

# Finnish segment inventory

## Practice with phonetic symbols, properties

- (a) Read the following descriptions of the segments (vowels and consonants) of Finnish. Give an articulatory description and an appropriate phonetic symbol for each segment V1-V8 and C1-C5. (In some cases, it may not be possible to conclusively decide between two similar articulations/symbols.)
- (b) Make a vowel chart and a consonant chart for Finnish, based on the symbols you have chosen in part (a) and the additional consonant symbols already given.

The following segment descriptions are excerpted from:

Lehtinen, Mari. 1962. *Basic Course in Finnish*. Bloomington: Indiana University. 3rd ed., 1967. The Hague: Mouton & Co., pp xiv-xvi.

### Vowels

There are eight vowels in Finnish.... [E]ach of the vowels may be described as follows:

- V1** The tongue tip is up behind the front teeth. The lips are parted only slightly and pulled tight over the upper and lower teeth.
- V2** The tongue tip touches the lower teeth, and the part of the tongue behind the tip is pulled up and forward so that it almost touches the front part of the palate. The lips are parted halfway and pulled to the sides.
- V3** The tongue is flat on the bottom of the mouth, with the tip touching the lower gums. The mouth is opened wide, but with the lips spread to the sides as far as possible.
- V4** The back of the tongue is raised high, while the tip is behind the lower gums. The lips are pulled forward and pursed very tightly.
- V5** The back of the tongue is up, but not as high as for **V4**, while the tip of the tongue is directly in back of the mouth opening. The lips form a half open, very round "donut".
- V6** The tongue is on the bottom of the mouth, but pulled slightly back, so that the tip of the tongue is farther back than for **V3**. The mouth is opened wide, but without spreading the lips as for **V3**.
- V7** The tongue position is much the same as for **V1**. The lips are pulled forward and strongly pursed, as for **V4**. (The Finnish **V7** resembles the French [...] or the German [...], but the Finnish sound is more strongly rounded, and therefore sounds somewhat different.)
- V8** The tongue position is much the same as for **V2**. The lips are more or less as for **V5**, but are quite often not as close to each other or as vigorously rounded as for **V5**.

### Consonants [symbols given are orthographic]

There are thirteen consonants in Finnish.... The consonants may be described as follows:

p, t, k In Finnish, each of these sounds is pronounced much less energetically than the corresponding English sound. Americans who are unfamiliar with Finnish often mistake them for *b*, *d* and hard *g*. However, the Finnish sounds are not voiced like these English sounds. The main difference between Finnish *p*, *t* and *k* and the corresponding English sounds is that the Finnish sounds lack what is called "aspiration", which is very prominent in the English sounds, especially at the beginning of words. Aspiration is a small, audible puff of air ...

p Aside from lacking aspiration (see above), the Finnish *p* is much like the corresponding English sound.

- t The Finnish *t* is never aspirated (see above). The tip of the tongue is against the teeth or the bottom of the gums, not against the front part of the palate as in English. The pronunciation is the same between vowels as at the beginning of a word. The *t* is never quickly flapped between vowels, as "t" sometimes is in American English.
- d The tip of the tongue is against the teeth or the bottom of the gums, not against the front part of the palate as in English. The *d* is never quickly flapped between vowels, as "d" sometimes is in American English.
- k The Finnish *k* is never aspirated (see above). Otherwise, it is pronounced in much the same way as the corresponding English sound, except that before *u* and *o*, the tongue is pulled farther back than in English.
- C1** The Finnish **C1** is always pronounced more weakly than the English "v". In addition to this, when **V4**, **V5**, **V7**, or **V8** immediately precede or follow **C1**, it is pronounced by blowing air through a slit between the two lips, as though you were pronouncing a very strong "w". Otherwise, it is pronounced by blowing air through a slit between the upper teeth and the lower lip, as in English.
- C2** The Finnish **C2** is pronounced with the tip of the tongue pulled farther back in the mouth than for English "s". The position of the tongue for Finnish **C2** is more or less the same as the position for English "t". Put your mouth in position to pronounce an English "t" and then try to articulate a sound halfway between English "s" and "sh".
- h At the beginning of a word and between vowels, the Finnish *h* is pronounced much like the corresponding English sound. However, in Finnish, *h* also occurs at the end of a syllable, followed by another consonant. In this position, it is difficult to pronounce, for speakers of English ... it is simply a soft breath of air preceding the next consonant. Be careful never to pronounce it with the hard, scraping sound of German *ch* or Russian *x*, if you are familiar with these.
- m Pronounced much as in English.
- n The tip of the tongue is against the bottom of the gums, not against the front part of the palate, as in English. ...
- C3** Pronounced much like the English "ng" in "sing" or "singer" (but not "finger"). In Finnish, the sound occurs only in front of *k* and between two vowels. Between vowels, it is always long ...
- l The tip of the tongue is against the teeth or the bottom of the gums, not against the front part of the palate as in English. The back of the tongue is not raised toward the palate as in some varieties of English.
- C4** The tip of the tongue is trilled rapidly against the gums.
- C5** Pronounced much like English "y".