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# Work-related language learning trajectories of migrant cleaners in Finland

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*Cleaning is often the survival employment that migrants can get in their new home country. Ideally, the workplace can be a site for integration and language learning. This article explores how two migrants working as cleaners in Finland narrate their work-related Finnish language learning trajectories. The research is designed by applying nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), which focuses on social action in the intersection of interaction order, participants' life experiences, and discourses in place. The social action in focus here is investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015), which means a commitment to developing language skills to achieve one's aspirations. The article also analyses how language learners position themselves and are positioned by others, because positioning affects access to meaningful learning opportunities. Positioning analysis by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) in a small stories approach is applied to analyse the key participants' oral narratives told in the context of ethnographic research interviews. Follow-up interviews conducted a year later are analysed to show how positioning changes over time. The study illustrates that investment in work-related language learning is meaningful when occupational development and language learning can be purposefully combined. However, migrants are positioned as a potential workforce in low-level jobs and their expertise is often ignored, which means that investments in language learning might not pay off in career development. Supporting educated migrants in finding appropriate employment would facilitate goal-oriented language learning.*

**Keywords:** language learning, language in the workplace, migration, nexus analysis, small stories, positioning, investment

## 1 Introduction

Learning the local language and getting a job are often seen as the two main goals of adult migrants' integration into society. Getting employment in a new country may benefit an employee in many ways: not only is it a way of earning a living, but it also acts as a site of recognition, linguistic and cultural socialisation and self-improvement (see Duff, Wong & Early, 2000; Roberts, 2010). However, the downward occupational mobility of migrants is typical in western countries (e.g. Caglitutuncigil, 2015; Creese & Wiebe, 2012; Flubacher, Coray & Duchêne, 2016). Wills et al. (2010, p. 121) argue that it is especially hard for migrants

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working in low-wage low-skilled survival jobs to truly integrate into society because structural inequalities limit their opportunities to connect with wider communities in their new home country. Employment in unstable low-paid manual jobs might therefore actually hinder rather than foster integration into society (see also Könönen, 2015; Mankki & Sippola, 2015). In Finland, one of the biggest challenges for migrants is to find employment that meets their education, which is most often explained by their lack of language competence (Tarnanen & Pöyhönen, 2011, p. 150). The most common entry-level job for migrants in Finland is cleaning (Official statistics of Finland, 2013; Trux, 2002).

This study explores the work-related language learning of two migrants working as cleaners in Finland. Both of them have a place in Finnish working life and the education system: one of them came to Finland to take a Master's degree but ended up working for two private cleaning companies, and the other is apprenticed to become a professional cleaner in her permanent cleaning work in a specialist organisation that hires its own cleaning personnel. To understand the key participants' experiences of work-related language learning after moving to a new country, this study explores their oral narratives and addresses the following questions:

- 1) How do the key participants narrate their work-related language learning trajectories after moving to Finland?
- 2) How do they position themselves and how are they positioned in these narratives?

This article applies Darvin and Norton's (2015) construct of 'investment' in the field of language learning to explore the language learners' work-related language learning trajectories. Investment refers here to learners' commitment to learning a language guided by their aspirations and imagined identities (Norton, 2016, p. 476). Moreover, it is important to analyse how language learners are positioned in different sites of learning, as positionings affect their language learning opportunities and access to different resources (see Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 46). In so doing, this study also discusses how social roles and power relations affect migrants' language learning and employment in a new country. The concept 'trajectory', in turn, highlights the temporality of learning paths: the participants' learning processes are in constant motion but still have coherence through time (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). Trajectories are regarded here as dynamic and ongoing, without a fixed course (Wenger, 1998; see also Räisänen, 2013).

This study is part of a nexus analytical (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) study conducted in the key participants' workplaces (see Strömmer, 2016a, 2016b). Following a nexus-analytical research design, the study regards investment in work-related language learning as a nexus of social practices where people's historical trajectories and experiences, discourses, and interactional elements intersect. In this article, investment in language learning is analysed in the context of oral narratives told by the key participants in interviews which are subjected to narrative analysis, specifically, the *small stories* approach developed by Georgakopoulou (2006) and Bamberg (2004). Particularly *positioning analysis* (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) is applied in the analysis to tap into the relevant positionings that have an influence on investment in language learning. Based on the analysis of these stories, I argue that learners can best invest in their work-related language learning if they position themselves as working in

the field also in the future. In that case, it is motivating to combine language learning with occupational development. If, on the other hand, the career goal is unclear, investing in goal-oriented language learning activities can feel burdensome. Further, migrants' poor language skills are commonly stressed and migrants are positioned unequally in the Finnish labour market. Migrants working in precarious jobs might therefore have difficulty seeing the value of developing Finnish language skills.

In the following, the analytical concepts and methodology of the current study will be introduced. Then the key participants' work-related language learning trajectories will be examined. Finally, the main findings of the study will be connected to the discourses concerning migrants' work-related language skills and career options.

## 2 Investment in work-related language learning

Most migrants moving to Finland have no prior knowledge of the Finnish language, and inadequate knowledge of the language is most often used to explain their precarious position in the Finnish labour market (Forsander, 2013; Komppa, 2015). All unemployed migrants are offered a year-long integration course which concentrates on learning Finnish and also includes training in civics and computational skills. The goal is to reach the intermediate level in language proficiency (B1 in CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001), which enables independence in everyday situations and is one of the key requirements for Finnish citizenship (Tarnanen & Pöyhönen, 2011, p. 143). Ideally, it should be possible after that to continue language learning in a workplace and to develop especially those language and literacy practices that are necessary for performing well in that specific job (Arajärvi, 2009). However, the Finnish integration training is criticised for not being work-related enough: many students do not reach the goal of B1 and even those who do have difficulty finding employment directly after the training (Tarnanen & Pöyhönen, 2011). Besides, the situation of migrants who move to Finland to work or study is different: they are not offered integration training but should instead learn Finnish while studying or working. It is therefore important to explore how work-related language learning in working sites succeeds.

In order to explore language learners' work-related experiences and aspirations, this study applies Darvin and Norton's (2015) construct of *investment*, which refers to the use of time, energy or money to perform goal-oriented activities such as language learning to earn more material or symbolic capital. Its origins are in Norton's (1995) research on investment and imagined communities, which she has developed further with Darvin to better cover the changed settings for second language learning: mobility to western countries has increased, working conditions have generally become more precarious, and the technologies have developed. The mechanisms of power are therefore more invisible, and a critical exploration of the relationship between language learning, investment and identity is needed. The model proposes that identity issues, ideologies and capital are interwoven in investment in second language learning.

I am aware that the construct of investment has been criticised for applying economic terms to language learner identity (see the afterword of Kramsch, 2013, in Norton, 2013), but nevertheless many scholars have found it useful for

uncovering the social aspects of migrants' language learning in the globalised world (see De Costa, 2010). The investment of second language learners has mostly been explored in the context of (language) education (e.g. Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; De Costa, 2010; Early & Norton, 2014). Cooke (2006) focused on the aspirations and language needs of adult ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) learners in the UK and found out that even though they invested heavily in English language learning, many constraints still hindered their access to satisfactory employment. Gonçalves and Schluter (2016) investigated the value of migrant cleaners' linguistic resources in relation to economic and political conditions in a local cleaning company in New Jersey. Darwin and Norton's (2015) new model of investment has been applied in Barkhuizen's (2016) narrative longitudinal study, which explores the imagined identities of a preservice English teacher with an immigrant background, and in Stranger-Johannessen and Norton's (2017) study on teachers' investment and changing identities, in their case in the context of a Ugandan primary school where multilingual literacy practices are promoted.

This study explores the ways in which the key participants position themselves and are positioned in their work-related narratives. Darwin and Norton (2015, pp. 37-39) emphasise that access to meaningful resources may be impeded if language learners are positioned unequally in the sites of learning. Thus even highly motivated learners might encounter discriminatory practices that pose obstacles to their language learning. Moreover, human agency and imagined futures play a role in investment, because learners invest in different language and literacy practices not only because they desire benefits, but also because they recognise the practices as affordances for their learning (Darwin & Norton, 2015, pp. 46-47). Here, I draw also on van Lier's (2000) notion of *affordance* to illustrate how the key participants are able to use the opportunities available to them at work to invest in their language learning. The emphasis is on the relations between learners and their social surroundings when they invest in language learning. Linguistic resources in the environment are learning potentials, but they do not automatically produce learning or become affordances. From all the opportunities that the environment offers for action, learners select those that are somehow meaningful or useful for the activity in which they are engaged. (van Lier 2000, pp. 252-253.) In work-related language learning, this means that workers employ those (linguistic) resources that are somehow relevant for the tasks they are involved in at work – if (s)he has access to them.

### 3 Data and methodology

The research design of this study draws on nexus analysis, developed by Ron and Suzie Wong Scollon (2004, 2007, 2009). It is based on the traditions and methodological tools developed in critical discourse analysis, linguistic anthropology, interactional sociolinguistics and narrative approaches (Hult, 2010; Lane, 2014, p. 17; Pietikäinen, 2010; Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Pietikäinen (2012) and Al Zidjaly (2006) have applied a narrative approach within nexus analysis, as does the current paper. Pietikäinen (2012, p. 418) states that in nexus analytic research, meanings are constructed and reshaped in interaction situations that are part of larger (social) processes and practices. She explores language ideologies as a nexus of discourses, life experiences, and interaction

order (an interview and a genre analysis of a story) that build the language biography of a key participant. Al Zidjaly (2006), in turn, focuses especially on a disabled man's hypothetical future-oriented narratives – in other words, sequentially ordered pieces of anticipatory discourse (Scollon & Scollon, 2000) – to show how he uses this narration activity to cause social change.

The interview data analysed in this article have been generated in nexus analytical research being carried out at the key participants' workplaces (also reported in Strømmer, 2016a, 2016b)<sup>1</sup>. The first of the three steps in conducting nexus analysis is to engage in the field and discover the social actions and actors crucial in that research problem (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 153). I became interested in the role of language in so-called survival jobs and to begin to explore the theme I interviewed ten migrants working as cleaners. Three of them agreed to allow me to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in their workplaces. The data from that consist of 15 days of observations, field notes, over 300 photographs, 13 interviews, 382 minutes of audio-recordings, and 41 minutes of video-recordings. The aim of nexus analysis is to investigate the chosen social action – in this case, migrant cleaners' investment in work-related language learning – in a nexus point that is relevant for the study (see Pietikäinen, 2012, p. 418). I have chosen key participants' small stories about their work-related language learning for detailed analysis, which is the second step in conducting nexus analysis. For this sub-study, I decided to focus on two key participants, Mae Noi and Kifibin, because their educational backgrounds, current workplaces, and career plans are clearly different. Their work- and language-related trajectories can therefore be expected to demonstrate different aspects of investment.

The investment of these two language learners takes place at the intersection of the three main elements of nexus analysis: the *discourses in place*, *interaction order*, and *historical body* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 19). In the current study, the emphasis of the analysis is on the interaction order because positionings are constructed in interaction. This concept was first used by Goffman (1983), who emphasised the importance of exploring different social arrangements at a micro-level as interactional engagements that have specific norms and expectations. By observing individuals who have a joint focus of attention, one can find out about their statuses, relationships and cultural assumptions, and also about the conventions and rules that are attached to specific situations (Goffman, 1983, pp. 3-4). In this case, the interaction order is a research interview where *small stories* and *positioning* are constructed. The interview situation has norms and traditions: for instance, the interviewer is expected to ask questions and the interviewee is expected to answer them. From the nexus analytical perspective, historical bodies and discourses come together in the interaction order. By the term *historical body*, Scollon and Scollon (2004, p. 13) emphasise that people act differently in the same situations because of their bodily memories and personal experience. In this article, the term means that the key participants' and the interviewer's life history and also their shared experiences affect their behaviour in the research interview setting. *Discourses in place*, in turn, means that all the actions are accomplished in material places where there are many discourses circulating and some of them are enacted (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, pp. 4, 14). In this study, discourses are not the focus of analysis, but linkages between the positionings and dominant discourses about migration are discussed in the Conclusion.

To operationalise the analysis of the interaction order further, I draw on the small stories approach developed by Georgakopoulou (2006) and Bamberg (2004). ‘Small story’ is an umbrella term for stories that are smaller than big life stories in two ways: they can be shorter, and they might not meet all the requirements of a prototypical chronological story of personal past experiences of non-shared events (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p. 123). Avoiding clear-cut boundaries, small stories research is interested in the tellings of past, ongoing, future, hypothetical and shared (known) events but also refusals to tell and delaying telling (Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 258). In this study, I follow Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008) by focusing on *positioning*. Positioning analysis was developed within constructivism and first used by Davies and Harré (1990), but in this paper I narrow the scope to the positioning analysis developed further in the context of small stories research to take into consideration the situational and fluid nature of positioning.

I analyse positioning by attending especially to the two first of the three levels proposed by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 385). Level 1 means exploring how the characters are positioned *within the story*, which is significant because the ways the speaker relates him/herself in relation to others in narrating indicates how (s)he wants to be understood (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 380). Level 2 focuses on the ways in which the speaker positions him/herself and is positioned *within the interactive situation*. This level can be investigated by analysing narrating as activity, for instance by analysing story openings, evaluation, tense shifts and repetitions (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, pp. 386-388). As the interaction situation here is a research interview, it is important to look also at the formulation of the questions and answers. The second level explores the constructive nature of narratives, while the first level focuses more on investments. In addition to the examples, there are also short excerpts from the interviews in the running text to give the background knowledge needed for understanding the key participants’ experiences (see also Sprain & Hughes, 2015; Virtanen, 2016). However, detailed analysis of positioning levels 1 and 2 is applied only to the numbered data excerpts 1-7.

In the Conclusion, I also discuss issues related to the third level proposed by Bamberg and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 391) and developed further by De Fina (2013). This level requires connecting the small stories to macro-level societal processes, and I consider particularly how the positionings analysed in the next section (Section 4) relate to the *dominant discourses* about language and migration. I have not located the discourses in this study but instead I refer here to relevant research on migration.

When analysing small stories, it is essential to understand the situational nature of storytelling, because stories are seen as discourse engagements that produce or are connected to specific social activities (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 117). In this study, two audio-recorded interviews with each key participant are analysed. The first interview with Kifibin was conducted in December 2012, and the follow-up interview in April 2014 (one year and 4 months later). Similarly, I interviewed Mae Noi in May 2013 and July 2014 (one year and 2 months later). While Mae Noi chose to use Finnish, Kifibin used mostly English and a little Finnish in the interviews, although he mostly used Finnish in informal discussions in the field with me. The interactional dynamics and participation roles in the interview context – in other words, in the interaction order – define which stories will be told and how (De Fina &

Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 124). The interviewer affects and sometimes also co-constructs stories with the interviewees (De Fina, 2009). The ethnographic perspective is strong in the interviews, as I share some experiences from the field with the participants. Moreover, I was Kifibin's teacher when he took a Finnish language course at the university a year before the data collection, and these experiences are part of our historical bodies affecting the interview situations. In the discussions with Mae Noi, I offer her utterances in Finnish and rephrase some of her turns to check if I have understood her correctly, because it is sometimes hard for her to express herself in Finnish<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, there still remain some misunderstandings between us. The data triangulation part of nexus analytical research design – ethnographic observations, field notes, and interviews conducted with the key participants' co-workers – facilitates the interpretation of the interviews.

## 4 Migrant cleaners' work-related language learning trajectories

### 4.1 Kifibin: Tensions between aspirations and opportunities

Kifibin's trajectory as a Finnish language learner began when he moved to Finland from Uganda to study in 2010. His mother tongue is Luganda, and he had already studied in English in his home country. In Uganda, he studied biology and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in science technology, after which he worked in the water industry. He wanted to take further studies, and as one of the interns in his workplace had studied in Finland, Kifibin checked the options here. He found an appropriate international Master's programme that was related to his expertise and was taught in English, applied, and was accepted. Hence Kifibin's main reason for coming to Finland was professional: he already had a Bachelor's degree in natural sciences and work experience in the water industry, and he wanted to develop this proficiency. Darwin and Norton (2015, p. 45) state that learners often use the capital they already have as affordances in acquiring new resources in their new home countries. Kifibin's degree was regarded as valuable in the Finnish university context as it gave him access to the Master's degree.

To finance his stay in Finland, Kifibin took a cleaning job soon after arriving. He got a part-time job in a large private cleaning company. In 2012, he completed his degree and moved to a bigger city in Finland for better employment opportunities, but he continued to work for the same cleaning company there. The first interview with him took place in December 2012. On the day of the interview, he travelled back to the university to complete his Master's degree: the last compulsory exam. For the near future, he wanted to apply for doctoral studies and get a PhD, to be able to work at a university. The next excerpt shows that Kifibin hopes his investment in a doctoral degree will pay out in the future:

#### Excerpt 1, December 2012

- 1 **Kifibin:** before I even came to Finland, I I always admired the teaching profession. so I always wanted to be like a teacher in my university. and  
 2 **Maiju:** in Uganda or



- 3 Kifibin:** yeah. so. actually that's why I I I I so much wanted to go for further studies. so if I upgrade, learn more, then I would be able to to teach in the university. because I mostly want to teach in the university. and I also am interested in doing research. yeah. so
- 4 Maiju:** so maybe university would be a dream workplace for you
- 5 Kifibin:** yeah it would because me, I I always look at myself. like if I do part time teaching in the university and then I have this research, maybe a research project going on. that's what I would love in future.

**Level 1.** Positioning in the story-world in this example is twofold, because Kifibin talks about both his past and his plans for the future. First, Kifibin narrates himself admiring the teaching profession in his home country, Uganda, and more specifically in the university where he did his Bachelor's degree. Then at the end of this excerpt the telling turns into a hypothetical future-oriented narrative (Al Zidjaly, 2006) about studying for a PhD degree and getting a university post. Kifibin is imagining himself teaching and doing research in this hypothetical dream-come-true future, and his words *I always look at myself* indicate this reflection. Barkhuizen (2016, p. 658) emphasises that imagining yourself in relation to your future – “anticipation of what one will be” – is a meaningful aspect of investment. Kifibin hopes that his investment will help him get his dream job. The historical body is constituted by the lived experiences of an individual but also includes orientation to the future (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 160); these both orient the individual's social actions, in this case, investment.

**Level 2.** Narrating begins in this example with orienting the listener to the time of the narrated events (*before I even came to Finland*). There is a lot of evaluation expressed by verbs and intensifiers here: *I always admired, I always wanted, I so much wanted, I mostly wanted, I would love*. This positive evaluation frames future plans as highly meaningful for Kifibin: he explains that they are the main reason for coming to Finland to study more, and ends the hypothetical telling with an affective coda (*that's what I would love in future*). When it comes to positioning in the interactional situation, I as the interviewer position Kifibin as a potential academic by proposing that the university is a *dream workplace* for him. Kifibin invested a lot of time and energy in participating in my research, which he explained by his own interest in doing research. Given our shared professional goals and parallel historical bodies in that sense, the interview situation probably offered Kifibin a relevant site to share his future plans as an academic as well.

However, Kifibin's hopes of getting onto a PhD programme foundered for lack of funding. In 2013, he started to work for another cleaning company in addition to the first one, to get more working hours. In interviews with the managers of these two companies it emerged that cleaners need to have either Finnish or English language skills to get hired, but the level is not defined or evaluated in detail. Because of his tight work schedule, Kifibin had no time to take any further language courses after the two beginners' level courses (CEFR target levels A1 and A2) he took at the university. However, he believed that Finnish language skills were necessary in cleaning work and on other occasions in Finland (an excerpt from an interview conducted in December 2012): *“I think I really need the Finnish language skills. Otherwise, in most cases it's so hard because, people are always trying to interact with you, and if you don't understand then it does break the communication ... probably it's much easier to get even friends and along everywhere if you can speak the language.”*

Kifibin worked in many locations, as cleaners' work in private companies is usually mobile: they need to clean the premises of several different clients (Käyhkö, 2006, p. 106). Due to the field's fierce price competition and terminable contracts, cleaners need to be flexible about changing locations and their working schedule (Herod & Aguiar, 2006; Könönen, 2011). In different locations there are different combinations of co-workers and clients with whom to interact. Cleaners are often on the outer edges of work-communities, partly because of their status within the outsourced services (see Strömmer, 2016a) and partly because their workplaces change so often they do not have time to become part of the work community (Käyhkö, 2006, p. 183). Certainly, this sets constraints on networking and inhibits access to social capital, and so it makes language learning in interaction at work more difficult. In the next excerpt, Kifibin reflects on one of his working locations from the perspective of Finnish language learning:

### Excerpt 2, December 2012

- 1 Kifibin:** before I went to that place [the current workplace], there is this place it's *jäähalli* [ice stadium].
- 2 Maiju:** *joo* [yeah].
- 3 Kifibin:** so we're doing that. so for that place, we were taking like three coffee breaks. so like sometimes six people, sometimes five, like that. so you work from six up around seven or eight, we take a coffee break. so then they would call us, *mennään kahville* [let's go for coffee], so we would go for coffee, then we sit they discuss, they talk they talk actually that place I liked it a lot because, I I could sit and listen and, get to hear how they pronounce some things and. yeah.

**Level 1.** In this example, Kifibin narrates the routine of taking three coffee breaks each working day together with a changing combination of cleaners (*sometimes six people, sometimes five*). He uses mostly the personal pronoun *we* when referring to his colleagues but it is not always clear when he is referring to all of them and when to only some of them. By saying *then we sit they discuss*, he makes a distinction between "we" and "them" - probably migrants who were listening and Finns who were talking. Kifibin positions himself as an active listener: he listens to the Finnish discussions and tries to learn from them, especially pronunciation. However, in doing so he positions himself at the outer edge of the coffee table discussions, not as an active participant. Also Cooke (2006, p. 67) found that her research participant, a migrant woman working as a cleaner in the UK, framed herself "as an eavesdropper in others' conversations". According to Cooke (2006), the low status of the cleaner limits her right to speak, and there might be similar reasons for Kifibin's silence. However, it is clear that he is trying to learn Finnish at the workplace even though he invests in learning mostly by listening. Van Lier (2004, p. 93) argues that perceiving and interpreting linguistic resources in the learner's social and physical environment is a precondition for language learning, and it seems that Kifibin is actively concentrating on Finnish phrases that he can take as affordances for learning at the workplace.

**Level 2.** Kifibin begins the narration by orienting the listener in respect to time (*before I went to that place*) and place (*there is this place it's jäähalli* [ice stadium]). He frames this narrative in the past tense at the beginning and at the end, where he presents an evaluative coda: "*actually that place I liked it a lot*". In other parts of this excerpt he mostly uses the historic present, which is a discourse device often used to bring the narrated past events closer to the telling

situation (Schiffrin, 1981, p. 46). Kifibin also uses a highly conventional Finnish phrase, *mennään kahville* ('let's go for coffee'), which is an example of a phrase that he has heard and learned at the workplace. He evaluates coffee table discussions there as good opportunities to learn Finnish. However, at another point in this interview Kifibin declares that he could learn a certain amount of Finnish in cleaning work, but the possibilities were rather limited: "*it's a slow process. but every now and then I'm learning something*" (Interview, December 2012).

I conducted a follow-up interview with Kifibin in April 2014, a year and four months after the first one. He was still working for two cleaning companies and had neither a position as a PhD student nor other work opportunities. His working day began at 6 am and ended around 9.30 pm so he did not take any language courses: "*I would love to. but. it's a bit tricky with the time*" (Interview, April 2014). Nevertheless, he believed that his language skills had developed a lot. He had another new workplace: he was cleaning a shopping mall with a Finnish co-worker, with whom he spoke Finnish regularly. He also invested in language learning by using online materials to study at home. The development was confirmed in a National Certificate of Language Proficiency test (FNBE, 2014)<sup>3</sup>. Kifibin told me that he could now understand "*probably like 50 percent or more*" of Finnish phrases, and in the next excerpt he describes how this development is manifested at work:

### Excerpt 3, April 2014

- 1 Maiju:** how can you tell that it [Finnish language proficiency] has improved. are some situations easier or?
- 2 Kifibin:** yes. I can really like now. (there) are different situations that I have encountered. like, in now I bought some old car. but when it breaks down, sometimes I have to take it for for repair. and some mechanics they don't speak English, but somehow I can survive with my Finnish and. then another situations. when I am at work. when my colleague is not there. then I have to be with the phone work. so they always call and sometimes I am surprised that people talk to me on phone in Finnish and I am understanding what they are saying. so different situations (work) and I manage them in Finnish. so I think I've really really improved. mhm. since last year  
(...)
- 3 Maiju:** is any situation somehow different now for example with your supervisors or workmates or?
- 4 Kifibin:** my supervisors aren't worried any more about. like they just call and speak. they don't maybe worry about speaking English. and sometimes we we have those meetings they are in our coffee place. and the meetings are in Finnish.

**Level 1.** Compared to Excerpt 2, where Kifibin positions himself as a listener, here he positions himself as a more active participant in phone conversations and work meetings, which are linguistically demanding situations (see Suni, 2011, p. 17). In this example, Kifibin's supervisors position him as a competent Finnish language speaker, as they no longer use English with him (turn 4); previously, they used English if they wanted to double check that the instructions were understood. When I interviewed his supervisors at the beginning of 2013, they framed Kifibin as a successful language learner with an urge to learn but not yet capable of managing entirely in Finnish at work (see more Strömmer, 2016a).

**Level 2.** The interview questions I asked prompted storytelling, as they call for situations where development is evident. However, Kifibin's replies are not

typical narratives in the sense that they concentrate on sequenced events with an opening, middle, and end, but instead his answers are more general and descriptive: he tells me about typical events that happen often by using the adverbs *now, sometimes, always, any more*. He knows that the research focuses on Finnish language learning in cleaning work, and this probably affects what situations he chooses to refer to in the interview, although he first mentions out-of-the-workplace events at the garage. Nevertheless, it seems that Kifibin's networks in Finland are so limited that his work actually offers one of the few opportunities he has to use Finnish. That is why he tries to invest in speaking Finnish at the workplace, to take the opportunity to practise his Finnish language skills.

In addition to investing in language learning, Kifibin had also invested in his work by getting a driving licence, which meant taking driving lessons in Finland, and by buying an old car, which he used for moving between his home and his different cleaning locations. Despite these investments and his comparatively long work experience (four years) in the same cleaning company, he had not got any new responsibilities at work. After working in the same cleaning company for over a year after completing his Master's degree, his position had not changed at all, but his attitude towards the future had changed. He said that he had tried to apply for doctoral studies in Finland and contacted professors in North America too, without success. He had therefore started to consider other options, and he presented various possibilities that could give him more power over his working life. He mentioned different plans: starting his own company, doing smaller projects like buying land in Uganda, or training in a new vocational field in Finland. He had also looked at research assistant jobs, but he believed that his language skills were not sufficient as a *good command in Finnish language* was required. Whatever the plan, Kifibin considered developing his Finnish language skills as a major means of success, but he seemed not to have any clear idea of an appropriate goal to pursue:

#### Excerpt 4, April 2014

- 1 Kifibin:** the longer I stay in Finland, the more chances of learning the language. and then I can I can learn something different. maybe if. I can learn something different. a different skill. that maybe I can work still for some time as I am thinking of what else I can do
- 2 Maiju:** do you have any idea what kind of skills those could be
- 3 Kifibin:** well not yet but maybe it could be in construction. I don't know. I'm just still thinking.
- 4 Maiju:** you said
- 5 Kifibin:** ((stops Maiju)) well and and and. ((7.0)) but still everything that I'm thinking of the language limits. but I have like my background in biology. would would support me to do anything in the medical field. I don't know. a friend of mine was advising me to do nursing. but I haven't thought of it yet.

**Level 1.** This excerpt begins with a hypothetical future-oriented narrative (Al Zidjaly, 2006) of getting the needed skills for vocational education and thus a better position in the labour market by investing in better Finnish language proficiency (turn 1). Kifibin mentions some new career options he is still unsure of: construction work and nursing, both of which are typical jobs for immigrants in ethnically segregated labour markets locally and globally (Lahti & Valo, 2013; Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018; Näre, 2013). However, contradicting his earlier observations about managing well in Finnish at work (Example 3), he voices the belief that his Finnish language skills are still inadequate for success in any of

these plans (*everything that I'm thinking of the language limits*). It seems that Kifibin does not know enough about the opportunities and obstacles concerning education and work in Finnish society. Creese and Wiebe (2012) noticed that although many sub-Saharan African men working in survival jobs in Canada continued to express hope of eventually getting a job in their field of expertise, they did not have any strategies for reaching this goal and most of them were trapped in precarious jobs. Similar observations have also been made in the Finnish context (Helkkula, 2014; Könönen, 2015; Mankki & Sippola, 2015). Kifibin's case shows that the problem is not only that his entry-level cleaning job offers rather limited opportunities for language learning; he also has difficulties getting acknowledged professionally in the Finnish labour market even with a good command of Finnish (see also Strömmer, 2016a).

**Level 2.** In this excerpt, Kifibin is evaluating the probability of realising his different plans. The first turn is quite optimistic, and the possibilities are expressed by repetition: *I can I can learn something different - - I can learn something different - - a different skill - - I can work - - I can do*. The last turn, however, is more doubtful sceptical: *but* is repeated three times. Kifibin expresses the uncertainty of his plans by highlighting his ongoing thinking process (*maybe if, I am thinking of what else, not yet, still thinking*). It is a common belief that individuals experience their lives as a coherent life story, and even that this is crucial for a good life (Strawson, 2004, pp. 428-429). However, postmodern life is characterised rather by uncertainty, fracture and experience of disunity (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 157). The aim of trying to tease out a coherent life story with a clear future plan is visible in my attempt throughout the interview to get Kifibin to narrate his main plans. Here, in turn 5, Kifibin stops me when I try to refer back to what he had said about his future earlier in the interview, and then takes a long break, which might indicate that he is tired of this attempt.

Kifibin's first option was still to begin doctoral studies: *"it would be also good to like keep on this knowledge and science that I've learned"* (Interview, April 2014). By investing in studying for a doctoral degree in Finland Kifibin would certainly gain symbolic capital, which might help him to get a privileged position in Uganda. As it was uncertain whether he could ever succeed in this plan, he had started to see the value of Finnish language skills differently: he was planning to stay in Finland for at least some years to learn more Finnish and maybe even study something different, which would strengthen his position in the Finnish labour market. He seemed to be unsure of the value of his degree and language skills – in other words, his cultural capital – in the Finnish context. From the researcher's perspective, his command of Finnish was not the real reason for getting trapped in cleaning work: in Finland, it is tricky even for Finns to get employment with a degree in biology, and many people with Masters degrees in that field go on to doctoral studies (Hirsimäki, 2013). Besides, African men in Finland often have difficulty getting a job that matches their education (Mankki & Sippola, 2015), so Kifibin's race and nationality will also have affected his employment opportunities.

#### 4.2 Mae Noi: Investing in work-related language learning

Mae Noi came to Finland for personal reasons: she moved from Thailand to Finland in 2005 because she married a Finn, which is the most common reason for moving to Finland from Thailand (Lumio, 2011, p. 17). I interviewed Mae Noi in 2013, when she had already lived in Finland for eight years and had had a

full-time position as a cleaner for one year. Mae Noi told me that before coming to Finland she had had various jobs in Thailand: massaging, cooking, and selling food in a market place. Of these, she preferred massaging and described it as her *real occupation*<sup>4</sup> because she had a degree in that field. Therefore she would have liked to continue that in Finland, too. However, she had not worked as a masseur after coming to Finland except for giving massages to her friends, neighbours and family. Sometimes cultural capital is not valued in a new context (see Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 45), and it seems that Mae Noi's degree had lost its value in Finland. Mae Noi doubted her ability to work as a masseur here; she was worried about the taxation system and other bureaucracy related to starting one's own company. At the same time, she stressed her motivation for massaging: "*because it is my occupation*"<sup>5</sup>. This indicates that although Mae Noi had achieved a secure position in the Finnish labour market, she still differentiated between what she saw as her real occupation and cleaning by highlighting that she had invested in massaging skills. Massaging was a meaningful part of her life experiences, and therefore, her historical body.

Mae Noi's mother tongue is Thai and she knows some phrases in English. Her trajectory as a Finnish language learner began as soon as she arrived in Finland, when she studied Finnish first in the one-year integration training for unemployed adult immigrants. These full-time studies consisted of a so-called *ABC course*, where she learnt to read and write in Finnish, and then the courses *Finnish 1* and *Finnish 2*. After three years of parental leave she started working life in Finland with a two-month internship in a lunch restaurant. In the next excerpt she describes the workplace and, particularly, learning Finnish there. The language of the interview was Finnish, and because of the inaccuracy in Mae Noi's pronunciation and the structures she used, the translation cannot capture all the characteristics of her telling<sup>6</sup>. The goal of the English translation presented below is to convey the content and to maintain the interactional elements crucial for the narrative analysis. The analysis is based on the original data.

#### Excerpt 5, May 2013 (an English translation below)

- 1 Maiju:** no millasta oli ku alotit, alotit työn siellä lounaspaikassa, niin niin miten siellä suju. miten meni työ millasta se oli
- 2 Mae Noi:** missä
- 3 Maiju:** siellä lounaspaikassa
- 4 Mae Noi:** joo se menee hyvin ja hauska, ja opitan tämä suomen kieli puhumaan enemmän, koska puhuu nyt puhuu maustekieli, niin sä tiedä minkälainen mausteita on, mikä mauste tämä nimi on, mikä siellä on luokanimi on, mikä luoka. esimerkki mikä tuolla makaloonilaatikko pitää tekä mitä laitetaan aine (...) sä on nyt on kaikki oppima sä tiedän kaikki
- 5 Maiju:** keneltä opit siellä
- 6 Mae Noi:** se on, se on tuolla mun kokki, tämä pääkokki nimi vain [Kaisa], tää on hyvä sä opit mä mun kaikki, sä anna mun tekee luokaa kaikki ite myös, sä on kokeilla ja hän vain maistaa, tää on hyvä sitä, ja nyt opitaan tuolla jos asiakas tilausluokaa, minkälainen lautasia annosta minä pitää antaa mitä pitää tekee, mä oon mä oon oppinu ((nauraa))
- 7 Maiju:** no niin, kyllä. ja samalla opit sitten suomen kieltä myös
- 8 Mae Noi:** nii, se hauskaa sitä näin
- 9 Maiju:** joo, millä tavalla opit sitä suomee siellä
- 10 Mae Noi:** sitä oppii vaan puhuu plaa plaa plaa plaa tämmönen näin, ja on kaikki on nainen, sä vaan oppi vaan puhuu, ja oppi vaan

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- 1 Maiju:** well what was it like when you started, started working there in the lunch restaurant, so how did it go. how did the work go, how was it
- 2 Mae Noi:** where
- 3 Maiju:** in the lunch restaurant
- 4 Mae Noi:** yeah it goes well and fun, and I learn to speak Finnish language more, because now speaking spice language, well you know what kinds of spices there are, which spice what's the name of it, what's the name of the food, what food, for example what is there macaroni casserole should make what ingredients to put (...) you are now learning everything you know everything
- 5 Maiju:** who did you learn from there
- 6 Mae Noi:** it is, it's there my cook, this main cook her name is [Kaisa], it's good you learn I my everything, you let me cook food everything by myself as well, you can try and she only tastes, this is good that, and now we learn if a client orders food there, what kinds of plates portions what you should give what to do, I've I've learned ((laughs))
- 7 Maiju:** so, yes. and at the same time you've learned Finnish as well
- 8 Mae Noi:** yes, it's fun like this
- 9 Maiju:** yeah, so how did you learn Finnish there
- 10 Mae Noi:** you just learn it you just speak blah blah blah blah like this, and everyone there is woman, you just learn just speak, and just learn

**Level 1.** In this excerpt, Mae Noi strongly links language learning at the workplace with the work tasks, in this case cooking different meals: the names of the dishes, the ingredients to use, and the ways to season and cook them. She mentions work-related vocabulary (the names of spices and dishes) as a target of learning (see also Ratia, 2016). Terminology is one aspect by which work-related language skills are often defined (Härmälä, 2008, p. 62; Komppa, 2015). In her telling, her language learning and use are narrated as strongly situational. According to Darwin and Norton (2015, p. 48), language learners develop their language skills by employing the linguistic resources available in different places, which in this case means a lunch restaurant. Particular places activate different spatial repertoires because speakers take part in repeated activities and language practices that are relevant and attached to specific places (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2014, p. 166). Interaction between the language learner and his/her social environment, for instance other people present at a place, can also offer meaningful affordances for language learning (see van Lier, 2000, pp. 50-52). In this excerpt, Mae Noi names her co-worker, a Finnish cook, as the one she mostly learned Finnish from (turn 6), and she positions herself among the other women who worked in the restaurant. Mae Noi says it was fun to talk and learn Finnish with them (turn 10). Immigrant women often have difficulties gaining access to opportunities to interact in the public world (Norton, 2000, p. 12), and therefore it must be important to Mae Noi to have the chance to talk Finnish with her female colleagues.

Besides language learning, Mae Noi claims to have also developed her cooking skills: she was able to work individually, as the main cook let her prepare dishes and she only tasted them afterwards (turn 6). Virtanen (2016) found in her research on the development of professional language skills that it is important to give newcomers opportunities to work independently but also to provide enough support. This example indicates that the chief cook, who had the power to regulate working practices in the restaurant, offered good conditions for Mae Noi to invest in work-related learning. This example

indicates that Mae Noi would have learned a whole new “spice language” related to a cook’s work. A cook’s practices had become part of Mae Noi’s *historical body* already in Thailand, and that might be why she could relate the Finnish language utterances she heard directly to the cooking tasks.

**Level 2.** As for positioning in this interactional situation, it is evident that the research setting strongly affects the interactional accomplishment of narrating. The telling is strongly co-constructed here. The research question (turn 1) prompts Mae Noi to start narrating. I then ask Mae Noi to say who she learnt Finnish from (turn 5) and suggest ways to interpret the narrated events (turn 7). In general, throughout the interview I clearly position Mae Noi as a Finnish language learner getting scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) for her learning process from others, and this is visible in this example as well – turns 5, 7 and 9 are all about learning.

After the internship in the lunch restaurant, Mae Noi worked for a while as a cook in a Thai restaurant, where she used mostly Thai language with her co-workers and did not have as many opportunities to use Finnish. When the restaurant went bankrupt, Mae Noi got a job in a private cleaning company. She was given hotel cleaning, where she had few chances to use Finnish: “*rush rush does not say anything to anybody, sometimes there is a client, just say hello, yeah and for the whole day just hello, nothing else*”<sup>7</sup> (Interview, May 2013). She also regretted that she did not even have the opportunity to learn work-related Finnish vocabulary there, but another Thai cleaner gave Mae Noi orientation in Thai. In low-level jobs it is common to have several employees from the same linguistic groups so that they can use their mother tongue at work (Cooke, 2006, p. 66; Goldstein, 1997). Mae Noi was unsure whether she used the correct detergents and equipment because she did not know their names in Finnish. Thus here too her Finnish language needs were directly connected to the actual work routines, but unlike in the lunch restaurant, here there was nobody to help her (Excerpt 5).

In 2012, Mae Noi got tired of hotel cleaning. She noticed that a large specialist organisation was recruiting their own cleaning personnel, applied, and got a job. The work was more varied than hotel cleaning, and the area where she worked had different workspaces. My observations indicated that there were Finnish language learning opportunities at the workplace. Many of the organisation’s employees chatted with Mae Noi during her cleaning routine, and in addition to that she spoke Finnish with her cleaning team daily in breaks and monthly in team-meetings (see Strömmer, 2016b). Mae Noi told me that she wanted to develop her language skills: “*I want to learn more [Finnish] all the time, because I live in Finland and (...) because I need to work here*”<sup>8</sup> (Interview, May 2013). In the next excerpt, she narrates a moment when she realised that her language skills had developed at the current workplace:

**Excerpt 6, May 2013 (an English translation below)**

- 1 Maiju:** no tota tuntuuko sinusta että opit täällä [työpaikalla], suomea  
**2 Mae Noi:** joo  
**3 Maiju:** joo, miks, miks se tuntuu siltä tai mistä sen huomaa  
**4 Mae Noi:** juttelee [palkkaneuvottelu] mitä se on saa pääsee nousee palkka. sitten hän [esimiehen nimi] sanoo Mae Noi sinä huomaatko, mitä, sinä puhu suomi enemmän kun ensimmäinen tulee tähän, oonkoo, mä sanoo sille ((nauraa))  
**5 Maiju:** ((nauraa)) joo  
**6 Mae Noi:** hän sanoo oon oon oon no, huomaatko, en huomaa, no, koska mä juttelee koko päivä, ja sitten koko ajan siellä, taukotila plaa plaa plaa plaa silleen näin. niin koska mä tykkään puhuu, ja sitten mä puhuu enemmän ((nauraa))



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- 1 **Maiju:** well do you feel that you learn Finnish here [at the workplace]  
 2 **Mae Noi:** yeah  
 3 **Maiju:** yeah, why, why do you think so or how do you notice it  
 4 **Mae Noi:** talk about [wage negotiation] what is it you get salary increases. then she [the superior] says Mae Noi do you notice, what, you speak Finnish more than when you came here for the first time, am I, I say to her ((laughs))  
 5 **Maiju:** ((laughs)) yeah  
 6 **Mae Noi:** she says yes yes yes well, do you notice, no I don't, well, because I chat the whole day, and then all the time there, in a break room blah blah blah like that. yeah because I like talking, and then I talk more ((laughs))

**Level 1.** Here Mae Noi narrates two characters – herself and her superior – in a performance appraisal, which is a high-stakes situation because her performance is being evaluated and her salary might increase as a result (see Boswell & Boudreau, 2002). It is a hierarchical and confidential discussion, a rare occasion to discuss vocational development with a superior. In this setting, Mae Noi positions her superior as someone who evaluates her language skills and has noticed her development (turn 4). Mae Noi explains that her language skills have developed due to chatting all day long, especially in the coffee room (turn 6). Telling me this, Mae Noi positions herself again as a person who learns a language by happily and actively taking part in conversations at the workplace and she reinforces her words by a laughter “because I chat the whole day - - because I like talking” (*koska mä juttelee koko päivää - - koska mä tykkään puhuu*) (see also Excerpt 5).

**Level 2.** Mae Noi decides to tell a story to answer the question about how she notices the progress in her Finnish language skills. She begins by orienting the listener to the situation of the story, a performance appraisal discussion. This kind of interactional situation is not typical at her work, and thus it is relevant to consider why she chooses to tell this particular story in the interview. The interaction order of the performance appraisal is a hierarchical negotiation, which is a linguistically demanding situation where achieving and agreeing on common goals in a dialogue is crucial (see Pälli & Lehtinen, 2014, p. 93). By using reported speech in her story, Mae Noi gives more credibility to the process of developing language skills: quoting the manager adds an authoritative voice to the small story (De Fina, 2003, p. 94). Reported speech is also a powerful positioning device (Wortham, 2001), since it allows a speaker to present different points of view (De Fina, 2003, p. 96). Here Mae Noi uses it to express her surprise: “am I, I say to her” (*oonkoo, mä sanoo sille*; turn 4) and “do you notice, no I don't” (*huomaatko, en huomaa*; turn 6).

I interviewed Mae Noi for the second time in July 2014, one year and two months after the first interview. By then she had held her permanent full-time position as a cleaner for two years. In the follow-up interview, Mae Noi was especially satisfied with the chance to develop her cleaning skills in an apprenticeship, which had begun a year ago. She told me that she was learning new cleaning techniques, such as the use of cleaning machines and the specific cleaning equipment and detergents for handling different floor materials, all the time. In the next example, she describes the process of work-related learning, in which language learning is closely connected with the actual work:

#### Excerpt 7, July 2014 (an English translation below)

- 1 **Maiju:** eli koulussa opit ja sitten työkaverit vielä täällä paikan päällä

- 2 Mae Noi:** joo koska on kouluun vaan mennään vaan kouluun. ja sitten on työpaikka, pitää tekee töitä ja näyttää ihan oikein mitä siellä tapahtuu. sitten meidälle muistaa enemmän kun ka mennään kouluun istuu penkki. siellä on vaan teoriaa.
- 3 Maiju:** okei
- 4 Mae Noi:** siellä on vaan. täällä on tekee töitä. täällä on kunnan sitä tekemään. ja sitten työkaveri ka pitää näyttää. ka siellä on koulu. jos on nimi. jos ei näytä pullo tämmönennäin esimerkiks sä näytä pullo. minkälainen pullo ja tämmönen tämmönen on. minkä nimi on ja mikä pitää käyttää tämmönen näin. koska mennään kouluun mennään vaan teoriaa meidälle ei näe missään. sitten meidälle ei muistaa mittää. ja työpaikan ja näyttää ja pitää tekee. ja sitten on ihan oikee. sä on muista kaikki. sillälaine.
- 5 Maiju:** no onko se kuitenkin hyödyllistä se koulu. onko se tarkeeta.
- 6 Mae Noi:** ((nauraen)) särä sä
- 7 Maiju:** tai hyvä.
- 8 Mae Noi:** on hyvä. on hyväkin myös. ihan molemmassa on hyvä. koulu ka oppii. se on nytten vaan ensinnäkin sä on oppii, sä opettaja opettaa kaikki. tämän nime. sä ei vielä oikein ymmärrä että ihan työssä. pitää täällä työ työpaika työkaveli kanssa ja sitten on. kysymys kysyy tämmönennäin työpaikka ja sitte on työkaveri mitä tämä tarkoittaa mitä tää on. mikä tämä on nimi on täällä. näytä minkälainen on

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- 1 Maiju:** so you learn at school and then on top of that the workmates here
- 2 Mae Noi:** yeah because to school you just go to school. and then the workplace, you need to work and show right what happens there. then we remember more than when we go to school to sit at a desk. there's only theory there
- 3 Maiju:** okay
- 4 Mae Noi:** there is only. here you work. here it's really doing that. and then a workmate also has to show. there at school. if there's a name. if you don't show a bottle like this for example you show a bottle. what kind of a bottle and like this like this is. what's the name and what you need to use like this. because we go to school go just theory we do not see anywhere. then we don't remember anything. and workplace and show and have to do. and then it's just right. you remember everything. like this.
- 5 Maiju:** well is the school anyway useful. is it important
- 6 Mae Noi:** ((laughing)) [unclear: särä sä]
- 7 Maiju:** or good
- 8 Mae Noi:** it's good. it's also good. both are good. in school you learn. it's now firstly you learn, the teacher teaches everything. the name of this. and then you don't quite yet understand but at work. you must here at work with a work mate and then it's. question to ask like this at work and then there's a workmate what does this mean what's this. and what's the name is here. show me what this is like

**Level 1.** In this example, Mae Noi positions herself as someone who learns best by practising and doing: "just theory we do not see anywhere. then we don't remember anything. and workplace and show and have to do. and then it's just right. you remember everything" (see in Finnish at the end of turn 4). Mae Noi mentions different people who are significant for her learning process: her workmates and her teacher. She mentions two relevant environments for work-related language learning: the school and the workplace. Mae Noi narrates learning to be a cyclic process: it takes place at school in theory and at the workplace in practice. The

outcome of the investment in learning at school is concrete, as Mae Noi can use the detergents and techniques directly after the school week.

**Level 2.** The beginning of this example shows how co-constructed the interaction in the interview with Mae Noi is: I as an interviewer try to sum up what Mae Noi has been telling me, and the summary prompts Mae Noi to carry on. In turns 4 and 6, Mae Noi seems to contrast language learning at school negatively with learning at the workplace, as she says “to school you just go to school” (*kouluun vaan mennään vaan kouluun*) and “there is only” (*siellä on vaan*). In turn 5, the research question calls for a (re-)evaluation of the usefulness of the school, and when Mae Noi’s reply is unclear (turn 6), I rephrase the question to get the evaluation, suggesting a positive response (turn 7). Then Mae Noi gives a more positive evaluation of the school, and her laughter in turn 6 may signal awkwardness, as the question in line 5 may have put her in a rather difficult position by questioning her evaluation. In this excerpt, the speech is very repetitive: Mae Noi says the same things slightly differently again and again and gives me many examples to highlight the division between the theoretical school and the practical workplace, probably partly to try to make sure that I understand what she means. Repetitions have a crucial role in negotiating shared understandings (see Suni, 2008, p. 200). She emphasises the theoretical and static aspects of school with the phrase, “we go to school to sit at the desk” and the practical and dynamic aspects of the workplace with “here it is really doing”.

In the follow-up interview, Mae Noi seemed to be satisfied with her work. She was clearly proud of being a recognised and valued employee. Brody (2006, p. 549) found in her ethnographic research on Thai cleaners in a shopping mall in Bangkok that especially the female cleaners expressed working-class pride in their ability to withstand a physically hard job, and a similar attitude came across to me from Mae Noi’s speech and the reactions she described when doing her job. She told me that she wanted her working life to go on just as it was. She had also established her own business and gave massages every Saturday in customers’ homes. The change from the first interview to the second one was that she felt she belonged in cleaning work as well as in her occupation as a masseur – maybe partly because she was studying to get a vocational degree in cleaning, too. Earlier she had said that massaging was her “own occupation”, and in the follow-up interview cleaning seemed to be her occupation too. The vocational development in cleaning work gave her motivation: she was able to gain new skills and appreciation at work. Her orientation towards language learning was work-related, as she wanted to do her job better; she therefore invested in activities that would help her to attain that goal.

## 5 Conclusion

This study focused on the investment in work-related language learning of two migrants from different backgrounds, by exploring how they narrate their work-related language learning trajectories after moving to Finland and how they position themselves in these narratives. The positioning analysis illustrates that the ways in which the key participants position themselves as language learners is connected with their learning opportunities, especially related to their future aspirations. Mae Noi invests a lot in vocational development in cleaning work because she can imagine herself in the field in the future. Kifibin’s primary

aspirations, on the other hand, are in the field of biology and he therefore does not find it so useful to invest in work-related language learning when doing cleaning work. Kifibin invests in Finnish language skills in order to get on in his career in some other field(s), but is unsure of his goal, which undermines his attempts and is stressful. This indicates that when learners have a realistic career goal to which they can orient their investment, and especially if it pays off, it is meaningful to develop the relevant work-related language skills.

The high unemployment rates among immigrants are often highlighted in reports on migration in Finland (e.g. Arajärvi, 2009; Eronen et al., 2014). The research participants in this study emphasised their willingness to work, and they both had two jobs. Their poor Finnish language skills are often given as the main reason for migrants' weaker position in the Finnish labour market. Kifibin's trajectory indicates that improving their Finnish language skills does not necessarily further migrants' career, because the expertise of skilled migrants is not always taken into consideration. This implies that there are also mechanisms of exclusion that are not directly connected to language skills. Darwin and Norton (2015, p. 43) note that sometimes language learners are positioned before they even speak, so the mechanisms of power can constrain migrants' entry to specific sites. For instance, the ways in which African men are positioned in Finland as potential workforce for cleaning jobs, regardless of their high level of education (see Helkkula, 2014), could explain why Kifibin does not believe that his intermediate language proficiency (B1) would be sufficient for getting a job related to his academic expertise in Finland. As Canadian research (Creese & Wiebe, 2012) on tertiary educated sub-Saharan migrants with excellent English language skills has shown, employment agencies tend to guide migrants to entry-level jobs instead of helping them to build a long-term career strategy. Garrido and Codó (2017) found that African migrants in Barcelona had appropriated the dominant 'tabula-rasa' discourses and thus disregarded their education and language skills and aimed at low-skilled jobs, although their reason for coming to Spain had been to study further. The migration services in general and employment offices in particular should carefully consider how educated migrants could be supported in finding appropriate employment, because that would facilitate both purposeful language learning and integration into Finland.

Mae Noi's case indicates that when the workplace offers opportunities for an employee to develop vocationally, it is more meaningful for them to invest in work-related language skills. Getting a full-time job in an organisation offering apprenticeship as well as scaffolding in language learning was an important step for Mae Noi towards starting to imagine her future in cleaning work. Mae Noi also found a way to work as a part-time masseur, which is an important part of her historical body. Webster and Haandrikman (2017, p. 17) found that Thai women who have small businesses are excluded from the privileged normative entrepreneurial discourses in Sweden as "racialized others", and there might be similar stereotypes in Finland, too. Besides, Thai masseurs are often linked to prostitution (Monk-Turner & Turner, 2017). Mae Noi challenges these stereotypes by having a business name as a masseur and by being proud of her massaging and language skills. Serwe (2015) found in his ethnographic research on Thai entrepreneurs in Germany that self-employment motivated the participants to develop their German language skills, and Mae Noi's Finnish language proficiency is an advantage in her massaging business as well.

This article offers a new angle from which to operationalise the study of investment in second language learning by applying a nexus analytical research

design and positioning analysis in the small stories approach. The second level of analysis worked as a reflexive tool to analyse the constructive nature of narratives. It is important to take into consideration also the role of the interviewer when research interviews are analysed as interaction. Further, this study applied the concept of investment to the context of working life, which opened new viewpoints on societal power relations connected to migrants' opportunities to invest in second language learning. More research is needed to uncover the hierarchies and inequalities that limit migrants' ability to purposefully invest in a meaningful career in general, and work-related language skills in particular.

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<sup>2</sup> The participants chose the language(s) for the research interviews. I told them that I could use Finnish and English, and if they wanted to use another language, I would arrange a professional interpreter. Mae Noi did not want to have an interpreter but wanted instead to use Finnish with me.

<sup>3</sup> Kifibin had taken the language test a couple of months before the follow-up interview. He got level 3, which is equivalent to B1 in CEFR (see Council of Europe, 2001) for speaking, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension, and level 4, equivalent to B2, for writing.

<sup>4</sup> This is a translation of the original phrase in Finnish: "mun oikee ammatti".

<sup>5</sup> This is a translation of the original phrase in Finnish: "koska iten on ammatti".

<sup>6</sup> Mae Noi has not taken an official language test. Her oral Finnish language usage has features typical of level A2 in CEFR. She uses some simple structures correctly, but still systematically mixes up tenses. Her pronunciation is generally clear enough to be understood despite a noticeable foreign accent, but conversational partners often need to ask for repetition and check if they have understood. She told me that her written skills are weaker than her oral skills.

<sup>7</sup> This is a translation of the original phrases in Finnish: “kiile kiile ei puhu mitään ketään, joskus on asiakas, sanoo vaan telve, niin ja koko päivä vaan telve, ei mitään muuta sano”.

<sup>8</sup> This is a translation of the original phrases in Finnish: “minä haluu koko ajan lisää [suomea] oppi, koska minäkin iten asun suomi (...) koska pitää teke töitä täällä”.

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