Foreign professionals in Finland and the importance of Finnish language skills

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**Abstract:** This qualitative study attempts to increase the understanding for foreign professionals in Finland and the place the Finnish language has in their lives. Finland is characterised by distinct circumstances, which makes it a particularly interesting context to study: English is widely spoken in the whole population, Finnish is considered a difficult language to learn, and there are two official languages.

Fourteen participants from ten different Western countries were interviewed for the study. Only three of them spoke Finnish on an above-basic level. In addition, a subsample of five native English-speakers was compared to the other participants. The findings reveal that Finnish skills are not necessary for satisfactory adjustment to life in Finland among the particular group of foreigners. However, this does not suggest that language skills are trivial. Already basic skills are beneficial for relationships with Finns. Indeed, host country language skills appear to be most important in social situations, which is further shown in the rather surprising position of Swedish among the foreign professionals. In addition, the study indicates that a good Finnish proficiency is highly valued by employers, even when Finnish is not necessary for the task itself. Thus, finding a job without fluent Finnish is generally considered very difficult.

The study contributes to the existing knowledge on host country language learning by pointing on the importance of society’s expectations, as well as possibly important personal and psychological motives. Further, the study shows that the benefit/cost ratio of learning the host country language cannot be assumed to be linear.

**Keywords:** adjustment, language, Finnish, Finland, highly-skilled immigrants, self-initiated expatriate
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1 INTRODUCTION

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.
If you talk to a man in his language, that goes to his heart.

Nelson Mandela

Language is an important part of identity, culture, and communication. In the increasingly multicultural workplace, language is clearly an important, but often neglected, aspect.

Foreign professionals have interested both scholars and managers for decades. In a business setting, expatriates have received attention since the 1960-1970’s, though the term itself originates from as early as the 19th century (Dabic, González-Loureiro, and Harvey, 2015: 316). Since then, foreign professionals, and especially their adjustment to the host country, have received much attention in academia.

Socio-cultural adjustment refers to how well the needs of the migrant and the demands of the host country are met (Ward and Kennedy, 1993: 131). The adjustment of foreign employees, whether they are on an assignment or hired on a local contract, is important for employers. Research has shown that well-adjusted foreigners may exhibit less withdrawal behavior, perform better in their work, and are less likely to repatriate (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, and Luk, 2005).

A central part of socio-cultural adjustment is communication (Ward, Bochner, and Furnham, 2001). Host country language skills have been shown to be positively related to socio-cultural adjustment (Selmer, 2006; Peltokorpi, 2008; Froese, Peltokorpi and Ko, 2012). Furthermore, language skills are important for relationships with host country nationals, which in turn are very valuable for the migrant (e.g. Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009; Cao, Hirschi and Deller, 2014). Today, the common language in business, and indeed in most international communication, is English. As the language is expected to be common for all, the impact of languages on organisations are often overlooked in management research (Marschan, Welch, and Welch, 1997; Welch, Welch, and Piekkari, 2005).

Increasingly, language skills and the impact of language receive more attention in research. One line of research currently in development is the impact of languages spoken within the organisation, and associated power, network, and information
processes (Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari and Säntti, 2005; Welch and Welch, 2008). From a skilled migrant point of view, the bulk of the research focuses on studying the relationship between host country language skills and various outcomes on adjustment and performance. The consequences of host country language skills, such as its impact on relationships with host country nationals, have also received some attention (Peltokorpi, 2008; Froese et al., 2012).

1.1 Problem background

Insufficient host country language skills frequently emerge as one of the main issues for foreign professionals and their adjustment to the host country (Nygård, 2013; Suutari and Brewster, 1998). While host country language skills of migrants and foreign professionals are receiving more attention from scholars, much is yet to be studied when it comes to the subjective experiences of the migrants. To explore how the migrants themselves talk about language skills and what they consider important or insignificant is essential for identifying central, but neglected areas and patterns for research. Research has focused largely on antecedents and outcomes, but the processes “in between”, i.e. the experiences of the migrants, can help identify new explanations for these relationships.

Furthermore, much research on the impact of host country language skills have been conducted in English-speaking countries or in Asian countries. However, these studies are not necessarily applicable to the Finnish context for several reasons: first, Finnish is considered a very difficult language to learn; second, English is widely used in Finland among the whole population; and third, Finland has two official languages. Hence, it is necessary to study Finland in its own right.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of foreign professionals in Finland in regard to the Finnish language. The specific research questions are as follows:

1) Do foreign professionals experience challenges due to insufficient Finnish skills (in a work context), and if so, in which situations?

2) How do foreign professionals in Finland experience the importance of Finnish skills?

3) What differences are there between native English-speakers and others?
1.3 Delimitations

This study focuses on highly educated, Western professionals currently living and working in Finland on their own initiative. Furthermore, these migrants have lived in Finland for a fairly short time. Also, the study is limited to those living and working in the Helsinki region. Thus, this study is only concerned with a very specific group of foreign professionals in Finland, and does not attempt to represent other types of migrants or their experiences.

The aim of the study to explore the importance of the Finnish language. While cultural aspects of communication are very important, this study only includes these aspects of communication to the degree it is central for the purpose of this paper.

The study is exploratory in its nature, and based on qualitative interviews. Thus, the aim of this study is to gain deeper insight in the experiences of the foreign professionals, rather than present any quantitative relationships.

1.4 Key concepts

Many of the central concepts and terms in this subject are attached with different meanings and used in different ways in the literature. Thus, this section clarifies how central concepts are defined and used in this thesis.

Migration and migrant

The definitions of migration and migrants vary widely in the literature. This thesis will apply the most general definition. Migration refers to “geographic relocation across national borders” and “change in dominant place of residence” (Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, and Dickmann, 2014: 2303). Consequently, a migrant is any person who moves to another country.

Foreign professionals

A foreign professional is defined as a migrant with a university degree (Chaloff and Lemaitre, 2009), and is currently employed in a field related to their studies. In this context, the field related to their studies is defined loosely as work a person with a particular education could reasonably be expected to perform in their home country. However, it should be taken into account that foreign professionals employed on local
contracts may work at lower levels in the organisation (Andersen, Biemann, and Pattie, 2015).

Western countries

The Western world can be defined in many ways, but this thesis uses a cultural viewpoint, and focuses on the countries in which the dominant culture is European in origin: all of Europe, North and South America, plus Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (Thompson and Hickey, 2005).

Host country

Host country refers to the country to which the migrant has relocated. Consequently, host country nationals are the native population of the host country. Host country language is defined as the dominant language spoken in the host country (Chiswick and Miller, 2001).

Language ability, language skills

According to Selmer and Lauring (2011: 403) “language ability comprises various dimensions of linguistic proficiency, such as speaking, writing, and comprehension of the host country language as well as understanding and speaking the local dialect at the specific host location and being familiar with local non-verbal communication.”

Adjustment

Adjustment can be described as the fit between the individual and the environment (Haslberger, Brewster, and Hippler, 2013: 334). Adjustment consists of social-cultural adjustment (the behavioural aspect of adjustment) and psychological adjustment (the affective aspect of adjustment).

1.5 The Finnish context

When studying migration the national context is an important variable. With its less than 5.5 million inhabitants (SVT, 2015), Finland is a small country in the European Union. In order to describe the contextual setting of the study, this section presents migration trends in Finland on a micro level. Further, the use of languages in Finland is briefly explained, as it has some quite unique qualities.
1.5.1 Foreigners in Finland

The Finnish law defines a foreigner as a person who is not a Finnish citizen (Kansalaisuuslaki 359/2003). Another common way of distinguishing foreigners is to distinguish between the original population (fin. kantaväestö) and population with foreign origin that may or may not already have Finnish citizenship (fin. ulkomaalaistaustaiset) (Niimenen, 2004).

Because of the climate and geographical location, Finland has historically had a low percentage of foreigners (SVT, 2005). Finland is traditionally an emigration country; in other words, the flow of people has been negative (Niimenen, 2004). A substantial proportion of immigrants has been returnees from Sweden. In the 1990’s the first big wave of immigration begun, mostly from the former Soviet Union and from Somalia. For the past few years, the flow of migration has been positive, with most immigrants still coming from Europe (Niimenen, 2004).

Of all tertiary-educated professionals in Finland in 2010, approximately two percent were of foreign nationality (SVT, 2011). The number of highly educated foreign professionals has increased steadily during the 2000’s. In the late 2000’s, the sectors with the biggest percentage of foreign professionals were the health care sector and the IT sector. However, during the decade the percentage grew in all sectors except humanities, which had the largest percentage in the beginning of the decade (SVT, 2011).

On average, most foreigners get lower salaries than Finns (Katainen, 2009). However, there is a considerable difference between nationalities. In general, migrants from developing countries (Nigeria, the Philippines, Thailand, and Somalia) have very low income, while migrants from developed countries (Austria, Denmark, and the Netherlands) have much higher income (Katainen, 2009). One explanation for these differences is the fact that individuals from developing countries often work in different sectors and in different jobs respective those from developed countries (Katainen, 2009).

Marriages between Finns and foreigners are steadily increasing, and a Finnish spouse is a common reason to move to Finland. Of all Finnish marriages, three percent are cross-cultural (Lainiala and Sääväälä, 2012: 15). Cross-cultural marriages are especially common in the Helsinki-region, where a considerable 15% of new marriages in 2011 were between a Finn and a person with foreign nationality. Finnish women who choose to marry a foreign man are usually from the Uusimaa-region, and their husbands tend to come from Great Britain, Germany, Russia, Turkey, and the United States. In contrast,
men with foreign wives are more often from the Eastern parts of the country, and marry women from Russia, Thailand, Estonia, Germany, and China (Lainiala and Säävälä, 2012: 22-25).

1.5.2 Languages in Finland

The main language spoken in Finland is Finnish. In 2013, almost 90% of the Finnish population were Finnish speakers (SVT, 2013). Finnish is part of the Finnish-Ugric language family, and only directly related to Estonian, Hungarian, and Sami (Ethnologue: Finnic). Thus, it is considered a quite difficult language to learn by both foreigners and Finns (Selmer and Lauring, 2011: 407).

Swedish is the second official language of Finland, and 5.3% of the population speak Swedish as their mother tongue (SVT, 2013). According to the constitution, everyone has the right to use either Finnish or Swedish when dealing with the State and with bilingual municipalities (Kielilaki). Swedish is a part of the Indo-European language group which includes most European languages (Ethnologue: Indo-European), and hence it is considered fairly easy for other Europeans to learn (Selmer and Lauring, 2011: 407). Swedish is particularly closely related to the other Nordic and Germanic languages (Ethnologue: Swedish). However, it is practice very difficult to live in Swedish in most part of Finland.

In 2013 5.3% had another mother tongue than Finnish or Swedish, a drastic increase compared to only 1.9% in 2000 (SVT, 2013). In Helsinki, 12.8% had another first language than Finnish or Swedish, while 5.9% were Swedish-speaking (Helsingfors stad, 2015).

1.5.2.1 English in Finland

The importance of English in Finland has changed dramatically during the 20th century. Especially after the Second World War, the position of English as the lingua franca of the world has been strengthened by technology, popular culture, and increased international mobility (Leppänen, Pitkänen-Huhta, Nikula, Kytölä, Törmäkangas, Laitinen, Pahta, Koskela, Lähdesmäki, and Jousmäki, 2011). Thus, English has become an important language in Finland, as well as in the rest of the world. However, Finnish being a very small language, the importance of skills in English are even more pronounced. English is the most-studied foreign language in Finland. Indeed, most
Finns regardless of age have at least some knowledge of English (Leppänen et al., 2011). Most commonly English is used for travelling, but 40% reported English as the main foreign language used at work. English is also used for studying, communicating with friends, or at leisure activities and hobbies. Of foreign languages heard in Finland, English was by far the most common (Leppänen et al., 2011), and English is common in TV, movies, and music.

1.6 Outline of thesis

This chapter attempts to give the reader an introduction to the subject and the context of the study. Also the aim of the study and the research questions are stated, and the delimitations explained; these will guide all other parts of the thesis.

Chapter 2 describes the relevant existing literature. It begins with a brief report on the discussion concerning terminology associated with migrants (2.1). It then goes on to clarify the main findings within the field of adjustment (2.2) and research on the impact of communication and language skills (2.3).

Chapter 3 explains the methodology for the study. All stages of the research process are described: research approach (3.1); the data collection process (3.2), including the sample (3.2.1) and the interview process (3.2.2), as well as the analysis of the data (3.3). Finally, the quality of the study (3.4) is discussed in terms of trustworthiness (3.4.1), researcher impact (3.4.2), and research ethics (3.4.3).

Chapter 4 presents the results of the study structured according to the template analysis. Chapter 5 analyses these results further by identifying key processes and themes emerging from the template analysis. Finally, Chapter 6 reflects on the findings in the light of the literature review. A conclusion of key findings and implications is presented (6.2), and limitations, as well as suggestions for future research are outlined (6.3).

The outline of the thesis and the chapters’ relation to each other is illustrated in figure 1 below.
Figure 1  Outline of the thesis.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this chapter is to review the relevant existing knowledge on adjustment and communication. The chapter begins with a summary of the discussion of terms and definitions associated with migrants (2.1). Section 2.2 presents existing literature on what adjustment is, what influence adjustment, and the implications of adjustment. Section 2.3 reviews challenges in intercultural communication and the impact of culture, factors influencing language proficiency, and implications for adjustment.

2.1 Concepts and terms for migrants

Foreign professionals are hardly a novel occurrence in the world; the word expatriate has been used for almost two centuries. Today, many different terms are used for both foreign professionals, as well as migrants in general, often with an attempt to distinguish one group of migrants from another. However, there is a lack of consensus on the definition of these terms.

While expatriates are often treated as one group, many scholars identify a need to distinguish between so called organisational expatriates (OEs) and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs). The former group is sent abroad on an assignment by their organisation, while the latter group takes the initiative to move abroad themselves, and work there under a local contract (e.g. Andersen et al., 2014; Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Literature reviews have identified many alternative terms used to describe self-initiated expatriates, such as self-selecting expatriate, self-initiated international work opportunities (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014), overseas experience, self-designed apprenticeship, free travellers, and self-initiated foreign work experience (Doherty, 2013).

Although there are no universal definitions, most authors agree that the key difference between OEs and SIEs is whether the initiator for the move is the organisation or the person (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). Research have found demographic differences between OEs and SIEs (Andersen et al., 2015). First, SIEs tend to be younger and are more often single. Second, while the majority of OEs are men, the proportion of women SIEs are more equal to the proportion of men. Finally, they often have spouses working abroad, which implies that many SIEs are trailing their spouses. Furthermore, SIEs are considered having different motivations for working abroad (von Borell de Arajuo, Mendes Teixeira, Bastos da Cruz, and Malini, 2014), and they tend to stay longer in the
host country (Andersen et al., 2014). Even when controlling for level of education, research has shown a difference in the organisational level at which OEs and SIEs are employed, indicating that SIEs are employed at lower positions even when they have the same education as OEs (Andersen et al. 2015). SIEs are also in general significantly higher in organisational mobility preference (Andersen et al. 2015), and there is evidence that SIEs adjust differently from OEs (see section 2.2). Thus, it is clearly justified to treat these two groups separately, although it is important to note that SIEs may not be as homogenous a group as sometimes assumed.

Other terms for migrants include migrant, immigrant, highly skilled immigrant, skilled migrant, and foreign professional. Often these terms are used interchangeably. Several authors have tried, based on literature reviews, to formulate standard frameworks for distinguishing especially SIEs from other types of migration. Al Ariss (2010) point out that the differentiation between SIEs and migrants in the existing literature is heavily stereotyped based on their geographic origin and destination, the forced or chosen nature of the move, length of stay, and the symbolic status. Thus, he claims that the term migrant is often used to describe individuals who are moving from developing to developed countries by force of the circumstances, and often have a low status in the host country (Al Ariss, 2010.).

Based on their literature review, Cerdin and Selmer (2014) identify four dimensions in an attempt to separate SIEs from other types of foreigners. First, the international relocation has to be self-initiated; second, the expatriate must at least intend to engage in regular employment in the host country; third, the intention must be to stay only temporarily in the host country; and finally, SIEs have skills or professional qualifications that are transferable across borders. According to Cerdin and Selmer (2014), an SIE’s intention to stay temporarily in the host country may change to an intention to stay permanently, and the SIE becomes an immigrant. However, Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) show that most SIEs do not have a definitive time-frame in mind for their stay.

Andersen and his colleagues (2014) state that SIEs are by definition a type of migrants, and they put no requirements of temporary stay. Their framework begins by distinguishing migrants from non-migrants, such as travelers. This requires that the individual changes his or her dominant place of residence to another nation, and perform legal work in the host country. In addition, different types of expatriates are distinguished according to who initiated the “key binding activity”, whether or not there
is a change of work contract partner and whether it is internal or external organisational mobility.

In summary, it may be very difficult to separate one group of migrants from another based on factors such as intended length of stay and reason for move. However, previous research indicates that the circumstances for migration are indeed important variables that may influence adjustment and motivation. From the standpoint of this study, the most differentiated group consists of expatriates that are on an (often time-bound) assignment initiated by the organisation. Certainly there are substantial differences between other migrants, but these are not as obvious.

2.2 Adjustment to host country

This section lays the ground for research on migrants. Both acculturation and adjustment are important concepts explaining the migrant’s situation. This section begins with an overview of the best known acculturation strategies (2.2.1), and then goes on to review the more elaborative concept of adjustment (2.2.2). Literature on the most significant variables influencing adjustment are then briefly summarised. Networking and support (2.2.5) receives extra attention, due to the objective of this thesis.

2.2.1 Acculturation strategies

How people adjust to a foreign environment and how this process evolves over time have received vast attention in academia, and several frameworks attempting to describe this process have been proposed. The history of the perhaps best-known model, the U-curve, begins in the 1950s (Shi and Franklin, 2014). The U-curve symbolises the four stages an individual presumably go through in a new environment: the honeymoon stage, the adaption stage, the depression stage, and finally the recovery stage (Shi and Franklin, 2014: 196). A further developed version of the U-curve model is the slightly more elaborative W-curve (Shi and Franklin, 2014: 196).

Another well-known framework is developed by John W. Berry in the 1980s. Berry (2005: 698) defines acculturation as a long process of “cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members”; on an individual level, the changes in the person’s behaviour. People in new environments vary on their preference for their own group, and own culture and heritage, as well as on their preference for other groups. Thus, according to
Berry’s framework (2005), expatriates choose one of four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalisation. The four strategies are derived from the two dimensions of preference, and illustrated in figure X. Consequently, assimilation strategy refers to individuals embracing the host culture, while identifying less with their own culture. Separation entails a limited interest in adopting the local culture, while maintaining a strong bond to one’s own culture. Integration is internalising the local culture, while still holding on to one’s heritage culture and identity. Finally, marginalisation is a weak connection to both the local and the heritage culture (Berry 2005: 704-705).

![Acculturation strategies diagram](image)

**Figure 2  Acculturation strategies (Berry, 2005: 705).**

The model has received its share of criticism and even Berry himself (1997) points out that this framework assumes that the individual freely can choose strategy. In reality, however, the context will often restrict the migrant’s possibilities to choose assimilation style.

### 2.2.2 The multidimensional nature of adjustment

The adjustment of expatriates and immigrants to the host country have received vast attention in academia. However, definitions and approaches vary greatly between studies, to the point that Tucker, Bonial and Lahti (2004:222) claim that “neither a clear and measurable definition of intercultural adjustment and expatriate job performance has emerged from these studies nor has a valid set of predictors of adjustment”. In the
psychological literature, adjustment is defined as the fit between person and environment (Haslberger et al., 2013: 334). This person-environment fit consists in turn of two types of fit; the needs of the person and how well these are met by the aspects of the environment (needs-supplies fit), and the demands the environment pose on the person and how well the person is capable to meet these (Haslberger et al., 2013).

Based on Berry’s framework on acculturation and the social learning framework (Shi and Franklin 2014: 197), Ward and her colleagues (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1993) identified two dimensions of adjustment, namely psychological and socio-cultural. These have received considerable support in research.

Psychological adjustment is related to the affective aspect of adjustment; in other words, how the migrant feels about his or her life in the host country. Ward, Bochner, and Furnham (2001: 70) explain psychological adjustment with the stress and coping framework. This is related to the views Berry had on the psychological aspect of acculturation. The underlying assumption of Berry’s framework is that acculturation is “a major life event that is characterised by stress, demands cognitive appraisal of the situation, and requires coping strategies” (Ward et al. 2001: 71). How one copes with this stress, and thus the positive or negative feelings one will develop towards one's life in the host country, is influenced by several factors, such as personality, coping styles, and social support (Ward and Kennedy 1993; Berry, 1997).

Socio-cultural adjustment is concerned with the “fit” between the migrant and the host country, and is related to the behavioural aspect of adjustment (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Thus, it is related to the cultural, behavioral change in Berry’s (2005) acculturation framework. According to Ward and colleagues (2001) a very important part of socio-cultural adjustment is communication. Indeed, most behaviours that in some way include two or more people contain some kind of communication. According to the cultural learning approach, difficulties arise when individuals from different cultures do not understand each other's behaviours (Ward et al., 2001: 52). Thus, relationships with host country nationals are important, as the migrant learns to understand the ways of the new environment, and learn through imitation to adjust his or her own behaviour. In addition to relationships, knowledge about the culture, length of stay in the host country, previous overseas experience, acculturation models, and language competence can facilitate or undermine the adjustment (Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Ward et al., 2001).
Black and his colleagues (e.g. Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou, 1991) identify three facets of socio-cultural adjustment (of organisational expatriates): adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with host country nationals, and adjustment to the general environment. These aspects have received quite a lot of attention in the organisational expatriate literature, but recently also for SIEs. According to Black’s theory, each facet of adjustment is influenced in a different way by different antecedents, such “that global antecedents are most strongly related to global facets and specific antecedents are most strongly related to specific facets” (Black et al., 1991: 304). This has received some support in further studies (Suutari and Brewster, 2001). However, this does not suggest that for example, interaction adjustment is unimportant for success in the workplace.

Some researchers add a third dimension for immigrants; economic adaptation (Aycan and Berry, 1996; Ward et al., 2001: 207). Aycan and Berry (1996: 242) define economic adaptation as “the sense of accomplishment and full participation in the economic life in [the host country]”. They argue that the economic factors are a very important reason for permanent migration, and this should therefore be taken into account when studying adjustment to the host country. Successful economic adaptation is influenced for example by language skills and the international transferability of the migrant’s professional skills.

2.2.2.1 Implications of adjustment

Intuitively it makes sense that a person who is well adjusted to the surrounding environment performs better at his or her job. However, while the link between different antecedents and adjustment has received quite a lot of attention, not many studies are dedicated to examining the relationship between adjustment and performance. The studies that do exist point to a complex – usually weak to moderate – relationship (Tucker et al., 2014: 194). Others show evidence of a positive relationship. Tucker and his colleagues (2004) found that those expatriates who thought they did well in their job were also high on intercultural adjustment. Shi and Franklin (2014) found a strong relationship between business expatriates’ job performance in China and their cross-cultural adaption. Bhaskar-Shrinivas and colleagues (2005) found that job satisfaction had a positive correlation with both interaction adjustment and work adjustment. Similarly, withdrawal cognitions were related to all dimensions of adjustment: cultural, interaction, and work adjustment. They also found a positive relationship between adjustment and performance.
Most scholars seem to agree that adjustment is a multifaceted phenomenon (Shi and Franklin, 2014: 196). Also a vast variety of predictors and moderators have been related to host country adjustment: language skills, age when moving, previous overseas experience, time spent in host country, personality, contact to host country nationals, support and networks, etc.

### 2.2.3 Personality

Several studies point to personality as a predictive variable for intercultural adjustment. Successful adjustment have been linked to a vast number of personality traits. For example Tucker and his colleagues (2004) found in their study that personality traits such as social adaptability, risk taking, open-mindedness, flexibility, internal locus of control, interest in other people, and sense of humour were predictive of adjustment on expatriate assignments. Also cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence have been shown to influence adjustment to the host country (Lee, Veasna, and Munir Sukoco, 2014).

### 2.2.4 Time spent in host country and previous overseas experience

Selmer and Lauring (2011) found that the time spent in the host country correlated positively with language skills, general adjustment, and interaction adjustment, but not with job adjustment. Aycan and Berry (1996: 248) showed that language skills and general knowledge about “Canadian life in general and business life in particular” increased with time among migrants in Canada. Shi and Franklin (2014) concluded that both psychological and socio-cultural adjustment was individual, and influenced by both the individual and the host culture, and it fluctuated over time. The relationship found between time on assignment and job performance was weak.

Studies on the impact of previous overseas experience is inconclusive. Studies on organisational expatriates suggest that while previous overseas experience may be related to better adjustment, at least work adjustment, the relationship is not necessarily linear (Black et al., 1991: 293). Shi and Franklin (2014) did not find a relationship between previous overseas experience and adjustment. Bhaskar-Shrinivas and colleagues (2005) concluded that previous overseas experience probably has very little practical implications.
2.2.5 Networks, support, and host country nationals

Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) conclude that weak embeddedness in the host country, home country pull, and shock are important reasons for repatriation decisions for SIEs. Weak embeddedness means that the costs of leaving the host country is fairly low in terms of “career and community sacrifices” (Tharenou and Caulfield, 2010: 1022). In other words, strong relationship ties in the host country makes it more difficult to leave, while obligations, social relationships, and better career and community prospects in the home country act as pull factors. Social ties are also important sources of emotional support for migrants (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009).

2.2.5.1 Family

Much research on organisational expatriates point out that a key problem for many expatriates’ adjustment is the adjustment of spouse and family (Suutari and Brewster, 1998; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Other family members may have less support for adjustment, less opportunities for acquiring a local network, and weaker language skills than the person who accepts the job abroad. Some evidence suggests that spouses and families of SIEs are more positive about the move, and thus adjust better to the host country than those of OEs (von Borell de Araujo et al., 2014). Ward and colleagues (2001: 85) point out that marital support is very important for the stress level in sojourners.

For the context of this thesis it is important to notice that many migrate (permanently or for an unspecified time) to Finland for family reasons, such as a Finnish spouse. Connections with host country nationals before migration is obviously a valuable gateway to interaction adjustment, a source of information on the local culture, as well as an important motivator for adjustment to the host country (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). Froese (2012: 1104) found that foreign professors living in Korea with Korean spouses had support from their spouses in practical matters and also were at arrival already accustomed to Korean ways and food, which increased general adjustment. In addition, a local family increases embeddedness in the host country, thus making it more difficult to return. Persons with spouses from the host country were also in general “more satisfied with their social interactions” as “their spouses had opened up social networks with the locals” (Froese, 2012: 1106), hence facilitating interaction adjustment.

In sum, family ties influences the migrant in three ways. First, family left behind in the home country can act as a pull factor for repatriation. Second, adjustment of family that
follow the person to the host country greatly influence the adjustment of the expatriate. Finally, a “local” family in the host country can be a very important source of support, information and contacts, while simultaneously increasing the costs of repatriation.

### 2.2.5.2 Host country nationals

Relationships with host country nationals are valuable for migrants in several ways, and many studies show that these relationships are important for adjustment (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). In contrast to organisational expatriates, other migrants usually do not receive organisational support when arriving to the host country. Host country nationals can be a source of support and help, helping the migrant adjust to the host country culture (Cao et al., 2014). According to social learning theory, migrants learn the appropriate local behaviour by observing and imitating host country nationals (Osman-Gania and Rockstuhl, 2008). Hence, the more the migrant interact with locals, the better it is for adjustment. Indeed, contacts to host country nationals have shown to be predictive of work performance, and this relationship is mediated by interaction adjustment (Osman-Gania and Rockstuhl, 2008). “Frequent social interactions with host country nationals” has been found to be positively related to general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and job satisfaction (Froese et al., 2012).

Creating contact with host country nationals is a common challenge for migrants (e.g. Suutari and Brewster, 1998; Ryan and Mulholland, 2014). A major limiting factor when connecting with the locals is the language (Suutari and Brewster, 1998: 93). However, several studies imply that SIEs interact more readily with host country nationals than do OEs (von Borell de Araujo et al., 2014; Peltokorpi and Forese, 2009). In a study about expatriates in Japan, Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) found that SIEs were more adjusted both to general cultural aspects as well as to interaction with host nationals than were OEs. For work adjustment they did not find a significant difference between the two groups. These findings show that although OEs usually receive more organisational support for adjustment, SIEs compensate by their strong personal motivation to understand the culture and integrate, and possibly by more interaction and social ties with locals.

### 2.2.5.3 Home country nationals and other foreigners

Some studies have shown that migrants find it easier to connect with other foreigners than with host country nationals (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014). While establishing
professional networks with locals may not be a problem, forming friendships with other migrants may be easier. Other migrants share the same experience, and may have a stronger motivation to form new relationships in a country where they have few pre-existing ties (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014).

Similarly, other migrants from the same home country can be a valuable source of support for migrants. People also tend to prefer the company of those similar to themselves (Harvey, 2008: 1757), which means that the familiarity of home country nationals can seem appealing for the migrant. According to Ryan and Mulholland (2014), the interest to interact with other home country nationals vary between migrants. While some seek out the support and friendship of other migrants from the same country, others seek to avoid these sort of clusters, preferring to interact with locals instead. Others initially seek to integrate with host country locals, but struggling to do so may push them to seek out the home country community (Ryan and Mullholland, 2014) Harvey (2008) found that British and Indian expatriates in Boston participated only to a very limited degree in home country networking events.

### 2.2.6 Summary on adjustment to host country

Adjustment to the host country is important for the migrant’s wellbeing, and has been related to job performance, job satisfaction, and less withdrawal behaviours. Table 1 summarises the meaning of psychological, socio-cultural, and economic adjustment, and important factors that have been proved to influence the adjustment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of adjustment</th>
<th>Consists of</th>
<th>Examples of influencing factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological adjustment</td>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>Coping mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coping</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-cultural adjustment</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Communication skills, cultural understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Work adjustment</td>
<td>Expectations from environment</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interaction adjustment</td>
<td>Needs of the migrant</td>
<td>Contact with locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- General</td>
<td></td>
<td>Language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic adjustment</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
<td>Knowledge transferability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Summary of adjustment dimensions and influencing factors.

Support and contact with host country nationals emerge as one important factor. Host country nationals are important for adjusting to the host country and learning the language. However, at the same time, language skills are important for relationships with
host country nationals. In addition to relationships with locals, language skills are related directly to socio-cultural adjustment, as well as to economic adjustment. Section 2.3 explores the subject further.

2.3 **Language, communication, and adjustment**

All interaction between people include some sort of communication. As everyone knows from experience, communication can be challenging in any situation. It is even more so when there are different cultures at play. The section begins with an overview on intercultural communication (2.3.1) and the relationship between culture and language (2.3.1.1). Then literature on factors influencing language proficiency is introduced (2.3.2), and the impact of host country language skills on adjustment (2.3.3). Finally, existing literature on Finnish host country skills of foreign professionals is reviewed (2.3.4).

2.3.1 **Intercultural communication**

Porter and Samovar (1997: 21) define intercultural communication as “whenever a message that must be understood is produced by a member of one culture for consumption by a member of another culture”. Hence, all communication between individuals of different cultural backgrounds can be labeled as intercultural. In contrast, Hartog (2006: 185) suggests that only parts of discourse between persons of different cultures are intercultural. In other words, only parts of the communication when cultural differences appear should be called intercultural. Hartog (2006: 185) further claims that interaction is becoming less intercultural, as globalisation and mobility bring cultures closer to each other.

Porter and Samovar’s model of intercultural communication (1997: 21) is illustrated in figure 3. Culture A and B are quite similar, which is symbolised by the similar shape and close physical distance, while culture C is rather different from the other two. Within the shapes are smaller figures representing individuals belonging to that culture. The shape is slightly different from the culture, as individuals are influenced by other factors than culture.
Communication (symbolised by triangles) is transmitted from one person to another. The message is encoded according to the sender’s culture, and undergoes a transformation when it is decoded in the context of the receiver’s culture (Porter and Samovar, 1997: 21). In other words, culture influences how people communicate their message and how they understand others. Consequently, the main challenge in intercultural communication is to communicate in a way so that the sender and the receiver attribute the same meaning to the message (Fiske, 1990: 6, 39; Porter and Samovar, 1997: 25).

Language proficiency can be divided into linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge. Problems arising from weak linguistic competence are due to insufficient grammatical knowledge or limited vocabulary, speed, or a strong accent (Henderson, 2005: 70). These problems are usually quite easily visible, and what we would normally call insufficient language skills. However, problems arising from sociolinguistic competence are harder to recognise and often lead to misunderstandings of which both parties may be unaware. Sociolinguistic competence is the appropriate way to communicate and appropriate speech behaviour: how you greet, address, and thank somebody, body language, tone of voice, etc. (Henderson 2005: 70; Selmer 2006: 352). While a person’s linguistic competence may be strong, misunderstandings will nevertheless arise, if a person continues to think and interpret communication in relation to his or her own culture (Selmer, 2006: 347).
Children learn these sociolinguistic characteristics of their own culture while growing up (Fantini, 1995). Studies show that these sociolinguistic characteristics are inclined to prevail even when after years in the host country (Liu, 1995). Liu (1995: 265) concluded: “Learning L2 [second language] sociocultural values and rules may not ensure acquisition, because knowing about values and rules does not mean that one can and will apply them in thinking and communicating.” Hence, even in situations where the parties are speaking in a common language, the parties involved may not be understanding the discussion in the same way. However, it should be noted that also individuals from similar backgrounds differ in their personal communication styles. Froese and colleagues (2012: 339) concluded that expatriates in Korea with a personal communication style closer to that of the Korean “were likely to show a high level of job satisfaction, and a low level of turnover intentions”.

The English language has secured its position as the lingua franca of the business world, and it is increasingly common for organisations to change their official language to English. Although a shared language may appear as an easy solution, it hides many – often unrecognised – communication challenges that arise in multicultural and multilingual workplaces. Henderson (2005: 75) writes: “One problem that frequently occurs when English is used as the working language of a team is that participants are under the false impression that they are sharing the same context and the same interpretation”. Likewise, participants may have a different view on what makes a good speaker or a good leader (Henderson, 2005: 71). Some members of multicultural teams experience strictly work-related, “technical” discussions easier than communication with a social purpose (Henderson, 2005: 73), and that the unfamiliar style of the locals can make it difficult for migrants to connect with host country nationals. In addition, studies show that the organisational language patterns influence for example information and knowledge flow (Welch and Welch, 2008), as well as power structure (Vaara et al., 2005) within the organisation.

2.3.1.1 The link between language and culture

The idea of culture and language being intertwined is very old, but one of the first modern theories on this relationship is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis from the early 1950’s (Fong, 1997: 207). According to this deterministic view, language, i.e. grammar, syntax, and vocabulary, shapes peoples’ perceptions of the world (Fong, 1997: 208). Consequently, people speaking different languages perceive the world differently. Indeed, Sapir and
Whorf claim that if there is not a word for something in one’s language, one is not aware of its existence. However, not many years after Sapir and Whorf, Brown proposed a more relativist view on the relationship between culture and language. According to Brown’s theory, people attach labels (words) to things they need labels for, and construct the language in order to be able to use it as they need (Fong, 1997: 208). In this way, reality is not determined by language, but rather language is developed to fit the needs of a specific group’s reality. The relativist view have received more support in research (Fong, 1997: 208).

Languages embody cultural values and assumptions, differing in for example the objectives of communication and thought structure. Studies show that these sociolinguistic aspects prevails in translations, so that for example originally German texts translated to English are more direct and explicit than are texts originally written in English (Rehbein, 2006: 48). The Finnish speech culture has received quite a vast interest by scholars. Undoubtedly, the most prominent aspect of the Finnish culture is the silence. Privacy and quietude is an important part of the culture (Carbaugh, 2009: 43). This is also related to the informative status of language; for example closeness is primarily expressed through non-verbal means (Carbaugh, 2009; Wilkins and Isotalus, 2009: 6). This appears as a certain directness, even rudeness, in the eyes of foreigners (Sajavaara and Lehtonen, 1997: 276). On the other hand, Finns have also been accused of being indirect and avoidant in their communication style. A reason for this may be that harmony and agreement are other main goals of the Finnish speech culture. However, the speech culture in Finland is changing (Sajavaara and Lehtonen, 1997; Wilkins and Isotalus, 2009).

### 2.3.2 Factors influencing language proficiency

Language skills fill the requirements of human capital (Chiswick and Miller, 2001: 392), as they are not separable from the person, are productive “in that they may increase earnings in the labor market or decrease costs of consumption by lowering the costs of communication with others”, and they are acquired at an expense in form of time and money. Language skills can even increase the productivity of other human capital. Finally, their creation require an expense; time and money (Chiswick and Miller, 2001: 391-392). Hence, Chiswick and Miller (2001: 393) argue that migrants will invest in learning the host country language “up to the point where the marginal rate of return is just equal to the marginal interest cost of the resources they invest”. In other words,
migrants will not invest more time, energy and other resources, than they feel they gain in benefits of increased language skill.

Clearly, language skills are important, but not all migrants reach the same level of host country language proficiency. Both the required investment and the expected returns vary between individuals as well as between countries. Chiswick and Miller (2001) have developed a formula for determining language proficiency: \( \text{LANG} = f(\text{exposure}, \text{efficiency}, \text{economic incentive}, \text{wealth}) \). Exposure consist of both how much the person has been exposed to the language, as well as intensity of the exposure (Chiswick and Miller, 2001: 393). This variable naturally increases with time spent in the host country, but there are many other reasons for why exposure to the language may differ between migrants. Certain migrants may have been exposed to the language before the move, some may speak the host country language at home, while others may have very little exposure to the language in their daily lives (Chiswick and Miller, 2001). Linguistic groupings, such as neighborhoods occupied mostly by migrants from the same country or language group, can lessen exposure to the host country language, and the incentive to learn (Isphordin and Otten, 2014). Efficiency refers to how easily the individual learns the language. For instance, efficiency depends on the age at the time of the move (Chiswick and Miller 2001: 394) and the linguistic difference between home and host country languages (Chiswick and Miller, 2001: 394; Selmer and Lauring, 2011).

The economic incentive a migrant has to learn the host country language depends on how much the language skills will improve the migrant’s economic situation, such as increase in wage or better job opportunity (Chiswick and Miller, 2001). Clearly, this is also determined by how long the individual plans to stay in the country. Chiswick and Miller (2001: 395) incorporate social, political, and cultural interest in economic incentive, under what they call “consumption benefits”. The last factor in the model, wealth, is quite simply the wealth the person has to invest in learning (Chiswick and Miller, 2001).

2.3.2.1 **Native English-speakers and host country language proficiency**

Native English-speakers are often assumed to have an advantage in English-speaking (working) environments (Henderson, 2005). Hence, English-speakers working in a predominantly English-speaking setting would have less incentive to learn the language, especially if it is easy to get by on English also in other situations. In a study of migrants in Israel, English-speakers had the lowest skills in Hebrew, which the researchers
assumed to be partially due to the position of English as the lingua franca in Israel, and thus reduced incentive for native English-speakers to learn the language. They proposed that this would also be the case in countries where English is not the dominant language. (Beenstock, Chiswick and Repetto, 2001) However, in for example teams, the advantage native English-speakers have from their stronger language proficiency compared to others may cause imbalances, and create a situation that allows the native speakers to dominate the discussion (Henderson, 2005). Non-English speakers may also experience that the native English-speaker speaks too fast, and use unfamiliar words or expressions. Thus, English-speakers may have to adjust their English in international settings (Henderson, 2005).

2.3.1 Host country language proficiency on adjustment

Intuitively it is reasonable to expect that good host country language proficiency is positively related to adjustment, and this has indeed been supported by several studies (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Selmer, 2006; Peltokorpi, 2008; Froese et al., 2012). For the specific facets of adjustment, the evidence is more varied. Bhaskar-Shrinivas and colleagues (2005) concluded in a meta-analysis on international adjustment that host country language proficiency has a positive impact on cultural and interaction adjustment, but not on work adjustment. However, other studies have found that good proficiency is positively related to work adjustment. Selmer (2006) found a relationship between language proficiency and all three dimensions of adjustment, although the proficiency-work adjustment relationship was the weakest. Also Takeuchi, Yun and Russell (2002) found in their study of foreign professionals in Korea that language proficiency was positively related to work adjustment. Interestingly, according to their study, good proficiency was related to interaction adjustment indirectly through work adjustment. Instead they found that willingness to communicate was an important factor influencing interaction adjustment. In the same study they did not find a relationship between proficiency and general adjustment. The researchers explained this with the good availability of English-speaking services targeted to foreigners living in Seoul.

These differences in findings may be due to different measures used in the various studies, or other methodological variances. What is “good” language proficiency, for example? Different levels of language skills may also have different impact on respective adjustment dimension. However, they may also point to the importance of contextual factors, such as the level of English spoken in the country, the job, and the circumstances
for the migrant. Indeed, a study comparing foreign academics working in Norway respective those working in Finland concluded that the host country language difficulty influenced both the dimensions of adjustment language proficiency and the significance of it (Selmer and Lauring, 2011). It is also important to note that for example interaction adjustment can be important for performance in the workplace (Selmer, 2006: 358).

Although the exact relationship between host country language proficiency and the various dimensions of adjustment is ambiguous, inadequate language skills frequently cause problems for migrants (Suutari and Brewster, 1998). Insufficient language skills are also related to another common problem, namely forming relationships to host country nationals (Suutari and Brewster, 1998). Low language skills can make the migrant feel isolated and even lead to a negative attitude towards HCNs, both within the workplace and in private (Froese et al., 2012; Henderson, 2005). In the workplace, language-issues can lead to tension and misunderstandings (Henderson, 2005). People are often found to prefer interaction and communication with other similar to themselves and in their native language (Froese et al., 2012; Welch and Welch, 2008). In for example organisations, the organisational language and language skills have very big impact on access to information, in what way information is shared (Welch and Welch, 2008), power and social networks (Vaara et al., 2005). On the other hand, good language proficiency improves communication with HCNs and help the migrant to understand the culture (Peltokorpi, 2008), thus helping the migrant in the process of adopting appropriate behaviour at work (Froese et al., 2012).

### 2.3.1 Finnish skills among foreigners in Finland

In a study about Americans living in the Nordics, it becomes clear that those living in Finland use more English than do those living in the other Nordic countries, and they also rate their skills in the host country language (Finnish) lower (Latomaa, 1998: 55). This can be explained with the perceived difficulty of the Finnish language. Language distance depends on the linguistic distance between home and host country language, but also the complexity of grammar, sounds, etc. (Isphoring and Otten, 2014). Studies show that difficult host country languages provide different challenges and opportunities. In a study of expatriated adjustment, Selmer and Lauring (2011) compared language skills in Finland and Norway. The two countries are very similar in many ways, and English is widely spoken in both countries. However, Norwegian is part of the Scandinavian language group, and considered an easy language, while Finnish is
considered a difficult language. Selmer and Lauring (2011) found that host country language skills were higher in Norway than in Finland. However, in Norway host country language skills were modestly related to interactional adjustment, whereas it in Finland was positively related to all socio-cultural adjustment variables.

The study of Americans in the Nordic countries (Latoma, 1998), further show that Finns generally prefer to switch to English rather than speak Finnish with the Americans, although they are pleasantly surprised when foreigners attempt to learn Finnish. Generally, it is not expected of certain foreigners, such as Americans, to learn Finnish, while it is demanded of others. However, the American respondents considered not knowing Finnish as a disadvantage, and as many as 73.3 % claimed that they “absolutely needed Finnish” (Latoma, 1998: 58). The study concluded that Americans can choose to live within an English-speaking bubble in Finland or learn the language to become more integrated with the Finnish-speaking locals. Finally, Finnish courses were criticised for the heavy emphasis on grammar rather than spoken language (Latoma, 1998: 62).

### 2.3.2 Summary on language, communication, and adjustment

Host country language skills are positively related to adjustment and contact with host country nationals. Table 2 summarises factors influencing host country language proficiency, structured according to Chiswick and Miller’s (2001) formula. Research show that language difficulty does not only influence learning, but it also impacts the outcomes of language skills. Communication is more than language itself; also an understanding of the culture is important. The focus of this thesis is on the language, but it is important to be aware of the cultural aspects of communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>Depends on</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exposure</strong></td>
<td>Exposure to language</td>
<td>Time spent in host country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensity of exposure</td>
<td>Frequency and quality of interaction with host country nationals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Efficiency</strong></td>
<td>How much one learns with investment</td>
<td>Age at the time of the move</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linguistic difference to home country, language difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic incentive</strong></td>
<td>Economic benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social, political and cultural interests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wealth</strong></td>
<td>(Monetary) resources available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Factors influencing host country language proficiency
3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter is to explain the methodology and the research process. The chapter begins with a discussion of the research approach (3.1). Then the data collection process is described (3.2), including the restrictions for the population, presentation of the sample, and the interview process. Section 3.3 describes the research analysis, and finally the quality of the research is critically discussed (3.4).

3.1 Research approach

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective realities of foreign professionals in regard to the Finnish language. Hence, the study is qualitative in its nature, as qualitative methods are appropriate for exploring and increasing understanding of a particular phenomenon (Kvale, 1997: 67). Data is collected through semi-structured interviews. The study adopts a so called interpretive research philosophy. Hence, the underlying assumption is that reality is subjective, socially constructed, and highly complex (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2009: 119). Although assuming a subjective view on reality that is influenced by individuals’ values and previous experiences, common patterns emerging from the data can be used as an indicator of how individuals in the specific group studied collectively experience their reality.

This study attempts to find new patterns, exceptions, and experiences that eventually form new knowledge and new theories; hence, the research process is inductive (Saunders et al., 2009: 125). However, the study does rely on a few assumptions from existing literature and research, which gives it some deductive characteristics. Previous studies on adjustment and language have provided the basis for the research design and interview guide (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Jackson, 2012: 125). Also the formulation of the specified target group is influenced by assumptions from existing knowledge on migrants. The assumptions drawn from existing literature that have influenced the research design of this study include:

- Communication and language skills play an important role in the adjustment of foreign professionals to their host country.
- Language difficulty influences the mechanisms and processes of language learning and use.
Native English-speakers may experience international communication situations differently from others, which makes it interesting to have a subsample of native English-speakers and non-native English speakers.

3.2 Data collection

Following the research question and the aim of the study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals belonging to the group of interest. Interviewing is a very flexible tool, suitable for broad, multilevel issues such as the one at hand, which is generally positively viewed by the participants (Castell and Symon, 1994). However, the social characteristics of the interview situation, and the interplay between researcher and interview, may lead to different types of bias and quality issues (Saunders et al., 2009: Ch. 10). Although these biases cannot be entirely eliminated, the researcher can take action to minimise bias and increase transparency. Sample bias and interviewee bias are discussed in the respective sections. Trustworthiness and the impact of the researcher are critically discussed separately in section 3.4.

3.2.1 Sample

The aim of the study is to study foreign professionals in Finland. However, this is a quite heterogeneous group, which could reflect on the data gathered and consequently require a bigger sample (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). Therefore, the target population in this study was restricted to a smaller, fairly homogenous subgroup, and identifies possible patterns within this particular type of foreigners. Below the restrictions are argued for one by one.

*University degree and working within own area of study/expertise.* A foreign professional in this study is defined as a person with a university degree, working in their own field. “Own field” refers broadly to work that a person with a particular education could reasonably be expected to perform in their home country.

*Living and working in the Helsinki-region.* The Helsinki-region is quite international and urban. The experiences of foreigners in the Helsinki-region may therefore vary from that of rest of Finland, especially outside of the big cities. The Helsinki region consists of the following municipalities: Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen, Järvenpää, Nurmijärvi, Tuusula, Kerava, Mántsälä, Pornainen, Hyvinkää, Kirkkonummi, Vihti and Sipoo (Helsingin Seutu).
Originating from a Western country. Also a subgroup was sampled, namely native English-speakers from North America, the United Kingdom and Ireland, and Oceania. For the rest, the targeted group included foreign professionals from other Western countries. The reason for this restriction is that individuals originating from other parts of the world may be treated differently due to racism and prejudice, thus their reality may vary quite a lot from that of Western professionals. This too, however, would be an interesting field of study. Also, these cultures also have a European origin, and the main language usually belongs to the Indo-European language family. Although these countries clearly have substantial differences, it is not as big as with other countries.

Not sent to Finland by employer. Organisational expatriates are usually provided with more support from their organisation than other expatriates are. Persons that initiate their move themselves can also be expected to have a different attitude towards the move and the country. Therefore they may experience their adjustment process quite differently.

Living in Finland for ca. 1-5 years. The adjustment process is highly individual. However, foreigners that live for many years in Finland may feel more integrated in the country, while less integrated individuals already have moved away. Citizenship as such may not be the best indicator of integration, as the incentives to apply for it vary between nationalities. In order to make the group somewhat more comparable and focus on those that are indeed still “foreigners”, an approximate restriction of one to five years spent in Finland were added. The higher restriction was based on the time-frame for applying for citizenship (although it is four years for people with Finnish spouses).

Many studies choose to study only foreigners from a particular country or language group. However, an international, but otherwise relatively homogenous sample increases the generalisability of the findings between different nationalities. The group chosen for this particular study can be considered to possess the characteristics that makes adjustment to Finland as easy as possible. Therefore, it could be argued that this group could be used as a benchmark for possible comparisons to identify differences between other types of foreigners.

The sample was collected through a combination of convenience sampling and snowballing. I announced the need for participants for this study widely among my extended network of different ages and backgrounds. Hence, many the interviewees were acquired through the networks of my own contacts. Some interviewees also suggested
their own contacts for interviews. In addition, some organisations were contacted. A non-probability sample contains a certain bias as it is not statistically representative of the target population (Saunders et al., 2009: 233). Therefore the aim was to gather interviewees from as many different sources as possible, in order to hedge for this bias (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012: 229). The purpose was also to collect a sample of diverse nationalities, professions, and companies.

Most of the participants were contacted by electronic messages, stating the purpose of the interview, the expected duration of the interview, and the criteria for participants. This ensured that the research only involved people who perceived themselves to fit the target group. Participants C and I were contacted in person and per telephone respectively. It should be noted that interviewee I has Finnish roots, although he did not speak Finnish at home, and did not have close relations in Finland at the time of his move. Also, participant M did not finish a university degree; however, both he and his employer seem to attribute him with equivalent qualifications.

In total, fourteen interviews were conducted, which should be enough to reach data saturation in a relatively homogenous sample (Guest et al., 2006: 20). Ten of the participants were men, and four women. The participants came from Poland, France, Canada (French-speaking), Australia, Austria, Portugal, Ireland, Germany, USA, and the Netherlands, and spoke six different native languages, all of which belong to the Indo-European language group (Ethnologue: Indo-European). At the time of the study, the participants had lived in Finland between seven months and seven years. This time does not include the time the participants had contact to Finland before their move, such as coming to Finland on vacations with a spouse. Similarly, it does not include exchange semesters; five of the participants had been to Finland on an exchange. Of these, one had other experience of living abroad. Of the remaining ten, only one participant had no previous experience of living abroad before moving to Finland.

A Finnish spouse was the most common primary reason why the participants had chosen to move to Finland; of the fourteen one came to do his Master’s degree, one to do a Ph.D., and one because of love for the country. One came for a relationship and to do her Master’s degree. These characteristics are summarised in table 3. Furthermore, the participants were between 25 and 39 years old, and worked in IT, business, academia, law, and sports. However, in order to ensure the participants’ anonymity, these characteristics are not presented for each participant individually. The participants
worked at eleven different companies, ranging from small to very large. I had met four of the participants before the interview.

<table>
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<th>Language</th>
<th>Years in Finland</th>
<th>Exchange Finland</th>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3  Presentation of the participants.

One of the research questions in this study involved possible differences between native English-speakers and others. Therefore a subsample of native English-speakers were included. Of the fourteen participants five were native English-speakers, of which all were men (in italics in the table).

### 3.2.2 Interviews

The interviews were mostly conducted in face-to-face settings: at cafés (A, G, J, M, N), the interviewee’s office (E, L), the interviewee’s home (B, C), and at Hanken (D, H). Three interviews was conducted via Skype (F, I, K). The idea was to make it as convenient for the interviewee as possible. The different contexts may have had an impact on the interviews. However, I assume the influence of the context in this study was small, as I did not notice any prominent differences between the interviews. At the beginning of the interview the subject of the study and the interview process was briefly explained, and the interviewee was asked for an informed consent. The interviewee was also asked for permission to record the interview. The whole interview situation was planned to take no more than an hour. This was in order to make people more willing to participate, and with respect to the interviewees time constraints. The shortest interview was 18 minutes long, and the longest 62 minutes. On average, the duration of the interviews was ca. 40 minutes. Interestingly, the five first interviews were all under 40 minutes, while most of
the later interviews were longer. This could be partially be explained by that I as a researcher gained more experience, learned to take longer pauses, and react to the answers in a more encouraging manner (Kvale, 1997: 137).

As the interview is a social process, the interviewee makes judgements of what is the “correct” answer to the question, in other words, what answer is socially acceptable or expected of them (Grant, Rohr and Grant, 2012). The interviewee may also be reluctant to reveal certain information (Saunders et al., 2009: 327). However, the interviewees generally appeared happy to discuss the topic, and contributed with reflective answers. The participants were assured that the interest of the interview lay in their subjective experiences, something several of them emphasised.

The interviews were conducted in English. English is not my first language, nor is it the first language of most of the interviewees. Speaking in one’s second or third language may lead to misunderstandings, difficulties to express oneself, and neglect of for example non-verbal cues (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004: 225, 234). However, a non-native English-speaker may be more comfortable speaking with another non-native speaker, rather than a native speaker. In this study, the only common language with most of the participants was English. All participants also conducted at substantial part of their work in English. Hence, I decided not to offer to a possibility to conduct the interviews in Finnish or Swedish. In this study, the only common language with most of the participants was English. All participants also conducted at substantial part of their work in English. Hence, I decided not to offer to a possibility to conduct the interviews in Finnish or Swedish. In addition, it is possible that speaking in that certain language influences one’s perception of that particular subject. Simultaneously, by conducting the interviews in English I avoid the issue of translation, and may use the interviewees’ own words in the quotations. This choice did mean, however, that the subgroup of native English-speakers had a linguistic advantage over the other interviewees, but especially over me as the researcher (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004: 236).

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed, which all the interviewees willingly gave their consent to. Notes were taken during the interviews in case of technical problems. The recording for interview F was lost due to technical problems, and because of the different viewpoint of this interviewee a second, shorter and more focused, interview was conducted. This interview was analysed in combination with notes from the first interview. Recordings offer an unbiased record of the discussion. However, it may also influence the interviewee’s answers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012: 139). This was addressed by assuring confidentiality and the right to leave any questions unanswered at the beginning of the interview. Interviewees were also assured that their own names or names of their employers would not be enclosed in the study.
3.2.2.1  Pilot interview

A pilot interview was conducted to test the interview guide and to identify possible important topics that had gone unnoticed. Simultaneously, it allowed me as a researcher to gain some experience before interviewing the participants (Kvale, 1997: 137). The person interviewed for the pilot interview was a 27 year old English-speaking male from Canada with a university degree, who had lived and worked in Finland for five years at the time of the interview. The pilot interview took 41 minutes.

In the first version a few of the questions had two options; one for interviewees with basic skills in Finnish, and one for interviewees with a higher proficiency in Finnish. After the pilot interview this was judged unnecessary, and were substituted with more generally applicable, open questions. From the pilot interview additional important topics emerged: the possible importance of Finnish for accessing media such as newspapers and TV; and jokes, references, and informal conversations at the work place. The topics were also slightly reorganised in the final interview guide to align with the natural flow of the discussion.

3.2.2.2  Interview guide

The interview guide can be found in Appendix 1. The same interview guide was used for all interviewees, but after the first some minor changes were done to better support the topics that emerged as important during the first interviews. The structure was changed slightly to be clearer. A question about perceived working opportunities in Finland was added. Also, the interview was ended with the question “What advice would you give to foreigners coming here?” The reason for this was to get a more natural ending to the interview (Kvale, 1997: 39), but also provided an opportunity for rephrasing earlier questions. In addition, the first interviewees stressed many times that their perspective was subjective, and therefore I ensured the following interviewees that I understood this already in the beginning of the interview. This was expected to make it easier for the interviewees to talk freely without feeling like representatives of all foreigners, minimising bias in their answers.

The interview guide was structured around a few key themes and questions to encourage longer answers and free associations. These were then followed by more specific, further questions in case the interviewee did not discuss some aspect of the topic on his own initiative. The interview started with questions about the background of the interviewee.
These were designed to gather relevant, descriptive background information (Guba, 1981), but also to make the interviewee feel comfortable and start thinking about the topic at hand. These more general questions were followed by several main topics: the working culture in Finland, communication challenges, communication advantages/use of Finnish, and knowledge of Finland and life in Finland. Finally, the interview were asked how long they are planning to stay in Finland and whether they are planning to learn more Finnish, if they whether, and to give their recommendations to other foreign professionals. The interviewees were encouraged to share concrete examples, in order to increase the understanding of the situation and exemplify their reality (Kvale, 1997: 37).

The topics were quite broad and not too tightly-knit to the research question. There were two reasons for this. First, the explorative nature of the research question made it difficult to know beforehand which topics actually were most relevant. Second, the idea was to open the associations in the mind of the interviewee, and to gain access to examples and ideas that the interviewee did not explicitly relate to adjustment, communication, or language (Gant et al., 2012). The order of the questions asked fluctuated a little, if the interviewee started talking about the topic earlier on or a certain question followed naturally on an answer.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Because of the inductive nature of the research, template analysis (Saunders, 2009: 505) was applied on the data analysis. The main source for the data transcriptions of the interviews. In text, the interviews lose other important forms of communication, such as tone of voice and body language (Kvale 1997: 147). However, it allows the researcher to study the actual words and the contents of the interview. In some cases, silences and laughs were transcribed where it appeared significant. As a complement to the transcriptions, a researcher’s diary was also kept of key points after each interview, but also of the points that emerged during the transcription.

The researcher’s diary comprising key points from the interview sessions and transcriptions served as a basis for creating the template of primary categories and codes. The transcriptions where then coded one by one. Codes and categories were added, revised, and rearranged several times during the process of analysing the interviews, until a comprehensive and inclusive final template emerged (Saunders et al., 2009). The final template is illustrated in figure 4. To increase the transparency of the analysing process, the codes and categories that were part of the interview guide structure are
shown in **bold** in the figure. Codes and categories in *italics* were not directly included in the interview guide, but the underlying rationale for some questions.

Chapter 4, *Results*, is structured according to the template and presents the results for each category. As the data consists of people’s communications on their experiences, it is important to know not only what is said, but also how it is said. Therefore, relevant quotations from the interviews are included to illustrate the presentation of the results. Chapter 5, *Analysis*, then analyses these findings and their relationships further to construct meaning of the results.
Figure 4  Final template analysis structure.
3.4 Critical discussion

3.4.1 Research quality: trustworthiness

The quality of qualitative research, in particular when assuming that there is no single objective truth, is not possible to verify in the same way rationalistic research can be verified (Guba 1981). Instead, quality can be assessed in terms of trustworthiness. This section discusses the measures taken to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Guba 1981).

When assuming that multiple realities can be true at the same time credibility becomes an issue of truthfully accounting for the participants’ experiences (Guba 1981: 80). Possible interviewee bias is discussed in conjunction with the interview process, and interviewer bias in section 3.4.2. All data is saved in order to ensure the possibility to judge the reliability of the research if necessary. To further ensure the credibility of the results, the findings are discussed in the light of previous research.

In qualitative studies, the assessment of transferability falls upon the reader (Guba, 1981). Hence, descriptive data was collected, and the background of the interviews, the research context and data collection process is described in detail, to allow evaluation of the applicability of the results to other contexts (Guba, 1981: 86).

In qualitative research “instruments that are assessed for consistency in qualitative research are the researcher and the informants, both of whom vary greatly within the research project.” (Krefting, 1991: 216). Although the assumption is that identical research cannot be made, the description of the process attempts to be such that future researchers could follow the same blueprint, in order to increase dependability (Krefting 1991: 221).

Finally, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, total objectivity is not considered possible or even desirable in this research. Guba (1981) suggests that qualitative research instead would ensure the confirmability of the study. An important aspect is to account for values and motivations underlying the study, as well as the researcher’s own prepositions (Shenton, 2004). Thus, decisions and rationales are justified throughout the methodology chapter to ensure high transparency in the research process. The following subsection discusses the impact of the researcher.
3.4.2 Impact of researcher

As a researcher I may influence the research process with my own values, interpretations, and experiences (Saunders et al. 2009: 119; Guba 1981), and I will therefore reveal my background. I am Finnish, and part of the Swedish-speaking minority. My own experiences profoundly influence my preconceptions on the importance of languages in Finland, such as that the position of Swedish in Helsinki is relatively weak, and not helpful in practical daily matters. Rather, I have experienced that English is more positively viewed among Finnish, than is Swedish. Although Finnish myself, I am quite familiar with the subject in this discussion. My own experiences and preconceptions before this study is that Finnish is not necessary for satisfactory adjustment in Finland. I also assume that language are important for identity and relationships. Obviously, unconscious preconceptions I hold may be even more influential.

In the interview situation, I may have impacted the interviewee with my responses and reactions (Saunders et al., 2009: 326). However, aware of this bias, I consciously strived to answer the interviewees in an interested, but neutral manner. Furthermore, social desirability may have increased as I as a Finn asked questions about life in Finland, Finns, and Finnish. Indeed, when criticising Finns several of the respondents pointed out that they did not want to generalise, and even explicitly told me they did not consider me belonging to “that group”. Overall, I did not discuss my own background with the interviews. However, my seemingly-foreign name may have allowed some of the participants to mentally distinguish me from the “typical” Finn.

3.4.3 Research ethics

Conducting research includes ethical responsibilities. First, the interviewees participating in the study are affected by the research process. Second, the new knowledge produced influences our understanding of the world (Kvale 1997: 104). This section accounts for how ethical aspects have been taken into consideration throughout the study.

The aim of this study is to improve the situation for the target group by increasing knowledge of their reality. In the beginning of interviews, each interviewee was informed about the nature of the study, and asked for their consent to participate in the study, which they all freely gave. To protect the participants, both their own names as well as that of their employer(s) are kept confidential. Furthermore, all names directly related
to the interviewee were changed already during the transcription phase. Although the interviewees gave their consent for me to use other information shared during the interview for the study, I have attempted to give a sufficiently accurate picture of the participants without sharing unnecessary personal information.
4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study according to the template developed during the analysis stage. However, this chapter focuses on presenting the findings associated with each category as objectively as possible, while the next chapter will analyse the findings further. The findings are illustrated by selected quotations from the interviews. For the convenience of the reader, the subsample of native English-speakers are marked with italics in the tables.

Of the respondents all but one (G) worked in very international companies and tasks; however, most of the team members or closest colleagues were in general Finns. One respondent (K) had a job that formally required Finnish, and two (G and I) used some Finnish at work. Although varying in degree, the respondents did not have definitive plans to stay. Some were fairly certain that they wanted to move somewhere else at some point, others had no plans to leave. However, the responses put into questions the attempt to classify migrants according to a specific time-frame.

4.1 Attitudes towards learning Finnish

Because language skill can be quite subjective, the participants were asked to rate their Finnish skill on whatever scale they preferred. The participants where later assigned a Finnish proficiency number (1, 3, 5) based on that answer and other comments the respondent made during the interview about use and understanding. Most of the respondents were assigned level 1. Level 1 should be seen as a broad continuum of basic skills. Some spoke only a few sentences, while others were able to have limited discussions. Because the participants varied in their comments on their own skills and also in their actual use of the language, a more specific classification was not possible. Two participants were rated 3; they had limited working proficiency in Finnish, and could understand or participate in more complex discussions. One participant got was assigned level 5; participant K used Finnish as part of her job and spoke only Finnish at home. One participant chose to start with Swedish and did not speak Finnish at all. Participant E had participated in courses but not finished them, and did not use Finnish. The findings are summarised in table 4. It should be noted that the Finnish levels are relative; thus, level 5 does not represent full working proficiency.
Although only participant A and B were taking Finnish classes at the time of the interview, the participants were in general eager to improve their Finnish skills. Some had very concrete goals in mind, others vaguer. Three of the participants wanted to improve their Finnish skills, but were currently focusing on their Swedish-skills. Of the eleven participants, three did not express interest in improving their skills in either local language. When asked to give some advice to other foreign professionals moving to Finland, participant E (Australia, 5 years) recommended that “If they’ve got work already lined up, then don’t learn the language if you don’t have to.” He was unsure whether he would try to learn more Finnish himself. The two single men participating in the study, C and M, did not see much use in learning more Finnish.

**Table 4** The participants’ Finnish skills and their interest for continued learning.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Years in Finland</th>
<th>Primary reason for move</th>
<th>Language of spouse</th>
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<th>Wants to continue</th>
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<td>Swedish</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

A, Poland, 3 years
I will continue learning Finnish.

B, France, 1 year
I hope I’m soon going to get to the point where I can at least start talking to people in the shops. Because what happens is that I’ll order something, I know what to say, I know “Yks kahvi, kiitos” or this kind of stuff, but then as soon as the person asks me more details, or like here or take away, or something, then I’m lost.

C, Canada, 3 years
It does not bring, at the moment, that much value. Coming back a bit to your question earlier. I don’t feel like I would get an advantage in the workplace. That’s a huge commitment of time and effort. I might do it at some point if I’m in the perfect environment for it, and for that I mean like having a Finnish girlfriend, with Finnish TV playing in the back, which like repeating motion. Because you cannot just do it by reading half an hour every night, that’s not the way you’re going to learn, you want to be strategic about it.

D, Australia, 1 year
I’ve actually been trying to learn Swedish instead.

E, Australia, 5 years
Maybe.

F, Austria, 3 years
Right now perfecting my Swedish is first priority.

G, France, 5 years
I don’t know if I will go to school, I don’t think it’s… But I learn every day, I learn something new.
Yes, I would like to learn more Finnish. I think, I was planning that maybe next year if I, because I think the workload will decrease, then I could learn, start learning Finnish again. But I don't know if that is going to happen.

But hopefully this autumn I would like and take proper classes here again.

By the time, this time next year I want to be having, you know, a lot more conversations and interactions in Finnish. Because if I don't, you know... No, there's no if I don't, I need to and that's that. It needs to happen. I'm determined on that point.

Depends. Probably I need to find another Finnish girl or something like that to help encourage me, keep me here. That would be a long-term plan to stay. Apart from that, if I don't have a good, long-term reason to stay, I don't think so at this point.

So I really hope that I will learn Finnish and I'll manage to really speak it fluently, but at the moment I will start Swedish, because I'm a little bit desperate, so let's see afterwards.

A general pattern for learning Finnish emerges among the respondents. Generally, participants took basic Finnish courses at an early stage of their move, most commonly at Aikuislukio (adult high school), or as a part of their studies in Finland. Participants I, J, and N chose to study Finnish already before their move. However, it seems to be difficult to overcome a basic level of proficiency. Of the fourteen participants, two reported virtually non-existent Finnish skills, while nine spoke some degree of basic Finnish. The three participants with higher Finnish proficiency had primarily improved their skills by use in their daily life.

Finnish is a difficult language to learn, and this was recognised by every one of the participants. Especially they mentioned the vocabulary, as the words are often very different from those in other languages. This was also the main challenge for the three participants with a higher level of Finnish skills for improving their skills. Furthermore, Finnish classes were not considered helpful for learning spoken language. Participant A (Poland, 3 years) concluded: “Finnish classes and books are really bad and boring.”

Consequently, the main reason Finnish studies were interrupted was time constraints. The participants recognised that learning Finnish required a lot of invested time, effort, and energy. In order to learn Finnish, many explained that they would had to study very intensively. This in combination with lack of incentive to learn the language led to discontinuing Finnish studies.
because it was very formal Finnish, and it was a bit far away from the talking Finnish and slang and everything.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I, the USA, 5 years</th>
<th>I did the one-on-one teacher thing, and that just wasn't helpful. I really need conversational Finnish, like either in group where I go talk, or just to be more disciplined with talking with people, in my daily life, in Finnish. So I guess not really any plans for formal instruction.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K, Germany, 6 years</td>
<td>The thing that really helped me was that my boyfriend decided, about three years ago, that from now on we will talk only Finnish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J, Ireland, 1 year</td>
<td>And then I need to find kind of speaking clubs, I think. Is this other alternative, I mean, surely, I'm sure there is something in a pub for an international community or whatever, some evening a week, and I might try to do that as well. That's my plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6  Comments on learning by talking.

4.2  Other languages in Finland

4.2.1  English in Finland

The level of English is Finland is very high, and this was acknowledged by all the participants. The participants could take care of most practicalities and day-to-day matters, find information, get service, and communicate with most people they met in English. Obviously this made life for the participants much easier, and was something they appreciated very much. Thus, it was made clear by all participants that one can get perfectly well by in Helsinki without learning the language, due to the high level of English among the locals.

The participants frequently pointed out that the high level of English actually made it more difficult to learn Finnish, as there is not much incentive to learn. The participants also experienced that it was more difficult to learn Finnish, as there are not many opportunities to practice the language. In general, the participants claimed that Finns quickly switch to English, even when the other party actually wants to practice the language. Still, several respondents also mentioned that Finns often are quite insecure and uncomfortable speaking English.

Some of the participants did point out that it may not be as easy to get by without Finnish in other, less international parts of the country, where English may not be as commonly used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A, Poland, 3 years</th>
<th>Everybody speaks English, so there is no real reason to learn Finnish.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B, France, 1 year</td>
<td>Everybody speaks English. And that also makes it harder to learn Finnish; that you don't need to speak Finnish. When you go to France, spend six months there, you have no choice but to learn French or you're not going to be able to order anything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G, France, 5 years</td>
<td>In Helsinki, the fact that I don't speak perfect Finnish has never been, hasn't been an issue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For a foreigner, living in Helsinki, I think the situation is very good, because many people speak English, even people in the supermarket, like the older ladies who are there at the cashier. Which is very, was very surprising to me when I came.

Finnish, again, is very special because maybe it’s so different from other languages and so hard to learn, you get by very well without Finnish.

If you try to learn Finnish, you just have to be persistent. That’s something I noticed that, people probably try to help you, and maybe also try to make it easier for you, or maybe try to avoid awkward situations, I don’t know, but at least in the beginning when I tried to speak Finnish, in daily situations, so nothing work-related. They would answer always in English, which was a bit irritating, because then you feel like, is my Finnish so bad that you’re just having pity for me.

People speak to me in English, and I haven’t encountered any difficulties with language here, with all the people I have interacted with. Which is quite impressive, and obviously makes my life a huge amount easier.

Some, some do, some don’t. Some try to speak to me in Finnish, they’re trying to force me to speak Finnish. Which is good. I appreciate that. It means that we don’t have very much to say to one another, but I do appreciate it, because predominantly people switch to English immediately, and that’s not just in here, that’s Finland in general.

The average English, at least within the professional environment I work in, it’s very good for, yeah, the standard for the typical Finn is very good.

### Table 7  Comments on the use of English in Helsinki.

#### 4.2.1.1  English at work

English was even more established at work. Generally, the participants worked in very international organisations. For all participants except G, who coached Finnish and Swedish speaking teams, the official language of the organisation was English, or English and Finnish. The working language in participant I’s organisation was English, but internally Finnish was used for example at some meetings. Participant K’s organisation was very international, but at the local office Finnish was the main language.

On the whole, participants did not find the formal communication at the workplace challenging. Most of the participants also had very international tasks, often working with colleagues or customers located abroad. Several participants highlighted that they purposely looked for jobs where Finnish was not a requirement. In conclusion, except for G and K who had more Finnish-focused jobs, Finnish was not considered to be of much importance for doing a good job at the workplace. This was also shown in the low interest among employers to support Finnish skills. Twelve participants said that their employer had encouraged them to learn Finnish little or not at all.
However, the participants frequently mentioned that this may differ between jobs and especially sectors. Both participants working in IT and others pointed out that the IT sector may be the easiest to work in without Finnish skills. Also some experts may have an advantage. In addition, three of the nine non-native English-speakers (B, F, and N) worked primarily with customers in their native language group, which made Finnish skills less relevant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, Portugal, 3 years</td>
<td>It’s not really an advantage at work to know Finnish.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, France, 1 year</td>
<td>I basically don’t need to speak Finnish, as I talk with everyone in English and everybody speaks English. And I do my marketing in French, for my markets.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C, Canada, 3 years</td>
<td>Work place, very international, many colleagues, very international working environment, although the company is very Finnish. The job and the department is very international.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D, Australia, 1 year</td>
<td>Not needed in IT industry. Again, it's the industry that is the easiest to get into.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E, Australia, 5 years</td>
<td>Professionally everything is done in English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, Austria, 3 years</td>
<td>The work is done in English and German.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G, France, 5 years</td>
<td>Usually when I check the job opportunities I usually go on the one where you need to speak English as the main thing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H, Portugal, 5 years</td>
<td>[The organisation] is very English-speaking, and when I applied it was also, that was one criteria, that was important for me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I, the USA, 5 years</td>
<td>Even though I'm based in Helsinki a lot of my clients are not in Finland. I mean, I do some Finnish deals, but most of them are like I said, not in Finland, and even if it's a Finnish deal there are people involved who aren’t in Finland, so the language is English anyway.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J, Ireland, 2 years</td>
<td>Particularly in my previous work I didn't need to, I don’t have a need to now. I've been specifically recruited as a Nordic-based role, not the Finnish role, so I'll be dealing with the four Nordic countries and colleagues there, so English will be my first language.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L, Ireland, 1 year</td>
<td>My business is done, I've a European role, my business is done through English, so there is no need for me to, from a work point of view, learn Finnish. It's more of a personal...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M, the Netherlands, 7 years</td>
<td>But it is also dependent a bit on that I've purposely applied for roles that are international, so that I can get by with English.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N, France, 0.5 years</td>
<td>[In] my everyday life, I speak English with my team, or French with the part that is French. And then for the rest of my customer, most of the time I speak French or English. And anyway, the customers I'm dealing with in everyday life are not Finnish, so I don't need to speak any Finnish.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 Comments on how Finnish is not necessary for work.

Although the organisations and jobs were mostly very international, the closest colleagues at the physical workplace were often Finns. Only B, F, and M had an equal proportion of foreigners and Finns as their closest colleagues at the physical workplace. On the whole, participants had not encountered much difficulties communicating with colleagues, due to the high level of English among Finns. However, the degree of English spoken at the organisations did vary. In some organisations English was the main
language for all interactions among colleagues, whereas in others English was only used when speaking directly to the foreigner. The participants noted that there are differences between people and groups in how readily the language was switched. Only K used mainly Finnish to communicate with her colleagues.

| B, France, 1 year | I don’t know if it related again to the high ratio of foreigners, but... There’s so many people not understanding Finnish in the company, so it’s easier to speak English. And it depends also a lot on people. |
| C, Canada, 3 years | And the second that there is one person, a foreigner, who does not speak the language, in the conference room, then people [...] don’t even question it, it’s going to be English right away. |
| F, Austria, 3 years | The workplace has a lot of internationals, so we mostly use English. |
| H, Portugal, 5 years | I think it’s just a matter of getting used to it, because later I think people became much more aware of that and obviously willing to do that [use English]. And to have the meetings in English and the presentations in English. |
| I, the USA, 5 years | If they’re talking with each other it’s always in Finnish. If I’m around they do tend to switch to English. |
| L, Ireland, 1 year | People speak to me in English, and I haven't encountered any difficulties with language here with all the people I have interacted with. Which is quite impressive, and obviously makes my life a huge amount easier. |
| M, the Netherlands, 7 years | My Finnish colleagues, amongst themselves, do talk Finnish, but, even then they sometimes talk English, because there’s so much English being spoken around them. Yeah, also socially, we speak a lot of English. |
| N, France, 0.5 years | It’s really rare for instance, that if I go for lunch people around you are going to speak Finnish. It’s extremely rare, even if I’m the only English-speaker, they are all going to switch to English. Which is, for me, an effort I really appreciate. |

Table 9  Comments on the use of English among colleagues.

### 4.2.2 Swedish

Finland has two official languages, but because of the fairly small Swedish-speaking population, the limited use of Swedish outside social interactions, as well as the limited practical Swedish skills among Finns, this study focused on Finnish skills. Swedish was not mentioned by the researcher during the interviews. However, several of the respondents mentioned Swedish and Swedish-speakers on their own initiative. This lead to believe that it may have some practical implications for foreigners. However, it should be noted that most of the respondents were contacts or contacts’ contacts of the Swedish-speaking researcher, which most certainly means some sort of bias towards foreigners involved in the Swedish-speaking community. However, the proportion of marriages between Swedish-speakers and speakers of another language compared to the total amount of marriages between Finns and other language is bigger than the proportion of Swedish-speaking Finns of the population (SVT, 2013) would suggest. This suggests that foreigners are more in contact with Swedish-speakers than the proportion of Swedish-speaking Finns would suggest.
Table 10 summarises the respondents that at some point mentioned Swedish or Swedish-speakers. In addition, participant C and K had Swedish-speaking connections from their Master’s studies. However, they did not mention anything in particular about Swedish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>FR</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>DE</td>
<td>FR</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>NL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Finland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Spouse, colleagues, friends</td>
<td>Spouse, work</td>
<td>Spouse, colleagues, friends</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of SE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3/5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to learn</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>continue</td>
<td>continue</td>
<td>maybe</td>
<td>maybe</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 Participants mentioning Swedish or Swedish-speakers.

All but one of the participants with a Swedish-speaking spouse mentioned that they were learning Swedish, which indicates that the social surroundings may play an important part when choosing which language to learn. However, both D and N pointed out that one reason for learning Swedish was that it was so much easier to learn than Finnish. H has no connections to Swedish-speakers whatsoever, but also considered Swedish much easier to learn. Swedish also gives access to that public information that is available in Swedish. D, F, and G said that they may also benefit from Swedish skills at work.

B and M did not mention learning Swedish, but they did remark that they found it easier to get along with and understand Swedish-speakers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D, Australia, 1 year</th>
<th>But at the same time I also know it’s an incredibly difficult language to learn. So, yeah, that’s why I’ve actually started with Swedish first, because it’s easier to understand compared to English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F, Austria, 3 years</td>
<td>It is easier to perfect my Swedish, with Finnish it is a very long process before I would be able to use it professionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G, France, 5 years</td>
<td>And now I would say I have a different challenge, because I’ve made an effort to learn Finnish and my team is in Swedish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H, Portugal, 5 years</td>
<td>But I’ve also thought about learning Swedish, because it could be easier for me to learn. Or I mean, quicker. And then I could at least read the official stuff. But maybe it wouldn’t, but then it wouldn’t be any useful for interaction, because people don’t speak Swedish, and because it would be a little bit maybe rude to start speaking Swedish to people who are Finnish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N, France, 0.5 years</td>
<td>But my plan is to learn Swedish, because I’m a little bit tired of trying Finnish. However, also because my boyfriend is Swedish-speaking, for me it also makes more sense on a social level, to actually learn Swedish, even though it would be better for my professional life that I’d learn Finnish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 Comments on learning Swedish.
Participant F (Austria, 3 years) was the only interviewee who spoke Swedish on a fluent level. As an exception, she was asked some of the same questions about Swedish as about Finnish. As the participants with higher proficiency of Finnish, she took a few courses in the beginning, but mainly learned by reading and talking. Also the benefits of Swedish skills appear to be very similar to those of Finnish skills. Participant F’s social environment is mostly Swedish-speaking, and so are several of her colleagues: “I live in a bubble in this Swedish-speaking bubble. I never hear Finnish, my whole surroundings are Swedish.” F uses Swedish in social situations both in private and at work, and claims that her proficiency in Swedish has improved her networking possibilities. F recognises that it is easier to reach a level of professional proficiency in Swedish than in Finnish, especially because of her German native language.

4.3 Finnish as a tool

As mentioned earlier, a lack of Finnish skills was not considered very challenging in everyday life, although the participants did encounter challenging situations. First, although the participants stressed that the general level of English is very good in Finland, occasionally insufficient English skills caused difficulties. In private, the respondents explained that they usually were able to find someone who spoke English to help them. In the workplace, D and M reported occasional situations where customer or third party did not have sufficient English skills for the task at hand. This meant handing over cases to others, or at least getting help from colleagues. Participant H was the only one who had encountered language-related challenges with her colleagues, although this did not lead to major inconveniences.

Second, participants occasionally came across information that was only available in Finnish. In private, this could be for example information from the housing cooperative. Even in organisations with English as their official language, some information is only available in Finnish. Some of the participants also had sufficient language skills to get an idea of the message. However, several participants admitted that they often ignored information that was only available in Finnish. This sort of situations were mostly regarded as a natural inconvenience of not speaking the local language, but mostly without any considerable negative effect on life. In the workplace, formal information that was not available in English included:

- More mundane practical matters, such as information on printers or on upcoming window cleaning (C, E, G)
• Some HR material (J, L, N)
• Job contract (B, F)
• Local social clubs or out of office activities (J, M)
• Quarterly reports (J)

Third, challenging situations also included times when the message was not directly directed to the participant, but nonetheless possibly important, such as a possible emergency situation. This was perhaps the type of practical implications that the participants were most concerned about. At the workplace, two participants recognised that this led to loss of information. They meant that they were missing out on informal information shared in for example open offices, that they would have access to if they spoke the language. Thus, information loss for the organisation occurs both as the foreigner misses out on this potentially relevant informal information, but also as the foreigner cannot add value by contributing to the discussion.

The participants framed these practical implications as mostly occasional annoyances, which did not considerably affect the quality of life in Finland, although they did wish they knew Finnish better in these situations. When necessary, spouses, colleagues, and Google Translate were used for translation. The three participants with higher levels of Finnish brought up similar situations as examples of when they benefited from their skills. These participants had also other practical benefits at work (4.3.1).

| B, France, 1 year | I know that my colleagues are speaking about marketing in front of me, but they are not talking to me, talking about their own market (...) Oftentimes I still catch up something and I say, "Oh, yeah, by the way, hear you speaking that, but I have the same thing" and they didn't know and then we talk about something. So even though I'm not targeted I think it’s always nice to have an ear everywhere.

I think it’s important to know everything that’s going on in the company. And again, even if it’s not official statements, hearing people talking together is always good. So in that sense, I think it would increase a little bit more my view on the organisation and what is happening. |
| D, Australia, 1 year | Possibly when interacting with third parties. So if you have a vendor that’s providing something from a third party, it would be nice to know it then. A lot of the times they are not that good in English [...] it’s been a few times when I had to give it to somebody else to actually do the job, because I just couldn’t. |
| H, Portugal, 5 years | And there are also people from the staff, like administrative staff, who don’t really speak English. But I don’t find it a problem, I mean, it’s okay, people never have to learn English, so it doesn’t bother me that then when I need to communicate with them I need to use another person, or ask someone to translate, or I translate myself... |
| J, Ireland, 2 years | You know, you could overhear a conversation in English, in the office, and you could add value, [if] you could understand it. A colleague might ask another colleague a question that you have the answer to. You can go, "Well actually, hang on, I have that here". In Finnish I can’t do that. Because unless I’m really actively listening, and I really understand what’s going on, I don’t add the value. |
Because my hearing is turned off. So I could have the answer that they are looking for, but I can't volunteer that answer because I don't understand the conversation. You do tune out of what's happening around you, when you don't understand the language well enough. And it's not ideal. Because you miss the, the subtleties, you miss the humor and the fun part of being part of an office.

M, the Netherlands, 7 years
But there are people there where their English is, it's not really good enough to properly get the communication through. So a typical situation was, well, for instance a few weeks ago. I had a meeting where we were discussing a challenging, basically a complex calculation. And the business case was quite complex for this. And it was just me and the owner of this calculation on the client's side. And he, it was really difficult for the two of us to really understand, for him to explain what it is that he wants for me to explain, what it is that I'm trying to do. And in the end I actually asked one of my Finnish colleagues to make sure, to go through the material and just check with him whether the thing was really correct.

Table 12 Comments on insufficient Finnish skills at work.

4.3.1 Working in Finnish

Three of the participants used Finnish in their job. Participant G worked with Finnish- and Swedish-speaking teams. Although he primarily worked in English, he used as much Finnish as possible to communicate with the players. Participant I worked in English, but in an organisation where Finnish was the primary language between colleagues. Also for example internal meetings were held in Finnish. His employer had at the beginning of employment supported his learning by hiring a Finnish tutor. Participant K was the only participant who had a job with Finnish as a requirement. Although a big part of her job tasks were in English, other tasks, as well as most communication at the office, was in Finnish. She also spoke Finnish at home. A previous employer had encouraged her to learn Finnish by speaking Finnish with her.

G, France, 5 years
If I say it in Finnish it might have a bigger influence on what I'm looking for in the players. So, using Finnish is important, it's very important.

I, the USA, 5 years
People dealing with each other I would say that the main language is Finnish. And for instance we have a weekly lawyers meeting every Monday morning, and for that they do the meeting in Finnish, and that's fine by me because I have been following along long enough.

Especially a deal I'm working on now I've been getting calls from clients, who starts speaking Finnish to me. And sometimes, instead of having to say, "I'm sorry, I don't speak Finnish", sometimes I can reply to them in Finnish.

K, Germany, 6 years
I would for example not be really comfortable giving in presentation in front of colleagues in Finnish. But if we are in a meeting, or small meeting at least, and discussing something then, yes, I can say something, and sometimes if I don't find the right word I'm using it in English.

I even did job recruiting now this year in Finnish.

Table 13 Comments on Finnish skills at work by participants with 3 or 5 level Finnish skills.

Thus, at a more advanced level, Finnish skills were obviously beneficial at work. This leads to one of the major issues identified by the participants, namely looking for a job.
Several participants made sure to have a job before moving to Finland, while others had to struggle to find something. The participants pointed out that Finnish was often a requirement for a job, even when it was not necessary for the place. They did not think they would benefit from better Finnish skills if they did not reach a very fluent level, and many doubted that they would be able to do that. There was some doubt whether even fluent Finnish skills would be enough; not being a Finn is a disadvantage in itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A, Poland, 3 years</th>
<th>My point is there is no actual challenge in not speaking Finnish. The only thing is that when you see a job ad, it says required Finnish. And I think this is an artificial challenge, it doesn’t have to be that way.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C, Canada, 3 years</td>
<td>If I was reaching a level that, that would be professional enough, certainly [Finnish would be beneficial].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D, Australia, 1 year</td>
<td>Again, it’s the industry [IT] that is the easiest to get into. But there definitely are a number of jobs that I can’t get in to, say, consulting roles. And that I was able to do in Australia, I can’t really do them here, because you’re going into a lot of Finnish clients. So from that point, it’s a lot harder, but then at the same point, to get to that level I’d have to be fluent in Finnish. That would take a while. So those jobs are really limited. The more international the company, the easier it is, but, yeah, you are limited in what you can apply for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E, Australia, 5 years</td>
<td>Because I don’t speak Finnish. But it’s just not, I don’t speak it perfectly. I’ll never be able to work professionally in Finnish. And there’s not that many jobs in Finland right now, so... I don’t think there’s that much demand for non-Finnish speakers in the economy. Yeah, I think it’s quite bad. I don’t think I’ll be able to get a job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G, France, 5 years</td>
<td>But, yeah, and it’s the fact that if there is competitive position between a Finn and me, the Finn will get it because they speak Finnish, and I understand it also.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J, Ireland, 2 years</td>
<td>Now, of course, if my Finnish was very strong, there’s some business, local business, that would have to be only done in Finnish, which I currently can’t do. If I spoke better Finnish of course I would be potentially able to do that type of work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K, Germany, 6 years</td>
<td>It felt very difficult to find something English-based job, so that’s why I thought it would be better to put some more effort into the Finnish language. And actually the job I got was because I spoke Finnish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L, Ireland, 1 year</td>
<td>And obviously, if I don’t always work here, finding work, you know, will be more difficult without Finnish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M, the Netherlands, 7 years</td>
<td>It does come back to this specific skill set that I was talking about. If I’m able to provide a service or job that’s you can’t find anyone in Finland, then in the end language is not a big deal, even culture, in the end it’s not a big deal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N, France, 0.5 year</td>
<td>That’s something that worries me a lot. I want a career. I’m pretty sure there is no possibilities for me to have one here. [...] Because I’m not Finnish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14  Comments on experiences and expectations of job hunting in Finland without Finnish skills.

### 4.4  Finnish and integration

#### 4.4.1  Connecting with Finns

The participants emphasised that understanding the Finnish culture and way of being is very important. Especially in the beginning, participants found the quiet and reserved way of Finns difficult to understand. Many participants learned to appreciate this part of
the culture, perceiving it as respect for other people's privacy. For others it was more
difficult to adjust to. Finns also sometimes changed their communication style when
meeting a foreigner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B, France, 1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td>I was a bit surprised, when they come to work and just say &quot;Moi&quot; and then say &quot;Moi moi&quot; at the end of the day, and that's basically the only discussion we have the whole day. So, I'm coming there and asking something, and then the guy is not saying something, he's just on his computer, I don't know if he heard what I said, and if he's looking for it, or if he just didn't hear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C, Canada, 3 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>I'm giving you one example, my manager, it took one week, two weeks to just realise that when she's thinking, I don't have to speak over her. I have to give her the fifteen seconds, twenty seconds that she's just going to be looking somewhere else and thinking for twenty seconds, and then she's going to say what she really thinks. And then I can speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D, Australia, 1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td>So when you're trying to get something through, everyone is very silent in the room. And people aren't as willing to talk up, or say things in general. So that's quite tough. And if they do say something it's normally two or three words, because it seems to be very limited, the less words they can use, the more appropriate. They're not very good at any small talk. And that can make it a bit challenging. You just have to change the way you're doing it, try to get them more involved, it takes a lot more effort. And you think you've got agreement, but there's what we call different types of silence. One is that I agree, one is I don't agree, and one is I really don't care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E, Australia, 5 year</td>
<td></td>
<td>Socially, the coffee room. People will just be quiet. People won't say anything. People will sit at lunch and not talk. They just, there just isn't an interaction. People will walk past each other in the corridor and not say anything. Even if it's, I mean, you don't have to have a ten minute talk with everyone you see every time. Of course not. But if it's the first time you've seen them for the day, a simple hi. Or bye. Is nice. At least what I'm used to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F, Austria, 3 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>...if someone didn't answer right away, I would wonder like, “Did I say something wrong...?” But it's just a different communication style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M, the Netherlands, 7 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Also had a bit of experience in meeting people here, and then it can get a bit challenging that if people don't talk to each other for too long, then they might not know that there's other stuff ongoing where they need the right information. And then people get out of sync, start doing things that don't work well together. So, yeah, I find myself having to manage that quite a bit, make sure I'm up to date on what everyone is doing, and making sure that everybody that needs to know is up to date as well.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15  Comments on silence in the Finnish culture.

A, G, H, and N perceived their own communication style as more direct than the Finnish, which they thought could be perceived as aggressive by Finns. F, K, and M mentioned the flat hierarchy and equal communication style. Most of the participants did not find body language in Finland different from what they were used to, but D, M, and N said they paid more attention to it than at home.

In general, the respondents found it quite challenging to find friends in Finland. This was partially due to the established networks of the Finns, but also to the distant communication style. Also language skills contributed to the barrier. Participants B and
M found Swedish-speaking Finns easier, because of their more familiar communication style. Most important sources for networks were a spouse and the workplace. Many respondents also had some connections to a home country community. Studies in Finland provided good networks. In most cases, friends that were not friends of a spouse, were mainly other foreign professionals.

| B, France, 1 year | I propose stuff, she propose stuff. This other Finnish speaking Finn, coming when we ask him but never proposes anything, invites, we have never been to his place. Something also different in my company, there’s a high ratio of Swedish-speaking. And... I feel quite a big difference of culture and behavior in Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking. Finns, Finnish-speaking Finns being more introverted. |
| D, Australia, 1 year | And in general, the culture, the people, friendship’s something that’s a lot more difficult to get in Finland. Everyone’s, like with Hanken, everybody knows everybody from school, from Hanken, from work and that’s their group of friends, they don’t need any other friends as part of that group, so when you go out spend it with your friends In Australia it’s the opposite, you are there with your friends, but at the same point you will small talk to anybody else around you and, you may just generate another friend that way. So when you’re coming in to it, it’s a lot harder to make friends, but then on the flipside, if you do make a friend, they're a lot better friends than what you can possibly get elsewhere. |
| G, France, 5 years | And we go and play a game and afterwards everyone go home. In France it would be, if you have these kind of things, after the game, someone would be like "Ah, let's go and have a drink, or have a sandwich"; "Yeah, sure." |
| F, Austria, 3 years | You can’t just drop by and say hi. You have to call first. But it’s because people value their personal life here. |
| I, the USA, 5 years | It’s difficult to start over in a country where everybody knows each other from school, or military service, or something like that. |
| M, the Netherlands, 7 years | I have actually tendency to socialise more with Swedish-speaking Finns. I’ve wondered why that is, and I think in the end it is actually a lot because of their sense of humor fits mine more. [...] Possibly also more of a language thing, the Swedish language fits, it’s similar to Dutch, so there's the same type of jokes there, I don’t know. |
| N, France, 0.5 year | So it’s pretty difficult because then like, they already have their circles and their network and stuff, and you just arrive in the middle of that and that’s pretty difficult. And then you have to go past the fact that Finns are not that accessible in the first place. Which is fine by me, but then it takes time, it takes a lot of time. |

Table 16  Comments on the difficulty of networking.

4.4.2  Finnish, relationships, and the concept of switching

The general consensus in the interviews was that both at work and in private, Finnish was most important in social situations where all other participants were Finns. In private, this was mainly when spending time with a group of Finnish friends. At the workplace it included informal situations like at lunch or in the coffee room, but also for example at meetings. These situations were often accompanied with a feeling of isolation.
In the work environment, the only time that I wish that I would speak Finnish, would be at lunchtime. There was a few times when I happened to be the only foreigner at the table at lunch. And then the discussion quickly changes to Finnish. It’s more social because you don’t have to talk about work. And I feel a bit... alone. (B, France, 1 year)

A concept that often came up was switching. Most participants expressed feeling uncomfortable related to asking people to switch to English for their benefit, or situations where everybody else switched to English for their benefit. The participants also felt that one non-Finnish speaker could be a burden for a group, especially if some of the participants in the discussion were not very comfortable in English. The lack of Finnish skills may also make it difficult to make friends, as the interaction is not in the person’s native language. Being the reason for a group to switch to English results in feelings of standing out. Consequently, speaking the language led to feeling more part of the team. Obviously, this also varied from person to person, and with whom they were interacting.

Interestingly, the native English-speakers appear to express slightly stronger emotions regarding switching.

| **D, Australia, 1 year** | Sometimes I was called in to a conversation and then when you walked in to the room they didn’t notice you walked in until “OK, you’re here, sorry” and switched to English, or other times they didn’t know that I didn’t speak Finnish, very early on.

It takes more effort [making friends in Finland]. It definitely takes a lot more effort to be in that, and not speaking the language as far as Finnish goes, makes it harder as well, because you then become a bit of a burden when it comes to a group of friends, because then the others sort of feel awkward that they have to speak English. |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>E, Australia, 5 years</strong></td>
<td>I do wish I knew Finnish. Yeah, I feel bad that people have to switch to English for my benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H, Portugal, 5 years</strong></td>
<td>I think the informal language has been my biggest problem. Because not knowing Finnish, I’m not able to participate in these kind of... How can I explain? Like imagine the situation when people are talking in the coffee room or something like that. And then, when I come, it is so that I am able to kind of understand what they are chatting or be more involved, they need to change the language, or I need to enter the conversation with something in English, or kind of disrupt the conversation. And I don’t feel very comfortable doing that, because it doesn’t feel natural to me, and I don’t feel comfortable in interrupting people’s conversations and making them switch to English. Although they would be very willing to do so.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **I, the USA, 5 years** | Well, like a lot of my fiancé’s friends, don’t really feel comfortable speaking English. And, also it’s kind of unreasonable for me to show up somewhere and all of a sudden expect people to start speaking English. [...] it can be uncomfortable, because it can be difficult to follow what's going on.

I think that's important that I can show that I at least understand people that I might not be the most fluent in the language, but... And also, just the fact that I know enough, I understand enough, that they don’t have to switch the language of meetings for me. [...] It feels like I’m more part of the team, and it's not, "Oh, everybody here understands, but I, so we have to speak his language". |
| **J, Ireland, 2 years** | I don’t want to be the Irish guy over in the corner, who only speaks English and people feel they have to speak English to. I want to try and integrate a bit more, and I think the language is really the only way to truly do that. |
I’m the odd one out. You know, in a team I’m the only one who doesn’t speak the language. I can’t expect my colleagues to always speak English with each other a 100% of the time, just so that they’re integrating me. Because it’s their country, it’s their language, they have to chit chat with themselves in local language. If I don’t learn that I will always be the outsider.

L, Ireland, 1 year

Every day in the canteen, I’d like to tell a joke in Finnish. I find myself, although people very much include me, I find myself sometimes feeling, and I know it’s a ridiculous thing to feel, but I feel it. So then I might eat alone so that people can speak in Finnish.

M, the Netherlands, 7 years

The only challenging part I find is when I walk in on a discussion in Finnish. So, to try and sort of get in there, make it especially when people don’t know, that I don’t speak Finnish, to try and initially announce myself as not a Finnish-speaker and then people have to swop and especially in larger groups sometimes I’ve had, meetings with these, events where there’s a group of like ten-fifteen Finns and then I come there and it’s like, ”Sorry guys...”.

Table 17  Comments on switching.

4.4.2.1 The use of basic Finnish skills for building relationships

Eleven of fourteen did not use any Finnish as part of their job. Still, eight of these eleven tried to use at least some words in Finnish when they could. Depending on the level this varied from a few words to a few sentences, but the meaning of it was mostly symbolic. One of the reasons was to practice and use the Finnish skills they had, but it was also considered very important for building relationships with Finns, both within and outside work. In the workplace, it was especially common to greet colleagues in Finnish, but also to break the ice with for example Finnish customers. Most participants mentioned that since Finnish is very difficult to learn and not widely spoken, even just making an effort to try to speak Finnish is appreciated by Finns. Thus, trying to speak the local language was experienced as beneficial for the initial forming of relationships with locals. At least G and J used it in order to ease Finns possible insecurities about their English. In addition, learning at least a little bit of the local language was also considered the right thing to do when living in a country. In general, it seemed to be important way for the participant to show goodwill and interest in their host country.

While the rest of the participants tried to use Finnish at least in some situations, three of the participants did not use Finnish in this way. D did not have sufficient skills in Finnish. The other two, participant C and E, were interestingly enough also two of the three who were not very eager to learn more Finnish. Contrary to the others’ beliefs that speaking some Finnish at the workplace was a sign of effort, C judged “practicing” at the workplace as inappropriate.
A, Poland, 3 years | Trying to speak Finnish is appreciated. It’s not even appreciate as much if you speak fluent, it’s appreciated that you try.

B, France, 1 year | But no-one will learn Finnish. No-one knows nothing about Finland. So if you come here and, and you say three worlds in Finnish you people are all happy.

C, Canada, 3 years | Especially in the workplace, you have to understand. Even if I was comfortable with it I would not do it, just because it’s a professional environment, so in a way you don’t want to speak like a kid, trying out stuff. [...] I would not in the workplace try to learn the language, I don’t think that’s appropriate, actually. It’s a place to be professional and do your work. Not to learn the language. Of course people could practice, and could be appreciated by the colleagues, but I don’t see it that way.

D, Australia, 1 year | I think you get a better relationship with them [third parties] as well if you can speak Finnish, so that does make a difference too.

G, France, 5 years | I would say, even now with my Finnish getting better, I still if I go to Kela or if I go to Maistraatti or whatever big office, I would start in English, all the time. [P]eople are so much, happier, when you start in English and you switch to Finnish, than starting in Finnish and switching to English. Because they feel uncomfortable about the English part. So if you start in English, usually I start: "Hi, do you speak English?", and then they say "Yes", some say "A little bit", and they speak better English than I do Finnish. So we start in English and at one point if I feel that communication in English is not going well, if I have the words in Finnish, I say it in Finnish and the smile on the face of the person, just because, "Wow, there is some Finnish!" And at the end of the conversation "Oh, but you speak very good Finnish, you should start to talk in Finnish". But no, it’s easier this way. I have experienced both ways and this is the best one I think.

I, Ireland, 5 years | I mean, just, just the fact that you show you’re trying. A lot of people really appreciate that. So, try to learn at least, and use at least a few words.

J, Ireland, 2 years | Because most Finns recognise that it’s a very difficult language, and I think they’re surprised that you can speak it. And they’re, maybe proud is the wrong word, they appreciate that you’ve taken the time to try and learn it, because it is so difficult. People try and fail, or they don’t try at all.

J, Ireland, 2 years | Just when we met for the first time I just introduced myself when I had said, I guess it was moi, or terve, or whichever I used. And he automatically said, "Ah, do you speak a little bit of Finnish?" And we suddenly started the conversation in Finnish. And we kept going for a few minutes, until I got stuck on a few words and only then did we change over to English. [...] Even though it was pretty basic, and maybe it’s pretty crap, his face automatically was different. It was, "Wow, you speak Finnish". He was just surprised, to start with, and I think just immediately there was a barrier gone. And it wouldn’t have been a big barrier, it never is. Like I said, most of the Finns speak really good English, and particularly in an office like that, where they are surrounded by English all the time. But it helps, it helps forge relationships earlier, I think.

Also, Finns can be cautious of speaking English. They’re usually much better than they think they are. Or I think if I display that, you know what, I don’t speak Finnish particularly well, they’re comfortable speaking English if they feel it’s not great.

K, Germany, 6 years | I guess it’s always an advantage if you’re a foreigner in your host country and you show some effort, that you’re trying to learn the language.

L, Ireland, 1 year | But I still think Finns are ultimately surprised somebody has learned their language. And that’s a positive advantage, definitely.

L, Ireland, 1 year | I use it to build bridges with Finnish customers. Yeah, so I do the whole, “No nim”, and then, you know, "Oh, you speak a little bit of Finnish", and then I can do a couple of sentences. Welcome to Finland, blah, blah, you know, that kind of stuff. And that creates something. Which is important in this job.

N, France, 0.5 year | Well, I guess somehow I give people the picture that I am really interested in the country, and that I’m not just here because I have to be, and I’m going to run away or something like that.

Table 18  Comments on the use of basic Finnish skills and related benefits.
4.4.3 Living in a Finnish-speaking society

Finnish was also seen as important for integration in general, in other words, by understanding the language of the surrounding society. In addition, insufficient language skills did restrict life in Finland in some ways. For example, participant H regretted that she could not go to the theatre. The participants often spoke about Finnish as a general way of integrating better, referring to “the little things”. Participant H and J spoke about being “in a bubble”, about the feeling of being in a way disconnected from their surroundings because of not speaking the language.

I have just this feeling that I’m like in a bubble, that I don’t understand what people are talking about, but they’re all like chatting around me. For instance in public places. (H, Portugal, 5 years)

It’s more obvious to me when I go back to Ireland. It’s as if suddenly one of my senses starts working again. When I’m here sometimes, it’s like, you know, racehorses wear these blinkers, you become like that sometimes. It’s almost like your hearing gets turn off. You totally tune out. When you don’t know, when you can’t hear everything around you, or you can hear it but you don’t understand it, you switch it off. And suddenly going back to Ireland, it actually feels like somebody switched on my hearing again. Because I go “Wow, I understand everything around me”. (J, Ireland, 2 years)

4.5 Native English-speakers

One of the research questions was to explore whether native English-speakers had an advantage over the other foreigners, and possibly less incentive to learn Finnish. The background information on the five native-speakers in this study are summarised in table 19.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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<td>m</td>
<td>m</td>
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<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>AU</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>IE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stay</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange in Finland</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes (2)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other oversea exp.</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Finnish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Swedish: 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wants to learn more</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Finnish</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>tries</td>
<td>tries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19 Summary of native English-speakers participating in the study.

No visible differences from the general group emerged concerning use of English, interest to learn the language, or perceived difficulty of the language. However, all English-speakers mentioned that they felt bad when others had to switch to English for
their benefit. The frequency with which related statements were made were slightly more common and stronger (especially for I, J, and L) than among the non-native speakers.

None of the English-speakers had a strong accent, and three of them mentioned that they were actively managing their English. This has less to do with Finns as such, and more about making themselves understood among non-native speakers in general. For at least two participants, this change took place already before moving to Finland. These changes included speaking more slowly, use easier words and sentences, and minimising cultural aspects of the language such as thick accents, slang words, and cultural references.

I've also done a lot of travelling overseas into foreign countries that don't speak English. And one of the things I've picked up from that is being able to change the way I talk. So change to, instead of using a complicated word, actually use a much simpler word. (D, Australia, 1 year)

So that helps me being understood, which is important in a non-English environment. Know what to say and how to say it to be understood. (...) I am, talking slightly different than I would be talking with friends or family. My speed, my word choice, is probably slightly different. Definitely my tone of voice, my accent. Everything! But it's part of, you have to adapt! It's not even about speaking the other language, it's about how you speak your own language. (J, Ireland, 2 years)

If I don't speak too fast, which sometimes I do. Irish people often have a very strong accent, I don't particularly have a strong accent, I think, and I also cultivated speaking clearly over years of working in different countries. I try to avoid, kind of, Irish slang or vernacular for the most part. (L, Ireland, 1 year)

All of the English-speakers did recognise a considerable benefit of being native English-speakers. This was mostly related to the fact that they were able to work in their native language, and could more easily produce high quality text compared to others. They also benefited from easier comprehension and found it easier to express themselves. M had very high proficiency in English, although not native, and admitted that he preferred to keep discussions in English, to retain the advantage above-average skills gave him.

If I'm speaking English, I have the upper hand, language-wise. I know that my English is better than that of most Finns. If I were to learn Finnish to a level that I would speak it professionally, then I would never get up to the level of a native Finn. It's just helps with negotiations, (...) it just helps having that little bit of an upper hand. (M, the Netherlands, 7 years)
5 ANALYSIS

The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of foreign professionals in Finland in regard to the Finnish language. This chapter aims to answer the research questions by the analysis of the results presented in the previous chapter.

5.1 Perceived challenging situations due to insufficient Finnish skills

The first research question for this thesis is as follows:

Do foreign professionals experience challenges due to insufficient Finnish skills (in a work context), and if so, in which situations?

When asked directly, the participants typically claimed that they did not experience much difficulties due to insufficient Finnish skills. However, when asked about for example benefits of speaking or learning Finnish, they had much more to say. Some of these answers came up in the form of challenging situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practically challenging situations</th>
<th>Situations when information is only available in Finnish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Information from the housing cooperative</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mundane practicalities at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Company information</td>
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<td>• Job contract</td>
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<tr>
<th>Situations where the other party has insufficient English skills</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Persons providing service</td>
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<td>• Friends (of spouse)</td>
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<td>• Third parties at work</td>
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<td>• Customers</td>
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<td>• Colleagues</td>
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<tr>
<th>Situations where communication in Finnish is not directly directed to the person, but possibly important to understand</th>
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<tr>
<td>• (Possible) emergency situations</td>
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<td>• Informal work-related discussions at work</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socially/emotionally challenging situations</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Only foreigner in a group of Finnish friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Only foreigner at lunch or in the coffee room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Situations when need to ask others to switch to English</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 20 Challenging situations due to insufficient Finnish skills.
The participants of course differed in their perceptions of challenging situations, in how they experienced them, and what kind of emotions and how strongly they related to these events. However, the participants also had very different approaches to their interviews in general; for example, some were much more focused on work-related situations than others. Nonetheless, common themes emerge from the interviews. Based on the results (Chapter 3), the range of situations one or more participants explicitly expressed as challenging due to insufficient language skills is summarised in table 20.

In practically challenging situations the participant could not attain necessary information due to insufficient Finnish skills. These situations can be divided into three groups. The first group is quite simply situations where (written) information is only available in Finnish. The second group consists of situations where the other person does not have sufficient English skills required for the particular interaction. It should be noted that this does not necessarily mean that the other party’s English proficiency is low; however, either the proficiency or confidence in speaking English is not sufficient to comfortably engage in a particular conversation. The third group includes situations where the foreigner overhears a conversation in Finnish, but is not able to recognise whether or not the content of that conversation is important for them to understand. This included not being able to identify an emergency situation. The same three types of situations were detectable both in the respondents’ private lives and at work.

Some situations were socially or emotionally challenging for the participant. In these situations, there are not necessarily any obstacles for speaking English, but the foreign participant may feel less part of the group when doing so, or feel uncomfortable asking the others to switch. This also include situations where a group of Finns would speak Finnish with each other, although the participant was present.

Finally, insufficient Finnish skills were considered to considerably limit job opportunities.

One participant claimed he experienced no challenging situations due to insufficient Finnish skills; however, this participant was very focused on the work environment which may have reflected in the answers.
5.2 The importance of Finnish skills

The second research question in this thesis reads:

How do foreign professionals in Finland experience the importance of Finnish skills?

From the data strongly emerges two main themes; factors encouraging the acquisition of Finnish skills, and factors discouraging. These two counterforces and their main components will be analysed, and finally incorporated into a model. It is important to keep in mind that all processes and their perceived relative importance on quality of life for any given person is highly individual.

5.2.1 Disincentives for learning Finnish

In the Helsinki-region, English is spoken by most locals, and often on a quite high level. Even a big proportion of commercial communication, ads, and movies are in English, and most information on, for example, public transportation and social benefits is available in English. In addition, English is commonly used in the business world, and well-educated professionals usually have particularly good English skills. While the high level of English makes Finland in general, and Helsinki in particular, a very easy place to live for foreigners, it also considerably lowers the incentive to learn Finnish.

The level of English among Finns and the high level of its use impacts the learning of Finnish in two ways. First, there is less incentive to learn Finnish when almost everything at work and in private can be taken care of in English, compared to many other countries where the local language is essential in day-to-day life. Thus, Finnish is not a requirement for life in Finland. Second, because everything can be done in English, and Finns are in addition usually quite quick in switching to English, there is not necessarily much exposure to the language. Of course, this depends on to what degree English is spoken in the individual’s workplace and personal network. The lack of exposure, as well as the lack of opportunities to practice, makes it even more difficult to learn Finnish than it already is. Commonly Finns do not expect foreign professionals to speak Finnish, and are surprised and proud when someone attempts to speak even a few words.

The difficulty of the Finnish language is clearly very demotivating for foreigners trying to learn the language. Not only is the structure of the language very complex, but also the vocabulary is very different from Indo-European languages. To make matters worse, formal and spoken language differ considerably from each other. This means that
learning is slow, and the student may feel that the progress is slow compared to the effort. Thus, learning requires much investment, effort, motivation, and energy from the student.

These circumstances form a self-fuelling cycle, which is illustrated in figure 5. The initially low benefit/cost ratio results in that few foreigners learn the language. Hence, the society's expectations on foreign professionals to learn the language are reduced, further facilitating life in English and consequently lowering the benefit/cost ratio.

![Figure 5 Disincentive process for learning Finnish.](image)

### 5.2.2 Incentives for learning Finnish

It is evident that foreign professionals belonging to the particular group targeted in this study can lead full and rich lives in Finland with only basic skills in Finnish. However, this does not mean that Finnish is not important. Figure 6 illustrates four groups of interrelated incentives to learn Finnish: practical benefits, improved employment prospects, relationships, and integration. These are analysed below. Because of their strong connection, relationships and integration are analysed together in the same section.
5.2.2.1 Practical benefits of Finnish skills

When examining the challenging situations presented in section 5.1, it becomes apparent that the level of Finnish would not have to be very high to be of assistance in everyday life. However, practical facilitation of daily interactions did not appear to be a main motivating factor to learn Finnish, probably again due to the high level of English used in Finland. Practically challenging situations were generally considered relatively infrequent or of minor inconvenience.

For many, a full working proficiency in Finnish does not appear attainable, but already an intermediate Finnish proficiency can be beneficial at work. The participants with higher Finnish skills reported benefits such as being able to attend meetings in Finnish and not having to switch to English right away. Reaching a level where the person can follow discussions and use more Finnish also makes it easier and faster to learn. However, the participants with basic Finnish skills rarely thought less-than-fluent skills would have any benefit in their professional lives. In general, practical benefits at work or at home can at best be considered a part of general integration.

5.2.2.2 Improved employment prospects

Based on this study, Finnish skills appear more important for finding work, than for performing well at work. According to the participants, Finnish is often required even for
positions where Finnish is not necessary for the job itself. This can work two ways. On one hand it can be an incentive to learn Finnish fluently. On the other hand, poor employment opportunities may push foreign professionals to leave the country, as several of the respondents had considered doing at some point of their stay. Alternatively, if they are not able to find a job, they never move to Finland in the first place. Being employed at the time of the arrival was important especially for the older participants. It was considered especially difficult to get the first job in Finland without Finnish skills, although it is almost impossible to speak Finnish fluently at that point.

One reason improved employment opportunities often do not motivate the foreign professionals is that the level required is considered to be very high. The participants often claimed that their Finnish would have to be fluent or unaccented to satisfy the employers. This level is clearly very difficult and time-consuming to obtain, if not impossible. Some participants even claimed that Finnish skills would not be enough; not being a Finn is a considerable disadvantage in itself. The motivation to learn Finnish for work is also influenced by how important it would be for the migrant to find a job in Finland, rather than abroad. These attitudes were quite strong, although participant K was employed with intermediate Finnish skills for a position requiring Finnish.

The perceived importance of Finnish for finding a job is also influenced by the specific industry and job tasks the person is looking for. For example, Finnish is perceived less important in the IT sector, and more important in customer service (with local customers). In international marketing, native-level skills in the target market was considered more important than Finnish skills. Also professionals with very unique skills can find it easier to get jobs without Finnish skills, as there is not the option for the employer to hire someone with Finnish skills.

5.2.2.3 Benefits for relationships and integration

The feeling of integration in different aspects of life appears to be the single most important implication of Finnish skills and lack thereof. Situations that are social in their nature, rather than professional, appear to be the most challenging. Because of the low expectations among locals, even very basic skills can improve relationships. The participants use it to form an initial connection with Finns, and to “break a barrier”. They experienced that trying to speak Finnish is a sign of effort and goodwill that is much appreciated by Finns.
There are situations where all other participants speak Finnish and the migrant’s skills are not sufficient enough for the situation. If the language is not changed, it can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as it makes it more difficult for the individual to participate in the discussion. However, when the language is switched to English, it may increase the feeling of being different, and the person may even experience being a “burden” for the rest of the group. Consequently, speaking Finnish makes it easier to connect and build relationships. The participants sometimes referred to it as “being part of the team”, and “less of a foreigner”. This implies that having sufficient language skills helps the individual to melt in to the group better. It should be noted that insufficient language skills were not as such an obstacle for making Finnish friends and connections, but it made it more difficult as it was less natural, especially in all-Finnish groups.

The importance of Finnish skills for relationships is of course also dependent on the main language used in networks. Hence, if one's important networks, for example at work or a with spouse’s friends, are mostly Finnish-speaking language skills will be important. If one’s networks are mostly English-speaking it is less important. It should be noted that English-speaking networks do not necessarily consist of only foreigners.

The same sorts of underlying processes are related to living in a Finnish-speaking society. Living in a society where one does not understand the local language means, for example, not understanding surrounding discussions and not being able to participate in certain events. While not in a strict sense necessary, it decreases the sense of being part of the society. The participants referred to this as a feeling of having their “senses turned off”, or “living in a bubble”.

The participants frequently used expressions such as “integration” and “feeling part of”, as opposed to being “the foreigner in the corner”, or “living in a bubble”. However, these feelings and the strength of these were highly individual. Integration was a word used by several of the interviewees, while I only used adjustment. It appears as integration was referring to feelings of being a part of the Finnish society, to mix in with the Finns (although not becoming “a Finn”). In sum, one of the most important meanings connected with Finnish appears to be that it creates the distinction between foreigners and locals.
5.2.3 A model for Finnish learning motivation

The relative importance of incentives and disincentives of learning Finnish are of course highly individual and situation-specific, and depend on for example the time one has for learning and the level of English used in networks. A particularly significant factor appears to be a Finnish spouse, as participants without a Finnish spouse generally appear less motivated to learn Finnish. Interestingly, participants with long relationships with Finns before their move did not have better Finnish skills, and none of the participants mentioned family reasons for learning Finnish. Thus, a Finnish spouse is likely to be an indirect motivator; friends of Finnish spouses are important networks for the participants, and these often all-Finnish groups are easier to integrate into if speaking Finnish.

Another important mediator appears to be how attached the person is to Finland in the long term; the embeddedness in the country. None of the participants had a specific time-frame in mind, but there were nonetheless differences in how attached they were to the country. It should be noted that this attachment is not necessarily the same as always living in Finland; for example participant L had plans to move abroad again, but wanted to keep Finland as a “base”. Again, a Finnish spouse is clearly one important factor in this equation, but hardly the only one.

Furthermore, language skills were considered a way of showing an interest in the country, “the right thing to do”, and accompanied with a desire to integrate. There may be other personal variables impacting the variances in motivation to learn Finnish, such as different acculturation strategies.

Hence, the relative importance of the two opposing forces – the incentives and the disincentives – interplay with one’s personal situation and perception. This is incorporated into a model of Finnish learning motivation (figure 7).

The model shows have the relative importance of the opposing disincentive process and the incentives influence and are influenced by the individual’s personal situation, values, attitudes, and embeddedness in the country. This process results in the perceived importance of and motivation for learning Finnish.
Foreigners in Finland may also consider learning Swedish. Learning Finnish and Swedish are of course not mutually exclusive, at least not in a longer time period. The presence of two official languages in a person’s life has implications on how important Finnish is perceived to be for a given individual. Swedish is perceived to be considerably easier to learn, and for some individuals it can be even more important for social settings. It may even be beneficial in a professional setting, if many of the colleagues are Swedish-speaking or the organisation works much with Sweden. Although the benefits of knowing Swedish in Finland are limited, the benefit/cost ratio of learning Swedish may be higher than that of learning Finnish. The interest in Swedish among the respondents further highlights the importance of language for cultivating networks and integrating. If a foreigner’s network is mainly Swedish-speaking, learning enough Swedish for social purposes may be more beneficial than attempting to learn the difficult Finnish language.
In terms of the model presented in the previous section (figure 7), the option of learning Swedish instead may further increase the disincentives of learning Finnish.

### 5.2.4 The non-linear benefit/cost ratio of learning Finnish

Hence, learning Finnish is associated with various costs and benefits, and foreign professionals can be expected to learn Finnish up to the point where the benefits are higher than the costs for that particular person at any given time. An interesting phenomenon that emerges from the study is the participants’ tendency to stay at a basic level of Finnish. This can be explained by that the benefit/cost ratio of learning Finnish is not linear (figure 8). Thus, at a basic level foreigners gain the benefits of Finnish by surprising Finns with a few words of Finnish, or perhaps by understanding some words in daily life, while the cost of learning remain reasonable. However, after the basics the benefits do not continue rising at the same speed, while the investment required increases substantially. Clearly, reaching a fluent level can be beneficial both in working life and in cultivating relationships. However, the investment required to reach this level is very high, at the very least until one reach the point where one can learn by using the language. Finns have a tendency to switch to English, which actually strengthens the importance of basics skills; as some participants theorised, Finns may appreciate basic skills more than a halting attempt at discussion.

![Non-linear benefit/cost ratio for learning Finnish](image)

**Figure 8** Non-linear benefit/cost ratio for learning Finnish.
Finnish is a difficult language, and for many the exposure to and use of the language is limited. At the same time, the main motivator is to use Finnish in a social setting. Based on the participants’ comments, Finnish classes seem to lack a sufficiently practical orientation. Daily vocabulary, spoken language, slang, and listening skills may be more relevant for many students. There is clearly a demand for conversational Finnish programmes, such as speaking groups. If these are seen to be interesting enough, they cut the perceived costs of learning Finnish by being interesting, fun, and a networking opportunity. On the other hand, if courses are considered not applicable and tedious, the perceived costs for Finnish increases.

5.3 Native English-speakers

The third question of this thesis is as follows:

What differences are there between native English-speakers and others?

Clearly, native English-speakers benefit from their English skills. Mainly this advantage is due to being able to work in one’s own language, where they even may have an advantage over Finnish colleagues. In addition, they can interact in their first language in most situations. On the other hand native English-speakers lack the niche advantage other foreigners gain from their native languages. Likewise, native English-speakers may have had less language training, or at least certainly less opportunities to use a second or third language, compared to others.

From the study it is not evident that native English-speakers would have either more or less incentive to learn English. However, among the participants a slight tendency could be detected of native English-speakers focusing slightly more on switching than others. In other words, English-speakers spoke slightly more frequently and emotionally about negative feelings related to other people switching to English, and on assuming that everybody speaks English. One explanation for this is that the interaction may be less equal when Finns switch to English for the benefit of a native speaker, than when both parties are not speaking their first language. Thus, native English-speakers may even have more incentive to learn Finnish than non-natives. This pattern cannot be confirmed by this study, but is indeed an interesting aspect to take into consideration for future research.
There also appears to be a tendency for foreign professionals to alter their English in order to be more easily understood by non-native speakers. This includes avoiding difficult words and vernacular, altering speed and tone of voice, as well as toning down accents. However, this is not specific to Finland, but rather for native English-speakers used to dealing with non-natives in general, and often happen already before the move to Finland.
6 DISCUSSION

The results of the study were presented in Chapter 4 and the analysis in Chapter 5. In this chapter the findings are discussed in the light of previous research presented in Chapter 2. The conclusions are summarised, and finally, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are stated.

6.1 Findings in the light of previous knowledge

6.1.1 Finnish skills and adjustment

This study reveals an interesting paradox; on one hand Finnish is not necessary for satisfactory adjustment, but on the other hand it plays a central role in relationships and integration. In the study, examples of language skills relating to all three adjustment dimensions came up, yet with a clear focus on interaction adjustment. In previous research, the link between host country language skills and the dimensions of adjustment is ambiguous, but most studies appear to point to the importance of language skills for interaction adjustment in particular (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

In the light of previous studies, it is no surprise that the participants found Finnish a very difficult language to learn (Selmer and Lauring, 2011). The study also confirms the previous findings that the Finns have quite low expectations for certain groups of foreigners to learn Finnish (Latoma, 1998: 58). Furthermore, it is easy to get by with English. Hence, the incentives to learn Finnish are low, while the costs are high. Following from this self-fuelling cycle of low benefit/cost ratio and low expectations, even basic skills in Finnish are perhaps disproportionately appreciated by Finns. Selmer and Lauring (2011) found that while the level of host country language skills were lower in Finland than in Norway, even basic skills in Finnish were more beneficial for adjustment, than were Norwegian. Selmer and Lauring (2011) attributed this difference to language difficulty. However, it should be noted that in this study the same kind of benefits appeared for Swedish, a language very closely related to Norwegian, but in Finland associated with very low expectations to learn. This indicates that rather than language difficulty, the mediating process may actually be linked to perceived low benefit/cost ratio and the following low expectations by the society for acquiring host country skills. Clearly, language difficulty is one important variable, but may not be the whole truth. For example, are Selmer and Lauring’s (2011) findings true in a context
where the host country is difficult, but the level of English spoken very low? To my knowledge, there are no previous research on the impact of expectations on foreigners’ language skills.

In Latomaa’s (1998: 58) study of Americans living in Finland, over 70 % “absolutely needed Finnish”, which appears somewhat surprising in the light of this study. However, Latomaa’s (1998) study included participants who had lived in Finland for a longer time, and were perhaps employed in jobs that required Finnish. It is also possible that individuals with higher Finnish proficiency appreciate the benefits of these skills more than do those with basic skills. The participants in this study obviously encountered situations where Finnish skills would be important or beneficial, but these were in general considered a minor challenge.

### 6.1.2 Language, relationships, and integration

In this study, the importance of Finnish is most clearly related to relationships with locals. As such, low Finnish proficiency is not a barrier for relationships with locals due to the generally high level of English. Previous research show that migrants often find it difficult to connect with host country nationals (Ryan and Mulholland, 2014), and similar tendencies appear in this study. Language skills were one important aspect, but the Finnish communication and socialising style was considered challenging too. The participants’ views on the Finnish speech culture was similar to that of existing (Carbaugh, 1997). Many of the participants learned to appreciate the silence, and what they frequently referred to as “respecting other people’s privacy”. The participants stressed the importance of understanding this part of the culture perhaps more than the importance of the language itself. The low level of communication and less spontaneous interaction made it difficult for many of the participants to connect with Finns. In addition they pointed out that Finns tend to have a quite set groups of friends.

According to existing literature, insufficient language skills are negatively related to forming relationships with host country nationals (Suutari and Brewster, 1998). While the study does reveal some experiences of difficulties finding Finnish friends, and temporary feelings of isolation, much negative attitudes towards host country nationals (Froese et al., 2012; Henderson, 2005) did not appear. On the other hand, probably unintentionally, languages did in some cases impact how information is shared, as shown in previous studies (Welch et al., 2005; Vaara et al., 2005).
The participants recognised that although Finns readily switch to English, many are uncomfortable in speaking English. Being the only foreigner in a Finnish group was usually considered difficult, and the participants often expressed negative feelings related to switching. Switching situations have not received attention in previous research, although it appears to be a source of stress and strain. People often prefer to speak in their own language (Froese et al., 2012; Welch and Welch, 2008), and groups of Finns may find it straining or less natural to speak English. In sum, being able to understand or speak the language appears to be the factor that makes foreign professionals feel less different from the others, and more integrated in the group.

Earlier studies show that linguistic groupings lessen the exposure to the host country language and the incentive to learn (Isphordin and Otten, 2014). Latomaa (1998: 62) concludes that Americans in Finland can choose to live in an “English-speaking bubble” or learn Finnish. To a certain extent this may be true. However, for example work is one important way for foreign professionals to expand their networks, and these colleagues are often Finns who are used to speaking English. Indeed, a mainly English-speaking network acts as a disincentive to learn Finnish, but does not automatically mean that the person does not have contact with host country nationals, and access to the benefits of local relationships previous studies have shown (e.g. Cao et al., 2014). Still, challenges in establishing contact with locals often pushed foreigners to mainly interact with other internationals.

That the main incentive to learn Finnish is relationships and integration is further confirmed by the found importance of the Swedish language. Several participants chose to learn Swedish because of their mainly Swedish-speaking networks. However, network language was not the only factor, rather the perceived benefit/cost ratio was considered to be higher than for learning the very difficult Finnish language. The importance of Swedish networks for foreign professionals may also be due to a more similar communication style.

Hence, it appears that language skills are more important for integration than for adjustment. Integration should here be understood as a sense of belonging and feeling less different, rather than as a direct reference to the acculturation strategy (Berry, 2005).
6.1.3  The model for Finnish language learning motivation compared to the LANG-formula

The model presented in the analysis is related to Chiswick and Miller’s (2001) claim that migrants will invest in the local language up to the point where perceived costs equal perceived return on investment. The model has several common notions with the LANG-formula, but also very important differences. The LANG-formula describes language proficiency as an equation of exposure, efficiency, economic incentive, and wealth (Chiswich and Miller, 2001). The importance of exposure is obvious also in the model, as the high level of English lessens exposure to Finnish, thus making it more difficult to learn. However, according to the findings in this study, the prevalence of English in the society in general as well as at work, the prevalence of English in Finland is not only lessening exposure, but also lessening the initiative to learn; in the terms of the LANG-formula, it lessens the economic incentive to learn. Exposure is certainly very important, and this becomes clear in the study. However, exposure as such is not a guarantee for good language skills; a long relationship with children did not guarantee good Finnish skills. Efficiency is related to the difficulty of Finnish, and is indeed very important, as the results show. On the other hand, wealth or monetary costs of studying Finnish rarely came up during the interviews, which can be due to the well-educated, currently employed sample, but also because education in Finland is possible to find fairly cheap or for free.

However, the LANG-formula seems to lack the importance of motivators. While benefits in working life are economic incentives, relationships, integration, and culture are not. The contextual factors and the individual are dismissed not only in the LANG-formula, but in the host country language literature in general. An interesting approach would be to apply the factors important for adjustment impact on language learning, such as acculturation styles (Berry, 2005), personality (Tucker et al., 2004), and indeed psychological adjustment (Ward et al., 2001).

6.1.4  Distinguishing between foreign professionals

As discussed in section 2.1 Concepts and terms for migrants there are many opinions on how to distinguish between various types of migrants. Research has shown that different groups adjust differently (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). Indeed, different motivations to move may have implications on one’s adjustment, but also on one’s willingness to learn
the language. This study offers some new insights in this discussion and its implications on language learning.

Several authors want to distinguish SIEs from (highly skilled) migrants by the length of time they intend to stay in the host country (Cerdin and Selmer, 2014). This study support Tharenou and Caulfield’s (2010) findings that most foreign professionals do not have a particular time-frame in mind, and more important than the planned time to stay is the embeddedness in the country. However, Thareou and Caulfield (2010) relate this to the difficulty of leaving the country. In this study it appears as one can be quite embedded in the country, although still plan to move abroad in the future. In this sense Finland has become a new home country. Still, it is difficult to classify migrants according to embeddedness, as it is likely to increase with time.

A Finnish spouse of course increases embeddedness in and the bonds to the country. Froese and his colleagues (2012) found that persons with local spouses were generally happier with their social life, because of the networks they attained through their spouses. However, these networks are usually Finnish-speaking (or Swedish-speaking), and the foreign spouse with insufficient language skills may feel like an outsider or as a burden. On the other hand, these networks are, as already discussed, a major incentive and opportunity to learn the language. The impact of local spouses is generally a neglected area in research on highly skilled migrants.

Hence, a local family and embeddedness are important factors that do influence both adjustment and language learning. However, it still remains very difficult to distinguish between different groups of migrants.

**6.1.5 Native English-speakers**

Some evidence suggests that native English-speakers have less incentive to learn the local language in a country where English is commonly used (Beenstock et al., 2001). This is not supported by this study. If anything, native English-speakers appear more aware of – and troubled by – others switching to English for their benefit. This appears to be a new finding. However, this does not mean that native English-speakers do not have an obvious advantage in an English-speaking environment, even compared to natives (Henderson, 2005).
6.2 Conclusions and implications of the thesis

In conclusion, Finnish language skills are not essential for satisfactory adjustment in Finland for this particular group of foreign professionals. However, this does not mean Finnish skills are unimportant. The main benefit of local language skills in Finland is for cultivating relationships and integration. The languages used in private and professional networks may therefore be very important in determining the importance of the language. Hence, Swedish appears to play a more important role in foreign professionals’ lives than expected. In addition, Finnish skills are a significant factor when looking for jobs in Finland. However, foreign professionals experience that Finnish skills are required for many jobs where it is not of importance for the task at hand, and that the required level is very difficult to reach. This study also points to the importance of the migrant’s personal situation, values, and perceptions for the motivation of learning Finnish. An important finding is that the benefit/cost ratio of learning Finnish is not linear.

This study is highly context specific to Finland and the particular group studied. However, there some general contributions to the literature on host country language skills emerge. First, the society’s expectations for a certain group of migrants on learning the host country language may be an influential factor for language learning.

Second, the migrant’s personal circumstances influence the perceived costs and benefits of learning a language. The individual’s embeddedness in the host country, values, and perceptions may all influence the language learning motivation. However, these factors may be more influential in a context where host country language skills are not an absolute necessity.

Third, benefit/cost ratio is not necessarily linear in other languages either, although it may work differently than in Finnish. This may influence language learning patterns. Host country language skills are usually assumed to be “low” or “high”, and the benefits are expected to rise linearly with increased skills. This is not only false, it may also leave important patterns unnoticed.

Fourth, there is no evidence that native English-speakers would be less motivated to learn the host country language, although they do have obvious advantages of their language when working in English-speaking settings. On the contrary, native English-speakers may actually experience more negative feelings than other migrants when locals have to switch to English for their benefit.
6.2.1 Implications for management

Because of the language difficulty, it is not reasonable to expect that newly arrived foreign professionals will have more than basic Finnish skills. However, they may possess important knowledge and experience that one cannot get from Finland or from someone who has been here for long. Hence, Finnish requirements may lead overlooking candidates with unique skills and insights.

Even more interestingly, the results points to an opportunity for employers to help their foreign employees learn the language. Because of the interest in conversational Finnish and discussion groups, workplaces (or several workplaces cooperating) provide a great potential for organising speaking groups for people that can be assumed to have similar interests. Besides the direct benefits for the employer, improved language skills also include many indirect benefits for the employer, when the foreign employees feel more integrated in the team and in the country.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The time and resource constraints put some limitations on this study. The sample was gathered through convenience sampling and snowballing, which is not ideal for a representative sample. In this case, there may also have been a bias towards foreign professionals with links to the Swedish-speaking community. Still, there are indications (SVT, 2015) that foreigners may have slightly more connections to Swedish-speakers than to Finnish-speakers, compared to the proportion of Swedish-speaking Finns. Also, attempts were made to also conduct an interview with at least one English-speaking woman, but this was not possible regardless of considerable effort made. This can be explained by that the majority of citizens from English-speaking countries living in Finland are men; for example over 80% of migrants from the UK and over 60% from the USA (Tilastokeskus, 2014: 28).

Gender has not been discussed in this work. No apparent gender differences emerged from the material, but it does not mean that gender may not be an important factor.

All interviews were conducted in English, and language as well as cultural differences between the interviewee and the interviewer may led to some lost information. However, the findings were quite well aligned between participants from different cultures.
All of the participants had a high English proficiency, which also may have influenced the answers. The answers of foreign professionals with poorer English skills may be different.

### 6.3.1 Suggestions for future research

The findings in this study are applicable to only a very limited group of foreigners. However, it can be seen as the most privileged group, a sort of blank canvas, against which other groups can be compared. This sort of research may reveal for example discrimination and local differences. Suggested research questions include: do foreign professionals from other parts of the world experience language importance in the same way as in this study? Is the situation the same in other parts of Finland?

This study focuses on the experiences of foreign professionals, and includes many descriptions on how these migrants understand the behaviours of locals. This naturally leads to the opposite question; how do Finnish colleagues and friends experience language when communicating with foreigners?

While some antecedents and mediators emerge in this study, the impact of many possibly important factors is left in the dark. Interesting lines of research include for example, the relationship between personality, acculturation strategy, or psychological adjustment and perceived language importance.

Finally, the subsamples of native English-speakers and non-native English speakers were not quite big enough to make any final conclusions. However, native English-speakers compared to other foreigners in different contexts may be an interesting line of research that has not received much attention so far. Especially interesting is native English-speakers and negative feelings related to switching.
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

Introduktion

Personer som arbetar utanför sitt hemland har länge intresserat både akademiker och företagsledare. Särskilt stort intresse har ägnats åt utlänningars anpassning till livet i värdlandet, och flera studier visar på ett positivt samband mellan anpassning och bland annat arbetsprestation och repatriering (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Därmed är utländska arbetstagares anpassning till värdlandet intressant för arbetsgivare som vill få ut det mesta av sina anställda.

En viktig del av anpassningen är kommunikation och kunskaper i värdlandets språk (Froese et al., 2012; Peltokorpi, 2008; Selmer, 2006). Språket är också viktigt för att skapa relationer med lokalbefolkningen. Idag är affärsverlden präglad av engelskan och språkfrågan glöms lätt bort (Welch et al., 2005; Marschan et al., 1997). Ändå har man på senare tid insett att engelskans roll som lingua franca inte gör lokala språk betydelselösa. Från individens perspektiv är litteraturen idag främst fokuserad på huruvida kunskaper i värdlandets språk påverkar anpassningen i värdlandet. I begränsad mån har även konsekvenserna av otillräckliga respektive goda språkkunskaper undersöks, bland annat i förhållande till relationer med lokalbefolkningen (Froese et al., 2012; Peltokorpi, 2008).

Problembakgrund


Syfte och avgränsningar

Studiens syfte är att undersöka utländska professionellas upplevelser i Finland med fokus på det finska språket. Forskningsfrågorna är således:
4) Leder bristfälliga kunskaper i finska till utmaningar för utländska professionella (i arbetskontext), och i så fall, i vilka situationer?

5) Hur upplever utländska professionella finskans betydelse?

6) Finns det skillnader mellan personer med engelska som modersmål och andra?

Avhandlingen använder orden *utländsk professionell* för att beskriva en person med universitetsutbildning som flyttat till Finland från ett annat land och är anställd inom sitt eget arbetsområde.

Den här studien är avgränsad till västerländska utländska professionella med en universitetsutbildning som på eget initiativ bor och arbetar i Helsingforsregionen. Studien fokuserar därmed på en mycket begränsad grupp av utlänningar i Finland och kan inte direkt appliceras på utlänningar i allmänhet. Studiens syfte är att öka förståelserna för utländska professionellas erfarenheter och avser således inte att presentera kvantitativa samband.

**Den finländska kontexten**


Nästan 90 % av den finska befolkningen talar finska som första språk (SVT, 2013). Finskan hör till den finsk-ugriska språkgruppen, och anses vara ett svårt språk att lära sig. Finlands andra officiella språk är svenskans, som hör till den indo-europeiska språkgruppen, och talas av 5,4 % av befolkningen (SVT, 2013). Andelen personer med ett annat modersmål än finska eller svenska har ökat drastiskt de senaste åren till knappa fem procent i hela landet (SVT, 2013) och nästan 13 % i Helsingfors (Helsingfors stad, 2015). Engelskans ställning har ökat i betydelse världen över, och särskilt tydligt syns detta i ett litet land som Finland. Engelska är det mest talade utländska språket i Finland, och nästan hela befolkningen har i något skede av sitt liv studerat engelska (Leppänen et al., 2011).
**Litteraturgenomgång**

Litteraturgenomgången sammanfattar den viktigaste litteraturen som är relevant för denna avhandling. Syftet är att ge en bakgrund om anpassningslitteraturen som helhet och sedan presentera relevant forskning om språkets betydelse.

**Användningen av begrepp för utlänningar i litteraturen**


**Anpassning till värdlandet**

kopplats till bland annat arbetstillfredsställelse och avståndstagande beteende (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).


**Språk, kommunikation och anpassning**

Nyttelserna till kommunikation är att göra sig förstådd och förstå den andra parten. Det räcker inte med att tala samma språk; olika kulturer kommunicerar på olika sätt genom gester, röstläge och scheman för att hälsa eller tacka. Missförstånd uppstår därmed om parterna talar ett gemensamt språk, medan de tänker och handlar i enlighet med sitt eget språk (Selmer 2006). Den finska kommunikationskulturen uppfattas ofta som reserverad, och har en annorlunda inställning till tystnad än många andra kulturer (Carbaugh, 2009).

Språkkunskaper kan anses vara en funktion av exponering för språket, inlärningens effektivitet (som påverkas bland annat av hur svårt språket är), ekonomiskt incitament att lära sig språket och tillgångar för inlärningen som individen har till sitt förfogande (Chiswick och Miller, 2001). Samband mellan kunskaper i värdlandets dominerade språk och individens anpassning har påvisats i flera studier (t.ex. Froese et al., 2012). Framförallt har språkkunskaper förknippt med relationer till lokalbefolkningen. Tidigare forskning pekar på att färre utlännings läser sig svåra värdspråk såsom finska, men att de har mer nytta av även grundläggande kunskaper jämfört med utlännings som läser sig enkla värdspråk (Selmer och Lauring, 2011).

**Metodik**

Denna kvalitativa studie använder sig av semi-strukturerade intervjuer för att svara på forskningsfrågorna. I forskningen tillämpas en tolkande forskningsfilosofi och det grundläggande antagandet är att verkligheten är subjektiv och socialt konstruerad. Tanken är därmed inte att finna en objektiv verklighet, utan att erhålla en djupare förståelse för utländska professionellas upplevelser i Finland. Mönster i respondenternas
subjektiva erfarenheter ger dock en indikation av den undersökta gruppens kollectiva verklighet.

**Datumsamling**


**Analys**


**Forskningskvalitet och -etik**

För att säkerställa forskningens trovärdighet redogör avhandlingen detaljerat för relevant bakgrundsinformation, kontext och beslut. Alla data är sparade så att trovärdigheten kan säkerställas vid behov. Som forskare och intervjuare påverkar jag forskningen med mina värderingar och tidigare erfarenheter. Därför har jag strävat efter att öppet reflektera över min egen roll i de olika faserna av forskningen. Även de etiska aspekterna av forskningen har tagits i beaktande genom att hålla deltagarna anonyma och inte publicera mer personlig information om deltagarna än nödvändigt för forskningens syfte.

**Resultat**

Resultaten från intervjuerna delades upp enligt tema. Nästan alla respondenter hade studerat åtminstone lite finska och flera planerade att fortsätta i framtiden. Dock upplevdes finskan som ett mycket svårt språk att lära sig och kurserna i finska ansågs
inte vara ändamålsenliga. Tre av respondenterna kunde mer än bara grunderna. Det kom fram under intervjuerna att respondenternas liv präglas även av andra språk än finska. En av respondenterna hade arbetsuppgifter på både finska och engelska; alla andra jobbade huvudsakligen på engelska. Det kom också fram att engelskan är på hög nivå i Finland i allmänhet, vilket gör det lättare för utlännings att klara sig utan att tala språket. Eftersom svenskan ansågs i början av studien att ha relativt liten praktisk betydelse nämndes inte svenskan under intervjuerna av forskaren. Emellertid tog flera självmant upp svensk och finlandssvenskar. Tre av respondenterna studerade svenska, varav en var på flytande nivå. Två övriga övervägde att lära sig svenska. Huvudsakliga orsaker för att lära sig svenska var svenskspråkiga nätverk och att svenska ansågs lättare att lära sig.

Otillräckliga finskakunskaper orsakade en del praktiska problem i vardagen. Finskan ansågs även mycket viktig för att få ett jobb, även om arbetsuppgifterna i sig inte skulle kräva finska.


Analys

Analysen grundar sig på de samband och mönster som uppstod från resultaten och syftar till att svara på forskningsfrågorna.

**Situationer som upplevs utmanande på grund av bristfälliga kunskaper i finska**

För att svara på den första forskningsfrågan presenteras alla olika typer av situationer som upplevs utmanande av deltagarna på grund av bristfälliga kunskaper i finska. Situationer där otillräckliga kunskaper i finska upplevs praktiskt utmanande kan delas in i tre grupper. Den första gruppen består av situationer där den andra parten inte har tillräckligt goda kunskaper i engelska för att bekvämt diskutera ämnet i fråga, och den andra gruppen består av situationer där information bara är tillgänglig på finska. Den sista gruppen består av situationer där en eller flera personer kommunicerar på finska
och meddelandet inte är riktat åt utlännningen, men det är eventuellt viktigt för denna att förstå.

Dessa situationer anses i allmänhet inte vara av särskilt stor betydelse. Större vikt har situationer socialt/emotionellt utmanande situationer. Därutöver är otillräckliga finskakunskaper ett problem vid arbetssökning.

**Motsatta krafter för finskans betydelse**

Försök att svara på den andra forskningsfrågan delar sig tydligt i två motsatta krafter som påverkar finskans betydelse för invandrarna. För det första anses finskan vara ett mycket svårt språk att lära sig och därmed krävs stora investeringar i tid och energi. Samtidigt talas det mycket engelska både i samhället överlag och framförallt på de flesta arbetsplatserna. Detta betyder att invandrarna är mindre exponerade för språket, men också att det går bra att klara sig utan finska. Kostnaderna för språkinlärning är därmed relativt höga jämfört med fördelarna. Denna process är illustrerad som en cirkel som börjar med att den låga lönsamheten att lära sig finska (1) leder till att färre utlännningar lär sig språket (2). Detta i sin tur medför att samhället förväntningar på finskakunskaper sänks (3) och det är ännu lättare att klara sig med engelska (4), med följenien att lönsamheten att lära sig finska (1) ytterligare sänks.

Incitamenten för att lära sig finska är en lättare vardag, bättre arbetsmöjligheter, relationer och integrering. Dock är den praktiska betydelsen av språket som redan nämnt relativt liten och dåliga kunskaper i finska anses inte försvåra vardagen betydligt. Flytande kunskaper i finska ökar möjligheterna att få jobb i Finland, men många tror sig inte uppnå en tillräckligt hög nivå för att kunna använda det som arbetsspråk. Finskan har störst betydelse för integrering och relationer. Kunskaper i finska underlättar relationer med lokalbefolkningen, låter invandraren känna sig som en i gruppen och som en del av samhället.

Följaktligen är det naturligt att svenskan kan ha en större betydelse än förväntat. Svenska anses mycket lättare att lära sig, vilket betyder att kostnaderna för att lära sig svenska är lägre än för att lära sig finska. De vars viktigaste nätverk är svenskspråkigt har mer nytta av att lära sig svenska, eftersom språkets huvudsakliga roll är att utveckla relationer. Detta pekar på betydelsen av språket som huvudsakligen används i immigrantens nätverk.

**Personer med engelska som modersmål**

Personer som har engelska som modersmål har en uppenbar fördel på engelskspråkiga arbetsplatser. Däremot tyder inget på att engelskspråkiga invandrare skulle ha mindre incitament att lära sig finska. Tvärtom visar resultaten en svag tendens för de engelskspråkiga respondenterna att uttrycka starkare negativa känslor i samband med situationer där andra måste använda engelska på grund av respondentens närvaro, jämfört med de andra respondenterna.

**Diskussion och slutsatser**

Resultaten från denna avhandling styrks av tidigare forskning. Framförallt visar denna studie liknande grundläggande drag som tidigare studier gjorda i en finsk kontext, även om denna studie utforskar ämnet mer djupgående. Den pekar även på betydelsen av samhällets förväntningar. Även antaganden om nätverkens inverkan på språkutvecklingen kan anses giltiga baserat på tidigare forskning. Tidigare forskning har inte tagit i beaktande betydelsen av den enskilda personens inställning för språklinlärningsmotivation. Överlag har ekonomiska incitament betonats utöver sociala och psykologiska incitament. Den relativa betydelsen för dessa kan dock påverkas av invandrarens sociokulturella status och värdlandet. Jag är inte heller medveten om någon studie som tagit i beaktande att förhållandet mellan kostnaderna och fördelarna i språklinlärning inte nödvändigtvis är linjära, något som delvis kan förklara de motsägelsefulla resultaten i tidigare forskning.

Avhandlingen är mycket kontextspecific, men bidrar till den existerande litteraturen med fyra generella slutsatser: 1) Samhällets förväntningar på språkkunskaper för en specifik grupp av utlänningar kan vara den underliggande orsaken till det som tidigare attribuerats till språkets svårighet. 2) Individens personliga attityder och värderingar
spelar en betydande roll i motivationen för att lära sig ett språk. 3) Lönsamheten för att lära sig ett språk kan inte antas vara linjär. Dock kan kurvan se annorlunda ut för ett annat språk. 4) Inget tyder på att personer med engelska som modersmål är mindre motiverade att lära sig värdlandets språk. Tvärtom kan negativa känslor i samband med att andra måste tala deras språk agera som ett incitament att lära sig värdlandets språk.
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APPENDIX 1  INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Purpose of the project, time available, consent to use interview for study and to record, right to leave any question unanswered, want individual stories (not expected to speak for all foreigners).

Tell me a bit about yourself and how you came to Finland.

- How old are you and where are you from?
- When and how did you come to Finland?
- When and how did you come to Finland?
- Do you have any previous overseas experience?

How would you rate your Finnish skills?

- Have you studied/do you study Finnish?
- Have your employer ever encouraged you to learn Finnish?

Could you describe your life in Finland and how you think you have adjusted here?

- How do you experience working culture here in Finland, interaction with colleagues, and such?

How international is your organisation?

- What is the official language of your organisation? Is all formal information available in English (and what is not)?
- What is the informal language in the organisation; what is the main language used among colleagues?

Are there any situations where you find it challenging to communicate with your colleagues, customers, or other people you at work? (Why?)

- Do you remember any situations where you wished you had known Finnish better?

Do you use Finnish in any situations?

- Do you think you benefit from it somehow?
• Would your organisation benefit from you learning better Finnish? How?

*How much do you know about Finland in general, for example about Finnish culture?*

• Is it an advantage for you somehow?

• Do you experience any challenges in understanding or being understood when it comes to for example jokes, sense of humor, or references?

• What about non-verbal communication, have you encountered any challenges regarding for example body language?

• Do you think being a native [language]-speaker is an advantage for you? How?

*How do you experience your networking possibilities in Finland?*

• How do you experience your working possibilities in Finland?

*Right now, for how long are you planning to stay in Finland?*

• Are you planning to learn more Finnish?

• What advice would you give a foreigner coming here?

• Is there anything else you would like to add on the topic?

*Thank you!*