | Open, less rounded CV6, often with some tongue root retraction. Some inconsistency here in which allophone is favoured, perhaps due to mixed exposure in English models (US, UK). | <i>I applaud Sean, he always walks and talks jauntily in autumn.</i> |

| Back Vowels | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|---|
| English Lexical Set | What's the pattern? | | Practice Phrase |
| START* | [ɑː], [ɔː] | The majority of our speakers selected an open back vowel, with or without a degree of centralisation. | <i>Mark marched up and had a harsh argument with the large guard, also Bartok and Mozart.</i> |
| BATH | [ɑː], [æ] | The majority of our speakers selected an open back vowel, although 4 of them have a long-term Southern England base. Be guided by the typical distribution of the target region in your character's adoptive country. | <i>The master's staff were laughing on the last grass path.</i> |

| Diphthongs | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|---|
| English Lexical Set | What's the pattern? | | Practice Phrase |
| FACE | [e̞ɪ], [e̞ɪ̯] | Most English diphthongs are realised as diminuendo diphthongs, with relatively slow glides between onset and coda. The closing vowel of FACE seems to vary according to following consonant and stress status of FACE word within phrase. | <i>Jake is aiming to lose acres of weight, because his crazy shape is not great for his dainty frame.</i> |
| CHOICE | [ɔ̞ɪ̯], [ɔ̞ɪ̯] | CV6 is not found in Finnish, so speaker may produce the onset with a slightly more open vowel, as before for NORTH, or select something closer to CV7, which does exist in L1. | <i>The noisy lawyer had many ploys to destroy the employer's choices.</i> |
| GOAT | [o̞ʊ̯], [o̞ʊ̯] | Produced with little difficulty, but even in a Southern England environment, the onset is likely to be fairly close back rounded. | <i>I'm totally frozen from my nose to my toes and I need a hot doughnut or potato.</i> |
| PRICE | [e̞ɪ̯], [ʌ̞ɪ̯] | Backness of onset may vary. | <i>It's not quite the right time of night to go for a bike ride.</i> |
| MOUTH | [ʌ̞ʊ̯], [ʌ̞ʊ̯] | MOUTH is likely to have a fairly back starting point, and very short duration on the closing vowel. | <i>The rowdy crowds of dowdy shouting clowns were all mouth and no trousers.</i> |
| CURE | [tʌr], [uɜr] | Finns with lighter accents may select a more central onset vowel. It's possible, too, that there is spelling-driven variation. | <i>I can't endure your obscure tales from on tour. They give me pure fury and they're not mature</i> |

| Diphthongs | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|---|
| English Lexical Set | What's the pattern? | | Practice Phrase |
| NEAR | [iɜr] | Likely to have a slightly closer onset than many English native speakers. | <i>I've had some weird careers: piercing ears, selling souvenirs, serving beer and being a volunteer.</i> |
| SQUARE | [eɹ][e̞ɜ̞r] | Again, a slightly closer starting point is likely, in the region of a lowered, advanced CV2. The complexity of the sequence will vary according to the stress status of SQUARE word within phrase, and also whether the speaker habitually taps post-vocalic and well as pre-vocalic <i>r</i> in English. | |

Sources

Pronunciation of Finnish for linguists <http://www.cs.tut.fi/~jkorpela/suomi/fon.html>

Finnish Phonology Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Finnish_phonology

The Xenophobe's Guide to The Finns (2001) Tarja Moles