Author(s): Räisänen, Tiina

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Räisänen Tiina

Finnish engineers' trajectories of socialization into global working life: reconstructing identities as users of English

Introduction

English as a lingua franca, ELF, is *the* world language and thus the inevitable communicative medium of choice for many speakers of different first languages. This is the starting point most often adopted for the exploration of both ELF and BELF, i.e., English as a business lingua franca (Seidlhofer 2011: 7; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta 2005). In the study of ELF, it is also important to consider how its users, ELF speakers, embody different *communicative repertoires* (Räisänen 2013) and *linguacultural* backgrounds (Risager 2010) and the ways in which such a background is constructed in communication. When ELF speakers communicate, they always bring their unique repertoires, background assumptions and expectations into locally constructed interactions in different ways (see also Seidlhofer 2006: 43; Jenkins 2007: 43; Baker 2009; Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey 2011). An individual's communicative repertoire refers to the package of all the resources available to them and used by them to communicate meaning (Blommaert and Backus 2011: 7). Repertoire development is influenced by one's unique trajectories of socialization and access to community memberships and interactions. The same applies to an individual's linguaculture which, as Risager (2010: 8) argues, develops as a result of, on the one hand, membership in communities (i.e., the collective aspect) and, on the other, the person's history and biography (i.e., the individual aspect). Linguaculture is tied first of all to the language(s) one first acquires, and it develops further as the individual learns additional languages. One's communicative repertoire and linguaculture form the basis for the identification of the self; thus, they are important in the study of ELF users' discursive identity construction.

This chapter investigates the ways in which a group of Finnish engineers discursively construct their language user identities by drawing on their collective and individual backgrounds. It illustrates a trajectory in their discursive identity construction and their enregisterment of Finnish ways of speaking English over time. It elaborates on my co-authored paper with Tarja Nikula (Virkkula and Nikula 2010), which investigated discursive identity construction among Finnish ELF users as revealed in interviews with seven engineering students aged 22–26 years both before and after a stay abroad, in Germany, in 2003. After that, the participants were again interviewed during their employment in an international company in Finland in 2008–2010. This data is added to the analysis to show the ways in which identity work and processes of enregisterment change as

individuals gain experience in intercultural encounters and are socialized into new ways of speaking during their global employment. The findings also illustrate how ideas of culture and nationality become increasingly important for people in making sense of lingua franca interactions and of themselves as users of English.

This chapter focuses on discursive identity work in interviews as individuals talk about themselves as English language learners and users. This chapter extends the discussion in the earlier paper by exploring how cultural and intercultural dimensions feature in discursive identity construction, particularly in working life proper, where the study participants communicate with people from various backgrounds. Consequently, this chapter addresses a gap in research which to date has largely overlooked the cultural and intercultural dimensions in ELF users' identity construction. By taking a non-essentialist and post-constructionist stance to questions of identity, this chapter focuses on the ways in which identities emerge, are locally negotiated and discursively constructed in interviews.

The present participants are viewed as drawing on *discourses* (or *Discourses*, Gee 2005) related to English in their talk, such as discourses of language proficiency, Finnishness and global working life. Simultaneously, individuals position themselves as certain kinds of people, or construct a certain kind of identity for themselves (Davies and Harré 1990). Over time, as the participants become mobile globally, their discursive identity construction changes and begins to incorporate more cultural and intercultural aspects. For example, the participants focus on the challenges they meet in intercultural interactions, and their feelings and emotions attached to those interactions; they foreground and question stereotypes; and they begin to accept new ways of doing and being, and to assess their earlier assumptions about nationalities. Such processes can be seen as part of the development of intercultural competence, which has been defined, for example, as a relational ability to manage intercultural interactions (Spitzberg and Changdon 2009: 7 as cited in Holmes and O'Neill 2012: 708). In the interviews, the participants foreground the notion of 'culture' in discussing their intercultural experiences. Discursive manifestations of culture of this kind have been defined as being of central interest in discussion of the intercultural dimensions of communication in the age of globalization (Piller 2011).

The present chapter is organized as follows: first, it introduces the longitudinal study, the participants and the theoretical approach adopted in the study. Next, the chapter presents the dichotomy between the language learner and language user identity as foregrounded in the earlier study (Virkkula and Nikula 2010). In particular, the chapter illustrates the ways in which a language

learner identity emerges out of the Finnish schooling system, but is later reconstructed and seriously challenged when the participants engage in intercultural encounters during their stay abroad in Germany and in working life proper. In their identity construction as users of English, the participants assign value to linguistic features and differentiate them from the rest of the language. In these enregisterment processes (Agha 2007), culture and nationality are discursively attached to ways of speaking. This becomes even stronger in working life. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion and conclusion.

The study and the participants

This chapter focuses on Oskari, Pete, Risto, Simo and Tero (pseudonyms), who were interviewed three or four times during the period 2003–2010. The participants' first language is Finnish; they were born between 1977 and 1981 and they have lived in Finland all their lives. Each of them studied English for seven years at junior and secondary school, and for three years in either high school (n = 4) or vocational school (n = 3). In total, they studied English as a school subject for ten years, and took a few courses at their polytechnic (now officially called a university of applied sciences). The participants carried out an internship of four to six months in Germany in 2003 when, for the first time, they used English extensively as a lingua franca. I, as a researcher and a student of German, also carried out my own language practice period abroad, accompanied the participants to Germany, and lived in the same student hall of residence for five months. This situation enabled me to gain an ethnographic, insider's perspective of the participants' lives in Germany and of the kinds of communicative situations they encountered. They interacted with German, Greek, Chinese and Indian students living in the same hall of residence. At work, they communicated with their colleagues, who were mostly of German or Portuguese origin. English was the principal lingua franca. The participants also used some German in their workplace, because according to company policy, interns were encouraged to learn German rather than use English, because German was the only language known to many of the German employees.

The participants were interviewed in Finnish first at the beginning of their stay, and then they were interviewed again at the end of the stay or after the stay was over. The first interviews concentrated on the participants' views of foreign language proficiency in general, their own proficiency in particular, and their feelings about using English. Prior to their internship in Germany, these students saw the use of English principally in terms of speaking. None of them had travelled abroad earlier for more than two weeks, and many mentioned the lack of opportunities to speak English in Finland. Interestingly, research has discovered that Finnish people in general now encounter and

appropriate English through various forms of new media, information technologies and through products of popular culture (cf. Leppänen and Nikula 2007; Leppänen et al. 2011). However, the participants encountered English more than spoke it; they referred to the school context and occasional encounters with tourists when describing their experience of speaking English.

In addition to the themes of the first interviews, the second interviews emphasized the participants' actual experience of being abroad and the effects it had on them and their skills as foreign language users. In particular, the interviews focused on the participants' encounters with people in English and their perceptions of these encounters.

After the period abroad, the engineering students returned to Finland, completed their studies in two years and were either already employed or almost immediately received a job in sales, project engineering or project management in an international company based in Finland. Their employer companies had English as either the official or the working language – hence, the participants began to use English in more varied ways for professional purposes. The participants were then interviewed for a third time (once or twice in 2008–2010) about their experiences of working life English and possible changes in their conceptions of themselves as English users since 2003.

Discursive approach to ELF users' identity construction

Virkkula and Nikula (2010) and, similarly, I in this chapter adopt a discursive approach to ELF users' identity construction because such an approach makes it possible to tackle participants' own understandings and points of view, i.e., the discourses they draw on. This chapter also utilizes perspectives belonging to the sociolinguistics of globalization, in which ethnographic approaches (e.g., drawing on Hymes 1996) have gained more ground with the aim of gaining a holistic understanding of what language does to people and what people do to language (Blommaert 2010).

When people communicate and interact, they draw on discourses which, according to Gee (1990: 143), are

> socially accepted association[s] among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'.

Discourses are hence representations of knowledge from a particular point of view (see also Gee 2005). They offer, in a way, tools for identification of the self and the other (Georgakopoulou 2007). For example, when individuals construct a sense of themselves as users of English, they draw on pre-existing discourses about English, language proficiency and communication, which

they have learned and into which they have become socialized during their lives. A discursive approach is necessary for exploring cultural and intercultural aspects of language use because it is often beneath the surface that we witness the kind of reality participants construct, reject, embrace and reconstruct, i.e., layers of hidden discourses (Dervin 2011). By uncovering such discourses one is able to trace the ways in which individuals construct identities in relation to intercultural encounters and their linguistic and discursive choices when talking about their experiences.

Such a discursive approach forces the researcher to critically examine his/her own biases, assumptions and understandings, which have a direct influence on the interview interaction, questions asked and replies given (Dervin 2011: 47). In other words, interviews should be seen as interactions, and analysis should consider the interviewer's word choices and points of view, which have a direct impact on the way the interviewee answers the questions and talks about the topics. If we are to properly analyze intercultural encounters and understand them, the very method of data analysis should also consider aspects of interculturality, interaction and the co-construction of knowledge between the interviewer and the interviewee. As a result of such analysis, we can witness a unique perspective on the one hand (occurring only in that moment, at that time) and a co-constructed perspective on the other hand (the interviewer and the interviewee making sense of the world with their own repertoires and linguacultures).

In the present study, the participants and the researcher share a very similar linguaculture, similar trajectories of socialization into Finnish discourses and common experiences during the stay abroad. Thus, this shared background should be acknowledged when interpreting the participants' accounts of themselves as language users, their descriptions of good language proficiency, and their labelling of and judgments about their own and other people's ways of speaking and communication. These co-constructed metapragmatic typifications provide information about the kinds of ways of speaking being enregistered and about how cultural and intercultural dimensions are part of such enregisterment work. Importantly, which discourses individuals have access to depends on their linguaculture and intercultural experiences. By implication, access to discourses is unequal among different individuals, and this inherently characterizes intercultural communication, which is "typically between people who have starkly different *material, economic, social and cultural resources* at their disposal" (Piller 2011: 173, italics added).

Discussion of research findings

The linguistic identity that emerges out of the Finnish schooling system

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In ELF-related research, two main identity options are identified for users of English as a foreign language: those of a language learner and a language user (Jenkins 2007; Virkkula and Nikula 2010; Jenkins et al. 2011: 307–308). They are seen to orient to language use in different ways. While the learner's ultimate goal would, ideally, be to approximate as closely as possible to native speaker skills, the language user is less preoccupied by such considerations; instead, he or she is more focused on language for communication. Of course, in the context of schooling and foreign and second language education, teachers approach pupils foremost as learners. Hence, learners are socialized into discourses of schooling which function as powerful resources in students' discursive identity construction. We (Virkkula and Nikula 2010) found this in our earlier study with the Finnish engineering students.

In our paper, we showed how the participants responded to the question of whether they thought they were good at English. Although such a question about good language skills already evokes a particular discourse (i.e., evaluation), the participants evaluated their skills as lacking something, not being particularly valuable, and thus highlighted their shortcomings in language proficiency. The participants explained that they had had very little experience of using English with others before their stay abroad, so their views were restricted to the experiences they had had, i.e., learning English at school, using it only receptively and a little outside school. Therefore, from the perspective of their linguacultural background, they understandably constructed learner identities.

The 'ELF experience' affecting identity construction

When approaching users of English from the perspective of communication and interactional abilities rather than the evaluation of linguistic proficiency, individuals' performance is seen as legitimate in their own right (e.g. Jenkins 2006). Moreover, ELF speakers can be viewed as affiliating with members of different groups and different ELF users in various ways: they may wish to create their own shared, temporary membership; to bring their earlier assumptions and discourses into their ELF interactions; or to reinvent their current identities by blending into other lingua-cultural groups (Jenkins et al. 2011; Baker 2009, this volume). At other times, these speakers may very strongly hold on to their identities as constructed through primary and secondary socialization in their previous contexts – hence rejecting what an ELF situation has to offer (i.e., new identities). Thus, neither ELF interactions nor ELF user identities are static; rather, they are changing and fluid and emerge as such especially when investigating individuals' trajectories across contexts and over time. Identities that have been constructed earlier do not disappear but gain new meanings when individuals engage in new intercultural encounters. Such multiple, fluid, and

negotiable identities characterize post-constructionist understandings of what identity is (e.g. Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004).

In Virkkula and Nikula (2010), we showed how the Finnish engineering students began to see themselves as legitimate (Norton 2000) users of ELF in relation to other ELF speakers with whom they interacted abroad. They also learned to recognize and use English in new ways and assign different values to English and their own ways of speaking it. In the interviews, they constructed new identities related not only to language but also to nationality and group membership. Hence English used as a lingua franca enabled them to engage with realities other than their own and thus to develop intercultural competence (Piller 2011: 53). Example 1 captures the positive effect of their stay abroad very well.

(1)   Tiina   so how did it make you feel when you were able to say what you really
                     wanted
           Tero   well yes it felt quite good and there was a sort of a feeling of success

As the example illustrates, a period abroad can generate powerful emotional effects (see also Jackson 2008; Kinginger 2004; Kinginger and Belz 2005). The effects for the participants in the present study were both positive and negative; on the one hand, their stay abroad contributed to raising self-confidence in their English skills in certain contexts, but on the other hand, they found the period emotionally demanding and it aroused feelings of anger and frustration, either because the desired effects of the stay abroad were not reached (see also Gallucci 2013) or because the participants experienced communicative challenges, for example, at work or in public offices. However, rather than constructing identities as incompetent language learners and linguistic identities with concerns about coping with specific skills, they constructed identities as competent language users and communicators who could survive with their repertoires in daily life. Finally, a collective identity as Finnish speakers of English as a lingua franca emerged more strongly than in the first interviews, conducted before they left for Germany, as will be shown in the following section.

A strengthening sense of Finnishness

In addition to changes in the individuals' discursive positions from learners to users, the engineering students began to talk about themselves from within a more macro perspective, i.e., not only as *individual* users of English, but also as Finns in relation to other speakers of English. Hence the *collective* aspect of linguaculture strengthened in their identity work as a result of staying

abroad: the participants constructed identities as Finnish people and engaged in enregistering Finns' English as a distinct way of speaking with either negative or positive value for them, depending on the discourse drawn on. This is how nationality and national culture emerged as resources for identity construction. Example 2 illustrates the growing sense of being a Finnish speaker of English.

(2) Risto well I think that if you compare Finns themselves then maybe it is a bit better the sort of general level [---] well I've had that impression also before but I've noticed it here as well that other people aren't terribly good at English either

Here Risto is asked to evaluate himself on a European scale as a speaker of English. He acknowledges the fact that other people for whom English is not a native language do not know English terribly well either and that Finnish people perhaps possess 'a bit better' skills in general. Finnish English (my own label) was associated by the participants either with one's own way of using English or with Finns' ways of speaking in general, the point of comparison being either a native-speaker of English, or a speaker of English as a foreign language or as a lingua franca. In Example (3) Simo introduces the notion of a Finnish way of speaking which is *not nice to hear,* especially when evaluated by a native speaker.

(3) Simo it's (.) basic Finnish [---]
well the way Häkkinen also speaks (.)
pronunciation is probably not [---]
it isn't nice to hear (.) when (.) if an English person hears it or (2.0) people from any country for that matter (.) it really is distinguishable (.) [---] maybe it's like childish for Finns to pronounce it in a fancy way or something like that but of course you try to speak as clearly as possible (.) you wouldn't dare to pronounce them in any way you like (*miten sattuu*)

In this example, Simo evaluates his pronunciation as "basic Finnish" and likens it to the English of a former Finnish Formula 1 driver, Mika Häkkinen, who was often interviewed in English in the international media. Furthermore, Simo contrasts Finnish and native speaker pronunciation by valuing the latter more and assigning authority to English people to judge his Finnish-style speech. Interestingly, Simo seems to consider non-native speakers' adherence to native speaker pronunciation to be "childish" and "fancy", and he assumes this is why Finnish people do not pronounce like native speakers. Hence, rather than being unable to pronounce English correctly, Finns, according to Simo, possess agency to select their own way of speaking. Moreover, Simo seems to resist the power of native speakers by aligning himself with those Finns for whom native-like language use carries overtones of acting *in a fancy way*, i.e., not being true to oneself and

others. This is how Simo discursively constructs an identity as a Finnish speaker of English, distinguishing different ways of speaking English and assigning values to them.

Furthermore, the way Mika Häkkinen speaks functions as a model for Simo to recognize both Finnish and his own way of speaking. It is common in enregisterment processes to establish such a model and associate a way of speaking with a person (cf. Goebel 2010: 172). Therefore, although Simo understates his own pronunciation skills, his Finnish way of speaking is a powerful cultural resource for constructing a language user identity. This relates back to the personal and collective aspects of linguaculture (Risager 2010) discussed earlier: even though Simo describes his individual way of speaking, by drawing on a shared discourse of Finnishness, he is able to justify his peculiarities in speaking. Lastly, Simo's attempt to pronounce as clearly as possible and his statement "you wouldn't dare to pronounce them in any way you like" indicates his awareness of appropriate behaviour and sensitivity in intercultural encounters.

As discussed in Virkkula and Nikula (2010), the participants describe Finns' speaking competence in more favourable terms than that of Germans and other users of English as a foreign language. This finding should be situated in the context in which the participants lived and interacted: they could use little English with the native speakers of German at work, partly due to company policy and partly because most of their German colleagues were not proficient in English. These factors probably influenced the participants' discursive construction of most Germans as 'reluctant to speak English', preferring German instead. Such a discourse about Germans may partly explain why the participants embraced Finns' English skills. A study by Dervin (2013) confirms that ELF users often opt for comparing their performance to that of others. Furthermore, the Erasmus students in Finland and France he studied evaluated Finns' English skills positively. In the present study, the positive value ascribed by the participants to a Finnish way of speaking is based on: 1) the Finnish educational system, praised by the participants for its emphasis on foreign language studies; 2) the participants' own Finnish way of pronouncing English, which is seen as clearer than, for example, Indians' pronunciation (see Virkkula and Nikula 2010: 267); and / or 3) the simple notion that other people, particularly Germans, are not terribly good at English either (ibid. p. 266).

Perhaps comparing oneself to others is safer collectively, particularly if one's own group is seen in a more positive light. This is shown in Pete's example below. Pete is asked to discuss what features of his own English skills, on the one hand, helped him cope in Germany and which, on the other hand, prevented him from doing so. Instead of answering from his personal point of view, he chooses to talk about language proficiency in Finland and Finns' skills in general.

(4)   Pete   [---] [in Finland] everybody studies English today (.) almost [---]
                       you're not probably as nervous about it as Germans are [---]
                       maybe Finns have a lower barrier to speaking

Also Risto (Example 2) thought that Finns' skills were a bit better than those of other Europeans and conceded that other people are not terribly good at English either. These all point towards raising awareness of *local ways of speaking* English and a shared sense of their Finnish nationality. Contrasting *us* and *them* can, obviously, lead to national stereotyping, but in this case adopting a collective identity as 'we Finns' and relating this to other groups also serves as a way of putting into perspective participants' earlier concerns about speaking English fluently, as also other people are seen to share similar shortcomings. Again, intercultural encounters affect one's identity construction and in this case have contributed to the engineering students drawing on a discourse of Finnishness which, clearly, is an important discursive resource for defining oneself (and the other) as a speaker of English (for a discussion on nationality as an interactional resource, see Jenks in this volume).

However, these analyses and discussions focus on a rather narrow sense of identity, i.e., that related to language proficiency. Moreover, had the engineering students lived in another country, their experiences and views would likely have been very different. For a holistic understanding of the influence of a stay abroad on identity construction, one should also consider the intercultural dimensions of identity work and the processes of acquiring and developing intercultural competence. Questions worth asking are, for example, do the participants foreground stereotypes, move beyond opposing 'us' and 'them' and challenge their own views about cultures? How do they manage intercultural encounters? By considering these aspects, we can find evidence of more complexity than was found in the earlier focus on language and language proficiency in Virkkula and Nikula (2010).

To illustrate the intercultural experience further, there are one or two other points worth mentioning. The participants were at first very excited about their forthcoming period abroad, but their adjustment to Germany involved many ups and downs. The 'downs' were particularly due to adjusting to German culture. German culture was constructed in various ways in the interviews. It was seen, for example, as rigid, a conclusion reached from the various difficulties they experienced in interactions with officials and the hierarchical company structure in the workplace, which prevented the students from handling issues smoothly. Then again, some participants were not satisfied with their job at the factory and saw it as a waste of their time because it was not demanding enough for them; some of them left Germany a month earlier than initially planned

because of this. By contrast, other participants were more open and tolerant, able to adjust to the circumstances, and enjoyed every new possibility they encountered during their stay. Judging by the engineering students' stories, their stay abroad also contributed to widening their worldview and their appreciation of Finland as a home country. Thus, feelings of national belonging and patriotism strengthened, but also awareness and understanding of the other.

As a result of their stay abroad, the participants became more aware of cultural differences and engaged in the process of foregrounding stereotypes, such as that Finns are silent and Germans are rigid. Such stereotypes were also challenged, and individual differences acknowledged. In the post-stay interview Tero, for example, explicitly said how he would not have expected Finnish and German cultures to be so different. When I asked what he meant by that, Tero explained:

(5)   Tero   it is a bit different to do business in stores
                          and everything in general
                          those offices and then also people behave differently in a certain way
           […]
           Tiina   where does it show
                          does it show when you speak with someone or in general handle things
           Tero   well it is for example handling things for example in offices
                          it just doesn't seem to work
                          I don't know if it is because of the language barrier or what
                          but (.) the culture is a bit different

Here Tero and I are constructing a sense of how handling everyday matters in Germany is different from in Finland. For Tero, encounters with German people have contributed to his view of cultural differences (his last line "the culture is a bit different"), with daily interactions as an example of where "it just doesn't seem to work". Tero's notion of the widely used term "language barrier" points to a learned discourse which is often introduced to explain communication difficulties between people speaking different languages. Here Tero provides two explanations for the difficulties in Germany: the language barrier, and different cultures.

Later in the interview, when I asked if anything in particular had made Tero's adjustment to Germany difficult, he mentioned Germans' unwillingness to speak English. He thus referred to language problems due to the other. Because the participants knew little German, they encountered difficult situations at work and were unable to defend themselves in conflicts. The German language hence functioned as a powerful tool in the workplace with which the hosts could rule the visitors (cf. Dervin and Layne 2013). Those situations were described as frustrating by the participants and as forcing them to manage their emotions. Tero illustrates his rising awareness of

Germans' distinct way of communicating compared to Finns: he explained that Germans use their hands more, and use facial expressions and different tones of voice to make a point.

The emergence of a Finnish BELF user identity

As the first two interviews showed significant changes, it is not surprising to find even more changes after the participants had moved into professional life. For example, the participants now described their *progress* with English in terms of a specialized vocabulary and being able to "talk business", but they also felt *regression* because of their sometimes limited ability to use English at work (Räisänen 2013). Moreover, their identity as a Finnish user of English had strengthened even further, had gained new meanings and had become a crucial factor for the participants in how they defined their professional communication in English. This part of the analysis focuses on the discursive construction of a Finnish BELF user identity and the enregisterment of a Finnish way of speaking in working life proper.

As the analysis of post-stay abroad interviews (the second set of interviews) showed, experiences in lingua franca situations contributed to the emergence of counter discourses and a trajectory of values assigned to a Finnish way of speaking. In working life, as illustrated in the third set of interviews, the constructed discourse of Finnish English (i.e., that there is something special in the Finnish way of speaking and using English) becomes even more valuable for the participants and a resource for constructing a BELF user identity. Example (6) shows how Oskari assigns great value to the way Finnish people speak and know English. Such appreciation has to do with Oskari forgiving himself for the shortcomings in his own pronunciation.

(6)   Tiina   do you think there have been changes in your language proficiency [---]
              Oskari   the fear to speak is probably completely gone [---]
I sort of know that I (.) cannot speak as well as- that I have forgiven myself (.) in pronunciation and the like as I have really noticed even more (1.0) how well Finns speak English and know and understand it compared to what I have encountered in the world and that there is no reason to feel humble about it

This example first illustrates the changes that Oskari has experienced over time and with his increasing intercultural encounters: his own hesitation about speaking has vanished, he has noticed that he can cope with the English he knows, and his self-confidence as a user of English has grown. On the other hand, Oskari discursively frames this realization as being possible after noticing his own and Finns' good English skills. In particular, the example illustrates ethnocentrism, as Oskari highlights and praises Finnish people's language proficiency as opposed to others. It is not certain

what Finns are particularly good at in Oskari's opinion, but Finns' competence is particularly highlighted because Oskari does not want Finns to feel ashamed of their language skills - as is usually the case. This finding is common throughout the study.

Leppänen et al.'s (2011) findings on Finns' perceptions of different ways of speaking English suggest that Finns' admiration of native speakers' skills influence their typifications. In the present study, the participants gradually begin to appreciate Finns' English skills and modify their earlier assumptions about appropriate language use and communication. This implies that national culture and nationality are indeed important in using English as a lingua franca, and while people use and talk about ELF, they strongly construct their identities in relation to both their own nationality and culture, and to their intercultural encounters. Oskari above focuses mostly on language, but in some other cases (see the following example), the participants might reinforce their regional or professional identities. A mere linguistic identity, i.e., that of a language learner or language user, is too narrow for conceptualizing identity in using English as a lingua franca.

In working life, the participants used English for various purposes with people from different linguacultural backgrounds. Some common, identifiable features characterize a Finnish way of business communication: discourses of Finns as not very talkative and as direct communicators explicitly emerge in the interviews. Below both Risto and Tero describe themselves as typically Finnish – again, nationality emerges as a discursive resource in constructing a sense of oneself.

(7)   Tiina   how does your small talk go
        Risto   well my [small talk] is sort of taciturn - typically Finnish
                  but then again as I gradually gain more confidence about being able to talk lightly and my speaking flows better so that I no longer have to translate sentences and words in my head before speaking it is much easier and more natural too

(8)   Tiina   what observations about language did you make in the US [---]
        Tero   people start talking more easily than for example in Finland
                  for example they may start talking to you in an elevator and that scares a kind of Ostrobothnian guy like me heheh

In Example (7), Risto first describes his small talk as 'taciturn - typically Finnish' (*suomalaisittain jäyhää* in Finnish), i.e., as not talkative at all, but then with the word choice 'but' he makes a move to describing how through gaining confidence his speaking has become easier and more natural. Further, Risto brings the stereotype of Finns as "taciturn" into question as he distances himself from this constraining stereotype by stating that his discursive resources are much richer than the stereotype conveys. On the other hand, these evaluations provide this way of speaking English a

somewhat negative value because of a lack of confidence and of fluency. Risto also describes how he has to 'translate sentences and words in his head before speaking', suggesting that the mental process of translating speech from Finnish to English hinders a Finn like Risto from speaking well. Although this behaviour may not be unique to Finns, it is discursively framed as Finnish, and nationality is introduced by the participant as an explanatory factor.

Tero in Example (8) implicitly refers to Finns' lack of confidence ("Finns are quiet for a while and then have the courage to start speaking") when compared to 'talkative' Americans. He thereby reinforces stereotypes, and by conforming to Finnishness and Finns' quietness, he is able to justify his own behavior in an encounter with a native speaker of English. This is a clear example of the discursive power difference constructed between a NS and an EFL speaker of English: discourses of speaking English in an American way (i.e., the native speaker) include the notion of talkativeness and small talk, whereas discourses of Finns speaking English (i.e, the EFL speaker) include the requirement to learn native speaker habits, such as small talk.

Tero also explicitly characterizes himself as "a kind of Ostrobothnian guy like me" (*tämmönen pohjalainen* in Finnish) which is implicitly associated with the stereotypically untalkative and 'silent Finn'. These findings are in line with Sajavaara and Lehtonen's (1997) well-known arguments about Finns' national perception of self as untalkative and coming from the north, which from the geohistorical point of view can be seen as a remote periphery (Tero's reference to *pohjalainen*, i.e., a person from Osthrobothnia). Osthrobothnia is the name of a geographical region and a historical province in the west and north of Finland. Literally, the name refers to "Bottom (Low) lands" (Wikipedia). Osthrobothnians are characterized in Finnish society as having a particularly strong sense of themselves, for example as descendants of a rustic culture and having a particular sense of entrepreneurship (Zimmerbauer 2002). However, we can also see that Tero is playing with the stereotype as signaled in his laugher at the end of the extract.

Returning to Tero's example, it should be noted that from the observer's point of view (as a researcher I accompanied Tero, a Sales Manager, on his work trip to a large convention held in San Diego with a group of Finnish colleagues), however, Tero was in fact quite active in discussions and not at all 'silent' as a user of English, except perhaps when first meeting new people. Hence, from a researcher perspective, Finnish silence is not, after all, as prominent a discourse in interactions as it is from the participant perspective as brought out in the interview. Could it be, then, that discourses of Finnishness are learned and rooted in our stories (our linguaculture), and

that we draw on them to justify our sense of our own behavior, such as silence in Tero's case, although they were not "true" in interactions? The following examples further illustrate the cultural resource of Finnishness for the participants as they view Finns as using English in their own way in business.

(9)   Pete   in general I've tried as in Finnish not to write unnecessary poetry but to tell the issue heh as it is [--]

Pete's example (9) is part of his description of himself as a user of English at work. As he illustrates, he typically goes straight to the point and does not use small talk, which he chooses to describe with the word 'poetry'. After this, he continues with the topic, explaining how there are differences in cultures in the way, for example, email messages are formulated. Pete has noticed that Finnish people are typically direct communicators. Also Oskari introduces the same characteristics in Example (10). Oskari was working as a Project Manager in a Finnish company which has a subsidiary in China, where Oskari was travelling frequently at the time of the interview. He had therefore gained experience of communicating with his Chinese colleagues. In many of the meetings Oskari attended, a Chinese interpreter was present.

(10)   Oskari   I have noticed that in meetings when we negotiate a Chinese person [--] goes around the topic for example start with the person's personal characteristics saying for example @you as an intelligent person understand your best interest in this matter@ and so forth. at times it feels like (.) if the translations are correct [--] it is almost like telling a story [--] if I for example say that @you should deliver this within a week@ and it's after all only about the subject matter but then they coat it

Oskari constructs a difference between 'we', himself and a Chinese person who, according to him, 'tells a story' and 'coats' the message (in Finnish *kuorruttaa*). This example shows how Oskari views the differences between his communicative style and that of a Chinese professional, and how this affects communication: his message is no longer the same when related by the interpreter from the Chinese point of view. While Oskari has learned about these differences and developed his awareness, he seems to be somewhat confused by them, judging by his comment that his command 'you should deliver this within a week' is 'after all only about the subject matter'. Nevertheless, such a simple command is, according to Oskari, loaded with additional expressions anyway. This example suggests that an awareness of differences does not necessarily mean respect for them, since Oskari seems to give his approval to his own way of focusing on the subject matter. This is a good example of how cultural differences are discursively constructed.

It should also be noted that although Oskari mentions 'we' (i.e., Finns) and a Chinese person and thus indicates the existence of two distinct national groups, he could also refer to a clash between different *organizational cultures* (see Angouri 2010). Elsewhere in the interview, Oskari shows that he knows about the Chinese face-saving communicative culture to which he has had to adjust in his work, which may indicate that he was also earlier constructing difference between 'imagined' national cultures. He explains that

(11)   Oskari   the message does not come across [via interpreters] in the same way as it has been presented by us
apparently strong filtering occurs and somehow they don't want to cause a difficult situation and a loss of face

This example clearly shows Oskari's rising awareness of the communicative challenges involved in working in China: he describes how Chinese interpreters do not translate word for word but filter the message, which he has noticed since the message has not come across in the intended way. Oskari also evidently knows about the notion of face as part of Chinese communicative culture, as he explicitly mentions the term. Adjusting to such an environment has been a central part of Oskari's job. Apparently, communicative differences create visible tension at the local level of interaction and need to be locally negotiated in the workplace. For Oskari, managing such differences has been important, and he characterizes his workplace communication with the notion of simplicity, directness and without any redundancies (Räisänen 2013: 114). Although the notion of saving face applies to all communicative situations (Brown and Levinson 1987), it is a feature that explicitly emerges in the participants' accounts of workplace communication with Chinese people. By implication, the importance of culture and nationality is foregrounded again when individuals characterize and understand ELF interactions.

The third interviews thus shed further light on the Finnish engineers' identities as BELF users. A collective Finnish BELF user identity is growing and is being typified in more specific ways, i.e., with directness and untalkativeness as discursively ascribed to the way of speaking, a theme also discussed in earlier studies (e.g. Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1997; Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005; Kankaanranta and Lu 2013). Moreover, the data also shows some deviation of this stereotype too, as some participants do not perceive themselves as conforming to the stereotype. All in all, the discursive and enregisterment work by the engineers becomes more complex as a result of their socialization into working life.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has followed a group of Finnish engineers' discursive identity work, first, as engineering students, and later, as professionals, for over six years. The participants moved from the local, educational Finnish context to global working life in which English functioned as an essential communicative resource for professional lingua franca communication. In this process, discourses of deficiency were replaced by discourses of legitimacy, which allowed the participants to construct identities as successful ELF and BELF users, and discourses of complexity which began to question some common stereotypical attributes given to Finns as quiet or "taciturn". In addition, experiences in intercultural encounters gave rise to specific resources for identity construction, such as group membership, nationality and culture.

Before their stay abroad, participants' identity construction focused on the individual level. After the participants gained experience in intercultural encounters, during both work experience and in working life proper, they subscribed more strongly to having particularly Finnish features, in ways that suggested both acceptance of these features and some questioning of them, as well as reluctance to fully identify with models learned earlier. Hence, a complex Finnish speaker identity emerged and participants seemed to gain power as *Finnish* ELF users, and also in ways that challenged existing stereotypes. As Jenkins (2007: 201) argues, power relations exist among ELF speakers in that ELF varieties are seen as hierarchical. Indeed, some of the present participants felt more powerful with their own 'ELF variety', or rather, ELF ways of speaking, than others (i.e., non-Finns). The Finnish engineers' self-ascribed power may be a reflection of the current prestige enjoyed by the Finnish education system, as also mentioned by the participants. Moreover, the contrasts between 'us' and 'them' reflect a somewhat controversial image of these individuals' linguacultures and intercultural competence. Discourses of evaluation acquired in the earlier stages of socialization persisted over the years of this study and the collective aspect of linguaculture was evident in the participants' discursive identity work. These findings suggest that these individuals have become socialized to ethnocentric and judgmental discourses at home and do not explicitly foreground what has been considered essential for genuine intercultural dialogue, i.e., mutual negotiation and the co-construction of new ways of speaking and being (Dervin and Layne 2013).

However, some of the data revealed the participants' strong orientation to discourses of Finnishness. This suggests that they are imposing upon themselves the identity of a silent Finn as a speaker of English, but over time challenged this position. In their discursive work describing their intercultural experiences and the challenges they experienced in working life, the participants often

introduced the notions of culture and nationality. It seems as if culture functioned as an explanatory factor for them in their understanding of individual differences in linguistic proficiency and communicative competence, and in their misunderstandings and gaps in intercultural communication (see also Angouri 2010; Piller 2011). Silence and directness were attributed to discourses of Finnishness and gradually became more like questions of pride than of shame (cf. Dervin 2013; and Jenks' findings in this volume), and national identity seemed to be the key way in which, as professionals, they constructed an understanding of ELF interactions at work. Similar to Angouri's (2010: 210) findings, macro-level discourses of national culture prevailed in everyday working life and were drawn on by employees to explain work-related problems in situations involving people from different cultural backgrounds.

This chapter has illustrated how ELF experiences contribute to recognizing intercultural differences and reconstructing identities as language users and communicators. Evidently, the Finnish engineers have learned to do their jobs in global working life and the interview excerpts analyzed here show that the participants have not only developed but also actively sought to develop an understanding of foreign business practices and cultures, and of themselves and others as users of English. Across their trajectories, they have faced complexity, begun to assess and accept new ways of doing, and found ways to manage cultural conflicts at work. As I have shown in an earlier study (Virkkula-Räisänen 2010), Tero, for instance, has developed his intercultural competence in managing intercultural interactions in a meeting between Finnish and Chinese colleagues.

Nevertheless, experiences of ELF situations may not help individuals overcome ethnocentric views of the self or move beyond the construction of stereotypes. The present findings suggest that ELF carries a lot of inequality, which partly relates to differences in language proficiency (i.e., the linguistic aspect), but to a large extent, links to power relations and individuals' unequal access to resources (Blommaert 2010; Piller 2011; Räisänen 2013). ELF is by no means a neutral language and does not necessarily trigger any intercultural awareness; it can, instead, reinforce stereotypes and ethnocentrism.

As this chapter has aimed to show, ELF users' identity work and intercultural development is an ongoing process as individuals actively negotiate their sense of themselves and communication in the age of globalization. This chapter has demonstrated that identity is a central matter when using English as a lingua franca and, extending the discussion in Virkkula and Nikula (2010), it has shown that ELF user identity is more than a "learner" or a "user" identity, but is to a great extent a "communicator" identity (Gao 2014). As Gao (2014: 72-73) notes, different identities can exist

within the same individual, and have variations and combinations for different situations, being determined in interaction between the social and the individual. Intercultural and cultural dimensions are essential for our understanding of English used as a lingua franca and its users.

Transcription conventions

[--]	omitted text
[text]	added text to aid understanding
-	cut-off word
@	animated voice
(.)	a micro pause
(1.0)	silence marked in tenths of seconds
(xxx)	unclear speech/transcriber's interpretation

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Biodata

Tiina Räisänen is a Lecturer at the Language Centre, Aalto University, Finland and a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Languages, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. She received her PhD in 2013 with a doctoral study titled *Professional communicative repertoires and trajectories of socialization into global working life*. She has co-edited *Dangerous Multilingualism: Northern Perspectives on Order, Purity and Normality* (w. Blommaert, J., S. Leppänen and P. Pahta), published in the *International Journal of Applied Language Studies, Sociolinguistic Studies* and *Journal of Business Communication.* She is interested in sociolinguistics, business and engineering communication and intercultural communication.