Non-native Speakers in Call Centers. The Influence of Language on the Perceived Service Quality

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### Title of thesis:
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### Abstract:
Providing a good quality customer service has become essential for companies in order to succeed on the market and differ from competitors. Running call centers is an example of the services which companies offer to customers. Nevertheless, in many cases firms perceive running call centers as an extra cost and as such in some cases outsource/offshore those to lower labor cost countries. As a consequence, customer service is often provided by non-native speakers.

The aim of this thesis was to determine whether customers perceive service in a different manner hearing that employee is not a native speaker. Additionally, the study examined which non-native speech characteristics are important for the service quality perception. Besides that, the study looked for differences in the service quality perception between respondents under 30 years (so called Generation Y) and older respondents.

Theoretical framework focused on three core areas – call center specifics, the service quality perception and the role of language in the service, and in call centers in particular. Literature review helped to summarize factors characterizing non-native speech (accent, vocabulary, rhythm of speech, cognitive language frame and syntax) and determine suitable measure item scale for empirical part.

The empirical study consisted of the pilot study and consequent quantitative study. Pilot study was based on customers’ and customer service representatives’ interviews. All customer service representatives had experience with conducting calls in their non-native language(s). Based on the pilot study, hypotheses were formed and consequently tested by quantitative research realized in two countries, Czech Republic and Finland. Questionnaires with imaginary scenarios were used to gain data.

Findings indicated that service provided by non-native speaker may reach even more positive feedback compare to native speaker. It has been suggested that this situation is partly caused by the fact that expectations towards native speaker are higher. Nevertheless, at the same time non-native speaker is evaluated as less competent as trustworthy. Additionally, perceived level of misunderstanding is higher than in case of talking to native speaker. There is no significant influence of the age on the perceived service quality. However, nationality seems to be rather important determinant in this case, since perception of service quality varied significantly between Czechs and Finns.

### Keywords:
Call center, perceived service quality, second language acquisition, customer expectations, outsourcing, offshoring
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1 INTRODUCTION

In the world of high competition it has become a necessity for companies to provide good quality customer service for own clients. Customers expect company to be easily accessible and reacting quickly to solve client’s problem. Companies went a long way towards these requirements, for instance by enabling clients to serve themselves with the help of self-service kiosks, and easy to navigate web pages. With the increasing amount of technology surrounding the world, customers often feel that our society is “dehumanizing” (Duchene, 2008:36). Nevertheless, some services are not possible to manage without human interaction. Customer service, in particular call center, is considered as such example.

Call center is defined “as a telephone service facility set up to handle a large number of (usually) both inbound and outbound calls” (www.businessdictionary.com). Term inbound refers to calls coming from customers, for instance orders or help desk requests. Outbound calls are initiated by employees actively contacting customers with e.g. sales promotion offers. The integration of telephone and other technology (computers, faxes) is typical for call centers. Recently, additional technologies, such as the inter-active voice response (IVR) and automatic call distribution (ACD) has been utilized (Robinson and Morley, 2006:284).

Call centers have gone through a long development to reach current status. Operators connecting long-distance calls in 1920s can be considered as one of the first customer service representatives (CSR). Nevertheless, not until the middle of Twentieth century the term customer service was in use. In 1950 the New York Times reports about the so called “customer service consultants” who analyzed the work of phone operators teaching them how to “speak pleasantly, cheerfully and courteously over the telephone.” But not before 1980s and 1990s that 800 numbers took off, call centers were permanent part of companies’ customer service. (Yellin, 2009: 26-36)

According to “Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America” survey (2004), calling customer service has become very unpleasant situation for clients to go through. Even though customers often complain about having to listen to automatic recording instead of human their frustration does not end with speaking to CSR. Clients frequently argue that CSRs do have a lack of topical information, try to end call quickly and it is overall
difficult to get a solution to a problem. On the other hand, CSRs point out that they have to often deal with stubborn customers, rudeness and insults. (Yellin, 2009:2). With some call centers being located in foreign countries, language problems together with nationalism often strengthen antipathies towards calling a customer service.

Call centers are in many cases seen as an extra cost for a company instead of being taken as an opportunity for profit gaining and customer relationships building. In order to cut costs for running a call center firms apply various strategies. With current phenomena, outsourcing and offshoring\(^1\), when the customer service is located outside of country, new challenges have appeared. Cultural, geographical and language barriers make the interaction between company and client very sensitive issue gaining a lot of public and academic attention (Stringfellow, Teagarden and Nie, 2007). Stringfellow et al. (2007:168) refer to above mentioned barriers as invisible costs pointing out that these invisible costs have not yet been further explored even though they should be strongly considered by companies when deciding about offshoring a call center.

### 1.1 Research problem

It has been proved that language plays a significant role in services (Holmqvist, 2009). As Holmqvist (2009:30) notes, language is perceived as important in service encounters and customers do not mind paying extra in order to receive service in the language they prefer. Nevertheless, what remains unrevealed is to what extent language, and especially language spoken by non-native speakers, contributes to the perceived service quality. Language is crucial factor for successful interaction between client and CSR. The way employee speaks the language (tone, accent, wording) probably influences not only the one concrete communication episode but also company’s image, which client creates among others on the basis of these interactions. The communication between client and employee is so called “the moment of truth” showing company’s attitude towards customers’ enquiries.

\(^1\) for a further terms explanation see chapters 2.1 Outsourcing and 2.2 Offshoring
Despite of the growing tendency of offshoring among European companies a very few academicians have paid attention to this phenomena. Existing studies discuss mostly India as an outsourcing power (Poster, 2007; Priya, 2009; Rajini, 2009) or foreign call centers providing services to English speaking countries (Friginal, 2008; Sonntag, 2008). Researchers seem to leave out of consideration Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) where customer services are often outsourced/offshored (Stare and Rubalcaba, 2009). Calls from European countries are often answered in Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary or Slovenia (Stare and Rubalcaba, 2009:35-36) but it is not exceptional that call centers in these countries operate worldwide.

Wang, Arndt, Singh and Biernat (2009) have conducted a study called “Examining accent stereotyping effect in the service context and testing its influence on customer satisfaction and customer evaluation of employee performance”. Exploring customers to Indian, British and American accent they concluded that there are noticeable variations in the accent perception and consequently also quality perception. Moreover, in many cases non-native speakers are considered “as less competent and less credible than native speakers” (Tsalikis et al., 1991; Lippi-Green, 1997 all cited in Stringfellow et al., 2007:171). In correspondence with these findings non-native speakers often point out that they experience communication difficulties, perceptions of bias and feeling of being outsiders in the country (Derwing, 2003; Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010). Furthermore, the role of age as one of the factors playing role in the service quality perception has not been studied. There seems to be no study regarding the research problem whether the perception of non-native speakers in call centers varies among generations.

“The total perceived quality represents the gap between expected and experienced quality” (Grönroos, 2007:76). Due to absence of physical components, service providers and their behavior often become the customer’s source of cognitive and emotional evaluation in determining his/her level of satisfaction (Mano and Oliver, 1993; Rafaeli, 1993 all cited in Barker and Härtel, 2004:4). Different methods for service quality evaluation in call centers have been suggested. For instance, Boshoff (1999:238) proposed scale instrument called RECOVSAT consisting of eight attributes - time, communication style, empathy, reliability, perceptions of commitment to service quality and customer satisfaction, empowerment, staff attitude, explanation. Earlier, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) suggested a
measurement tool with three aspects directly connected to the call center context – competence, security and knowing/understanding the customer.

Nevertheless, Holmqvist (2009:2) points out the service literature have taken a common language between companies and consumers for granted. This may be the reason why surprisingly little attention has been paid to determining a role of language within service quality perception.

1.2 Aim of the study

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether customers perceive service in a different manner hearing that employee is not a native speaker.

Additional research objectives are:

1) To identify the non-native speech characteristics important for the service quality perception
2) To determine the role of respondents’ age in the service quality perception. Thus, resolve if younger population under 30 years (Generation Y) perceive non-native speakers in a differently than the older respondents.

1.3 Delimitations

The study focuses on studying the influence of language on the perceived service quality in the context of European countries and languages. Empirical study was conducted in two countries, Czech Republic and Finland. Limiting the study to two geographical areas can be seen as one of the delimitation of this study. Theoretical framework discusses some of the studies focusing on the role of concrete accent and concrete countries where to call center was offshored/outsourced. Manipulating with these variables would be certainly beneficial but they are however behind the scope of this study. In addition, differing among various types of call centers is behind the scope of this study, since the focus is on the perceived service quality. On the same note, the thesis concerns only the basic characteristics of call centers and does not involve into call center management discussion.
1.4 **Structure of the paper**

The thesis is divided into four main parts: theoretical background, methodology, empirical section and results discussion.

Theoretical framework is split into two parts. Chapter 2 forms a background to following chapters by introducing some specifics of call centers. Within this section, terms outsourcing and offshoring are clarified followed by the overview on the current call center situation in Central and Eastern European Countries. In chapter 3 the service quality perception content is discussed. Within the service quality perception framework the customers’ expectation towards call centers together with total perceived service quality concept are introduced. Consequently, the factors influencing the service quality perception are defined with the focus on the company and country image together with cultural and age differences. Finally, the items for measuring service quality are presented. SERVQUAL and RECOVSTAT are used in the studies focused on the call centers. Next, section 3.4. is dedicated to the role of the language in the call center setting. Firstly, the importance of language in service encounters is discussed. Due to thesis purpose the section continues with the debate over the second language acquisition and its basic characteristics such as accent, rhythm of speech and cognitive language frame. Subsequently the role of language as one of the nation’s component is examined.

Chapter 4. justifies the reason for chosen research method. The brief overview of scientific approaches is presented and motivations behind the applied approaches are explained. Since the thesis encompasses the pilot study, it is described and its tools are presented. Finally, the research design is described including the source of data, and questionnaire’s designing are explained.

Empirical study, chapter 5, starts with the pilot study findings presentation since hypotheses are derived from these. It continues with the descriptive statistics. In this section, the sample’s characteristics are presented as well as basic assumptions prior to analysis. Next, factor analysis used for the summated scales creating is described. Finally, hypotheses are tested and samples are compared cross-nationally.
Final chapter encompasses the discussion of the gained results followed by conclusions. Theoretical and managerial implications are included as well as study’s limitations and suggestions for the future research.
2 The call center specifics

Call center management is a broad area which cannot be described comprehensively in this study. Nevertheless, attention should be given to core topics related to the thesis aim. Therefore, the following section clarifies terms mentioned in the introduction, outsourcing and offshoring, in relation to the call center service allocation. Brief overview of the call center placement in Europe follows. In this study only the term offshoring is used in contexts where it is secondary whether call center was outsourced or offshored.

2.1 Outsourcing

Outsourcing has gained on popularity during the 1980s when it was introduced as a cost-cutting method. However, it has its origins in Roman times when government delegated the tax collection to the accredited citizens (Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2005:183). In the broadest definition, outsourcing encompasses the delegating or sharing of some business activity with the third-party vendor based abroad (Ramarapu and Parzinger, 1997:27). Concerning location, outsourcing can be agreed “among partners within the same country (onshore outsourcing), between partners of the same continent (nearshoring), or between partners from any location (international sourcing)” (Stare and Rubalcaba, 2009:32). Thus, if a European company allocates part of its business operations to another Europe based partner, term nearshoring applies. Nearshoring brings benefits in the form of geographical and cultural proximity; nevertheless, there are some drawbacks too, for instance the language distance.

2.2 Offshoring

Offshoring is a fairly similar practice to outsourcing in terms of the service allocation to another country. Fact differing offshoring from outsourcing is the non-existence of the third-party vendor. The allocated service stays “in-house” so company keeps running operations on its own even if located abroad. The purpose of offshoring does not vary from outsourcing; it is performed in order to cut down the expenditures. Offshoring does not differ among locations, therefore no matter where to the customer service is placed, the term offshoring is used.
Offshoring and outsourcing usually take an advantage of a relatively inexpensive and well educated work labor in such countries as India, Philippines, Latin America or Eastern Europe (Le Bon and Hughes, 2009:404)

There are various motives for the services outsourcing/offshoring. Gilley and Rasheed (2000: 769) point out that three most common goals are saving costs, improving the service quality by delegating the activity to the professional firm or focusing on the core business while outsourcing the back-office related tasks.

2.3 Call centers in Europe

The call centers management has gained on popularity as may be noted from the number of books dedicated to the subject. Numerous sources advising with setting up and managing call centers can be found (Fluss, 2005; Granered, 2005). Granered (2005:167) points out that there is no other area than Europe having so many highly advanced consumer markets speaking so many languages in such a condensed area. Naturally, this fact makes a call center running very difficult mostly due to hiring minor language speakers. In this case Granered (2005:167) advises creating of multiple hubs in order to serve different geographical areas. However, for many companies, this is too expensive solution.

There are very few statistical sources available, therefore the exact number of call centers offshored per country is not known. However, as Stare and Rubalcaba (2009:31) point out, the scattered evidence suggests that the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) are important suppliers of outsourcable services to the EU-15 [the European Union member countries before 2004 enlargement] naming labor cost differences, availability of skilled workforce as well as geographical and cultural proximity as important factors for choosing CEECs for call center allocation. For companies, CEECs are attractive from various reasons, among all the cheap labor, strong English and other European language skills as well as sensitivity to Western culture (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2007:400). In many cases CEECs are preferred to cheaper labor force countries such as India or China. This is mostly due to their proximity to EU-15 also in terms of legislative regulations.

A.T. Kearney’s location attractiveness index is annually published index rating countries as possible offshoring destinations. Countries are evaluated based on the set of criteria such as
business environment, legislative, labor costs. According to this index Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) do play a significant role in the offshoring. (A.T. Kearney, 2004:1) As popular call center locations are considered the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (Stare and Rubalcaba, 2009: 35-36). For instance in the Czech Republic call centers employ over 22 thousand people and start to overweight the country’s economical dependence on the automobile industry (Lidove noviny, 6.8.2010). As Lidove noviny^2 continues, among enterprises allocating own call center to Czech Republic belong e.g. Lufthansa, Siemens, ExxonMobil and Infosys Technologies. For instance, Siemens employing currently 780 people in two shared centers services in Prague and Ostrava announced to hire over 300 new employees during upcoming two years (Lidove noviny, 25.6. 2010). Companies in business services sector in Poland, Romania, and Slovakia reported that as much as 88 percent, 52 percent, and 42 percent of their respective exports in 2004 has been driven by outsourcing (Eurostat, 2007). In particular, CEECs are very attractive option for Western European companies. According to McKinsey index offshoring the business activities to the some of the new EU countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) can save 40 to 60% comparing to the Western Europe costs. (www.mckinseyquarterly.com).

^2 Lidové noviny (People’s Paper) is the Czech daily newspaper with the longest history and tradition (Established 1893).
3 Service quality perception in the call center context

The following section examines the content related to service quality perception in the context of call centers taking customers’ point of view. Many aspects play the role in this process evaluation and attention is given to a few important ones related to the study’s purpose. Terms as customer expectations prior to interaction and total perceived quality are explained at first. Factors as company and country image respectively are discussed in detail whilst other possible influencing factors are suggested and described briefly. A short discussion on the cultural differences follows since the thesis aims for comparing between two different nations. On the similar note, as study aims for finding the differences in perception of non-native speakers between people under 30 years, so called Generation Y, and respondents being over 30 years old, the chapter 3.2.4. discusses Generation Y characteristics. Finally, existing frameworks for service quality perception and customer satisfaction measurement are presented. Section 3.4. is dedicated to the role of language in the call center setting. Firstly, the role of language in service encounters, particularly in call centers is discussed. Next, the concept of language representing the part of belonging to a nation is introduced. Due to the thesis aim, the focus is on the second language acquisition and its main attributes. In chapter 3.4.4. the most common characteristics of the second language use are discussed in detail.

3.1 Service quality perception framework

Due to service quality perception being a broad term, discussion is narrowed to two aspects with the respect to the study’s aim. Firstly customer’s expectations towards the service encounter are discussed and consequently the concept of total perceived service quality is introduced.

3.1.1 Customer expectations

This study focuses on expectations and service perception towards customer service. In this respect, it is secondary whether customer’s call concerns services or goods purchased.
Therefore, no difference is made regarding the fact if service or goods were purchased prior to interaction.

Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, (1993:2) define expectations as “desires or wants of consumers, i.e., what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer”. Even though the experience may be a brand new for client prior to interaction, s/he possesses at least some image of what should happen. Expectations are created based on many factors, i.e. customer’s previous experience and company’s marketing communication. Naturally, expectations vary depending on the nature of service. For example Ojasalo (2001:200-212) differs among three main kinds of expectations customers may have. Firstly, the situation when customer is not sure what should exactly happen and which way is called fuzzy expectations. It is the task for the company to identify and consequently solve the exact problem. The identification happens through the dialogue. (Ojasalo, 2001:204). Customer may also have implicit expectations encompassing those s/he considers as self-evident and therefore does not communicate them by voice. Problem arises in the moment when implicit expectations are not met. Then service experience is perceived as unsatisfying and as a consequence expectations will probably not be taken for granted by customer during the next service encounter. Companies should be, therefore, aware of the fact that clients have certain implicit expectations towards the service. As Ojasalo (2001:204) further points out just as fuzzy expectations can be focused, implicit expectations can be revealed and debated over. Finally, the expectations of customers may be as well explicit meaning that they have a clear picture about the service course. Customers mostly pay attention to the service content and subsequently whether their expectations are met. Nevertheless, some expectations are considered realistic and some are unrealistic. Those unrealistic are not likely to be executed by service provider. Ojasalo (2001:203) notes that the best match between expectations is usually in the situation when the service expectations shift downwards and service execution shift the experience upwards.

In the call center setting, there exists some bias regarding customer expectations. Dean (2004:68) suggests that customers have very high expectations prior to calling. High expectations in this context refer to the ability of call center to solve all customer issues and answer possible enquires within one call. This conclusion is also supported by Monger, Rudick and O’Flahavan (2004:27) stating that the customer satisfaction will be 5-10 percent lower in case that more than one call is needed in order to solve the issue. On the contrary,
Sharma, Mathur and Dhawan, (2009:290) note that customers usually posses low expectations towards call center’s service quality. Dean (2004:62) further differs between predicted expectation level and adequate level of expectations. Predicted expectations are based on the previous experiences together with client’s forecast of interaction course. Adequate level of expectations encompasses then those which are realistic in predicting the service interaction. Additionally, Zeithaml et al. (1993:12) note that customers are willing to except a certain variation in the service, so called zone of tolerance (ZOT). ZOT is defined as the gap between the “ideal” and “adequate” situation.

As noted above, customers expectations are formed in very individual ways and are result of person’s own experiences and attitudes. Following sections discuss additionally the influence of company image, country to which customer service is outsourced, cultural differences and age on the expectations and total perceived quality. Other factors (mood, demographical variables) induce the chapter.

3.1.2 Total perceived service quality

The final total perceived quality is a difference between what customer expected and what really experienced (Grönroos, 2007:76). The total perceived quality of service is influenced by many aspects such as previous and current service experiences, expectations towards overall this kind of service and emotions from both customer and service provider sides.

Customers perceive two types of qualities. The technical quality is the outcome of the process, in other words what customers receive as result of service. Functional quality encompasses the service course, so how customers receive a service. To reach high customer satisfaction both functional and technical qualities should be excellent meaning that customer receives a great service in a great way. (Grönroos, 2007:74)

The Figure 1 presents an overview of factors influencing the total perceived quality listing separately aspects of expected and experienced quality. Important role of emotions is suggested by separating this factor from the two others. As noted in the figure 1, expected service quality image consists of many aspects, such as marketing communication and
customer needs. On the other hand, experienced quality is formed by two crucial aspects, technical and functional process quality, as discussed above.

Figure 1 Total perceived quality (Reproduced) (Grönroos, 2007:77)

With physical and visual components missing in the call center setting, customers often perceive the whole company’s quality based on the interaction with CSR (Burgers, Ruyter, Keen and Streukens, 2002:142). As Barker and Härtel (2004:6) point out once the interaction is finalized both parties go through a process of attributing causes to outcomes and satisfaction. In addition, some findings indicate that the efficiency measurement used in some call centers does not take to account the customer satisfaction (Feinberg et al., 2000; Miciak and Desmarais, 2001 all cited in Keiningham et al., 2006:271).

There are many aspects influencing the final customer satisfaction. Chapter 3.2 “Factors influencing the service quality perception” discusses a few of them in more detail manner. The attention is given especially to the outsourced/offshored call center country location, company image, cultural and age differences.
3.2 Factors influencing the service quality perception

In many cases service quality perception is not formed on the basis of expectations towards service encounter and consequent real experience. Often there are side factors influencing one concrete service episode. In the next section some of those factors are discussed with emphasis on the company image, image of country where to service is offshored, cultural and age differences.

3.2.1 Company image

Company image plays a role during service episode. Consequently, interacting with company influences its [company’s] image in the client’s eyes. Many companies are getting aware of the influence which offshoring may have on their image. The fact that call center is located in different country and calls handled by non-native speakers can change customer’s perception of a firm. Company’s concerns are often related to brand image, property rights; lower customer satisfaction and as consequences increased clients’ complaints and lower brand loyalty (Sharma et al., 2009:290). It has been proved that service quality and customer satisfaction correlate (Selnes, 1993; Sharma et al., 2009). Therefore, low quality service has a negative influence on the customer satisfaction. Contrariwise, service of a high quality influences positively customer’s satisfaction and as a consequence, company image.

Roggeveen, Bharadwaj and Hoyer (2007) have conducted a study with the aim to determine how location and reputation influence on customer’s expectations regarding upcoming service encounter. According to their findings call center location does not influence the expectations prior to interaction if the firm has a good image and reputation. This is, however, not the case for less known companies when clients predict lower level of service. (Roggeveen et al., 2007:403). The suggestion is based on the fact that if the company is lesser known, customers will expect poorer service from call center offshored than in case of good reputation firm which, as Roggeveen et al. (2007:403-4) point out, will more likely assure the quality service regardless the call center location. This finding is partly supported by Sharma et al. (2009:297) stating that” the more reputed or well known a service firm is, the less likely are
its customers to complain against its offshored call centers and more likely to continue using its services.”

Additionally, if company emphasizes its origins being in a certain country, this fact possibly influences customer’s expectations towards the customer service being also provided from this concrete country. The fact that call center is offshored to a different location may cause more negative reactions than in case of firms not basing their image on a concrete country.

### 3.2.2 Country Image

Studies indicate that various countries are assigned various images by the customers. Subsequently, this fact also influences on the service quality perception (Huber and McGann, 1982; Roggeveen et al., 2007; Thelen et al., 2010). Huber and McGann (1982:324) suggest that in case that clients are unable to detect the service quality on the basis of own experiences, they tend to evaluate it on the basis of their attitudes towards countries. Therefore, the country image is important determinant of service quality.

Thelen et al. (2010:196) have conducted a study where customers were asked to evaluate the imaginary service quality on the basis of the country service was offshored to. As Thelen et al. (2010:202) concluded “the most preferred countries to [American] consumers for services offshoring are not necessarily the ones with the highest skilled labor, lowest cost, or geographic closeness to the home country.” From the nine selected countries (Canada, Ireland, China, India, The Philippines, Singapore, Mexico, Jamaica, Pakistan), customers expected to receive quality service respectively, with Canada receiving the highest and Pakistan the lowest preferences (Thelen et al., 2010:202). With the exception of study presented below (Recognizing Finnish accent in Swedish by Swedes), there seems to be no similar study in the European context. However, considering that various European countries posses various images, then service quality perception by country certainly varies too. Roggeveen et al. (2007:407) based on the research concluded that call center location influences customer expectations only for lesser known firms having no impact on the expectations from well known firms with a good reputation. On the contrary, Barker and Härtel (2004:5) point out that customers have low expectations towards the quality of service provided by CSR with different cultural and ethnic background.
One topical study within the European context should be mentioned at this point. A research conducted in Sweden has aimed for determining the role of various aspects of Finnish language in Swedish, however spoken by Swedish native speaker. In conclusion researchers stated factors charactering the Finnish accent are identifiable by Swedes (Cunningham-Andersson and Engstrand, 1989 cited in Magen, 1998:382). This fact suggests that based on the accent it is recognizable from where the non-native speaker may come from.

Thelen et al. (2010: 196) suggests that companies should be aware of customers’ country perceptions prior to offshoring. However, it is questionable to what extent the country perception varies within European countries and as a consequence, to what European countries the service can be offshored without harming the company’s image. Nevertheless, a European country perception may vary from one country to another and thus, conducting the research is beneficial prior to offshoring.

3.2.3 Cultural differences

Hofstede (1997:5) defines culture as “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.” Cultural differences are some of the factors explaining differences in customers’ behavior. Since this study is conducted in two countries, variance in behavior based on the cultural habits may appear. In case countries’ cultures are alike they are referred to as low cultural distances countries (Stringfellow et al., 2008:172).

Hofstede (1997) presents four dimensions of cultural categorization

1. Power distance (small or large)
   As Hofstede (1997:28) puts it, the power distance is “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.”

2. Collectivism versus individualism
   The extent of collectivism and individualism indicates how human perceives himself – as a part of the society or individual.

3. Femininity versus masculinity
   Based on the results from IBM company study, Hofstede (1997:81) proposed a set of attributes typically perceived as masculine (e.g. earnings, challenge) and feminine (i.e.
cooperation, employment security). Taking the findings into account, Hofstede concluded that some country’s citizens tend to behave more masculine or feminine than it is typical in other countries.

(4) Uncertainty avoidance (scale from weak to strong)

On the similar note, some nations seem to tolerate higher level of unpredictability while others like to control the forthcoming (i.e. by technology, laws). (Hofstede, 1997:111).

For scoring differently in the above mentioned aspects, countries (and subsequently cultures) do not need to be located geographically far. Despite of Europe being relatively small area on the globe, many cultural variations can be found even in neighboring countries.

### 3.2.4 Age differences

It has been suggested that typical characteristics are shared by people born in a certain time (Yoon and Niehm, 2006). Generations have different life approaches and values. Heaney (2007: 197) summarizes key characteristics of three generations. Even though in the table 1 generation Y refers to those born after 1977, some sources note that Generation Y encompasses people born between 1977 and 1994 (Yoon and Niehm, 2006:621) or 1995 (Barlett, 2004)

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>Economic prosperity</td>
<td>Downsizing economy</td>
<td>Capitalism rules</td>
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<td>Cohort</td>
<td>Vietnam War</td>
<td>Death of socialism</td>
<td>Rise of China and high technology</td>
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<td>experience</td>
<td>Cold War</td>
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<tr>
<td>Core values</td>
<td>Idealistic, individuality</td>
<td>Pessimistic, diversity</td>
<td>Positive, globalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying habits</td>
<td>Spend a lot, brand loyalty</td>
<td>Very skeptical consumers</td>
<td>Products with cool images are important</td>
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This study aims for answering the question whether members of generation Y perceive service conducted by non-native speaker differently compared to other age groups. As noted in the table 1, Generation Y is characterized by their familiarity with use of media and high technology (computers, mobile phones, etc.). Members of this generation are adapted to globalization and they are more likely to learn foreign languages (Ramirez, 2008). Thus, it may be supposed that their approach towards non-native speakers is more positive compared to other generations. This assumption is based on the fact Generation Y members are more likely to interact with foreigners and consequently also with non-native speakers (through the use of technological devices). Taking this assumption to account, it may be supposed that they may perceive non-native speakers in call centers differently compared to other generations.

### 3.2.5 Other factors

As noted above, there are many factors both on the client and CSR’s sides influencing the service encounter. Barker and Härtel (2004:5) point out that prior to interaction, both parties bring with them their unique ‘makeup’ comprising demographic variables such as race and gender as well as attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, knowledge and previous experiences. The current mood and client’s and customer service representative’s (CSR’s) personal characteristics also determine to a certain extent how successful the interaction will be. Client’s expectations towards service whether based or not on the previous experiences influence the service encounter’s course as well. It is CSR’s task to focus fuzzy expectations, reveal implicit expectations and debate over with customer possible too high or low expectations towards service (Ojasalo, 2001:204). All this should happen in a friendly and calm manner. In addition, Sharma et al. (2008:289) notes that “negative attitudes towards offshored call centers (OCC) result in feelings of dissatisfaction, increase in complaints and decrease in repeat purchases”. With people having a negative experience with some call center their attitude towards all call centers may be negative.
3.3 Service quality perception measurement

Multiple methods to measure service quality perception (from the customer’s point of view) have been suggested. In forthcoming chapters attention is given to those being applied in call center related research, SERVQUAL and RECOVSTAT.

3.3.1 SERVQUAL

Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed a service quality evaluation tool using a multi-item scale called SERVQUAL, a 22-item instrument that includes five service dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Badri, Abdulla and Al-Madani, 2005:819). SERVQUAL represents the gap between the service performance level expectations and actual perceptions (Jaishwal, 2008:406). As Badri et al. (2008:819-820) further point out SERVQUAL has been tested and used to measure service quality in various contexts such as hospitality, telecommunication, professional services or retailing. Naturally, every service has its specifics meaning that SERVQUAL attributes and dimensions should be adjusted accordingly prior to topical research. In the call center setting Keiningham et al. (2006) proposed to use four SERVQUAL dimensions scales with leaving out the tangibles (physical) item.

Jaishwal (2008:406-7) argues that SERVQUAL does not satisfactory explain whether high expectations towards the service result in positive service evaluation while low expectations indicate a high quality service evaluation. In addition, opponents of this measurement tool, Cronin and Taylor (1992) suggested that service performance evaluations are directly linked to the service quality and therefore use of SERVQUAL is inadequate. On the basis of this argument Cronin and Taylor (1992) proposed SERVPERF framework for measuring service performance. Nevertheless, SERVPERF has not been widely used in the call center context.

3.3.2 RECOVSTAT

Boshoff (1999:238) proposed a scale instrument called RECOVSTAT in order to determine the customer satisfaction with the regard to the service recovery. Originally 13 suggested
factors (time, atonement, apology, fair fix, empathy, accepted responsibility, kept promises/reliability, feedback, empowerment, access/approachability, tangibles, staff attitude, and explanation) were reduced into 6 dimensions (communication, empowerment, feedback, atonement, explanation, and tangibles) and 17 items. (Boshoff, 1999:240-4). In later study Boshoff (2005:425) removes 4 items leaving the scale instrument to consist of 6 dimensions and 13 items. Since call centers often play important role in the service recovery the RECOVSTAT scale is very desirable in this context. Burgers et al. (2000:144) proposed to evaluate call center performance on the basis of following 8 attributes derived from 17 items originally suggested by Boshoff (1999): “time, communication style, reliability, perceptions of commitment to service quality and customer satisfaction; empowerment; staff attitude; and explanation” incorporated within the four-scale model including dimensions of adaptiveness, assurance, empathy, authority. (Burgers et al, 2000:144-157)

No matter which scale instrument is used for service quality perception measurement, researchers should always remember to tailor the items with regard to research question. For instance, when applying SERVQUAL in call center related research, tangible item is mostly left out due to its irrelevance in this particular setting.

3.4 The role of language in the call center context

In this section the content related to the role of language within the call center setting is presented. Firstly, the role of language in service encounters, particularly in call centers is discussed. The concept of language representing the part of belonging to a nation is introduced subsequently. Due to the thesis topic, the focus is on the second language acquisition and its main attributes. In this respect, chapter 3.4.3. presents the most common characteristics of the second language use are discussed.

3.4.1 Language in service encounters

Language is the very essential part of any interaction. In call centers it is particularly visible, absence of visual features makes both, client and CSR rely on the language abilities only. If the company and customer lack the common language, interaction is naturally more
problematic than in case of using the same native language. Currently, significant numbers of studies point out at the increasing customer dissatisfaction with offshored call centers originating from the communication deficiencies (Compass, 2007; Sharma et al., 2009). In addition to cultural and geographical distance related barriers, the language distance forms another potential challenge to successful interaction. The language distance may be explained as a barrier created by the situation when customer and CSR do not share the same mother tongue (Stringfellow, 2008:171).

Among factors related to language distance are considered among others accent, speech understandability and vocabulary used. Naturally, geographical and cultural factors play important role as well. With the customer service being located outside of a country raises the probability of technical difficulties such as problematic telephone lines making the communication even harder.

3.4.2 Language as expression of belonging to the nation

As Isaacs (1975:433) points out, in one form or another, the role of individual and its belonging to the nation has been often discussed. It has been suggested that language is the important part of national identity (Isaacs, 1975; Poster, 2007; Sonntag, 2009). Many people have strong emotional bonds to their language linking it to their own identity and are influenced by their own cultural identity also in the role of clients (Holmqvist, 2009:2). For instance Sonntag (2009:13) notes that American customers consider speaking American English as an equivalent to being American and therefore thinking that “if you’re not American, then you don’t speak English”. Language is perceived as the important feature when it comes to the national cohesion and the perception of job loose contributes significantly to rising of such attitude (Poster, 2007). In the European context Holmqvist’s study (2009:35) also confirmed the importance of native language in the service setting assigning the preference for native language functional and also emotional aspects. The perception of non-native speakers may be influenced also by these issues. As Barker and Härtel (2004:5) further note, prior to interaction, both parties bring with them their unique ‘makeup’ comprising demographic variables such as race and gender as well as attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, knowledge and previous experiences. “
While Indian customer service representatives are asked to adapt to Western culture by posing like Americans and they are also given American nick names (Poster, 2007; Sonntag, 2009), there are no trace of similar requirements towards call center employees in Europe. One of the reasons behind this may be the cultural proximity within Europe. India, the country where customer service for United States of America is often offshored to, has no cultural, geographical neither language proximity to USA.

Within the EU, similar cultural and linguistic background together with historical and geographical proximity form strong arguments when it comes to offshoring. On this base, as supported by foreign direct investment (FDI), Scandinavian countries are likely to offshore to Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Germany to the Czech Republic or Poland, and Austria to Slovenia. This proximity is in favor of Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) even though Asian or Latin American countries could have offer lower costs. (European Commission 2006 in Stare and Rubalcaba, 2009:41)

Nevertheless, the non-native speakers’ perception within European context remains fairly unexplored area. There seem to be so far no study dealing with meaning and importance of the national language to Europeans and consequently their perception of non-native speakers. Due to different setting, the findings from Anglo-Saxon context cannot be fully applied. Studies have proven that the person’s perception by listener varies by accent (Magen, 1998; Wang et al., 2009). Thelen et al. (2010:197) have suggested that the perception is influenced by the speaker’s (assumed) country of origin since various countries have various images. The chapter 3.2.2. Country Image explored this topic further.

3.4.3 Second language acquisition

The term second language acquisition relates to the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue. As Ellin (2003:3) points out, phrase the second language does not necessarily need to apply to one language studied but refers also to third or fourth language acquisition. For instance, if person speaks besides own language three other languages, the term “second language” applies to all of them. In addition, the term “second
language” is often confused with “foreign language”. The second language may be spoken in a person’s native country and cannot be, therefore, called foreign.

A second language can be acquired in a variety of ways, differing among others in the extent of mastering the language and purpose of studying it (Klein, 2003:15). The success of language mastering depends on many factors such as social conditions, person’s intelligence, language aptitude (a disposition for learning a language), motivation or age, just to mention a few. (Ellin, 2003; Klein, 2003). There have been many studies regarding the fact to what extent is a person capable to manage the second language and whether it is possible to master the language on the native level (Sleve and Miyake, 2006:675). Every language has own specifics which are not easy to bear for non-native speakers.

The next chapter discusses in detail some common mistakes non-native speakers make. These languages aspects are those indicating that a person uses the second acquired language.

3.4.4 Common differences between language spoken by native and non-native speakers

It has been suggested that second language acquisition is relatively complicated process with many factors influencing the final output. It is, however, debatable to what extent the output is final since language studying is in many cases life lasting process. It has been proved that native speakers can recognize a foreign accent from the very short speech samples (Flege and Hammond, 1982; Flege, 1984 in Magen, 1998:381). In the following subchapters some of typical features differing non-native from native speakers are presented.

The forthcoming aspects form a basis for the thesis’s empirical study. Since one of the thesis aims is to identify language factors contributing to the perceived quality, the following aspects are important part of empirical research.

Accent

The second language acquisition has been gaining the research interest within the field of psychology and social psychology for decades (Derwing, 2003: 548). Accent as the important
aspect of the second language use has been given attention as well. Topical research has focused on the interaction examining from both sides, native speaker’s (Magen, 1998; Cargile, 2000) and non-native speaker’s (Derwing, 2003; Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010). Sociolinguistics literature (Lippi-Green, 1994; Giles and Powesland, 1975 all cited in Wang et al., 2009:940) considers accent as important indicator of person’s ethnicity, regional association and social background. This fact suggests that non-native speakers are assigned certain characteristics formed apart of their appearance by the way they speak the language. In personal encounters the total impression is created by both physical appearance and spoken language together with non-verbal signals. In a call center, nevertheless, the visual elements are missing, leaving customers to judge employees on the basis of spoken interaction.

As noted above, customers can recognize the non-native speakers already after a couple of exchanged sentences. Depending on preexisting attitudes, established and reinforced throughout an individual’s life experiences clients evaluate CSR and the company (Barker and Härtel, 2004:4). As accents are often connected with certain status (e.g. social and cultural background) people tend to react differently on various accents (Magen, 1998; Cargile, 2000). As a consequence some non-native speakers are perceived more positively than others. The accent indicates in many cases the non-native speaker’s probable country of origin. Some researchers (Thelen et al., 2010) suggest that this association of customer service being located in a particular country significantly influences the perceived service quality. Chapter 3.2.2. Country Image further examines this concept.

Wang et al. (2009) have conducted a study where respondents listened to the short conversation samples from call centers. The conversation content was identical in all cases, manipulation factor was customer service employee’s accent (British, Indian and American English). On the basis of the research Wang et al. (2009:940) conclude that customer satisfaction is strongly influenced by the service outcome. In case that clients are not satisfied they tend to reflect this fact on the employee personality. Thus, Indian English has received the least positive feedback out of offered options (Wang et al., 2009:940).

Nevertheless, the studies mentioned above were conducted in the United States of America and it is arguable whether their findings apply also in European setting differing from Anglo-Saxon culturally and also linguistically.
Vocabulary

Customer service representative (CSR) needs to master language to such extent that communication with client makes no problems to any side. A sufficient vocabulary is a core condition for a successful interaction. However, as far as it concerns the second language acquisition, there may appear challenges related to vocabulary. Typically, non-native speakers face four kinds of problems:

**1) Insufficient vocabulary**
It is very difficult to determine the proficiency level which can be considered as a sufficient. Generally, customer service employee has to be familiar with the second language vocabulary at least to such extent that enables understanding customer’s requirements and providing an understandable good-proficiency answer in a fluent matter. Naturally, the vocabulary sufficiency depends on the kind of customer service. Vocabulary proficiency requirements are different for the employee accepting and confirming simple order by phone and employee advising customer how to set up a computer program.

**2) Use of words in a wrong context**
This problem is strongly related to language incompetence. Employee has learnt to use a word in a wrong context changing the sentence meaning. Consequently, this influences the customer’s image of employee and the company in a negative manner.

**3) Unfamiliarity with idioms**
To understand idioms, usually specific in every language; non-native speaker has to be on the advanced language level. Various languages express idioms in various ways often leaving non-native speakers confused about the meaning.

**4) Vocabulary confusion**
When using the second language, people tend to bring cognitive frames from mother tongue and therefore eventually use improper wording (Marcella and Davies, 2004:1383). Commonly these mistakes include word confusion such as using a word from a one language in another language. Additionally, non-native speakers may not be aware of words possible other meanings.

Syntax

Syntax is defined as the study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages (Chomsky, 1971). Naturally, this process varies from...
language to language. In some of them free word order applies while in others fixed word order needs to be kept. The basic rules of second language syntax need to be studied by non-native speakers already at the very beginning of second language acquisition. The knowledge of syntax is crucial for a sentence forming. For instance, question form in some languages is formed by switching the pronoun and verb position in the sentence. Leaving this out, a person does not ask question but instead states a sentence. Alternatively, especially in free word order languages manipulating with a word order changes noticeably the sentence meaning. Non-native speakers may not be aware of the shifted sentence meaning.

**Rhythm of speech**

Rhythm of speech significantly influences the understandability of message. Therefore, both client and CSR should adjust the speech pace so that interaction makes no problem to any of them. Nevertheless, if person speaks grammatically correctly and her/his speech is otherwise understandable, listeners are not very sensitive to voicing differences (Magen, 1998: 381).

**Cognitive language frame**

According to ongoing research (Pang, 2000:237) there exist beside similarities also biological and cognitive differences between first and second language acquisition. Therefore, the process of the languages acquisition varies from one language to another. Cognition may be defined as understanding our experiences through mental processes such as perception, recall, and reasoning (McLaughlin, 1998: 95). Naturally, experiences within one, most often, mother tongue often reflect in the second language. As Varner (2000:48) confirms people do have a tendency to bring their own cognitive frames to the interactions.

**3.4.5 Language factors influencing the service quality perception**

Chapter 3.4.4. Common differences between language spoken by native and non-native speakers identified the main factors distinguishing native and non-native speech. The figure 2 summarizes the language factors contributing to the call center interaction between customer
and CSR. Service interaction in the middle of figure is influenced by following proposed factors – accent, vocabulary, cognitive language frame, rhythm of speech and syntax.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 2. Aspects affecting the call center service interaction with non-native speaker.

Even though the above mentioned factors are affecting the service interaction, their contribution does not need to be equal. For instance, the accent may be perceived more significantly than rhythm of speech by customer (native speaker). The perception of these factors depends on the concrete customer and concrete service encounter episode.

SERVQUAL and RECOVSTAT measurement scales were discussed in the section 3.3. Service quality perception measurement. Both tools were used in the call center settings and therefore, this study as well, takes advantage from them.

### 3.5 Summary of the theoretical part

Theoretical part focused on the three core areas, the call center specifics, service quality perception and image in the call center context and the role of language in the call center context.
Firstly, call center specifics were introduced by clarifying the basic terms. Outsourcing and offshoring are often used interchangeably. Thus, the differences between them were made, using short concrete examples of use. As Stare and Rubalcaba (2009:31) point out that “CEECs are important suppliers of outsourcable services to the EU-15”, therefore the current situation and allocation of call centers within these countries were discussed.

In the second section of the theoretical part the service quality perception content was presented. Within the service quality perception framework the customers’ expectation towards call centers together with total perceived service quality concept were introduced. Every customer has certain expectation regarding the service prior to interaction. Ojasalo (2001) differs between fuzzy, implicit and explicit expectations. In addition, bias regarding the customer expectations in the call center setting was discussed. Service perception measurement scales SERVQUAL and RECOVSTAT were used in the studies focused on the call centers, therefore they were presented in subsequent chapters.

Studies indicate that countries are assigned a certain image in the client’s eyes and this fact also influences on service quality perception (Huber and McGann, 1982; Roggeveen et al., 2007; Thelen et al., 2010). Thus, the company and country image factors were discussed as important indicators of customer’s service evaluation. Since the thesis compares between two nations, Czechs and Finns, a brief overview of cultural differences was presented.

Due to thesis focus, attention was given to the role of language in service interactions. The language is the very essential part of any interaction, especially in call centers where the other visual components are missing. The language distance defined as a barrier created by the situation when customer and CSR do not share the same mother tongue (Stringfellow et al. 2008:171) can make the interaction more challenging. For offshored call centers the significant percentage of non-native speakers is typical. The situation when client and CSR do not come from the same country creates apart from language also cultural and geographical distance related barriers (Stringfellow et al., 2008:171). Since the language is an important part of national identity (Isaacs, 1975; Poster, 2007; Sonntag, 2009), the role of language as a national aspect was discussed. As Holmqvist (2009: 2) points out many people have strong emotional bonds to their language linking it to their own identity and being influenced by their own cultural identity as consumers. Speaking the language is by some people perceived as a belonging to the nation.
Due to thesis theme the second language acquisition was given the attention. Ongoing research aims for determining whether a non-native speaker is capable to master the language at the native level (Robert and Miyake, 2006:675). Due to the fact that native speakers recognize non-native speech in a short time (Flege and Hammond, 1982; Flege, 1984 all cited in Magen, 1998:381), the subsequent chapters discussed in detail common characteristics of non-native speech: accent, vocabulary, syntax, rhythm of speech and different cognitive language frame. Finally, it was suggested the SERVQUAL and RECOVSTAT are to be used as the measurement tools in the empirical part.
4 Methodology

This chapter presents overview of chosen research methods and explains the motivation behind these choices. The need for pilot study is justified, together with the core aspects of the chosen quantitative approach of the empirical study.

4.1 Choice of research method

The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether customers perceive interaction differently if service is provided by non-native speaker. Additionally, the study aims for determining the role of respondents’ age in the service quality perception. The choice of research method is very important decision in regard to thesis. When selecting the most suitable research method, the thesis aim, especially the research question, need to be taken to account. Firstly, researcher needs to make a decision whether to utilize qualitative or quantitative methods or eventually their combination. Whilst quantitative methods deal with objectively measurable data, qualitative focus on in-depth analysis of problem. In marketing, the quantitative research methods used to be preferred to qualitative since they base on the statistics and are therefore easily verifiable (Hunt, 1994). Qualitative methods aim in prior for understanding a certain phenomenon than to generalize the truth (Patton 2002:40). As Reichardt and Cook (1979:17) put it, the fundamental distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods is in the dimension of verification versus discovery. Quantitative approaches are often used to verify or confirm theories whilst qualitative methods are applied in theory creating and developing. Similar studies (Burgers et al. 2000; Roggeveen et al. 2007; Sharma et al. 2009) have taken the quantitative approach. Most commonly, questionnaires were distributed among customers.

Additionally, there are three possible research approaches to be used in the study. Deductive develops hypothesis on the theory basis and tests it consequently. Inductive collects data and develops theory subsequently. The third approach, the abductive research does not follow the straight path in research as inductive and deductive approaches do, but rather prefers to explain and describe problem deeply by multiple usage of methods (real life observation, theory matching,...) and it is used the most while unexpected observation cannot be explained using an established theory. (Kovács and Spens, 2005:137).
Most of the previous field studies have applied the deductive approach by basing own research on the existing theory trying to broaden the knowledge (Roggeveen et al, 2007; Sharma et al, 2009; Thelen et al, 2010). Due to lack of topical research within European context, a pilot study was conducted prior to the quantitative research. The purpose of the pilot study lies in gaining the topical knowledge and consequently trying to find the similarities and differences with the research already conducted in the Anglo-Saxon context. Therefore, based on the argumentation above, this study takes a quantitative methodology because it is involved in the theory verification. In this respect, study utilizes primary deductive approach.

4.2 Preunderstanding

According to Gummesson (1991:56-67) preunderstanding refers to the knowledge, experiences and insights about the topic person has prior to research. Gummesson (1991:56-67) differs between two kinds of preunderstanding; the one based on the personal experience and the second one based on intermediaries.

The researcher worked for six months in the call center grounded in Czech Republic. Originally USA based medical company offshored its customer service to the professional outsourcing firm having the European center in the Czech Republic. Call center was serving European customers in their native languages and communicated with distributors, Middle East and African customers in English. Due to company manufacturing medical products, customers were usually hospital and blood centers. The researcher provided customer service in English and Finnish being non-native speaker of both. With the respect to the above mentioned fact it can be understood that researcher gained the preunderstanding based on the personal experience.

4.3 Research design

This section deals with the research design of the pilot study and quantitative research. Regarding the first mentioned, the methods used for the interviews are justified and the
interview guides are presented. In the quantitative section source of data and questionnaire and overall research design are described.

4.3.1 Pilot study

The pilot study was based on the interviews with two groups of informants, customers and customer service representatives (CSRs). Next the nature of pilot study is described. The interview guide used for dialogs with for customers is attached in Appendix 1 and customer service representatives in Appendix 2.

Interviews with customers

When taking qualitative approach interview is a fairly regular tool to gain information. Informants are interviewed by researcher in order to get unobservable information, such as feelings, thoughts and intentions (Patton, 2002:341). During interviews researcher has opportunity to explore individual’s attitudes and values (Silverman, 2006:114). Nevertheless, interviews are usually not practiced in the quantitative methods mostly due to time and financial demandigness.

The study focuses on studying the influence of language on the perceived service quality in the context of European countries and languages with emphasizes on the Finnish and Czech language. Due to the study being conducted in two countries, ten interviews with customers were conducted with five respondents of Finnish nationality and five of Czech nationality. The main reason for conducting interviews with customers was to gain a pre-understanding on the topic prior to the quantitative study and subsequently search for similarities and differences with non-European research. Hypotheses were suggested after the pilot study findings analysis.

Interviews with Czech informants were conducted during June and July, 2010 in Brno, Czech Republic since it was the most convenient location for informants. Five face-to-face interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes each. Similarly, five interviews with Finns were conducted with roughly same length. These interviews took a place in September and October/2010 in two Finnish cities – Helsinki and Kauhava.
Multiple approaches may be taken in regard to case selection. For instance, Patton (2006:243-4) differs among sixteen different approaches within two categories – random probability and purposeful sampling. In qualitative interviews the number of informants is rather small with the study focus being to gain in-depth insight to a problem. Thus, as Eisenhardt (1989:536) points out, cases selection is crucial important for building theory. In this study the purposeful sampling was applied leaving on the researcher to select the cases for own research purposes. Informants were chosen in regard to the purposive sampling, where it is the researcher selecting respondents on the basis of their suitability with the project purpose. As Patton (2002:230) puts it the information-rich cases are to be selected. Thus, within the purposive sampling a criteria selection has been applied. The informants had to fulfill the condition of at least one interaction with a call center prior to interviews.

**Interview guide for customers**

Researcher applied the general interview guide approach when the interview proceeds on the basis of a set of predefined questions, called an interview guide. In this case, researcher may follow interesting path in conversation returning later back to the guide procedure. Thus, informants were asked the same basic questions but the researcher followed interesting patterns emerged returning to the predefined set once side questions were answered. Additionally, apart from the open ended questions, informants were described a short scenario of calling to a concrete call center and subsequently asked to answer a set of questions. The motivation for including this short scenario was for researcher to receive a fair picture of informant’s attitude towards one specific situation.

**Interviews with customer service representatives**

The interviews with CSRs were very important part of this study since these employees, all non-native speakers, interact or interacted with customers – native speakers on the daily basis. In this context, the criteria sampling was applied as well and prior to the interview informants had to have a work experience as CSR in a call center. It was very beneficial to get a topical insight from this angle and the interviews were source of rich information on the non-native speakers’ perception by European customers. Informants were chosen to represent maximum variety of European languages and countries, from Northern to South Europe.
The interviews were conducted during July and August, 2010 in Brno, Czech Republic since it was the most convenient location for informants. Seven face-to-face interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

**Interview guide for customer service representatives**

The interview guide for CSRs contains to a high extent similar questions as the interview guide for customers. Nevertheless, there are some differences too. Firstly, it takes the CSR’s point of view and it is based rather than on scenario on own experiences. In addition, the background questions are extended by the set of enquires concerned with the second language acquisition.

**4.3.2 The questionnaire design**

As noted above, the interviews with customers and CSRs formed the base for determining the elements used in the quantitative part. Therefore, categories indentified by the pilot study analysis were utilized when designing a questionnaire.

Questionnaire has been chosen as the most suitable method for the data gaining since as Saunders et al. (2009:280-282) point out; it enables getting data in a quick manner assuring that all respondents get the same treatment. It includes the set of questions in the concrete order. Questionnaire has a multiple use often being utilized in experiments and case studies. Saunders et al. (2009:282) differ among three types of questionnaires. Self-administered (managed via emails or Internet), postal and delivery collection questionnaires (given to respondents and collected later). The postal questionnaires were not suitable for this study due to them being costly in terms of time and financial resources. Therefore, paper and electronic form distributions were applied. Both methods have their advantages and drawbacks. The paper form is compared to the electronic more time consuming in the terms of distribution but enables better control and choice of respondents. Electronic form makes it possible to collect the data within shorter time horizon but does not (to a great extent) enable controlling the choice of respondents. At first, electronic data distribution was chosen due to feasibility and possibility for more comfortable response collection and consequent analysis. Drawback of the electronic data distribution was relatively low response rate. Thus, finally questionnaires
were partly distributed in the paper form enabling better control of respondents and also higher response rate. Due to the fact that one of the study aims was to explore whether perception of non-native speakers differs between two countries, Czech Republic and Finland, the questionnaire was distributed in two geographically different locations and additionally in two language versions. Since the additional research aim was to determine if the perception of non-native speakers in call centers varies by the age of respondents (Generation Y versus those older than 30 years), it was desirable to get approximately similar amount of answers from both respondent groups.

Scenario experiment was considered as the most suitable choice for the study purpose. Saunders et al. (2009:136) point out that experiments are designed to explore whether there is a link between two variables. In experiments respondents are usually assigned into two groups, experimental and control. Assigning to groups happens on the random basis. In this study, respondents receiving “non-native speaker” version of scenario are members of experimental group whilst those getting “native speaker” version are considered as a control group. Roggeveen et al. (2007:405) used in the similar study the scenario based questionnaire with the own research scale items developed. As they point out scenario based approach enables to control the independent variables and assures that all respondents are given the same treatment. The classical form of questionnaire with questions and answers based on the respondent’s experience did not suit to this study purposes since prior to the quantitative study a comprehensive inquiry would have to be conducted to find only respondents having a prior experience with the non-native speakers in call centers. Additionally, the types of call centers would probably significantly differ making experiences of respondents non-comparable. Therefore, the scenario experiment (SE) when respondent is presented with a story and asked to imagine being the part of it, seems to be the most suitable option. Once scenario was presented, a set of follow up questions was introduced after the incident. The scenario was written in two versions distinguishing only in the aspect of call center employee being and not being the language’s native speaker. Prior to the data collection, a pilot study with the 10 respondents (5 answered the native speaker version and 5 respondents filled the non-native speaker version questionnaire) was conducted in order to determine possible bias. To minimize misunderstanding it was aimed for described scenario to be realistic and easily understandable. The presented scenario (ordering a book and subsequently making complaint in customer service) received a positive feedback during the pilot study with respondents stating that scenario was easy to imagine and represented a type
of situation most of the people have already experienced. The fact that all respondents base their answers on the same text can be seen as the advantage of SE. Nevertheless, the scenario is only imaginary and respondent’s answer does not need to necessarily reflect their actual behavior when it comes to the situation.

### 4.3.3 Source of data

As one of the aims of study was to differ cross-nationally and within age groups (under and above 30 years old), it was desirable that respondents form roughly same sized clusters. 50 questionnaires per version were set up as the minimum response rate (Saunders et al., 2009). Thus, at least 200 questionnaires were desirable. Questionnaire, originally developed in English, was translated into two language mutations. Both versions were reviewed by native speakers to ensure that content is grammatically correct and wording is as similar as possible. Both Finnish and Czech respondents were told that the purpose of thesis is to determine call center function influence on the company’s image.

Czech version link was part of the article posted on the blog which is a part of Czech newspapers Internet webpages www.idnes.cz. This portal, www.idnes.cz, is online version of daily published Czech newspapers MF Dnes. Newspapers offers its readers possibility to publish own blogs under the Idnes.cz patronage. The MF Dnes´s internet server is visited by approximately 3,5 million readers per month and therefore was chosen as a suitable source of data. Link to questionnaire was published on the author’s personal blog accompanied with short article explaining what the call centers are. Article did not reveal the purpose of the research. Overall 35 answered questionnaires (native speaker version) were submitted in this way. This was quite low number considering that article was read by 1500 people. Thus, the rest of the answers were obtained via networking resulting in final 114 valid answers of Czech version (respondents marking Slovak or Other as their mother tongue were omitted from the study).

The Finnish sample answers were obtained in two ways. 45 valid questionnaires were distributed and consequently collected in Kannelmäki library 15.11.2010. The rest of the answers, 67, were obtained via networking. Asking friends and acquaintances to fill and distribute the questionnaires could have influenced the final results. Unfortunately, no
company was interested to participate in questionnaires’ distribution and later benefit from the results.

4.3.4 Research scales design

In order to provide suitable data for answering the thesis aim, the questionnaire needs to be well prepared and thought through. The development of the scale reflecting the questionnaire content is crucial for the analytical part. In this study, respondents marked their opinion on the seven point Likert-type scale (completely disagree – completely agree) with the distances among scale items supposed to be equal. Seven-point scale was chosen because it gives respondent enough variety for expressing opinion, yet it is not too wide like for instance ten-point scales.

As suggested in the theoretical part, service quality perception in the call center context was most often measured by two tools, SERVQUAL and RECOVSTAT. Statements included in the questionnaire reflect categories of SERVQUAL. As noted in chapter 3.3.1. SERVQUAL, SERVQUAL consists of five service dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). Tangibles item was left out because of its irrelevance for the study. Table 2 presents SERVQUAL categories and example statements in the questionnaire.

Table 2. SERVQUAL categories reflected in the questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SERVQUAL</th>
<th>No of items</th>
<th>Example question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RELIABILITY</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>My overall impression from the service is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESPONSIVENESS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am satisfied with the way my complaint was handled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSURANCE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I believe that customer service person did her best to help me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPATHY</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>In my opinion customer service person was polite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since SERVQUAL and RECOVSTAT measurement scale items are partly overlapping, some questionnaire statement may have been recognized also by the RECOVSTAT scale. For instance, statement “I am satisfied with the way my complaint was handled” could correspond to RECOVSTAT’s item “Competence” and “I believe that customer service person did her best to help me” fit into “Empowerment” item. Nevertheless, in this study SERVQUAL reflected more precisely the questionnaire’s items.

The purpose of thesis was to determine whether service provided by non-native speaker is perceived differently compared to the one conducted by native speaker. Therefore, two questionnaire’s version were developed differing in the one detail:

(1) In scenario respondents were supposed to read prior to question’s answering (non-native speaker) was added following sentence “You can clearly hear that she [customer service employee] is not a native speaker of your language because she has a foreign accent”

After reading a short scenario respondents were asked to express their opinion on the seven-item Likert-type scale (1= completely disagree, 7= completely agree). The statements were preliminary divided into following 4 categories. Nevertheless, the factor analysis was used to create summated research scales (Chapter 5.3.3. Factor analysis). Negatively worded questions (no 8, 9, 10, 11 12, 13 and 14) were reversed prior to statistical analysis. Statements marked with (r) are the reverse coded items. Example questionnaires may be found in Appendix 4. (Native speaker version) and 5. (Non-native speaker version).

(1) **Perceived service quality** (4 items)
   
   Statements:
   
   I am satisfied with the way my complaint was handled
   
   The solution customer service person offered was customer-friendly
   
   I will purchase from this company also in the future
   
   My overall impression from the service is good

(2) **Opinion on the CSR’s competence and behavior** (5 items)
   
   Statements:
   
   I think that customer service person was competent
   
   I am satisfied with behavior of customer service person towards me
I wonder why call center employed exactly this person (r)
I felt annoyed by need to repeat my sentences (r)
There was a high probability of misunderstanding during this call (r)

(3) **Opinion on the CSR’s helpfulness and politeness** (3 items)
 Statements:
 In my opinion customer service person was polite
 I believe that customer service person did her best to help me
 I believe that other customer service person would serve me better (r)

(4) **Opinion on the CSR’s trustworthiness** (2 items)
 Statements:
 I wonder why customer service person complained about poor lines when I heard her well (r)
 I think that poor phone connection was just an excuse for her not really understanding me (r)

One statement was not preliminary placed into any category because it did not particularly suit to any cluster. Statement “I think that call center is located outside of country” was intended to test whether customers perceive higher probability of service being allocated abroad when interacting with a non-native speaker.

Finally, after filling the questionnaire, respondents were kindly asked for information regarding their sex, age, education and mother tongue. Since the thesis purpose is comparison between Czechs and Finns, only questionnaires where respondent marked Czech, Finnish or Swedish as a mother tongue were included.
5 Empirical study

In this section the study’s results are presented. Firstly, the pilot study is analyzed, compared and contrasted to already existing topical research. Hypotheses derived from pilot study findings are introduced. Chapter continues with the descriptive statistics and factor analysis. Finally, hypotheses’ testing is discussed.

5.1 Pilot study findings

In this section findings from conducted interviews are presented. Consequently, the set of hypotheses derived from the pilot study is introduced.

The gained data was analyzed with the respect to the theoretical framework presented. The ultimate purpose of the pilot study was to search for similarities and differences with the existing Anglo-Saxon literature. Results, sorted into three categories are presented in tables below. Even though many interesting patterns could be followed based on the pilot study, the forthcoming hypotheses were narrowed to reflect study’s aim.

5.1.1 Findings on the offshoring awareness

Interview guide included three questions whose purpose was to get knowledge on the offshoring awareness and perception.

(1) In case that employee is a non-native speaker would you have concerns on service being located outside of the country?

(2) In case that employee is a non-native speaker would you have concerns on theft or misuse of your personal data?

(3) In case that employee is a non-native speaker would you have concerns on reliability and trustworthiness of the company?

Table 3 presents questions asked together with summary of findings contrasted and compared to the literature evidence. The last column, “comments” further explains the findings gained.
Following data serves as base for understanding the level of offshoring awareness among customers. From findings it can be concluded that awareness towards offshoring varies by the age with younger informants possessing higher level of offshoring consciousness.

The purpose of including the question related to reliability and trustworthiness of the company was to find out how strongly customers connect employee with a company s/he works in. The link did not seem to be very strong; instead informants expressed concerns on the CSR’s trustworthiness in case of insufficient language capacities. Based on the findings following hypothesis are proposed:

H1: Interacting with non-native speaker customers more likely suppose that call center is located outside of country

H2: Customers perceive non-native customer service representative as less trustworthy compared to native speaker
Table 3. Findings on the offshoring awareness and perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Literature evidence</th>
<th>Pilot study findings</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service allocation</td>
<td>In case that employee is non-native speaker would you have concerns on service being located outside of the country?</td>
<td>If customers are aware of service being located abroad they become more critical towards the interaction outcome (Sharma et al., 2009; Wang et al, 2009).</td>
<td>5 informants have expressed these thoughts; 5 informants did not connect the non-native speakers with the service being allocated abroad. Interestingly, 4 of these 5 informants were over 30 years old.</td>
<td>This finding may indicate lower offshoring awareness among European customers in comparison to U.S. customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft or misuse of personal data</td>
<td>In case that employee is non-native speaker would you have concerns on theft or misuse of your personal data?</td>
<td>Nationalistic tendencies may grow into doubts about CSR’s moral qualities (Sonntag, 2009)</td>
<td>No informant has agreed with this statement. This fact is also supported by CSRs stating that customers have never expressed these concerns.</td>
<td>This finding may suggest that Europeans posses higher level of trust towards companies compared to U.S. customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability and trustworthiness of the company</td>
<td>In case that employee is non-native speaker would you have concerns on reliability and trustworthiness of the company?</td>
<td>Risks of outsourcing are among others descending company’s image and consequently reduced brand loyalty (Sharma et al. 2009)</td>
<td>No informant has agreed with this statement. This fact is also supported by CSRs stating that customers have never expressed these concerns. Nevertheless, 4 informants stated that they would possibly have doubts of CSR’s trustworthiness in case of him/her having insufficient language knowledge</td>
<td>Based on the pilot study informants do not seem to directly link CSR to a firm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.2 Findings on the perception of non-native speakers

Three questions whose purpose was to gain understanding on the perception of non-native speakers were integrated into the interview guide.

(1) On the basis of what it can be recognized that employee is a non-native speaker?
(2) In your opinion why do companies employ foreigners in call centers?
(3) In your opinion, do foreigners provide worse service because of them being non-native speakers?

Table 4 presents questions asked together with findings summary contrasted and compared to the literature evidence. In two cases pilot study findings directly supports the literature evidence. Analysis confirmed that native speakers can indeed recognize non-native speech within couple of sentences. The recognition is somehow intuitive since informants had troubles to express which factors make speech sounded as non-native. Similar to previous findings, informants considered labor costs to be the most important reason for employing non-native speakers in call centers. Even though informants did not directly support the statement that service provided by non-native speakers is of poorer quality, they indirectly expressed it by adding the condition of very good language capacity of CSR.

Therefore, based on the pilot data analysis, following hypotheses are suggested:

H3: Customers perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-native customer service representative

H4: Non-native customer service representative is perceived as less competent
Table 4. Findings on the perception of non-native speakers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Literature evidence</th>
<th>Pilot study findings</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-native speakers recognition</td>
<td>On the basis of what it can be recognized that employee is a non-native speaker</td>
<td>It has been proved that native speakers can recognize foreign accent from the very short speech samples (Magen, 1998)</td>
<td>All informants declared that they can recognize non-native speaker based on the way s/he speaks.</td>
<td>Based on the scenario experiment, informant were not exposed to the audio sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion on employing non-native speakers</td>
<td>In your opinion why do companies employ foreigners in call centers?</td>
<td>The main reason for relocating customer services are mostly lower labor cost (Stringfellow et al., 2007)</td>
<td>Eight informants and all interviewed CSRs stated the lower financial costs as the main argument for employing non-native speakers. Older informants hesitated longer time before giving the answer. 4 of them stated that they are not aware of the fact that non-native speakers can work in call centers.</td>
<td>Two informants stated competence as the main reason for employing non-natives in call centers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion on the service difference provided by native and non-native speakers</td>
<td>In your opinion, do foreigners provide worse service because of them being non-native speakers?</td>
<td>Research indicates that customers tend to be less satisfied when interacting with offshored call centers and consequently with non-native speakers (Sharma et al., 2009)</td>
<td>Six informants and all CSRs disagreed with this statement. Four informants admitted that it may be the case if language capacities are insufficient.</td>
<td>Even though if informants did not agree with this statement, seven of them have consequently emphasized very good language capacity as a necessary prerequisite.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.3 Findings on the communication related factors

Questions related to presented scenario were written in forms of statements. Informants were asked to express the degree of agreement on the scale 1-7 (1= completely disagree, 7= completely agree). Questions were formulated so that they reflect the findings introduced in the theoretical framework. Same questions were used for both groups, customers and CSRs, nevertheless the wording was slightly changed depending on the group informant belonged to. The purpose of including above mentioned set of statement was gaining deeper understanding of the non-native speech perception by native speakers.

Table 5 summarizes key findings divided by two groups, customers and CSRs. Based on the analysis, the accent seems to be noticed at first when interacting with non-native speakers. In accordance with research findings, customers seem to accept a variation within service having so called zone of tolerance (Parasuraman et al., 1988:12). Therefore, for many informants accented speech started to be perceived negatively once it was hard to understand and thus, behind the zone of tolerance scope. The key factor for successful service interaction is CSR’s language capacity, since the need for reformulating and simplifying speech is perceived negatively by customers. On the other hand, repeating of sentences seems to be considered positively in the certain contexts (concluding, clarifying). Nevertheless, both customers and CSRs agreed on the fact that communication with native speaker is smoother and includes less risk for potential misunderstanding. Based on these results following hypothesis is suggested:

H5: Customers perceive higher probability of misunderstanding when interacting with non-native speakers
Table 5. Findings on the communication related factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Customers</th>
<th>CSRs</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I try to repeat my requirements also in other words so that I can be sure that CS person understands me</td>
<td>9 informants stated that they repeat requirements in case that they think CSR does not follow</td>
<td>6 CSRs experienced this behavior from the clients. However, CSRs find this fact as very useful stating that they have themselves the habit of repeating what was agreed in order to prevent misunderstanding.</td>
<td>Contrary to correcting, repeating and rephrasing seems to be perceived positively by both customers and CSRs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that the probability of a misunderstanding is higher than when interacting with native speaker</td>
<td>Almost all informants (9) agreed with this statement reasoning that only native speaker can understand language nuances.</td>
<td>Similarly, 7 CSRs agreed with this proclamation basing it on the same ground as the other group (customers).</td>
<td>Both customers and CSRs are of same opinion that interacting with native speaker involves less possibility for misunderstanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to prevent misunderstanding by careful articulation of my problem</td>
<td>8 informants stated that they would start reformulating own problem only in case they think CSR does not understand</td>
<td>7 CSRs have experienced that customers changed wording and speech pace even though CSR understood the speech.</td>
<td>Apparently, it is not easy to recognize when the misunderstanding is caused by insufficient knowledge and when by the fact the CSR simply just did not hear a sentence. According to CSRs customers have a tendency to underestimate them. This fact can be, however, influenced by lack of experience with non-native speakers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, customers were asked to sort following non-native speech factors according to order in which they find them noticeable. The number in parenthesis refers to the average final rank. The accent together with the improper wording is the factor which native speakers seem to notice at first. The wrong syntax and limited vocabulary follows. The rhythm of speech is the least noticeable factor which supports also literature findings on the page 26 (if person speaks grammatically correctly and her/his speech is otherwise understandable, listeners are not very sensitive to voicing differences (Magen, 1998: 381)).

Question: If you speak with non-native speaker which of following factors do you consider as the most noticeable? Please, evaluate from the most to the least noticeable.

- Accent (1)
- Limited vocabulary (4)
- Syntax (does not create sentences correctly) (3)
- Different speech rhythm (5)
- Using the words in a wrong context, e.g. non existing comparisons or sayings (2)

### 5.1.4 Findings on the role of respondents’ age

Since the purpose of the study was to examine whether non-native speakers’ perception varies by age, the pilot study data was analyzed in this regard. As seen in the pilot study findings, older informants seem to have lower awareness of offshoring. Additionally, awareness towards presence of non-native speakers in call centers tends to be lesser in comparison with Generation Y members. According to pilot study older people seem to be treating non-native speakers in a different manner, supposing lower level of understanding. Therefore, these customers tend to repeat and rephrase sentences more compared to younger informants. When interviewing, older informants mostly hesitated prior to answering and expressed higher unfamiliarity with behavior towards non-native speakers (different treatment of non-native speakers by repeating, rephrasing and simplifying own demands). On the other hand, Generation Y members were more used to both speaking foreign languages and interacting with non-native speakers (although not in call centers). Due to lower familiarity with talking to non-native speakers may, as a consequence, older people feel more threatened by non-native speakers and consequently perceive service more negatively.
Therefore, following hypothesis was suggested:

H6: Older people (over 30) perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-native speakers in call centers compared to Generation Y members

5.2 Hypotheses

Based on the pilot study analysis, six hypotheses were suggested. H1 and H2 were formed based on the findings related to offshoring awareness and call center allocation abroad and company’s perceived trustworthiness respectively. H3 is directly connected to the thesis aim; exploring the influence of non-native speech on the perceived quality. H4 and H5 support H3 trying to further explain the role of accent (H5) in the interaction and non-native speakers perception (H4). H6 concerns the role of age in the non-native speakers’ perception. Nevertheless, for the statistical purposes, hypotheses were reversed into null hypotheses, supposing that there is no difference among variables. Null hypothesis are presented in the section related to hypotheses testing (Chapter 5.3.1. Hypotheses testing).

H1: Interacting with non-native speaker, customers are more likely to suppose that call center is located outside of country
H2: Customers perceive non-native customer service representative as less trustworthy compared to native speaker
H3: Customers perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-native customer service representative
H4: Non-native customer service representative is perceived as less competent
H5: Customers perceive higher probability of misunderstanding when interacting with non-native speakers
H6: Older people (over 30) perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-native speakers in call centers compared to Generation Y members
5.3 Descriptive statistics

In this section the study results are presented. Firstly, the sample is described followed by basic assumptions regarding the data distribution. Factor analysis was used to create summed scales and their reliability was consequently tested. The variables’ correlation between scale items follow. Hypotheses were tested by techniques for exploring relationships among variables, by MANOVA and T-test. When possible, same methods were used while comparing values cross-nationally or alternatively, Mann Whitney U-Test was conducted as the non-parametric test option.

5.3.1 Sample information

In total 241 questionnaires were submitted. Nevertheless, respondents marking “Slovakian” or “Other” as their mother tongue were excluded due to thesis purpose being narrowed to comparison between Finns and Czechs. Thus, after exclusion of 15 questionnaires, the sample consisted of 226 respondents.

Table 6. Sample overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Excluded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native speaker</td>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-native speaker</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample consisted of 91 (40, 3 %) males, females respondents formed up larger part of sample, filling 135 (59, 7 %) questionnaires.

Table 7. Sample overview (Sex)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>40, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>59, 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, respondents were asked to fill information about their age. Since the study purpose was to determine the influence of age on the quality perception, originally 5 categories were grouped into 2 prior to analysis. Group 1 consisted of respondents falling into age categories “Under 18 years” and “18-30 years”, group no. 2 was formed by people being “31-45 years”, “45-59 years” and “Over 60 years”. In this respect, group 1 formed 54.9% and group 2 then 45.1% of the sample. Basic characteristics of sample are drawn in the figure 3 below.

Respondents submitted information concerning the highest education they have reached. In this case, the sample consisted predominantly of people obtaining university/polytechnic degree (54%).

Figure 3. Sample overview (Age)

![Age of respondents](image)

Figure 4. Sample overview (Education)

![Education](image)
Final question determined whether respondents were included into the sample or not. Respondents marking “Slovak” or “Other” as their mother tongue were excluded from the study. Thus, in total 7 respondents marking “Slovak” and 8 marking “Other” were omitted.

Table 8. Sample overview (Native language)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native language</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to questions answering, respondents were briefly explained the nature of research and its purpose (master thesis). After reading a short scenario, respondents answered a set of questions directly related to the text. Firstly, they were asked to evaluate the company performance and satisfaction with the complaint handling. In this respect, non-native speaker CSR received slightly higher (more positive) scores than native speaker CSR. Items Stat1-satisfaction with complaint handling, Stat2 - solution was customer-friendly, Stat3 - likeliness of future purchase, Stat 15 - overall good service impression were intended to measure perceived service quality. Interestingly, non-native speaker scored higher in all items. Next, respondents were asked to express their opinion about CSR’s competence and behavior. Even though non-native speaker was perceived as less competent, she has received higher evaluation in politeness and helpfulness (e.g. Stat4 - satisfaction with CSR’s behavior, perception of CSR’s competence - Stat5, CSR did her best to help me - Stat7).

Additionally, non-native speaker was perceived as somehow less trustworthy (Stat12 - complaining about poor connection, Stat13 - poor connection as excuse) and customers perceived slightly higher risk of misunderstanding when interacting with non-native speaker. The means for selected statements are presented below in the table 9. For the purposes of statistical analysis, statements were coded as “Stat”. Stat’s number corresponds to the number statement was assigned in the questionnaire. In the descriptive statistics section the mark “Stat” was used accompanied with the short abbreviation of the statement.
Table 9. Means of selected items (items not reversed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Native speaker</th>
<th>Non-native speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the way my complaint was handled (Stat1)</td>
<td>3,23</td>
<td>3,66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with behavior of customer service person towards me (Stat4)</td>
<td>4,42</td>
<td>4,33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that customer service person was competent (Stat5)</td>
<td>4,42</td>
<td>3,97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that customer service person did her best to help me (Stat7)</td>
<td>4,81</td>
<td>5,34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was a high probability of misunderstanding during this call (Stat11)</td>
<td>4,48</td>
<td>4,82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My overall impression from the service is good (Stat15)</td>
<td>3,32</td>
<td>3,40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that poor phone connection was just an excuse for her not really understanding me (Stat13)</td>
<td>3,76</td>
<td>4,55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.2 Basic assumptions

Prior to the analysis, gained data was examined for not violating the basic assumptions. Firstly, checking for missing data was performed. As Pallant (2005: 52) points out it is hardly the case that complete data would be obtained from all respondents. In this study, the check showed that 11 values were, indeed, missing. Nevertheless, the number did not exceed three responses per item and mostly one answer per question was reported. Table 10 lists the missing answers per item. However, since the sample was rather large (N=217), the amount of data missing did not threaten the analysis course. Participants with missing responses were not excluded from the analyses.
Next, the normality of the data was assessed. This process was done in order to test basic assumptions requested by method used for hypotheses` testing. Normality of the data may be assessed by multiple ways. In this study it was screened by skewness and kurtosis scores which are described below. Additionally, the PASW analysis was run (By using “Explore” option). For data to be considered as normal, the Kolmogorov – Smirnov statistics should be non-significant (over .05). In this study all items showed the significance of .00 which is considered as normality assumption violation (Pallant, 2005:57). However, as Pallant (2005:57) notes this is fairly common in larger samples. Skewness and kurtosis were checked next. Skewness shows how symmetrical is the distribution whilst kurtosis provides information about the data “peakness” (Pallant, 2005:51-52). In the ideal case both values would be 0 but as Pallant (2005:52) points out this is rather unusual in social sciences. Out of 15 items checked for skewness, 8 items scored positive values and 7 items reached negative skewness. These values indicate whether the mean deviations for items are going to be positive or negative. Regarding kurtosis, all items were assigned negative values suggesting the flat distribution. According to Pallant (2005:52) this fact indicates that many cases fall into extreme values. Nevertheless, with larger samples (N≥200) skewness and kurtosis values are not of high difference (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2000 in Pallant, 2005:52). Therefore, it may be supposed that even though data is not distributed normally, it is not an obstacle for this study. Additionally, data normality and suitability for the particular method was screened prior to concrete analysis (MANOVA and T-test).
Since some of the statistical techniques are sensitive towards outliers, the test was run in order to determine possible outliers. Data scores which significantly differ from others are labeled as outliers (Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2010). Analysis was performed for all items. Items were checked for significant difference between “5% trimmed mean” and “mean”. As Pallant (2006:62) notes if these two values vary noticeably, data needs to be reexamined prior to the next procedures. Since the items were measured on the scale 1-7, extreme values (respondents completely disagreeing (1) or agreeing (7)) were detected for every item. Nevertheless, the difference between “mean” and “5% trimmed mean” was not high for any item. For instance, item evaluating service quality (satisfaction with complaint handling, Stat1) had a mean of 3.42 whilst “5% trimmed mean” scored 3.37. On the similar note, item concerned with helpfulness of CSR (opinion on CSR’s politeness, Stat6) had values of 5, 12 and 5, 20 respectively.

5.3.3 Factor analysis

Factor analysis is performed in order to find similarities between set of variables. It helps to identify correlating factors and their shared variances. In this study the factor analysis was conducted in order to determine number of items forming dimensions for data analysis. It was preliminary suggested that four following dimensions help explaining the data variance.

1. **Perceived service quality** (4 items)
2. **Opinion on the CSR’s competence and behavior** (5 items)
3. **Opinion on the CSR’s helpfulness and politeness** (3 items)
4. **Opinion on the CSR’s trustworthiness** (2 items)

Nevertheless, conducting factor analysis was necessary to verify this supposal. Additionally, since some dimension included rather high number of items (i.e. 5 statements in case of Opinion on the CSR’s competence and behavior), the purpose of the analysis was to determine whether smaller number of items may explain the data variance.

At first, data needed to be assessed for the factor analysis suitability. In this regard, Bartlett’s test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, both generated by PASW program, are those determining the appropriateness of factor analysis. For data being considered as suitable, Bartlett’s test of sphericity should be significant (p < 0.05) and Kaiser-
Meyer-Olkin measure ranging from 0 to 1 should reach value of .6 in minimum. (Pallant, 2005:174). In this study Bartlett’s test of sphericity was of $P=.000$ significance and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure reached .810 suggesting the factor analysis appropriateness. Additionally, Pallant (2005:178) advises that items in correlation matrix should reach value of $r=.3$ at least. This condition was fulfilled as well. Highest correlation .638 was between items of Stat6 (opinion on CSR’s politeness) and Stat4 (satisfaction with CSR’s behavior). In total, 15 items were selected for the principal component analysis (PCA). PCA suggested the suitability of 4 items all exceeding Eigenvalue of 1 explaining 62 % of variance. Eigenvalues reached values of 4, 46; 2, 35; 1, 44 and 1, 08. Next, the Varimax rotation was performed in order to enable their interpretation. Consequently, Oblimin rotation was run to determine whether another alternative to the component grouping exists. Oblimin rotation offered fairly same solution as the Varimax. 12 variables in total were divided into 3 components. 3 items (Other CSR would serve me better - Stat8, wonder why the CSR was employed - Stat9 and call center located abroad - Stat14) were deleted due to two reasons – loading in multiple factors and additionally their contribution to variance explanation was relatively low (less than .300). The summated scales as suggested by factor analysis are presented in the table 11.

Table 11. Summated scales from Factor Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component 1</th>
<th>Component 2</th>
<th>Component 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat6 (opinion on CSR’s politeness)</td>
<td>.865</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat4 (satisfaction with CSR’s behavior)</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat5 (perception of CSR’s competence)</td>
<td>.755</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat7 (CSR did her best to help me)</td>
<td>.676</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat10 (need to repeat sentences)</td>
<td>.806</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat12 (complaining about poor connection)</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat13 (poor connection as excuse)</td>
<td>.682</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat11(high probability of misunderstanding)</td>
<td>.625</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat2 (solution was customer-friendly)</td>
<td>.795</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat1 (satisfaction with complaint handling)</td>
<td>.751</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat15 (overall good service impression)</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat3 (likeliness of future purchase)</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The factor analysis suggested to group components slightly differently than it was proposed in previous chapters (Perceived service quality - 4 items, opinion on the CSR’s competence and behavior - 5 items, opinion on the CSR’s helpfulness and politeness - 3 items, opinion on the CSR’s trustworthiness - 2 items). The analysis grouped together 2 items (opinion on CSR’s politeness - Stat6, CSR did her best to help me - Stat7) originally intended to measure helpfulness and 2 items supposed to determine competence (satisfaction with CSR’s behavior - Stat4, perception of CSR’s competence - Stat5). The scale was renamed to Attitude since it included four items forming attitude towards customer (behavior, qualification for the task, politeness and helpfulness). The next cluster contained statements related to competence and ability to handle call. The third component was identical to the originally suggested 4 items for service quality perception measuring; thus, it has confirmed that statements are well-connected and form a solid group. Therefore, scales were reorganized as follows:

(1) **Attitude**
I am satisfied with behavior of customer service person towards me (Stat4)
I think that customer service person was competent (Stat5)
In my opinion customer service person was polite (Stat6)
I believe that customer service person did her best to help me (Stat7)

(2) **Competence**
I felt annoyed by need to repeat my sentences (Stat10)
There was a high probability of misunderstanding during this call (Stat11)
I wonder why customer service person complained about poor lines when I heard her well (Stat12)
I think that poor phone connection was just an excuse for her not really understanding me (Stat13)

(3) **Service quality perception**
I am satisfied with the way my complaint was handled (Stat1)
The solution customer service person offered was customer-friendly (Stat2)
I will purchase from this company also in the future (Stat3)
My overall impression from the service is good (Stat15)
Since 3 items (Other CSR would serve me better - Stat8, wonder why the CSR was employed - Stat9 and call center located abroad - Stat14) did not satisfactory correlated with others (lower values than .300) they were opted from the groups. In the next chapter, reliability of the identified scales is discussed.

### 5.3.4 The scale reliability

Based on the results from Factor analysis items were grouped into clusters. The internal consistency of scales is one of the most important aspects of the study’s reliability (Pallant, 2005:90). In this regard, Cronbach’s Alpha is the most suitable indicator. For scale to be considered as reliable Cronbach’s Alpha should be above .7 (Hair et al., 2010)

Table 12 presents overview of reliability statistics for each scale. All scales reached values above .7. They are considered as internally consistent and therefore, according to Cronbach’s Alpha, reliable. The four items of Attitude have received the highest value of .841. This suggests good internal consistency of items. Nevertheless, values for Competence and Perceived service quality components .737 and .752 respectively suggest a good consistency as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Mean values</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Service Quality</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.5 The correlation between factors ‘components

The factor analysis has identified 3 groups within variables used in the research. Next, the analysis was performed to further determine relationships and correlations between components. The value of Pearson correlation (r), varying between 0 and 1, is important indicator of strength of variables’ relationship (Pallant, 2005:126). Cohen (1998 cited in
Pallant, 2005:126) has suggested following guidelines for evaluating the strength of relationship between variables.

Table 13. Pearson correlation values (reproduced)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Strength (r)</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-0.10 to 0.29</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>0.10 to 0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.3 to 0.49</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>0.3 to 0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.50 to -1.0</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>0.50 to 1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Firstly, the analysis was conducted for the factors of Attitude (satisfaction with CSR’s behavior - Stat4, perception of CSR’s competence - Stat5, opinion on CSR’s politeness - Stat6, CSR did her best to help me - Stat7) and Service quality perception (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15). The test showed positive small and medium correlation among in cross tests. Therefore, high scores for one item associate high scores for the other item (Pallant, 2005:126). In this cluster, all values are significant (marked in bold font) suggesting that the items are suitably grouped. This implies that items of these two clusters are positively related, thus, the positive value for variable in one cluster suggests that as a consequence also variables in the second cluster are positive. Additionally, the relationships between all items in two clusters are significant, thus their relationship may be considered as rather strong.

Table 14. Correlations between Attitude and Service quality perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stat1</th>
<th>Stat2</th>
<th>Stat3</th>
<th>Stat15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat4 Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.409**</td>
<td>0.212**</td>
<td>0.299**</td>
<td>0.426**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>**000</td>
<td>**002</td>
<td>**000</td>
<td>**000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat5 Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.436**</td>
<td>0.231**</td>
<td>0.206**</td>
<td>0.398**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>**000</td>
<td>**001</td>
<td>**002</td>
<td>**000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat6 Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.313**</td>
<td>0.203**</td>
<td>0.185**</td>
<td>0.334**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>**000</td>
<td>**003</td>
<td>**006</td>
<td>**000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat7 Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>0.355**</td>
<td>0.276**</td>
<td>0.315**</td>
<td>0.399**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>**000</td>
<td>**000</td>
<td>**000</td>
<td>**000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Next, the correlation between Competence (need to repeat sentences - Stat10, high probability of misunderstanding - Stat11, complaining about poor connection - Stat12, poor connection as excuse - Stat13) and Attitude (satisfaction with CSR’s behavior - Stat4, perception of CSR’s competence - Stat5, opinion on CSR’s politeness - Stat6, CSR did her best to help me - Stat7) was examined. In case of these set of variables the strength of correlation was small or medium. Nevertheless, with the one exception (Stat6 and Stat11) negative correlations may be seen from the table 15. Negative correlations refers to the case when high scores of one variable associates with low scores of the other (Pallant, 2005:126). This implies that items do not measure the same aspect. As for instance high values on satisfaction with CSR’s behavior (Stat4) shows that this item is not positively connected to CSR complaining about poor phone connection (Stat13).

**Table 15. Correlations between Attitude and Competence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.228**</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>-.335**</td>
<td>-.267**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.125</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>-.298**</td>
<td>-.212**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.247</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>-.302**</td>
<td>-.184**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.644</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.224**</td>
<td>-.127</td>
<td>-.321**</td>
<td>-.235**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Finally, the correlation scores between Service quality perception (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15) and Competence (need to repeat sentences - Stat10, high probability of misunderstanding - Stat11, complaining about poor connection - Stat12, poor connection as excuse - Stat13) are presented. In case of all variables correlation reached negative values, thus variables correlate negatively (high scores for one variable imply low scores for the other one and vice versa). Similarly to table 15, also these values point out on
the negative relationship among variables in two categories. High values for Stat13 (poor connection as excuse) correlate negatively with the items of Service quality perception (likeliness of future purchase - Stat3 and overall good service impression - Stat15). To conclude, the fact that CSR complains about the poor quality of phone connection indicates low values for service quality satisfaction. The output of the correlation analysis is presented in the table 16.

Table 16. Correlations between Competence and Service quality perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stat1</th>
<th>Stat2</th>
<th>Stat3</th>
<th>Stat15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.117</td>
<td>-.035</td>
<td>-.299**</td>
<td>-.205**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.610</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.174*</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>-.123</td>
<td>-.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.114</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>-181**</td>
<td>-198**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>-.140*</td>
<td>-.144*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.246</td>
<td>.730</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.034</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The most significantly correlating items may be found between the groups of Attitude and Service quality perception where all correlations are significant at the 0.01. On the other hand, Competence and Service quality perception correlate rather negatively and also Pearson correlation is small (-0.10 to -0.29).

5.3.1 The hypotheses testing

In this study MANOVA was used to determine whether significant differences in service perception between native and non-native speaker exist. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is performed in order to find differences among groups. As an extension of ANOVA it is being used in case of more than one dependent variable. These variables should have similar characteristics, especially variance (homogeneity of variance within groups) since they are grouped together for the purpose of analysis. The argument for using
MANOVA instead of a few separate analyses is limitation of Type 1 error – considering difference among group as significant even though it is not and consequently rejecting null hypothesis. (Pallant, 2005:246).

As Hair et al. (2010:439) point out MANOVA is suitable for assessing group differences across multiple dependent variables simultaneously. In this study MANOVA was used for hypotheses testing as well as for assessing differences in cross-national comparison in case of more variables involved. Additionally, T-test was conducted in case of single dependent variable. Hair et al. (2010:442) define T-test as a “test to assess the statistical significance of the difference between two sample means for a single dependent variable.” When comparing only two means, T-test for independent samples and ANOVA gives identical results (www.experiment-resources.com). Thus, T-test was performed when possible.

It was suggested that when “interacting with non-native speaker, customers are more likely to suppose that call center is located outside of country” (H1). This hypothesis has been tested by T-test, because it enables to examine means of two different groups (Pallant, 2005:205). T-test was performed in order to determine whether difference in means between native and non-native speaker perception reach significant level. The values for the item Stat14 (I think that call center is located outside of the country) were examined. The item was reversed prior to analysis. In order to avoid type 1 error (considering difference among group as a significant even though it is not and consequently rejecting null hypothesis), the null hypothesis was tested at first, thus, it was primary supposed that there were no differences between groups. The Levene’s test confirmed that equal variances are assumed. There was a significant difference (p<.05) between perception of service allocation for native and non-native speaker (p=0.009). The T-test suggested rejecting null hypothesis (for both native and non-native speaker customers equally suppose that service is located abroad). Therefore, when interacting with non-native speaker customers more likely supposed that call center is located outside of the country.

Table 17. Hypothesis 1 testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, the testing of trustworthiness perception level for native and non-native speaker was conducted. H2 was proposed as follows: Customers perceive non-native customer service representative as less trustworthy compared to native speaker. Nevertheless, the null H2 was tested (Customers perceive non-native customer service representative on the same level of trustworthiness compared to native speaker). Hypothesis was tested by T-test measuring the differences in means for the reversed item Stat13 “I think that poor phone connection was just an excuse for the not really understanding me”. The Levene’s test confirmed that equal variances are assumed. There was a significant difference (p<.05) between perception of native and non-native speaker’s trustworthiness (p=0.003). According to the means, native speaker was considered as more trustworthy. People were more likely to trust native speaker that she does not hear what they say whilst when interacting with non-native speaker customers predominantly supposed that she does not understand them but at the same time does not admit it loudly. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and H2 was supported.

### Table 18. Hypothesis 2 testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stat13</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was proposed that customers perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-native customer service representative (H3). For the purpose of analysis null hypothesis was suggested “customers do not perceive different service quality when interacting with non-native customer service representative”. Therefore, the influence of service quality perception cluster (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15) on the native or non-native speaker version was examined. Hypothesis was tested with MANOVA. The Box’s Test (.614) showed that data did not violate the assumption of homogeneity. Similarly, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances indicated that assumption of equality was not violated. According to Wilks’ Lambda (.434) there was no significant difference in the service quality perception of encounter provided by native or non-native speaker. Tests of between
subjects’ effects confirmed non-significant values for items. Therefore, the null hypothesis has not been rejected. The summary of the results can be seen in the table 19.

Table 19. Hypothesis 3 testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stat1</th>
<th>Stat2</th>
<th>Stat3</th>
<th>Stat15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean value</td>
<td>F value</td>
<td>P value</td>
<td>Mean value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat1</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>3,600</td>
<td>2,85</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>3,243</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat2</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>3,457</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>3,369</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has been proposed that non-native customer service representative is perceived as less competent compared to native speaker (H4). For the purpose of analysis, null hypothesis supposing that there are no differences in perceived competence was tested. The questionnaire included the item designed for measuring the perceived level of competence – Stat5 “I think that customer service person was competent”. The Levene’s test confirmed that equal variances are assumed. There was a significant difference (p<.05) between perception of native and non-native speaker’s competence (p=0.039). According to the means, native speaker was considered as more competent. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 20. Hypothesis 4 testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stat5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat5</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(Customers do not perceive higher probability of misunderstanding when interacting with non-native speakers) was suggested. T-test compared means for item Stat11 “There was a high probability of misunderstanding during this call.” The Levene’s test confirmed that equal variances are assumed. There was no significant difference (p<.05) between perception of probability of misunderstanding when interacting with native and non-native speaker (p=0.127). Based on this, null hypothesis was retained.

Table 21. Hypothesis 5 testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat11 Non-Native</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One hypothesis regarding the influence of age on the perceived service quality when interacting with native or non-native speaker was proposed. H6: Older people (over 30) perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-native speakers in call centers compared to Generation Y members. In the analysis, null hypothesis was tested (Older people (over 30) do not perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-native speakers in call centers compared to Generation Y members). For purpose of this testing, the variable of age was recoded so that respondents younger than 30 years (categories under 18 and 18-30 years old) formed group 1 and the rest of respondents (31-45, 46-59 and over 60 years) group no. 2. MANOVA was performed with Service quality perception variables (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15) and their dependence on factors of Age and Native (native or non-native speaker version). The Box’s Test (.270) showed that data did not violate the assumption of homogeneity. In addition, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances indicated that assumption of equality was not violated. Wilks’ Lambda for Native and Age combined was .784. Combined test of Native and Age showed that the differences were non-significant in all cases. Thus, the null H6 was not rejected. The results are presented in table 22.
### Table 22. Hypothesis 6 testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat1</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>3,517</td>
<td>.475</td>
<td>.491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,711</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>3,237</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,250</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat2</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>.181</td>
<td>.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,378</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>2,712</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat3</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>2,517</td>
<td>.212</td>
<td>.645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,178</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>2,390</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,135</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat15</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>3,433</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,489</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native</td>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>3,203</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>3,558</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5.3.2 Cross-national comparison

One of the aims of this study was to compare the service quality perception in one concrete situation between two nations. For this purposes, Czechs formed group 1 while those marking Finnish and Swedish as their mother tongue were grouped into cluster called Finns. MANOVA was performed to determine the influence of nationality on the service quality perception (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15). The Box’s Test (.008) proved that data did not violate the assumption of homogeneity. Similarly, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances indicated that assumption of equality was not violated. Wilks’ Lambda reached .000. The test showed that there is a significant difference of
the service quality perception for 3 out of 4 items. The only item being of non-significant values was Stat2 (the solution customer service person offered was customer-friendly). MANOVA pointed out on the significant differences in service quality perception between nations. The results are presented in table 23.

Table 23. Cross-national comparison in service quality perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Mean value</th>
<th>F value</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat1</td>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>9,957</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>3,748</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat2</td>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>3,055</td>
<td>.661</td>
<td>.417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>2,888</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat3</td>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>2,284</td>
<td>23,339</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>3,262</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat15</td>
<td>Czechs</td>
<td>3,174</td>
<td>5,099</td>
<td>.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finns</td>
<td>3,654</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, nationalities were compared in the regard of their opinion of CSR’s attitude (satisfaction with CSR’s behavior - Stat4, perception of CSR’s competence - Stat5, opinion on CSR’s politeness - Stat6, CSR did her best to help me - Stat7). MANOVA was run to find whether there is a significant difference in perception of CSR’s attitude. The Box’s Test (.000) suggested that data violate the assumption of homogeneity. In addition, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances indicated that assumption of equality was not violated for items Stat4, Stat5, Stat6 but value of item Stat7 was .007 (assumption of equality is violated when a value is below .05). Thus, items were tested by non-parametric test because it does not have strict requirements about the data distribution (Pallant, 2005:286).

Mann-Whitney U Test was run in order to test whether there is a significant difference between nations. Mann-Whitney U Test’s output displays the null hypothesis; significance level and result of the test (retain or reject hypothesis). The test’s output is presented below. As seen from the table 24 the significant variance was found only in case of one item, Stat7 (CSR did her best to help me). All other items retained null hypothesis.
Table 24. Cross-national comparison for opinion about CSR’s attitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Null Hypothesis</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat4</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs perceive the same level of satisfaction with CSR’s behavior</td>
<td>.340</td>
<td>supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat5</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs perceive the same level of CSR’s competence</td>
<td>.961</td>
<td>supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat6</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs perceive the same level of CSR’s politeness</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat7</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs CSR believe that CSR did her best to help them</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Item Stat7 was proposed as follows: I believe that customer service person did her best to help me. Comparing the means, it can be deducted that difference is noticeable. Finns considered CSR as helpful while Czechs believed she could have done more in order to provide higher service quality (Means were 5.47 for Finns and 4.69 for Czechs).

Finally, nationalities were compared in the regards of their opinion of CSR’s competence (need to repeat sentences - Stat10, high probability of misunderstanding - Stat11, complaining about poor connection - Stat12, poor connection as excuse - Stat13). MANOVA was run to find whether there is a significant difference in perception of CSR’s attitude. The Box’s Test (.000) indicated that data violate the assumption of homogeneity. Similarly, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances indicated that assumption of equality was not violated for items Stat10, Stat12 and Stat13 but value of item Stat11 was .001 (assumption of equality is violated when value is below .05). Thus, Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine if differences in items are significant. Test showed that difference between nations in items Stat10 and Stat13 were significant.
Table 25. Cross-national comparison for opinion about CSR’s competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Null Hypothesis</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stat10</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs perceived the need for repeating sentences as equally annoying</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat11</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs perceived equally high probability of misunderstanding</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td>supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat12</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs equally wondered why CSR complained about poor connection</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stat13</td>
<td>Finns and Czechs equally perceived poor connection as an excuse for not understanding</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the means for items Stat10 (I felt annoyed by need to repeat my sentences) and Stat13 (I think that poor phone connection was just an excuse for her not really understanding me) revealed that Czechs perceived as very annoying that they had to repeat sentences (means 5.01 and 4.23 for Czechs and Finns respectively). Additionally, Czechs were more likely to believe that the true reason for need to repeat a sentence was that CSR did not understand and not the poor phone connection as she stated (means 4.61 and 3.67 for Czechs and Finns respectively).

In this section descriptive statistics together with data analysis was presented. In Table 26 the testing for hypotheses is summarized. The data served as the basis for comparison between two nations, Czechs and Finns. The comprehensive discussion of results is to be found in the next chapter.
Table 26. Hypotheses testing summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1 Interacting with non-native speaker, customers are more likely to</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suppose that call center is located outside of country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2 Customers perceive non-native customer service representative as less</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustworthy compared to native speaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3 Customers perceive lower service quality when interacting with non-</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>native customer service representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4 Non-native customer service representative is perceived as less</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5 Customers perceive higher probability of misunderstanding when</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interacting with non-native speakers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6 Older people (over 30) perceive lower service quality when interacting</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with non-native speakers in call centers compared to Generation Y members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Discussion

In this chapter the core findings from empirical part are discussed. Consequently, conclusion summarizes the most important aspects of the thesis. Additionally, the theoretical and managerial implications follow together with recommendations for further research and limitations of this study.

6.1 Native and non-native speaker perception

Numerous studies point out at the increasing customer dissatisfaction with offshored call centers originating from the communication deficiencies (Compass, 2007; Sharma et al., 2009). Research indicates that customers tend to be less satisfied when interacting with offshored call centers and consequently with non-native speakers (Sharma et al., 2009). As confirmed by the statistical analysis, native and non-native speaker are perceived differently in the same situation. Even though it was supposed that service provided by non-native speaker is perceived more negatively compared to the one conducted by native speaker, data confirmed opposite. Questionnaire included 4 items concerned with service quality perception (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15). Comparing means for all items, non-native speaker received more positive evaluation compared to the native. Nevertheless, difference was not significant for any item. Wang et al. (2009:940) note that customer satisfaction is strongly influenced by the service outcome. Looking for overall scores for perceived service quality, it can be noted that customers were in common not satisfied with this service. All 4 items received relatively low evaluation ranging from 2, 73 to 3, 60. In this scenario, even though CSR solved customer´s problem, she advised the solution bringing extra work to customer (writing an explanation of why book is returned). Thus, in this regard, the study’s finding (relatively low perceived service quality) is in accordance with Wang et al. conclusion.

Theoretical part mentioned two types of qualities customers perceive. To recall, the technical quality is the process outcome, what customers receive as the result of service. Functional quality encompasses the service course, so how customers receive the service. As Grönroos
(2007:74) notes to reach high customer satisfaction both functional and technical qualities should be excellent meaning that customer receives a great service in a great way. In this scenario the service quality was considered as rather low by respondents (4 items measuring service quality perception received relatively low evaluation varying from 2.73 to 3.60). These 4 items (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15) measured predominantly technical quality, the level of service itself. On the other hand, components concerned with functional quality, the way how service was delivered (such as, satisfaction with the CSR - her politeness and helpfulness) scored higher values (means ranging from 4.2 to 5.3), therefore, functional quality of service was perceived as higher compared to the technical one.

Since the scenarios were identical, the finding of higher perceived service quality in the service conducted by non-native speaker may indicate that customers may possess higher expectations towards service provided by a native speaker. As Barker and Härtel (2004:5) point out customers have lower expectations towards the quality of service provided by CSR with different cultural and ethnic background. This assumption is supported by means CSR’s scores for following items. When stating “I believe that customer service person did her best to help me”, non-native CSR was awarded higher scores (5.36 compared to 3.57 for native speaker” but when respondents were asked next to evaluate statement “I believe that other customer service person would serve me better” they were predominantly of opinion that other than this non-native CSR would help them more (3.57 versus 3.39 for native speaker). Thus, it can be suggested that the provided service may be perceived as sufficient when conducted by non-native speaker but expectations towards service provided by native speaker are to some extent higher and thus, customers were not satisfied with this concrete service encounter. Nevertheless, in the terms of service quality perception, the differences in means were rather small and not statistically significant. Thus, no other conclusions can be drawn apart from the fact that in this concrete situation there were no significant differences in the service quality perception for the native and non-native speaker.

Sharma et al. (2009: 291) point out that non-native speakers are often perceived as less competent. In this study, even though there were no significant variations in terms of service quality perception, the perceived competence was significantly different. When designing questionnaire, it was intended to include one item directly measuring competence (perception
of CSR’s competence, Stat5) and one item to evaluate trustworthiness (poor connection as excuse, Stat13). According to Pearson’s test these items negatively correlate on the significant level (r = –0.02). T-test rejected null hypotheses in both cases and it was suggested that non-native and native speaker was assigned different level of competence with non-native speaker being perceived as less competent. On the similar note, non-native speaker was perceived also somewhat less trustworthy. In this research, trustworthiness was connected with the need for repeating sentences which CSR explained by poor phone connection. Respondents were asked to evaluate whether they perceive poor connection as a true reason for this situation or could the problem have been caused by CSR simply does not understanding them. In case of the non-native speaker people predominantly believed that the poor phone connection was just an excuse and CSR did have problems with understanding all what customer said. Nevertheless, this item is very dependent on the concrete context. Even though the differences in competence and trustworthiness were confirmed in this concrete scenario, they are subject to variation in dependence to the sketched situation. Additionally, as noted in pilot study findings, presence of non-native speaker did not seem to impact on the company’s reliability and trustworthiness as it rather influenced customer’s opinion of employee.

It has been proposed that accent forms barrier in communication and as a consequence raises probability of misunderstanding (Stringfellow et al., 2008: 171). Based on this suggestion, gained data was screened for the difference in level of perceived misunderstanding during the call. Even though customers perceived slightly higher risk of misunderstanding when interacting with non-native speaker (means 3.17 and 3.51 for reversed Stat11 “There was a high probability of misunderstanding during this call”), t-test suggested retaining null hypothesis meaning that there were no significant differences in this regard. One explanation for this result may be the scenario itself where the customer’s problem was solved. Since client received clear answer to his/her problem, this may have affected the level of the perceived misunderstanding during the call. It would be interesting to see whether significant differences in perception would be obtained when manipulating with the scenario so that customer’s problem is not solved.

As proved, customers are aware of service being located abroad they become more critical towards the interaction outcome (Sharma et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2009). In this scenario customers were no aware of service being located abroad prior to interaction. Nevertheless, it
has been suggested by hypothesis that when interacting with non-native speaker, customers are more likely to suppose that call center is located outside of country (H1). Consequent empirical analysis has proved that there are significant differences in connecting presence of native and non-native speaker with offshored call centers (Means for reversed Stat14 “I think that call center is located outside of the country” were 3.82 and 4.42 for non-native and native speaker respectively). However, higher likelihood of supposing that call center is being located abroad when interacting with a non-native speaker seems to be rather intuitive. Taking into account only native speaker’s presence in call center, customer has no reason assuming that the service is offshored. Since pilot study findings indicated rather low awareness of offshoring customer services abroad, it can be suggested that it was presence of this statement in the questionnaire which influenced respondent’s opinion about the call center being offshored.

6.2 The influence of age on service quality perception

It was proposed that there are differences in service quality (and consequently also non-native speaker) perception between older and younger people, Generation Y members. In this regard, respondents were divided into two groups with one being younger than 30 years and the other one exceeding 30 years. MANOVA was conducted to compare at first these two age groups in terms of service quality perception variables (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15). The means for these 4 items were slightly higher for respondents over 30 years, with significant result in Stat3 (I will purchase from this company also in future). This indicates that older customers were slightly more satisfied with experienced service encounter; but at the same time variations in means were, however, not very big, reaching significance in only one case. Interestingly, the significant difference was in the item concerned with propensity of future purchase. This finding may indicate that in this case older customers considered technical quality (problem was solved) as slightly more important compared to the functional quality (how the problem was solved).

When adding an additional factor, native or non-native speaker’s interaction, differences in perception of 4 variables (Stat1-Stat15) were non-significant. However, comparing means of items, contrary to supposal, older respondents were more satisfied with the service no matter whether they interacted with native or non-native speaker.
Higher satisfaction with the service could have been caused by older respondents having wider zone of tolerance. Zeithaml et al. (1993:6) define zone of tolerance as the gap between the “ideal” and “adequate” situation. It may be supposed that respondents being over 30 years old are more experienced customers and thus, have experienced service in many variations from very bad to great excellence service. Nonetheless, the differences in means are rather slight. Due to their insignificance it may be concluded that they are scenario related and cannot be generalized.

6.3 Cross-national comparison

Finally, the data was analyzed in terms of cross-national comparison. No hypothesis was proposed prior to the data analysis because contrasting two nations was not the main aim of this study. Even though both countries are located in Europe, analysis has pointed that differences in the service quality perception between Czechs and Finns exist. Comparing the means for service quality perception items (satisfaction with complaint handling - Stat1, solution was customer-friendly - Stat2, likeliness of future purchase - Stat3, overall good service impression - Stat15) it can be noted that the two nations vary significantly in this aspect. With the one exception (solution was customer-friendly - Stat2), Czechs were significantly less satisfied with the experienced service. This was rather surprise finding, since it could be supposed that due to different political and economical development Finns are more demanding customers.

There was also a significant difference in how nations perceived CSR’s helpfulness. Czechs believed that CSR could have done more to help them (Means were 5.47 for Finns and 4.69 for Czechs). The means for other items of Attitude component were not of significant difference but still indicated higher CSR’s evaluations from Finnish customers. Comparing the means for the component of Competence (need to repeat sentences - Stat10, high probability of misunderstanding - Stat11, complaining about poor connection - Stat12, poor connection as excuse - Stat13) revealed that Czechs considered CSR as less competent and trustworthy compared to Finns. For instance, Czech customers were more likely to believe that the true reason for need to repeat a sentence was that CSR did not understand and not the poor phone connection as she stated (Stat13 – “I think that poor phone connection was just an excuse for her not really understanding me”).
Overall, findings indicate that Czech respondents were somewhat more suspicious towards the CSR, no matter was she a native or non-native speaker, resulting in evaluating her competence, attitude and trustworthiness with lower marks than Finnish respondents. This may be explained by the fact that Czechs perceive stronger linkage between service quality and CSR’s personality. Thus, complicated internal processes causing inconvenience to customers (including written explanation why the book is being returned) may have been perceived as the CSR’s incompetence to help customer. On the other hand, Finnish customers may have perceived company’s rules and CSR as two different factors and evaluated them separately. Nevertheless, since no additional research was conducted in order to explain these varieties in behavior, no definite explanation may be suggested.

6.4 Conclusions

This study has proved that differences between perception of native and non-native customer service representative exists.

The theoretical framework contributed to the identification of important factors regarding the non-native speech’s perception. Unfortunately, possibility of their verification in this study was quite limited since the scenario experiment was used to gain the data. In order to confirm the significance of these factors (accent, vocabulary, syntax, rhythm of speech, cognitive frame) audiovisual techniques such as recorded speech samples would have to be applied. Conducting the pilot study was important factor in relation to hypotheses forming. Additionally, it contributed to finding similarities and discrepancies between already conducted researches in other geographical areas than Europe.

The quantitative study realized in the forms of questionnaires brought interesting findings concerning the perceived quality of service provided by the native and non-native speaker. Important role in the service encounter is played by customer’s expectations. In this study, expectations seemed to be higher towards the native speaker resulting into the lower level of service satisfaction based on the service encounter course. Customer service person was partly evaluated on the basis of her behavior, nonetheless, the fact she could not influence (company’s internal rules) impacted on her final evaluation probably as well. Contrary to
what is often thought, non-native speaker is not perceived more negatively compared to native speaker if s/he delivers a good quality service. Nevertheless, non-native speaker received slightly more negative evaluation in the competence and the trustworthiness. Since customer service offshoring awareness among European customers is somewhat lower compared to U.S., for many customers talking to non-native speaker is a fairly new experience which can rise insecurity about the way they should treat the non-native CSR (rephrasing, simplifying own speech, etc.)

The study found no evidence of different perception of non-native speakers by various age groups. This shifts personal characteristics (character, experiences, attitudes, etc.) above the factor of age. Additionally, translated to two language mutations, research were conducted in two countries, Czech Republic and Finland, indicating that there are significant differences in some aspects between these two. While Finns tend to be overall more satisfied with the service itself and the CSR personality, Czechs have more reserved attitude towards both resulting in lower evaluation of service and CSR.

6.5 Theoretical implications

The theoretical framework contributed to broadening academician knowledge by identifying important factors regarding the non-native speech perception - accent, vocabulary, syntax, rhythm of speech, cognitive frame. These factors may possibly serve as a base for developing a framework concerned with the service quality evaluation in case that service is to be provided by non-native speakers.

This study indicates that customers have different expectations towards service provided by native and non-native speaker. Therefore, native speaker is evaluated on the basis of stricter standards compared to non-native. Current literature (see e.g. Stringfellow et al., 2008; Sharma et al., 2009) does not discuss expectations as a service quality evaluation component but in this study they tend to be relatively significant factor.

As Sharma et al. (2009) note customers tend to be less satisfied when interacting with offshored call centers and consequently with non-native speakers. The results of this study, however, imply that there are multiple factors influencing the employee-customer interaction
(the final outcome, behavior of CSR, etc.). Even though interacting with non-native speaker does not necessarily bring along lower perceived service quality compared to a native speaker, research results imply that non-native speakers are assigned lower level of competence. This finding is in accordance to Sharma et al. (2009) concluding that non-native speakers are perceived as less competent. Additionally, study highlighted another factor connected with competence - trustworthiness. Perceived level of competence influences the perceived level of trustworthiness making these components additional factors to take to account when evaluating overall quality of service provided by non-native speaker.

The study has also pointed out on the influence of cultural background on the service quality perception. Even though Europe is geographically small compared to other continents, significant differences in European customers’ thinking and behaving may be found. This fact makes difficult for scholars to generalize studies’ findings and calls for the need to verify findings in various settings.

6.6 Managerial implications

Since many European companies decide to offshore their customer service to a different country, employing non-native speakers in call centers is no longer rare. This study focused on the perception of non-native speakers in call centers. Findings indicate that service provided by non-native speaker does not necessarily need to be perceived negatively, reversely, based on the research conducted for thesis, a non-native speaker can be evaluated more positively compared to a native speaker. At the same time, non-native speakers may be perceived as less competent and trustworthy. Customers also suppose higher risk of misunderstanding due to employee being non-native speaker. Thus, when recruiting, companies should be aware of these facts and comprehensively test future customer service employee’s language capacities prior to hiring him/her for the call center work position. Thesis identified five areas of possible non-native speech’s shortcomings - accent, vocabulary, syntax, rhythm of speech, cognitive frame. Thus, it is desirable that future employee’s language capacities are tested in multiple ways.
Study indicates that customers have lower expectations of service quality when they hear that employee is a non-native speaker. However, when the service is of good quality and thus, expectations are met (or even exceeded), the perceived service quality may be even higher than in case of interacting with native speaker.

Nevertheless, research pointed out that cultural background plays its role during the service encounter as well. In this study, significant differences between two nations, Czechs and Finns, in perception service quality were found. Finns evaluated service quality in the research scenario more positively compared to Czechs, with higher scores for non-native speaker in both nations. Even though Czechs were more satisfied with non-native speaker (compare to native speaker scores) in the research scenario, received customer satisfaction scores were significantly lower compared to Finns. Thus, the country’s specifics need to be taken to account when hiring non-native speakers to call center work positions.

6.7 Limitations

This study has limitations related predominantly to two aspects. Firstly, the way data was collected probably influenced the outcome of the study. Even though maximum effort was taken for obtaining data from various groups of respondents, most of the responses came from 18-30 year old people, women in prevail. Additionally, percentage of respondents having university degree (54%) could have also had an impact on the study results.

Secondly, research design using scenario as a tool of gaining information has limited the possibility to generalize results. Since responses related to one concrete scenario, manipulating with its text would probably bring quite different results.

6.8 Further research suggestions

It would be interesting to see how different scenarios impact on the perceived service quality. For instance, conducting research with scenario including differences of native and non-native speaker CSR providing extremely good or bad service. Alternatively, propose the scenario so that it distinguishes significantly between native and non-native speaker. In addition, scenario could also manipulate with non-native speaker’s perceived country of origin or with the image
of company (well known versus lesser known). Different results would be obtained by exposing respondents to the audio sample of example service encounter. Apart from that, study identified factors influencing the perception of non-native speech (accent, vocabulary, rhythm of speech, syntax, cognitive language frame). Even though they were given attention of linguisticsians, their exact contribution to the perceived service quality is not yet exactly known.

Additionally, the setting of the service encounter could be changed to the face-to-face interactions in order to determine differences in non-native speaker’s perception during the phone call interaction and the face-to-face conducted service. It would be beneficial to determine the role of visual components during the service encounter.

Finally, including more countries into study would help gaining more comprehensive picture of possible similarities and differences among nations. The study would enlighten perception of non-native speakers in various countries and enable also comparison of other factors such as perceived service quality or competence of CSR.
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Appendix 1 Interview guide for customers

Interview guide for dialogues with consumers

Abbreviations
CS = customer service
CSR: customer service representative

(Informal greetings, prefatory statement)

1. Demographical questions (age, education, place of living)

2. Have you ever been calling a customer service?
   - Follow up – if so what kind of? Please, describe your experience. Was the call conducted in your native language? Was the CSR person the native speaker? Why do you (or don’t) think so?

3. Have you ever been calling a customer service with a particularly technically difficult question?
   - Follow up – if so what kind of? Please, describe your experience. Was the call conducted in your native language? Was the CSR person the native speaker? Why do you (or don’t) think so?

4. In your opinion why do companies employ foreigners in call centers?

5. Please answer questions concerning following situation:
   A. Imagine that you want to activate roaming on your mobile phone as well as ask about the price offers related to roaming because you are going to call home from abroad quite often. This process is not technically nor timely demanding. You call CS and hear that your call is answered by a non-native speaker.

Would you have concerns related to:
- Reliability and trustworthiness of the company?
- Theft or misuse of your personal data?
- Service being located outside of the country?
- Communication?

Communication follow up – Please evaluate on the scale 1-7 (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree) and comment your decision
- My native language spoken with accent by CSR makes me feel uncomfortable about the company
- I cannot completely concentrate on the content of speech because of the person’s accent
- I feel like correcting the person when s/he says something wrong or uses improper wording
- I am considering the wording of my speech carefully (avoiding the difficult words)
- I try to repeat my requirements also in other words so that I can be sure that CS person understands me
I am thinking what could be company’s reasons to employ foreigner and not native speaker.
I feel that the probability of a misunderstanding is higher than when interacting with native speaker.
I try to prevent misunderstanding by careful articulation of my problem.
I am willing to change wording and way of my speech because of this CS person.

6. If you speak with non-native speaker which of following factors do you consider as the most noticeable? Please, evaluate from the most to the least noticeable.

- Accent
- Limited vocabulary
- Syntax (does not create sentences correctly)
- Different speech rhythm
- Using the words in a wrong context, e.g. non existing comparisons or sayings

7. From the customer’s point of view - do you think that employing foreigners in technically non-demanding services (simple order placing) is more acceptable than in technically demanding services (e.g. computer set up, program installation)? If so, why?

8. In your opinion, do foreigners provide worse service because of them being non-native speakers?
Appendix 2 Interview guide for customer service representatives

**Interview guide for dialogues with current or former customer service representatives**

(Informal greetings, prefatory statement)

1. Demographical questions (age, education, place of living)

2. What is your native language and in which language do you provide the CS?
   **Background questions:** How have you learned the language in which you provide CS? Follow up – how many years have you been studying the language? Have you obtained any certificates regarding the language knowledge? Have you lived in the country where the language is spoken? Have you been working or studying in that country? If so, how long? When being in the country have you experienced any negative comments or behavior regarding your accent or overall way to speak the language?

3. How would you evaluate the knowledge of the language you speak in CS on the scale 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = completely)?

4. Please describe the call center you are or were working in. (The type of service, technical demandiness, active versus passive call center). How long have you been working there? If you quit your job, what were the reasons behind it?

5. In your opinion why companies employ foreigners in call centers?

6. Please describe your duties as CSR. How many percent of your work time do you use email and phone in contact with customer (approximately)? Follow up – do you feel more comfortable when emailing or calling? Why?

7. Have you ever experienced any difficulties related the language (e.g. not understanding the customer)? If so, how often? How have you solved them?

8. When customers call, do they ever express concerns regarding:
   - Reliability and trustworthiness of the company?
   - Theft or misuse of their personal data?
   - Service being located outside of the country?
   - Communication?

Communication follow up – Have you ever experienced following situations? If so, please comment further.
   - The way I speak the language make customers express doubts about the trustworthiness and reliability of the company
   - I feel that customers do not completely concentrate on the content of speech because of my accent; I have to repeat my statements multiple times
   - Customers correct me when I say something wrong or use improper wording
Customers start to consider the wording of their speech carefully (avoiding the difficult words)

Clients try to repeat their requirements also in other words ensuring that I understand

Speaking with me make customers wonder where the call center is located. Follow up – are you permitted by employer to reveal where the call center is located? Do you answer truly about the CS location? In case that CC is located outside of the country, how do customers react on that?

Clients ask what are the company’s reasons to employ foreigner and not native speaker

I feel that the probability of a misunderstanding is higher than when interacting with native speaker

Customers try to prevent misunderstanding by careful articulation of their problem

I notice that clients are willing to change wording and way of their speech because of me being non-native speaker

Customers try to end up the call quickly and I think that it was because they did not feel comfortable about me being non-native speaker

9. Do you think that employing foreigners in technically non-demanding services (simple order placing) is more acceptable than in technically demanding services (e.g. computer set up, program installation)? If so, why?

10. In your opinion, do foreigners provide worse service because of them being non-native speakers? Why?

11. Imagine that you call CS in your native language. Would you feel uncomfortable talking with a foreigner employee (non-native speaker)?
Appendix 3 List of interviews

**Customers:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Native language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ilona</td>
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<td>Czech</td>
<td>Czech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>František</td>
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<td>Czech</td>
<td>Czech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>Czech</td>
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<tr>
<td>Veronika</td>
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<td>Czech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuzana</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>Czech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juha</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katja</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikael</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taisto</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Finnish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Customer service representatives:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Native language</th>
<th>Customer service provided in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dagmar</td>
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<td>Czech</td>
<td>French</td>
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<td>Jitka</td>
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<td>Kamila</td>
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<td>Czech</td>
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<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slawomir</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>Norwegian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4 The native speaker questionnaire (Finnish)

Asiakaspuhelinpalvelun vaikutus yrityksen imagoon

Hei,


Kiitos vastauksestasi!

Lucie Storova


Arvioi asteikolla 1 - 7 (1= täysin eri mieltä, 7= täysin samaa mieltä) kuinka paljon samaa tai eri mieltä olet seuraavien väittämien kanssa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>täysin eri mieltä</th>
<th>täysin samaa mieltä</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asiakaspalvelijan esittämä ratkaisu oli vaivaton asiakkaalle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uskon ostavani tästä yrityksestä tuotteita myös tulevaisuudessa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olen tyytyväinen siihen miten asiakaspalvelija käyttäytyi minua kohtaan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pidän asiakaspalvelijana pätevänä työhönsä</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mielestäni asiakaspalvelija käyttäytyi kohteliaasti

Uskon, että asiakaspalvelija teki parhaansa auttaakseen minua

Luulen, että joku muu asiakaspalvelija voisi auttaa minua paremmin

Mietin miksi juuri hänet on palkattu puhelinpalvelutyöhön

Ärsyynynyt että minun piti usein toistaa lauseitani

Uskon että puhelun aikana väärinymmärtäminen oli erittäin todennäköistä

Ihmettelen miksi asiakaspalvelija valitti huonesta yhteydestä vaikka minä kuulin häntä ihan hyvin

Luulen huonon puhelinyhteyden olleen vain tekosyy hänen vaikeuksiinsa ymmärtää minua

Luulen että asiakaspalvelun toimipiste ei sijaitse Suomessa

Kaiken kaikkiaan minulle jäi tästä palvelusta hyvä vaikutelma

**Sukupuoli**

□ Nainen      □ Mies

**Ikä**

□ Alle 18 vuotta      □ 18 - 30 vuotta      □ 31 - 45 vuotta
□ 46 - 59 vuotta      □ Enemmän kuin 60 vuotta

**Koulutus:**

□ Peruskoulu      □ Ammattikoulu
□ Lukio      □ Yliopisto/ammattikorkeakoulu

**Äidinkieli**

□ Suomi      □ Ruotsi      □ Muu
Appendix 5 The non-native speaker questionnaire (Finnish)

Asiakaspuhelinpalvelun vaikutus yrityksen imagoon

Hei,
opiskelen kauppiaata Hankenissa ja olen opintojen loppuvaiheessa. Graduni käsittelee sitä,
miten kokemus asiakaspalvelulosta vaikuttaa asiakkaiden käsitykseen yrityksestä. Puhelinpalvelukeskus on erillinen asiakaspalvelun osasto, jonka yritykset perustavat
auttamaan asiakkaita ongelmatilanteissa. Tällaiseen keskukseen voit ottaa yhteyttä
puhelimitse tai kirjallisesti (sähköpostilla, kirjeellä). Ole hyvä, lue seuraavan tilanteen kuvaus
ja kuvitele itsesi asiakkaan roolii. Sen jälkeen vastaa tekstin alla oleviin kysymyksiin.
Tehtävä vie noin 5-10 minuuttia. Kysely tehdään gradua varten ja vastaukset käsitellään
tilastollisesti, eikä vastauksia välitetä eteenpäin.
Kiitos vastauksestasi!
Lucie Storova

Olet tilannut nettikauppasta lahjaksi kirjan perheenjäsenellesi. Kun paketti saapuu, huomaat,
etta kirja on tuhoutunut - sen sivut ovat rypistyneet ja kansi on osittain repeytynyt. Pääätät
ratkaista ongelman heti ja soittaa yrityksen asiakaspalveluun. Sinun pitää odottaa
muutaman minuutin ennen kuin pääset puhumaan asiakaspalvelijan kanssa. Lopulta naispuolinen
asiakaspalvelija tervehtii ja kysyy miten hän voi auttaa. Kuulet selkeästi että hänen
ääinkielensä ei ole suomi, sillä hänellä on vieraasaksenti. Selität ongelma hänelle. Hän
kuuntelee tarkasti mutta keskeyttää sinun muutaman kerran ja pyytää toistamaan muutamia
sanoja. Hän pahoittelee että yhteys on aika huono ja että hän ei kuule sinua kovin hyvin.
Käsivällisesti toistat sanoja, joita hän kysyy, koska ei kuullut kunnolla. Asiakaspalvelija
pyytää vielä nimeäsi ja osoitteesi. Sinun on pakko tavata niitä useamman kerran ennen kuin
hän löytää asiakkaasi koska teksti on tietokoneeltasi. Asiakaspalvelija sanoo että ainoo tapa
korjata asia, on palauttaa paketti ja liittää mukaan kirjallinen selonteko siitä miksi olet
palauttamassa paketin takaisin. Sen jälkeen kun paketti on saapunut yritykseen, sinulle
lähetetään uusi kirja mutta sisäsien tilausten prosessoinnin vuoksi se voi kestää jopa kolme
viikkoa. Asiakaspalvelija kysyy onko vielä muita ongelmia jossa hän voisi auttaa. Kerrot ettei
muita ongelmia ole ja kiitä palvelusta. Hän kiitää soitosta ja lopettaa puhelun

Arvioi asteikolla 1 - 7 (1= täysin eri mieltä, 7= täysin samaa mieltä) kuinka paljon samaa tai
eri mieltä olet seuraavien väittämiens kanssa.

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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pidän asiakaspalvelijana pätevänä työhönä

Mielestäni asiakaspalvelija käyttäytyi kohteliaasti

Uskon, että asiakaspalvelija teki parhaansa auttaakseen minua

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