

Phonological description of Finglish

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1 Introduction

Finglish is an artificial language created for a linguistics class at the University of South Carolina in spring 2001. It borrows much of its grammar and vocabulary from Finnish[1] so it could be considered to be in the Finno-Ugrian family of languages.

Finglish differs from Finnish by greatly simplified morphology and morphophonology. The lost morphological expressiveness will be covered by structures borrowed from the Germanic languages.

Throughout this paper I have a convention to use double phonemes e.g. /aa/ to symbolize a long phone e.g. [a:]. This is due to phonologic-orthographic equivalence in Finglish and Finnish languages. This convention is not absolute and in the cases that I specifically address the length of phones I will use the standard IPA notation [:].

2 Phones and phonemes

Finglish has 12 consonant and eight vowel phonemes. It should be noted that the number of vowels is quite high compared to English which has only five to six vowels. The detailed list of phonological features can be found in table 2 on page 3. First I will describe the consonants.

2.1 Consonants

Finglish, like Finnish, does not have any affricates, but it does have stops and fricatives. The stops are /p, t, k/.

/p/ Voiceless bilabial stop, non-continuant and unaspirated. e.g. [pi̯po] 'hat', [pi̯fa] 'yard', 'garden'.

/t/ Voiceless apico-dental stop, non-continuant and unaspirated. e.g. [ma̯to] 'worm'. [t̥apa] 'custom'

/k/ Voiceless velar stop, non-continuant, unaspirated. e.g. [kasa] 'pile', [haka] 'bolt', 'clasp', [k̥uk̥ko] 'cock'.

The three fricatives of Finglish are /s, h, v/.

/s/ Voiceless alveolar fricative. Continuant. e.g. [satu] 'fairy tale'. [šy̯ty̯] 'catch light'-imperative.

/h/ Voiceless glottal fricative. Continuant. Sometimes voiced. e.g. [lahja] 'gift', [mafia] 'stomach'.

/v/ Voiced labiodental fricative. Continuant and sonorant. e.g. [huvi] 'amusement', [vaja] 'shack'.

The Finnish nasals are /m, n, ŋ/.

/m/ Labial nasal. Voiced sonorant. e.g. [jama] 'situation' [muta] 'mud'.

/n/ Alveolar nasal. Voiced sonorant. e.g. [jænnæ] 'exciting', [kaŋta] 'base'.

/ŋ/ Velar nasal. Voiced sonorant. e.g. [helsinki] Helsinki (name of the city), [kaŋ:as] 'cloth'.

The Finnish has three approximants /l, r, j/

/l/ Voiced apico-alveolar lateral approximant. Continuant. Several allophones. e.g. [kaɫa] 'fish', [kulta] 'gold', [tulʲi] 'fire', [malʲja] 'bowl'.

/r/ Voiced apico-alveolar trill. Various phones used from one flap to several flaps. e.g. [raja] 'border', [varas] 'thief', [varras] 'skewer', 'spit'.

/j/ Voiced palatal glide. Continuant and sonorant. e.g. [maja] 'hut', [juna] 'train'.

2.2 Vowels

English has a mouth full of vowels; eight to be exact. In addition to vowels /i, e, æ, ɑ, o, u/ commonly used in English, Finnish has two more rounded vowels /y, œ/. Table 1 summarizes the vowel phones.

Table 1: The vowels in Finnish language.

Openness	Front	Back
High	/i, y/	/u/
Mid	/e, œ/	/o/
Low	/æ/	/ɑ/

The vowels /y, œ, o, u/ are rounded.

Table 2: Phonological features

	p	t	k	s	h	v	m	n	ŋ	l	r	j	i	y	e	œ	æ	u	o	ɑ
vocoid	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
syllabic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
sonorant	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
continuant	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
voiced	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
strident	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
glottal	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
labial	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-
dorsal	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+
high	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-
low	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+
peripheral	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

3 Phonetic rules

Finnish has very few allophonic rules but enormous amount of morphophonological ones. For English, I have dropped almost all of morphophonology and tried to concentrate more on allophonic rules.

3.1 Word structures

English word can begin with any vowel or consonant except /ŋ/. The final phoneme of a English word must be either a vowel or one of /t, s, n, r, l/

All of the vowels can be “doubled” like /ii/ [i:] and most of them can be used in diphthongs. The most important exception of the diphthong rule is that /ɑ, æ/ can never appear as the second component of the diphthong.

3.1.1 Vowel harmony

English follows vowel harmony inherited from Finnish. This means that each morpheme can contain vowels from only one of the groups /u, o, ɑ/ or /y, œ, æ/ while vowels /i, e/ are indifferent e.g. [isæ] 'father', [iso] 'large'. It should be noted that this harmony affects each free morpheme separately e.g. a compound word [hætæ-apu] 'relief'.

3.2 Allophones

Finglish allophones are not very different phonetically. The allophonic rules change the phonemes very little compared to English rules. Below there's a list of Finglish allophonic rules.

- The consonants /p, t, k, s, h, v, m, n, ŋ, k, r, j/ are nasalized in front of rounded vowels e.g. [k̃uɟɑ] 'alley', [p̃yĩy] 'blizzard', [m̃yrs̃ky] 'storm'.
- The glottal fricative /h/ is voiced between vowels. e.g. [vafɪɑ] 'vax', [lafɪo] 'rotten'. The voiceless form involves less noise than the voiced.
- Apico-alveolar nasal /n/ is dental before /t/. e.g. [kaŋtɑɑ] 'to carry', [p̃uŋtɑ] 'pound' (currency)
- Velar nasal /ŋ/ is short in front of /k/ and long otherwise. e.g. [keŋk̃æ] 'shoe', [keŋ:æŋ] 'shoe-gen.'.
- Voiced apico-alveolar lateral approximant /l/ is voiceless between vowels e.g. [k̃uɟu] 'expenditure' and palatalized before /i, j/ e.g. [muulʲi] 'mule', [kaɟja] 'beer'.

3.3 Morphophonology

As I noted above, I have dropped most of the Finnish morphophonology. The morphophonology and morphology are the things that have deservedly given Finnish a reputation of being a “difficult” language.

For Finglish, at this point, I will give only one morphophonological rule:

- The vowels of a suffix morpheme follow the vowel harmony of the preceding free morpheme.

4 Comparison with English

Speakers of Romantic or Germanic languages might find Finglish hard to pronounce and comprehend. This view is most likely due to wide spread contrastive use of long phones and somewhat dissimilar phones that are found in common English. e.g. [kana] 'chicken' [kan:ɑ] 'carry-2.p singular, imperative, /væinœ yrjœlæ/ a man's name.

Especially the Finglish phone /r/ is often considered “ugly” because it is a loud trill with several flaps. Finglish [r:] sounds like a helicopter. This “ugliness” is well described by a quote from song lyrics by Ismo Alanko: /rakkaus on runojen raiskaus/ 'love is the rape of poems'.

5 Examples

Here are a few examples of Finnish phonetic derivations. Base /yhyttææ/ 'to meet' becomes [yfiyttæ:] after voicing of /h/ and nasalizing of /t/ in front of a rounded vowel.

	/yhyttææ/
Voicing	fi
Nasalization	ĩ
	[yfiyttæ:]

Original Finnish word /laŋantaa/, which stands for 'to make thread' (Finnish 'kehrätä') becomes [laŋ:ɑntɑ:] after making /ŋ/ long and dentalizing /n/ in front of /t/.

	/laŋantaa/
Long [ŋ]	ŋ:
Dentalization	nt̪
	[laŋ:ɑntɑ:]

Base /væylæ-lla/ 'on the shipping lane' becomes [væyl̥ællæ] after devoicing of /l/ between vowels and applying vowel harmony to morphological suffix.

	/væylæ-lla/
Devoicing	l̥
Vowel harmony	æ
	[væyl̥ællæ]

References

- [1] H. Sulkala, M. Karjalainen: Finnish, Routledge, (1992)