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**Author(s):** Ilikkanen, Päivi

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# The use of language in migrant stay-at-home parents' process of integration: Experiences of inclusion and exclusion

Päivi Iikkanen, University of Jyväskylä

*This paper examines the use of language and how it contributes to the experiences of inclusion and exclusion of recent migrant stay-at-home parents in Finland. The study shows how the use of language facilitates the integration process of newly arrived stay-at-home parents of migrant background and affects their experiences of social inclusion and/or exclusion. The study uses the translanguaging approach (Canagarajah, 2013) to shed light on the multilingual reality migrants are faced with in their new surroundings. The approach is ethnographic and the data is interpreted using data-driven conventional content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 108–113). The results suggest that English works quite well as a lingua franca, although to become “fully” integrated, migrants feel that they need to develop a command of the local language.*

**Keywords:** migrant, stay-at-home parent, integration, inclusion, exclusion, language, English, Finnish

## 1 Introduction

Migrants and integration are highly politicized phenomena. Official state policies often define integration in highly technical terms, such as “language learning and abiding by public rules and abstract principles” (Veikou, 2013, p. 52). Therefore, they provide a very abstract view of integration and its “ideal products”: working, well-adjusted people who are able to engage in meaningful interaction with their surroundings. Recently, so-called *integration from below* approaches to integration (e.g. Veikou, 2013) that concentrate on following the everyday life experiences of migrants have attempted to throw more light on the actual individual processes of integration that people go through. By adopting an ethnographic approach to studying migrants, this paper is the result of such an attempt.

One specific group of migrants that often surfaces in public debates on migration is stay-at-home parents (or usually stay-at-home mothers). It is common to assume that stay-at-home parents' integration processes are delayed due to their inability to attend school-like language instruction. Moreover, previous research on migrant stay-at-home parents has largely concentrated on

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Corresponding author's email: [paivi.iikkanen@jyu.fi](mailto:paivi.iikkanen@jyu.fi)

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people with a refugee background, and on people with a low educational background and/or low literacy skills. Hence, they have been considered a particularly vulnerable group of migrants and, as they are not seen as contributing much to society, this group has largely been neglected in research (e.g. Nordberg & Wrede, 2015; Wrede, 2010). Here, I want to gear the focus to people who have migrated for other reasons, such as marriage, work or studies, and are therefore largely invisible and hard to reach through official channels. I am interested in finding out how well-educated, highly mobile migrants use their varied language resources to navigate in a new, and often strange, environment, in a country with a strong monocultural tradition, and how they handle the challenge of learning the local language while caring for small children and being unable to attend formal language instruction. I also want to see whether being able to use English as a lingua franca (ELF), a common medium of communication (Seidlhofer, 2011), has an effect on their process of integration.

In this article I ask: How does migrant stay-at-home parents' use of language contribute to their process of integration and their experiences of social inclusion or exclusion? I draw on previous research on integration and how it relates to language learning (Anthias, Kontos & Morokvasic-Müller, 2013; Kärkkäinen, 2011; Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015; Simpson & Whiteside, 2015; Veikou 2013), the changing understanding of language (Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Pennycook, 2010), studies of ELF (Jenkins, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011) and the connection between language practices and experiences of inclusion (Delanty, Jones & Wodak, 2008; Latomaa, 1998; Leinonen, 2012; Leppänen, Nikula & Käätä, 2008). The data consists of interviews with eight stay-at-home parents of migrant background. Methodologically, I will apply conventional data-driven content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 108–113). I conclude by considering the broader implications of this study.

## 2 On Language and Integration

### 2.1 *Integration and Language Learning*

The official integration policy in Finland regards integration as a two-way process in which both the migrant and the receiving society have their own roles to play (Centre of Expertise in Immigrant Integration, n.d.). As outlined in the policy, society undergoes changes as the population becomes more diverse and migrants obtain the skills and knowledge they need to function in society: in daycare centers, schools, free time activities and work places. State policies have, however, been criticized for being idealistic and assume, to a large extent, an *assimilationist* approach to integration (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015), which suggests that migrants are expected to adopt the dominant culture and values to become accepted members of society. They also seem to be reflecting the 'deficit' discourse (e.g. Anthias et al., 2013, p. 3) often connected to migration.

From an individual's point of view, from below, integration is a (never ending) process that takes place on many different levels and relates to different areas of life (Veikou, 2013). There are several approaches to defining integration, depending on disciplines and individual scholars. According to Kärkkäinen (2011), some aspects that are central to most approaches to the study of integration are structural, political, cultural and social integration. She explains that, typically,

integration may proceed unevenly in different areas of life and there are often considerable individual differences in the subjective rate and experiences of integration.

Integration and inclusion relate closely to the concepts of belonging and settlement. According to Jones and Kryzanowski (2008, p. 44) “belonging can be considered a process whereby an individual [...] feels some sense of association with a group, and as such represents a way to explain the relationship between a personalized identity and a collective one”. They say that these attachments may be weak and even conflicting, and they may be, but do not have to be, based on ‘objective’ characteristics. In their view, belonging can be elective; i.e. sometimes individuals are able to make a ‘choice’ to include themselves in the collective without the endorsement of the ‘in-group’. For Ilcan (2002, pp. 2–3), “settlement is a practice without firm boundaries” and Levin (2015) explains settlement as a never-ending process that is intertwined with both the past and the present. Thus, all these concepts: inclusion, belonging and settlement are very closely related and they are all linked to identity formation.

One of the key elements of integration is language. In Finland, Finnish or Swedish language education is provided to all immigrants who possess a valid residence permit (Finnish Ministry of Labour and the Economy, 2014), but, in practice, stay-at-home parents often find it difficult, or even impossible, to participate in school-like language education because of their childcare responsibilities. In a similar vein, Simpson and Whiteside (2015, pp. 4–5) criticize the language learning point-of-view in state integration programs quite heavily by arguing that “language learning as being for integration discursively positions newcomers as outsiders who are by definition not yet ‘integrated’” and, too often, only migrant “employability” is emphasized. Pöyhönen and Tarnanen (2015, p. 115) have found the same line of reasoning in their interviews with Finnish stakeholders. They say that policy-makers and integration educators tend to believe that proficiency in the dominant language and literacy skills “have the power to change the material circumstances of migrants who are marginalized until they reach the targets defined for integration training and fulfill the aims of integration policy”.

## *2.2 From Monolingual Orientation towards Translingual Practice*

Today, however, as Canagarajah (2013) puts it, language has become only a part of the multilingual and multicultural competence that migrants need to develop, which challenges the traditional approach to the study of language, the so-called monolingual orientation. In the monolingual orientation languages are understood as fixed systems with predefined meanings (Canagarajah, 2013, pp. 20–23). In Canagarajah’s view, the monolingual orientation has its ideological roots in several eighteenth century developments such as Romanticism, the Enlightenment and Modernity, the birth of nation states, industrialization, structuralism and imperialism. He finds that in the monolingual orientation, languages are considered to be fixed to a specific geographical location and an individual’s native language identity was defined through the particular speech community they were born into. Further, he states that structuralism turned languages into manageable, “objectively analyzable products”, isolated from social processes, culture and individuals. In a similar vein, ‘multilingualism’ also infers that there is a separate “set” of languages that are “added on top of each

other in a person's head" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 7). With increasing diversity of communication and resources these earlier models are, however, no longer able to explain how languages relate to each other in more fluid ways.

Therefore, in a sharp contrast to the monolingual orientation, there are a number of scholars who have developed alternative models. Canagarajah, as one of them, uses the term 'translingual practice'. It means "language resources that are mobile, fluid and hybrid" (2013, p. 15). Although the translingual practice approach understands language quite differently compared to the earlier monolingual orientation, it still recognizes the fact that "while language resources are mobile, they acquire labels and identities through situated uses in particular contexts and get reified through language ideologies" and, therefore, labeled languages and language varieties have a reality for social groups (Canagarajah, 2013, pp. 15–16). Moreover, he finds that they are an important form of identity for these groups. A similar line of thinking has also been developed by Pennycook (2010) as he describes a 'practice-based perspective' of language and Garcia and Wei (2014) with 'translanguaging'. In this paper, I follow Canagarajah's thinking as far as the overall understanding of language and its varied uses are concerned, but also occasionally refer to different "labeled" languages, because they seemed to be an essential part of how the interviewees described and understood their everyday reality. The terms 'native speaker' and 'non-native speaker' are also used in this paper to distinguish between people who have acquired English from birth on and those who have learned English as an additional language to their repertoires, although their use may be considered problematic as far as "birthright" to a specific language can, in fact, be claimed (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 16).

### *2.3 Language Practices as a Basis for Migrant Inclusion and Exclusion*

Generally, inclusion is treated primarily as entailing the adaptation of migrants to the 'host' society (e.g. Anthias et al., 2013). In contrast, following Essed's (1991) argumentation, Delanty et al. (2008, p. 3), "define everyday exclusion/racism/xenophobia/anti-Semitism in terms of symbolic violence frequently expressed indirectly in the coded expressions in everyday-life situations". Delanty et al. go on to argue that this 'othering' and racialization of migrants through language, shows for example as "absence of recognition as opposed to overt discrimination". This results in

"language competence [being] ... perceived as one of the most relevant gate-keeping devices, in as much as "even if ... [migrants] have a command of the language and hold the citizenship of the host-country, some migrants report that they are still not accepted or viewed as equal." (Delanty et al., 2008, p. 3)

Although English has no official status in Finland, it is the most widely studied and commonly used foreign language and it is considered an essential resource in the increasingly multicultural and globalizing world (Leppänen et al., 2008). According to Leinonen (2012), this is indeed (at least part of) the problem: discourses related to immigrant integration on the one hand and the internationalization of the Finnish society on the other hand are separate, and seem to lead in quite different directions. Leinonen's study focused on Americans living in Finland and she found that in some contexts, Americans were perceived as 'elite' migrants because of being native speakers of English, but for example

when entering the job market, their lack of local language skills was a potential drawback signaling immigrant status. Furthermore, Latomaa (1998) found that it was quite possible either to try and learn Finnish and live as Finns do, or to choose to live only in the English-speaking community in Finland.

The studies carried out by Leinonen (2012) and Latomaa (1998) and research on English as a lingua Franca (ELF) (e.g. Jenkins 2007; Seidlhofer 2011) can offer an interesting view into migrants' experience. What makes ELF particularly interesting and relevant in this study is that, today, English is used more frequently between non-native speakers than native speakers (Seidlhofer, 2011). Her often quoted definition for ELF is "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). Recently, ELF research has also been moving towards a similar practice-based view of language as described above but most researchers in the field still talk e.g. about *existing* shared repertoires or communities of practice, not of those being co-constructed in the interaction (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 65). Therefore, ELF research might have some potential in explaining the role language plays in migrants' experiences of inclusion and exclusion, but it fails to address the underlying power structures related to the use of language.

In fact, English might indeed be enough for some people and in some contexts, but in the long run, it might not be enough. If parents want to be involved in society and conduct their families' affairs with local authorities and service providers by themselves (without using interpreters), they need to have a command of the local language resources (Intke-Hernández, 2012; Intke-Hernández & Holm, 2015; Lainiala & Säävälä, 2010). In the following, I will first describe the data collection process of this study and then discuss whether it is possible to integrate into the Finnish society by using English as a medium of interaction with the host society and to what extent it facilitates (or hinders) social inclusion.

### 3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

#### 3.1 Ethnography

Ethnography is an inductive science and, in itself, a social activity which allows researchers to see how language practices are connected to the conditions of people's lives (Blommaert & Dong, 2010; Heller, 2008). Linguistic ethnography is a study of "*language use as a form of social action*" and it focuses on "speakers as social actors who use language as a resource to interact and establish social relations with others" (Moyer 2008, pp. 21–22, original italics). Further, through ethnography, researchers are able to tell a story which throws light on social processes and "generates explanations for why people do and think the things they do". Ethnography can help in understanding the process of the construction of social reality and it can also provide insights into social differences and inequalities (Heller, 2008, pp. 250–251). In this study, my perspective is not on analyzing actual, observed language use but rather on interpreting the participants' *understanding* of their use of language. It can, of course, be questioned, how reliable people's own accounts of their language use are and whether this window into their lives is nothing but a mere reflection of their actual

language practices. This question will be addressed in more detail in the following sections. This is how Eva Codó writes about immigrant exclusion and how it can be studied:

To expose the inequalities affecting immigrants and the multiple mechanisms of exclusion to which they are subject (including the fundamental role of language and linguistic practices in this exclusion), it is essential to examine the circumstances in which their daily lives unfold, the kinds of experiences they go through and the ways in which they are (or are not) being incorporated into the host societies. At stake are the values we live by, namely, democracy, equality, freedom and the goodness of the welfare state. (Codó, 2008, p. 4)

In this paper, I have deliberately chosen the term ‘migrant’ instead of ‘immigrant’, first of all, because of negative political and social connotations connected to the word ‘immigrant’ and, second, because I feel that the word ‘migrant’ better describes the voluntary (and possibly recurring) character of the migration processes of the people that are the focus of this study.

### *3.2 Participants*

When starting an ethnographic inquiry, one first needs to identify the phenomena one is interested in, as this defines where one needs to look for evidence (Heller, 2008). In this case, after having formulated the research question: how does migrant stay-at-home parents’ use of language contribute to their process of integration and their experiences of social inclusion or exclusion?, and outlined the group of people I wanted to reach, I knew exactly where to find suitable participants for the study: a multicultural family café organized by a local nongovernmental organization. The café is open once a week and welcomes all parents and children regardless of their background. I was already familiar with the organization, and, this time, I also had a bonus: my own son was then 18 months old, so we were ideal participants for the group. I quickly discovered that having a child of one’s own made me one of the group, not just some strange researcher coming from “the outside”. It was easy to adopt an ethnographic approach and start the research by observing the group’s activities. By engaging individual group members, I was able to determine who would be suitable candidates for the study: I wanted to find parents of migrant background, who were staying at home with their children, knew some English, had not lived in Finland for longer than five years and had moved to Finland on a voluntary basis. Intke-Hernández (2015) reports doing similar research and also finding that the common ground of parenthood facilitated the research process. Participating in the group also made it possible for me to establish a relationship with the participants before the interviews, which helps the researcher when it comes to the interpretation of the data (Heller, 2008).

Seven of the participants were found through the above mentioned family café. One more person was recruited through other contacts, because I wanted to include people with as varied backgrounds as possible in the study. In the end, the participants originated from Asia (3), Europe (2), Australia (1), North-America (1) and the Middle-East (1). There were seven female participants and one male. Two of them were native speakers of English, i.e. having acquired English from

birth on. The participants spoke 1–4 other languages in addition to their first language. Their ages varied between 23 and 41 years, the average age being 33.5 years. They had all migrated to Finland voluntarily: because of work, marriage or studying. At the time of the interviews, they had lived in Finland for between 1.5 and 5.5 years and had one or two children in their family. Their educational backgrounds ranged from comprehensive school to a PhD. Some of their spouses also worked or studied in the university or had a university degree. There was also an obvious gender imbalance, because only one of the participants was male. This, of course, is connected to the fact that, for various reasons, women still form the vast majority of stay-at-home parents, even in modern Western societies.

Table 1 summarizes the countries of birth, the age and language profiles of the participants (with pseudonyms) and their spouses, their educational background, the year they migrated to Finland and their motivation for coming. As shown in Table 1, although Finnish was not the first language of any of the participants, it was still somewhat present in the families' everyday communication. Katherina and Emily, for example, reported that their children "brought Finnish home" from daycare and in four families the other parent was Finnish. Two of the parents, Paulina and Camila, were already fluent Finnish speakers and, therefore, I have added Finnish to their language repertoires. The colors indicate differences in the parents' language backgrounds; in those marked with blue, the parents have a different first language. In the ones those marked with purple, the parents also have a different first language but one of the parents is Finnish. In the ones marked with yellow, the parents have the same first language.



**Table 1.** Stay-at-home parents' ages, languages spoken, education, years and motivations for migrating and previous experiences of migration.

Stay-at-home parent (SAHP) + country of birth	SAHP's age	SAHP's level of education	SAHP's first language	Other languages spoken by the SAHP	Other parent's first language	Language(s) parents use with each other	Language(s) parents use with children	SAHP's year of migrating to Finland	SAHP's motivation for migrating to Finland
Emily, Korea	34	MA	Korean	English French Japanese	English	English	Korean English (Finnish)	2014	husband's studies at university
Paulina, Poland	41	MA	Polish	Russian English Finnish	English	English	Polish English (Finnish)	2010	former husband's job
Thomas, Australia	39	vocational school	English	Finnish	Finnish	English	English Finnish	2012	wife's studies and job
Helen, United States	41	PhD	English	Russian Swedish Finnish	Finnish	English	English Finnish	2013	husband's job
Natalie, Vietnam	26	vocational school	Vietnamese	English Finnish	Finnish	Finnish English	Vietnamese Finnish	2013	studies -> marriage
Annisia, Indonesia	23	vocational school	(Java), Indonesian	English Finnish	Finnish	Finnish English	Finnish English	2014	marriage
Katherina, Hungary	41	MA	Hungarian	German English Spanish Finnish	Hungarian	Hungarian	Hungarian (Finnish)	2013	husband's job
Camila, Afghanistan	23	comprehensive school + English classes	Persian	English Finnish	Persian	Persian	Persian (Finnish)	2010	marriage

### 3.3 The Data

The data collected consisted of ethnographic participant observations, field notes and interviews with eight stay-at-home parents of migrant origin. I participated in a multicultural family café with my own son during the autumn of 2015 and the spring of 2016 to observe and recruit the participants. I had individual interviews (October 2015 – February 2016) with all of them. The data analyzed in this study is based mostly on the interviews, as the observations and field notes that I made at the family café, mainly related to the recruitment of participants and my reflections on their suitability for the study.

The interviews were conducted in English, because it was the medium of communication that the parents and I shared and had been using since we first met each other. With Paulina and Camila, it would have been possible to use Finnish (the interviews were made in a highly Finnish-dominant area, so Swedish was not an option), too, but they chose English. Some Finnish words were used occasionally, both by the interviewer and the interviewees, mainly when referring to Finnish institutions or concepts such as *'neuvola'* (family clinic), *'päiväkoti'* (daycare center), *'perhekerho'* (an activity group for parents and children), *'kotoutuminen'* (integration), *'ammattikoulu'* (vocational school) or *'puhelin'* (telephone). The interviews were semi-structured thematic interviews. The participants were asked to talk about their education and family background, language knowledge, how long they had lived in Finland, what had motivated them to come here, what they thought about integration and using language in relation to social life and the use of Finnish services (family clinics and daycare in

particular), what their future plans were and their use of social media. The interview outline (see Appendix 1) was rather detailed, but the more explicit questions were used only, if there was a need to elicit more information on a certain topic.

My initial preference was to conduct the interviews in the interviewees' homes, but two of the participants, Helen and Katharina, suggested we meet at a café in the city center and Emily wanted to come to the university because they did not think we would be able to talk at their homes with their children present. Afterwards, when listening to the tapes, I realized that there was a lot of background noise in the cafés, so some pieces of information may have got lost due to that. The length of the interviews ranged from 32 to 86 minutes, and they made a total of 420 minutes and 54 seconds of data. The average length of an interview was 53 minutes.

One of the methods of data collection was the so-called clock task (Mäntylä, Pietikäinen & Dufva, 2009) in which the participants marked their daily language use on two clocks, one for the hours between 7 am and 6 pm and the other from 6 pm to 7 am. The purpose of using this task was to illustrate the use of language resources in the participants' everyday communication. This task generated a lot of useful information, because seeing their daily language use written down obviously also made the participants think about their own language use in a more systematic and comprehensive way than only by listing the particular language resources they used to draw on. I believe that the implementation of this task also helped the participants to become more aware of the varied language resources they had in their repertoire, i.e. it helped the participants to approach their language use in a more holistic and translingual manner. Below in Figure 1 is an example of Natalie's clocks and in Excerpt 1 is her explanation of them.

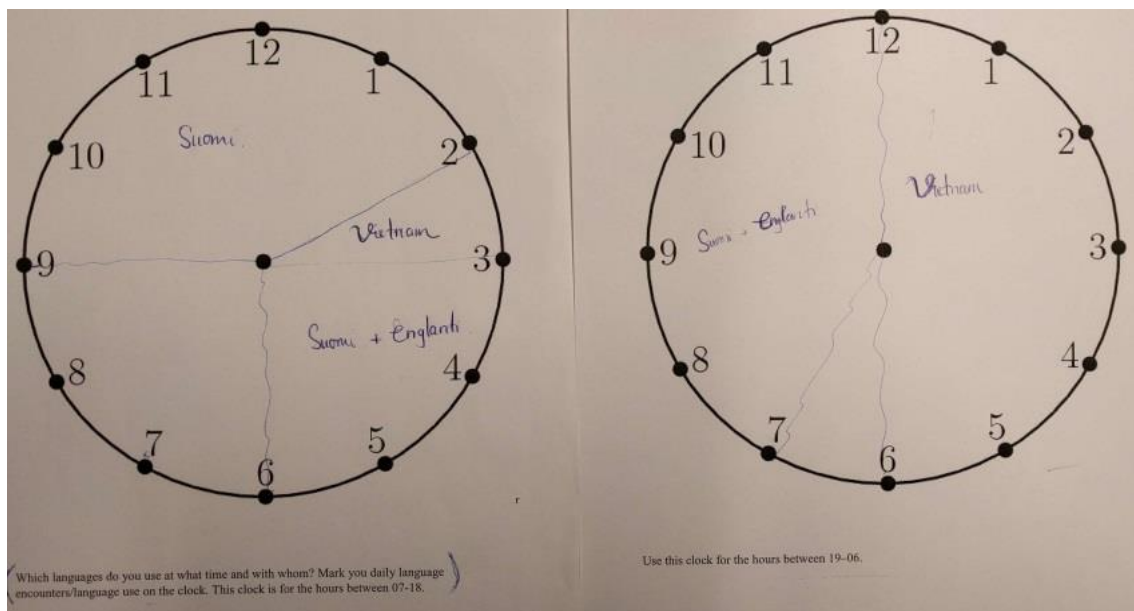


Figure 1. The "clock task".

**Excerpt 1**

- Päivi           so you use quite a lot of Finnish as well?  
 Natalie       well, I don't think so, *joo*, ('yeah') but, for, because, ok, my husband go to work and my mother-in-law not speak too much, have something else to do, most of the time I stay with [her child's name]  
 Päivi           mm, and you speak Vietnamese to her?  
 Natalie       yeah, but of course, **if she ask me something or want to talk with me, I need to talk in Finnish, yeah, my mother-in-law, but for one hour or two hour I speak Vietnamese with my mother**

Natalie's daily language use consists of speaking Vietnamese to her daughter and her mother (usually via Skype since her mother lives in Vietnam), English ('*englanti*' in the picture) and some Finnish ('*suomi*') to her husband and Finnish to her mother-in-law (and father-in-law). At the time of the interview, Natalie's family was temporarily living with her Finnish parents-in-law, so she had even more contact with them and the Finnish language than she normally did. This example will also be referred to in Section 4.

**3.4 Content Analysis**

After transcribing the interviews<sup>1</sup>, the data was interpreted using data-driven conventional content analysis. In data-driven content analysis, the data is first *reduced* (Hsiuh-Fang & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, pp. 108–113), i.e. divided into units that are more manageable. This means searching for expressions in the data that provide answers to the research question. The analysis can start with a single word and it can then be expanded to a sentence or even a number of sentences that express a certain unit of thought. In the second phase of content analysis, the data is clustered or grouped according to concepts that describe similarities and /or differences that occur in the data. Then, concepts that mean the same are grouped together and categorized according to the contents of the group. Building on these categorizations, the researcher can then theorize further about the findings. The reason for selecting this method for this study lies in the fact that in data-driven content analysis all the conclusions are based directly on the data. This means that throughout the process of analysis, the researcher's aim is to try to understand the significance of the phenomena under study from the research participants' own perspective instead of following a given, ready-made framework.

**4 Use of Language and Its Relation to Migrant Stay-at-home Parents' Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion**

My research question for this study was: How does migrant stay-at-home parents' use of language contribute to their process of integration and their experiences of social inclusion or exclusion? I started the analysis by looking at references to the use of language and their relevance to the participants' integration process. When talking about language use, the parents mentioned *English* most often. In addition, references to *the use* and *learning of Finnish* were also quite numerous, especially when the participants were talking about integration. Therefore, these two expressions were selected as the basis of the first

phase of the analysis. To continue, I looked at the contexts where these expressions were used and found numerous references to using English “everywhere” or when being “out and about”, running errands, shopping, meeting friends or communicating with their family members.

Other languages than Finnish or English were most often used when communicating with family members or friends, who had the same first language or spoke some other language in the participants’ repertoire. Excerpt 1, about the clock task with Natalie, illustrates this point quite well. In the following, I will give more detailed examples of how language use has contributed to the participants’ experiences of exclusion and inclusion and how language use has affected their integration process.

#### *4.1 Exclusion through Language*

For most participants, the use of English seemed to present some problems. They reported having experienced rudeness in shops and being excluded from conversations or groups. Next, I will present experiences of exclusion reported by Natalie, Thomas and Helen when they were trying to talk to people or participate in different groups.

In Excerpt 2, is Natalie’s account of how some people just “goes away” when she tried to approach them with her daughter at Hop Lop, an indoor activity center for children.

##### **Excerpt 2**

Couple of days ago I went to HopLop with her [...] and there’s a lots of mother and children and there’s a Finn mother, I and [her daughter’s name] come close to their children and **I just think to say hi to them, but then they, I don’t know, I don’t know what they’re think, what they think, but they run, they goes away**

It is not quite clear why the other mother refused to talk to Natalie and her daughter. There can be a number of factors at play, such as the fact that they were ignored because they spoke a different language (or Finnish with an accent) or because they looked different. It is quite apparent, however, that for some reason Natalie and her daughter were viewed as different and were deemed undesirable company. This resonates with the “absence of recognition” mentioned by Delanty et al. (2008) in the previous section. It may be connected with language but they also mention “symbolic violence” which may manifest itself indirectly in everyday-life situations, e.g. avoiding the company of the racialized “other”.

Excerpt 3 illustrates how Thomas described a thing that he called “the language barrier”. He believed that Finns are afraid of speaking English, especially with a native speaker and he saw that as a major obstacle of communication which made him feel excluded.

##### **Excerpt 3**

so it’s just Finns being shy and, and **thinking you are their schoolteacher and you’re gonna mock them on everything, like you know that’s pronounced wrong**, so, ‘cause that’s, that’s one of the things, that’s, the language barrier takes a long, it’s taken some people two years to open up to me, to actually have the confidence to speak English to me

As Thomas is a native speaker of English, this wariness may reflect the native vs. non-native speaker relationship that non-native speakers of English may have trouble dealing with. People may be shy of engaging in conversations with native speakers, because they are afraid of “saying something wrong”. Thomas reported having also experienced “racial discrimination”, *although he is Caucasian*. I found this quite interesting, because “race” is usually connected with differences in appearance that single one out from the majority. In Excerpt 4, Thomas uses the term to refer to language:

#### Excerpt 4

- Thomas I mean **I still get racial discrimination as well, because I don't have that Finnish**, I don't speak Finnish even though I'm Caucasian and stuff like that
- Päivi how does it show?
- Thomas mm, I've been into some shops and I've asked for the, oh, do you have this, and then it's like, **no, we don't have that, ok, see you later, good bye**
- Päivi so they refuse service?
- Thomas yeah, just being rude, so, and I've had
- Päivi what type of shops are they?
- Thomas mm, this was an electrical store, so, but yeah, which I found, but I think it was just a one-off, like it's, the other thing I found is that services not so much, **just, say, if I put something in to get it repaired or I need to get something, I find that the price goes up**

Helen, the other native English-speaking parent, also reported a number of similar incidents, when she had felt “invisible”. In the following, she describes visiting a club for parents and children:

#### Excerpt 5

that was a really hard place for me to be, and I, I went because, you know I, it was kinda like something to do, but it was, kind of classic Finnish, you know, **people didn't really talk to you**, [...] and **so I felt a little bit invisible being there** and [...] I spoke, I, one woman was really friendly at first and then, she kind of like, I could just kind of tell that she kind of stepped back a little bit and didn't really wanna talk so much, so we'd say a few words at the end and beginning, [...] they've all these clubs for kids but **I think they're not very accessible to foreigners and I think even, like, if you speak the language, even if you're maybe like a Finn from another place**

It does not seem easy to connect with people or enter unofficial groups, when one does not speak Finnish. The fact that Helen had the impression that it would be difficult to socialize in this group, *even though one spoke Finnish*, certainly indicates that there was no encouragement for interaction. Thomas, too, talked at length about how isolated he felt in Finland; he said he did not have many friends and that the multicultural family café where we had met was “his only social interaction”.

Surprisingly, feeling like they did not know enough Finnish for everyday communication seemed to be more problematic for the native speakers of English, Helen and Thomas, than for those who spoke it as a foreign language. Helen described herself as being “a language person” and said that when she had lived in Russia and Sweden, she had learned both the languages without a great deal of effort. Therefore, it was unexpected for her to encounter so much difficulty when

trying to learn Finnish and she seemed to be quite disturbed by this. She also seemed to find it extremely difficult that she could not manage the family's affairs as she was used to doing; because of her lack of Finnish skills, she was forced to rely on her Finnish husband in many matters:

#### Excerpt 6

yeah, and like, I've, I have this, really this idea, **if you live in another country, you need to learn that language and**, you know, and so, I, that I'm like, I'm not really living up to that right now and I'm a bit afraid of, like [...] but, yeah, certainly for like dentist's appointments, or something like, you know, [her husband's name] will go, we'll all go, so I feel a little bit, you know like, like **I don't like feeling like that dependent**, you know, especially in [her country of origin] **I was able to do that without thinking about it**

Martin (2002) also describes how not knowing the local language and being forced to rely on other people's help when managing everyday affairs, may be disruptive for one's identity and create an obstacle for integration. Martin states that specifically for native speakers, it may be difficult to find the motivation to learn a 'small' language like Finnish. This did not seem relevant in Helen's case, however, as she expressed a very strong desire to learn and use Finnish, and failing to do so, was very difficult for her to handle.

In Thomas' case, one of the reasons for finding it hard to set up a satisfying social life with peers might have been the fact that he is middle-aged and staying at home with his son; the vast majority of men of his age are working during the day, which is when it would be easiest for him to socialize. He had not really worked in Finland so he did not have any colleagues. Even today, some people might still be inclined to think that it is not normal for a man to stay home and take care of the children while the wife takes the breadwinner's role in the family. This kind of attitude is probably not voiced but may be among the underlying factors that would explain why Thomas was having a hard time integrating.

#### 4.2 Achieving Inclusion through Language Use

Although the participants had occasionally experienced exclusion and were not quite happy with their social lives, all of them said that, in general, Finns spoke English quite well and that they had had mostly positive experiences when using English in e.g. the employment office, family clinics, health care centers and hospitals. So, for most of them, English did seem to work well as a lingua franca. Next, I will discuss how Emily, Camila, Natalie, Helen and Thomas described language-related experiences of inclusion.

Of all the participants, Emily was the strongest advocate for the usefulness of English as a means of communication in Finland. She even used words like *fortunate* and *thankful* to convey how happy she was about this. As Excerpt 7 shows, Emily knew that because she was "a stay-at home mom" she did not have "that much of access to meet a lot of people", so this made English an even more important medium of communication for her. Moreover, she felt that if she would only have known Korean, and not English, she would just have been "stuck at home" not knowing what to do.

## Excerpt 7

- Emily but it's amazing here, actually, **I feel very fortunate, 'cause I can communicate in English with Finnish people here**
- Päivi right
- Emily 'cause they are very, very good at speaking English
- Päivi a lot of people are
- Emily right, right, so it's definitely easier adjustments
- Päivi mhm
- Emily so even go to grocery store, at least a few words
- Päivi mhm
- Emily they understand and try to
- Päivi mhm
- Emily help me out,
- Päivi mm
- Emily so, yeah, I use English everyday
- Päivi ok
- Emily everywhere in Finland, yeah [...] that's really one thing I wanted to say, mm, **knowing English in Finland**
- Päivi mhm
- Emily **it gives you a lot of opportunities make friendswise, especially for me,**
- Päivi yeah
- Emily 'cause I'm staying home mom, so, mm, **I don't have that much of access to meet a lot of people**
- [...]
- Emily **I'm so thankful, like what if I don't speak English, only know Korean, and come here and don't know Finnish and I just stuck at home** and don't know what to do, you know, but, yeah, **knowing English is very, very helpful**

For Emily, English provided a way out of the home, a way of communicating with the locals and helped her to feel included and integrated. In fact, Latomaa's study (1998) also confirmed that it is quite possible to get by using only English in Finland. The study was, however, conducted in the Helsinki area, so it is perhaps not quite comparable with the situation in the small town where this study was conducted. Nevertheless, I suspect that this was the case with Emily, and that was why she had found the entry to Finland so easy and effortless: all of her friends were English-speaking and, apparently, she had not experienced any difficulties when dealing with Finnish service providers either. In fact, she specifically mentioned even having had an interpreter at the family clinic, which had been initiated by the nurse.

In Camila's life, learning English seemed to have had an even more profound effect. Camila was only 17 years old when she moved to Finland to get married to her cousin. Because of living in exile in Iran (she was originally from Afghanistan), she had not been able to study further after comprehensive school. Nevertheless, she had learned English at an international institute. For a young Muslim woman, knowing English was a very powerful indicator of independence and "being smart". In fact, it was so powerful that she was able to convince her parents that she was capable of handling the trip to Finland all by herself and, therefore, they let her travel unaccompanied. This is how Camila explained the difference that knowing English had made in her life:

### Excerpt 8

usually it is in our culture and, I mean in our family, girls cannot be so independent and they, I mean, when I came to Finland, we got married because my husband was living here, I had to, come alone to Finland, and it was my first time to travel to another country alone, **but because my parents knew that I can speak English and I am so, I mean independent and smart to do that, that they let me**

Excerpt 9 shows how Camila had also impressed her husbands' relatives with her language skills, as she was able to visit the employment office all by herself as soon as she had arrived in Finland.

### Excerpt 9

Coming to Finland, the first year, **I used to speak English a lot, I mean whenever I, wherever I went, I used the English** and it was so surprising for the people around here, I mean for my husband's family, because they, even though they were living so long time in Finland, some of them are still having, mm, interpreters and when they go to doctors and they have a problem, but the first, **the first day after coming to Finland, I went to the, unemployment service office and I went there alone**, it was so surprising for them, how can you just, mm, go there alone without any interpreter

Camila's case illustrates very well how knowing English seemed to allow some participants a lot more freedom and independence, or even put them in a privileged position, compared to many other migrants who do not speak English (or Finnish/Swedish), despite having already lived in Finland for a considerable period of time. This, no doubt, relates to the status of the English language worldwide, but even more than that, to the empowering effect of education in general and the education of women in particular.

Natalie's account from HopLop that was introduced in Excerpt 2, fortunately continued in a more positive manner as there was another mother who was more willing to talk to her:

### Excerpt 10

I went to some other place in that HopLop, and there's one mother, she's a Finn and her husband is American, they carry two kids in HopLop, and they play there and [her daughter's name] can join, and she start to talk with me, I say yeah, now I have someone to talk [...] an' **because her husband is an American, so they speak English with me**, and she, we have little communication, little talk, and they, we exchange phone number, and she say, hey, come visit us some time, I say yeah, yeah, let's make it happen

This second excerpt shows that there is some hope left: there was another mother who was willing to engage in conversation with Natalie. She attributed this difference in the other mother's attitude to the fact that this woman was married to an American, and was, therefore, used to speaking English at home.

Despite the obvious benefits that English seemed to offer, all the research participants expressed it very clearly that in order to be fully integrated, they needed to learn Finnish. It seemed that, for them, learning the language would be the indicator of being integrated, which suggested that they had indeed reached "the targets defined for integration training and fulfilled the aims of integration



policy” (Pöyhönen & Tarnanen, 2015, p. 115). At least for Camila, the use of English seemed to be a temporary solution:

#### Excerpt 11

but after the first year, when I started a bit Finnish, I just tried to speak Finnish and, whenever I felt that I cannot continue in Finnish, I just turned the language and started speaking English, **but now, I don't need English language anymore, because I can, I try to communicate in Finnish**

Language seemed to play a big part in integration for Natalie as well:

#### Excerpt 12

Päivi Mhm, ok, do you feel you are integrated into Finland?  
 Natalie Mm, ok, **maybe 50-50, because I know my Finnish is not so good**, but in here is, is how to say, how to explain that, **is not so difficult that you can use English, ok, some old people they cannot, they cannot speak English, but then they try to speak something easy for me to understand**

For Natalie, integration and language learning seemed to go very much hand-in-hand. She felt that she would manage to integrate only halfway with English, and in order to achieve 100% integration, if such a thing can even be considered possible, one must know Finnish. Interestingly, Natalie mentions that (old) people who do not speak English, “try to speak something easy for me to understand” which shows how considerate people could be and how they modified their own language use when they realized that Natalie was not a fluent Finnish user. Despite all her worries about not being able to use Finnish “properly”, as mentioned above in Excerpt 13, Helen also described an incident which, in fact, shows that she was hardly incompetent in using Finnish:

#### Excerpt 13

we went to this music class at, is that [name of local school], it's at Pitkäkatu, I got the wrong building, and I wasn't paying attention, so we got there really late, like I walk in and **everyone's looking at me, and you know, like, I'm trying to say that I was in the other building and I couldn't find it**, and you know, the teacher finally understood, afterwards, like, **some of the women were surprisingly friendly**, and I was talking to one woman and she was like, oh, you speak really well, and so, **Finns are so encouraging, like if you can say a few sentences, like they give so much encouragement and I know I don't speak well, but like hearing it**, like, oh, ok, I mean, it's just like, even subconsciously, like, well, **someone said I speak well**

This excerpt demonstrates that, despite her feelings of inadequacy, Helen was capable of explaining to the others why she was late for the class, and even received praise for it. Although Helen felt like she was not able to use Finnish the way she wanted to, the amount that she knew enabled her to become an acceptable member of the group. The other native speaker of English, Thomas, did not know very much Finnish either, but nevertheless, he was keen to try and use it whenever he could. He was also quite clever in using contextual cues to be able to tell what was being said, as illustrated below:

### Excerpt 14

I went to the shop the other day and I bought something, and the lady asked me if I would like it to be gift-wrapped, **I didn't know that she said that exactly, but I could say, I knew that she, that's what she was implying**, so, I couldn't tell you the word she said but I've, so **I've learned to pick up and be more vigilant with my hearing**

Just like Helen, Thomas did not want to assume that everyone would just speak English with him; instead he wanted to convey his sincere desire to make the effort and learn to use Finnish, to live as Finns do. So although a lack of language knowledge may seem to limit one's possibilities for successful communication, using whatever language resources are at one's disposal, i.e. using the translingual approach instead of the monolingual one, can work in one's benefit.

## 5 Language and Integration

The research question for this study was: How does migrant stay-at-home parents' use of language contribute to their process of integration and their experiences of social inclusion or exclusion? The study showed that English was a very useful resource for the participants, specifically right after arriving in Finland and before they had had the opportunity to learn Finnish. Although the participants were able to use English as a lingua franca virtually everywhere in Finland, they also faced a lot of challenges. English did help them to manage their affairs and even establish social contacts, which suggests that their knowledge of English helped them to become better acquainted with Finnish society. However, this is not the whole story; most participants had had a hard time establishing and maintaining social contacts with the locals; and they had even experienced discrimination or been ignored completely. Only one person, Emily, felt that speaking only English in Finland worked well in all spheres of life.

One major variable in learning the local language seemed to be whether migration was a temporary solution or a permanent life choice for the participants. This distinction had a profound effect on the participants' interest and willingness to invest in language learning. This showed particularly well in Emily's case: although Emily said that they would have liked to stay in Finland after her husband had finished his studies, they did in fact move back to the US in June 2016. It might be, then, they had only intended to come here for a limited period of time, i.e. simply for the duration of Emily's husband's studies. Such a preconception can affect the way people approach integration and language learning; if not intending to stay, why make the effort to learn the language (Latomaa, 1998, p. 60).

Thomas was also hoping to return to Australia at some point, so, in a sense, his residence in Finland could also be considered temporary. The major difference between them was that Emily felt she was not having any trouble managing her life in English, but Thomas saw his lack of Finnish skills as a major obstacle for having a fulfilling social life. In Helen's case, the situation was yet somewhat different, as she seemed to find it most disturbing that she was unable to manage everyday affairs, such as going to the dentist, in Finnish. She was not happy with herself, because her own expectations for mastering the language had not been fulfilled. In contrast, the two participants who had lived in Finland the longest, Paulina and Camila, were already fluent speakers of Finnish. This is partly

because both of them said they had come to stay and had not found learning Finnish particularly challenging. They had also learned the language before having their children and been able to participate on courses more easily. Natalie's reports on using English in Finland were twofold: on the one hand she had experienced exclusion but, on the other hand, she also felt that it was not difficult to manage with English in Finland.

I found that the participants, almost without exception, referred to the use of specific, "bounded" languages when they talked about for example their typical day (see Excerpt 1, the clock task). This may partly be blamed on the research design, as 'the use of different languages' was mentioned in the interview questions. Nevertheless, I believe that this is how most 'lay people', like the research participants, understand and talk about language. In fact, although Canagarajah (2013, pp. 15–16) talks about "language resources that are mobile, fluid and hybrid", he also states that labeled languages and language varieties have a reality for social groups and that they are an important form of identity for these groups. Nevertheless, despite *talking* about the use of "labeled" languages, some of the participants' *accounts of their language use* did, in fact, reflect a translingual orientation to language use: e.g. the clock task with Natalie (Excerpt 1) and Helen and Thomas's "survival Finnish stories" in Excerpts 13 and 14.

## 6 Conclusion

The people I chose to focus on were highly educated and, therefore, they also had a varied repertoire of language knowledge. They did not know the official national languages, Finnish or Swedish, before coming to Finland. Therefore, I wanted to find out how they used their existing language resources to overcome this obstacle. As they had limited access to learning the local language, I was interested in whether knowing English could make entry into the new society easier. This study showed that the participants' expectations and understanding of the role language played in their integration process resulted from a number of different factors, such as how long they were planning to stay in the country and their sociocultural contexts of language use.

It became evident that knowing English can work *both as a gateway and an obstacle* to integration: as Emily's account shows, it is possible to integrate with the "English only" approach whereas Helen and Thomas, the native speakers, seemed to be particularly disturbed by the fact that they did not know enough Finnish. For some of the participants, like Camila, English seemed to work best at the beginning of the period of residence and, once they had learned Finnish, they did not "need" English for everyday interaction anymore. The fact that most of the participants seemed to equate integration with using the dominant language shows how strongly assimilationist ideologies are advocated through government integration policies and how these policies are being communicated to people of migrant background. This does not, however, diminish the importance of the participants' experiences of inclusion achieved through the use of language – be it English or Finnish.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Excerpts and transcription conventions: The interview excerpts have been given verbatim, only some repetition and sounds that indicate recognition and listening on the interviewer's part, such as *mhm, aha, yeah* or *ok* have been left out to shorten the texts and make them easier to read. Commas are used to indicate slight pauses or thought units.

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## Appendix 1. Interview outline for migrant stay-at-home parents

1. Warm up: How and where did you hear about [name of the multicultural family café]? Do you go there often?
2. Personal information: tell me about yourself.
  - a. Who are you (name, age)?
  - b. How long have you lived in Finland?
  - c. Why did you come to Finland?
  - d. Where have you lived before coming here?
  - e. What kind of a family do you have?
  - f. What is your educational background?
3. Personal language repertoire (self-assessment).
  - a. What *languages* language can you speak (e.g. English, Vietnamese, Swahili)?
  - b. How have you learned the languages: out-of-school (*acquisition*) or in school (*learning*)? How old were you when you learned/acquired these languages: a child, teenager or adult?
  - c. What can you do with the languages (*functions*): read, write, speak, understand (speech)? What do you do with these languages; are they for your own “thinking” (*internal* functions, e.g. counting, dreaming) or for dealing with other people (*external* functions, e.g. reading a newspaper, chatting with a friend)?
  - d. Where do you use the languages (*domains*; e.g. home, school, daycare); in what *roles* (e.g. mother, spouse, friend), and in addressing what *topic(s)* (e.g. daily chores, weather, homework)?
4. Personal language encounters: tell me about a typical day in your life and describe your language encounters during the day.
  - a. You can use the clock, for example: what time do you use different languages and with whom?
  - b. Have there been any changes in your (and your family’s) language use since you moved to Finland or during your stay here?
5. Integration: social inclusion/exclusion
  - a. How do you understand the term integration? What does it mean to you; do you feel integrated into Finnish society? Why (not)?
  - b. What things have helped you to integrate into Finnish society? (Do you have friends here, for example? Which languages do you use with them?)
  - c. What things can make integration more difficult?
  - d. In your opinion, what is the role of language in integration?
6. Integration: dealing with Finnish service providers (family clinics, daycare, comprehensive school, social work, Finnish language teaching, third sector).
  - a. How often do you use one or more of these services?
  - b. Which languages are used during the encounters? Is the use of a certain language required in some of these encounters?

- c. Do you feel that you are getting all the information you need and want in these encounters? Why (not)?
  - d. Have you had any difficulties using these services?
  - e. How should services for migrant families be arranged; where, in which language etc.?
  - f. Would you give me permission to talk to some of the people you deal with on a regular basis about possible language-related issues relevant to these encounters? Do you have specific people in mind that I could talk to?
7. Future plans
- a. Where do you see yourself in five years (related to family, studies, work, residence)?
  - b. What about your (and your family's) language encounters; do you think there will be any changes in them?
8. Use of social media
- a. Do you follow or use any social media applications (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs)? For what purposes do you use them?
  - b. Are you willing to share your experiences on everyday language encounters and being a stay-at-home parent of migrant origin in Finland with other parents in the same situation on social media (photos, text)?
9. Anything else you would like to say before we finish

*Thank you very much for your participation!*

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