Swedish-speaking Finns’ Construction of Work-related Identities

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**Abstract:** Due to its history Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish. Despite a common nationality, it can be argued that the minority of Swedish-speaking Finns makes up a separate ethnic group because of its language, while also other factors like laws and common stereotypes reinforce a notion of distinction. Following from past research, ethnicity is one collective characteristic based on which individuals create their social identities and a sense of belonging. Also in an organisational context one’s ethnic background has been found to inform how individuals relate to themselves and other people in the organisation.

This study sought to learn how Swedish-speaking Finns experience their ethnic background, and language abilities in particular, in organisational settings and what work-related identities they create based on those. The data were gathered in semi-structured interviews with ten 20- to 39-year-old Swedish-speaking Finns living in the Helsinki region. Narrative analysis was used to interpret the data.

The findings suggest that the work-related identities of Swedish-speaking Finns are highly based on their subjective perception of their Finnish skills which influence the level of interference of Finnish skills with job performance and labour market access. That may have a further impact on an organisation’s talent attraction as well as on the general organisational climate and employee satisfaction. The results also add to the theoretical knowledge about ethnic minorities’ organisational experiences and social identity at work, as well as about language in work contexts and its influence on identity. The results allow comparison with other ethnic groups and contexts.

**Keywords:** Social Identity Theory, Swedish-speaking Finns, ethnic minority, language, work-related identities
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1 INTRODUCTION

Roughly 5% of Finland’s population speak Swedish as their primary language (Tilastokeskus, 2016). Those Swedish-speaking Finns have been pointed out by international press to be “the world’s most pampered minority” (Alvarez, 2005). Though they account for just a small part of the population and are mostly to be found in partly or entirely Swedish-speaking communities along the West and South coast of Finland (Tilastokeskus, 2016), the constitution has been guaranteeing since 1922 that the minority members’ cultural, educational and social needs can be complied with in their mother tongue (Hedberg, 2004; Liebkind, Henning-Lindblom and Solheim, 2008). Swedish speakers have the right to receive service by authorities in Swedish language, if there is not even an own Swedish-speaking institution in place, and all official documents and leaflets have to be translated to Swedish (Suomen perustuslaki 11.6.1999/731, s. 17). It is also possible to serve military time in Swedish-speaking units. In the education sector, apart from the existence of separate Swedish schools, Finnish universities have to follow special admission quotas for the Swedish-speaking minority (Alvarez, 2005) and, at least in the University of Helsinki, Swedish speakers have the right to use their mother tongue for assignments and tests even if their track is otherwise in Finnish (Yliopistolaki 558/2009, s. 11). While some Finnish speakers would like to change the status quo by, for instance, making Swedish a voluntary, not mandatory subject in school (YLE, 2014), it seems reasonable to first look at what kind of general social environment the status of the Swedish language has created as it probably (negatively) affects spaces shared by Finnish and Swedish speakers.

Until 1809, when Finland became part of Russia, it belonged to the Swedish kingdom (Liebkind, Henning-Lindblom and Solheim, 2008). Swedish has never been a majority language in Finland (Broermann, 2007), but it was the administrative and only official language in Finland until 1863 and has been spoken in Finland at least since the 13th century (Liebkind, Henning-Lindblom and Solheim, 2008; Raento and Husso, 2002). Even as a part of Russia, Swedish remained the language of law and administration (Lojander-Visapää, 2008). Nowadays, Swedish is the second official language besides Finnish and the registered first language of a little less than 300 000 people, while Finnish is the main language for 89% of the population (Tilastokeskus, 2016). Swedish therefore has been and still is spoken every day in numerous parts of Finland.
Yet, fewer and fewer Finnish speakers are interested in learning Swedish, despite the obligation to do so in school, partly because of an associated elitist image (Raento and Husso, 2002). Accordingly, at least in the past, Finnish used to be the language of the common people and Swedish the language of the wealthy and powerful (Liebkind, Henning-Lindblom and Solheim, 2008). It is argued that the historical experience of a high-class Swedish-speaking minority and a low-class Finnish-speaking majority is still reproduced in common social portrayals and controversies of the two, the Swedish noble elite and the Finnish peasants (Alvarez, 2005; Broermann, 2007), even though statistics already showed in the 1980s that a large share of the Swedish-speaking population in fact did not hold any executive or other higher professional positions (Liebkind, 1982). Also the fact that the Swedish-speaking did not constitute a unity but consisted of rural and urban groups and could themselves be separated into the ruling upper class in the cities and the normal folk often living near the coast (Hedberg, 2004; Raento and Husso, 2002) does not seem to change that elitist image too much. Generally, Sweden, where the mother tongue of the Swedish-speaking minority has been mainly formed (Hansén, 1987), often becomes superordinate when depicted as Finland’s big brother (Liebkind, Henning-Lindblom and Solheim, 2008). Such a representation could evoke similar feelings of Finland’s subordination. Based on that, from a Finnish speaker’s perspective it may look like a relic from former times that they have to learn Swedish and accept the rights of those 5%. Finnish speakers may tend to feel that their own rights are being neglected (Alvarez, 2005) while on the Swedish-speaking end, for instance, school children in Helsinki rather speak Finnish in public to avoid being bullied (Saari, 2000). How parts of the Finnish society deal with each other today is therefore to some degree based on outdated images and half-truths. The relationship between Swedish and Finnish in the past could affect today’s life on the individual and group level, influencing how people view, react to and interact with some of their countrymen in a negative, exclusive way.

Having lived in Finland as a foreigner for more than 2 years by now, I have experienced the situation mainly in my private circles of friends and due to studying at a Swedish university. Finnish-speaking friends rarely seem to have Swedish-speaking friends, but they have an image of what they were like. And only few of the Finnish speakers speak Swedish. University is then, besides some Finnish-speaking and foreign students, full of Swedish speakers who equally seem to stick to their Swedish-speaking circles that have often been established already before entering university. That also links to the notion that the separation between Finnish and Swedish has overall been largely
institutionalised, both through the choice of going to either Swedish or Finnish institutions and through them being mostly also physically separated. Maybe the separation has become normal, as it has been part of the life in Finland for long already, and that is why the image of a nevertheless relatively homogeneous population can persist (Raento and Husso, 2002). It is noteworthy though that, despite claims that otherwise Swedish might disappear completely from Finland, the educational separation of Swedish and Finnish speakers could support the ethnical separation, since educational institutions affect the development of culture and identities (Hansén, 1987).

1.1. Research problem

Despite a common nationality it can be argued that the minority of Swedish-speaking Finns makes up (and is made up as) a separate ethnic group because of its language, while also other factors like laws and common stereotypes reinforce a notion of distinction. Accordingly, the assumption seems justified that both ethnic groups, the Swedish- and the Finnish-speaking Finns, co-exist relatively separately and that they tend to also perceive their own group separate from the other, in terms of us and them. That thought construct is central to Social Identity Theory: Social identities derive from a notion of in- and out-groups triggered by an individual’s characteristics which are socially shared categories, like nationality, religion, ethnicity and language (Hogg et al., 2004). Then again, the linguistic boundaries are not as clear cut as statistics suggest: With growing numbers of mixed-language couples, a decrease of Swedish natives, and a declining ability to communicate in Swedish on the side of the Finnish speakers, the Swedish language is becoming more and more marginalised, and a large amount of native Swedish speakers is practically bilingual (Raento and Husso, 2002). Swedish speakers may therefore plead to keep up the current system to save the Swedish language, but the same system may also divide Finnish people already at a young age. And while language is an important part of identity, nationality is as well.

Following from that, it appears that there are several layers to consider when thinking about the identities of a Swedish-speaking Finn. First and foremost, what also differentiates them from other ethnic minorities that most often have an immigration background, while their ethnic background is Swedish-speaking their nationality is clearly Finnish (Lojander-Visapää, 2008). It is arguable that belonging to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland creates a complex situation between reinforcing ethnic and downplaying national identity and vice versa, depending on the demands of a social
setting (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Hogg and Terry, 2001). How does the situation affect Swedish-speaking Finns in their self-understanding? What impact does being a Swedish-speaking Finn have on their identities in daily life when being amongst Finnish speakers?

For instance, also in an organisational context one’s ethnic background has been found to inform how individuals relate to themselves and other people in the organisation. The workplace is, despite any overarching organisational aim, another distinct social context in which individuals negotiate who they and who others are and whom they feel connected to (Adams and Crafford, 2012), based on a variety of personal attributes. Ethnicity, and especially ethnic minority belonging, plays an important role in such social processes. Research suggests, for example, that ethnic minorities tend to stick together in organisational contexts (Leonard, Mehra and Katerberg, 2008), that they are often judged based only on their ethnicity and related stereotypes (Kenny and Briner, 2013), and, more generally, that they face challenges and disadvantages at the workplace and in career development (Atewologun and Singh, 2010; Bell, 1990; Hofhuis, Van Der Zee and Otten, 2012). In the Finnish organisational context that might mean that Swedish speakers make similar experiences of judgement and challenges, or generally connect certain workplace experiences to ethnic belonging, and create their work-related identities accordingly in relation to ethnicity and language.

1.2. Aim of the study

This study focuses on the effects of the complex and partly inaccurate position of Swedish-speaking Finns in the Finnish society on workplace and career experiences and work-related identities. It therefore seeks to learn about

- how members of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland experience their ethnic background in organisational settings, and, following from that,

- what identities they create for themselves with regard to work life.

1.3. Key concepts

Four terms are central to this research: (social) identities, ethnicity, language and Swedish-speaking Finn. They are clarified to provide a basic understanding of the set-up of this study.
1.3.1. **Social identities**

Identities are largely a combination of individual motivations and experiences with social norms and settings that lead to a definition of the self (Deaux, 1993). In accordance with Corlett and Mavin (2014), an understanding of identities being a relational, dynamic and contextual social construct is central to this research.

Any social identity derives from a triangular process: “the self’s projections towards others, others’ projections towards the self and reactions to received projections” (Beech, 2008, 2011 in Corlett and Mavin, 2014). Such concepts of the self are, for the matter of this research, understood as being directly connected to people’s thoughts and actions and, therefore, do not exist “independent of those who create them” (Deaux, 1993: 102). That means it is important to keep in mind that any social identity is constructed in relation to an individual’s context and therefore cannot claim universal validity. From this relational and contextual understanding also follows that identities may change over time when actors involved and social settings change, or when influential experiences are made. It also means that identity is something people do during social activities, rather than something people necessarily really are (Coupland, 2007: 275).

More than that, this study is based on the assumption that any individual possesses a multitude of identities (Deaux, 1993) due to the various spheres and spaces that people life in, the private, the public, the circle of friends, the family, the workplace and other. Common categories applying as a basis for self-definition in such social spaces are race, ethnicity, gender or sexual preference. Those multiple identities are most likely to overlap and interlock, rather than they would be active separately (Corlett and Mavin, 2014). Thereby, identities are unique to an individual in their combination, despite a number of individuals being able to have a shared identity based on a certain characteristic, e.g. their ethnicity. Identities are also formed and activated in a larger social, cultural and historical frame (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008), which means they are context specific.

1.3.2. **Ethnicity**

In research and literature, *ethnicity* is often named alongside *race*, and their distinctions are subject of discussions (Gunaratnam, 2003). The category of race is understood as rather politically and socially constructed through discourse over genetics and physical appearances, like skin colour or eye shape (Frable, 1997; Hall, 2000 in Gunaratnam,
2003). It has a quasi-biological status (Zuckerman, 1990 in Frable, 1997) and is possibly entailing systems of power imbalance, exploitation or exclusion (Hall, 1990 in Gunaratnam, 2003). In contrast to this, ethnicity is often understood as deriving from a national origin, but it can also refer to culture, and is shown in social, everyday features like language, eating habits or religion (Frable, 1997; Hall, 2000 in Gunaratnam, 2003; Phenice and Griffore, 2000). Language may be perceived as the most critical feature to constitute ethnic belonging and identities (Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind, 1998). In a case like the one of the Swedish-speaking Finns the common origin would go against at least the different language, and it is to see in how far that affects Swedish-speaking individuals.

A central belief underlying this research is the relationality of life’s social aspects. With regard to ethnicity, this study takes a stand following Everett Hughes (1994 in Jenkins, 2008: 11): “An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group on the contrary, because the people in and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the ins and the outs talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group.” Ethnicities further have no fixed meanings or values, instead they need to be understood contextually (Hall, 1996 and Brah, 2000 in Kenny and Briner, 2013). While connotations and representations may be subject to change, a person’s ethnic identity as such is perceived as one of the primary identities which are rather unchangeable (Jenkins, 2008 in Kenny and Briner, 2013).

### 1.3.3. Language

Unlike identities, language systems do not only exist in people’s heads but also as external entities (Hall, 2011). As such, they are in general terms a verbal way to communicate, to transmit information and to express ourselves. Those language systems change (Mooney, 2011), over time, across space and situations, and there is more than just one language.

But language is also a system used to represent oneself and others by showing language competence. That way, language is linked to identity. Verbal abilities, an accent or a dialect may inform, for example, about where a speaker comes from in geographical and social terms (Mooney, 2011). Language thereby influences the social encounters in which people create their identities as an informative aspect, but also as a formative one by what is being said. In that respect, language and specific forms of articulation can also be a source of power. The use of a certain language can, for instance, support a position of
power in an organisation, but it can also function symbolically (Mooney, 2011). A certain language then is a symbol for power, for instance as Swedish used to be a symbol for the ruling elite in Finland (Broermann, 2007).

In relation to ethnicity, language functions greatly to illustrate belonging and define identity. It is likely of great importance to minorities to keep up their language as a main constituent of ethnic belonging and identity, but also for majority members language is a crucial aspect of group membership and can therefore be a source of self-esteem (Woolard, 1991).

1.3.4. **Swedish-speaking Finn**

While the term might be clear for someone living in Finland, it may cause certain confusion for outsiders. Premise for counting as a Swedish-speaking Finn in this study was the statement of Swedish being one’s mother tongue at the time of sampling. That way it was possible to include both mono- and bilingual individuals but to exclude Finns with Finnish as their mother tongue who speak Swedish and who are, basically, Swedish-speaking Finns as well. The term “Swedish-speaking Finn” accordingly bears a certain imprecision. Yet, a precise, officially published answer to “What makes a Swedish-speaking Finn?” could not be found despite literature dealing with them. Maybe it is due to the fact that international, i.e. English-speaking, research on Swedish-speaking Finns has been rather limited (Liebkind, Tandefelt and Moring, 2007) that definitions or demands for such have remained equally scarce. Statistically, Swedish-speaking Finns are the Finnish citizens that have Swedish officially registered as their primary language. In accordance with what seems to be a common perception in general in Finland based on the conversations I have had, this study defines Swedish-speaking Finns as of Finnish nationality but growing up with Swedish as the only mother tongue or besides Finnish and therefore ascribing certain importance to being Swedish-speaking in their self-understanding.

1.4. **Personal pre-understanding**

The study is based on my personal understanding of identities being socially constructed. Therefore, that same understanding applies to the identities of Swedish-speaking Finns. Ethnicity and identities are, from my point of view, part of a social reality that is constructed and reconstructed by social actors, the in- and out-groups of social settings and their individual members (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Interaction is the key process as
identities are co-constructed in a reciprocal process: Individuals, as well as groups, ascribe and are ascribed roles simultaneously (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Understandings of oneself and others are, moreover, versions of reality (Coupland, 2007). That implies that different versions exist of one and the same matter, and while none is the ultimate correct one, they all tell about the people representing and the ones represented. Understanding hugely depends on individual interpretation.

In the case of Swedish-speaking Finns, stereotypes and representations have remained, despite socio-economic and political changes in Finland, as a discursive category of the Swedish-speaking life and identities. The images of Swedish-speaking Finns, that strongly relate to past power relations, become mixed with personal encounters and experiences of today. Ethnicity and identity, as central concepts in this study, are therefore no inert, fixed parts of reality. Instead, they have certain cornerstones but always find themselves “in the process of being formed” (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 22).

1.5. **Scope and delimitation**

The study considers Finnish citizens with Swedish as their mother tongue, that, at the time of the research, have graduated, are 20-39 years old and that live in the metropolitan area of Helsinki. While the choice of sampling criteria is presented in chapter 2, the study set-up has several implications for the study’s scope.

The research project covers only Swedish-speaking individuals. No other ethnic minority has been taken into account as the relation between Finnish- and Swedish-speaking Finns is understood to be incomparable to any other majority-minority relationship in Finland. The study equally does not involve Finnish-speaking Finns. The research design was not aimed at a dialogue between the two groups but at a rather comprehensive insight into the Swedish-speaking minority.

Certainly, the findings do not speak for all Swedish-speaking people. Apart from personal differences, it is also worthwhile to consider regional variety. Regions differ in the distribution of ethnic groups and the distribution certainly influences how often Swedish and Finnish speakers meet and how they relate to the other language group. Therefore, regions can also differ in the social representations that have developed over time.
1.6. Contribution of the study

The contribution of this research is fourfold:

1. The general public of Finland, and particularly the people that deal or have dealt with the Swedish-speaking minority from inside or outside may be able to recognise the plurality within the ethnic minority, while also acknowledging the particular challenges that the minority faces despite its special status. It is certainly worthwhile to show that there is no such thing as *the* Swedish-speaking, but a variety of identities and realities.

2. The research adds to the body of literature by applying Social Identity Theory to a country-specific ethnic minority. While the national context makes the minority to some degree particular, the findings may nevertheless raise the readers’ awareness for how other ethnic minorities find their place in a society by looking at the creation of work-related identities by Swedish-speaking Finns. Therefore, the research may be partly applicable to other majority-minority contexts as well.

3. This study adds to the theoretical knowledge about the meaning of language in organisational contexts and its influence on work-related identities. Due to the large number of languages and their wider social connections to one another as well as the various types of work and work environments, this study provides specific local information on a complex and diverse matter. It also tells about mechanisms that individuals develop to cope with perceived disadvantages deriving from a different ethnic background and language (in)abilities.

4. Businesses may find value in this research as it provides insights into the experiences minorities, and Swedish-speaking Finns in particular, make in various workplaces. It informs about what factors are effective in identity creation and how identity creation can take place at work. As a result, managers can gain a better understanding of diverse workforces and use findings to, for example, establish more inclusive environments. Such may enable individuals to make use of their distinct attributes in a way that is favourable for organisations as a whole.
2 **SOCIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITY IDENTITIES AND THE ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT**

This chapter introduces Social Identity Theory as the primary concept underlying the current study. Based on that, existing literature that applies Social Identity Theory to ethnic minorities in an organisational setting is reviewed. Also the few related studies on Swedish-speaking Finns are presented.

Generally, previous work on social identity processes of ethnic minorities in organisational contexts appears scattered. Identity research in the work context has often focused on managerial or organisational identities and the effects of identities on organisations. Related to that is an interest in practices to effectively manage identities for the sake of better outcomes for the organisations (e.g. De Braine and Roodt, 2011; Haslam, Powell and Turner, 2000; Madera, King and Hebl, 2012). Other works have looked at vocational identities in specific industries or sectors (e.g. Kirpal, 2004; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). With regard to the social identities of minorities, in general but also at work, the focus has predominantly been on marginalised groups or the sexes (e.g. Atewologun and Singh, 2010; Bell, 1990; Kenny and Briner, 2013; Leonard, Mehra and Katerberg, 2008). What needs to be stressed in the Finnish context is that Swedish-speaking Finns may be perceived as their own ethnic group, but they are and have always been Finns by nationality. That makes up the main difference to other ethnic minorities that often have a history of immigration.

### 2.1. The self and its many social identities

Social Identity Theory, founded mostly on the works of Henri Tajfel, focuses on the collective rather than the individual and deals with topics such as categorisation, prejudice, discrimination, intergroup relations and conflict (Hogg et al., 2004). Central to Social Identity Theory is the comparison taking place between one group of people with a shared social identity, the in-group, and another, the out-group. Members of one social group identify themselves in the same way, they have the same definitions of who they are, what characteristics make them, and in how far they are different from other, specific out-groups (Hogg et al., 2004).

Contrast is the main characteristic people try to preserve upon comparing themselves with others (Beech and Sims, 2007), as contrast provides the clearest possible picture of who one is and whom one belongs to. The contrast most often goes alongside
characteristics that are deemed positive or negative. Each group’s (unconscious) goal is to create relative, positive distinctiveness for itself by performing intergroup comparisons on categories perceived advantageous for the in-group (Hogg et al., 2004). The out-group is then portrayed with the downgraded, disadvantageous attributes. This intergroup comparison is motivated by individuals striving for a positive self-esteem: The positive view of the in-group serves as a source for a positive view of oneself (Deaux, 1993; Phenice and Griffore, 2000). That means, individuals strive to obtain a positive, and therefore beneficial image of themselves from creating, promoting and keeping up a positive image and status of the group they feel to be a member of, “because group evaluation is self-evaluation” (Hogg et al., 2004: 256). This is a process of positive distinctiveness that only is possible relative to others. Being part of a certain group means constructing a collective self in opposition to another group, expressed in us as opposite to them (Hogg et al., 2004). While comparison to an outgroup is based on a principle of maximum differentiation, comparison within a group or between individuals is rather focused on creating a sense of uniformity (Hogg et al., 2004).

Be it in their own mind or when they are talking to others, individuals make use of a variety of social categories. Previous work has differentiated between visible, e.g. race, and invisible, e.g. sexual preferences or social class, categories (Corlett and Mavin, 2014). The field is not in complete agreement about where to draw the line between personal and social identities (Deaux, 1993). While some rather use the term attributes instead of personal identity (Hogg et al., 2004), others see the connection between personal and social identity in whom those identities tell about (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008). Generally, though, people have as many identities, social and personal, as there are groups they find themselves belonging to. But only one identity is active in an individual’s mind at a time and which one that is is context dependent (Hogg et al., 2004). In social encounters, people will most likely act to create “a subjectively more meaningful and self-favouring identity” (Hogg and Terry, 2001: 7) respectively one that is relevant in the situation and socially appropriate (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001).

In the 1970ies, Tajfel’s work got noticeably complemented by his former student John Turner’s studies on self-categorisation. Social Identity Theory and self-categorisation differ in that “[Social Identity Theory] examines how people understand and position themselves and others in terms of social group categories (i.e. in-group/out-group), whereas [self-categorisation theory] investigates what leads people to view themselves as unique individuals in some circumstances and, in others, to define self through group
membership, thereby depersonalizing aspects of identity” (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008: 13). Self-categorisation is accordingly viewed as the necessary predecessor of social identity formation, taking place in individuals’ minds. The de-personalising act of categorisation, also commonly known as stereotyping, is the ascription of a group's attribute to the individual. People apply stereotypes to others but also to themselves. While self-categorisation is a process of de-personalising oneself in order to foster conformity, solidarity, liking and trust within the in-group (Brewer, 2001; Hogg et al., 2004), categorising others provides clarity in the sense-making process in social encounters and helps to demarcate the out-group (Hogg et al., 2004).

Following from that, there are more reasons for creating social identities than just a human’s strive for positive self-esteem and self-enhancement from belonging to a certain in-group. Social identities are not only descriptive and evaluative towards oneself and others, they are also prescriptive: The creation of social identities also results from the need to reduce uncertainty (Hogg and Terry, 2001). Putting others and oneself into categories sets boundaries to behaviours, perceptions or attitudes. Accordingly, group belonging entails usually the (not necessarily verbalised) prescription of a certain way of being and acting and makes a part of one’s life more predictable (Hogg et al., 2004).

### 2.1.1. Intersecting definitions of self

Social identities and social identity categories, or dimensions, follow a hierarchic order. This order is defined by the individual, but also, and maybe most significantly, by the social context (Deaux, 1993). Intersectionality research acknowledges that parts of societies are particularly disadvantaged due to belonging to various of such lower-order categories. For example, first research in the field of intersectionality was conducted on the overlap of the categories woman and black to derive an assumption of “interlocking oppressions” (Corlett and Mavin, 2014: 260). “Intersectionality” accordingly deals with the “relationship among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (McCall, 2005: 1771). That means it attends to the interaction between different identity categories, e.g. gender and profession, and analyses in how far that interaction relates to power in social encounters (Davis, 2008).

Central to intersectionality is the viewpoint that different social identities do not just add up to one another, but that they (partly) converge (Bowleg, 2012 in Corlett and Mavin, 2014). Therefore, the unit of analysis in intersectionality research is how the different
dimensions of identities interact with and influence each other, positively or negatively (Corlett and Mavin, 2014).

Generally, an individual’s social identities and relations are particular due to the unique combination of individual-specific identity dimensions. As an example: “Defining ourselves as secretaries, middle managers, or professors, for instance, does not entail simply stepping into pre-packaged selves, but always involves negotiating intersections with other simultaneously held identities (e.g. black male professor and parent) and making individualized meaning in interaction with the people and systems around us (e.g. competent, highstatus secretary)” (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008: 10). Talking in terms of us or them, to create a stronger sense of unity respectively distinction, means to also downplay the multitude of individual dimension-combinations, i.e. intersectionalities. Thereby individual social identities and relations get blurred and imprecise.

2.1.2. Social identities at the workplace

The organisational context is an interesting arena for identity processes as individuals can find themselves in complex relations to others from which they draw their identities, based on, for instance, hierarchy, power, status, function, responsibility, ethnicity or sex.

Existing literature that combines organisational and identity research often appears far less complex, though. For the most part, it can be categorised as interested in organisational benefits, characterised by the aim to find a way to effectively manage identities in the organisational sphere. *Organisation* and *identity* are therefore put together to *organisational identities* – shared beliefs about the distinctive, steady and central characteristics of an organisation (Pratt and Corley, 2012) – and tested for their potential to influence organisational outcomes. Organisational identities are then studied as a reason for turnover rates on the level of the individual or groups, for example (Madera, King and Hebl, 2012). But they can also be a source for work motivation (Haslam, Powell and Turner, 2000), a factor influencing psychological wellbeing (Pratt and Corley, 2012) and ultimately a driver of performance (De Braine and Roodt, 2011). They are also studied because work settings provide options for self-enhancement, self-esteem and certainty (Pratt, 2001). Though the unit of analysis has often been the individual, the end of those studies has always been an organisational one.
The study at hand is yet not interested in such technical (Habermas, 1972 in Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008) approaches, but in how individuals perceive themselves in their work environment. Previous researches that asked how individuals make sense of themselves as well as of their experiences in workplaces focused, for example, on sex and gender. One finding was that (female) gender roles are especially negative and rigid when combined with numerical underrepresentation, because numerical underrepresentation reflects power imbalances (Ely, 1995). Other studies sought to shed light on specific sectors and industries, professions or positions and their relation to work-related identities (e.g. tourism, engineering, nursing and telecommunications in Kirpal, 2004, senior manager in Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). No matter if the focus lied on gender or a particular profession, such researches equally aimed at capturing the influence of imagery, stereotypes and representations, and also pointed at larger national or organisational systems affecting peoples' identities in organisations. In that respect, identity formation also hugely varies across countries. National contexts, e.g. institutions regulating the labour market or the maturity of education systems, inform individuals on how to perceive their work-related selves (Kirpal, 2004).

Research has also taken place in single organisations (Adams and Crafford, 2012), informing about identity creation strategies on various levels that may be generalisable beyond a singular context to other organisations. Employees draw upon their personal philosophies, their relationships, their career management and work-life balance when negotiating who they are at work (Adams and Crafford, 2012). Thus, individuals do not only consider their immediate work environment in work-related identity formation, but also the wider context of their lives. Seemingly unrelated events and relationships inform people’s work-related identities, and therefore the organisational context appears as just one factor amongst several.

While all of such studies might to some degree inform the research at hand, it still is the ethnic minority context that plays an important role in differentiating this research from various others.

2.2. Ethnic minority identities

Past research on ethnic minority identities is in two ways relevant to this study: 1. What can previous work tell us about how ethnic minority members create their identities in organisational environments, and 2. what issues have been raised with regard to the identities of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland?
2.2.1. Ethnic minority work-related identities

In past research, special interest had been paid, for instance, to the disadvantaged position of ethnic women (e.g. Bell, 1990) as they combine the ethnic minority status with the female gender and have been identified to be especially hindered in career advancement (Atewologun and Singh, 2010). Women of colour in white work environments establish different mechanism to cope with their bicultural and biethnic context: while some may view it as enriching and as sources of knowledge, information and new friendships, others find themselves isolated or distressed by the complex relations and heavily rely on the empowerment they experience from their original community (Bell, 1990). Either way, most of them keep the different areas of their life, work and private life, mentally separate. Interestingly, visible identity categories, i.e. features of one’s outward appearance, are often perceived as a distinctive difference despite a common nationality, both by the in- and the out-group members. This applies to the identity construction of both female and male professionals (Atewologun and Singh, 2010). As a consequence, a considerable amount of sense-making with regard to one’s own identities can be quite directly linked to visible features. It is arguable in this respect what is considered to be an ethnic feature, as it was already pointed out in the introduction to this study that ethnicity is not a clear-cut concept. Related to that is another finding from the same study (Atewologun and Singh, 2010) on dark-skinned professionals in the United Kingdom: The social context can also function as a restriction to identity. Some interviewees in that study expressed the notion that English was associated with white, and from that followed the constraint in their work environment to take on both a black and an English identity simultaneously. Not fitting with the majority characteristics therefore turns into exclusion and a need to reconfigure one’s understanding of the self.

But not only visual features can be differentiators in identity formation, also language can affect minorities’ experiences and identity processes in organisations. As language abilities affect interpersonal relations, they, in the long run, also affect how units relate to one another and how organisations are able to influence units and individuals (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007). Social networks are perceived more strongly in case of a shared, fluent language (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007), and possibly the mother tongue would create the strongest bonds due to the strongest verbal skills. As a consequence, people that speak the same language fluently partly share social identities, and it has been found that languages thereby also inform trust in organisations (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007). So people that are able to speak the same language
generally tend to trust each other more. Furthermore, language, depending on which organisational level it is spoken on, influences perceptions of in- and out-groups as well as perceptions of power (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007; Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen and Piekkari, 2006). If, for instance, managers speak a certain language that most of the subordinate employees do not speak, language clearly informs structures linked to power and, hence, influence interpersonal dynamics. But also language minority members can be in a powerful position, even if it is simultaneously linked to out-group belonging: If the minority language helps to perform a certain task, for instance handling customers in a language that the rest of the unit does not speak, then it is possible also for a minority to be in a powerful position.

Past research has further found differences between men and women in how they address their own position in organisations with regard to their ethnicity. While ethnic minority men have been found to use strategy and battle-like terminology and often portray their status as a chance or value, women appear to explain difficult experiences in a larger context, restructuring them to lessen the focus solely on ethnicity or gender (Atewologun and Singh, 2010). What they have in common though is that men’s and women’s ethnic identity becomes evident in similar ways. A study on British black Caribbean employees (Kenny and Briner, 2013) showed that ethnic identity salience in the workplace is usually triggered in two ways: either it is assigned by others to an individual (“push”) or individuals themselves increasingly affiliate with their ethnic group due to a particular social context (“pull”). Push therefore means that, for example, a co-worker comments on an individual’s way of working by pointing at stereotypes connected to the individual’s ethnicity. On the opposite, individuals themselves pull their ethnic background into their sense-making processes, mostly when their ethnicity enables them to perform better at work.

Research on ethnic identity processes in organisations has often reflected the ethnic composition of the national population, though. That means that organisations were studied in which the personnel’s ethnic mix was fairly identical to the society outside the organisation. But even when two different minorities face each other in an organisation in- and out-group behaviour takes place. African-Americans and Hispanics, considered both a minority in the United States, constituted a new majority-minority context in an organisational setting (Leonard, Mehra and Katerberg, 2008). The Hispanics, the minority in this case, rather identified and became friends with their own ethnic group, and thereby perpetuated ethnic separation. While the research at hand is not placed in a
single organisation, it will certainly also take into account whether the internal organisational context that participants refer to resembles the composition of the external environment.

### 2.2.2. Ethnic minority experiences in Finland

Past research upon minority identities in Finland has mostly dealt with the Russian, Estonian or former Soviet Union minorities (e.g. Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind, 1998; Mähönen, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind, 2011), rather than the Swedish-speaking. Generally, feeling ethnically discriminated may lead to dis-identification with the Finnish nation. Such a dis-identification is accountable for an increase in immigrants’ and ethnic minorities’ hostile attitudes towards the Finnish society, adding to the general distinction between the ethnic in- and out-groups (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Solheim, 2009). But not only does ethnic discrimination have outward effects, it may also result in lower health and wellbeing of the individual. The perception of a lower socioeconomic status due to ethnic belonging, communicated through unemployment and little belief in one’s ethnic group’s controlling power, negatively affects mental and physical health of ethnic minority members (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Perhoniemi, 2007).

In contrast, adult Swedish-speaking Finns have not been widely considered in terms of effects of their ethnic minority membership. Rather, they have been contrasted to Finnish speakers with regard to a larger social capital, leading to longer and more active lives, and a health state which is generally perceived as better (Hyyppä and Mäki, 2001). This points out that the position of the Swedish-speaking Finnish minority is very different from other ethnic minorities, but also at times perceived to be superior to the Finnish-speaking Finns, especially in terms of social and economic capital (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind and Teräsaho, 2007).

Nevertheless, studies on Swedish-speaking Finnish children and teenagers indicate interesting tendencies that are important to the study at hand as they could be seen as a precursor for adult life. In a Swedish-speaking preschool environment it has been observed that small children already clearly determine in- and out-groups based on ethnic features (Forsman and Hummelstedt-Djedou, 2014). While that study included far more ethnic backgrounds than the Swedish- and the Finnish-speaking, it points at the early tendencies to sympathise with some people while disconnecting from others, based on ethnicity. Equally, teenagers in upper secondary schools in Finland have been
found to aim for rather clear distinctions between Finnish and Swedish-speaking Finnish based on private and public language use (Lojander-Visapää, 2008). In a study, they clearly differentiated between us and them. While being Finnish seems to be based on speaking Finnish at home, being Swedish-speaking Finnish is often determined by visiting a Swedish school. As bilingual individuals do not quite fit into either one of the categories, their identity understanding is based on exactly that bilingualism.

Apart from the power of language as an ethnic identifier, language has also been studied as a source for perceived power dynamics between employees of Swedish-Finnish and Finnish origins in a Finnish organisation (Vaara et al., 2005). A Finland-based company had chosen to change its corporate language to Swedish after a merger, contrary to the external environment in which the majority speaks Finnish. The company thereby created its own power dynamics between the employees along with work identities based on the feelings of superiority and inferiority. The corporate language hence partly dictates the social interactions, the organisational identity and dominance structures, underlining that power is not only inherent in specific positions but also in cultural attributes, such as language (Vaara et al., 2005). Languages spoken in an organisation can influence who networks with whom, how information are distributed, and even who is perceived as being competent in a certain context. Furthermore, the study by Vaara et al. (2005) showed that employees reconstruct not only their work-related identities but also their national identity once the corporate language changes.

2.3. Summary of the literature review

The aim of presenting existing literature on Social Identity Theory and its application to organisational contexts was to firstly show the multitude of angles from which the two combined can be addressed.

Despite identities having been widely studied in terms of an organisational identity and organisational outcomes, far less attention seems to have been paid to work-based identities. While we can tell to some degree how specific characteristics play a role in how individuals act and see themselves at work, e.g. female gender, or how specific positions and fields of work influence identification processes, research on the ethnic (minority) component in work-based identity creation is scattered. If Social Identity Theory has been applied to ethnic minorities in organisational contexts, it has not been to the Swedish-speaking Finns. Again, one may assume that the institutional protection of Swedish-speaking Finns has effects that make them fairly incomparable to other ethnic
minorities anyways. Even though their ethnic identity has been looked at in terms of how children and teenagers already distinguish between members of a population that are basically all Finnish nationals, we are unable to tell how the story continues once they grow older and start working. Generally, there is little research upon the ethnic minority of Swedish-speaking Finns despite them having been present and influential in various ways for a long time.

Overall, although existing literature might allow us to make assumptions on how Swedish-speaking Finns relate to the Finnish-speaking majority or how they interact in workplaces, no source has proved to be sufficient enough to capture an answer to the research aim. There remains a research gap on how Swedish-speaking Finns actually create a coherent story of their own identities at work given the multitude and variance of experiences inside and outside organisations, while getting older and while changing locations and also workplaces.
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In contrast to previous research, the study at hand looks at the Swedish-speaking Finns’ construction of work-related identities from a narrative perspective. This chapter therefore introduces the design chosen for the study. The qualitative method of semi-structured interviews as well as the choice for it are explained, before the sampling criteria and methods are presented. The reader is further informed about how the interview guide had been created and how the data collection took place during the interviews. The chapter closes with a description of the narrative analysis approach applied in the data analysis and an assessment of how criteria for evaluating qualitative research have been implemented.

3.1. Identity construction in semi-structured interviews

Silverman (1993: 144) stated that “work becomes scientific by adopting methods of study appropriate to its subject matter”. Accordingly, if social identities are viewed to arise from personal interaction and communication, the same means should be applied to understand

- how members of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland experience their ethnic background in organisational settings, and, following from that,
- what identities they create for themselves with regard to work life.

Conducting semi-structured, face-to-face interviews was deemed most appropriate against the criteria of personal interaction and communication about the experiences and (self-)understandings of Swedish-speaking Finns. I believe that no one else but the subjects themselves can give a better account of how they understand their own identities. While the primary goal during an interview in general is to “generate data which give an authentic insight into people’s experiences” (Silverman, 1993: 91), the semi-structured approach holds the benefit of leaving the interviewer both prepared and flexible. While the topics to touch upon are set a priori in an interview guide, a semi-structured interview setting also leaves flexibility to adapt to the plurality of narratives. Questions do not need to be asked in the same order or sub-questions are allowed depending on the course of each interview. (Bryman and Bell, 2011) The semi-structured interview frame therefore also leaves room for the interviewer becoming more used to and skilled in listening and asking questions.
The semi-structured interview set-up sets focus on what stories people tell within a specific topical frame. Such narratives connect the internal and external parts of an individual’s existence, and thereby illustrate “the boundaries of identities (of who one is and who one is not)” (Plummer, 2001: 395). Narratives also serve as linkages over time. They capture historical and cultural changes, generations, and life phases and thereby put an individual’s story into context with the *bigger picture* (Plummer, 2001). In other words, through a narrative’s nature of telling a story, events and ideas that are chronologically scattered become connected and get a “meaningful pattern” (Riessman, 2008: 5). More than that, by the means of interviews, Social Identity Theory can be approached through narratives. Narratives provide opportunities to develop social identities, group belonging and social action, beyond the factual individual story – they are “an everyday technology of self-construction” (Coupland, 2007). Due to this creative, constructive aspect, narratives reflect the fluid, ever-changing character of identities, “always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong” (Yuval-Davis, 2006 in Riessman, 2008: 8). The narratives provide the interviewer with an insight into the social psychological dynamics by which individuals create their own story as coherent as possible, while the conduct of interviews enables the subjects to perform “discursive work” (Coupland, 2007: 276). By the means of interview interaction, subjects construct and develop their own identity, and even discover themselves (Coupland, 2007), as discourse can be viewed as a tool to construct rather than just displaying or reflecting identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). And while that is a description of the understanding at present, narratives also always include a direction for what should happen in the future, respectively for what role they and other social actors will play (Beech and Sims, 2007). Therefore, narration is both a descriptive and formative act at the very same moment with respect to the questions of “Who am I?”, “Who are we?” and “Who are they?” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). While it tells about who someone is at the very moment, narration also provides an opportunity to form the future self.

It is yet important to acknowledge that narratives are co-created in an interview set-up (Coupland, 2007; Silverman, 1993). Like the subject matter of the research the research design is equally based on social construction. Just as in any other social encounter, interviewer and interviewee are able to negotiate the interview content, i.e. the identities, through instant dialogue (Riessman, 2008). In this respect, the interviewer plays an important role in the form, content and impact of the narrative. This is not to say that new identities are created in an interview but that *outside* identities can be expressed in
new ways, depending on how interviewee and interviewer interact. Moreover, the identities constructed in narration give a temporary, subjective picture that is dependent to a large degree to the individual context, even though a shared ethnicity provides for a partly equally shared background (Parker, 2005).

### 3.2. Population of Swedish-speaking Finns

Generally, the amount of Finnish citizens that have Swedish registered as their primary language currently make up about 5% of the total population of Finland. 89% of the population refer to Finnish as their mother tongue. Table 1 also shows the proportions in absolute numbers, as well as that the remaining 6% speak other minority languages, like Russian, Estonian, Somali, English, Spanish, Romanian or Sami.

| Table 1 Finland’s total population 31.12.2015 by language (Tilastokeskus, 2016) |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Whole country | Languages, total | 5,487,308 | 100.00% |
| Finnish | 4,865,628 | 88.67% |
| Swedish | 290,161 | 5.29% |
| Russian | 72,436 | 1.32% |
| Estonian | 48,087 | 0.88% |
| Somali | 17,871 | 0.33% |
| English | 17,784 | 0.32% |
| Spanish | 7,025 | 0.13% |
| Romanian | 3,161 | 0.06% |
| Sami | 1,957 | 0.04% |

Due to previous studies either having no specific age restrictions or studying school children, this study focuses on the earlier years in working life after school education is (for the time being) completed. This age is also significant in terms of school-to-work transition, during which experiences made in teenage years are transferred into the work environment, as in Finland graduation from upper secondary school takes place between 19 and 25 years on average, and graduation from university around 26 or 27 years of age (Tilastokeskus, 2013).

Accordingly, looking at how specifically the Swedish-speaking Finns of age 20 to 39 (about 65,000 people), are spread within the country, Appendix 1 shows that they
accumulate in specific regions. In relative terms, based on population statistics from 2015, Åland has the highest proportion of Swedish-speaking Finns with roughly 95%. This may be easiest explained by Åland being a self-governed area of Finland that has only one official language: Swedish. Followed by Ostrobothnia with 50%, Åland, accordingly, is the only region where Swedish-speaking Finns constitute the majority. Uusimaa and Central Ostrobothnia each have a Swedish-speaking population of 8%, then follow Varsinais-Suomi with 6% and Kymenlaakso with 1%. The remaining regions of Finland indicate a very low proportion of Swedish native speakers with 0%.

In absolute terms, shown more clearly in Table 2, Uusimaa is characterised by the highest number of Swedish-speaking Finns with about 29,400 people, followed by Ostrobothnia (20,300), Varsinais-Suomi (6,800), Åland (5,500) and Central Ostrobothnia (1,200). All other regions show numbers below 500 Swedish-speaking Finns.

Table 2  Swedish-speaking population in Finland 31.12.2015 by region, sex and age (Tilastokeskus, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Both sexes</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uusimaa</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,657</td>
<td>7,406</td>
<td>7,171</td>
<td>7,127</td>
<td>29,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varsinais-Suomi</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,206</td>
<td>1,626</td>
<td>1,473</td>
<td>1,499</td>
<td>6,804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satakunta</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanta-Häme</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirkanmaa</td>
<td></td>
<td>117</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Päijät-Häme</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kymenlaakso</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Karelia</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etelä-Savo</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pohjois-Savo</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Karelia</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Finland</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Ostrobothnia</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostrobothnia</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,630</td>
<td>5,058</td>
<td>4,737</td>
<td>4,917</td>
<td>20,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Ostrobothnia</td>
<td></td>
<td>255</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>1,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ostrobothnia</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainuu</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapland</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Åland</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,355</td>
<td>1,427</td>
<td>1,361</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>5,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>64,914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Due to looking at a minority situation, both Åland and Ostrobothnia drop out as possible sample areas. Instead, both from a convenience and statistical perspective, the capital area around Helsinki appears as a valid geographical area for sampling. As 45% of the Swedish-speaking population reside in Uusimaa, a sample from the capital region is likely to represent a large share of the population when taking into account that individual experiences differ based on the characteristics of different geographical areas.

### 3.3. Sample

The population of particular interest, the Swedish-speaking Finns between 20 and 39 years of age residing in Uusimaa are fairly evenly spread in terms of sex with a slightly higher amount of men (52%) than women (48%). Representing them in more narrow age cohorts of 5-year steps, there is only a couple hundred people more in their 20s than in their 30s.

**Table 3  Swedish-speaking population in Uusimaa 31.12.2015 by sex and age (Tilastokeskus, 2016)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,902</td>
<td>3,755</td>
<td>3,788</td>
<td>3,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>7,657</td>
<td>7,406</td>
<td>7,171</td>
<td>7,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the previous descriptive data it was deemed appropriate that a sample relevant for the purpose of this study would consist of young adult to mid-aged Swedish-speaking Finns living in and around Helsinki. The main point of such criterion sampling is to reach cases that are expected to be particularly “information rich” (Patton, 2002). Such cases most likely enable the researcher to reach insightful answers to the research questions. The sample is described in more detail next.

The final sample matched the following sampling criteria:

- Swedish as mother tongue,
- graduated,
- 20 to 39 years old and
- residing in the capital region of Helsinki (including Vantaa and Espoo).
No further restrictions amongst age cohorts were applied. Further, as previous literature suggests that both male and female employees of ethnic minorities are interesting subjects with regard to work-related identities, no particular sample composition in terms of sex was targeted. A rather even amount of male and female participants was only loosely aimed for to be prepared for possible gender-based differences.

An equally not targeted, yet noteworthy feature of the participants was whether they classified themselves as monolingual, i.e. Swedish-speaking, or bilingual, i.e. Swedish- and Finnish-speaking (indicated in Table 4 as “mono” and “bi”). No previous literature could be found that would generally indicate a correlation with the level of majority-language abilities, but it is likely that they highly influence the organisational experiences of (Swedish-speaking) individuals. Related literature was not available because Swedish is not just a minority language in Finland but an official language as well. That constitutes a context that is very particular and hardly comparable. Accordingly, Swedish speakers likely face different possibilities and expectations than any other minority in Finland as well as most other minorities in other countries. Mono- and bilingualism are likely to result in different levels of language proficiency and self-confidence about language skills. Such different levels might also result in differences how Swedish speakers create their work-related identities. It sounds reasonable to assume that monolinguals would be less proficient or at least less self-confident while bilinguals would show more confidence, and that would also influence how they view themselves at work.

The only criterion not statistically available was the status of having graduated. As it is, though, of primary importance given the research aim possible participants were informed about the criterion already during the sampling process. Generally, it was assumed that the combination of place of residence, age and graduated as sampling criteria provide for work experience of some kind. The type and extent of work experience was not deemed significant for a general view on the creation of work-related identities, therefore they did not influence the sample composition. Only cases of no work experience at all could not be included in the sample. In that respect, also enrolment in a doctoral program was considered as graduated despite the student status. Obtaining a doctoral degree includes research work that requires interaction with faculty staff, other students and other parties, and it can be based on a formal contract where salary is received. For this study, it was therefore classified as a work experience.
Data were gathered from ten interviews. Table 4 shows the more specific make-up of the sample. Out of ten interviewees, seven were female and three were male. On average, they lasted 42 minutes. Participants were between 25 and 37 years old.

Table 4  Sample, sampling and interview overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Type of work</th>
<th>Work (since graduation)</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Guide</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 M, 25 Master Mono</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>10 mos</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Own network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 F, 25 Bachelor Bi</td>
<td>Physiotherapist</td>
<td>4 yrs</td>
<td>23 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Public library</td>
<td>Own network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 F, 27 Bachelor Bi</td>
<td>Secretary, Customer Service</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>41 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Swedish-speaking institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 F, 25 Bachelor Mono</td>
<td>Secretary, Customer Service</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>27 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Swedish-speaking institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 M, 37 Bachelor Mono</td>
<td>Office director</td>
<td>6 yrs</td>
<td>37 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Swedish-speaking institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 F, 28 Master Mono</td>
<td>Department Administrator</td>
<td>3.5 yrs</td>
<td>49 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Hanken LinkedIn group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 F, 37 Bachelor Mono</td>
<td>Consultant (self-employed)</td>
<td>10 yrs</td>
<td>75 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Own network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 M, 33 Master Bi</td>
<td>Ph.D. candidate</td>
<td>3.5 yrs</td>
<td>44 mins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Facebook group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 F, 36 Master Mono</td>
<td>HR Business Partner</td>
<td>12 yrs</td>
<td>36 mins</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Own network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 F, 32 Master Bi</td>
<td>Business Area Director</td>
<td>9 yrs</td>
<td>39 mins</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviewee’s office facilities</td>
<td>Own network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ten interviewees were recruited using various approaches (Patton, 2002; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Five participants came from own networks (i.e. convenience sampling), three could be recruited by getting in touch with a major Swedish-speaking institution in Helsinki (i.e. snowball sampling), one took the initiative after an announcement about the study had been posted in the LinkedIn group Hanken - Svenska handelshögskolan intended for students and alumni of Hanken School of Economics (i.e. self-selection sampling), and a final participant expressed interest after posting an
announcement in a Facebook group of a Swedish-speaking student union of Aalto University (i.e. self-selection sampling).

Convenience sampling took place when people in my private network were interested in participating in the study. This seemed advantageous given that an interview also highly depends on the interviewee’s willingness to share information. The same applied to self-selection sampling. Despite literature pointing out that non-probability samples are likely to be not representative (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) also snowball sampling was used, i.e. some participants were asked to inform their own networks about the possibility to take part in my research project. Given the conduct of research upon Swedish-speaking Finns, who have been pointed out for their social networking abilities and strong inter-ethnic connections (Hyyppä and Mäki, 2001), it seemed very appropriate to make use of a sampling technique that relies on participants’ networks.

3.4. Interview guides

The data collection period started with structuring a preliminary interview guide. The overall design of the interview guide followed the assumption that interviewees are “knowledgeable agents” (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013: 17) who can give account of their actions and thoughts without the researchers needing to apply too many pre-constructed theories. So I followed the idea of getting to know the people I was interviewing in terms of their language skills and how those shaped their experiences over the years.

An article from Helsingin Sanomat (appendix 2) was chosen as to start the interview after I had introduced myself, aimed at triggering an easy start into reflecting own experiences and circumstances. The article tells about actress Alma Pöysti and her experiences as a Swedish-speaking Finn in Finland. While it was optional to read the whole article, the following parts were marked (translated from Finnish):

- In 2014 the number of Swedish-speaking Finns moving to Sweden reached a new high (933 people).
- The Swedish-speaking interviewed for the article told that the atmosphere towards Swedish-speaking Finns in Finland has become harsher. It is also viewed problematic that the mother tongue cannot be used at their workplace.
If one reads, for example, discussion forums there is quite a lot of hate towards the Swedish-speaking Finns.

Being a Swedish-speaking Finn is not only about sailing and crayfish parties. Quite a lot feels left outside that definition. The upper-class image is a clichéd, old-fashioned and perhaps also convenient. It can be used to affront the upper class, and this bättre folk [in English: better folk].

Pöysti herself has not experienced racism, but some of her Swedish-speaking Finnish friends avoid talking Swedish in public places in the evenings, because they are afraid to get beaten up. And some have gotten.

Another classic situation to Pöysti is that if a single Finnish speaker comes along, the language is changed immediately, even though Finns have studied Swedish in school as much as the Swedish-speaking Finnish.

Especially the older Swedish-speaking Finns noticed that Swedish is cannot be spoken in different locations in the same way as before.

However, she does not get angry if the Finnish do not know Swedish.

The then following questions were inspired by the literature review, and the topics had a rather chronological order, starting with childhood, then continuing with teenage years and ending with workplace experiences. Generally, open-ended questions were used as they are more likely to yield interviewees’ attitudes, values, opinions, understandings, experiences or interpretations (Silverman, 1993), and the questions were formulated in a non-directive way. First, I wanted to ask for opinions, feelings and thoughts on the article to hear own accounts of discrimination and explaining it. As identity, intergroup behaviour and ethnic attitudes are associated with childhood, family and peers (Mähönen, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind, 2011), the interviewees were asked for encounters and experiences with regard to Finnish speakers and the Finnish language in their childhood and teenage years. For their adulthood, the relationships inside and outside work, as well as work and private activities were touched upon as factors of identity negotiating (Vaara et al., 2005), just as advantages and disadvantages stemming from language skills were asked upon in terms of task performance (Atewologun and Singh, 2010; Vaara et al., 2005). I wanted to find out whether language had ever been an issue in the organisational context and, if so, how that had been the case. A question on
incidents when ethnicity was particularly salient seemed appropriate to further bring about how the interaction amongst colleagues drew the line between Finnish and Swedish speakers (Kenny and Briner, 2013). Generally, the interview guide should cover a wider range of questions based on the previous finding that individuals draw upon various aspects when creating their work-related identities (Adams and Crafford, 2012). The purposes of/and those different parts of the interviews are illustrated in Table 5 below.

If an interviewee pointed out men or women at any point, I also added the question whether differences between the actions and reactions of men and women are perceived. While this was never any primary intent of the research, it seemed yet interesting given the findings of past studies (Bell, 1990).

Table 5  Summary of interview guide 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and opening (article)</td>
<td>Build trust and encourage the interviewees to share information without being straight personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article validity and own experiences, feelings and ways of coping</td>
<td>How participants perceive the discrimination of Swedish-speaking Finns and how (il)legitimate discrimination seems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing Finnish and Swedish during childhood and teen age vs. quality/quantity of inter-ethnic relations during adulthood</td>
<td>Investigate the perception of in- and outgroups is formed in early years as well as vitality of in-group relationships and attitudes towards the out-group of Finnish speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace behaviour, interaction with colleagues, usage of languages</td>
<td>Whether and how language is an issue at work and how that manifests itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>Give participants a forum to share remaining thoughts, e.g. on heightened self-awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first draft of the interview guide was then tested in three pilot interviews in order to test the order and intelligibility of the questions as well as the recording equipment, and to generally practise how to spontaneously adapt to the interview situations as a researcher. Also the article was tested for starting the interview. Since that was perceived interesting, relevant and a useful tool to base first reflections on, it was adopted in the
following data collection period. The first version of the interview guide, though, was slightly altered due to the feedback and experiences in the pilot interview round. The wording of the questions was reviewed in order to be more clear, and sub-questions were added to the topic areas in order to be prepared for a certain variance in the answering behaviour. The only part that was completely taken out was directly asking for perceived differences between Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking Finns, for it being too insinuating, and because such viewpoints were expected to be stated while answering other questions anyway.

Apart from that, questions were added or altered during the data collection period when some appeared to be more triggering than others. For example, when covering the topic of workplace experiences, it appeared that asking “Has your mother tongue ever influenced where you work?” evoked much more insightful answers than “What are your experiences at work related to your mother tongue?”. It turned out to elicit much better the reasons for (not) applying for a job, responsibilities that the interviewees got or did not get, or perceptions of organisation’s requirements towards employees. The version of the interview guide that I used in the first eight interviews is shown in Appendix 3.

Though initially not written into the interview guide, fairly at the beginning of the data collection period, a final open question was added. Giving the interviewees the opportunity to add own thoughts that were not connected to a specific topic area or specifically asked for in one of the questions oftentimes served as a forum for general thoughts, wrap-ups or even self-awareness. This also felt to be a good way to not abruptly end the interview but instead leave some room for the participants to digest the interview.

The interview guide further evolved during the data collection process for testing whether precise enough data could be gathered using the first interview guide. Therefore, in the two last interviews, the focus was set solely on work-related experiences, leaving out the article as well as childhood and teenage years. The questions of the second interview guide (appendix 4) were informed by answers given in the first interview round, but still took up issues already included on workplace experiences in the first interview guide. I was particularly interested in how differently, i.e. advantageous and disadvantageous, language skills are perceived in the work environment, and in how the interaction differed between and with Swedish and Finnish speakers. Its parts and their purpose are summarised also in Table 6. Questions upon childhood and teenage experiences indeed did not prove to be necessary, but they were yet relevant periods with
regard to the interviewees’ language skills and relation to the language groups. Participants related to them often by themselves when they considered it relevant. For the research aim it was important to ask questions on language and ethnicity at work, so those were part of both interview guides. While interview guide 1 gave wider information and made it possible to put different aspects of the interviewees’ lives into perspective, interview guide 2 went more into detail to support and enrich stories that interview guide 1 had already generated. There were two main observations with regard to differences in the interviews: Interview guide 1 provided an easier start due to using the article and might also have set a certain critical mood (which was not necessarily negative though), interview guide 2 instead demanded more work, i.e. flexibility and adaptation, from myself as the interviewer so that interviewees would not simply describe their work but consider it thoroughly.

Table 6  Summary of interview guide 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction + opening (interviewee introduction)</td>
<td>Build trust and give an easy start into the interview situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work performance (relevance of Swedish in task performance)</td>
<td>When language skills are perceived as an extra skill and when as an obstacle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with different colleagues, language usage in interaction</td>
<td>Do Swedish speakers stick to internal in-groups, what differentiates the Swedish-Swedish interaction from Swedish-Finnish (or even Finnish-Finnish) interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>Give participants a forum to share remaining thoughts, e.g. on heightened self-awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5. Semi-structured interviews

All of the potential interviewees of the first round received the following written information on the interview arrangement by email when the first contact was established: “The interview would need approximately 45 minutes in total (with introduction and questions afterwards), and you would be asked to read parts of a 2-page Finnish article. With your consent, I would record the interview for the end of accurate data. The study, the article as well as the subsequent questions deal with the everyday experiences of the majority-minority constellations of Swedish-speaking Finns. Your
anonymity will be preserved.” The potential participants of the second round received the following information upon the first contact: “After a first interview round, I am now looking for more Swedish-speaking Finns that are willing to have an interview with me which would need approximately 30 minutes. The study aims at understanding the workplace experiences of Swedish-speaking Finns. Your anonymity will be preserved, and only with your consent I would record the interview for the end of accurate data.” All of them were also reminded of the sampling criteria and encouraged to ask any remaining questions. None of the contacted people withdrew from participating.

The interviews took place in various locations (table 4), depending on the availability of the interviewee. Most often, the interviewees offered to reserve some space at their workplace. Only one of the interviews was held in a group work room of a public library. All of the interviewees were informed once more before the first question that their anonymity would be preserved. They were also advised of the possibility to end the interview at any point or not answer to a question, yet none of the interviewees did so. All of them agreed to have the interview recorded.

During the interviews, special attention had been paid to keeping a minimal profile as the interviewer as I could have had a significant effect on the answering behaviour of interview participants (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Firstly, questions were aimed at being open and neutral, to limit the respondents’ feeling of social desirability, as interviewees might tend to give answers “with a concern for what they say about the speaker today and for the future” (Coupland, 2007: 275). Secondly, I also aimed at creating an atmosphere where clarifying questions from both sides were accepted and encouraged to avoid incongruity in meanings. Thirdly, as I am neither of Finnish nor of Swedish-Finnish ethnicity, response effects could probably be limited because the interviewees could not see a connection between myself and the interview topic. In order to minimise unwanted distortion, it was clearly stated in each interview that my personal background, i.e. ethnicity, is not attached to the topic.

Since the interviews held for this research were semi-structured, the data were gathered loosely following the prepared interview guide. After, in the first interview round, I had started by asking all interviewees for the first thoughts on the article content, all interviews took slightly different paths, e.g. because some question to follow got already answered or because dwelling on a particular aspect seemed fruitful. The interviews also varied in length (table 4). After the short second interview round, I felt that giving interviewees a chance to actually elaborate more on their individual background from
childhood on gave a) a more accurate, though also more complex, picture of them and b) they appeared much more likely to reflect upon themselves and, as a consequence, talk more naturally. Therefore, the second approach was quickly discontinued.

3.6. Data processing and analysis

As all interview participants agreed to the interview being recorded, the interviews could afterwards be transcribed completely and as verbatim as possible. Only on rare occasions difficulties occurred due to breaks in the recordings, background noise or pronunciation that was unintelligible. The transcription was done carefully, already taking note then of choices of words deemed particular, e.g. due to a change in tone or a preceding thinking break. Also laughter was listed. Due to simultaneous data collection and partial analysis it was possible to notice similarities and differences in the narrations at an early stage.

The analysis process corresponded to the narrative analysis approach (Riessman, 2008; Silverman, 1993). Narrative analysis is, despite aiming at determining overarching similarities, case-centred (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis has a focus on the forms of storytelling and functions of talk, thereby centring around the performing actions of speakers: It acknowledges the interviewer as part of the act, even if s/he is only facilitating and provoking the narration, and pays critical attention to the features of a talk, taking into account that what is being said can have further functions than simply giving a picture of the interviewees’ lives (Silverman, 1993). Stories, and with them their structures and settings, are considered as a whole rather than being reduced to single incidents (Silverman, 1993). This also influenced the first interview guide to include wider aspects of the interviewees’ lives to combine or contrast different aspects of the self, instead of reducing them to work life.

I found analysis steps indicated by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) to achieve rigour in qualitative research to be very helpful in administering the narrative analysis approach and in organising the different narratives. Table 7 illustrates the respective process. In practise, I started in a case-centred manner, initially sorting data from each interview. Especially at this stage I kept in mind Silverman’s above stated questions. I marked parts I considered to be relevant for the research question on the transcript print-outs and noted particular wordings, topics dealt with and explanations the participants were giving for their experiences. I listed all of these notes afterwards and grouped them according to similarities. Thereby, headlines emerged. Based on those, I found myself able to organise the data further and develop the data into more theory-centred
dimensions. Finally, once those dimensions emerged, deviant cases were searched for amongst the data to test whether claims hold true (Silverman, 1993).

Table 7  Analysis process overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skimming transcript by transcript, marking passages and giving them titles, i.e. perform initial, informant-centric data sorting</td>
<td>Finding recurring themes</td>
<td>Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013; Riessman, 2008; Silverman, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gathering themes, i.e. compiling 1st-order terms</td>
<td>Giving headlines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping headlines, i.e. organising headlines in a theory-centric manner</td>
<td>Developing an overarching data structure, i.e. dimensions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for deviant cases</td>
<td>Establishing sound claims</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from this step-by-step narrative analysis process, I deemed the following questions important when reading through the transcripts. While those questions were not specifically answered, they still functioned to preserve an objective stand as and inform the researcher when analysing narratives.

- What is the content of the story?
- Who are the main agents?
- How is the story told (structure and sequence)?
- What purposes does the story serve (function)?
- In what place or setting is the story told (context)?
- How does s/he position characters in relation to one another, and in relation to him/herself?
  (Silverman, 1993: 82)

3.7.  Quality of the research

This sub-chapter will assess credibility, transferability, confirmability and authenticity as criteria to evaluate the quality of this social, qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, 1994 in Bryman and Bell, 2011; Shenton, 2004). Generally, ethical concerns also need to be taken into account, particularly pointing at a professional interaction with research subjects (Bryman and Bell, 2011).
The **credibility** criterion demands from a researcher that the phenomenon studied is presented and understood from the participants' viewpoint. As there are many accounts to social reality, the only account credible in the frame of a study is the one of its participants. Only through the eye of the participants the evaluation of the quality of a research is possible (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A researcher inevitably incorporates own accounts on various levels of the research, for example own opinions and experiences always influence already what topic is researched and how. Therefore, researchers do not simply replicate social reality but direct how a study portrays it. To do quality research, it is then necessary to reach congruency between the reality and how it is being portrayed through the application of adequate tools (Shenton, 2004). Adequate tools are the ones that fit the concepts studied. In the current research project, I found it most suitable to let the subjects themselves talk directly in a relatively free manner, and both record the interviews and take notes in order not to lose data or use my own vocabulary to reproduce experiences and thoughts.

As another means to reach credibility, different ways of triangulation in order to ensure the credibility of the research and its findings should be considered (Shenton, 2004). One option is to include a large variety of informants, i.e. informants that have, despite the sampling criteria, differing characteristics and backgrounds. For that end, I chose to utilise various sampling methods and networks to avoid that participants are very alike apart from the predetermined criteria.

**Transferability** points at the degree to which findings of a qualitative research project can be generalized and are applicable also in other settings (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Shenton, 2004). The better the assumptions and contexts underlying a study are explained, the higher the potential of transferability. Because different settings become better comparable the more information are available. Nevertheless, the aim to transfer findings to another context already depreciates the specifics of a case (Shenton, 2004). Transferability of qualitative research results is, therefore, hard to reach in reality. What is more significant is the willingness of the researcher to lay open the boundaries of the study. Such a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973 in Bryman and Bell, 2011: 398) of the case at hand demands exhaustive information on the significant characteristics of the study environment. I therefore included any available information on the various stages of the research to give the clearest possible picture of how findings have been reached.

Previous chapters of this study have already pointed at the influence of the researcher at different points of the research project. The criterion of **confirmability** takes exactly
this issue up. It is the researcher’s obligation to be aware of and critically reflect upon own values’ and beliefs’ power of manipulating the design and conduct of a research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). As a consequence, a researcher’s ability to prove that findings are “the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004: 72) translates to a thorough explanation of the analysis process. Apart from pondering the limitations of the study and including a self-reflexive part there, I tried to clarify step-by-step how the analysis process took place based on the accounts of the interviewees. The analysis process is thereby laid open and relied to the least possible degree on my personal skills and perceptions (Shenton, 2004).

**Authenticity** is strongly correlated with a perception of *fairness* (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Authenticity asks whether the researcher has represented different viewpoints amongst members of the target population in a fair manner, instead of presenting a one-sided view on the social context. Furthermore, authenticity is also interested in a study’s impact on the participants and the target population, e.g. in terms of whether they gain a better understanding of their social context or whether they arrive at a state of acknowledging others’ perspectives on the matter due to the research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). A one-sided view was prevented by applying various sampling methods and therefore giving a voice to more random stories. Then, at the end of each interview, the participants were also given some minutes to reflect openly upon the interview. A surprisingly large amount noted new self-awareness.

Lastly, also ethical concerns should be addressed in the evaluation of a research project as they mediate between the research goal and the rights of participants (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001). **Ethical principles** question the interaction with participants to the extent of harm, privacy issues as well as information and deception. The aspect of *beneficence* demands a researcher to take care that participants are not physically, emotionally or in any other way, e.g. their career prospects, harmed by taking part in the study (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Rather, being part of a research project should do the participants good. This also is strongly connected to preserving the participants’ anonymity and keeping records confidential, and generally recognising the participants’ vulnerable position due to being a research subject (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001). My subjects were able to consent to or decline the participation at any point. Thereby I tried to preserve the participants’ autonomy (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001). They received the following information both upon the
first contact by email and when we actually met for the interview: I informed about myself, the aim of the study, what would happen during the interview, my wish to record the interview, and I offered to answer any remaining questions. I also promised that each participants’ privacy would remain protected.

From a broader perspective, an ethically conducted research should also consider its impact on non-participants, be it, for example, because the findings could portray people in a certain way (Bryman and Bell, 2011). I aimed at portraying any account as individual. Any negative connotation is equally individual and should neither be taken as applicable to all members of the target population or to the rest of the society. Remembering the co-constructive, contextual nature of social encounters, it was me as the researcher and the interview situation that might have provoked certain accounts. But also were any participant’s past experiences co-created by the individuals that had been present at that time.
4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS: SWEDISH-SPEAKING FINNS ON ETHNICITY, LANGUAGE AND WORK

This chapter presents the research findings, also in the light of relevant literature. It discusses how members of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland talk about their ethnicity, and language in particular, in relation to work experiences and what work-related identities they thereby construct. Finally, statements about the private life are contrasted against findings on work-related identities, reinforcing notions of private and work-life separation.

4.1. The importance of language to identity

In the introduction to this research project it was stated that a shared ethnic background is based on common features like national origin and everyday cultural practices like language, eating habits or religion (Frable, 1997; Hall, 2000 in Gunaratnam, 2003; Phenice and Griffore, 2000). Generally, the interviewees’ responses reflect to a large degree the notion that language is the most critical feature to constitute ethnic belonging (Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind, 1998). Language, in terms of abilities, apparently also widely influences the work-related identities of Swedish-speaking Finns. Without necessarily having been asked directly about languages the interviewees based a lot of their work-related stories on their Finnish language skills as a noticeably decisive factor that paves the way of a Swedish-speaking Finn’s work life. Particularly the comparison to native Finnish speakers’ language abilities characterises their accounts, telling about language-based obstacles and opportunities that distinguish Swedish-speaking Finns in work environments.

Unlike the English term “Swedish-speaking Finn”, which stresses the language aspect of the minority, the most common Swedish and Finnish terms do in fact not contain the direct link to language: in Finnish they are “suomenruotsalaiset” and in Swedish “finlandssvenskar”, so just Finland’s Swedes. The importance of not being Finnish but a Swedish-speaking Finn in particular appears to indeed stem from an early exposure to Swedish language, but also to other aspects of Swedish culture. Obviously, exposure varies in its extent depending on family composition and place of residence, as some family backgrounds and locations might also include other languages. Being connected to some degree to what is happening in another country and culture differentiates the Swedish-speaking Finns more than just linguistically from the rest of the Finnish
population. An interviewee described the importance of being a Swedish-speaking Finn by “growing up in a Swedish-speaking society or culture, family, [where] everybody speaks Swedish in your closest environment” (I9) and by feeling connected to Scandinavia, and Sweden in particular, due to having been more exposed to the media from there and far less to the Finnish ones.

So your life is Swedish even if you’re Finnish by nationality, and the media that you follow growing up is Swedish. [...] And no, we are not Swedish, like, by nationality but we follow Swedish and maybe we are closer in some way, culture way, but, eh, and then you also embrace the Finnish culture, some of those parts, not maybe to the same extent as the Finnish people do. (I9)

Quite like her, several others tried to express their feeling that a Swedish-speaking Finns’ overall cultural capital differs from the Finnish one. It seems difficult for them to directly pinpoint why that is so, but they described themselves as being almost “automatically more international” (I3), having a more open approach to people in general but especially Nordic ones, and benefitting from the practical advantage of having it easier to learn several other languages that Swedish is similar to (I2, I9).

While their self-understanding at times defies national borders, reminders of belonging to a minority are yet an integral part of their lives. Such reminders become visible in various situations, inside and outside of work, even though a lot have become somewhat integrated into daily life, i.e. normalized, and are therefore less distinct.

I would say like once a week I would be like recognized as not, you know, that people would ask me "Where are you actually from?" or. And if you have that once a week, 365 days a year, of course you will be very aware, you will think about it even though you are not interested in thinking about it. [...] If I go to a shop, should I ask in, I guess that’s a typical for people that are minority, should I order my coffee in Swedish or in Finnish if I know there are people in this coffee shop that are actually a lot of them are speaking Swedish or that the person have a flag that they can speak Swedish, like this political ways of when are you outing yourself or on which, what are you, what is your identity, am I like a Finnish speaking not that good Finnish or am I a Finnish person that is a Swedish-speaking Finn? (I7)

Interviewee 8 indicated that her background is questioned as not being Finnish enough. Therefore, she finds herself repeatedly and in various situations wondering whether to lay open the complexity of her own identities despite the fact that she does not want to constantly be reminded of her minority belonging. While, apparently, being Swedish-speaking is a part of the identity that is personally chosen to be very important, from a national identity perspective Swedish-speaking Finns can find themselves at times in a complex relation to position oneself, especially when facing “real, basic Finns” (I10).

Who are those real Finns in the eyes of a Swedish-speaking Finn? To some it is the ones with only Finnish roots (I10), to others real Finns grow up in monolingual households, i.e. one where only Finnish is spoken (I3). Generally, the real, basic Finn is the one that
Swedish-speaking Finns appear to then compare themselves to in the organisational context.

Interestingly, some Swedish speakers that have grown up in a monolingual, i.e. only Swedish-speaking household, also consider bilinguals, who have grown up in a Swedish- and Finnish-speaking household, as a comparison point. While a monolingual can consider a bilingual to have “the two really strong languages” (I9) bilinguals do not necessarily see themselves as perfectly fluent either and face similar language struggles as interviewee 3 described:

> Because when you’re a Swedish-speaking Finn even though you have two mother tongues like I do, I speak Finnish and Swedish from the birth, so there might still be some ways that we, åh, articulate or say things or words or some, somehow say things in such ways that Finnish speakers recognise that this is not your stronger language, and then point out the fact that you made a mistake in the grammar or you shouldn’t say that because that’s not the right form of, or the grammatical form or that’s not a real word. (I3)

While monolinguals might consider bilinguals to be in a much better position workwise than themselves, the bilinguals point out that they will still be recognisable due to small differences in sentence structure or choice of words.

The research therefore shows that there is no consensus amongst the Swedish-speaking Finns with regard to either whom they consider to be really Finnish or to be fluent. Bilingualism also mostly means that Swedish abilities are still perceived to be stronger. It is obvious that language is a fundamental part of the Swedish-speaking identity, informing whom they feel close to and whom they differ from. And even though some Swedish-speaking Finns could potentially be called bilingual experiences with Finnish speakers still keep them affected and classified by their Swedish-speaking background.

4.2. Work-related identities of Swedish-speaking Finns

The participating Swedish-speaking Finns’ narratives differ at times widely in the described level of interference of Finnish skills with job performance and labour market access. The level of interference is notably based on their subjective perception of their language abilities. The detected identity constructs are 1. the unaffected, 2. the constantly comparing and 3. the restricted worker. The term worker should not indicate a certain kind of labour but instead encompass different types of employment arrangement, for instance also self-employment.
### 4.2.1. The unaffected worker

An unaffected worker does not seem to view task performance anyhow connected to languages. Most likely because both Swedish and Finnish are spoken fluently and because there is no difference in the ability to articulate oneself in either one of them, no particular advantages or disadvantages of being a Swedish-speaking Finn are associated with the organisational context. Unaffected workers perceive Swedish and Finnish as equally developed languages (I2: “I can switch anytime”). Interviewee 2 named Swedish as her mother tongue, usually she tells people though that she is bilingual.

So I’m a physiotherapist, so I have like maybe 8-10 clients per day, and like maybe 90% or even more are Finnish-speaking. Then some English-speaking, foreign people, and then Swedish-speaking maybe like once a month. So that’s a minority there. But I don’t maybe feel it [being a Swedish-speaking Finn] affecting my work so much, sometimes maybe a client asks for a Swedish-speaking therapist but that’s also very rare at us. I don’t know how it’s in other places but. [...] Well sometimes they ask about my name, so they might say “Are your parents Swedish-speaking” or something like that, that happened a few times. But nobody wanted to speak Swedish with me or anything like that. [...] (I2)

Interviewee 2’s response is characterised by unawareness for the importance of language in her work, both with customers and colleagues, because of how advanced she perceives her own language skills. Hence, single languages are a negligible part of her work-related identities. When dealing with customers she does not relate to her Finnish and Swedish skills, for example, as a possibility to adapt to the language needs of customers. Switching languages is a completely integrated, and therefore practically overlooked, part of her work-life in which she feels perfectly confident with either language. That also applies to the interaction with colleagues:

I can’t really tell. Maybe it could be an issue if some people don’t speak the other language and feel excluded if the others speak a language they don’t fully understand. But otherwise than that I don’t see it as a problem in any way, and not maybe any big advantages either. (I2)

The work-related identities in terms of languages are based on complete bilingualism, that does not anyhow interfere with task performance or access to work.

Interviewee 2 was the only participant in the sample that fits this category, she showed no signs of any of the other two.

### 4.2.2. The constantly comparing worker

When a Swedish-speaking Finn works in a Finnish-speaking environment but is aware of the impact of language abilities, the work-related identities are created in an alternation between added values due to Swedish skills and shortcomings due to
imperfect Finnish skills. Shortcomings are often connected to an immediate attempt to relativise them.

**Falling short**

Work-related identities are constructed in various scenarios of shortcomings deriving from imperfect Finnish skills. Generally, the participants were very conscious about their language abilities. The abilities were most often presented as practically fluent, but not sufficient. The interviewees were mostly aware of this contradiction themselves, but one main reason for still making this difference could possibly be the experiences connected to work.

I’d say they [Finnish skills] are alright. Still, it’s, it is my probably weakest language that I’m, of course, I mean the weakest of the languages that I’m fluent in, let’s put it that way. I, I’d say I’m fluent but still, yeah. I can’t say I feel perfectly confident in Finnish. And I always, you know, especially when, you know, in working situations or even just in social situations, I’d say you always feel that you’re just a little bit slower, just a little bit slower all the time than everyone else. (I1)

“Everyone else” most likely points at all the Finnish natives with whom this (monolingual) interviewee cannot keep up in terms of Finnish skills. It is not only in the work environment where he feels to fall behind, but there it seemingly leads to a very unfavourable outcome: a loss in work efficiency. Interviewee 1 told he had caught up somewhere that one can be up to 30% less efficient when not working in one’s mother tongue, and even though the interviewee acknowledged to be very self-critical, the feeling remains that he cannot live up to his full potential when using Finnish. It ends up in “frustrating” (I1) situations where someone, at least he himself, questions his own capabilities for needing every now and then a few seconds to find the right word.

I don’t know, to me maybe the largest issue always is just that constant little fear of appearing to be stupid just because you’re not perfectly capable of using that language to the full. [...] [In Swedish] I don’t have to think about how I’m going to put this, I just say it, it just comes. Here I have to, you know, really think what words to use. And although it’s just a question of maybe [laughs] up to just a few seconds it’s still there. And then, you know, just looking for words at some point, you know, it’s just, it just feels stupid because you don’t know how to say something, you just know what you wanna say, you know what you think, but you can’t just really say it, or at least not say it fast enough. (I1)

In a Finnish work environment, the Swedish-speaking Finn accordingly may face a daily struggle of performing worse than a Finnish native or than in the Swedish mother tongue, but also the fear of appearing like a less professional version of oneself for being less verbal in Finnish in general. An outcome of not being a native Finnish speaker is an insecurity about the professional appearance in organisational contexts.
While (monolingual) interviewee 1 had been working only for a few months in his current and first position after graduation, (monolingual) interviewee 9 had been working already for several years. She also showed a certain consciousness about the use of Finnish, assuming that she may be more inclined to proof-read compared to any native.

I maybe read some, if I’m sending a message out to the whole staff, for example, as I might do in my work, I do read it through a couple of extra times maybe compared to maybe what a Finnish person would do. Ehm, if it’s really important, I, if it’s a formal letter or something, text, then I would, I would ask my, for example, my colleague from communications or some assistant, to check it through, to make sure that it’s a good language. (I9)

Taking the safe way and making sure that especially important messages go without mistakes, she solves any insecurity by seeking support from natives. (Bilingual) Interviewee 10’s response leaves room to the assumption that any anxiety may fade over time, and one may also develop a more relaxed handling of language (in)abilities, as also she had been in work life for several years.

I used to tell some stages about our team, our business area, once a month or so, and there when I write this letter to my team, usually a quite long letter with a lot of subtopics, and when I started doing that I was really like conscious about my language and, since I did it in Finnish and know that Finnish is not my, the, prime, first language. But then again, nowadays, I don’t stress that much about that. I just do it and use my language and they know me, I feel that, ok, they know me and if there are some mistakes, let’s say, just, then we’ll accept it. [laughs] (I10)

At a point where the workplace and its environment feel secure and the own personal features are known, a form of self-irony, making jokes about the package of being a Swedish-speaking Finn, may be developed to cope with insecurities. It is not just the Swedish speakers themselves that learn to accept what comes along with being a Swedish-speaking Finn but also the opinions and reactions of the colleagues decrease in importance. Particular ways of expressing herself are accepted as being part of her identities that can by and by be taken more light-heartedly. Interviewee 10 seems certain enough about her work environment to not question her professionalism and to accept personal shortcomings.

Another possible starting point for creating work-related identities is the perception that one’s Finnish skills are good enough to communicate efficiently but competencies are eyed not by oneself but rather by Finnish natives. (Monolingual) Interviewee 5 described the situation of inter-institutional work meetings, in which he does not just experience outspoken debates over work matters but also that his language (in)abilities indirectly determine the intensity of co-operation with the other, mostly native Finnish participants. Even though the interviewee is working for a Swedish-speaking institution his position requires him to deal with Finnish and Finnish speakers on a frequent basis
in cooperative group meetings. While atmosphere there is generally friendly and familiar, other attendees get disappointed or even almost annoyed whenever he messes up his Finnish. He sees his task performance in such meetings interfered with at times by the Finnish-speaking participants’ pedantry over his verbal skills, while he is of the opinion that “most Swedish-speaking Finns in Helsinki they talk Finnish like close to perfectly, they might just have a bit of an accent, might have to search a word now and then“ (I5).

I don’t have any kind of Finnish background like from home or anything, I was really, really, really just Swedish-speaking when I moved to Helsinki. And so I still kind of, eh, I don’t feel that I, I’m in any way like bilingual from my background, I just had to learn Finnish like from using it. And when I discuss it with other people that have the same background, that don’t have any kind of bilingual family or anything, I know that many people say the same thing, that they notice that if you were of any other ethnic background and you use Finnish in a professional situation, no one would be as kind of, mnh, demanding that your Finnish would have to be perfect. But then, you know, after a while, if you manage to get all the endings of the words correct and you use strange, strange temporal forms that only Finns use then they realize again "Well, he’s almost like one of us anyways". [laughs] So it’s, that’s the thing, you know, the sensitivity that Finns have towards Swedish speakers kind of not being completely perfect in their language is special. because if I was like a foreigner perhaps, I don’t know, perhaps this kind of friendly, really close atmosphere wouldn’t be the same, but at least you wouldn’t notice the kind of, kind of, kind of, bit kind of colder feeling that comes as soon as you kind of miss out and say something bit, you know, incorrect in Finnish. (I5)

In such meetings, that are an essential part of his job, the interviewee has to recurrently negotiate his belonging to the professional group because the native Finnish participants seem to think that “he is one of those [Swedish-speaking Finns] anyway” (I5) every time he uses bad-sounding Finnish. Apart from that, the Swedish-speaking Finn seems to face higher expectations and special criticism in work environments than any other non-native Finnish speaker with regard to the capability of expression in Finnish. Therefore, at least in verbal interaction, Swedish speakers more often need to prove themselves.

The interviewee yet found a way to make sense of those situation and his work-related identities remain fairly unimpaired.

I’m very, very pragmatic when it comes to language, I, ehm, I, I’ve had times during my life when I’ve lived kind of very much also in like the Finnish language, like used the Finnish language very, very much in my kind of just normal life, and I just feel like, you know, that language should be just, it should be a means of communication and like the means of like just getting along with people [...]. I know I can express almost anything I want to say in Finnish, so I think I would do that rather than, you know, making people a bit like confused because they probably don’t understand everything I say. I just want them to understand what I say. (I5)

As interviewee 5 has a very pragmatic approach to language he can bear situations of scrutiny. He pointed out how at least in work situations protecting a language does not serve his main concern of understanding and being understood, and therefore he is “allergic” (I5) to such protective behaviour. So instead of focusing on potential mistakes
when using Finnish, he re-focuses on why he and his colleagues are in the first place talking at all. He can hence condone the native Finnish colleagues’ reactions as minor issues, and thereby maintains his professionalism.

A similar coping mechanism of re-focusing was also seen in, for example, interview 9. She refocuses on her achievements, her “substance knowledge” (I9) and other abilities in order to not be affected by (criticism towards) her Finnish skills.

Of course, it’s really a big concern when you’re insecure about, you acknowledge the fact that you don’t speak fluently the other language, and the customers will come to you and ask you stuff, questions, in Finnish, for example. So, of course, it’s kind of stressful and not so nice every day, but, and then I think it’s a matter of decisiveness and willing to take the risk of not being able to serve somebody in the other language, but of course it’s not really nice every day. [...] Even if, yeah, but people hear from me that Swedish is my mother tongue, that the grammar go sometimes right, sometimes not, but I still manage to do, at least in my perspective, I feel that I manage my work as I would even if I would have say, let’s say, Finnish as my mother tongue or kind of bilingual background. But it’s always there, and it will always stay there, but I know that I develop all the time, I get better, I learn new words or kind of, I increase my kind of language skills all the time, but it’s always there.

Having worked over 12 years, (monolingual) interviewee 9 keeps up her work-related identity by stressing the knowledge she acquired in Human Resources instead of focusing on the things that she does not know, namely how to correctly express herself all the time in Finnish. She thereby builds the image of a determined HR specialist despite the fact that expressing such specialist knowledge in Finnish would not be perfectly fluent or flawless. She focuses on the skill development that takes place almost every day and turns her self-image into someone that is constantly improving upon dealing with customers and colleagues, and does not let the fact that even after years of work life the insecurities about Finnish skills still remain interfere with her “opportunities to succeed or get a promotion or get a new job” (I9). Her case shows a remarkable development from a monolingual to a native-like or bilingual-like, that is possible by detaching task performance from language skills. Even though she reported that insecurities about her Finnish skills will always be there she was able to become so self-confident about her professional skills that she can perform like a native Finnish speaker or a bilingual.

Adding value

Instead of framing it as a shortcoming, the cultural capital of a Swedish-speaking Finn can also be presented as a source for organisational benefits, a “plus in the book” (I8) based on which positive work-related identities can be formed. What has earlier been presented as a generally more open mind-set and an outgoing personality (due to a feeling of connectedness to especially other Nordic people and cultures) can be easily
turned into an advantage in the organisational sphere. The more outgoing person networks more naturally and makes contacts more easily compared to most of the native Finnish colleagues. In the presence of other Nordic offices, Swedish-speaking customers, or colleagues that want to brush up their own language skills, the worker with Swedish as a mother tongue can become a rather rare resource.

It [speaking Swedish] is in many ways seen as a very positive thing, especially since there is a Swedish office and some more Swedish costumers. So people that can, you know, easily communicate with them, that’s seen as a very positive thing. And, in fact, I mean, one of the entirely Finnish speaking colleagues that I work with a lot, we’re actually, you know, practising Swedish. So we speak Swedish together although she’s actually, you know, native Finnish speaker. So, I’d say it’s a very positive attitude. (I1)

The Swedish-speaking Finn as a colleague is able to support his Finnish-speaking co-workers in improving their own Swedish skills, be it in actual personal exchange (I1) or in digital ways (I10). But more than that, the narratives show that Swedish-speaking Finns in work life are able to connect to Swedish-speaking customers as well as to colleagues in other Nordic countries in a way a native Finnish speaker is not able to. They can take over Swedish-speaking customers that prefer to be served in Swedish and, hence, not only helps out Finnish-speaking colleagues but improves the service experience of the customers. The Swedish-speaking worker is able to build, maintain and improve relationships precisely because of the language abilities.

Since we are a Nordic IT consultancy it’s of course, not all the companies are, have this privilege, or how to say. But it’s good to know Swedish at [company name]. Now we are going to Gotland with all the employees and 1000, 1200 speak Swedish as their mother tongue. So of course it’s, and then as I do speak Finnish and I understand it, it has never been really a problem for me in work life, the, like the weaker Finnish. So I’m just seeing benefits of knowing that. And many customers are Swedish-speaking so then they might want someone, a counterpart, who is also speaking Swedish. (I10)

Interviewee 10 also reported that due to her language abilities she is accepted as part of the Swedish-speaking in-group of her Swedish colleagues during company events while the Finnish speakers usually miss out on this opportunity. While the other Finnish-speaking colleagues get excluded once the language switches to Swedish, the Swedish-speaking colleagues tell her (I10): “But you speak Swedish, you can come with us.”

Apart from creating a different experience both internally and externally, sharing the Swedish language with colleagues and customers also has the advantage of being able to have more explicit conversations and building trust. Interviewee 9 pointed out how she is therefore able to create more fruitful, effective work relations when the common first language Swedish can be used and that contents can be shared in a more precise and nuanced way.
We work in a Nordic matrix organisation, so in the Nordics cluster in this American company, so I do work a lot in Swedish also, talking Swedish with my colleagues here in the Finnish subsidiary and with Nordic colleagues actually. [...] As we have many people in the Finnish organisation who report to somebody in another Nordic country, I need to also sometimes have one-to-ones with them, like a Swedish manager to persons in Finland. Then I sometimes notice that it’s much easier to do it in Swedish with them because maybe they’re not perfect in English, ehm, so you kind of get closer, you get kind of, you can build the trust in a different way. (I9)

The focus on work relationships that rely explicitly on Swedish language skills provides a base to create a positive image of oneself at work because the language abilities improve the interpersonal exchange. And even when English is used there seems to be an advantageous position compared to the Finnish-speaking colleagues because the Swedish speaker often might have a better command of English, Interviewee 8 claimed.

I mean I do have an advantage also here for being Swedish-speaking. But it’s not for being Swedish-speaking, it’s rather because being Swedish-speaking, I guess, I have an advantage in English which the, you know, the average Finn isn’t that good at writing or communicating in English, I mean these guys who work here, they are, have become really good but they have, they’ve had years of practice so in that sense it might that I, sort of, had a head start on one of the, sort of, key areas when working here which is, you know, you are supposed to be producing compelling English text [...]. (I8)

So overall, the Swedish-speaking work-related identities, on the plus side, are a lot about the possibility of communicating better whenever Finnish is not needed.

Apart from having a stronger connection to Nordic colleagues, Swedish-speaking customers and colleagues that want to learn Swedish, there is also a high chance to have a strong relation to colleagues that are also Swedish-speaking Finns outside the work context (I10) due to being part of the tight-knit Swedish-speaking community in Finland (I2). Sharing the mother tongue and having the feeling of culturally belonging also at work might positively influence the level of a Swedish-speaking Finn’s satisfaction with the workplace, as an interviewee realised while mentally preparing for the interview.

I think this is sort of an interesting set-up here that, you know, you work in English and then you have this, sort of, informal workplace discussions in Finnish and then you have some discussion in Swedish, and I sort of, I mean thinking, spinning on that one I asked myself that would I, would I like it less here if I would not have a Swedish-speaking peer here, or a couple of Swedish-speaking peers. And it actually might be that I would, yes. [...] I would not be as happy at this workplace as I'm currently if I did not have that connection here also. Just that’s again speculative. [laughs] (I8)

The Swedish-speaking worker probably gains a stronger feeling of belonging to and liking the workplace when other minority members are present. Even though interview 8 claimed his thoughts were speculative and maybe felt silly to mention them, it is at least obvious that he was aware of the potential effects from having a companion with the same ethnic background. This is also apparent in him reflecting upon why he got hired, disregarding any other qualifications.
I'm not ruling out the possibility that my professor hired me because we, we have sort of this I guess, well because we're both native Swedish speakers so there might be some sort of cultural motivated, motivations behind that but I don't know about that, but I'm not ruling it out, so in that sense it has affected where I work, but sort of not sort of from my side that I would be choosing because, but rather that I would be chosen because of, but that's purely hypothetical anyways, so.

Along with Swedish-speaking Finns having been pointed out for their higher social capital, they often see themselves better able to create a more relaxed work environment which contrasts against the Finnish work mentality of "Let's get this done and not discuss anything other than what we have on the agenda and then continue with our work" (I3). The Swedish-speaking Finn might be more interested in or able to share also private matters in organisational contexts and reaches more balance between work and personal life matters. The more Swedish-speaking the workplace is, the more informal the environment possibly is.

I worked at I guess two or three workplaces that were almost completely Swedish, and the atmosphere there is, it's quite open. I feel that people communicate a bit better in a Swedish-speaking work environment, but then again, I don't know, this might be a generalization or just this is based on my experiences in these workplaces that I've been in. [...] So, I, for example here it's really open and we have a lot of fun together, we joke about stuff but we also can talk serious things. So it's not just this sort of shallow thing, because we also talk about personal things and stuff that might bother us, or not only on the workplace, but in our personal lives as well and outside the workplace, which I've also discussed with Finnish colleagues. [...] But then again I think that Swedish speakers are more approachable and probably also because I worked in the cultural field in Swedish so that might also be why people are so approachable. [...] But I really don't know what the difference between Swedish and Finnish workplaces are, I think they're quite the same, even though my argument would still be that Swedish workplaces are a bit more open and sort of more, it's not as down-to-business as Finnish workplaces are. (I3)

It is obvious that interviewee 3 finds herself in situation trying to make sense of her own perception of Swedish speakers being more approachable in general but also in terms of addressing private matters in a work setting. Several times she modified her statement that the communication in Swedish-speaking environments was better by pointing at the subjectivity of her experiences, at the field she worked in, or at the close relation she had had with some Finnish-speaking colleagues. Eventually she settled for re-stating that “work and personal life mix better in Swedish workplaces” (I3) because of the Swedish-speakers being more approachable and open to talk about non-work issues.

Just as it is the case with being able to improve work relations in case of Swedish-speaking clients or colleagues, a Swedish-speaking worker can also add to the performance of the firm in case its business requires a certain creativity and customer understanding. It is then not much about being Swedish-speaking in particular, but about adding skills that the majority of the workforce does not feature.

At least in a place like this where we work with consulting and we work with creative work and it's a lot about, you know, coming up with understanding customers, understanding problems and
challenges and coming up with good solutions then which is in a sense creative work I definitely think that the more we mix it the better. Be that languages, ethnicities, or different types of educations. I mean, the more you mix it the more creative and the better the solutions are gonna be. (1)

When the minority status is replicated in an organisation, the language abilities and also the general social capital of the Swedish-speaking Finns can support the creative potential because they might think, act or approach issues in a different way. The Swedish-speaking colleagues’ potentially different standpoint can ultimately lead to a more profound solution in a service-oriented organisation. From this point of view, interviewee 1 can define himself as a valuable asset to the organisation in terms of capitalising on diversity.

4.2.3. The restricted worker

Several interviewees seemed to feel significantly hindered to access the labour market after graduation. The reasons for that were solely based on Finnish language skills though they had been learning Finnish for several years. While some Swedish-speaking Finns apparently decide for themselves that their language skills probably are not good enough and apply mostly for Swedish jobs, other have few to no options to work in Finnish and therefore feel to be denied access to work.

(Monolingual) Interviewee 4 has mostly worked in predominantly Swedish-speaking places. Over the course of the interview she realised that her work life had been restricted by and isolated due to her own “insecurity” (I4) about her Finnish language proficiency in terms of work, as she described herself as perfectly confident in the private realm otherwise. She laughed upon saying that, and it almost appears like she was laughing at herself for the inconsistency.

I know I have a very functioning level of Finnish skills and I know, I dated Finnish guys and I know I can communicate [laughs] like a normal person in Finnish but still, for some reason, I have always felt kind of insecure because I’m not, I can never be as good as someone that’s a native speaker. [...] I mean I’ve been aware of it before but it’s kind of, it kind of like hits you in the face now that we’ve gone through it, and I do know that that highlights some of my insecurities about not being able to speak Finnish well enough and that I feel like maybe, maybe I apply to Swedish-speaking jobs because I feel like I’m not good enough like even if my Finnish is like near perfect, I feel like I’m still not good enough because you need to have like perfect Finnish to be accepted, I don’t know. (I4)

In this case, the work-related identity is built around the restrictions from insufficient Finnish, even though she still considers her skills to be nearly perfect in the private realm. No matter any other professional skills and experiences, her perception that perfect Finnish language abilities are absolutely demanded are the reason she cannot (or does
not try to) enter the Finnish-speaking part of the labour market. Any professional self-realisation is limited to (mostly) Swedish-speaking environments because Finnish natives are otherwise always a step ahead.

In contrast to that stands the solution that interviewee 7 found to the feeling of not having access to the job market. Neither had she been able to gain ground on the Finnish-speaking labour market nor were Swedish-speaking options really existent. Due to her Finnish skills having been insufficient for existing workplaces, interviewee 7 appeared almost pushed into entrepreneurship and, at first, needed to attend seminars and other further education offer in Sweden. Working as a self-employed consultant, the interviewee saw the opportunity to turn her ethnic background into a sales argument: She yielded credibility at work from being a Swedish-speaking Finn, being able to draw upon her own diverse background in advising on diversity issues. But even though she had managed to eventually enter both the Finnish- and the Swedish-speaking market through entrepreneurship, the struggles with the Finnish language still remained. Employing native Finnish speakers seemed the only solution which came at the price of not only becoming an employer but of becoming very dependent on people to tell her after meetings with clients and financiers how projects were supposed to continue.

I'm right now in urgent need of people that can help me to handle projects due to my lack of Finnish but I can't produce texts and I can't produce correct slides when I'm, I can train people in Finnish but the texts. Means that it's, ehm, it's an everyday like challenge, the language, ehm, but I'm not as lost anymore, I'm more integrated, I know my field, my, in the field that I'm working in, there I'm starting to be, yeah, updated, really updated. [...] Now I'm actually that, I've been able to reclaim, or in one or another way, and I'm very updated in the Swedish society the discussion and a lot of things what is happening there as well, so I feel more confident [laughs] and I mean if there is something that I don't know here it's more about that my field is so broad and you can't know everything, that is just how it is. [...] I also use that [own ethnic background], that when I'm working, I'm working with issues that have also, has also to do with like diversity, so in one way also a field that for me, right now in my profession, my lack of, my lack of language skills and my different background helps me a lot in my professional life, give me credibility, legitimacy for, for understanding things, yeah. (I7)

She finds herself now in a “comfortable” (I7) work position where she has developed the necessary professional vocabulary to serve both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking customers, but also where she can delegate certain tasks to her colleague and employees, and where she feels completely integrated. Most significantly, she derives credibility from her ethnic background and social capital, and views her possibility to learn from the Swedish expertise and serve the Finnish market as an advantage for her work. It seems particular that she could “reclaim” (I7) her professionalism, and with it a positive work-related identity, despite the drawbacks due to the Finnish language that still remain as a need for textual support. Comparing her stories to previous ones, several previously mentioned coping mechanisms are also apparent in her story: She relies on
the help of her colleague and employees in managing difficulties with Finnish, meets the overall demanding situations with self-irony and otherwise focuses a lot on the journey as a story of success and mastery.

4.3. Several selves: Contrasting work-related against private identities

There are different kinds of contradictions noticeable in the narratives between the work-related and the private identities. Numerous times, the self-portrayal and self-understanding based on language at the workplace does not match with the descriptions of the interviewees’ private lives. The contradictions centre around 1) the perception of language abilities and the usage of different languages and 2) interpersonal relations and social networks.

4.3.1. Language ability and usage

Inside an organisation, the majority of interviewees thought their Finnish language abilities could be better though being mostly perfectly able to fully express themselves. There is no consistent correlation to be seen between mono- and bilingual participants. Also bilingual participants showed concerns about their Finnish language proficiency, just as monolinguals said they had been able to reach a state of relative confidence. When it came to private life, though, none of them stated particular concerns about their verbal abilities. Certainly, demands in private and work communication are different, yet all participants felt equally able to manage daily private life in either Swedish or Finnish, so in that sphere the Finnish skills were most definitely sufficient.

Some participants amongst the ones working in Finnish-speaking environments made a distinction between what language they use for what purpose. Finnish was then presented as the professional language, while Swedish was the private, emotional one. Professional terminology had been used so much in Finnish that it was clearly more advanced.

Yeah sometimes, I think, the daily, like the tasks and the technical stuff and this, there’s no problem, but then again if you’re talking about some, like more deep stuff, about some feelings or try to express yourself, really what you are feeling or thinking deep inside, then it’s not natural in Finnish because it’s still my second language so, but the daily things... [...] the professional language is Finnish and that’s, I couldn’t even probably have my company presentation in Swedish because I’ve always had it in Finnish, so [laughs] yeah. (I10)

It is ambiguous that, one the one hand, the Swedish-speaking employee is not fully confident about her Finnish but then again partly feels that Finnish is the more
developed professional language. It might underline the pressure from comparing to the Finnish natives, and therefore also contrast against the private sphere in which language insecurities do not exist.

**4.3.2. Social networks and interpersonal relations**

The distinction between a language for work and a language for private life also appears to influence social networks. It at least is one possible influencing factor amongst others. A Swedish-speaking Finn working in an international, diverse environment can create an equally international, open-minded work-related identity based on picturing himself as getting along with people from various ethnic backgrounds. The private self, in contrast to this, can at the same time go into the very opposite direction, as the example of (bilingual) interviewee 8 shows.

I didn’t realise that before this interview but I don’t really have a lot of sort of Finnish-speaking close friends. So, I don’t know whether that says something about me or about the topic that you’re studying but [laughs] anyway sort of I, yeah, I mean, I mean identifying with the Swedish-speaking community is partly sort of about, about who you identify with, but it’s also I guess partly about how you sort of distinguish yourself from the majority, and yes, so if I’ve learned anything now during the last hour that would be that, that maybe I do make more of a difference than I even think between Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking. But that’s just in terms of really, really close and meaningful relationships. (I8)

Equally, (monolingual) interviewee 1 reported that his close friends were all Swedish-speaking. Then again, interviewee 4 who felt that her Finnish skills do not meet the requirements of Finnish-speaking workplaces referred to private relations “that are both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking and many bilingual friends of course” (I4).

Also here it becomes obvious that having grown up mono- or bilingually does not necessarily automatically end up in a particular social network. Rather, the two examples of having Swedish-speaking private networks might support the notion that having more, or at least a substantial amount of, Swedish-speaking friends has to do with Swedish being the more private language. It may also be a sign of compartmentalising behaviour (Bell, 1990: 472) to “reduce the stress deriving from the bicultural experience”.

In the same way as there is a difference between positive interpersonal relations inside and outside work, also negative interpersonal relations differ inside and outside the organisation. Conflicts may arise due to the Swedish language outside of work, but no one reported any open interpersonal problem in the organisational context. Compared to the work environment where the Swedish-speaking Finns find their way to create an accepted identity, the public sphere, where it is rather “normal to hear stuff like ‘You’re
not welcome here’, ‘You should talk Finnish in Finland’ and ‘Go, move back to Sweden’” (I3), may demand a different, less open behaviour. Interviewee 10, for instance, first seemed to take language struggles at work with self-irony and did not feel a need to hide her background.

It's nothing I would ever like hide [...] I think they're just used to that I say some stupid things sometimes or, or, a little bit struggle with some words, and some said that it's just cute or something [laughs] but. (I10)

Later in the interview though, she reported a far more covert nature when talking about her private life and public spheres. She appeared torn between whether or not her ethnic background would make a difference to native Finnish speakers.

Actually now, today, I'm in a Facebook forum with Finns from all around the country who are giving birth at the same, in the same month as me, and there I feel that I don't want to emphasise, it's in Finnish, and I haven't even told them that I'm actually Swedish-speaking. So, I, for some reason, want to hide from them, because, I don't really know why, but I, I think it's not, that's not necessary to emphasise. [...] I don't think it would change, they are, there are these biases against Swedes that some, in some parts of the country, but I think nowadays young people are quite open for things or. I don't think it would be a problem but I also like that, like the feel that they see me as a Finn as well, or, they don't actually know this, that this is my... (I10)

While in the organisational context it is possible to create a positive identity, for example by adding a value perspective to possible language shortcomings, the public sphere does not quite provide this opportunity. This reminds of Swedish-speaking school kids preferring to speak Finnish in public (Saari, 2000). At work one can emphasise personal differences for that they can bring about advantages, but in public the differences result in the rather clear-cut language-based ethnic groups of Finnish speakers and Swedish speakers, the real Finns and the not-real Finns, due to which the work life is so complex in the first place. Liking the feeling of being perceived as a Finn as well, as interviewee 10 said, points out how the national identity cannot reconcile the language insecurities.
This study built on the notion that the ethnic minority of Swedish-speaking Finns lives in a complex situation of imagery and stereotypes, largely based on the history of the country and past social relations between Swedish and Finnish speakers, and of secured privileges despite a declining trend of Swedish language use.

Existing literature has added to this starting point that ethnicity is an important factor in creating social identities (Corlett and Mavin, 2014; Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind, 1998), and it has also told how and why we create social identities in the first place. Social identities are accordingly not fixed, but instead relational, contextual and dynamic (Corlett and Mavin, 2014). Individuals are able to make sense of themselves in different ways, depending on the present social encounter, making use of different attributes that they consider to be beneficial at that particular moment (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Hogg and Terry, 2001). Individuals strive for a higher self-esteem, self-enhancement and less uncertainty, but also for a feeling of belonging, by negotiating what makes them different from and similar to others (Beech and Sims, 2007; Deaux, 1993; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg and Terry, 2001; Phenice and Griffore, 2000). Social identities relate to the collective characteristics and define what it means to be “us” and “them” (Hogg et al, 2004). Social identities connect and distinguish. Also the workplace is a distinct social context in which people create such identities, and their ethnic background, amongst others, has been found to play an active role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves in organisations (Atewologun and Singh, 2010; Bell, 1990; Kenny and Briner, 2013; Leonard, Mehra and Katerberg, 2008). Apart from Social Identity Theory and its application in organisational contexts, research on ethnic minorities’ work-related identities laid the theoretical foundation for this study. Also relevant previous research on Swedish-speaking Finns had been considered (Forsman and Hummelstedt-Djedou, 2014; Lojander-Visapää, 2008; Vaara et al., 2005).

As I understand identities to be the result of interaction, it seemed only logical to research upon them in an interactional setting. Therefore, I collected data from ten Swedish-speaking Finns, i.e. Finnish nationals with Swedish as their mother tongue, aged 20 to 39 and residing in the capital region, in semi-structured interviews. I then analysed their stories using narrative analysis. The narratives are mostly of high quality, given that they, for example, span different timeframes and are authentic in terms of
showing ambivalence, uncertainty and emotional epiphanies (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999 in Oxford et al., 2015).

The aim of the study was to learn about how members of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland experience their ethnic background in organisational settings, and, following from that, what identities they create for themselves with regard to work life.

5.1. Findings and their implications

The main results of this research are not stand-alone. As much as they build upon, refer to and add to the existing theoretical body, they also have implications for the business world. The final part of this study presents its wider contributions, and concludes with an acknowledgement of its limitation and suggestions for future research.

5.1.1. Swedish-speaking Finns’ construction of work-related identities

The narratives of the ten interviews were sorted based on the interviewees’ account of how much their Finnish skills interfere with their work life. Related to the three identity constructs, or identified levels of language interference, are different language-related identity components and coping mechanisms. Table 8 shows the results in a more concise form.

Table 8 Summary of language-based work-related identity creation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity construct, i.e. level of interference</th>
<th>Language-based identity component(s)</th>
<th>Coping mechanism(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unaffected</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly comparing</td>
<td>Falling short</td>
<td>• Seeking support from Finnish natives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appearing less competent</td>
<td>• Self-irony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Being under special criticism</td>
<td>• Re-focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adding value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improving work relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Creating less formal workplaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enhancing the creative potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted</td>
<td>No (actual or perceived) access to the Finnish-speaking labour market</td>
<td>• Focusing on Swedish-speaking job market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Entrepreneurship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work-related identities of Swedish-speaking Finns, with regard to their ethnic background, are largely based on the individual’s subjective perception of own Finnish skills. They centre around how the Finnish skills influence how the Swedish natives perform their job tasks or in how far they have access to certain jobs at the outset. The crucial point here is that it was mostly the participants’ subjective perception of their Finnish skills that made them portray themselves as not at all, partly or very restricted in their work life. The narratives create a general notion of us and them as central to Social Identity Theory (Hogg et al., 2004). Yet, the boundaries are partly blurred due to the fact that some monolingual Swedish-speaking Finns apparently tend to classify bilingual Swedish-speaking Finns as them as well, not just the real Finnish speakers.

The unaffected workers do not seem to connect languages to the work life despite them being an integral part of every encounter, because both languages, Finnish and Swedish, are developed to a fluent level. Theoretically speaking, the fact that only one out of then interviewees can be clearly placed in the first category might indicate the general frequency of unaffected workers amongst Swedish-speaking Finns. Due to the facts that the study though included mono- and bilingual individuals and that the influence of language exposure is not clear to this point, it remains as a speculation.

The constantly comparing workers tell about certain drawbacks in their task performance and in encounters with Finnish-speaking colleagues or customers. Nevertheless, they also relate to either mind-sets or actions that help them change their own self-understanding and thereby recreate more positive work-related identities. In the same way, the comparing workers point out in different ways that they also add value with their different ethnic background and language skills, e.g. by being able to provide better service to Swedish-speaking customers. Yet, some participants had also experienced that their ethnicity gets assigned to them by Finnish speakers, sometimes in the form of jokes and sometimes in subtly withdrawing from being relatively similar to each other. This strongly correlates with the push and pull observations that Kenny and Briner (2013) reported. In the same way as colleagues or others might point at the Swedish-speaking Finns’ language abilities etc., the Swedish-speaking Finns also identify at times strongly with their ethnic group. Especially comments about their social capital components and effects underline that Swedish-speaking individuals draw empowerment from recollecting their ethnic belonging (Bell, 1990) and define themselves through group-membership (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008; Brewer, 2001; Hogg et al., 2004). The latter also seems to be expressed by changing the narrative
from a first-person singular ("I") to a first-person plural ("we") account, like in interview 3 for instance. The social capital is a frequent source for demarcating positive distinctiveness from Finnish speakers, as well (Hogg et al., 2004).

What the constantly comparing worker also clearly shows is a re-focusing behaviour that in previous studies (Atewologun and Singh, 2010) was assigned to female participants only. In the research at hand, sex or gender do not seem to make a difference that much. Equally, unlike reported in previous studies, this research does not indicate any form of intersectionality with sex or gender. Especially the combination of minority ethnicity and the female gender has often been connected to oppressive environments (Corlett and Mavin, 2014), but if there is any statement possible based on the data at hand then that female Swedish-speaking Finns perhaps benefit from being more amiable when making mistakes in Finnish. This is not to say though that there are no identity categories intersecting with the ethnicity of Swedish-speaking Finns. Instead, the sample composition most likely influenced the data and needs to be taken into consideration when trying to generalise the findings. All the participants had graduated from university and therefore constitute an academically educated group whose approach to the topic as well as knowledge and reflection about their situation might therefore differ from other possible samples. The type of work the participants had done and the work environments they had experienced by the time of the study were probably linked to their educational background. A higher education might also equip an individual with different language skills. Hence, education influences work-related identities and could be a category to consider with regard to intersectionality in more heterogeneous samples.

Last but not least, the restricted workers feel that their Finnish level keeps them from entering the labour market in its entirety. While some see the opportunity to then make up an own business and step-by-step overcome language obstacles, others limit themselves to the Swedish-speaking workplaces. In this category it is most obvious that the experience can be two-fold: It can be external factors that are suggestive of insufficient Finnish skills, but it is also an individual’s own evaluation that drives them into playing safe.

In terms of language skills in general, all of the participants spoke Finnish even though I had not sampled accordingly. The language skills probably relate to the high level of education amongst the sample in case of participants that had not grown up with Finnish. Generally, it seems to be the Helsinki region demanding a certain command of Finnish, as reported by interviewees, that makes Swedish speakers learn Finnish.
Even though one might assume that bilingualism from birth on would be the main differentiator in work-related identities, also interviewees that classified themselves as monolingual had gained confidence over the years and, in contrast to this, some interviewees that considered themselves to be bilingual told about doubting and feeling insecure about their language skills. The relationship accordingly is likely to be more complex. This notion is also supported by the fact that interviewees oftentimes approached languages and language groups differently when it came to the work versus the private sphere. Imperfect Finnish in the workplace can turn into fluent in private, and an individual that is perfectly fine dealing with people from different ethnic backgrounds at work can turn into a private person that hardly interacts with anyone but other Swedish speakers. There certainly also are accounts that could be placed in between those extremes.

Apparently though, most of the Swedish-speaking Finns, i.e. the constantly comparing and restricted workers, strongly compare their Finnish language abilities to monolingual Finnish-speaking Finns. This seems to be the case for both monolingual and bilingual Swedish-speaking Finns. The findings leave room for the assumption though that bilinguals place themselves more in the categories of unaffected or comparing workers while monolinguals tend to the other end.

Even if someone grew up from the very beginning with both languages it appears like a necessity to choose one as the better language. The decision in the interviewees’ cases was always positive for the Swedish language. That is probably rather because of feeling closer to the Swedish ethnic background than actually insufficient Finnish skills: Firstly, participants had been more exposed to Swedish than to Finnish due to, for example, having attended Swedish-speaking kindergartens and schools, and, secondly, participants frequently were inconsistent in evaluating their language skills across different areas of life. Interestingly, it appears that interviewees who pointed more at mastering the language challenges at work then described their private context in a far more monolingual, i.e. Swedish-speaking, way. Vice versa, participants categorised as more restricted workers and the ones working in mostly Swedish-speaking environments pointed at their diverse private networks. Maybe this behaviour can again be explained as an effort to balance bicultural identities (Bell, 1990). Then again, there is probably too little research contrasting private against work-related identities to reach a solid conclusion.
Other research (Freynet and Clément, 2015) already pointed out that the current strains to explain the connection between bilingualism and identity creation vary. Part of the reason for that might be that the term bilingualism does not provide a definite answer to what level of language skills makes someone bilingual (Oxford et al., 2015). Apart from that, the influence of context and personality render cases largely incomparable (Freynet and Clément, 2015). Based on that, all participants of this study could be termed bilingual in theory. Freynet’s and Clément’s (2015) study on ethnic identities of French- and English-speaking Canadians in bilingual areas further claimed that it is an interplay of various factors that decides which path to identity creation an individual takes. For instance, bilingual individuals can be part of mostly one or both language environments, and they can have social interactions with either mainly one or both groups. For the Swedish Finns that would mean that their created identities thus varied in their attempts to reconcile Finnish with Swedish. Most strikingly, the study (Freynet’s and Clément’s, 2015) pointed out that it is not necessarily the second language affiliation but the level of confidence in and attachment to the first language that is important in bilinguals’ identity creation. Accordingly, in the context of Swedish-speaking Finns, the attachment to and confidence in Swedish is more decisive in ethnic identification than the level of Finnish skills and contact to real Finns. The connectedness to Swedish may then also influence the perception of Finnish skills and their interference with career development. Yet, these correlations are only speculations and it is unclear, at this point, how such findings translate into the work environment.

As social identities are understood to be relational, contextual and dynamic, individuals could probably create different language-related identities. Also since it depends on the subjective language evaluation how Swedish-speaking Finns depict their work life, it seems justified to assume that they could in- or exclude several identity components. Theoretically, this could go both ways: towards less or more interference of language with work life. Some of the stories, telling about the personal development over time or over several workplaces, support this assumption as well, even though the participants in this study always told about developments towards less interference.

The presented coping mechanism are as well not exclusive and individuals may make use of several and different ones depending on the situation (Hogg and Terry, 2001; Ashforth and Johnson, 2001). Considering still the very understanding of social identities as being contextual and under constant modification, the findings of this research cannot claim permanent accuracy. Instead, they need to be seen in relation to the current social
context. If, for instance, the education system in Finland changed, it would likely, sooner or later, affect the social identities of Swedish-speaking Finns.

Deaux et al. (1995: 287) concluded that “social identities are a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous group”. Accordingly, due to the variety of dimensions applying to an individual’s identities, individuals with the same attribute in one dimension, e.g. ethnicity, most certainly still account for very dissimilar social identities overall. This appears to also apply to the results of this research. Another main takeaway is that despite tendencies to constitute groups of us and them, there also seems to be a certain discomfort with ethnicity-based distinction. This is best seen in the narration of interviewee 9 who struggled with his own thoughts around the importance of ethnic representation for, for instance, well-being at work. Presumably, that also explains several of the times when interviewees started laughing during their talks. This apparent discomfort may point at the fact that in terms of national identity Swedish- and Finnish-speaking Finns are downright equal, and it underlines once more the particularity of the context that was also often noted by the participants at the end of the interviews (e.g. I1 noticing the monolingualism of his circle of friends or I4’s insecurities about Finnish skills when searching for a job). The self-reflective potential of this study was in that respect high.

5.1.2. Theoretical contribution

While Social Identity Theory has been widely applied in general, and in particular with a technical interest (Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas, 2008) in organisation studies, this research puts it into a new context: Swedish-speaking Finns’ construction of work-related identities. Thereby, it not only contributes to the application of Social Identity Theory, but also adds to previous studies on ethnic minorities’, (their) work-related identities and the importance of ethnicity and language to (work-related) identities. It certainly also adds to the research on Swedish-speaking Finns.

The study, first of all, provides a framework for categorising the identity creation processes of Swedish-speaking Finns, based on the subjective perception of how Finnish skills interfere with job performance and labour market access. Swedish-speaking Finns appear to strongly focus on their Swedish and Finnish language abilities when creating their work-related identities. On the one hand, this contrasts against findings from previous research on ethnic minorities, who, for example, shared the national identity but also the main language and instead were of different appearance (Atewologun and
Singh, 2010). It also highlights again the contextuality of identities. On the other hand, it supports the previous notion that language is the main determinant of ethnic belonging (Jasinskaia-Lahti and Liebkind, 1998). The study generally delivers insights into the life of the Swedish-speaking Finns. It thereby also works against the lack of research on Swedish-speaking Finns in English language and clearly acknowledges them as one of Finland’s ethnic minorities. The study further recognises and highlights the complex situation of Swedish-speaking Finns, from the external environment in the introduction to the individual-internal environment in the analysis. Partly obsolete imageries, stereotypes and privileges might be mirrored by the discrepancies and relativisations in identity creation found in the data. It also shows the heterogeneity amongst Swedish-speaking Finns in terms of, for example, experiences, paths of life and work-related identities.

By applying it to a country-specific ethnic minority context the study also adds to the body of literature on Social Identity Theory. Even though the case of Swedish-speaking Finns is particular, the findings still allow comparison to other ethnic minority contexts. The findings generally increase the understanding for how other ethnic minorities might view their place in a society, or in organisations in particular, by presenting how Swedish-speaking Finns create their work-related identities. Having used two different interview guides supported, for instance, previous findings on work-related identities. While the first guide was construed to cover aspects like relationships, career management and work-life balance which Adams and Crafford (2012) had identified to play a role in negotiating work-related identities, the two last interviews that followed another guide underlined the accuracy of their observation. Even when not directly asked for private relationships or more general, personal views on the majority-minority context in Finland, participants eventually pulled in more topics as the semi-structured interview gave room for that.

Lastly, this research contributes to the theoretical knowledge on language in organisational contexts and its influence on work-related identities. It showcases the importance of the majority language to language minorities as well as the minority’s special consciousness about language proficiency in a work environment. Related to that is this study’s contribution in highlighting some coping mechanisms that minority members develop to handle perceived disadvantages due to their language (in)abilities. In the case of Finland, the findings suggest that far more factors than learning Finnish in school or at home play a role in determining language skills, and they also point out that
bilingualism, i.e. growing up with Swedish and Finnish language, does not make a self-confident Swedish-speaking Finn with regard to language use at work. Swedish-speaking Finns at times do considerable work to manage their bicultural experience from being part of the Swedish-speaking ethnic minority while also being Finnish nationals, not just in organisational contexts.

5.1.3. Managerial implications

Some researchers appeal to organisations to establish an inclusive diversity climate that entails a higher level of identification with the organisation, and could prevent the general tendency of sticking to one’s own ethnic in-group in the organisational context (Hofhuis, Van Der Zee and Otten, 2012; Leonard, Mehra and Katerberg, 2008). As identities are perceived to be contextual and dynamic “[m]anipulation of the intergroup social comparative context can be a powerful way to change organizational identity (self-conception as a member of a particular organization) and thus attitudes, motives, goals, and practises” (Hogg and Terry, 2001: 7). While this research was not organisation-specific, it yet shows that even despite a common nationality the workforce can be to different degrees divided. It should be important for a manager what (positive and negative) effects an ethnic or language composition of the workforce can have on individual members as well as majority and minority groups to be able to improve the organisational climate. When struggles are known managers can better prevent possible undesired outcomes, and when they know how individuals can cope with challenges they can provide better support. Eventually, a diversity climate could enable ethnic minority (and majority) members to reach higher levels of positive and lower levels of negative job-related outcomes, e.g. more recognition and creativity but less turnover (Hofhuis, Van Der Zee and Otten, 2012). With regard to the Finnish context, the study, for example, explicitly shows individual benefits from being able to use Swedish with Swedish-speaking customers as a source for a positive work-related identity. Even though it is not shown in this research, it is likely that an organisation could yield benefits from such a situation in the form of satisfied customers. An inclusive environment enables and supports individuals in making use of their distinct attributes in a way that is favourable for organisations as a whole (Hofhuis, Van Der Zee and Otten, 2012).

But before all this can take place, managers need to realise in how far work-related identities might also keep minority members from approaching certain jobs and organisations in the first place. This might happen due to actual previous experiences or
due to a more general impression to misfit that can be influenced by various actors and factors.

5.2. Limitations and future research

As “what we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning” (Heisenberg, 1959 in Riessman, 2008: 183) there are a couple of limitations deriving from the design of this research. At the same time, they indicate interesting future research possibilities.

First of all, it needs to be acknowledged that the use of English language to collect data in interview settings might have had an effect on the quality of the answers. The interviewees’ main language was Swedish or were both Swedish and Finnish. So possibly, they would have been better able to express themselves in those languages than in English. Yet, one could argue that the distortion of the answers could be mediated to some degree by the interviewees’ educational background which might indicate a good enough command of the English language. Neither is my mother tongue English. Accordingly, one needs to bear in mind that maybe in the interviews certain issues could not be fully or adequately expressed. This also points at the possibility that words have different connotations for different people and hence distort the exchange.

Another language-related limitation is that there is previous work that would have been of interest and related to this research that could not be assessed though due to the language used. It is probable that studies on the Swedish-speaking minority or the Finnish-speaking majority were published in either/both Swedish or/and Finnish, and therefore had not come to my attention.

Amongst the Swedish-speaking Finns there is obviously still a lot of variety that could be researched upon in greater detail. While it appears that growing up with only Swedish does not directly foretell challenges in work life, a focus on the differences between monolingual and bilingual upbringing could generate more clear and comprehensive information on how they affect social identities in general in later life, but in particular work-related identities. Also, researching upon Swedish-speaking Finns in a different region might end in different results. As regions in Finland differ in the concentration of languages such targeted research could add another layer to explaining how Swedish-speaking Finns experience their ethnic background.
A further limitation following from the research design is the influence of the article chosen to open most of the interviews. While it held the benefit of keeping the researcher’s own views and perception out of the interview, it certainly might have steered the interviewees into certain directions as it told, for instance, about experiences of discrimination. An article with a different focus, for example on long-lasting inter-ethnic friendships, would likely have evoked different answers.

A question to recognise is also in how far the place of an interview affects the answers. Mostly the locations were chosen by the interviewees themselves and that probably supported a more comfortable, known environment as a counterpart to not knowing exactly what would be asked. Posing questions partly about work at work might still have had its effects. That might be the case even if the questions were unrelated to the actual organisation, as they referred to relationships at work.

Also the influence of the researcher’s ethnic background needs to be considered: What possible (positive or negative) effects could a foreign, or in particular German, background have? As it was stated, my origin had been clearly communicated to all participants to create transparent and comparable interview situations. On the one hand, given that only Swedish-speaking Finns made up the sample, a Swedish-speaking Finn as the researcher maybe could have generated more straightforward answers. Maybe my German background now provoked rather socially appropriate answers (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001). One the other hand, a third, outside ethnic background can enable an honest answering behaviour, especially compared to a native Finnish researcher. It is anyway likely that my own background directed my pre-understanding, my way of questioning and generally interacting despite my endeavours to meet the confirmability criterion.

Lastly, there are options to create a bigger picture by including the individuals and groups in relation to whom social identities are created. In the case of Swedish-speaking Finns, (work-related) identities are connected with Finnish-speaking Finns. It could complement the findings to hear voices from the language and ethnic majority of Finnish-speaking Finns: How do they see themselves and the Swedish-speaking Finns in organisational contexts? How do they create their work-related identities? Moreover, it may bring about intriguing differences or similarities to study other majority-minority contexts, where ethnic identities are different but the national identity is shared as well, and compare the findings. Also in this respect and with regard to previous research done on UK black professionals (Atewologun and Singh, 2010), it could be very insightful to
research a minority with different physical traits and a different main language but a nationality shared with the majority: Would there be a dominant characteristic in work-related identity creation? How would those minority traits intersect and influence work-related identities?
REFERENCES


# APPENDIX 1  FINLAND’S POPULATION 31.12.2015 BY REGION, LANGUAGE, AGE AND SEX (TILASTOKESKUS, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>20-24</th>
<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-34</th>
<th>35-39</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uusimaa</td>
<td>41,320</td>
<td>43,017</td>
<td>44,000</td>
<td>45,592</td>
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<td>788</td>
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APPENDIX 2  ARTICLE FROM HELSINGIN SANOMAT (TEXT ONLY)

Ruotsiin muuttava suomenruotsalainen Alma Pöysti: Suomi on muuttunut pelokkaaksi

Jotkut näyttelijän ystävistä välttävät ruotsin puhumista julkisilla paikoilla paikoilla iltaisin.

KULTTUURI 27.7.2015 2:00 Päivitetty: 27.7.2015 10:35

Sonja Saarikoski

Kun Alma Pöysti aloitti opinnot Teatterikorkeakoulun ruotsinkieliselällä näyttelijäntyön linjalla vuonna 2003, hän ei voinut kuvitellakaan näyttelevänsä isoja rooleja suomeksi. Vaikka hän oli opiskellut suomea koulussa, pelkkä puhuminenkin tuntui hankalalta.


Näyttelijällä on takana vajaa viikko Kuhmon Kamarimusikissa. Tahti on tiivis ja harjoituksia teatteriproduktioihin verrattuna todella vähän, vain yhdestä kahteen kappaleen yhteen. Pöystin kaikki työt ovat suomeksi, muun muassa perjantaina esitettävä Debussyn Bilitiksen laulujen lausunto.

"Uskalsin alkaa puhua suomea, kun tajusin, että ihmiset eivät vihaa minua, vaikka kuulostan hassulta. Puheeni saattoi naurattaa, mutta eihän nauraminen tapa.

Hän on tehnyt monia isoja produktioita suomeksi, muun muassa Tšehovin Kirsiikkapuiston Anjan roolin Turun kaupunginteatterissa vuonna 2012 ja Laura Ruohosen Luolaston pääroolin Kansallisteatterissa vuonna 2014.

Silti suomeksi näytteleminen jännittää Pöystiä edelleen eri tavalla kuin ruotsiksi näytteleminen.

"Suomi ei ole tunnekieleni, joten myös muistaminen on erilaista."

Ensi syksynä Pöysti näyttelee lähinnä ruotsiksi. Hän lähtee lokakuussa kahden vuoden kiinnitykselle stadsteaterin Tukholmaan. Tarjous tuli, kun Göteborgin kaupunginteatterin entinen taiteellinen johtaja, ruotsinsuomalainen Anna Takanen, aloitti työt Tukholman stadsteaterin taiteellisena johtajana ja pyysi Pöystiä töihin.
Pöysti oli mukana Takasen ohjaamassa Fosterlandetissa Göteborgissa. Ensi-ilta oli helmikuussa.

"Ruotsissa huomaa, että kaikki on itselle vähän nopeampaa. Ei tarvitse hakea sanoja missään tilanteessa. Tajuaa, että tällaista on olla enemmistönä jossain maassa", Pöysti sanoo.


Aikoina vuosina määrä on ollut lehden mukaan 700–800.

Jutussa haastatellut suomenruotsalaiset sanoivat, että ilmapiiri suomenruotsalaisia kohtaan on Suomessa koventunut. Ongelmallisena nähtiin myös se, että ihmiset eivät voi käyttää äidinkieltään työpaikallaan.

Pöysti ei lähde Suomea pakoon, vaan muuttaa Ruotsiin kiinnostavan työtarjouksen takia. Hän kuitenkin tunnistaa asenteiden koventumisen.

"Jos esimerkiksi lukee keskustelupalstoja, niin kyllähän siellä on paljon vihaa suomenruotsalaisia kohtaan."

Ennen kaikkea viha kohdistuu näyttelijän mukaan pakolliseen ruotsinopiskeluun, mutta myös inhoa herättävä "bättre folk" -mielikuva elää ja voi hyvin.

"Suomenruotsalaisuus ei ole vain purjehdusta ja rapujuhlia. Aika moni kokee jäävänä tuon määritelmän ulkopuolelle. Yläluokkakuka on kliseinen, vanhanaikainen ja ehkä myös kätevä. Sen avulla voi haukkua yläluokkaa ja tästä 'bättre folkia'."

Pöysti ei itse ole kokenut rasismia, mutta muutamat hänen suomenruotsalaisista ystävistään välittävät puhumasta ruotsia iltaisin julkinsa paikoilla, koska pelkäävät saavansa turpaansa. Jotkut ovat saaneetkin.

Toinen klassinen tilanne Pöystin mukaan on, että jos seuraan tulee yksikin suomenkielinen, kieltä vaihdetaan välittömästi, vaikka suomalainen on opiskellut koulussa yhtä paljon ruotsia kuin ruotsinkielen suomea.
Etenkin vanhemmat suomenruotsalaiset huomaavat, että ruotsia ei voi puhua eri paikoissa samalla tavalla kuin ennen. Pöysti sanoo, että täysin ruotsinkielisenä elämien vaikkapa Helsingissä on hankalaa.

Hän ei kuitenkaan ärsyynny, jos suomalainen ei osaa ruotsia.

"Aina voi kokeilla. Ja jos ei onnistu, niin ei se haittaa. Usein kysyn, puhutko ruotsia ja jos puhuu, niin sitten puhutaan ihan vain vaihtelun vuoksi ja siksi, että voidaan."

Suuomenruotsalaiset pelkäävät kielsä aseman säilymistä. Pöystin mielestä uhkakuvia ei kuitenkaan pitäisi korostaa niin paljon.

"Toki selviytyminen on tärkeää, mutta se on se viimeinen oljenkorsi. Mitä jos puhuttaisiin selviytymistarinan ja säilyttämisin sijaan siitä, kuinka kulttuuri elää ja kehittyv koko ajan?"

Pöysti ei ole varma, kannattaa hän ruotsin pakollisuutta koulussa. Hän esimerkiksi ymmärtää, että itärajalla saattaa olla järkevämpää opiskella venäjää.

"Pakollisuus luo enemmän vastenmielisyttä kieltä kohtaan kuin mitä se antaa. Oppiminen on rikkaus, mutta sen pitäisi perustua enemmän kohtaamisiin ja puhumiseen. Kielioppi on toki tärkeää, mutta sen painoarvo ei saisi olla liian suuri."

Erikielisten välillä pitäisi näyttelijän mukaan olla enemmän luonnollisia kohtaamisia.

"Kun soitin klarinettia, meillä oli leirejä, joilla oli sekä suomen– että ruotsinkielisiä lapsia. Klarinetti oli se yhteys siinä. Luulen, että kaikissa urheilu-, musiikki- ja kulttuuriharrastuksissa eri kieliryhmiä voisi sekoittaa paljon enemmän. Silloin saisi enemmän tuntumaa 'vieraaseen'."

Hänestä ruotsin- ja suomenkieliset ovat taipuvaisia eristäytymään omiin ryhmiinsä, koska vieraan kielen puhuminen koetaan hankalana.

"Esimerkiksi teattereissa kaksikielisiä produktioita voisi olla enemmän ilman, että siitä tehdään numero. Ei sillä tavalla, että korostetusti ollaan tekemässä jonkinlaista kieliprojektia, tai että täänään sanotaan kaikki god dag, vaan luonnollisesti."

Tällainen produktio on vaikkapa kaksikielinen, tekstitettynä suomalaisista sotalapsista ja ruotsinsuomalaisisuudesta kertova Fosterlandet, joka nähdään ensi keväänä myös Tukholman Stadsteaternissa.

Kun Pöystille tarjottiin töitä Tukholmasta, ensimmäisenä tuli mieleen, että nytkö täytyy valita: suomi vai ruotsi.

"En halua missään nimessä kadottaa suomea. On tosi tärkeää, että minulla on nämä kaksi", Pöysti sanoo.

Hän kertoo oppineensa ihmisten ja lukemisen kautta rakastamaan suomen kieltä, jossa asiat sanotaan ihan omalla tavallaan. Siksi näyttelijä haluaakin järjestää aikataulunsa siten, että aikaa seuraavien kahden vuoden aikana jää myös suomenkielisille töille.

Tässä vaiheessa hän pitää selvänä, ettei jää Ruotsiin lopullisesti.

"Koen, että olen suomalainen, jonka äidinkieli on ruotsi."
APPENDIX 3  INTERVIEW GUIDE 1

First of all, I would like to tell you in person who I am and what this interview is for and about. It will be absolutely anonymous. Whatever you are going to say, I won’t reveal any data that would make it possible to identify you as a person.

Related to that, I would like to ask you permission to tape the interview. Thereby I also want to inform you that I may make use of quotations which will be anonymized though. Is that alright?

Introduction of the topic and my aim

My name is Sabine, I am 29 years old.

I am a student at Hanken in the Master program of International Strategy and Sustainability, while I would term my own study interest as Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Business.

This interview is part of the data collection for my Master thesis which aims at a better understanding of living in a majority-minority-context. So as we are in Finland, I am concerned with the Finland-Swedish minority and the Finnish majority, in terms of private life but also education and work

I want to highlight that my personal background is detached from this topic, I am of German origin with the interest to understand this characteristic of Finland. I believe a lot of things related to a context of majority-minority are universal, so that my findings can be useful also in different places.

Please excuse me if I use words to separate Finland-Swedish that may be incorrect, offensive or else to you. I do not mean to be provocative, but feel free to let me know how I can deal with this vocabulary.

So we will start off with a few demographic data so that I can give an overview of the people I interview. That helps to make my work more transparent and valid to the reader.

Do you have any questions so far?

Semi-structured Interview Guide
Demographic data

- Sex
- Age
- Highest education

Some months ago, I found an article in Helsingin Sanomat. It tells about the Finland-Swedish actress Alma Pöysti and her moving from Finland to Sweden. I would like you to read specific, marked parts. After that I will ask you some questions on your personal background and experiences.

Article validity and own experiences, feelings and ways of coping

If you think about your own experiences (at school, at work, in free time), can you relate to this article?

- E.g. have you ever witnessed jokes, comments or other attacks towards Swedish-speaking Finns?
- If NO own experiences: If you experienced a similar situation, how do you think would you react?
- Do you think this article gives a picture of reality?

How do you feel about that?

How do you explain those experiences?

Experiencing Finnish and Swedish during childhood and teen age vs. quality/quantity of inter-ethnic relations during adulthood

Where did you grow up? What is your mother tongue? What language did you speak at home as a child?

- Maybe if both as mother tongue: Do you feel closer to one?

What schools/universities did you go to in terms of language?

How about your circle of friends?
• Were they mostly Swedish speakers? How international/diverse is it now?
  
  o How and why has it changed?
  
  o In case it was/is not diverse: Do you have reasons why that is so? Is that a question of attitude? Is it systemic?

So now we will change our focus on to the workplace.

**Workplace behaviour, interaction with colleagues, usage of languages**

Describe your workplace a bit, please. What do you do and whom do you work with?

Has language ever influenced where/how you work?

Are there moments you are reminded of being Swedish-speaking?

If you think about your work life, have you worked in mixed work environments, meaning amongst people with different cultures, languages etc.? How do you view those?

• If yes: How was your experience? How were the interpersonal relations?

  o Try to remember incidents where the differences became an issue. They can be negative or positive, funny or awkward, whichever.

  o A classmate of mine, for instance, told us once that his workplace is mixed, with Finnish and Finland-Swedish people, but sometimes they make jokes about the Swedish.

**Closing**

So I am done with my questions. But at the end, it is always the interviewee's floor, in case you feel there is something you still wanted to share with me, something that popped up in your head, something my questions haven't covered.
APPENDIX 4  INTERVIEW GUIDE 2

First of all, I would like to tell you in person who I am and what this interview is for and about. It will be absolutely anonymous. Whatever you are going to say, I won’t reveal any data that would make it possible to identify you as a person.

Related to that, I would like to ask you permission to tape the interview. Thereby I also want to inform you that I may make use of quotations which will be anonymized though. Is that alright?

Introduction of the topic and my aim

My name is Sabine, I am 29 years old.

I am a student at Hanken in the Master program of International Strategy and Sustainability, while I would term my own study interest as Corporate Responsibility and Sustainable Business.

This interview is part of the data collection for my Master thesis which aims at a better understanding of generally living in a majority-minority-context. Precisely, my study focuses on the workplace experiences of Swedish-speaking Finns in this context.

I want to highlight that my personal background is detached from this topic, I am of German origin with the interest to understand this characteristic of Finland.

Please excuse me if I use words to separate Finland-Swedish that may be incorrect, offensive or else to you. I do not mean to be provocative, but feel free to let me know how I can deal with this vocabulary.

Do you have any questions so far?

So we will start off with a few demographic data so that I can give an overview of the people I interview. That helps to make my work more transparent and valid to the reader.

Demographic data

- Sex, age
- Highest education
- Work experience (overall, after graduation, no. of employers)
**Opening**

Would you introduce yourself to me: What is your workplace, what do you do?

- If you introduce yourself, do you point out being a Swedish-speaking Finn?
- How are your language skills?

**Job search / application**

How much did your language skills influence where you are working and where you applied? How was it with past workplaces?

**Work performance**

How much do you feel being Swedish-speaking is relevant in your job / at work?

- Does Swedish benefit you in performing your tasks?
- What challenges do you face due to your language abilities in task performance (speaking, writing mails)? Is there anything you find challenging at work stemming from being Swedish-speaking?

Have you ever perceived that there are particular expectations towards Swedish-speaking employees?

Is there anything in your style/way of working that could be considered “Swedish”?

**Interaction**

How many Swedish-speaking colleagues do you have? How multi-linguaged is your workplace?

How is your interaction with colleagues or customers?

- Do you use Swedish, e.g. teaching a Finnish speaker?
- Is there a difference in how you interact with SS and FS colleagues (or other language groups)?

Are there situations in which you feel “Swedish-speaking Finn”?

**Closing**

Is there anything you have in mind about the topic, any thought that didn’t fit into my questions, or some other remark?