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“English in Austrian primary schools-  
The Effect of Native Speaker Assistants on the  
pronunciation of younger students”

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Helene Adl

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## 1. Introduction

Foreign language learning is initiated at an increasingly early age, since language proficiency in the lingua franca English is generally regarded as a tool to open doors and even more so, as a necessity in the globalized world we are living. In Austrian primary school classrooms, English teaching commences at the age of six, and a trend towards intensified language learning can be detected since models such as 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' have evolved. Their aim is to establish a broad and firm foundation of language skills to build on. As a matter of fact, the teacher's language proficiency is a decisive factor in the acquisition process, thus especially in these intensified trials, native speakers of English are highly requested and favored teachers. Their extensive language expertise as well as their greatly valued and aspired pronunciation seem to justify this need.

For that reason, it appears as if young learners and the native speaker English teacher make the perfect match: children are equipped with a certain ease concerning language learning and through imitation, they also readily adopt their instructor's articulation. Natives, on the other hand, can provide a decent model of English and an accurate oral realization of the target language. The aim of this diploma thesis is to investigate in how far the native speaker English teacher does influence the students' pronunciation. Does the empirical study reveal some indication that the young learners profit from the native speaker teacher? Do the young learners actually show signs of influence of the native speaker in relation to pronunciation? How well are the native teachers prepared for their job in the elementary school classroom?

In the theoretical part of this paper, a conceptual basis in the areas of first and second language learning, English at primary school in Austria, as well as teaching and learning English on primary level is established; chapter one is dedicated to the characteristics of second language learning and how it differs from the acquisition of a first language. Moreover, what relevance a (probable) critical period in language learning in relation to the target group bears as well as characteristics of language learner himself or herself were included, too. The second chapter provides a short overview of the past and present of primary school English teaching, when interest in foreign language awoke and how the

respective school trial 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' is carried out. Finally, the focus is shifted to pronunciation teaching and learning and I try to explore what has to be taken into account concerning early formal foreign language learning and how pronunciation in a second language is learned. To round off, the native speaker and the class teacher as the English teacher at primary school level, their assets and drawbacks are included in a last section of chapter 4.

The theoretical background should provide a solid and sufficient basis, since the empirical part of this thesis is intended to establish the link to the realities of intensified English teaching at elementary school. A primary school in an urban part of Lower Austria that participates in 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' was selected to gain some authentic insights. I conducted observations in a first and a third form and carried out an interview with a native speaker teacher of English. The results of the research revealed that the teacher whose first language is English does have a significant, positive effect on the students' pronunciation, but also on their language proficiency in general. Most pupils spoke English self-confidently in the lessons, the teacher was aware of the importance of an intelligible articulation, therefore corrected their pronunciation thoroughly. In addition to the clear asset concerning pronunciation learning, the teacher also included training in all four macro skills into the lessons and equipped her students with more input and opportunities than the curriculums prescribes. Therefore, I will argue in favor of the intensified model of English learning at primary school.

## **2. First and second language learning**

It is the aim of this diploma thesis to closely investigate the acquisition of pronunciation skills in English as a second (or for some children even third) language at primary school level. Therefore, some information on both first language acquisition and second language acquisition (L2) needs to be included to provide a linguistic basis on the subject matter.

The following introductory chapter of this thesis paper is primarily concerned with first and second language acquisition; a certain emphasis is put on probable differences and similarities between these two forms of language learning. Furthermore, one of the most frequently discussed topics, the age factor concerning L2 acquisition, is briefly addressed. The aim is to gain an insight on possible advantages or disadvantages English as a foreign language has to younger learners. This leads over to the last part of the chapter in which the language learner, his or her background, and other factors involved in the language learning process are approached. The objective of this part of the paper is to provide a solid basis for the following sections that will be mainly focused on the specifications of primary school English. For a closer investigation into this research area, common ground knowledge on the above-mentioned topics has to be established, first.

### **2.1. First versus second language acquisition**

First and second language acquisition differ markedly in various aspects, from age of acquisition, learning environment, the organization of language learning to the exposure to the target language. Therefore, both types of language learning have to be discussed in an isolated way before a comparison can be drawn.

#### **2.1.1. First language (L1) acquisition**

The interest and research in the field of how languages, in this case the first language (L1), are learned has had a long history: Scientific research in first language acquisition development dates back several centuries, one of the earliest linguists with an interest in how children learn their first language was the German scholar Tiedemann in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1787, quoted in Singleton &

Ryan 2004: 6). According to Singleton and Ryan (2004: 6-7), an increase in research activity can be detected in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, starting with Piaget in the 1920s and 1930s and followed by Noam Chomsky in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, the ways in which further languages are learned became more and more relevant and interesting to linguists, this subsequently led to comparisons to first language acquisition and thus research in the field of L1 learning was resumed.

What appears to be a primary point of concern is at which age language acquisition is initiated. Claims reach from some time in the child's first year of life to the very first month of its life. However, several linguists, Singleton and Ryan (2004), Zangl and Peltzer-Karpf (1998) as well as Meisel (2011), among others, have pinpointed the onset at a preceding date, namely the birth or even in the mother's womb. In 1998, Zangl and Peltzer-Karpf (1998:1) argued that newborns already interact with their environment and six years later, this has been supported by Singleton and Ryan's (2004: 39) assertion that "perhaps even the latter stages of in-utero development are highly important for language acquisition". In the earlier 2010s, Meisel (2011: 24) resumed and further advocated the stance by claiming that the onset of language learning is prenatal. Outcomes of scientific research support this position, to cite an example, a study by Eimas et al. that dates back to 1971 detected that one month old infants are already able to differentiate between phonological categories (quoted in Singleton & Ryan 2004: 34). Thus, it can be concluded that the acquisition of the first language is in most cases initiated at a very young age or even before birth.

The first years of life are quite certainly the most essential ones in terms of first language acquisition. At the age of about six months, infants start babbling (Meisel 2011: 25), first words are produced between twelve and 18 months and "two-word utterances between 18 and 24 months" (Singleton & Ryan 2004: 13). This development progresses until the age of four or five, when children are usually able to have full, normal conversations. They have accomplished the grammatical control and lexis necessary for these speaking performances (Pinter 2006: 19-21). Dörnyei (2009: 14) strengthens this conclusion as he explains that "over the subsequent 3-4 years [after the first year of life], the acquisition of the basic linguistic system is largely completed for

most children". Of course, language education does not end abruptly at the age of five, nevertheless, a basic level of language acquisition has been reached but by further influences and formal education, this development is continued for several more years.

In the discussion on L1 acquisition, it is imperative to closely examine the acquisition process itself and its characteristics at this point, to enable the subsequent comparison to second language learning. In his work on first and second language acquisition, Meisel (2011: 22) has stated that there are some "invariant properties characterizing the course of L1 acquisition". He lists ultimate success, rate of acquisition and uniformity in particular. These three categories seem to be homogenous for L1 acquisition in general, no matter which particular language is concerned. This consistency in first language acquisition is taken up by various authors such as Dörnyei (2009: 12), who also addressed the issue of a "remarkable uniformity". By doing so, he additionally pointed out that despite intensive research in this field, it is still unclear why the acquisition process is so uniform (2009: 12), it has remained a mystery in 21<sup>st</sup> century linguistics. The three characteristics as identified by Meisel (2011: 22), ultimate success, rate of acquisition and uniformity, describe the following: Ultimate success refers to the fact that in most cases L1 acquisition is successful, every typically developing child is able to reach a high level of language proficiency his or her L1. Furthermore, rate of acquisition relates to the speed with which the L1 is acquired. The process is rather rapid, as mentioned before, and when the age of five is reached, children manage basic conversations. The third characteristic addresses that within one language, "certain milestones of language development occur with an impressive regularity in the majority of children" (Dörnyei 2009: 14). In more general terms, first language acquisition follows a systematic path no matter which language is concerned.

Thus, first language acquisition is a uniform process that is initiated even before birth; it follows a certain scheme regardless of the learner's L1. Moreover, with normal prerequisites, the L1 is learned successfully and enables the speaker to participate in basic conversations at the age of five. Considering these distinct characteristics, in how far can the acquisition of further languages be similar or the same as L1 acquisition? After a short input on L2 acquisition, it



is the focus of chapter 2.1.3. to develop a comparison between first and second language learning.

### **2.1.2. Second language acquisition**

Second language acquisition research is a considerably younger discipline than the investigation of L1 learning. Dörnyei (2009: 18) tried to determine a starting point of SLA research and refers to Larsen-Freeman (2002) who states that this field of scientific research was initiated in the 1960s and 1970s. From that time onwards, linguists have attempted to establish connections to first language acquisition. However, L2 acquisition is quite particular in its development, it “cannot simply be seen through research lenses and paradigms developed for L1 studies” (Dörnyei 2009: 18). As the comparison has again and again been element of debates among linguists, it is included in chapter 2.1.3..

Its name already indicates that second language acquisition deals with any language learned after a first one. What this second language is for learners depends highly on their living environment as well as their individual family background. In the Austrian context, English at primary school could be considered the second language that is introduced to the pupils. However, Austria has experienced increased immigration from various countries such as former Yugoslavian states, Turkey, Chechnya or further Southeast European countries over the last five decades. As a result, English is not necessarily the students’ L2. These groups of migrants might acquire German as their second or even third language, which puts English at least in third place of the languages learned.

In a country of immigration such as Austria, this migrant background needs to be considered in the investigation of English at primary school as especially in urban areas, the number of children with foreign background, who might not learn German as a first language, is ever-increasing. According to the newspaper Der Standard (Der Standard 2012), in 2012, 25% of Austrian primary school children had (depending on the region under consideration) another language than German as their mother tongue. This figure spreads out from one percent in northern regions of Lower Austria to the Viennese district of Margareten where 89% of primary school children have another L1 than German. Migration background and each student’s linguistic history can have a

considerable impact on learning English and it therefore is a point that needs to be acknowledged by teachers.

A term that is in the broadest sense linked to second language acquisition (SLA) is bilingualism as it is also used to describe the process of learning more than one language. It describes the simultaneous and concurrent learning of two languages, whereas second language acquisition is concerned with learning one further language when a first language has already been acquired to a certain degree. Nevertheless, the mother tongue can of course still be learned parallel to the further language in SLA, as it is the case with children who are introduced to English as a second language at primary school level. They still develop skills in their L1 but a basic level of language proficiency has already been attained.

It has already been stated at an earlier point that second language acquisition in an Austrian context does not necessarily have to take place at primary school but due to immigration can be initiated earlier, in an entirely different setting. This is an issue stressed by Dörnyei (2009: 19-20) who distinguishes between different types of foreign language learning, namely naturalistic and instructed second language acquisition. The instructed acquisition of a second language is what ought to take place at primary school when children whose mother tongue is German get to know the English language. Apart from brief, playful introductions at kindergarten, this is the time when second language learning is usually initiated. According to the author (Dörnyei 2009: 20), this controlled form of language learning is defined by the educational context it is set in and furthermore the relative absence of native speakers in the process. Instructed SLA usually takes place in the classroom, clear roles of the teachers as the main instructor and mediator of rules and guidelines on the one side and of students on the other side are defined. The language is introduced on the basis of an underlying curriculum, which is, at least in higher levels of lower and higher secondary school, quite detailed on what kind of skills ought to be acquired at which level. Certain learning and teaching goals, both for teachers and learners, are defined and are presented in handbooks such as the ESP (Europäisches Sprachenportfolio) or the EPOSTL (Europäisches Sprachenportfolio für Sprachlehrende in Ausbildung).

Unlike instructed SLA, in which interaction with the L2 is limited to a few hours per week, the naturalistic approach features a considerably higher rate of exposure. Learners are constantly in contact with the target language in authentic situations that occur in everyday life (Dörnyei 2009: 20). In this aspect, naturalistic SLA is related to bilingualism, in which both languages are usually learnt in a natural, informal environment. Furthermore, naturalistic second language acquisition often involves the learner's urge to build up certain skills in the target language, as they are needed for basic understanding.

Both naturalistic and instructed SLA are interesting concepts and it is essential to differ between the ways the L2 is acquired. However, in the case of this thesis, only the instructed acquisition of a second language will be of importance as this is how English is usually introduced in Austrian primary schools. Thus, in the following, if not indicated otherwise, it is instructed SLA that is referred to. Second language acquisition does vary from the acquisition of a first language and the exact differences or even probable similarities in acquisition are addressed subsequently.

### **2.1.3. L1 vs. L2 acquisition-differences and similarities**

The dissimilarities between first and second language acquisition concern various areas in the acquisition process. These will be addressed in the following.

One straightforward aspect in which first and second language learning differ from each other is the initiation, the starting point of the learning process. As already discussed in chapter 2.1.1., the L1 acquisition process commences even before birth, in the mother's womb, whereas second language acquisition starts much later. It can be concluded that formal SLA is initiated at the age of six in Austrian primary schools. By learning their first language, children try to make sense of the world and connect this with spoken words. There exists an underlying necessity for acquiring the L1 and motivation for learning is naturally given, it does not have to be fostered. The interest and willingness does simply exist and Dörnyei (2009: 22) refers to this as an automatic process.

For SLA, however, "motivation is a basic issue" (Dörnyei 2009: 22), students have to be excited to be studying a new language, interest and desire to acquire a foreign language can vary vastly among them. To a certain degree,

it can be seen as the language teachers' responsibility to engender enthusiasm for learning in their students and to arouse their interest in unknown cultures and languages. This point on personal factors in the differentiation between L1 and L2 acquisition is also addressed by Zangl and Peltzer-Karpf (1998: 2).

Concerning the time spent on the language acquisition process and the setting used for this procedure, one can state that L1 acquisition is not restrained by time limits due to lesson plans. Children acquire their first language at all times; this is at least true until they reach primary school age. Then, training in the L1 occurs in a formal setting, too, and is linked to slots in the schedule. At that point, young learners do not learn their first language merely through daily interactions any longer, but are introduced to linguistic principles and other elements in the broad spectrum of a language. This fact makes it quite clear how the situation for the L2 differs here. There is an exact timetable when English (or any other language) should be taught and exposure to the target language is limited to a maximum of one lesson per week (in 'Grundstufe 2'). In this context, Cook (2008: 135) talks about learning situations, the first language is learned "naturally in the intimate situations of [the learner's] family", "an L2 [is acquired] formally in the public situation of the classroom". The prerequisites for either type of language learning are quite divergent from each other. While L1 learning can happen freely without the fear of getting words wrong, SLA takes place in a group with other learners and a teacher, people who might judge one for making mistakes. This could lead to more caution and less risk-taking, the latter one being a factor that is usually considered to be an essential and crucial element of language learning.

In the discussion of the dissimilarities in language acquisition, Dörnyei (2009: 23) distinguishes between "implicit and explicit learning mechanisms" in the learning processes. L1 acquisition occurs implicitly and automatically, at least in the first few years of life. Second language acquisition, however, is explicit, certain learning goals such as text types and grammatical elements are taught by the teacher and specific acquisition phases need to be completed at a certain time. This issue is, nevertheless, not so unequivocal, according to Dörnyei (2009: 23),: L1 acquisition can also happen explicitly and L2 acquisition can also take place implicitly as, for instance, through automatization.

Not only the learning process itself but also which input is used for language acquisition varies. Most commonly, especially in the early years, the first language is acquired through audio or oral input, children repeat what people in their surrounding environment say, invent own word creations, but they hardly learn new words or utterances by reading them somewhere. This changes, of course, as soon as the young language learners learn how to read and start to attend school. As second language acquisition commences at a much later point, other channels can be used. Thus the focus can on the one hand also be on oral input, but written input is used more and more often for language learning, especially at later stages of the acquisition process. Hence, not only the ways in which languages are learned, but also the channels used for language learning, the input, vary strongly between L1 and L2 acquisition.

One further point of distinction between first and second language learning concerns the outcome; the qualitative difference between these two types of language acquisition is considerable. As noted in chapter 2.1.1., L1 acquisition is characterized by ultimate success. This implies that, apart from children suffering from language impairment or other disabilities, everybody manages to achieve a high level in his or her L1, it can be presumed that its acquisition is successful. The result of L2 learning can vary substantially, SLA does not necessarily have to be successful in every case, and a native-like level, which has been considered the ultimate language learning goal, is rarely reached. Examples of highly successful linguists who still speak in a clearly recognizable foreign accent when communicating in English are a welcome anecdote in the literature on second language acquisition. Cook (2008: 135), for instance, includes the issue relating to individual L2 learner differences in his discussion and states that there are “vast differences in how well people can speak a second language”. Dörnyei (2009: 21) also takes up this matter of variance in language learning outcome and stresses that results can be quite diverse; he entitles this phenomenon *differential success*. Factors that might explain the divergent outcome of language learning will be addressed in the chapter (2.4.) on the language learner.

“L2 learners [...] are different from children learning a first language since there is already one language present in their minds” (Cook 2008: 13). Cook (2008: 13) refers to the fact that when it comes to second language learning,

one language has already been internalized, and this always influences the acquisition of any further languages, in which way whatsoever. Learning a second language consequently differs in this point from first language acquisition. However, the fact that in second language learning another language is already present suggests that learners might try to benefit from their existing linguistic knowledge. Dörnyei (2009: 21) mentions that the L1 functions as a source of knowledge for the L2, the information and insights gained are transferred to the newly learned language. This shows that there have to be some similarities between L1 and L2 learning as a transfer would not be possible otherwise. Learners sometimes tend to apply sentence constructions or familiar word orders from their L1 when trying to communicate in another language, and by doing so, knowledge is transferred.

To prove his point, Dörnyei (2009: 21) turns to MacWhinney (2004: 83) who stresses that there might not be two distinct models for each language but rather a unified one “in which mechanisms of L1 learning are seen as a subset of the mechanisms of L2 learning”. Thus, according to him, there exists some sort of similarity, or at least an intertwining between first and second language learning. Especially in the acquisition of a second language, the first serves as a resource. This transfer varies from language to language and can be an explanation why learners with different mother tongues come up with different constructions in a second language. Nevertheless, as Cook (2008: 13) states: “L2 learning is more than the transfer of the first language [...] [t]he first language helps [...] when it has elements in common [...] and hinders [...] when they differ”. Cook’s rather cautious approach towards the issue of language transfer seems to be the most realistic one to follow. While SLA should always be seen as a concept on its own, the first language must not be disregarded completely.

In conclusion, it has been pointed out that a variety of differences between first and second language acquisition exists- starting from personal factors such as motivation to length of exposure and outcome. Summarizing, it can be said that L1 and L2 acquisition are hardly constructed in a similar way. However, as shown as a last point of consideration, there has to be some sort of similarity or rather, when following MacWhinney’s approach, one model that serves both first and second language learning.

## 2.2. The age factor in L2 acquisition

As has been mentioned at an earlier point, second language acquisition has been and is still a highly interesting area for scientific research. In linguistics, not only the acquisition process itself but also the factors which are of influence for this development are considered as well as in how far underlying prerequisites affect the language learning process. The subsequent chapter (2.3.) of this diploma thesis will therefore discuss the language student and his or her qualities and their impact on second language learning. The aspect of age, however, demands a chapter of its own due to its role attributed by linguists and is taken up in the following.

Age is one of the most straightforward, easiest to determine characteristics a person has, thus it has led to a great amount of research in the last decades. Entire books have been written purely on the age factor in second language acquisition. Under the keyword Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), the belief has been fostered that the younger the language learners are, the better they are at acquiring a new language. Most laypeople but also scholars would agree upon this notion that children clearly have an advantageous position in terms of language learning. Proverbs such as 'Was Hänschen nicht lernt, lernt Hans nimmermehr' – 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks' are strongly fixed in many people's heads and clearly support this belief that no matter which area is concerned, skiing, playing an instrument or acquiring a language, the learning process ought to be initiated at an early age in order to achieve good results. However, a strong opposite standpoint has been established among scientists, a position which claims that an advanced age is beneficial to second (or even third) language acquisition. The following chapter takes a closer look at the historical background of discussions on the age factor in language learning, the terminology *CPH* is explained and the two contrasting positions are depicted. Then an attempt is made to conclude this discussion, at least for the present paper.

The term *Critical Period Hypothesis* entitles a specific phase in childhood which is said to be 'critical' for any kind of learning. So in the case of language acquisition, children are extra receptive and learn a language very easily in that specific time frame. In the 1960s, the work of the linguist Lenneberg marked the starting point of investigations concerning the critical period hypothesis for first

language learning, he is “generally acknowledged as the ‘father’ of the CPH” (1967 quoted in Singleton & Ryan 2004: 33). He notes that the onset of the CPH is around the child’s second birthday, and that very receptive phase lasts until puberty (1967 quoted in Singleton & Ryan 2004: 33). Lenneberg reached this conclusion by following a biological line of argument, as has McLaughlin (1984: 46), who claimed that the brain merely is not able to process languages after a certain point any more since it loses its cerebral plasticity. Several linguists conducted studies in the following 50 years to prove that the condition of the brain is responsible for ‘better’ or ‘worse’ language learning. The time frame originally set by Lenneberg has continuously been reassessed, or, as Dörnyei (2009: 241) stated it: “practically every age has been mentioned [...] between 5 and 13 (puberty) [...], up to 16-18”.

Not only the time span for most effective language learning has been a point of discussion, also the name for this time frame has been widely discussed and needs to be reconsidered. A ‘critical period’ implies that a certain time frame is critical thus most suitable for (in our case) language learning. However, according to this concept, after that time slot has passed, language acquisition is significantly more difficult, constrained for the language learner or probably not possible in such successful ways as before. As reported by several scholars, a certain native-like level especially concerning pronunciation cannot be reached any longer. This is a rather harsh point of view and many linguists, Singleton and Ryan (2004) as well as Dörnyei (2009), to name a few, have established another terminology to discuss this age effect, and a distinction between a stronger and weaker version of the Critical Period Hypothesis was developed. They talk about a sensitive rather than a critical period for language learning, moderating the term and entitling a time slot in which language learning is optimal, as “susceptibility [to other languages] [...] only decreases” and does not vanish completely (Dörnyei 2009: 237). Meisel (2011: 205) even goes so far as to state there is not only one but several sensitive periods for language learning, but exploring this notion further would exceed the scope of this diploma thesis and go far off topic. Thus, having clarified the terminology and stressed that the concept of a sensitive period is more realistic, one can scrutinize more closely the two strong positions that have been built up in the context of CPH.



The 'the younger, the better language learner' position believes that children have a great advantage over adults or teenagers in SLA; the literature mentions several studies of the last decades to support this stance. Asher and García (1969 quoted in Singleton & Ryan 2004: 63) conducted a study with Cuban immigrants to California concerning their accent as well as their pronunciation. The linguists reached the conclusion that the group of children who arrived in the United States aged between one and six years achieved a most native-like pronunciation of English. Yamada et al. (1980 cited in Singleton & Ryan 2004: 62) investigated the foreign language vocabulary learning skills of Japanese elementary school children and deduced that the younger the learners (in their case seven years old), the better their vocabulary learning skills.

The second position claims that the older language learners are, the better their results concerning language acquisition, thus this viewpoint objects the concept of a critical period for language learning in younger years. This point of view is again verified by various studies in the literature: Asher and Price (1967 quoted in Singleton & Ryan 2004: 72) investigated a group of learners studying Russian and arrived at the conclusion that teenagers are more talented learners than eight- and ten-year-olds. Stapp (1999) as cited in Singleton and Ryan (2004: 73), studied a group of monolingual Japanese pupils and also found out that adolescents achieved higher results than younger learners.

The four shortly presented studies and their outcomes are merely a glimpse into the field of investigation on the age effect in foreign language learning, both positions can be supported by an uncountable number of research projects and seem to each prove their point. Interestingly enough, most studies in the literature under review that argued in favor of the 'the younger- the better' position worked with migrants and narrowed their focus on the test subjects' native-like pronunciation whereas the second stance focused on mostly formal, school-like settings. These settings and the outcomes have not been reached by accident and are not surprising, as several scholars have drawn the conclusion that both groups have their advantages in certain learning environments. Older learners tend to achieve higher levels of language proficiency in formal learning environments, that is, for instance school settings.

They “perform better in the classroom”, as McLaughlin concluded in 1984 (69), which might be due to the fact that they are already more used to formal learning situations and can adjust to them more easily. Younger learners, however, are more likely to achieve better results in naturalistic learning situations, for instance as immigrants to foreign countries, this implies high exposure to the target language and a natural, casual learning environment.

In the discussion on the Critical Period Hypothesis, arguments concerning age and pronunciation are ever present and simply cannot be ignored. Especially concerning the above-mentioned studies, it is interesting to consider the fact that pronunciation is often used as an indicator for the successful language acquisition of migrants. Even more than in any other language skill, this sensitive period seems to be advantageous for pronunciation learning, this is to say that younger learners supposedly acquire pronunciation much easier than older ones. Especially a native-like accent is most easily obtained at an early age, in a short sequence of time and rather effortlessly (Jihyun 2010: 323; Singleton & Ryan 2004: 84). This might be due to the plasticity of the brain claimed by supporters of the CPH, or could also be linked to the imitation skills younger learners possess. 15 years before Jihyun, Lengyel (1995: 124) stressed the ease with which young learners could achieve a native-like pronunciation. He also pointed out that phonological proficiency in a foreign language could be attained if the language is acquired before the offset of the critical period. Lightbrown and Spada (2006: 186) even go so far as to claim that students whose language learning was initiated in their first years of life “are most likely to eventually be indistinguishable from native speakers”. Whether or not this claim proves to be true would have to be evaluated by scientific research.

It is without doubt a great advantage that children seem to pick up oral skills in a foreign language so easily. However, this does not, of course, imply that older language learners are unsuccessful in terms of pronunciation learning, yet it might require more effort to reach certain goals. Nevertheless, one might also raise the question if native-like pronunciation really is the goal of language learning and can be used as an indicator for fruitful language acquisition. Still, it proves to be a worthwhile input for the subsequent chapters on pronunciation teaching and learning.

There exist several factors that differentiate a younger from an older language learner and these elements could be seen as either assets or drawbacks in the language learning process. These aspects could possibly explain why differences in age result in differences in foreign language proficiency. Children usually are not prejudiced against other languages or cultures and “[have] not developed social attitudes towards the use of one language as opposed to another” (Ellis 1989: 108). They are not yet biased against unfamiliar countries and their traditions, and this impartiality could foster language learning. Older learners on the other hand might see the necessity and importance behind the acquisition of language skills and therefore learn more efficiently. What is more is that they, being used to formal school settings and having studied their L1 for years in these settings, might know better how to approach language learning, which strategies to apply and how to work with the limited input received at school. Younger learners might lack these methods, they, however, tend to be less worried (Pinter 2006: 29), put less thought in what others might think about their skills or the mistakes they make and generally do not fear public humiliation to the same extent as especially teenagers do. This could of course be considered a benefit as they are willing to take more risks and risk-taking is an essential part of successful language learning. Having said that, though this list covers only parts of the differences between younger and older learners, there does not seem to be a clear advantageous position for either of the groups.

Several scholars, Cook (2008: 149), Nikolov and Djigunović (2006: 236) have now come to the following conclusion concerning the age effect on foreign language learning: Adults reach a higher level of proficiency after a shorter time than children do. In the long term, however, the group of younger learners achieves better outcomes. Hence, there might be one or several sensitive periods for language learning and this could lead to better results for younger language learners, but one should not disregard the fact that age is not the only element that influences a person’s language learning abilities.

Or- as Murphy (2014: 5) stated: “establishing that there are age-of-acquisition effects in L2 learning does not mean that we just have to teach or expose the child to the L2 when they are young to guarantee successful L2 outcomes”.

### **2.3. The language learner**

The aim of this sub-chapter is to raise awareness that not only age and the first language can have an impact on the acquisition of a foreign language, but a combination of further aspects that make up the individual language learner can influence the language learning process. Thus, attitude, motivation, aptitude, intelligence but also the learner's personality and personal background can be of undeniable significance to L2 acquisition and will be presented in the following. Implications of these individual factors for the L2 teaching process will also be given.

First of all, the role of motivation and the differences concerning various learner groups is investigated. Interest but also the need for achieving language proficiency in cases of migration, for instance, can act as motivating factors in learning. Also the attitude towards a target language and the target culture to which it is attached can act as elements of motivation or as means of refusal. Cook (2008: 137-138) even goes so far as to claim that admiration for the target culture and language results in successful L2 learning. For older groups of students, adolescents or adults, the promise of future, well-paid jobs could stimulate language learning as they have a "long-term goal" (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2004: 27) that they would like to reach, hence have to improve their language skills. While intrinsic motivation as the first mentioned case of interest in the target language is a fortunate situation for the language teacher, extrinsic motivation is an area on which the teacher has some influence. It could be fostered, for instance, by pointing out the prospective success of language learning or by school trips to English-speaking countries. Children, however, usually "do not have specific foreign language needs" (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2004: 27). As they do not yet care about their future professional careers or other possibilities that necessarily imply or request good language skills, it is even more often the teacher who has to promote extrinsic motivation and an interest in acquiring a new language.

Two further learner's characteristics are aptitude, defined as "the ability to learn the second language in an academic classroom" (Cook 2008: 144) and intelligence. The concept of aptitude describes a certain 'talent' for language learning, how well a person does concerning the storing and recalling of words and pronunciation as well as how easily he or she discovers and internalizes

grammatical structures. Aptitude is something a learner is more or less equipped with, thus it cannot be 'created' by the language teacher. The characteristic that is somehow closely linked to aptitude as it is also related to the cognitive abilities of students is intelligence. It is commonly interpreted as the performance in testing situations and is by some means also associated with the level of achievement at school. Thus, Lightbrown and Spada (1999: 52) state that "a link between intelligence and second language learning has been reported". Intelligence has mostly been associated with tests on receptive skills such as grammar or reading and less to tests or situations that put emphasis on communicatory abilities (Lightbrown & Spada 1999: 52). Again, intelligence is not something that is solely built up by the teacher, but his or her support can always be an important aspect of successful language learning.

No matter which subject area is concerned, the learner's personality is directly involved in learning processes. In the literature, there are often references to the learner's character traits and their effect on the learning progress and it can be expected that extroversion and introversion play a significant role in language learning. Cook (2008: 152) comments on this issue, too, and assumes that "an outgoing, sociable person learns a second language better than a reserved, shy person". Of course, this is merely a supposition, however, outgoing, extroverted people tend to find it easier to speak up and also to take risks, which is, as it has been pointed out before, an essential criterion of language learning. They might volunteer more often in speaking activities in the school setting, thus have more practice and receive more feedback from the teacher, which helps them even more to improve their language skills. Introverted students are often holding back and they might not dare to present their speaking skills in a foreign language in front of others. Their shyness could even prove a hindrance to assessed speaking activities or presentations, as they might not be able to present their language abilities efficiently. Even though character traits are preconditions a student carries with him or her when entering the classroom, a welcoming and relaxed atmosphere could help to overcome shyness and introversion, at least in some cases.

Another factor worth taking into consideration in approaching the individual language learner is his or her background. As has been stressed before, in Austria and especially in Vienna, schools have increasingly high

numbers of students with from a migrant background. Specifically in the language learning process, another language or mother tongue can have a considerable impact and is an aspect that distinguishes one learner from another. As a matter of fact, teachers ought to pay attention to the (linguistic) background of their pupils and should avoid giving explanations in German if this is not understood well by all students. One further factor that could be influential in second language learning and constitute to the pupil's background is, according to Cook (2008: 152), the level of proficiency in the first language.

It is a fact that every language learner has his or her unique set of characteristics, an individual background and various other factors that influence second language learning, age being the most visible one. As a language teacher, one has to bear this in mind and attempt to respond to the students and provide them with a learning environment that is suitable, which undeniably is a high-set goal but a necessity to guarantee successful language learning. Moving on to the discussion on age proposed earlier, younger learners might be in an advantageous situation concerning some forms of language learning. Nevertheless, a suitable way of introduction to the English language is of great importance, also or probably even specifically for this target group. As several above cited studies have pointed out, pronunciation learning is most fruitful in primary school, thus the employment of native speaker assistants in the target school seems to be a step in the right direction. As this is the focus of the paper, teaching pronunciation to younger children will be one of the main emphases of the following chapter but also the learner's perspective of the acquisition of articulation will be presented.

### **3. English in Austrian primary schools-history and perspective**

This chapter is included to provide a general overview of the current situation of English in the Austrian primary school curriculum as well as to take a look back in time to the roots of foreign language education in elementary schools in Austria. Furthermore, it investigates in how far English is implemented in the curriculum of the Bachelor's degree program for future primary school teachers at the teacher training colleges, as it is essential to know on which basis the teachers work.

### **3.1. English in the Austrian primary curriculum-past and present**

The interest in teaching foreign languages to young students in their first years of education was initiated roughly 40 years ago when a project called 'Fremdsprachliche Vorschulung Englisch' was trialed in several Viennese primary schools (Buchholz 2007: 47). As it proved to be successful, more schools were included and not only the fourth form but also the third form of primary school was integrated into the project. Yet where did this interest in foreign language teaching to a young target group come from? According to Barbara Buchholz (2007: 39), the roots can be detected in Europe and in the United States where programs entitled 'Early Language Learning' (ELL) provided the first contact with foreign languages for students from Waldorf schools. Especially after the Second World War, when relationships between the nations in Europe were strengthened, first confederations were established and all worked towards a unified European Union. This trend continued and led to the above-mentioned project in Austria. In the last decades, the integration of obligatory foreign language learning in primary school curriculums developed to be a main goal in various European countries (cf. Jantscher 1998, Ponterotto 2001: 51).

Following the trial phase in Vienna and an expansion throughout the whole of Austria, the 'Verbindliche Übung Lebende Fremdsprache I' was included in regular schooling (Buchholz 2007: 48). However, this involved only students of a third or fourth grade, that is, level 2 or 'Grundstufe 2'. Thus as a logical consequence, an expansion to 'Grundstufe 1', to first-and second-year-students, was demanded. Again, pilot studies were conducted at schools and proved the trial's success, in combination with evaluations and interviews with teachers that revealed a high level of acceptance among those affected by the trial (Buchholz 2007: 48). Curriculum developers started their work and in the school year 1993/94, the trial 'Lebende Fremdsprache ab der 1. Schulstufe' was launched (Buchholz 2007: 48). Therefore, the curriculum for level 2 had to be modified since the pupils would have completed two years of English language education, so they have already attained a certain level of language competence. The expansion to level 1 led to more consequences than merely the modification of the curriculum: in some cases, Native Speaker Assistants (NESTs) were assigned to assist and support regular primary school teachers

and new trials such as 'Sprachintensivierung English' but also bilingual models were released and tested (Buchholz 2007: 49).

From 1998 onwards, training in a foreign language became part of the regular primary school curriculum, it was now entitled 'Verbindliche Übung Lebende Fremdsprache' (Buchholz 2007: 49). The goal was that by the end of the school year 2003/04, the first classes attending regular and mandatory lessons in a foreign language would have graduated from primary school and all primary school children in Austria, from the first to the fourth form, would receive foreign language education. Nevertheless, there is still a difference between 'Grundstufe 1' and 'Grundstufe 2': In 'Grundstufe 1', foreign language teaching is integrative, there is no additional lesson provided, this implies that parts of lessons in other subjects are used to teach English. For 'Grundstufe 2', however, the curriculum provides one lesson per week for a foreign language and furthermore, additional practice in English can take place in an integrative way (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 207). Thus, the curriculum prescribes one English lesson per week for each of the school year's 32 weeks. Another point necessary to be mentioned is that the English skills (or skills in any other language taught at elementary school level in Austria), success or failure in the subject, are not graded at this level.

Having discussed foreign language learning in primary school from a historical perspective, there is one last point worth considering: I have mostly referred to English as the foreign language taught at primary school. In the curriculum, the subject in question is entitled 'Verbindliche Übung Lebende Fremdsprache', thus the English language is not explicitly stated. One could now pose the question why English? Why is it not French, Spanish or Czech that is taught predominantly at elementary schools? One justification for choosing English can be found when taking a closer look at the curricula of secondary schools. In a vast majority of secondary schools in Austria, English is taught intensively as a first foreign language, thus it seems only logical to initiate a first contact with a new language at an earlier age. The students will already have some knowledge concerning English as they will have been taught basic phrases and vocabulary and are no complete beginners any more, which facilitates the work of the language teachers. A further reason why the English language is introduced at primary school level is due to the available



resources: Austrian teacher training colleges do not educate student teachers in French, Spanish or other languages, so there is no teaching staff on-hand to teach other languages than English in elementary schools (Kettemann, de Cillia & Haller 2002: 4 quoted in Buchholz, Mewald & Schneidhofer 2007: 7). Another factor that contributes to choosing English is its worldwide popularity, 335 million people are considered to have English as their first language and an ever-increasing group of people speaks it as their second language (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2014). Its wide spread and the fact that inhabitants of German-speaking countries such as Austria are more and more surrounded by English in their daily lives is another reason for its usage in Austrian primary schools.

### **3.2. Current models and projects for primary school English**

In the history of primary school English, a great variety of projects and models has been introduced and trialed until the above-mentioned version of 1998 was established and has been in use since then. In recent years, linguists and pedagogues have sought to find solutions that result in an increased exposure to English, offering more contact with the language than the standard curriculum schedules. There are two other concepts for the integration of English at primary schools in use, 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' as well as bilingual classes.

Vienna can be seen as the center of bilingual schooling at elementary level in Austria, the first project to be discussed is named 'Vienna Bilingual Schooling' and seeks to build a basis in both the German and the English language (Buchholz, Mewald & Schneidhofer 2007: 11-12). One pre-condition to be allowed to participate in this program is that half of the students in the classes have German as their mother tongue, the other half speaks English as a first language, but all children who want to attend bilingual schools should have already established advanced skills in their second language (that is, English or German) (Buchholz, Mewald & Schneidhofer 2007: 12). Students are still taught with the Austrian primary school curriculum in mind and currently, there are ten bilingual primary schools in Vienna.

The second concept for intensifying English at this early stage is 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch', a school pilot initiated in the year 1998, the same year when teaching in a foreign language was included in the regular

curriculum. All schools can participate in the program; a certain percentage of the teaching staff and the parents have to vote for it. This model seeks to enhance English education at primary school level by offering additional lessons, an increase of one to three extracurricular English lessons per week (Joppich, Koncki-Polt, Hofer-Ludwig & Vlasitz 2012: 4). After four years of intensified teaching in English, students should have established skills in the foreign language that enable them to participate in basic conversations. In order to qualify for 'Sprachintensivierung English', one criterion concerning the teaching staff has to be met:

Mit einer Genehmigung des Schulversuches kann gegen Ende des laufenden Schuljahres ausschließlich an jenen Standorten gerechnet werden, an denen die LehrerInnen der Schule selbst über entsprechende Qualifikationen in Englisch zur Führung der Schulversuchsklassen,- d.h. der/die KlassenlehrerIn ist „native speaker“ oder besitzt eine gleichwertige Qualifikation –verfügen.  
(Joppich, Koncki-Polt, Hofer-Ludwig & Vlasitz 2012: 4)

Thus, schools have to employ primary school teachers whose first language is English or who have very advanced language skills, yet according to Buchholz, Mewald and Schneidhofer (2007: 10), this prerequisite cannot be controlled in reality. As several schooling institutions that wish to participate in this school pilot do not have native speakers of English in their teaching staff, they decided to employ a so-called 'Native Speaker Assistant' for teaching English. This also provides students with the opportunity to have some first-hand information on English-speaking countries and to gain precious insights in their cultures and traditions. As the project is, after its initiation 17 years ago, still being carried out, a number of individual models in various parts of Austria have been developed. In how far these models differ from each other cannot be determined, as each school can autonomously establish their interpretation of intensified English teaching, the project's overall goal is the daily English lesson (Buchholz, Mewald & Schneidhofer 2007: 9).

Since the establishment of 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch', its success has been put into question and various studies were conducted to assess its outcomes. The results of these studies, however, were quite diverse: Dalton-Puffer (2000) conducted evaluations at a very active pilot school in Lower Austria and reported advanced language skills whereas Daum (2006: 160 both quoted in Buchholz, Mewald & Schneidhofer 2007:11) investigated that school

attainment in English was not linked to the increase in English lessons in primary school.

Barbara Buchholz (2007), one of the leading experts on primary school English in Austria, conducted an extensive study in the year 2006 to determine the current status of early English teaching in Austria. Her study included numerous schools in Lower Austria and Vienna and involved both teacher and learner questionnaires as well as tests for students and lesson observations. Buchholz' aim was to investigate in how far the goals concerning the four skills as set in the curriculum were met. Her results revealed that both reading and writing were neglected in the English lessons, just as it is proposed in the curriculum (Buchholz 2007: 126; 147). The outcomes in terms of listening were satisfying, yet speaking activities were organized mostly in chorus, German was used frequently and the ability to communicate could not be acquired (Buchholz 2007: 117). The observed lessons did not involve any forms of explicit pronunciation training. What is highly interesting in connection to this paper are Buchholz' findings in relation to classes with a native speaker English teacher: The students' pronunciation and intonation is better, they have a more extensive vocabulary and spoke English with more self-confidence (2007: 183). So in terms of this study, 'Sprachintensivierung English' can be considered successful, especially compared to the results of regular classes.

Bilingual schools, increased English lessons and the regular, curriculum-orientated approach are the most common but not the only ways in which English is introduced in Austrian primary schools. Many primary schools offer additional, optional lessons that reach beyond the range of the curriculum. Buchholz, Mewald and Schneidhofer (2007: 12) also notice a certain trend to advertise additional training in English under eloquent-sounding names such as 'Sprachoffensive Englisch' and many parents wish to have their youngsters start their education in English as early and as intensive as possible.

### **3.3. Education of primary school teachers concerning English**

Due to the current situation of English at primary schools with its various forms, its increasing importance and received public attention, it is necessary to investigate another aspect of primary school English, namely the schooling of Austria's primary school teachers.

Elementary school teachers in Austria complete a six-semester Bachelor's degree program at one of the 13 so-called 'Pädagogische Hochschulen' (teacher training colleges) (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen 2014). Out of those 13, four are private, catholic colleges, the rest are public with no certain religious focus or patronage, but all end with a degree in education (Bachelor of Education, BEd.). Teachers' education in Austria, for all types of schools, is currently remodeled, consolidating the teachers' education at College of Education and universities and resulting in a Bachelor's and Master's degree for the various school types. Thus, the educational path for primary school teachers is adapted from the winter semester 2015/16 onwards and this might also affect the extent of their English education. One consequence of the renewal of the teacher's education is that the degree program will last eight semesters instead of six. The educational program for primary school teachers generally covers didactics, disciplinary training, various aspects of education and teaching as well as a large practical part that involves gaining teaching experience at various schools. In how far English or other foreign languages are integrated in their educational schedule is discussed in the following part.

One first step to analyze the extent of training in English or in foreign languages in general (the subject in the primary school curriculum) is to take a closer look at the curriculum for the Bachelor's degree in primary school education: The website of the teacher training college in Vienna (PH Wien) offers a detailed overview of what to expect in the course of their educational program. Concerning foreign languages, it is stressed in the preamble that "[...] auf Anforderungen wie insbesondere [...] Lebende Fremdsprachen [...] Bedacht genommen wird" (Curriculum Bachelorstudium Volksschule 2014: 2). Nonetheless, it does not become clear what this implies for the actual educational program. To which extent training in foreign languages is provided to students at teacher training colleges in Austria will be stated at a later point, first, the history of English education for primary school teachers will be examined.

In her book on primary school English (2007), Barbara Buchholz discusses in great detail the development of English for primary school teachers in the Austrian context. She reveals that up until the late 1980s, English was not

an obligatory subject at teacher training colleges (at that time still called Pädagogische Akademien). Training in English was, for a long time, almost completely neglected in the teachers' educational program (Buchholz 2007: 59). Only when in 1998 languages as a mandatory subject first for level 2 and then for level 1 were introduced, an improvement in their education was considered to be necessary. These new projects, some of which were already introduced in chapter 3.1., led to the need and requirement of good English skills on the side of the teachers. Thus, one can detect an increase in the number of English lessons in the educational degree program, from the former seven to eight lessons 'Lebende Fremdsprache' (Buchholz 2007: 62). According to Buchholz (2007: 62), these lessons should cover the following aspects: "[...] linguistische[s] Grundlagenwissen [...] [und] Kommunikations-, Grammatik-, Wortschatz- und Aussprachetraining, [...] Schwerpunkt ist die Fachdidaktik". Considering the total amount of 125 lessons of the teacher's training program (Curriculum Bachelorstudium Volksschule 2014) in the Bachelor's degree program, covering all these aspects in eight lessons altogether seems rather limited in terms of depth.

One further problem addressed by Buchholz (2007: 62-63) is that despite the fact that English education at the College of Education has now been adapted, it is very questionable if teachers who graduated before 1998 (when English for all primary school levels was introduced) achieved a sufficient level of qualification that enables them to teach their students appropriately. The amount of lessons designated to additional qualification in English (especially for the graduates before the 1998 mark) also varies considerably depending in which part of Austria one is employed.

As one further way of improving both, the student teachers' teaching but also language skills, students at teacher training colleges have the opportunity to participate in the European-wide Erasmus program. It permits them to study several months in another European country and to experience the countries' culture, language as well as the courses at another institute of higher education for primary school teaching. If students chose to do so and then go to an English-speaking country, this could be seen as a further possibility to professionalize their English skills as well as to receive some insights into teaching systems of other European countries.

English lessons as scheduled in the curriculum are, of course, not the sole option for improving teaching skills: Teachers at compulsory schools have a prescribed amount of units to be spent with further training or education for their area of teaching. The various Colleges of Education offer seminars on topics covering almost everything from music to natural sciences, and some focusing on English, too. To arrive at an understanding of what is offered in the topic area of English seminars, the seminar catalogue of the College of Education Vienna (PH Wien) for the winter semester 2014/15 (Fort- und Weiterbildungsangebot 2014) has been analyzed. There are various seminars on offer, several of them take up a creative approach towards English at primary school level: They stress the 'fun' part of learning English, focus on rhythms, chants and season-based topics ('Ice and snow- Winter in action') as well as on drama in the classroom. Furthermore, there is a seminar concerned with bridging the gap in English between primary school and lower secondary school. However, a fact also addressed by Buchholz (2007: 65) can be noted when looking through the various seminars: several of them have already been cancelled with no clear reason stated. The popularity and interest in English seminars does not seem to have affected a great part of Austrian primary school teachers, it would be highly interesting to investigate why such a great amount of seminars has been called off.

It can be summarized that due to the change of and increase in English at primary school level, the teacher's education was adapted, too. Additional seminars introduce a creative approach towards teaching English at primary school level. However, the amount of lessons designated to training in a foreign language in the Bachelor's program for primary education is quite limited. Furthermore, the transitory process for teachers who completed their primary teacher education before 1998 and now are obliged to teach English at all primary levels, from the first to the fourth form, is not fully developed or planned through.

### **3.4. English in the primary school curriculum**

Students in Austrian primary schools are taught in seven regular and mandatory subjects: 'Sachunterricht' (a combinatory subject of local history, geography and

biology), German, Mathematics, Music, Art, 'Technisches und Textiles Werken' as well as Physical Education. As has been mentioned before, in 1998, English was included as a mandatory exercise. Furthermore, each primary school offers a selection of optional subjects, ranging from choir to drama but also foreign languages. These subjects are usually taught in the early afternoon, as soon as the regular lessons are finished and students from various classes can be grouped together. The following subchapter focuses on English in the primary school curriculum, thus the official curriculum as well as additional information from specialist literature will be analyzed.

The curriculum for English as a single subject does not exist in this sense, as English merely is the language mostly chosen to be taught at elementary school level. Hence, the curriculum is entitled 'Lebende Fremdsprache' and should be applied to one of the subsequently stated foreign languages that can be introduced within the scope of the subject 'Verbindliche Übung Lebende Fremdsprache': English, French, Italian, Croatian, Slovak, Slovene, Czech and Hungarian (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 204).

Before going into detail on the range of topics in the four years of foreign language teaching, three major, underlying principles are introduced in the curriculum. The principles are the following: to engage students in the contact with unknown languages, to supply them with the necessary basics for communication as well as to foster open-mindedness about people from other cultures than their own (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 204). It is important to stress that primary school education in most cases establishes the foundation for every future contact with the foreign language. Thus, as it is stated in the curriculum, it is deemed to be essential that the students' interest is generated, not only in other languages but also in the cultures in which they are the means of communication. This exemplifies that the emphasis is not so much on the language skills themselves but rather on creating a general enthusiasm and sympathy for the foreign language, in combination with basic language skills that enable them to communicate.

Contrary to lower and upper secondary schools, primary school English teaching focuses on imparting knowledge in two of the four skills, training the pupils' listening and speaking skills. This seems to be realistic as the students only start to learn reading and writing in German in primary school, and

therefore adding another language might demand too much from them. After their fourth year of elementary school, the following goals should be reached, according to the curriculum: “[E]infache Äußerungen [...] verstehen, einfache Hörtexte [...] erfassen, Kontakte [aufnehmen], Informationen geben und einholen, Gefühle, Wünsche und persönliches Befinden zum Ausdruck bringen”(Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 204). All these points mentioned are part of everyday life situations. They include the training in some basic skills for the students, and additionally aim at supplying them with one first feeling for the language and an idea of how to express themselves. The curriculum specifies on these goals by listing some examples, mostly for speaking and listening situations, as they are the core skills to be developed in primary school. Students should manage basic conversations, ought to be able to talk with an interlocutor about their feelings or introduce family members and friends (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 205). Quite closely linked to these learning goals are the topics that are commonly used to introduce English at primary school level, namely friends, family, leisure time or basic conversations. At a later point in the curriculum, it is stated that the teaching of English should be playful, and ought to involve rhythmical exercises or songs as well as stories and games that have a learning effect (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 209). The students should not experience their English sequences as ‘studying’ the language, but rather as a mix of fun activities that help them to build up basic competences.

The above-mentioned ‘fun factor’ of English at primary school level closely links up with the attitude towards grading foreign languages at this early level. The curriculum itself does not give away any information on how the students’ language skills are graded, however, Barbara Buchholz (2007: 56), provides some facts concerning this aspect. She mentions that, “[...] die Leistungsfeststellung für die verbindliche Übung Lebende Fremdsprache [wird im Lehrplan] nicht erwähnt” (2007: 56). In the analysis of the curriculum, any notes or information of the grading system for foreign languages at primary school could not be detected either. There is no formal grading planned, no grades are given and also methods of verbal grading are not applied, nevertheless, students should get individual, verbal feedback during the sessions (Buchholz 2007: 56). This way of responding to the pupils’



achievements covers, for instance, praise or encouraging words. It completes the scheme or image of foreign language teaching at primary school level as the aim is to provide a first insight into other languages and cultures but it should still meet the needs of young learners by using playful ways of teaching. There should not be any pressure (for instance in form of grades) put on the students, it is far more important to arouse their interest and familiarize them with the sound of the language and some elementary expressions.

A fact that has already been explained in the historical overview of elementary school English in Austria, namely the amount of English at this early level, should be taken up again. In 'Grundstufe 1', that is, in the first two years of primary school, English is integrated into the lesson plan. Strictly speaking, there are no separate English lessons but sections of lessons of other subjects are used to teach English. Within a school year, 32 lessons should be used for English (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005b: 2), however, the start and distribution of these lessons and the time when English is taught is all up to the teacher, she or he should always take the receptivity of the students into account (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 207). The eight to ten-year-old pupils in 'Grundstufe 2' have one separate English lesson per week, nevertheless, the language can be taught additionally via integration into the lessons of other subjects, too. As has been stressed in chapter 3.2. on current models of EFL teaching at primary school level, 'Sprachintensivierung' and other programs provide an increased number of English lessons, but the curriculum and the contents are the same. In addition to the obligatory subjects, each primary school offers a range of extracurricular subjects, and also foreign languages can be chosen, it is again oriented towards the standard curriculum for foreign languages.

Since this paper especially focuses on primary school pronunciation training, I would like to highlight how pronunciation teaching is addressed in the curriculum. Pronunciation training is mentioned explicitly in several parts of the educational program: Practice concerning the learners' listening skills, and more concretely exercises to foster the recognition and discrimination of sounds are to be included into the English lessons (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 205). In this case, students take on a rather passive role of pronunciation learning, this does not yet call for an active involvement or training.

Still, when the focus is shifted on to the improvement of speaking proficiency, both the listening skills and also the pupils' pronunciation ought to be trained and cared for, according to the curriculum (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 207). Sounds, their various combinations among each other but also the ways of distinguishing as well as intonation and rhythm of speech should be addressed in primary school English lessons. Pupils should receive instructions on the specifications of the English pronunciation and ought to complete exercises that have their focus on pronunciation. This covers a large range of what pronunciation teaching should to be focused on and shows that pronunciation teaching is not neglected in the primary school curriculum. However, in how far this can be implemented in actual teaching situations in the course of a school year cannot be answered in the course of this paper, the empirical part can only offer limited insights. Moreover, one must not forget that primary school students participate in at most one hour of English training per week, and the teaching goals as stated in the educational program cover far more than pronunciation skills.

The curriculum provides information on teaching methods and suitable material for pronunciation, too. Pronunciation training should not happen in an isolated way but is to be included, integrated into the lessons, in conversations between teacher and pupils (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 209). The issue of time and the 'right' way of how pronunciation teaching is linked into the lessons has been discussed before. As stressed previously, intensive pronunciation practice can hardly be implemented in Austrian primary school classrooms if a teacher closely follows the prescribed goals. There simply would not be enough time to offer whole lessons or even sequences solely designated to pronunciation teaching as foreign language learning is quite limited in elementary school. Concerning the appropriate material for pronunciation teaching at this early stage, the curriculum suggests to adopt a playful way and to use rhymes and chants (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 206). Rhymes, chants, poems and especially songs are listed as suitable material in the syllabus for English teaching at primary school.

Since speaking competence is listed among the three basic goals of primary school English teaching and articulation training is in some ways linked to speaking, it is not surprising that the curriculum provides a considerable

amount of input on pronunciation teaching to younger learners. The methods, using rhymes and chants for teaching pronunciation, are quite similar to what the specialist literature stresses. It is clearly visible that pronunciation training is assigned a certain role in the educational program and is not completely neglected. However, the goals to be reached and elements to be covered are not quite detailed and are defined in a broad sense that leaves room for one's own interpretation.

The aim of this chapter has been to provide an overview of the primary school education of English in Austria, integrating various points, from the historical perspective, the teachers' education, the students' education in the foreign language (e.g. the curriculum) as well as to the insights into recent developments concerning foreign language teaching. It is certain that the trend towards an increase in foreign language education at a young age exists and models such as 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' as well as bilingual schooling prove that. However, the specific educational background for primary school teachers is still basic, opportunities for further training as well as obligatory courses at teacher training colleges ought to be developed and increased. Otherwise, it is highly questionable if a decent level of language skills can be reached in primary school.

#### **4. Learning and teaching English at primary school level**

Before the focus can be drawn onto the empirical part of this diploma thesis, learning and teaching English to young learners will be discussed further. First of all, teaching primary school children in general terms is considered. As a second part, pronunciation training, especially for this group of young learners, is brought into focus. Afterwards, the next sub-chapter deals with the issue of early pronunciation learning. Then another element of teaching, namely the teacher, is analyzed. By doing so, not only the regular primary school teacher but particularly also the employment of so-called native speaker assistants as teachers in primary classrooms is discussed. Probable prejudices, preferences and implications of each of these two kinds of teachers are presented. This input seems to be necessary given the fact that the research will be conducted in a school in which a native speaker is employed solely for teaching English at all levels. Therefore, the following, final theoretical chapter should round off the

conceptual background that is required for the empirical part and provide a solid basis for further investigations and any conclusions drawn after the research has been conducted.

#### **4.1. Teaching primary school children**

In the previous chapters, the acquisition of a second language by younger learners has been closely examined; the second chapter pointed out the theoretical background of learning at this young age whereas the third chapter took, among other things, a closer look at the current situation of teaching languages at primary school level in Austria. Now, however, it is essential to reveal what the teaching of primary school children implies, the prerequisites the children are equipped with and what has to be considered concerning the teaching strategies employed. To receive an insight in how far these implications for teaching are met in Austrian elementary schools, a connection to the curriculum for primary school foreign language teaching will be established, in order to fit the teaching pedagogy in the current context.

All learning groups are unique in their prerequisites, motivation and learning styles, concerning their needs and capabilities. The current group of six to ten-year-old learners consequently has a specific set of requirements for language learning and every young person in this group again has a one-of-a-kind set of characteristics. As a matter of fact, these students form a heterogeneous group among themselves. Especially when the foreign language teachers are not trained primary school teachers and are usually not in contact with this specific age group, it is essential that they are aware of the fact that primary school children differ widely from older learner groups or adults in the way they acquire languages. The following part presents some concrete aspects in which young learners are dissimilar from other learner groups and also tries to explain in how far these differences could affect the language learning process. Furthermore, the possible inclusion in the elementary school lesson plans are discussed.

Concerning the issue of risk-taking in the language learning process, it can be observed that older, for instance teenage, language learners can have a certain inhibition about using the target language in the classroom, in front of their colleagues and the teacher. They worry about mistakes and embarrassing

themselves, quite contrary to younger pupils, who do not necessarily know this fear yet, so they will use the foreign language orally without fearing humiliation. Primary school children are generally also often more willing to take risks in the learning process, contrary to the above-mentioned group of older pupils. These young learners are continuously trying out new combinations or sometimes even invent their own words, regardless of making mistakes or saving one's face. According to Tierney and Gallastegi (2007: 51), the children's rather fearless approach to language acquisition would explain the prevalence of aural and oral methods in teaching and justify this choice of teaching style. Furthermore, Maynard (2012: 10) supports this view and states that the main focus in primary school language learning ought to be on speaking and listening. What should also not be forgotten at this stage is that young students still learn how to read and write in their first language, thus an initiation of training in reading and writing skills in a second one at the very start might demand too much from them.

Young learners get enthusiastic easily in most cases, they seem to be curious about the world around them and are eager to work with new material or complete tasks presented to them. Their attention span is, on the other hand, lower than that of older learners, and so they can lose interest quickly. As a consequence, the teacher has to show some flexibility and introduce other exercises when he or she notices that the students are getting disinterested (Harmer 2007: 83). So in their preparation of lessons, teachers should pay attention to a great variety of activities that demand different interaction formats. Furthermore, the single tasks should be of restricted duration as of the children's limited power of concentration.

Harmer (2007: 83) summarizes what teaching a foreign language at this age level ought to be focused on: "A good primary classroom mixes play and learning in an atmosphere of cheerful and supportive harmony". This may seem rather idealistic, but certainly offers a core of truth. Especially at this young age, games appear to be a good change from the usual, typical lesson routines, and therefore could also be an excellent way to reduce boredom. According to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2004: 172), this activity format is ideal for training proficiency in several parts of language learning: in a more general sense in the four skills listening, speaking reading and writing as well as in pronunciation,

vocabulary and grammar training. Games are, however, not the only possibility to create diversified lessons, Hughes (2001: 22) lists songs, stories and drama, too. They can provide creative ways to introduce, train and learn new words or other elements of a language without actually creating the feeling of a learning situation. All of these quite creative ways to train language skills fit with the above-mentioned concept of varied lesson plans offering diverse activities.

Songs, rhymes and chants are quite flexible to use and can be adapted to the current season or topic and the learners are already, from their time in kindergarten onwards, used to learning new songs and rhymes. As a consequence, they can work well with these activity formats. Songs could also function as a way of conveying knowledge about the target culture. Furthermore, and what is even more important to language learning, is that songs are composed in repetitive way, and “this repetitive nature and rhythm make them”, according to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2004: 162) “an ideal vehicle for language learning”. As songs, rhymes and chants can also be applied very well in the teaching of pronunciation, some further information on them will be provided in section 4.2.2. on teaching pronunciation to young learners. Repetition and rhyme are core concepts of teaching foreign languages at this level, but, as Maynard (2012: 10) states, also the ability to communicate should be imparted.

“Social interaction is at the core [of language acquisition]” (Hughes 2001: 18), the ability to manage basic communication is what should be the goal of elementary school language teaching. Attention should especially be aimed at communication in everyday situations, including conversations that are connected to the students’ lives and basic introductions such as ‘Hello, my name is....’ could serve as starting points in the process. In this way, conversations could be acted out, since, according to Harmer (2007: 82) young learners have a need to interact, see and hear. This could be summarized under the term “multi-sensory approach”, which secures that the young learners approach the new language positively (Mewald 2001: 202). In these previously mentioned communicative situations, pupils might have to ask for some certain information or express their feelings on a specific topic. This focus on conversation-making can be directly connected to the curriculum for primary foreign language teaching, which was discussed at length in the third chapter,

as it states the ability to communicate in another language as a main goal (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a, 204).

However, there is more to foreign language teaching than being able to communicate, as emphasized before, an essential objective of primary school language lessons is the contact with other languages and cultures. The curriculum states that with the help of language learning, students are introduced to foreign cultures at an early age and by doing so, they should be able to keep an open mind about others (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 204). Nevertheless, it must not be ignored that most Austrian primary classrooms already are multicultural. Due to migration, the young learners are confronted with foreign languages and cultures on a daily basis, not only in their foreign language lessons. Still, this early start could be seen as a method of making them more sensitive to each other's background. Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2004: 5) also stress the challenge of primary language teaching to promote "sensitivity and awareness of foreign languages and cultures", and this does not only have to involve English but could easily include the cultures of all pupils of a class. Based on the English language and associated cultural traditions, the pupils might experience new and unknown cultures, countries and their languages as something positive and exciting; their interest is aroused. A fortunate start at primary school, provides a firm, long-lasting and solid basis that cannot be destroyed easily and open-mindedness to foreign cultures and language certainly is essential in all aspects of life, especially in today's multicultural world.

To summarize the above-described points, it cannot be stressed often enough that primary school children have different needs and preconditions than older learners do, hence this should be considered in teaching them. They are readily enthusiastic about activities, however, to avoid boredom, a great variety of material and especially tasks of a more playful matter such as games ought to be included in the lesson plans. Furthermore, short sequences of exercises are essential as well as flexibility from the teacher's side, to react to the students' condition. As young language learners usually are willing to take risks without fearing mistakes, the teacher or native speaker assistant could focus on the training of oral as well as aural skills in his or her teaching. Hence, communication training, speaking activities combined some first steps into

acquiring listening skills can be at the core of the lesson plans. Of course, as much input of and exposure to the target language as feasible is necessary for successful language learning. Early foreign language learning provides a basis for any further language learning, it is a foundation for the years in secondary schools as well as for other languages. A general sympathy and awareness for the English language, the countries in which it is spoken and their cultures needs to be fostered in order to ensure the children's successful language learning in future years.

However, as the focus of the empirical element of this paper, the lesson observations and interviews is directed to the students' pronunciation skills, it is deemed necessary now to discuss the teaching of pronunciation skills, together with the specific implications which pronunciation teaching to younger learners has.

## **4.2. Pronunciation teaching**

This subchapter concentrates on teaching pronunciation, in our case specifically the English pronunciation, to foreign language learners. The first part will therefore discuss English pronunciation teaching in general, and specify on factors to be considered. Then, the focus shifts to the group of younger learners in primary school who gain their first experiences with a foreign language. The specifications concerning this learner group are addressed, as it has been stressed before that children have certain needs when it comes to learning.

### **4.2.1. Teaching English pronunciation**

Pronunciation and all its closely entangled subareas such as intonation, rhythm and stress are essential parts of a language and can often carry more information in conversations than simply the words the speaker uses. The concept of pronunciation generally describes the production of speech sounds. Pronunciation involves not only the production of individual sounds, so-called phones or allophones, which is the way a phone is adjusted according to its environment (Cook 2008: 69) but also connected speech that is to say, the articulation of complete phrases or sentences. In these cases, setting pauses and stress as well as intonation are considered.



The way a person speaks, how he or she pronounces words as well as utterances and sets pauses contains far more clues than what is being said: facts about the speaker, attitudes towards what has been expressed, feelings or his or her personal background. To name an example, intonation is, according to Harmer (2007: 249) essential for conveying meaning: Feelings such as enthusiasm or disinterest but also the purpose of a sentence can be transmitted by pitch. Hence far more information is (often unconsciously) given than what is expressed by the words or sentences themselves. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994: 4) emphasize this phenomenon by stating that simply by hearing a speaker's voice, "indications of [his or her] social [as well as] individual identity" are shared. Therefore, besides the elements of vocabulary and grammatical structures used in conversations, pronunciation holds an essential part in communication, and its role of bearing information ought to be recalled when teaching a language.

English is spoken as a first language in various parts of the world, in Great Britain, the United States and Australia, of course, but also in several countries in Africa, in the Caribbean as well as in Asia. These nations make up to 335 million English speakers (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2014), and each region where English is spoken has evolved its own, distinct variety of English. Based on a person's pronunciation, one can detect if the speaker is from England, Canada or Australia and experts in phonetics are able to distinguish even further. Not only the differentiation between varieties of English becomes possible, but also native and non-native speakers of English can be separated, at least in general terms. Cenoz, Lecumberri and Garcia (1999: 3-4) claim that a speaker's pronunciation is "the most salient characteristic of non-native speakers".

Therefore, for the past decades, a general trend in foreign language learning to achieve a native-like pronunciation in English could be detected. The most popular and widely used varieties for teaching English pronunciation are the British one, the so-called 'Received Pronunciation' (RP) and the US-American one, 'General American'. For a long period of time, especially the first one mentioned, RP, has served as the goal in pronunciation teaching in Austrian schools. However, as English has developed into a 'lingua franca', a world language used internationally as a medium of communication in

institutions such as the United Nations, people speaking English as a foreign language outperform those whose mother tongue is English (Trudgill & Hannah 2008: 7). As a matter of fact, a vast group of people has acquired English or is still taught English in institutions of education and makes use of the language in a great variety of situations, for business or personal purposes. In combination with the individual preconditions from first language and possible other languages learnt, ESL speakers have established further varieties of English. In order to exemplify this claim, one could, for instance, discriminate French speakers of English from Spanish speakers of English.

At this point, it has to be questioned what the desirable (and also achievable) goal of pronunciation teaching ought to be. Or- in other words- is it really necessary to strive after a native-like pronunciation of English? Native-like pronunciation of English might not be crucial for the life of an EFL learner but a good, solid basis in terms of language skills is needed to allow communication. Students, not only in Austria, will mostly need English for international contacts and conversations, not to communicate with natives of English-speaking countries. It is going to be used as some kind of linguistic bridge between two people who do not share a first language. As Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994: 6) state it: “[t]he task of pronunciation teaching [...] is [...] to establish models for guidance, not norms for imitation” and also other linguists such as Kenworthy (1987:3) support the claim of favoring intelligibility instead of native-like pronunciation as it can be considered to be a realistic objective for learners. Intelligibility might be more essential in the acquisition of pronunciation than achieving a pronunciation that closely resembles the way native speakers articulate themselves. This is much easier achievable and serves one primary purpose of foreign language learning- the ability to communicate with others.

Native speakers certainly are good models for guidance, no matter if the overall goal is to achieve native-like pronunciation of English or not. As much exposure to the target language as possible is a necessity for fruitful language learning. A decent model helps to make learners aware of the specifications of the English pronunciation and, as a next step, to try to acquire them. Cenoz, Lecumberri and Garcia (1999: 11) investigated the acquisition of English by a group of Basque and Spanish learners and reached the conclusion that phonetic competence is best achieved via the interaction with native speakers.

Jihyun (2010: 323) also stressed the employment of native speakers in foreign language learning situations, as well as the necessity of authentic material. Authentic material is not only relevant to pronunciation learning, but for all areas of learning in general as makes it visible to students where they can apply the language and therefore prepares them for future use of language. Furthermore, it shows why an acquisition of foreign language skills can be useful in their lives.

There are various ways how pronunciation training may be included in the lesson plans of foreign language teaching. One could, of course, focus whole lessons on teaching pronunciation, but given the strict curriculum to be followed, this might not be feasible. The acquisition of English pronunciation is certainly not one of the primary goals in teaching English in Austrian schools. Another way to integrate pronunciation teaching is to draw the students' attention to it when it fits the current task, hence to clarify and discuss the pronunciation of a specific word or utterance, for instance. Harmer (2007: 251-252) addresses the various opportunities in pronunciation training, too, and names the above-mentioned, integrated one "integrated phases". Furthermore, he states that teachers could plan certain phases of a lesson with a focus on pronunciation, so-called "discrete slots", with the bonus of providing varied lessons for the pupils. What might always be necessary concerning articulation teaching is to react to the current situation in the classroom and address issues when they become relevant. Thus, "when lesson realities make this inevitable", opportunistic teaching is applied, according to Harmer (2007: 252). Which approach to follow is always determined by the time available to the teacher. However, it seems quite unrealistic that whole lessons could be focused solely pronunciation teaching, since has been mentioned before that teachers have to follow a strict curriculum and should cover vast areas of grammar, speaking, reading and writing training. As a matter of fact, the time for pronunciation teaching is relatively limited, hence most teachers might address English pronunciation only when it fits the context and the exercises. They might, in these situations, draw their students' attention to it and for instance point out the correct pronunciation of a word.

As in all areas of language teaching, the path to success is repetition. Continuously recapitulating the pronunciation of words or whole phrases aids learning. According to Cook (2008: 81), repeating is one core element in

pronunciation teaching when learning new words. However, she also states that useful repetition is bound to feedback, as learners need to receive information on their performance in order to prevent internalizing the wrong pronunciation of words or phrases.

One further aspect to be considered in relation to feedback is the fact that speaking, especially the pronunciation of words, can be one of the most face threatening parts in language learning. The student exposes himself or herself in front of other colleagues as well as the teacher. While exercises practicing other skills often require written work, a student's pronunciation is examined openly when he or she is speaking. "[P]ronunciation is an extremely personal matter" (Harmer 2007: 252), even more so than any other work produced by learners. Hence, any comments, constructive feedback or corrections made by the teachers have to be imparted in a sensitive, cautious way, to save the learner's face. It is necessary to prevent the discouragement of the learners by the critique of the teacher.

Up to this point, a more general perspective on conveying the English pronunciation to foreign language learners has been presented in detail; pronunciation is a sensitive area to teach and the teacher has little time at hand to fit it into the lessons. However, with the right strategies, it can be rewarding and can deliver feelings of achievement to the pupils. Nevertheless, in the current context of primary school students, it seems to be inevitable to narrow the focus on this specific group of learners.

#### **4.2.2. Teaching pronunciation to young learners**

Chapter 4.1. has already been targeted at demonstrating the uniqueness, the prerequisites and needs of a group of younger, six- to ten-year-old learners. Of course, several points mentioned are equally valid when focusing on pronunciation teaching.

Their attention span is rather short and this ought to be considered in the choice of classroom activities. It is also valid in terms of pronunciation activities

which could be placed in alternation to listening or speaking tasks in the lesson plans. By doing so, boredom and disinterest would be prevented. On the other hand, however, it has been mentioned that younger learners tend to be easily enthusiastic about activities. Therefore, it might not be too difficult to keep them interested in some tasks if they are well-selected.

This certain group of learners generally shows a low level of timidity so pronunciation teaching might consequently be facilitated. Their readiness to take risks is advantageous in terms of training phonetic skills, since, pointed out before, performing pronunciation activities in front of a whole class by oneself usually is an uncomfortable situation for most foreign language learners. It might not apply to younger students who mostly try things out and do not worry about the consequences. The learner group's ease and fearlessness is therefore beneficial for pronunciation teaching.

Furthermore, the previous chapter on teaching younger learners included information on suitable activities and tasks for the target group, and some of them might be of use for pronunciation teaching, too. Of course, games with a focus on the practice of pronunciation would take quite some effort to create and there are more convenient ways to train pronunciation in a way that is appropriate to the group of learners under review. According to Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2004: 163-164), songs are a useful tool in the acquisition of English pronunciation and for pronunciation practice in general. The authors argue that songs cannot only help to train the pronunciation of individual sounds and elements of connected speech, but are even more significant in practicing stress and rhythm. To quote an example, "Encouraging children to clap the beat as they [...] say rhymes will help to develop a sense of rhythm in English" (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2004: 164). With this method, intonation could be trained, too. Songs, rhymes and chants are, as it has already been stressed, playful ways of acquiring new elements of a language and also prove to be particularly appropriate for pronunciation learning.

Of course, more than in any other area of foreign language teaching, intensive and continuous input by the teachers is vital, as especially young children tend to imitate others strongly. Lightbrown and Spada (2006: 105-106) list the "amount and type of exposure to the target language [as well as] the degree of use of the first language [...] as influential contributors to [successful]

pronunciation [learning]”. Especially in the training of younger learners, the language teacher’s correct pronunciation is indispensable as it usually is their sole source of input, at least in the first four years of English learning in primary school. Unlike older language learners, they mostly do not watch TV series or other programs in English, music videos or communicate internationally- areas that might provide older English learners with sources of input concerning pronunciation. Consequently, their teachers are crucial in the language learning process, especially for the acquisition of pronunciation.

#### **4.3. Young learner’s pronunciation learning**

Concerning the issue of pronunciation acquisition, not only the teaching perspective has to be considered, but that of the learners, too. In the following, some basic characteristics of pronunciation learning of a second language are described, then, the focus is shifted towards imitation which is a core concept in children’s pronunciation learning.

In her contribution on second language acquisition, Lakshmanan (2009: 388) claimed that studies in the field of second language pronunciation acquisition by children are rare, this coincides with the results of my research on this topic area. A countless number of articles and books have been published that center around the age factor in second language pronunciation learning. Most of them elaborate on the advantage younger learners have in terms of achieving a most native-like level, yet few concentrated on L2 pronunciation acquisition as such. Nevertheless, those who do focus on it stress the similarity of L2 phonological acquisition to L1 pronunciation learning (Lakshmanan 2009: 388).

More than two decades prior to Lakshmanan Wode (1983: 185) already claimed that “the L2 is acquired through the grid of the prior L1” and also Markham (1997: 17) reported about the retention of L1 elements in second language pronunciation learning. The young learners apply the articulatory knowledge from their first language in the acquisition process; especially sounds that are the same to the language they are familiar with are transferred (Anderson 2004: 199; Major 1994: 185). It is plausible that learners, no matter which age they are, apply their already existing knowledge on a sound system to acquire a new one as this step certainly facilitates the learning process and

enables the speakers to produce words faster. The mechanisms of first language pronunciation attainment guide the learner through L2 learning (Wode 1983). However, experts in phonological acquisition have determined that young language learners still separate the languages; they are stored in “two distinct systems” (Anderson 2004: 199).

Thus, sounds that are shared in both languages are used for foreign language pronunciation and as a logical consequence, sounds that are unfamiliar to the students can present some difficulties. Which sounds are difficult to pronounce or are mispronounced depends on the learner's first language. This is pointed out by Wode (1983) who compared various studies on the pronunciation of students of English whose mother tongue is German. He discovered that in most of these studies, students tended to substitute [θ] and [ð] by s,z and especially f as these two sounds are not part of their first language. As a matter of fact, he concludes that errors in pronunciation occur “where specific vowels are not available in the L1” (Wode 1983: 183).

One further, significant element in L2 pronunciation learning by children is imitation. It is a core concept in the learning process and is not limited to the language learning but occurs in every area in which a person tries to acquire new skills. The common procedure is to closely observe another human while performing a task, and then attempting to copy him or her as much as possible. It is also applied in communication when one human being imitates another human being (Adank, Hagoort & Bekkering 2010: 1903). In social interaction, not only spoken words but body language, gestures and mimics are imitated, too. Human beings tend to imitate others vocally in terms of phonetics and phonology (Adank, Hagoort & Bekkering 2010: 1903-1904), the target of imitation are often people whose competence we wish to achieve ourselves, we therefore select those we emulate.

Thus, imitation is a concept that is relevant in any learning process, focusing on language learning, Nielsen (2014: 2965) even goes so far as to claim that “imitation [...] is one of the basic mechanisms governing language learning”. Especially young learners who are still very much in the acquisition process have a tendency to imitate people in their close environment intensively and more frequently than their older colleagues. Imitation helps these early language students to enhance pronunciation skills (Speidel 1989: 166). Nielsen

(2014: 2067) seeks to find an explanation for the increased imitation of pronunciation by young learners and refers to phonetic categories. Features of pronunciation are divided into categories, and as young learners have not yet established a great range of sections, they imitate more (Nielsen 2014: 2067).

According to Whitehurst (1977 quoted in Bohannon & Stanowicz 1989: 132), younger learners perform exact imitation, thus, they copy precisely what their linguistic model has said. Bohannon and Stanowicz (1989: 132) further claim that a great part of these imitations are assumed to be unanalyzed, the term *rote imitation* is used. This is only logical as students in their early school years have not yet made sense of the underlying system of a language, have not built up meta-knowledge, especially not in the foreign language. When the pupils get older, their approach towards imitation also develops, they do not merely copy their model, but elaborate and add parts themselves which is called *extended imitation* (Snow 1981 cited in Bohannon & Stanowicz 1989: 133). The learner's background knowledge about a language has expanded and so has his or her ability to apply structures and the "competence with syntactic and semantic forms" (Snow 1981 in Bohannon & Stanowicz 1989: 133).

It can be concluded that second language pronunciation learning does transfer elements from the L1, particularly those that are shared whereas sounds that do not occur in the first language often lead to pronunciation errors. Furthermore, imitation is an essential concept in young learners' phonological acquisition since it helps to learn the pronunciation of specific words. The older the learners are, the more they tend to expand in their imitations, thus integrate own elements.

#### **4.4. The primary school teacher versus the native speaker assistant-a comparison**

In Austrian primary schools, either the regular class teacher-with an educational degree in primary school teaching-, a native speaker English teacher (NEST) or the two together conduct the English lessons. As discussed in the third chapter of this paper, it is currently the class teacher who teaches English in most primary schools in Austria. Some few, selected schools from various parts of Austria participate in the project 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch', thus might



employ NESTs for foreign language teaching. Another exception is bilingual schools, which are quite rare in Austria's educational field. According to the project description for the model 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch', in order to qualify for teaching English, the class teacher either has achieved native-like competence in the target language English or is a native speaker of it him- or herself (Joppich, Koncki-Polt, Hofer-Ludwig & Vlasitz 2012: 4). In this official description, the native speaker is defined as a person who has acquired English as his or her first language or has obtained a similar level of linguistic competence through repeated stays in English-speaking countries.

Native speakers are in a vast field, from training English in kindergarten to tutoring and advanced English courses for teenagers and adults in most cases highly requested and praised resources for learning. Language institutes advertise their courses with the apposition of 'qualified native speaker teachers' and even for the youngest group of learners in kindergarten, native speakers or at least a high level of English language proficiency paired with numerous stays in English-speaking countries is required. This level of language proficiency has also been acknowledged as the aim of language learning and teaching for both teachers and learners, as Cook stresses (2008). These two groups "accept that their goal is to become as similar to the native speaker as possible" (Cook 2008: 172).

Watson Todd and Pojanapunya (2009: 24) take up the continuous predilection for natives in EFL language teaching and report of a historical preference "for native speakers as teachers of a language". The social acceptance of the superiority of native speakers as language teachers is prevailing, regardless of the ever-growing number of EFL speakers and the increased use of English. Cook also takes up this claim and stresses that until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was generally accepted that the aim of language teaching was the native speaker, as they present "the only valid model of language" (Cook 2011: 5). The term *native speaker* seems to imply prestigious linguistic competence: a person who teaches his or her first language is thought to be immune to making mistakes, and even if he or she is wrong on a rare occasion, this is forgiven easily. The term *native-speakerism* was coined by linguists to describe the superior status of native speaker teachers in the educational world of foreign language teaching (Halliday 2006: 385). The

above-mentioned case provides to be a good example of what *native speakerism* refers to in practice. Thus native speakers of a language are believed to possess excellent qualities for conveying their first language to learners, they are equipped with an innate feeling for their language, instantaneously know which structures and words are right or appropriate and which are not. Various studies have also proven that students- when asked- state that they prefer native speaker as foreign language teachers.

Yet, do these prejudices and assumptions, justify the employment of NESTs for EFL teaching in Austrian primary schools? Or are the regular class teachers with a degree in pedagogics more suitable for conveying English to the students? No matter who is in charge of the children's first contact with a foreign language (apart from the limited episodes of English in kindergarten), this person bears a high level of responsibility. For the Austrian primary school students, this person represents, at least in most cases, the sole input in this language. Each type of teacher, the regular one or the one with the native speaker background, has a unique profile and is associated with a certain set of qualities. The following part focuses on the comparison of the regular teacher and the native speaker as teacher and tries to present a well-rounded picture of assets and drawbacks of each group.

The primary school teacher and the native speaker are two unique yet very differing types of teachers, and linguists have often aimed at contrasting them. Árvai and Medgyes (2000) as well as Cook (2008) have, among others, focused on the differences between native speaker and non-native speaker teachers and conducted a detailed analysis. Guided by this input from the literature, these two options for English teaching at primary school are compared and contrasted, and it is attempted to challenge possible prejudices or stereotypical views.

The most straightforward difference between them seems to be language proficiency (Árvai & Medgyes 2000: 357), native speakers are believed to have a higher level of linguistic competence in a language that is their first than the regular class teacher who was introduced to the language as a second or further one. In relation to the result of a small-scale study, Árvai and Medgyes (2000: 360) repeat that students attribute this "superior English-language competence" as one prime asset of NESTs. The non-native speaker teacher on

the other hand might lack competence in various areas of the language, he or she might be less fluent in the foreign language, a point mentioned by Cook (2008: 189). However, the essential word here is 'might', merely because somebody has not acquired a language as his or her mother tongue does not automatically imply a lower level of language proficiency.

The argument concerning language skills is also closely linked to proficiency in the English pronunciation. It seems logical that a person who is teaching his or her first language does not only present a decent model for the young learners towards which they can orientate themselves but also has the necessary background knowledge on how specific sounds and sound combinations ought to be pronounced. Regular class teachers can, of course, try to imitate the native's articulation and research on the rules of pronunciation; however, native-like proficiency is still very challenging to achieve. Moreover, it can be assumed that learners also favor natives in pronunciation training, this is pointed out in a study by Watson Todd and Pojanapunya (2009: 31). In this study, students expressed a preference for native speaker teachers in relation to pronunciation teaching.

As of their already mentioned tendency to acquire pronunciation through imitation, a close-to-perfect articulation is fundamental to primary school language teaching (Peltzer-Karpf & Zangl 1998: 50). This further supports the employment of native speakers as English teachers in primary school. Children will quite certainly adopt the variety their teacher speaks, and even though each variety of English has its uniqueness, a high level of correctness concerning the teacher's pronunciation should be of even greater importance. It can be assumed that native speakers have a correct pronunciation of their first language and so might be preferred to their non-native colleagues. With their limited training in English pronunciation and their probable restricted contact to the English-speaking world, class teachers might not be an ideal option in terms of primary school pronunciation acquisition in English. In connection to this, Harmer (2007: 252) stresses that students need "continual opportunities to hear the sounds being used correctly", a demand that can be achieved safely when native speakers are employed to teach English at primary school, even if they only teach in addition to the class teacher.

However, this strong claim for the employment of native speakers for the sake of a correct pronunciation should in no way shed an unfavorable light on regular primary school teachers or present their teaching qualities as insufficient. In order to be proficient teachers, they are educated in a great variety of fields and English is simply not one on which countless lessons are spent, this could also be due to its under-representation in primary school.

Árva and Medgyes (2000: 357) present a whole list of differences between native and non-native English teachers, as perceived by the students. Natives are said to be more willing to be inventive in their teaching whereas teachers with another first language than English prefer following a scheme, are tentative and like to orientate their teaching towards a book. It is also claimed that non-natives are less confident in their use of English and adopt a more regulated style of teaching, with controlled activities and a teacher-centered format. All these characteristics of native and non-natives were perceived by students might not necessarily be true for all language teachers. It could be the case that teachers whose L1 is not English are more self-conscious in their teaching but they can be just as innovative, flexible and confident as their native speaker colleagues. One should not ignore arguments such as above listed ones, however, always question them and view them as probabilities, not as facts.

Cook (2008: 187), however, mentions one point in the comparison of native and non-native speaker teachers which is worth further consideration: “[b]eing a native speaker does not automatically make you a good teacher” (2008: 187). Not everybody is born to be an efficient and successful teacher, and having a particular first language certainly cannot imply outstanding teaching skills. Thus, despite their own language proficiency, native speakers might just not be able to convey their knowledge to students and issues such as classroom management or dealing with the children’s behavior could have them reach their limits. It could not yet be confirmed whether NESTs in Austrian primary schools are required to have some certain pedagogic education, so their first language might be qualification enough to employ them as native speaker assistants. It has to be assumed that their training in teaching English to young students is very limited; primary school teachers on the other hand completed a three-year-long academic education covering various areas, also

pedagogy. Therefore, they might be more familiar with classroom management, lesson planning or the selection of appropriate tasks than their native speaker colleagues. However, this is again a proposition, and native speaker assistants could have completed some sort of pedagogic training, too. It can also be presumed that they enjoy teaching which ought to be a core competence of all teachers. As a matter of fact, the lack of pedagogic education does not necessarily position NESTs as inappropriate teachers, especially when considering the rather limited input their colleagues have received on teaching English to primary school children at Colleges of Education in Austria.

One further argument in contrasting the regular class teacher to the native speaker assistant is concerned with a thought presented by Cook (2008: 72) "L2 users are not imitation native speakers but [...] people who simultaneously possess two languages". This statement emphasizes an attribute both the class teacher as well as his or her students possess: They have already acquired at least one language before they were introduced to English, and this could have its effects on learning the foreign language. In the discussion of teacher types, it is of relevance as the class teachers have once been, and are, to a certain degree, still in the same situation as their students. They have not acquired English as their first language, thus are believed to set an example to their students and ought to be able to know how their students could cope with the acquisition of a new language and be aware of the typical struggles language learners face. Native speakers simply are not able to gain this certain insight concerning English. Yet one should not disregard the fact that the native speaker assistant might as well have a bilingual or even multilingual.

However, the native speaker has an asset in another area in relation to language learning, which is, quite similar to the one mentioned previously, unattainable to the second group of teacher, in that case now the non-native class teachers. NESTs present a direct connection to the target culture. They can easily convey typical customs and traditions of their home country to their students, which is an element that can prove to be difficult to foreigners such as the regular class teacher. To establish a link to the Austrian primary school curriculum for foreign language teaching, an insight into other cultures is also a point that is highly stressed in this document (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a).

Even by building up a vast knowledge on the target countries and cultures in which English is spoken, the class teacher might never be able to provide such a truthful and authentic picture as the native speaker is capable of, even if only of one country or region.

Both types of teachers have certain benefits and constraints concerning their teaching and it is, at this point, certainly not possible to state that one is 'better' or more suitable for teaching English at primary school than the other. Despite their lack of teaching education, native speakers might prove to be acceptable English teachers at primary school level as they have a high level of English language proficiency. In this case, it will be highly interesting to see what kind of educational background the NEST of my study has, and how she masters the classroom situation in order to see if these propositions can be verified or falsified. To master their probable lack of pedagogic competence, training could be offered or the native speakers could form team-teaching pairs together with the class teacher, which should guarantee a necessary balance between successful classroom management, pedagogic strategies and linguistic competence. This is also proposed by Peltzer-Karpf and Zangl (1998: 50), who argue for the employment of native speakers as support teachers.

## **5. Description of the study**

### **5.1. Research question & aims of the study**

For an empirical study to be successful and informative, it is necessary to develop a detailed hypothesis on the expected outcome of the research as well as to state the aims of the study. By doing so, the process of deciding on suitable research design and methodology, designing appropriate research material but also its implementation is facilitated. The formulated aims and the hypothesis guide through the investigatory process and help the research not to lose focus on what ought to be examined.

This diploma thesis intends to investigate the effects of a native speaker English teacher on the language skills, particularly the pronunciation skills of primary school students. For this purpose, two classes were selected, both of which participate in the school trial 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch'; therefore, they ought to be trained more intensively in the English language than primary

school children at schools with no specific focus on language learning. In Austria, research and investigation in the field of primary school foreign (English) language learning and teaching has been the focal point of several academic papers in the area of linguistics as well as in pedagogy and teaching methodology. Barbara Buchholz' (2007) extensive work on primary school EFL teaching and learning has been already mentioned at an earlier point, she conducted another study in the same year with a similar focus together with Mewald and Schneidhofer (2007), but also Daum (2006) and Lackner (2004) investigated the Austrian approach towards elementary school English language teaching. However, unlike some other studies, the empirical work for this paper is not targeted at testing the pupils' language skills or drawing a comparison to students who do not receive intensified training in English. It is the topicalisation between the native speaker and the students and specifically the impact of the NEST's teaching on the pupils' language skills that is at the core. As an investigation on the broad spectrum of language skills would by far exceed the scope of this diploma paper, I decided to narrow the focus and examine the native speaker's influence on the students' pronunciation skills. Pronunciation was chosen as it is assumed to be an aspect of language in which results of teaching are easily detectable and which is furthermore achieved rather effortlessly in the early stages of language learning. Or, in other words: younger learners make faster progress in terms of the acquisition of pronunciation and develop high proficiency (see Dalton & Seidlhofer 1994: 8; Peck 2001: 172; Harmer 2007; Jihyun 2010: 324). As a consequence, especially since imitation is a strategy of undeniable importance for younger learners in foreign language learning (Peltzer-Karpf & Zangl 1998: 50), the effect of the native speaker is believed to be distinct and easily noticeable. A person's pronunciation is one of his or her most distinct features with regard to language, therefore it can be assumed that the influence of the native speaker on the young learners' pronunciation skills could be detected more easily than in other aspects of language learning. In combination to that assumption, the literature attributes the primary school language teacher an immense importance as he or she presents-in most cases-their sole source of the English language.

Thus, the research question for this diploma thesis was formulated the following way: Which effect does the native speaker assistant as the English teacher in the primary school classroom have on the students' pronunciation? This primary research question is drafted roughly, therefore, it is necessary to divide into several more specific questions, to be able to arrive at some detailed research goals and consequently to have the chance to elaborate on concrete aspects in the discussion.

1. How much time does the NEST spend on pronunciation teaching?
2. How is pronunciation training organized and which teaching strategies are used?
3. Do the learners apply imitation as a strategy for pronunciation acquisition?
4. What kinds of pronunciation mistakes are observed and how does the native speaker correct the students?
5. What impression is gained about the students' pronunciation skills and can it be assumed that this level of proficiency related to any other form of direct influence from the native speaker?

By attempting to answer these questions, the study tries to pursue the following aims:

- to investigate how the English lessons are designed
- to gain some insight which teaching strategies the NEST applies and which skills are trained to which extent
- to find out which status teaching and learning pronunciation has, and how it is approached by the native speaker
- the methods applied by the NEST to assist the students in achieving pronunciation proficiency
- to discover to which extent imitation is of relevance
- to study in how far the NEST influences the pupils concerning their pronunciation, to provide examples of his or her influence

## **5.2. Research design**

From the broad field of research methods, I decided to conduct observations in an Austrian primary school that employs a native speaker as English teacher and to further support the study's outcomes, a detailed interview with the NEST



was carried out. The goal was to establish a comprehensive picture of young learner pronunciation teaching at an Austrian school. For this purpose, two classes were chosen, a first as well as a third form. The observations were conducted over a time span of seven weeks, each class was visited and observed seven times, as they have one lesson English per week that is taught solely by the native speaker teacher. In the following, first the observation sheets and the concept of the interview that were designed for this specific research project are presented. The interview questions, the transcribed interview with the NEST and the observation sheets are included in the appendix of this thesis.

Observations were made to gain some authentic insight into English lessons conducted by a native speaker at primary school and how this specific type of teacher addresses and handles pronunciation in the sessions. These help to collect information of everyday life situations that are not superficial or modified (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 396). Furthermore, it was my goal to investigate the issue of imitation of pronunciation in the classroom. Since this phenomenon occurs in social interaction (Adank, Hagoort & Bekkering 2010: 1903), observations seem to be the optimal choice to monitor them at first hand. In more general terms, I am convinced that the effect of the native speaker on the students' pronunciation could be investigated properly when everyday classrooms situations are observed, as I have to be able to observe both the teacher's input and the students' output. This was one main reason for choosing observations as the research instrument, and it is supported further by the claims on the students' imitation skills (which again can be observed well with their model at hand). Moreover, the theoretical background on teaching pronunciation was discussed at length in the first part of this paper, information was provided on how to integrate articulation training, what has to be considered and which material is appropriate. Thus I hope to be able to review the claims brought forward in the literature on the basis of this method of first-hand data collection observations. I adopted a rather structured approach concerning the design of the sheets and therefore selected three foci for the observations.

The first page of the observation sheets is designated to lesson design and interaction format, it seeks to investigate how the speaking time is split up

between NEST and the students and which skills are trained. Furthermore, it also aids at gaining an understanding of pronunciation events in the lessons, the status of pronunciation teaching in the class as well as the frequency of pronunciation imitation by the students. To elicit information on these topic areas, the method of “time sampling” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 401) is applied, so the first part of the sheet is designed in the form of a grid. The purpose is, in two-minute-slots, to detect who is talking and how the lesson is divided in terms of which skills are addressed at which point of the lesson and which type of interaction format is used. With the help of the grid, one could now clearly work out when the class practiced pronunciation and which grouping format was used.

The time slots at the top of the table that start with minute one to minute 49 enable to include information on a set of nine different aspects which are subdivided into more concrete categories. The first two aspects center on the native speaker’s speaking time and the students’ speaking time, the next aspect is interaction format. I distinguish here between interactions initiated by the NEST, among students, started by a student and choral interactions. Then, the focus is shifted towards grouping format, where abbreviations for individual (i), pair (p), group/whole class (g) and teacher-fronted(tf) are used and should be filled into the grid. The next aspects are concerned with skills and pronunciation, item number nine asks to indicate which macro skill is trained primarily at which specific time, speaking (s), listening (l), writing (w) or reading (r). Item number ten provides space to note down the occurrence of pronunciation events. The next one distinguishes between the explicit (e) or implicit (i) introduction of pronunciation events, thus whether the native speaker tells the students explicitly that they are going to do some pronunciation exercises or not. Since the students’ pronunciation mistakes and the teacher’s reaction and correction are specifically addressed by a research question, this aspect ought to be observed and item number twelve and 13 are used to indicate corrections and whether they were explicit or implicit. Item number 14 deals with pronunciation recast by the NEST and the last item in the grid, 15, is concerned with imitation by the students, which is also at the core of the research questions. Thus, this grid provides a general picture of how the lesson

time is distributed among which skills, among the teacher and the learners and some facts on pronunciation teaching and learning in the classes.

As the pronunciation events in the classroom could not be covered sufficiently by the grid only, the second part of the observation sheets includes five direct questions concerning the issue of pronunciation teaching. This covers points that were already investigated from a theoretical standpoint in the first part of this diploma thesis. In terms of the type of observation applied, this follow-up section makes use of the concept of “event sampling” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 400) rather than time sampling. The questions are: 1. Are certain parts designated to training pronunciation? 2. How is pronunciation introduced- explicitly/implicitly? 4. How does the NEST handle the correction of pronunciation? Explicitly/Implicitly? and 5. In how far/how is the NEST’s pronunciation imitated by the students? words/sentences/intonation. For questions two and three, I provided some space to count the occurrence of pronunciation events and the correction of pronunciation, but the sheet was also designed in such a way to provide some space for notes. Therefore, the five direct questions help to collect information on whether certain parts of the lessons are specifically designated to pronunciation learning and how the English pronunciation is introduced, implicitly or explicitly. This second section also offers some space to fill out with notes on the correction of the students’ pronunciation by the NEST as well as the chance to include further details on the imitation of the NEST’s pronunciation by her students. As a last point, the question if the pupils ask direct questions concerning pronunciation is posed. As a matter of fact, the second part proves to be a supplement and consolidation to the first section of the observation sheets and aids at investigating in how far the theoretical background on pronunciation teaching can be validated in authentic teaching situations.

To supplement the previous two sections and to present a holistic picture of the observed English lessons, the last part is concerned with the lesson outline in general as well as the material used for it. What could also be mentioned at this point is that the involvement of the class teacher is included in the form of a yes/no question at the top of the sheets, as well as a section related to the lesson’s topic. Consequently, with the help of the observation sheets in combination with the detailed interview conducted with the native

speaker, it will hopefully be possible to investigate if she actually does have a significant impact on the students' pronunciation. It cannot, however, be denied that "regardless of how sophisticated an observation protocol might be, it will fail to tell the whole story of classroom life", as Dörnyei (2007: 179) stresses. The observations only present short glimpse into English teaching at primary school and they are by no means representative for the project 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' in general terms or how primary school English teaching is approached. Nevertheless, the goal is to examine whether or not the claims can be validated and the research questions can be answered and therefore allow a cautious conclusion on primary school pronunciation teaching and learning.

The observation sheets were then evaluated and analyzed the following way: The information from section 1, the grid, was added up, thus the ticks in the different categories such as NEST speaking or students speaking were counted and then expressed as a percentage. This should enable a more straightforward way of describing and analyzing the various items. The section on the four skills and on pronunciation teaching were also added and compared with each other. The answers to the second sheet were extracted, specific examples for corrections or imitations of pronunciation were collected to work out possible similarities and to be able to categorize them. In the item on imitation, I distinguished between single words and whole phrases, and in the course of the analysis, I further differentiated between phrases or words that were familiar or unfamiliar to the students. Material listed on the third sheet was again counted, to work out preferences in terms of material. This analysis procedure for the grid and the other observations sheets should enable a extensive examination of the English lessons.

For the lesson observations, I selected two classes; a first form as well as a third form, and both have received intensified English language training since they started primary school. The classes were primarily selected because of their difference in level, since this would allow a comparison in terms of English language proficiency. One would expect that the lessons in the more advanced class differ in their structure, in the skills addressed and in the area of pronunciation, too.

The seven observed lessons and the insights as noted on the observations sheets can by no means allow a complete and extensive insight

into the teaching of the NEST, especially since they were conducted at one singular school. They merely offer a brief glimpse at lesson procedures, lesson design and teacher-student relationships. These observations cannot be the basis of generalizations on English teaching to young students but certainly aid at enriching an understanding of how it could work in real life teaching situations. They are, nevertheless, a direct way of investigation and help to develop at least a basic idea of how English teaching in Austrian primary schools is organized. This point ought to be kept in mind in the analysis and interpretation of the impressions gained.

As a second element of empirical research, an interview was chosen, since it is developed, prepared and conducted relatively easily and furthermore enables to communicate people's background and their beliefs about topics. For these reasons, it was considered to be an ideal form of inquiry into the current topic. Since the main target group were children, it was deemed necessary to integrate the standpoint of a grown-up, too. The interview will provide extensive background information on the NEST, her attitude and approach towards elementary school English teaching. Moreover, the conversation offers the opportunity to receive more insights on her teaching than the observations sheets convey and clarifying questions can be posed. The native speaker was very cooperative and was willing to answer a great amount of questions on her teaching, so the interview could be conducted parallel to the observations in early 2015.

In the case of the interview design, I chose to use a structured format, which is referred to as a "standardized open-ended interview" (McKay 2006: 52). According to McKay (2006), this should imply questions formulated in a detailed way and a strict procedure or structure. This specific type allows the researcher to guide through the interview and to receive answers to a specific set of questions. Since it was expected that the interview would provide clarification for and answers to precise topics and specific questions, these criteria were determining in the decision of the interview format. One goal was to formulate questions in a way which allows the interviewee to reply openly, to restrict her answers as little as possible, therefore most questions are open-ended ones such as Q24: How do you handle mistakes concerning pronunciation? (Appendix 2). These inquiries entail the native speaker to

elaborate and explain her teaching style in detail, a factor that is deemed essential since the observations merely provided limited insights into her teaching. Of course, “‘fixed-alternative’ items” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 357) that feature a prescribed set of possible answers (yes/no questions, to name an example), are not entirely inevitable, but the aim was to keep their total number rather low. However, this type of questions often proves to be a good basis for further, follow-up questions, as for instance Q8: Did you visit/complete any pedagogy course in preparation for teaching? (Appendix 2). If answered with yes, the usefulness as well as the extent of the respective didactics programs could be brought up as element of discussion and when the interviewee replies with ‘no’, the need for some preparation for teaching can be explored.

The interview contains 27 questions altogether, but some are divided into follow-up questions. In terms of organization, they are grouped into three topics. Firstly, general questions to gain some general background information on the native speaker herself, her educational path and employment as a NEST are featured. As a second topic, the native speaker assistant’s teaching in broad terms is investigated; aspects such as teaching material, aims of teaching and the balance between the four skills are included in the question set. The main focus of the interview, however, is placed on the third and last aspect, which is concerned with pronunciation teaching and learning. By doing so, the native speaker is interrogated on her approach towards pronunciation teaching, specific exercises she applies and what she views to be aspects of pronunciation in which her students have most difficulty, specific phones or allophones that prove to be problematic to learners. Of course, stress is also put on how she handles pronunciation mistakes, strategies of correction and her point of view on the imitation of pronunciation is addressed.

### **5.3. Description of the research context**

#### **5.3.1. General description of the school**

The primary school that made it possible for me to conduct the empirical research is located in an urban part of Lower Austria and consists of eight classes, two on each level. The teaching staff includes eleven class teachers, the NEST, teachers for religious education as well as employees for mother-

tongue teaching. On the basis of the impressions gained by the several visits paid to the school and the English lessons as well as the fact that the school employs several mother-tongue teachers for various languages, it can be concluded that the school integrates students from various nations and cultural backgrounds. Mother-tongue teachers are employed to impart the students' first language (when German is not their first language), this usually takes place in extracurricular lessons and should help pupils with migrant background to build up skills in their mother tongue. The native speaker told me that several students of the two observed classes have a multilingual background. English is not the first foreign language they encounter, a factor that should not be disregarded in the observations. The issue of multilingualism has already been stressed in chapter 2.1.2. and will again be taken up in the discussion of the findings. The following section is focused on how English language teaching is organized at the selected school, its scope, underlying principles and acceptance of the teaching staff, the parents and the learners involved.

### **5.3.2. English language teaching at the selected school**

The respective primary school has been participating in the trial 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' since the school year 2012/13. The two third forms, out of which one was observed for this empirical study, are therefore the first ones who received intensified training in English in the past two school years. They will consequently be the first year to complete their primary school education with the addition of four years of intensified foreign language learning. The fourth forms are still organized following the model of English language learning as prescribed by the national curriculum; thus, they have one English lesson per week at this school which the native speaker teaches.

In the course of the interview (Appendix 2), the NEST informed me on the organization of the school trial 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch', as it does not necessarily have to follow a strict schedule in terms of lessons and arrangement. The six classes, which are already participating in the school trial, are taught by the native speaker one lesson per week, and in this one lesson, the focus is solely on English language learning. Furthermore, two lessons of each week are conducted in the form of integrated learning or what could also be described as CLIL lessons (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and

involve both the native speaker and the class teacher. They team-teach subjects out of the students' lesson plan in English that are usually imparted in German. To name some examples, the native speaker elaborated that they had conducted physical education lessons, music, arts and crafts or even Mathematics lessons in English. How this is implemented in the classes is discussed further in the interview. It will also be highly interesting to see how the teaching staff and other people involved receive the school trial at this particular school, thus the English teacher was asked to describe her impression, and these insights are included in 6.1..

As mentioned before, two classes were chosen for the observations, the class with the group of eight or nine-year-old students consists of 20 pupils, half of them is male and the other half is female. The second class observed is a first form, there are 20 pupils in this class, nine girls and eleven boys. Both classes can be considered multicultural as several children have a migrant background and some have just arrived in Austria during the school year. This can always prove to be challenging not only for the class teacher but for the English teacher, too. The third form's weekly English lesson is on Wednesdays in the 5<sup>th</sup> lesson, so at the very end of their school day, which might have to be considered in the schedule as the students' concentration could be low. The students from the first form have their English lesson on Fridays in the second lesson. Additionally, both classes each have two lessons of integrated learning per week, where the native speaker joins the class teacher in any subject lesson and they conduct team-teaching.

### **5.3.3. The native speaker English teacher**

Before the focus can be shifted to the native speaker, a short remark on the two class teachers is provided. Both are female, the class teacher of the first year has just completed her education a few years ago whereas the third-year-teacher has been teaching for several years already. In the following, information on the native's background is given, a more elaborate picture of her background, her view and teaching methods can be found in section 6.1. in which the interview is analyzed.

Concerning her linguistic background, it can be said that the native speaker is originally from West Africa, from Nigeria, but her parents migrated to



Austria when she was still an infant. Her first language is English, which was spoken in the family environment, but living in Austria, she was soon introduced to German, too, and attended a bilingual, international school. Thus, one could conclude that she was raised bilingually, a fact which is considered advantageous in the specific teaching environment.

The respective English native has not completed any kind of pedagogic training in preparation for teaching, she holds a Bachelor's degree in Philosophy. However, she stressed in the interview that she has always been teaching or tutoring, and her experience ranges from kindergarten English training to primary school, lower secondary school and up to adult education at various educational institutes.

The native speaker currently teaches 16 lessons as the respective school, she teaches all students from year one to year three for one lesson a week, two lessons in each class per week are conducted as team-teaching units and she teaches the fourth forms' single English lesson per week (as it is prescribed by the curriculum).

## **6. Findings**

I conducted an empirical study in order to present a well-rounded picture of English teaching by native speaker assistants at Austrian primary schools and to further investigate the claims brought forward in the literature. Chapter 6.1. deals with the interview with the native speaker assistant. The second subchapter aims at presenting some general features of how the English lessons are conducted, the interaction format, the material used and the skills that are practiced. Additionally, possible differences or similarities between the two classes are illustrated, for instance to what extent the teaching differs in terms of skills addressed or the lesson outlines. An emphasis is then placed on pronunciation teaching and learning in the observed classes, its initiation and role in the lesson plan. Furthermore, it was also part of the observations to collect information both on the imitation and correction of pronunciation. The final discussion offers room to examine the findings, compare them as well as establish a connection to the theoretical part of this diploma thesis, the literature and the interview with the native speaker. It seeks to create a more comprehensive picture of the NEST, her qualities as a primary school English

teacher and which progress could be achieved, specifically concerning the pronunciation of English. In the discussion, I should also be able to arrive at a concluding remark about the native speaker and her influence on the students' pronunciation skills and English skills in general.

### **6.1. The interview**

In the following, the outcomes of the interview that was conducted with the native speaker assistant are presented and analyzed. This should enable a more extensive discussion of the observations at a later point. The analysis is chronically oriented towards the interview guideline: First, her educational path and its implication for teaching are reviewed, then the focus is shifted to the perceived reactions of people involved in the school trial and to her approach towards teaching. Afterwards, pronunciation teaching is focused.

Some background information on the NEST was included in chapter 5.3.3., she has a bilingual background herself since she is a native of English but was raised in Austria from a young age onwards. The native speaker teacher has acquired a high level of language proficiency in English, which is commonly claimed to be an asset to first-language-teachers (Árva and Medgyes 2000: 360). In addition, she is also trained in the common language of instruction in Austrian schools, German, which can certainly be beneficial in situations in which issues or tasks cannot be explained sufficiently in the target language. So language-wise, the native speaker seems to be the perfect match between excellent target language skills and the necessary competence in the language commonly understood by the learners.

Furthermore, concerning her educational path, the native speaker stated in the interview that she did not complete any pedagogic education or pedagogic courses, she holds a Bachelor's degree in philosophy but had been teaching in various language institutions. She expressed that she had always done tutoring and teaching, from kindergarten to primary school and lower secondary school up to adult education, the NEST considered teaching a talent of hers and she enjoys it. Nevertheless, she seemed to be aware of her shortcomings as she states "there're some many things [to consider when teaching], how to deal with the social aspect, how to deal with the children as well" (Appendix 2).

The lack of training in pedagogy and teaching could be quite problematic in some classroom scenarios and is also a point of consideration brought forward in the literature (cf. Cook 2008: 189). In her study, Buchholz (2007: 182) also addressed this issue in the interviews with experts and primary school teachers, and the result was that being a native of English cannot be enough for teaching English at primary school level, these teachers often lack pedagogic skills. Yet the respective native has extensive teaching experience at almost all educational levels, it can be assumed that despite the lack of a professional pedagogic training, she has acquired some skills of how to teach a language successfully and age-appropriately. Furthermore, the NEST explains that she gained her experience in the pedagogic field from the team-teaching with non-native colleagues, she stressed that she was learning by doing, observed them closely and tried to be open to advice. Of course, all this experience can never replace the well-rounded and extensive education primary school teachers receive in terms of pedagogy and teaching strategies at a College of Education. As long as the native speaker has not completed any comprehensive pedagogic course herself, she will never be as well prepared as her colleagues from the colleges. Nevertheless, the native speaker expressed that she enjoys teaching and considers it to be a talent of hers, pleasure and motivation for the teaching profession are without doubt most crucial traits teachers ought to be equipped with. Through the model of team teaching, possible shortcomings in the area of pedagogics could be balanced and overcome effortlessly, at least in the subject lessons that are taught by the native together with the class teacher. This might also have a positive effect on the lessons she teaches solely. Buchholz (2007: 325) as well as Peltzer-Karpf and Zangl(1998: 50) draw the same conclusion that as a solution to this problem, native speaker assistants could teach together with the class teachers.

In the course of the interview (Appendix 1, Q10), I asked the native speaker about her impression about the reactions to the school trial and the NEST stated her beliefs on the attitudes of parents, colleagues and students. According to her, the parents seem to appreciate the intensified exposure to English; her explanation was linked to a previously illustrated argument that English is a language of international importance. The reactions of fellow teachers were classified by the native speaker as being positive, too, as they

can also improve their knowledge of the English language in the course of the lessons. The native speaker teacher is convinced of her students' positive attitude towards their English teaching, and reasons that they are not yet put under pressure by a grading system and can acquire skills in a positive atmosphere. Of course, the NEST's assumptions on how the class teachers, the pupils and their parents view the intensified English teaching and learning model cannot provide a complete picture of how the school trial is accepted. It can only offer insights on what she takes in through her teaching and possible parent talks; only an extensive survey could present a detailed answer to the interview's question 10. Nevertheless, to receive the permission to participate in the school trial 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch', at least two thirds of the parents as well as the teachers have to vote for it (Buchholz, Mewald & Schneidhofer 2007: 10), thus a positive attitude towards this model of language teaching can be assumed. Also, it is interesting to investigate how the native speaker teacher herself views her work and its reception.

The purpose of this section is also to provide an insight into how the native speaker English teacher organizes her lessons and her core goals for teaching primary school children. Topic-wise, she orients herself towards the books she works with, 'Playway' for the two lower levels and 'Lasso' for the third and the fourth form. Adaptions are made when necessary and storybooks are often in use, too, as well as rhymes and songs, more examples of this can be found in chapter 6.2. and 6.3. that focus on the observations. From the third form onwards, the NEST equips the pupils with a vocabulary book to write down any new words, and she conducts dictation tests to foster the students' reading and writing skills. These short checks are announced to the parents to allow the children some time for preparation, but as it has been mentioned, the pupils do not receive grades in the foreign language in primary school. According to the native speaker teacher, they receive 'suitor grades' (as she calls them) and tend to be quite eager about this form of testing. This illustrates the carefree attitude of primary school children, they do not yet fear testing situations but view them as fun challenges. In addition to training the four skills, the teacher aims at imparting some grammatical knowledge, she "incorporate[s] some grammar in the higher forms" (Appendix 2) but without labeling it as grammar teaching. So contrary to what has been stated in curriculum and in specialist literature (cf.

Maynard 2012: 10), the native English chooses to integrate, at least from the third form onwards, all four skills and elements of grammar teaching. Her choice is justified by her explanation, as she states that she wants to encourage her students and does not want to keep them from reading when they are obviously interested in it. She would not forbid them to read but rather maintain their interest.

In the course of the interview, the native speaker teacher elaborated on the aims she tries to achieve in her English teaching at primary school level. The NEST believes this transition to the secondary school and English teaching there to be overwhelming and extremely demanding to the children. Pinter also views the confrontation at secondary school as “daunting in the extreme” (2012: 9) and emphasizes that the young learners tend to be discouraged. Therefore, the native wants to equip her students with a broad basis of English language skills, to discharge the feeling that a great deal is demanded of them. The preparation for further education has been discussed repeatedly and is also a primary goal as stated in the curriculum (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a). She tries to individualize her teaching and wants to pick up the students from the level they are, whenever they are ready (Appendix 2).

The native speaker wants to create a fun atmosphere in the classroom but stresses that it is “a thin line between fun and [...] impart[ing] something” (Appendix 2), she does not want to put the students under pressure but the learners should still benefit from their English lessons, especially for their future education in English. Thus, her claims for the English language classroom are similar to what has been proposed by Harmer (2007: 83), who also argued for a mix of “play and learning in an atmosphere of cheerful and supportive harmony”.

What proves to be quite challenging for her are the differences in the students’ language skills: New students are entering the existing classes on a regular basis, and finding a balance between integrating the new children and still providing appropriate exercises for the others is not always uncomplicated. Especially for those pupils, who have just recently joined the classes, the NEST believes her teaching to be an opportunity for them to catch up and be ready when they are formally introduced to English in the secondary school, where they will have to deliver a good performance in the language to pass and

receive positive grades. This point of concern as brought up by the NEST has been already mentioned in the first part of the paper, when the issue of migration was raised and that there are students in classes whose first language is not German and who are often not even able to communicate with their colleagues or the teacher. It will be interesting to witness in the course of the observations how the native speaker takes care of migrant children with little language skills, as it seems to be quite an issue in the classes.

The native speaker teacher is strongly convinced that children have the capacity and capability to acquire languages rather effortlessly, she aims at taking advantage of their potential in order to build up a broad basis in English language skills. She states that one unique characteristic of this young group of students is that “they have no hesitation, [they] allow themselves to be corrected” (Appendix 2). This goes in line with what has been argued in the theoretical part, that early language learners do not worry too much about making mistakes (cf. Pinter 2006: 29). When asked, she was cautiously positive that her teaching improves the students’ language skills and that they benefit from her teaching as a native speaker of English. The following part on the results of the interview is going to provide more information on the NEST’s approach towards pronunciation teaching, thus her answers to the final set of interview questions.

The native speaker stresses that she does not teach her students phonetics or phonic skills in any way, but just the pronunciation of words. She tells them to repeat, which goes in line with Cook’s argument that repetition is essential to pronunciation teaching (2008: 81), and to clap the syllables. The teacher tries to include pronunciation training as often as possible, in as many lessons as possible but she aims at devising her exercises in a fun way. Thus, there are no specific phases designated to training the English articulation but “opportunistic teaching” as termed by Harmer (2007: 252) is used. Furthermore, she states that rhymes and songs are frequently applied as methods to convey the English pronunciation, which is again proposed in specialist literature (cf. Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2004: 163-164; Maynard 2012: 10).

Question 22 deals with sounds that NEST considers most difficult for her students, and her immediate answer to this question was “the th-sound” (Appendix 2). This is not surprising as German speakers often cannot

pronounce this sound correctly, as the “specific sound clusters or vowels are not available in the L1” (Wode 1983: 183). Her strategy is to correct mistakes immediately, which should prevent the students from memorizing sound clusters or words incorrectly.

One final item to deal with is imitation, the teacher noticed cases of imitation of her pronunciation by the students in the classes, and mentions that the first form imitates the phrases ‘Sit down’ and ‘Good morning’ and the students also repeat the beginning of the song ‘London Bridge is falling down’. She is sure that it somehow “stuck in their consciousness” (Appendix 2). Pronunciation acquisition is often achieved by imitation, it is “essentially imitative” (Markham, 1997: 39). The examples the native speaker mentions could be categorized as “rote imitation” (Bohannon & Stanowicz 1989: 132) as they occur without reflection or analysis by the young learners but merely copy the instructor’s way of articulating. Thus, imitation does happen in the primary English language classroom at the respective school but to which extent and whether it involves more than these phrases can be investigated in the observations.

The presentation of the interview and its subsequent analysis is valuable as it enables to establish a basic idea of the teacher’s beliefs, strategies concerning pronunciation learning and other issues. The information gathered here will be brought into relation with the findings of the observations in the discussion, which will help to investigate in how far the observations and the NEST’s insights correspond.

## **6.2. General impression of the lessons**

In the course of the observations, it could be detected that the class teachers were never involved in the lessons that were primarily focused on English teaching; they left the classroom as soon as the native speaker entered. It was the NEST who conducted the lessons; the class teachers were not involved in the planning phase either. Since there is no bell that indicates the transition from one lesson to another, the NEST used a specific, invariable scheme to signal the start of her lessons: She wished the children ‘Good

Morning', the children replied; this was followed by the question 'How are you?' which the pupils answered with 'Fine, thank you'. By doing so, the native speaker aimed at receiving the students' attention, she tended to repeat her question until all students answered actively. The younger students from the first form replied with the same answer, but clapped the syllables. This strategy was also frequently used for vocabulary and pronunciation learning, to find out how many syllables newly learned words consist of.

The lessons for both groups of students had a clear topical focus, for instance seasons and the weather or animals. In order to convey the topics appropriately, the native speaker introduced a great variety of material; the beamer was used in each lesson, but also worksheets, a magazine, the blackboard and books. In the interview, the native speaker shared that her teaching is based on the schoolbook, 'Playway' for the lower classes and 'Lasso' for the third and fourth form. In addition, the NEST frequently included songs or rhymes in the lesson plans. The students tended to get enthusiastic about them and seemed to enjoy this specific approach towards language learning. Songs such as 'Five Little Monkeys' and rhymes about the different days of the week were not merely sung but were combined with specific moves that were performed accordingly.

With the help of that great variety of material, the NEST trained her pupils in several skills. In the detailed analysis of the observations sheets, it has become clear that speaking was the skill most lesson time was devoted to, at least a third of each lesson was spent on developing the students' speaking skills. Speaking exercises mostly concentrated on answering questions as posed by the native speaker or imparting information about the students themselves. Most conversations could be described as following a typical question-answer scheme, the teacher posed questions and the students replied to them, which proves to be similar to what Peltzer-Karpf and Zangl concluded in their work (1998: 29). The greater part of the speaking activities as performed in classes did not involve the students speaking freely on certain topics, yet this would not be possible given their recent start in foreign language acquisition. In one instance, however, the third-year-pupils were asked to build sentences on what they can do in each season. The NEST provided 'I can build a snowman in winter' as an example and the children managed to build correct sentences



themselves. Of course, these speaking activities focused on building basic utterances, it is, however, impressive how well these pupils could interact with the teacher without a detailed model at hand. Just as suggested by the curriculum (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a), speaking was the prevailing skill trained in the first form, too. Despite their recent introduction to the new language, the children were able to answer questions with yes or no and sing songs along with their teacher.

The second skill that should, according to the curriculum (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a), be trained at primary school level is listening. In that case, listening activities did not involve an exercise and a sheet to complete, but the teacher adopted a method more suitable for this specific target group: In the third year, the native speaker frequently used children's books to read out loud to train the pupils' listening skills. They listened and could look at the pictures (via the beamer) at the same time. The pictures facilitated understanding and a feeling of success was created among the students, as they managed to understand the story line. In the course of story reading, the NEST tried to assist the weaker students as well as those who had just joined the class and translated the sentences into German, but she also let the pupils themselves translate, which several of them managed well. Gerngross (2001: 189) categorizes stories as "ideal means of developing listening comprehension [...] since [they] fascinate children". The stories and books introduced by the NEST quite certainly matched the children's interest, another point essential for successful language learning. Listening was also the second area addressed by the native speaker in the first form; the NEST again adopted a very guided yet fun approach that can be considered appropriate for this age group. She paused after short sequences, discussed the single tasks with the students and always ensured they understood the listening exercises. Films were used as a kind of listening training, too, and since the pictures supported the plot, understanding was eased. Both the listening exercises as well as the film were fun thus entertaining for the pupils.

Interestingly enough, concerning the group of older students, the native speaker did not only seek to improve their speaking and listening skills, but also aimed at training them in reading and writing. The curriculum assigns the two latter mentioned skills an insignificant, minor part in primary school English; they

should only be conveyed on a minimal and elementary level (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a). Despite this curricular commentary, the NEST emphasized on several occasions that she wanted to prepare her pupils for their further schooling also in areas of reading, writing and grammar, as she wanted them to have a smooth start at secondary school. In terms of reading, it could be observed that the third-year-students were able to read and understand short texts and single sentences. The reading practice was thoroughly guided by the NEST who stopped frequently to check understanding. Writing practice is, according to the native speaker English teacher, initiated at the beginning of the third form, but it is kept at a minimum level. Training in writing involved the composition of short sentences and phrases. In terms of writing competence, it could be noted that the pupils managed to form basic sentences, for instance on what they like to do in each season ("In winter, I like skiing."). These skills were again trained in a secure and supportive way, through guidance by the teacher and without pressure.

What could be considered most exceptional in the linguistic areas addressed in primary school English teaching is that the native speaker teacher also included short sections on grammar. In the course of the observations, I could study how the NEST taught demonstratives as well as the present progressive. The issue of grammar teaching was also addressed in the interview, and the native speaker emphasized that she does introduce basic grammatical structures, but in an age-appropriate way. Thus, the present progressive was not explained to the young learners as such, but their attention was directed to it in texts or in other teaching material. They managed to recognize it themselves, and categorized it as 'ing-form'. As a matter of fact, there was no time spent on learning grammatical rules or structures, but the students' awareness was raised and it seemed as if they stored it as a specific form of verb. Again, an age-appropriate path was chosen to on the one hand convey some sort of meta-understanding of a language, but on the other hand still not overwhelm the pupils with input that would demand too much of them.

Training in the various skills was organized in short-timed activities, due to the students' limited attention span, a fact also mentioned by Harmer (2007: 83), who suggested a change in activity when pupils are getting disinterested. The native speaker assistant inserted drawing activities, an age-specific activity

format, as a break between exercises that required the students' full concentration. These drawing or coloring activities were directly linked to the current topic, as for instance the first form practiced the poem 'Humpty, Dumpty' and received a 'Humpty, Dumpty' coloring sheet. Another method the native speaker applied to regain the children's attention was singing songs. Especially 'London Bridge is falling down', which involved the pupils moving around in the classroom, was frequently performed. So songs, rhymes or chants functioned as a treat, the students seemed to appreciate and were eager to perform. As emphasized previously, the syllabus also states the appropriation of songs and rhythmical chants as learning goals for primary school English (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 206), thus the teacher certainly fulfilled this aim. The students' limited attention span certainly justifies and explains the continual alternation of exercises and exercise formats. In the first form, it was evident that after about half of the lesson, they could not manage to focus any longer, got restless and left their seats. With a change in activity format or by introducing a new exercise, the NEST managed to regain her students' attention. This goes in line with what has been mentioned in the literature; a rich variety of material in teaching is needed to keep the English lesson interesting (Sarter 1997: 46).

Concerning the grouping or interaction format, it could be observed that the native speaker assistant prefers activities that involve the whole class, the students were rarely asked to work individually. Thus the NEST could determine the pace and ensure that the pupils had understood the tasks and had completed them correctly. What is more is that this specific age group might not yet be able to work on tasks individually; they could be overstrained by the exercise and not complete it properly.

According to the curriculum, it is not planned that the NEST should grade the students in any way in terms of their English language proficiency. However, in the first form, the native speaker adopted a certain system to honor good performances or tasks completed well: The young students received golden star stickers for good work. The first-year-pupils responded quite well to this form of praise, they were eager to receive stickers, got enthusiastic about them and seemed to be encouraged in their learning and performance. In the third year, praise for good work or the students' attention was distributed differently, with

the help of songs. As the class apparently enjoyed performing songs or rhymes, the NEST made use of this interest and rewarded the pupils by singing songs if they behaved well. It can be assumed that this approach works, too, as students became excited about the promise of a song. Especially this young group of learners has a “need for individual attention and approval from the teacher”, as Harmer (2007: 82) states. This goal could be attained by the reward system of stars as practiced in the first form.

I gained the impression that the continuous repetition of teaching content was at the core of the English lessons: In the first form, newly learned vocabulary reoccurred in listening activities and in the group of older students, recently learned grammatical items such as the demonstratives were practiced frequently. The element of repetition has also been stressed by the native speaker teacher herself, who is convinced that at that early stage of language learning, the pupils need to be confronted with the new material as often as possible to enhance or enable internalization.

Moving on to a more general perspective on the observed lessons, it was apparent that the issue of classroom management took up quite some time in each unit. This involved issues in which the native speaker had to admonish and reprimand single students, as they started to talk, got inattentive or did not manage to sit still any longer. Behavioral matters or classroom management might not seem relevant concerning the students’ English teaching and learning, yet they do influence the lesson plan and consequently also the outcome. The NEST had to leave out activities she had planned or switch to another exercise. Instances such as the above-mentioned issues made it clear that the students are still young and that a good balance between activities is much needed. For the NEST, the necessity to admonish the children on a regular basis is a characteristic of English teaching to younger learners. She emphasized that probably half of the lessons is needed to scold and reprimand students as well as to repeat what has been said. The native speaker considered this fact to be challenging and energy draining yet rewarding, as one receives immediate feedback on the pupils’ opinion about a task.

The overall impression gained from the observations of the English lessons is that the NEST manages to balance playful, fun activities and language learning, as it is also suggested in the literature (cf. Harmer 2007). A

cheerful atmosphere prevails; this factor definitely supports the young language learners' fearless attitude towards the target language. In the interview, the native speaker also stressed that the emphasis in her teaching is on a playful and enjoyable approach but without neglecting the fact that the students should gain knowledge. By the alternation in action format, the NEST seemed to regain the pupils' attention again and again. Hughes' (2001: 22) quote nicely summarizes the impression of teaching and learning English at the respective school: "[...] [A]n opportunity for lots of practise and repetition without boredom through songs, stories, drama, games etc."

### **6.3. Pronunciation teaching and learning**

In addition to establishing a more general picture of primary school English as taught by a native speaker, this research was primarily focused on pronunciation teaching in the two classes. In the following, various aspects that could be observed in relation to pronunciation teaching and learning are closely investigated: speaking time and language use, but also the methodological approach towards teaching the articulation of sounds and utterances in the foreign language.

First of all, speaking time in the English lessons and its division between native speaker and pupils is discussed. Except for one lesson that was conducted in a teacher-fronted style, students were asked to contribute to the lesson orally for at least a third of the time, an average of 16 to 18 minutes. In lessons where the focus was almost entirely on speaking, the learners spoke for half the lessons, thus about 22 minutes. In year one, the learners' speaking time mostly involved activities that were carried out in chorus, singing a song or rhymes, to name some examples. Speaking time in the third year implied that the students did not only carry out exercises in chorus, but they also spoke solely, gave answers to the exercises or shared information with the teacher.

Concerning the languages used in the classroom, I investigated that the native speaker used the target language in both classes quite often. During exercises or other classroom activities such as story reading she talked English, but also for giving instructions, she regularly chose the target language. Especially in the first form, the native speaker repeated her orders in German or inquired if the students understood her by letting them translate the

requirements of a task into German. The NEST also translated main parts of the stories she was reading out loud into German and accompanied her reading with exaggerated gestures, to enhance and secure understanding. Following the analysis of my notes on language choice on the observation sheets, the choice of English by the native speaker teacher accounted for 80% of her speaking time in the third form and slightly less, about 60%, in the first form.

The English teacher did not teach and train pronunciation in specific, designated slots, but in an integrated way. Therefore, it was incorporated into speaking, listening and reading activities or exercises for vocabulary learning. In most cases, single students mispronounced words and the NEST took up this opportunity to train the English pronunciation. Consequently, pronunciation training was focused on practicing single words which the NEST pronounced loudly in front of the whole class and then asked the students to repeat them. Repetition was usually initiated with the words 'Everyone say/ Alle sagen'. Additionally to the training of the correct articulation, the NEST let the students clap the syllables of the newly acquired words, to name an example, the young learners were introduced to the word 'hibernation' and the native speaker asked them to clap the syllables.

What could be detected throughout the observations is that rhymes and songs were frequently included into the lessons, at least once in each unit. The native speaker integrated songs into the English lessons as a way of loosening and as a treat for good and concentrated work. Traditional children's songs and verses were used, such as 'Humpty, Dumpty', 'The wheels on the bus', 'Hickory, Dickory dock', 'London Bridge is falling down' and 'Five little monkeys'.

As a next point, observations concerning the correction of mistakes as well as the imitation of the native speaker are presented and discussed. Correction in the field of pronunciation mostly focused on the reiteration of a word's articulation, as the students did not yet produce long sentences on their own. With the help of the observation sheets (Appendix 3), events in which the students' pronunciation was corrected were noted down and it was distinguished between an explicit or implicit correction. Most instances (except for one) in which pronunciation was revised could be categorized as implicit, thus the teacher did not tell the students directly that a sound or sound combination was being mispronounced but provided a correct version.

The native speaker made use of two different techniques to make her students aware of an incorrect pronunciation: In one instance in the first form, one male student did not pronounce the word *snake* correctly, he said [sneil] and consequently, the English teacher posed the following question to the whole class: 'Hmmm... How can you say *Schlange*?' and then continued by saying 'Everybody say *snake* [sneik]!'. Another technique the NEST applied to signal to the young learners that their articulation of a word was not accurate was that she said 'Sorry?' which led, at best, to a change in pronunciation by the pupils. One student in the third form pronounced the word *july* [juli], the native speaker teacher then replied with 'Sorry?', he rethought his articulation and answered [dʒ u'la ɪ]. The same scheme was applied for the word *august*, first articulated [august] and after the teacher's intervention [ɔ : 'gʌst]. Throughout all the observed lessons, there was one occasion in the first form in which the NEST reacted explicitly to an incorrect articulation. The native speaker was just teaching the word *horn*, when a male student pronounced it the following way: [hoan]. She reacted immediately and said: 'Nein, nicht [hoan], alle sagen [hɔ : n]'.

There was one specific sound that was frequently mispronounced by the students, the th-sound, thus the unvoiced /θ/ or the voiced /ð/ sound. It could be discovered that the pupils commonly mispronounced it the following way: *three* was articulated as ['sr ɪ], which was immediately rectified by the NEST, as well as the mispronunciation of the word *this* ['t ɪ s] instead of [ðɪ s], it was again set right. The native speaker corrected the students' mispronunciation and then they practiced specific words with a 'th-sound' in them. Furthermore, she also trained the sound on its own, letting the students pronounce the voiced /ð/ several times.

What was most significant in terms of the correction of pronunciation was that the third-year-students frequently corrected their articulation among themselves. One female student in the third form pronounced 'table' [table] and a fellow pupil intervened immediately by saying 'Das heißttē [ɪ bl]'. As a matter of fact, the intervener's pronunciation of the word was an imitation of how the English teacher articulated this specific word. In a second instance, the NEST had just been reading the children's book 'The Gruffalo' to the class when one student used the German word for it, [Grüffelo] and a colleague of his

corrected him: 'Nein, das heißt Gruffalo' [ˈgrʊfələʊ]. Yet they did not only correct others, but also themselves: in one further instance in the third form, one female student spontaneously started to pronounce the single phone /r/ in the word 'February' without any instruction from the native speaker as she did not seem to be satisfied with the way she herself articulated the word. The NEST noticed her efforts, encouraged her to repeat the word and to be confident.

Furthermore, imitations of the native by the students occurred in various ways. In general terms, the young learners most frequently imitated single words with which they were familiar. Some examples in the third form were the names of the months *September*, *October*, *November* and *December*, where the sound combination /bə/ was clearly copied from the native speaker. Several other words that were regularly in use in the observed classes were also imitated significantly, such as *weather*, *little* or *January*. The native speaker repeated them often and provided the students with sufficient opportunities to hear them being pronounced following the RP scheme of pronunciation.

The process of learning a new term, its pronunciation and the consequent imitation of it could be witnessed with the word *autumn* in both classes observed. At the beginning of the observations, the students articulated it the following way: ['autumn]. The NEST then quickly intervened and corrected their mispronunciation with a method that was stated previously; she presented the children with a correct articulation of the word, ['o : əm]. She also asked the students to work out how many syllables the respective word consists of, by clapping them. Interestingly enough, she applied the same procedure not only in the third, but also in the first form and rounded off this process of pronunciation teaching by letting the students repeat *autumn* several times. After her intervention and the training of the correct articulation, it became obvious that the young learners picked up her pronunciation. From this moment onwards, they autonomously pronounced the word the right way, changing the /au/ sound at the beginning to an /'o/ sound. The imitation of the pronunciation of 'autumn' was noticed in all subsequent lessons, as the respective word was frequently in use and not only the older students but also those from the first form articulated it according to RP both in chorus as well as by themselves.

Apart from this group of words familiar to the young learners, it was detected that the pupils occasionally imitated the pronunciation of words that



were unfamiliar to them. In the third form, when the native speaker explained the concept of demonstratives to the students, she used the terms *singular* and *plural*, which the children understood but which certainly were not part of their active vocabulary. Some students started to mumble these two terms, clearly copying the NEST's way of articulation and stressing.

The observations in the first and in the third form revealed that apart from single words, utterances and how these were articulated and stressed were imitated as well. In most cases, these were phrases the native speaker used on a regular basis for issues of classroom management, giving instructions or other orders. To name one example, a female student of the third form imitated the phrase *raise your hand* just moments after the NEST said it. The imitation of phrases was even more recognizable in the first form, where single students repeated the utterances *colour the bus* and closely mimicked the native speaker's pronunciation. The same phenomenon happened with the command *ready-set-go* which the native used before completing an exercise, and most interestingly with the phrase *a job well done*, used by the teacher for praising the students.

#### **6.4. Discussion**

With the help of this study, my intention was to arrive at an understanding of how the native speaker as the English teacher influences the pupils in terms of their pronunciation. Based on the observations, I could determine that the NEST does influence the students positively in their articulation. To be able to draw a final conclusion, to see if the research goals were met as well as to assess implications for further empirical work, it is deemed necessary to discuss the main findings of the study. The outcomes are compared to the teacher's comments in the interview and information from specialist literature. The following part will readdress the main findings of the study in terms of pronunciation training, speaking time, target language use, the inclusion of pronunciation training, difficulties the students have in relation to the English pronunciation and also the teacher's reaction to mispronunciations. Furthermore, the issue of imitation is discussed, too. Therefore, I should be able to answer the set of research questions as posed in chapter 5.1..

In terms of the distribution of speaking time, I could detect that despite the leading role of the NEST throughout the lessons, the third-year-students were involved speaking in many instances; they spoke for at least a third of time (about 16 to 18 minutes) and in lessons that focused on speaking activities, for approximately 22 minutes. The younger students' speaking time accounts for slightly less, an average of 15 minutes. As speaking activities were quite frequently on the agenda, it is not surprising that the young learners participated in conversations with the English teacher and contributed to the lessons. The results in terms of speaking time can be considered quite remarkable, given the students' young age and their only recent start in learning English. The findings in relation of speaking time can be directly correlated to a conclusion drawn by Peltzer-Karpf and Zangl (1998: 32) that the proportion between teacher's talk and learner's talk is 3:1.

The native speaker chose the target language English for most of the time, training in oral English was not restricted to specific exercises but took place in all interactions in the classroom. She tried to incorporate as much target language use as feasible, but without the danger of reducing comprehension. This certainly broadened the students' range of vocabulary and the artificiality of speaking training was reduced. Maynard's (2012: 17) suggestion to aim at carrying out any communicatory situation "that would be a normal part of the lesson" in English describes the teacher's approach accurately. The observation that the target language is used for 80% of the time in the third form and for 60% in the first form relates to the findings of Peltzer-Karpf and Zangl (1998: 32) who also report that English was used predominantly in the classes they observed. The amount of target language use did not seem to overstrain the learners as they clearly followed the instructions and were able to translate them into German when the teacher asked them to. The constant use of the target language English is vital for successful language learning (Maynard 2012: 17) and is also essential for a correct pronunciation, as Harmer (2007: 250) stresses: "The key to successful pronunciation teaching [...] is [...] to have them listen and notice how English is spoken".

Both the division of speaking time between the native speaker and the students as well as the use of the English language are relevant factors for the acquisition of pronunciation. The inclusion of listening activities or films helped

to build up an understanding of the language's pronunciation, too, since these serve as a model for pronunciation and intonation in the English language (Buchholz 2007: 127). In addition to the rather passive training of the articulation of English with the help of listening activities and the input by the native speaker, tasks that did not require the students to use the language orally themselves, the lessons also provided the students with plenty of opportunity to actively practice their speaking and also their pronunciation skills. The following section presents how pronunciation training was generally organized in the respective classes.

It could be observed that similar to what the native speaker claimed in the interview, pronunciation training occurred in the form of "opportunistic teaching" (Harmer 2007: 252). Thus, there were no specific slots designated to pronunciation teaching, but the teacher addressed mispronunciations or introduced new words. This is also what the curriculum foresees, an integrated pronunciation practice (Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 209). To answer the first research question on the time devoted to pronunciation training (as posed in chapter 5.1.) no time specification can be made. Nevertheless, since new words are frequently introduced and the students also mispronounce words, pronunciation training is included at least once into every observed English lesson and the NEST also stressed that she tries to integrate it as often as possible.

Another characteristic of her pronunciation teaching was repetition, the NEST had already stressed in the interview that it is at the core of teaching pronunciation and also Cook categorizes it as "the mainstay of pronunciation teaching" (2008: 81). Recently introduced words were repeated several times, especially long terms, and also another technique which the native had mentioned is used, namely clapping to work out how many syllables newly acquired words have, this was applied with the word *hibernation*. By observing the lessons, it has become clear that NEST acknowledges the importance of repetition for pronunciation learning as she frequently let the students repeat words for several times and paid extra attention to their pronunciation.

As it was already stated, apart from practicing newly learned words, the NEST introduced songs and rhymes as a way to train the English articulation, she already told me in the interview that it is one of her methods for

pronunciation teaching. The suitability of musical elements and verses for the early language classroom has already been pointed out; specialist literature as well as the curriculum list songs and rhymes as appropriate methods to impart pronunciation skills (Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2004: 163-164; Lehrplan der Volksschule 2005a: 209). In the course of her study, Buchholz discovered that songs are the most widely used method for teaching and learning (2007: 162). They transmit a feeling for the stress and rhythm of the language, are considered to be age-appropriate and entertaining. Tunes are uncomplicated for the students to reproduce and it can be supposed that they provide encouragement, as the young learners are able to produce English words themselves, even when it simply is the repetition of a song. Thus, to come up with an answer to the second research question on the organization of pronunciation training and possible strategies, I conclude that it takes place whenever lesson realities require it. In addition to that, songs and rhymes are strategies or rather teaching methods and material the teacher applies for articulation training.

Pronunciation mistakes were, except for one case, corrected implicitly. Just as she stressed in the interview, the native speaker intervened immediately when a mispronunciation occurred in order to prevent the students from memorizing a word inaccurately, but she did not tell the respective student directly. Her strategy is described at length in chapter 6.3., by presenting the correct pronunciation of a word to the pupil or by asking *Sorry?*, she implied that his or her pronunciation was incorrect yet without telling him or her so. This method proves to be non face-threatening for the respective learner but still gives the native speaker teacher the opportunity to remedy mispronunciations. Also when a student volunteered to read a dialogue out loud to the whole class and frequently uttered words incorrectly, she did not interrupt and correct him. In the course of the interview, the English teacher mentioned that a unique quality of her students is that they “allow themselves to be corrected” (Appendix 2), and this could be investigated, too, in the observations. They readily picked up her suggestions for improvement, reacted to her corrections and adapted their pronunciation. Of course, their positive reaction towards critique can be brought in relation to the teacher’s cautious method of correcting. In their work on teaching strategies in primary foreign language classrooms, Coyle, Valcárcel

and Verdú (2001: 154) state that in terms of correction, it is essential to foster phonetic precision by explicitly correcting the pupils' mispronunciation. Given the insights gained throughout the observations, it can be assumed that also an implicit correction can lead to phonetic accuracy. As proposed by Harmer (2007: 252), the NEST adopted an effective and helpful method to approach pronunciation difficulties. After her intervention, all pupils were asked to repeat the correct pronunciation of the respective word until she was satisfied with the way they said it, and this confirmed the impression that I gained after the interview, that a correct pronunciation is one of the native speaker's main goals in teaching primary school English.

Since the English teacher informed me in the interview that she is convinced that her students have most difficulties pronouncing the 'th-sound', thus the unvoiced /θ/ or the voiced ð/ sound, I was very interested in the result of the observations, if this could be confirmed. The observations supported the NEST's claim that this specific sound proves to be problematic for the young learners as it was the sound they mispronounced most frequently. Moreover, the native speaker teacher paid extra attention to the pronunciation of the 'th-sound' as she had the students repeat words with this specific sound very often but also practiced it separately by asking the learners to pronounce the voiced /ð/ numerous times. Interestingly enough, Wode (1983), who compared in his work several studies on common pronunciation mistakes in English of young students whose first language was German, reached a conclusion very similar to what I could discover through the observations. He concluded that the unvoiced /θ/ was often replaced by the /s/ and argued that this is due to the fact that in this area, English does not meet similarity requirements with German and this leads to mistakes (Wode 1983: 181). Despite the fact that both classes are multilingual and German is not every learner's first language, this seems to be a logical explanation for the phenomenon of th-mispronunciation as it is discovered by the NEST and recorded on the observation sheets.

Highly interesting in terms of correction was also that the students in the third form corrected each other's pronunciation. This occurred for instance concerning the word *table* which a student mispronounced, a colleague intervened immediately and provided him with the correct articulation. One fellow classmate tried to improve her own pronunciation of the word *February*

and started to practice it in the lesson. These incidents showed that the young learners did not merely copy or imitate the way their teacher pronounced words or utterances but had established an understanding of how words ought to be pronounced themselves. What is more is that they were even far more critical about the pronunciation of their colleagues than the native speaker was. This fact is considered remarkable as one must not disregard the learners' young age and that they had just been learning English for two and a half years. Again, the incident demonstrated that the native speaker herself put a lot of focus on pronunciation training and the correct articulation of a word, because otherwise, her pupils might not have reached such a level of awareness concerning the English pronunciation. In relation to research question number four on pronunciation mistakes and their correction, it can be stated that the NEST corrected immediately and tried to adopt a cautious way of implicit correcting.

Countless studies have stressed the importance of imitation in terms of pronunciation learning, especially for young learners (cf. Cameron 2003; Brewster, Ellis & Girard 2004; Nielsen 2014) and in the course of the observations, I could detect three different types of imitation. The students most often imitated words with which they were familiar such as *weather* or the names of some months. These terms were repeated frequently in each English lesson, thus the students had several opportunities to hear the specific word being pronounced correctly. When the new word *autumn* was introduced to both classes, it was easily detectable how essential imitation is in their learning process, a fact that is also stressed by Peltzer-Karpf and Zangl (1998: 50). After several repetitions and the teacher's intervention to correct their articulation, they closely copied her accent, functioned as mirrors of her pronunciation (Buchholz 2007: 311).

Additionally, the young learners also copied their teacher's pronunciation of unfamiliar words such as *singular* or *plural*. The third group of imitations involved whole utterances such as *raise your hand* or *ready-set-go*. It can be assumed that the students understood the basic message of these statements, however, they certainly did not comprehend every single word, as the first-year-students surely had not yet learnt the word *job*, for instance. They seemed to copy what they had just heard in the lesson, probably to process it. Especially

phrases that occurred on a regular basis were stuck in the young learners' minds, as it could be noticed that single students in both classes babbled the first line of the song 'London Bridge is falling down', on and on. This links to what has been discussed in the interview when the issue of imitation was addressed. In the interview, the English teacher told me that she noticed the imitation of her pronunciation specifically in the first class; they copied utterances such as *sit down* or *good morning* as well as the previously mentioned London Bridge song. She is convinced that these expressions are somehow stuck in the children's consciousness.

These types of imitation can be categorized as "exact imitation" (Whitehurst 1977 quoted in Bohannon & Stanowicz 1989: 132) as it is especially the case among younger language learners, they tend to copy single phrases or words accurately, without expanding them or adding own elements. On the basis of the latter two examples of unfamiliar words and phrases, I would conclude that imitation is not necessarily linked to understanding the meaning of a term, and especially younger learners seem to readily pick up words and copy them. This links to a term used by Bohannon and Stanowicz (1989: 132) who name this not reflected type "rote imitation". Yet it is still remarkable how accurately the students copy and imitate the native speaker's articulation, they certainly do "reproduce the accent of their teachers with 'deadly accuracy' " (Cameron 2003: 11 cited in Harmer 2007: 81). Buchholz (2007: 311) reached a similar conclusion in her study since she claimed that the students who were taught by a NEST had a pronunciation that was similar to their teacher's. Despite the fact that the students did not necessarily understand everything they imitated, imitation certainly aids at building up a feeling for a language and how words as well as phrases ought to be pronounced. As the teacher of the respective classes is a native speaker of English, her articulation of the target language can be considered very accurate, she consequently presents a suitable model for imitation. Ideally, the children will manage to keep this decent model in mind and will establish an accurate pronunciation of English. To answer research question number three on imitation, it has become obvious that imitation is an essential element of pronunciation learning and the young learners make frequently use of this method.

The last research question is concerned with the pronunciation skills of the students and whether the pupils' proficiency in articulating English can be related to the native speaker. Of course, it is not possible to rate the students' language skills as only seven lessons were observed and no tests were conducted. Nevertheless, just as the native speaker mentioned in the interview, some students in each class show decent pronunciation skills and certainly show the influence of the native as they copy her accent and mirror it (Buchholz 207: 311). This is certainly influenced by the pupils' approach towards the language learning: most students readily used the foreign language in classroom situations and did not seem to worry about making mistakes, just as the native claimed "they have no hesitation" (Appendix 2) and as it is mentioned in specialist literature (cf. Pinter 2006: 29).

It can be concluded that paired with the extensive L2 input, the native speaker's accurate model of the English articulation and the students' imitation skills, the NEST affects the learners' pronunciation substantially. The significance of exposure to a correct model of the target language and the teacher's excellent pronunciation and intonation cannot be stressed often enough, "teachers [certainly] are key players in early language learning" (Nikolov & Djigunović 2011: 160) and their effect on their pupils' language skills is remarkable.

In the end, some limitations of the present study ought to be emphasized: It should not be neglected that this was merely a small-scope study, observing two classes and one native speaker, and it can therefore only provide a limited insight into native speaker language teaching, these results surely cannot be deemed valid for all native speaker teachers in primary school classrooms. Furthermore, no direct comparison to classes following the classic model of English teaching in Austria was drawn, which further restricts the results. Nevertheless, it would be highly interesting to investigate how this intensified model of English teaching affects the students' future language learning, whether they will have a good and rather easy start at their secondary school as anticipated by the native speaker and if they continue to be able to benefit from their early English learning. This could certainly be the initiation point for a longitudinal study as it was carried out in a similar way by Buchholz (2007) and Peltzer-Karpf and Zangl (1998). Of course, one must not disregard



the fact that a model such as this, with a native speaker as English teacher in primary school, would hardly be feasible for the whole of Austria, due to financial and organizational reasons.

Drawing an overall conclusion and also with regard to the research question and the aims of the study, it can only be stressed once more that the native speaker and her teaching absolutely do have a positive effect on the students' pronunciation skills. The young learners were aware of the English pronunciation, received intensified input and various opportunities to practice the articulation themselves. This resulted in a, at least in most observed cases, quite accurate pronunciation of the target language. In addition, the employment of the native speaker also affected other language skills, as the students received some basic training in writing, reading and grammar, too, that are usually neglected in the curriculum. Through the target language use, the young learners got a first impression of the language and how it ought to be pronounced. Furthermore, the teacher's playful approach using songs, rhymes and age-appropriate material motivated them for language learning. Thus, this leads to the notion that the native speaker as the English teacher in primary school is highly valuable and seen as an enrichment in terms of the students' language skills, despite her lacking pedagogic education.

## **7. Conclusion**

Young students are equipped with certain prerequisites that make them successful language learners: They get excited easily, pick up and imitate the language of others and are curious about the world around them. Since foreign language learning has found its way to Austrian primary classrooms and the need to expose children as intensively as possible to the target language has arisen, the employment of native speakers as English teachers is the logical consequence. The aim of this diploma thesis was to explore how the native speaker as the English teacher affected the language skills of the pupils, and particular attention was given to their pronunciation skills.

The first part of this paper provided a theoretical basis for the subsequent empirical study that was conducted at a primary school in Lower Austria. Firstly, aspects of first and second language acquisition and the issue concerning the Critical Period Hypothesis were discussed. However, it was also deemed

necessary to provide some background information on the past and present of English teaching at Austrian primary schools, the education of the teachers, its organization and scope. The focus of the theoretical part was then shifted onto the implications of teaching a foreign language to young students. Considerations on early pronunciation teaching and learning were given strong emphasis, as well as the matter of imitation and early learners. Thus a broad topical basis was established to make an empirical study and the response to a research question possible.

The research questions focused on the effect a native speaker English teacher has on the pronunciation of younger learners, thus research was conducted to find answers to these questions. Two classes, a first and a third form of a Lower Austrian primary school that participates in the school trial 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' were observed for a time span of seven English lessons in each class. In addition, their native English teacher was interviewed to gather more background information on her teaching. I expected that the teacher would have a positive effect on the pupils' skills of articulating English, due to the background information gained from specialist literature.

After the analysis of the observations sheets, the evaluation of the interview and the impressions gained from the observations, it could be concluded that the NEST certainly does influence the pupils' pronunciation in a positive way. Most students had an intelligible articulation, shaped by the native speaker's clear appliance of RP, and they spoke confidently and naturally. What was most significant in the course of the observations was how intensively the young learners imitated their teacher's pronunciation. They tended to copy regularly occurring words but also whole phrases with an impressive accuracy. Thus with the help of the study, I managed to find some evidence that the employment of NEST is efficacious in terms of pronunciation. Moreover, a clear benefit was noticeable in relation to other macro skills, reading and writing, as well as concerning grammar skills. The teacher provided varied lessons for the students, applying a mixture of activities types, intensive exposure to the target language and an inviting atmosphere to train their proficiency in the English pronunciation and their language skills in general.

As this was only a small-scope empirical study, its general significance in the field of early pronunciation learning and the influence of a native speaker is

rather limited, despite its highly interesting and valuable insights into primary school English teaching. Nevertheless, it certainly opens up to a highly relevant field of research; future studies could expand investigations on the issue and broaden the field. Furthermore, the long-term effects and consequences on the students' language abilities and particularly their pronunciation skills prove to be relevant and fascinating areas for empirical projects.

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## Appendix A

### Appendix 1- Interview questions

#### General questions

1. As you are a native speaker of English, where are you originally from?
2. For how long have you been in Austria?
3. For how long have you been working as a NEST in schools?
4. To how many different schools have you been?
5. At how many schools are you currently teaching?
6. What are you teaching at this school (classes, hours)?
  - Do you know how long this school is participating in the intensified English learning program?
7. Have you studied to become a teacher/teaching assistant?
  - If not, what has your original career path been?
8. Did you visit/ complete any (pedagogy) course in preparation for teaching?
  - If yes, was it useful?
  - If no, would you have been interested in a course?
9. Are there any extracurricular activities offered for English?
  - Could you give some details on them?
10. What are the reactions to this specific, intensified type of English language teaching?
  - by the class teachers
  - by the students
  - by the parents

#### Teaching

11. Do you team-teach or work in any other way together with class teacher?
  - Could you describe your work with the class teacher?
12. Concerning which criteria (curriculum, book, topics,...) do you organize your teaching? How do you plan your teaching?
13. Which material do you use?
14. Is there a book you orientate yourself on for teaching?
  - What do you think of the textbook?
15. What are your core aims or goals for primary school teaching?
16. Rate the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing concerning the time spent on them in the classroom?
  - Could you explain your ranking?
  - What else is important to you (for instance vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation)?

#### Pronunciation

17. Do you specifically teach pronunciation?
  - Could you give reasons for your answer?
18. How much time (in %) do you spend on pronunciation?

19. How is pronunciation addressed in your teaching?
20. Do you do any specific exercises for pronunciation training?
21. Could you give examples?
22. Could you name some (if any) phones or allophones [single sounds or sound combinations] that you would categorize as most difficult to pronounce for the students?
  - Do you have any strategies to improve them?
23. How do you handle mistakes concerning pronunciation?
  - What is-in your eyes-important concerning the correction of pronunciation mistakes?
24. Have you noticed any imitations of your pronunciation by the students?
  - Are these imitations linked to any specific situations?
  - Are there any specific words with which you noticed imitation?
25. How would you generally rate/describe the pronunciation skills of your students?
26. How would you rate/describe their language skills in general?
27. What are the consequences of your teaching- as a native speaker of English for the students? Is this beneficial? Is this somehow reflected in their language and especially pronunciation skills?
28. Is there anything more you want to add?

## Appendix 2- Transcription interview NEST

I: Interviewer

N: Native speaker

I: Hello and thank you for doing the interview with me.

N: You're very welcome.

I: Thanks..Ehm..As you are a native speaker of English, where are you originally from? Are you from Austria or from some other country?

N: No, I'm originally.. I'm African, I come from West Africa, in Nigeria.

I: Ok and for how long have you been to Austria?

N: Mmm.. My parents migrated in the seventies, my father had.. He won a scholarship to study medicine when I was six months old, so I was a very small baby and I attended kindergarten in Vienna and primary school 'til the fourth class, but I went to a bilingual school.. yeah... So my first language was German.. and when I started school, went I started at the international school, English. Although my parents always spoke it at home.

I: Ok, mhm.. So for how long have you been a native speaker teacher at school?

N: Phuu, that's a good questions, 'cause I worked in so many different places..

I: Mhm..

N: Emm..I had a... I worked freelance..

I: Ok..

N: I worked freelance with language institutions and I had contracts to work emmm in kindergarten.. ja.. in Lower Austria, I had a contract to work with a primary and secondary school here in Austria but only the lower levels, from the first to the third forms and we eh and I also did adult education with Volkshochschule?

I: Mhm, ok, yes, Volkshochschule

N: Yes.. and in Wifi and these were children that had to redo their

I: Oh the.. A-levels?

N: Yeah..

I: Oh oh the for the lower secondary?

N: Yeah, for the lower secondary school..

I: Ok...

N: And they had to redo it.. We worked as external examiners..

I: Oh, ok, I see

N: I was only responsible for the....

I: The testing?

N: For the English part...

I: Oh, ok

N: They had different subjects and they had external examiners and they redid their ...Yeah, and I wouldn't call them A-levels..

I: Yeah, no ..

N: You know it's the fourth.. You know, you have a different educational system..The fourth lower level

I: Yeah, you don't really have a final exam, but just to pass the mandatory schooling..

N: Yeah..

I: Ok, I see, and at how many different schools are you currently teaching?

N: Only one..

I: Only here  
N: I'm.. No, I mean these are two different schools ..  
I: Oh you're in both?  
N: Yes  
I: Ok.  
N: And I only have one private lesson  
I: Ok..  
N: Normally, I'm employed in this school  
I: Ok  
N: But in the other school, the parents have to pay for the lesson.  
I: Oh ok..  
N: But it's just one lesson in a week  
I: Ok, ok.  
N: And I have about 16 children in the class..  
I: Ok.. And how many lessons do you have in this school?  
N: I have sixteen lessons.  
I: Sixteen.. So that's  
N: In total...  
I: Two per class or how is it divided?  
N: The lessons? Three lessons a week.  
I: Three lessons a week!  
N: Yes.  
I: Ok wow  
N: I have one.. I hold one lesson alone and I have two integrated learning with the teacher  
I: Oh ok  
N: That means we do integrated learning also with not only with English but we have the other subjects like we've done gym lessons, physical education  
I: Oh, that's interesting  
N: We do music, arts& crafts as well... yes, that's how we divide the three lessons a week..  
I: Oh, I see, so you're team teaching somehow in the other two?  
N: Yes, yes  
I: And that's from the.. the third form is your oldest.. where you have this model  
N: Yes, yes.. They are the pioneers  
I: Ja, the pioneers... And the other ones, the forth form, they just have one lesson with you per week?  
N: Yes, that's these would you call the Verbindliche Übung and the Unverbindliche Übung..I mean we have it divided like this.. there's a school trial project, this Schulversuch, they have three lessons a week and in the other class where there is no school trial project, they have.. I hold.. I do one lesson in a week with the. depending on what class they're in.. in the lower class the Unverbindliche Übung and in the higher the verbindliche Übung  
I: Just like it is in the curriculum.. Oh I see, that's interesting!  
N: Yeah..  
I: And have you studied to become a teacher or a teaching assistant?  
N: No, no, no, I did not study any form of education, I have a Bachelor's in philosophy, Bachelor's of Arts in philosophy  
I: Ok, that's interesting.. mhm  
N: The thing is, I've always been teaching, I have always done tutoring, when I was in the university, I always held, had tutoring lessons, ja, ja, and it's a kind

of.. somehow, I found myself in this profession but I have a talent to teach and when I came to Austria, my first job was in a kindergarten in Vienna, as a native speaker

I: Oh, ok

N: And I just found myself in this position although I didn't really want to but it's something I do like, I enjoy teaching and I know that it's a talent I have, but a professional teacher, no

I: No

N: No, I studied philosophy and I wanted to do something else back then.. yeah.. let's see what the future.. no,no,no,no..I'm 38 now, so

I: It's enough

N: Yeah

I: Ok, and so you didn't do any pedagogic course in preparation?

N: No

I: Would you be interested in something like that?

N: Well, I could do a Master's, I could do the Master's in yeah I could specify in some certain

I: in education

N: field.. in an educational fields

I: Yeah but that takes up so much time

N: That's an option...I mean you could do it as a berufsbegleitend

I: Oh, yeah

N: Yeah, that's the advantage, but I don't know if I want to do it, I mean, it depends on how much, I don't know, I have to check how many semesters they normally have

I: I think it's at least four, isn't it?

N: Four, yeah

I: I mean it takes quite some time, apart from teaching spending on this like

N: Yeah.. I think.. yeah.. I think I'm a typical example of an English person, you know, through and through.. I'm gaining experience from the pedagogic, the educational part, I mean I'm learning by doing..

I: By doing, yes..

N: Practically and I learn every day and I .. I, I see how the other teachers work and I try to take advice when they tell me something .. I do.. I adapt in my own lesson and there're so many things, how to deal with the social aspect, how to deal with the children as well.. yeah..

I: Mhm..

N: Yeah, learning by doing

I: It might be more useful the way you do it than going to a pedagogic college and doing the Master's degree probably..

N: Yeah it depends, it depends but I think from my part- teaching English- I don't think it's really compulsory

I: Yeah.. no

N: I think, cause I do have a Bachelor's- a degree. If you wanna say that I'm qualified.. yeah.. that I'm a qualified.. probably not a teacher but a qualified employee, I don't know how you would

I: Yeah

N: I don't know how to

I: Yeah and

N: B

I: And by going team-teaching, you see a teacher and you, like you said you gain experience and tactics and strategies.. And are there any extracurricular activities offered here or just the.. so not really?

N: No, I don't think so..

I: So just the trial and the normal

N: Yes, no, we don't have any extracurricular activities

I: I mean it's quite a lot already

N: Yeah, it's quite a lot, Yeah it's quite a lot Yeah.. I mean the want to introduce the system of the you know, they don't have.. emm. a completely, a day school, they only have .. They want to introduced it next year, and I don't know how it's gonna apply to me because it's probably applies to the other, the main subjects like German or Maths or something and they're maybe extracurricular, but yeah, I don't wanna say too much, I don't know exactly how it's going to be organized or yeah

I: So might be, might not be, depending on how it's organized, yes...

N: Yes, and on how many children register, that's the first thing, and they have yeah..yeah.

I: ok, so teacher talk.

N: Yeah..

I: Ok and so what the reactions to this intensified teaching of English, what do you think?

N: Yeah, I mean the parents, they like it because I think that we live in a very, we live in a global society

I: Definitely

N: and English is very common everywhere, it's nothing new, I think it's quite important to integrate this in the, not only in the secondary levels

I: Yeah

N: but also in the lower

I: Early on..

N: Because normally, I think, there are lots of, there are lots of people and they're doing their jobs really quite good in the secondary levels and in the lower levels, they're kind of like ahmm.. being neglected kind of.. a bit, I would say

I: Yes

N: Yeah, because I mean the primary teachers, they're so, they're quite ehmm ehmm so occupied with all their

I: With all their subjects already

N: Yeah, with all their subjects and so they need someone who really can focus und this, yeah

I: Yes

N: So the feedback from the parents is very good and..yeah..

I: And the colleagues, how is it, is it good?

N: The colleagues? I mean the colleagues, yeah, that's a good question.. yeah because colleagues have different personalities and especially when I'm doing the team-teaching and emm and what I can do with one colleague, I cannot do with another colleagues

I: Yes

N: And that's for me also a learning process

I: Sure, sure

N: because I also want to learn and learn, I believe that we can learn from everyone, yeah and for me, it could only be an advantage for me

I: Yeah

N: So, yeah, but generally, I think they're quite pleased and they also learn a lot of things doing the lesson as well

I: And the students, do you think they enjoy it, the

N: Yeah, ehmm, they don't have pressure, the don't get..

I: grades or anything

N: Yeah, there's no pressure so that's, I also think a very good advantage for them so I can.. they, yeah.. I can, I can present or conduct the lesson in a way that is quite... in a fun atmosphere but I still have to know my boundaries

I: Yeah

N: Because it's not always easy, it's, it's a thin line between yeah.. fun and, because I do want to impart something

I: Sure

N: I want to impart something useful yeah. Something that they can use for their entire.. I mean I, I'm 38 years old and sometimes I remember songs that I learned in nursery school and I am like aaahh, it goes like an earwig in your head and, and I just want something to be left behind

I: Yeah.

N: Yeah, so it's a thin line between a fun atmosphere, so I try to juggle, juggle it, yeah, yeah

I: Especially because they're so young, it's quite difficult, isn't it?

N: Yeah, yeah, they're very young, and these are not kids that go, it's not like they're.. when I worked with adults it was like they want, they want to

I: Yeah, they want to learn..

N: Yeah, they want to learn and you don't have to tell them put your pens away, do this, do that.. the scolding aspect is already gone, you don't have to scold these people because they want to learn, yeah, and with the kids, you probably have to use half the lesson to scold and reprimand and

I: Yes

N: and repeat and repeat and repeat.. Yeah, it's, it's a challenge, it's quite challenging and it takes a lot of energy, a lot of strength from you but it's also an experience and hopefully, when the kids know ok this is the kind of person you are, then they hopefully follow the rules and regulations

I: But it's a lot of work, definitely

N: Yeah, it's a challenge, ja

I: Ok.. so my next question would be the team-teaching, but we already talked about it, that you do two team-teaching and one alone

N: yeah, one alone

I: And concerning which criteria do you organize your teaching? So are there any books or topics or how do you how do you plan your teaching?

N: Ja, for the school trial project, I always have to document what I do, so there's a documentation.. emmm. yeah I mean there are lots of books that you can use, the *Playway* books are not really sooo emmm.. I don't really like the *Playway* books so but they have new revised editions for example the *Lasso* and colleagues because they like this teaching, the English, the new subjects in English, some colleagues travel to Scotland, and Ireland and the UK and the bought some beautiful books

I: Oh, nice

N: And so we use this books as well and we have story books.. so that's that's the material that I use

I: So you just have like topics and you do one topic and then you do another one

N: Yeah, I mean, I have, from school we can order, we have, this is nice [shows Lasso] but I only have for the third and fourth class

I: So it's a bit more advanced than *Playway*?

N: Yeah, it's a revised edition because they had the old one and I didn't like the old one. But this is the revised edition and it's beautiful

I: Oh, yeah, so did this from i? [I recognizes an exercise which was done in one observed class]

N: Oh, did we do it this last time?

I: Yeah, on Wednesday

N: Yeah, and so they have the different topics and I try to adapt it then in the lesson

I: Yeah, you can't take everything, of course

N: Yeah, but it's good, it's enough, there's so much to do.. so these are the main books that I normally order, in the third and in the fourth class, I have a first class, we use the *Playway* in the first class because they have.. You can do stick-on pictures and emmm the *Playway* 1 is not here.. then *Playway* in the second class as well yeah.. because they have got sketches and things like that.. I think we've watched a few films from the *Playway*, that's from the *Playway* book

I: Yeah the lion and the

N: Yeah and and that's what I use for the first and the second classes

I: And then you switch to the other one

N: Yeah

I: Ok and... what are your core aims or goals for teaching, what do you want your students to, to acquire within the four years?

N: I just want to equip for the next, for the secondary levels and my main aim and goal is to equip these children that when they go to the secondary school when they are confronted with the real grammatic yeah, that they're not overwhelmed with the entire situation that they have that they have, just that it's a bit easier.. Would I say simplify? I don't know..

I: Yeah

N: the next stage a bit, that's my goal, just to equip them a bit.. yeah.. because I think that most of the kids in the primary levels, they have nothing and then they get into the secondary schools and all of a sudden, they have to know this and that, the present tense and progressive and past perfect and whatever and it gets more and more and more and then they start, they need tutoring, they need lots tutoring and then they have to write application letters and then they have to write texts, lots of texts, 150 words and in only God know what tense.. and they're completely overwhelmed and then they always.. and when they start bad, they always get bad grades, and it's difficult

I: to change the...

N: yeah, to improve, then

I: Sure

N: And, I hope, yeah, I mean I am a bit emmm, how would I say? Ambitious or maybe too ambitious.. and sometimes, I have to step back a bit and think oh they're young kids and now we have to do a bit of fun and play and so but I, I believe that something stays

I: sticks, yes, definitely. And just, just that they see ok this is something familiar and I have heard that before..



N: Sorry to interrupt you but, we did numbers today, in this class, and the integration class, the parallel class, from the level, from the standard, is a bit lower, because it's an integration class, the have to two children with Down syndrome.. and I did numbers with these children in the integration class, last week, and we repeated it again this week and then I asked them to count the numbers from one to twenty and they could do it, yeah, and Bettina's class is a much higher level and we just begun I mean we.. stumbling blocks..

I: Yeah but you can see some improvement

N: Yeah, I mean some kids pay attention and yeah and I have to repeat myself, I'm just like a broken record, keep playing and playing again and again and again.. yeah

I: Yeah but they need that!

N: Yeah, it's interesting...And I have a son who is fourteen and he is like "Mama, why don't you teach in an older school because we don't behave like that" and I say, nooo.. And I say no, I'm with the younger ones, because I like that you get immediate feedback and the kids, they're soo cute and they can be challenging but you get when they don't like something they show it immediately

I: Or say it, yeah

N: yeah, when they like something, they tell you immediately, and that's for me emmm..my way of getting my... yeah..

I: Being rewarded

N: My confirmation, ja,

I: Definitely.. Yeah but that's not the case with the older ones

N: Yeah I mean I have a fourteen year old so he tells me things that they normally do in class

I: Yeah, but I think they don't really show it that much, what they like and what they don't like, they're just

N: Yeah, they're puberty stage

I: yeah, fun Ok and if you had to rate the four skills listening, speaking, reading and writing concerning on how much time you spend or how important this is for you in the class or in the first and the third one, would you do this? Probably?

N: Yeah, the thing is, from the school board commission, emm... We're not really allowed to write

I: Mhm, yeah, I know,

N: And writing is still...even.. I mean, we are allowed to write beginning from the third classes, but it has to be quite a minimum level, normally, the advantage with the school trail project is that I have enough room to do a bit more, I can do a bit more

I: Yeah, mhm

N: Ja, emm, the thing is, my experience is that I have, for example, a second class, I wish you could, why didn't I tell you to come to the second class? Well you needed a first and a third class

I: Yeah, but I

N: Ok, did you, a second wouldn't have been ok?

I: It might have been ok, I don't know

N: Can you change? Are you only documenting? Can I ?

I: I could come and visit

N: Yes, yes because they are not allowed to write and that's always a challenge for me, and they are a bit higher than the first class but they can identify words, they can read already and thing is that I try to encourage them, I mean when

child starts to read, I would not say please don't read.. So I encourage them, the child, so they cannot identify some words.. There is a book that I use a colleague brought from London, it's really good, it supports the national curriculum and it's a key stage one, and, yeah they have three letter words and they have to fill in the vowels and I allowed them to do that

I: Oh, ok

N: Yes, simple things, men, and they knew it, men, red, only the vowels, a,e,i,o,u, and they knew it

I: It's good that they can do it!

N: In the second level!

I: in the second level! After one and a half years of English, I mean that's great

N: And I encourage that, a little bit, although the school board doesn't want me to but my principal told me that because it's a school trial, I have more free room

I: Freedom to do something like this

N: yeah, yeah

I: I mean, it's just logical to include it, because, I mean in the third and fourth form, they manage to write basic sentences

N: Yeah, short sentences, short, short phrases, yeah

I: Yeah so just

N: and the vocabulary.. In the third class, I introduce the vocabulary books because then we have a vocabulary book where we can write in the vocabulary book and then we do some dictation tests as well, also that's how I try to.. you know foster the the writing and the reading skills ... but they don't get grades, they only get suitor grades, they always ask me "Esther, was hab ich den?" and I say "Oh, you have a 2 and a 1" yeah because

I: Because they somehow like it

N: Yeah, they love it, the dictation tests? Oh they love it, they love it, it's emmm after you left, you know, we were on Wednesday, they were not well-behaved, and I was so angry, and on Thursday, I said, ok we're gonna have a test and normally, I write it in the Mitteilungsheft and they can learn for about two weeks because the parents are and I said of course they can learn, it's no problem.. but I was so angry, I said we're going to do a test, with the six words, make-making, write-writing, ride-riding, bake-baking, dance- dancing and.. six words use-using.. and yeah I mean they didn't read for the test, but only about four pupils didn't really get it right but they tried.. and they did this make-making and they trid

I: Ok, so somehow incorporation of grammar as well, yeah, I saw this in your, when I observed that you try incorporate some grammar in the higher forms

N: Yeah, but we're not allowed to say that it's grammar. Do you understand? I'm not allowed to say: I'm teaching you the present progressive today..

I: But we're doing the -ing form

N: Yeah, we called it another name, the -ing words

I: Yeah, but they get it somehow and they.. I realized that they see it and they're like "Oh, that's the -ing form" They identify it immediately

N: Yes, yes

I: And, Ok, as I'm specifically doing pronunciation, now some questions on pronunciation teaching and learning and so.. So do you somehow specifically teaching pronunciation or just incorporate it? Or when it comes up?

N: Teach phonics.. phuu..

I: Just like..not with the symbols but

N: I just tell them to repeat and with the syllables, "How many syllables" [N claps] and they repeat and they repeat it and repeat it until I'm quite satisfied with the way they pronounce it but to teach.. I mean that's oral English, I don't teach them oral English, I don't teach them any form of phonetics or phonic skills, but I just tell them to pronounce the words, that's the only thing I do, that's our way of oral English

I: Yeah, mhm. So you can't really tell how much time that is per lesson, it depends on which words come up and how they pronounce it..

N: I try to as much as possible, I don't know if that's enough time for you

I: That's fine

N: As much as possible. When I know that it's a new word, or if it's a, it's a long word, then I try as long and often, but I try to do it in a fun way, because I say: make and uuuse and uuuse and.. yeah I mean, make it a bit fun

I: Yeah

N: Yeah, but how much time, I don't really, specify time

I: Yeah, because pronunciation is just really at the bottom, and when it comes up, you just deal with it when it comes up but you just don't really incorporate it

N: Yeah, mhm, and as often and in as many lessons as possible

I: And so, and specific exercises would be just to repeating and making it in a playful and funny way?

N: Yeah, yeah

I: And would you say that you also train, is songs and rhymes, is this a way of training pronunciation for you?

N: Yeah, yeah we do rhymes, especially in the lower classes, you have to use rhymes because you can't really do integrated learning, I can't do integrated learning, so we do lots of rhymes.. ja, and, ja, and I think that that's a good way..

I: Definitely

N: Songs as well, ja, we do songs as well, but we haven't been doing lots of songs recently, ja, we have to do more songs, but we do rhymes as well, you know, the Incy, Wincy Spider, the Humpty, Dumpty, the London Bridge, and Two little birds, sitting on a wall, we also learned that as well. Fly away Peter, fly away Paul, come back Peter, come back. Two little dicky birds sitting on a wall, genau. One named Peter, one named Paul, fly away, Peter, fly away Paul, come back Peter, come back Paul, genau.[NEST performs rhyme with movements]

I: So with movements?

N: Ja, genau, we do lots of movements and mimic and gestures, ja.

I: Ok, and would you say that there are any single sounds or sound combinations were they have most difficulties with or-

N: Yes, th,

I: Th, yes

N: like thirteen

I: the Austrian

N: yeah, thirteen, I did it last year, not this year, I haven't really done it, but I always used to tell them that they should say [N puts tongue between teeth] yeah, th is quite a problem. And I want to do it when they are a bit mature because sometimes, it can go out of control, and so I say [...] and the have to repeat

I: Ja

N: Ja and they have to say thirteen, ja, th is a problem

I: It's difficult. Ok and how do you handle mistakes concerning pronunciation?  
N: I correct immediately  
I: Mhm and would you, do you tell the students that it's wrong or do you just correct and then they know that it's wrong? Or is there any, is there anything important about correcting pronunciation in your eyes?  
N: I, I, for me it's important to correct immediately, emm, emm, a girl, or someone sneezed in her class today and then I said "Bless you" and then a boy said: "Sagt man nicht God bless you?" And then I said "No! Bless you sagt man im Sinne von wenn jemand niest und God bless you sagt man Gott segne dich wenn ich dich segnen möchte" Im Sinne von, also, ja, so I correct immediately, ja. Or, ja, whatever, I can't really think of anything spontaneously at the moment but when something comes up, I try to deal with it immediately  
I: So that they don't start learning or remembering it in the wrong way  
N: Yeah, definitely  
I: And have you noticed any imitations of your pronunciation by the students?  
N: Oh yes, the first class, they're so cute, when I say "Sit down please" and sometimes I hear "Sit down, good morning", they always, it's like a earwig, I told you, I'm like a broken record and so and they repeat it and sometimes, I just laugh, but it's good because  
I: So, things they really hear a lot like good morning  
N: Yeah, something that's in their consciousness I think it has been stuck  
I: Yeah, yeah, so they might not even get single words like Sit down please, they know what they have to do, but just like because they hear it probably  
N: Yeah, so often that they have to say it, yeah, they hear it so often, or sometimes "London Bridge is.." sometimes, sometimes  
I: Yeah, they start singing  
N: Yeah, so "London Bridge is falling..", "I know, I know but" ja, but it stays in their conscious mind  
I: Definitely, I also noticed that the third form, they say "Singular" and "Plural" just they way you say it  
N: Really?  
I: Yeah, that's incredible  
N: Singular  
I: Yes, they just like imitate you  
N: Ja, and when they get to the secondary schools, hopefully, and they see a teacher that is very strict and you get grades for it, then they won't be too.. shocked I'd say  
I: Ja, mmhm Ja, and hopefully also speak English and speak up  
N: In conversations, ja  
I: They do it now so naturally but  
N: I think it's quite important I mean I start as young as possible because I think children, they have the capacity, the capability to learn  
I: Yes  
N: emm, there's a, some kind of research, they said that some students can learn, children have the ability to learn up to about seven languages, ja, I don't how their mind is because they absorb so much information, ja, and I can only use it now, so I take advantage of it, sorry children.. but I take advantage of this.. ja..  
I: Ja, definitely, especially speaking skills  
N: Yes  
I: Because now they're not timid or afraid of making mistakes, I think

N: Making mistakes, Yes! A beautiful thing, they have no hesitation, even if they say it wrong, they say it wrong and they allow themselves to be corrected, ja

I: Ja, that's true and in the higher levels, you have the problem that they're so scared of making mistakes in front of the others

N: Oh, ok I'm glad I'm in the lower levels

I: Yeah, definitely, they just start speaking, they don't really think about it

N: Ja, and that's good

I: Definitely. Ok so how would you rate or describe the pronunciation skills of your students? Do you think that they are quite good or..

N: I have very good pupils like Martina, and Leo, and Lisa-Marie I have good.. ja.. and then I have some pupils that make lots of efforts like Bernhard, he's not always well-behaved but when I ask him something, he always, always almost always gets it right

I: ja, ja

N: And he, he raises his hand and he tries to read, ja, and for me, that's, I appreciate that because he's making efforts, ja, and then I have.. yeah, it's difficult because hmmm.. and then I have kids that are like Erik.. I... ja.. I don't know how to... I can't give you a general rating.. I'm not R&R, this rating agency

I: It's difficult, isn't it?

N: Europeans, they were so angry when they rated

I: When they got downgraded

N: Yeah, I can't really, I don't have a general rating

I: No, no, no because you also don't have to grade them so why should you

N: I'm glad because I can do some kind of an individual, I try to individualize it a bit and not really generalize it .. ja... ja..

I: Yes, and as long as they pick up something, I think, it's really good

N: Genau, where they are, I pick them up from the level that they are and when they're not there, then I, I just leave it and whenever they're ready, then we continue from there and I try to build up on it, yeah, yeah

I: Yeah. Ok.. and you also have some many new students in they classes, is that

N: Yeah, I mean, it's been a real challenge for me because no, that is a real challenge because the kids are, they've already achieved a certain standard and then new kids come into the class and you have to step down, ja, and that's really quite difficult because the kids don't want me to...emm..the things they already know, they don't want me to repeat it .. and I have to, kind of a bit.. integrate the new children.. and that day, we did numbers upstairs, from eleven to twenty and then we did the ten's and then we did addition and I said, for example "twenty-three plus thirty-seven is" and they had to not only tell me the answer but they had to write the word

I: oh, ok

N: And Manseed started crying and I said "Manseed, why are you crying?" and he said because he didn't finish the other sheet and he doesn't know what to do and I, I wrote it on the board, I wrote it in figures so  $37 + 22 =$  and I asked Manseed, I said "Manseed, have you done this with your teacher" and he said yes, and I said, because they normally do hundreds, and thousands, and ten-thousands and the children said "We've done up to one thousand" because they're in the third class, and so I said "So what's the problem? I'm just writing it in English, we're doing additions in English and I'm writing it on the board and they only thing that you have to do is just to write, just to write from the board." and then he said yeah, but he doesn't have enough space and then I said "Ok,

then write smaller, you don't need to cry, take a tissue paper and clean your eyes".. ja.. What was the question?

I: Ja, the differences between the students because they have just joined the class

N: the new students, especially the new students that are coming and that's the challenges that I have to deal with, ja because they are, to a certain extent, overwhelmed, but there are still lucky because they're not being graded for it and this is their chance.. as long as they.. as soon as they start with the secondary school..

I: They'll be graded

N: Ja, and then they have to really deal with some serious problems. So they're still I mean in my hands, Manseed is really good t

I: Yeah

N: And he's really good

I: And he now has to two years to build up some English skills

N: Ja

I: which hopefully will help him

N: Ja, I mean Rena, she's a girl, you know, with the Arabic alphabet, they write from, they write differently from how we write from left to write, they write from right to left, for example, ja.

I: Ja

N: And I mean she's also a girl, and she surprises me sometimes as well

I: Like on Wednesday

N: yeah, I said something and

I: I think, and didn't she know

N: A word

I: dress? I don't know

N: Just a word, and sometimes, and she raises her hands because she wants to, and she stands up and then I say "sit down" ja, but some, some kids, they surprise me, I have the Rejuud, he also surprises me, today, he had a number and he wanted to. He said it in German because he is learning German with the, he is going to this with Förderstunde? He has extra lessons. And then he said it very quietly three.. Ja.. and so, and I said "Very good, Rejuud, I have three". Ja, so they try a bit, it's quite challenging because they kids are at a different level and, and when the kids are a bit higher, I understand that..

I: They get bored

N: ja, ja,

I: But you have to repeat

N: Repeat, yes, I have to give these kids a chance as well, it is not easy

I: not easy, yes

N: Yeah

I: Ok, so would you say that your teaching is or this model of teaching is beneficial to the children?

N: I hope so, I hope so

I: Yes,

N: Ja, emmm, ja, I mean, I can't rate myself, I'm no rating agency, emmm, ja, I hope, I'm doing my best and, and I hope it is beneficial

I: I'm sure it is

N: Yeah, of course, I mean, we do exercises and we do lots of things to make sure that they..ja.. I believe it is

I: I'm sure it is, and is there anything more you want to add or?

N: Emm add? Patience is a good virtue. My mother always said the patient dog gets the fattest bone.. ja.. ja I have to patient with the kids, and also when things don't really work out the way I want, I shouldn't give up, I should be patient and we're going to reach our goal, that's the only thing I want to say, I'm trying to comfort myself

I: That's a good strategy. Ok so thank you for very much

### Appendix 3- Observation sheets

Date& Time:	School:	Class:	Pupils (f/m):	Topic:	Observer:
Involvement of the class teacher: y/n					

[illegible]

**Notes:**



Date & Time:	School:	Class:	Pupils (f/m):	Topic:	Observer:
Involvement of the class teacher: y/n					

Pronunciation

1. Are certain parts of the lesson designated to training pronunciation? y / n
  
2. How is pronunciation introduced - explicitly/ implicitly-? [       ]
  
3. How does the NEST handle the correction of pronunciation? Explicitly/Implicitly?[       ]
  
4. In how far/How is NEST's pronunciation imitated by the students? words/ sentences/ intonation?
  
5. Do the students ask direct questions concerning pronunciation?[       ] y / n:

Date& Time: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Involvement of the class teacher: y/n \_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Pupils (f/m): \_\_\_\_\_

Material used:

Lesson outline:

## **Appendix B**

### **Abstract English**

This thesis seeks to explore how native speaker assistants in the Austrian primary school classroom influence the young students' pronunciation skills. In addition to the theoretical background provided, a study with two elementary school classes was conducted.

The first part of this paper provides a certain conceptual basis. It includes the characteristics of second language learning, information on the past and present of primary school English teaching in Austria and on the respective school trial 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch'. Then, the focus is shifted to pronunciation teaching and learning as well as to the native speaker and the class teacher as the English teacher at primary school level, their assets and drawbacks.

The empirical part of this thesis is intended to establish the link to the realities of intensified English teaching at elementary school. A study was conducted in a primary school in Lower Austria that participates in 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch'. It combined lesson observations and a detailed interview with the English native who is employed as English teacher. The outcomes of the research revealed that the native speaker has a significant, positive effect on the students' pronunciation, but also on their language proficiency in general. Most pupils spoke self-confidently with a quite accurate pronunciation, which could some part be due to the native's efforts in the classroom, her corrections and methods of conveying the English articulation. Moreover, all four macro skills as well as grammar and vocabulary were integrated in the extensive English teaching and learning program. Thus, the results support the claim that the native speaker does affect the young learners' pronunciation skills positively.

## **Deutsche Zusammenfassung**

Diese Diplomarbeit befasst sich mit 'native speaker assistants', die im Englischunterricht in österreichischen Volksschulen eingesetzt werden und wie jene sich auf die Aussprachefähigkeit der Schülerinnen und Schüler, insbesondere auswirken. Zusätzlich zum theoretischen Hintergrund wurde eine Studie mit zwei Volksschulklassen durchgeführt.

Der erste Teil dieser Arbeit bietet die wissenschaftliche und sprachwissenschaftliche Basis. Er beinhaltet die Charakteristiken des Zweitspracherwerbs, Informationen über die Geschichte und Gegenwart des Fremdspracherwerbs an österreichischen Volksschulen und über den Schulversuch 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch'. Der anschließende Schwerpunkt ist das Aussprache lehren und lernen sowie die Vor- und Nachteile von Muttersprachlerin/Muttersprachler und der/dem Klassenlehrerin/Klassenlehrer als Englischlehrerin/Englischlehrer im Volksschulbereich.

Der empirische Teil dieser Arbeit hat das Ziel, eine Verbindung zu der tatsächlichen Situation des intensivierten Fremdsprachenerwerbs in der Volksschule herzustellen. Es wurde eine Studie an einer niederösterreichischen Volksschule die an 'Sprachintensivierung Englisch' teilnimmt, durchgeführt. Jene Studie beinhaltete sowohl Unterrichtsbeobachtungen als auch ein detailliertes Interview mit der englischen Muttersprachlerin, die als Englischlehrerin eingestellt ist. Die Ergebnisse der Forschung zeigen, dass die Muttersprachlerin nicht nur einen signifikanten, positiven Einfluss auf die Aussprache der Schülerinnen und Schüler hat sondern auch auf deren Englischkenntnisse im Allgemeinen. Ein Großteil der Schülerinnen und Schüler verwendeten die Sprache selbstsicher mit einer recht genauen Aussprache, was bis zu einem gewissen Grad sicher an den Bemühungen der Muttersprachlerin, ihrer Verbesserung und den Vermittlungsmethoden lag. Zusätzlich waren die vier Makrofertigkeiten sowie Grammatik und Vokabel lernen Teil des intensivierten Englisch Lehrens und Lernens. Somit bestätigt sich die Annahme, dass die Muttersprachlerin die Aussprache der jungen Lerner positiv beeinflusst.

## **Appendix C**

### **Curriculum Vitae**

#### **Personal Information**

Name	Helene Adl
Place of Birth	St. Pölten, Austria
Nationality	Austrian
E-mail	helene.adl@gmx.at

#### **Education**

since October 2009	Teaching degree studies in English and History at the University of Vienna
Winter semester 2013/14	Erasmus exchange semester at the University of Exeter
June 2009	school leaving examinations at BORG St. Pölten
2001-2009	grammar school BRG/BORG St. Pölten
1997-2001	primary school in St. Pölten/ Harland

#### **Work experience**

September 2014-June 2015	English trainer at kindergarten
since March 2013	city guide for primary school children in St. Pölten at "Aktion Landeshauptstadt"
2008-2013	several jobs delivering the mail and as shop assistant