

**“I THINK IT’S KIND OF SENSITIVE IN EVERY WAY”-
COMMUNICATING WITH NON-FINNISH-SPEAKING
CLIENTS IN CHILD WELFARE**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Communication in Child Welfare in Finland has been researched from multiple perspectives. Some attention has also been given to how the presence of non-Finnish-speaking clients affects communication and what challenges it might add to an already sensitive and delicate field, where communication is the main tool used to assess the services clients need. Child Welfare services can be life-altering and therefore accuracy in providing services is key. However, language barriers and a lack of means to overcome these barriers render this task very difficult.</p> <p>This study looks at the communication between workers and non-Finnish-speaking clients at one of Finland's around-the-clock family assessment units. The research questions for this study are how do workers at the unit experience day-to-day communication with non-Finnish-speaking clients? And how do workers at the unit experience using the assessment methods at their disposal to work with non-Finnish-speaking clients? The purpose of the study was to distinguish the experiences of Child Welfare workers when communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients who have no to limited Finnish language proficiency during day-to-day interactions and when using the assessment methods in more structured settings. The study was also interested in exploring the different strategies workers utilized in this interaction. The aim was to investigate whether the current communication means available in Child Welfare at the disposal of the workers are sufficient to optimize and facilitate the communication between workers and non-Finnish-speaking families at the unit and in Child Welfare in general.</p> <p>To answer the research questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven workers at the family unit. The transcripts were analyzed using Thematic Data Analysis by deducing the most reoccurring themes. Four main themes were then extracted from multiple codes covering various aspects of communication. The themes are: 1. Verbal communication, 2. Non-verbal communication, 3. Assessment methods as an effective means of communication, and 4. Participants' attitudes.</p> <p>The findings revealed creativity on the part of both workers and clients to find alternative ways of achieving a common understanding and also highlighted the important role of Public Service Interpreting and the effect of its shortcomings on achieving said understanding. In addition to these, findings revealed workers' attitudes towards working with non-Finnish-speaking clients and their developmental ideas to enhance the communication between the two parties in the future.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Societal Relevance

As a polyglot social counselor working in the Child Welfare Services field for many years, it has always intrigued me how other workers in this field experience communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients. I have witnessed the frustrations that occur when an interaction does not yield understanding between different parties. I have been curious to investigate how workers navigate these frustrations and challenges and what kind of resources and strategies they have developed to overcome the latter.

The interest in this topic also arises from the growing numbers of immigrants and non-Finnish-speakers as clients of the Finnish social welfare sector generally and the Child Welfare sector specifically in correlation to the rising numbers of immigrants in Finnish society in general. Therefore, this study benefits not only the workers of the Finnish Child Welfare system but also its clients as it provides insight from the workers' perspectives in drawing attention to what happens in interactions with non-Finnish-speaking clients. Legislators could also benefit from understanding the nature of communication between workers and non-Finnish-speaking clients to provide more targeted services that meet non-Finnish-speaking client's needs.

It is therefore that I chose to conduct research in one of Finland's around-the-clock family units, where workers and families are constantly interacting in day-to-day situations that they often cannot prepare for beforehand. One of the means of interaction between workers and clients in these units is the use of assessment methods, usually in structured meetings with the families. These assessment methods are meant to guide the workers and help them assess the clients' need for support both during their one-month long assessment period at the family unit and more importantly after the end of the assessment period. The content of these methods is usually in Finnish and occasionally translated into English, and workers rely on

interpretation services to bridge the linguistic gap between workers and clients. Using interpreters and translating these documents is not always enough, as the concepts presented in and through these methods are usually not created with non-Finnish-speaking clients in mind and therefore clients have trouble understanding them. Also, the majority of non-Finnish-speaking clients do not have sufficient Finnish proficiency not only to comprehend the literal content of the documents but also the purpose of using them even after the translation into the native language, as they can be strangers to how the Finnish Child Welfare System operates.

In this research, the term *Child Welfare* is used when referring to all the services aimed at families and children, including preventive ones offered to all citizens alike. The term *Child Protection* is specifically reserved to refer to cases where the child is regarded as a Child Welfare client and is receiving either open care or substitute services. In Finnish, both of these terms are referred to as *lastensuojelu* which translates more specifically into Child Protection as opposed to Child Welfare.

1.2 Study Design

The study aims to answer the following two research questions :

1. How do workers experience day-to-day communication with the non-Finnish-speaking client?
2. How do workers experience using the assessment methods at their disposal to work with non-Finnish-speaking clients?

The purpose of the study is to distinguish the experiences of Child Welfare workers when communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients who have no to limited Finnish language proficiency during day-to-day interactions and when using the assessment methods in more structured settings. The study was also interested in exploring the different strategies workers utilized in this interaction. The aim was to investigate whether the current communication means available in Child Welfare at the disposal of the workers are sufficient to optimize and facilitate the communication between workers and non-Finnish-speaking families at the facility and in Child Welfare in general.

The research was conducted based on the concepts of the institutional nature of communication in Child Welfare, Intercultural communicative competence, and the essential role played by Public Service Interpreting in this field. The research was conducted by interviewing seven workers at the family unit and inquiring about their experiences working with non-Finnish-speaking clients. The findings uncover four themes that were predominant in the participants' experiences with a few subthemes that will be mentioned at a later stage. These main themes are:

1. Verbal communication
2. Non-verbal communication

3. Assessment methods as an effective means of communication
4. Participants' attitudes

The study will first briefly introduce the Finnish Welfare system in general and around-the-clock facilities and units specifically. Then it will briefly look at the presence of immigrants and non-Finnish-speakers as clients of the Child Welfare system. The results are discussed next followed by a discussion and conclusion.

1.3 Background

To understand the context in which the research has taken place, it is important to provide an overview of the Finnish Child Welfare System in general and around-the-clock facilities more specifically. This study is mainly concerned with immigrants and non-Finnish speakers as Child Welfare clients within these facilities in Finland and therefore a chapter is dedicated to this below.

1.3.1 General Overview of The Finnish Child Welfare System

In Finland, the Child Welfare System is guided by several laws and agreements that either take on a national aspect including the Child Welfare Act, Finnish constitutional law, or an international aspect such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the UNICEF's Convention of the Rights of the Child, both of which are binding in Finland. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d)

According to the Finnish constitutional law Section 6, children are to be treated equally and individually (Perustuslaki, 1999). This also means that children in Finland have the same rights as adults (THL, Perustuslaki ja lastensuojelu, 2023). Parents and custodians are the main body in charge of ensuring that children receive proper care. However, municipalities and counties are responsible for providing sufficient services to support parents and custodians in their task to ensure the child's care and intervene in the case where the child is not provided with adequate care (THL, Lapsi- ja perhekohtaisen lastensuojelun keskeiset periaatteet 1-7, 2023). The Finnish Child Welfare services can be classified mainly into preventive Child Welfare services, open-care services, substitute care, and after-care services (THL, 2023). Open-care and substitute care services require the child to have active Child Protection clienthood.

Preventive Child Welfare services are accessible to all families in Finland and do not require children to be Child Protection clients. They are meant to increase the well-being of families and children to make sure that parents and custodians can provide adequate care for their children (THL, Ehkäisevä Lastensuojelu, 2023). These services include "maternity and child health clinics, and within other healthcare services, child daycare, family centers, education, and youth work" (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, n.d.). Open-care services are provided for families that have become clients of

the Child Protection system after a social worker has assessed that the parents and custodians alone are not able to provide adequate care for “the health and development of the child” (THL, Child Welfare notification and investigation of the need for Child Welfare measures, 2023). In this case, the preventive services are enough, and the family requires more intensive and individualized support. Substitute care services are provided when the health and development of the child is deemed endangered in the child’s current living environment. In this case, a substitute living place is provided in the form of foster care or around-the-clock institutional care such as a children’s home or correctional school (THL, n.d.). The after-care services are available for young people and their families after substitute care or prolonged open-care services, to support the domiciliation of children or to support young people’s process of becoming independent adults (THL, Jälkihuolto, 2023).

It is important to note that in addition to laws and regulations, Finnish Child Welfare is built on fundamental principles such as the child’s best interest upon which all the services provided must be based (Pösö, Skivenes & Hestbæk, 2014, p. 478). This entails that the child is treated individually and that his or her opinion is age-appropriately taken into consideration during the whole Child Protection process. Other values include supporting the family and parents during the Child Protection process, ensuring the involvement of the family and client in the process, and that this process be preplanned and structured (THL, Lapsi- ja perhekohtaisen lastensuojelun keskeiset periaatteet 1-7, 2023).

There are many ways a child’s case can be brought to the attention of the social worker. One of these is through the *duty to notify* concerning employees of various official sectors specified in Section 25 (88/2010) of the Finnish Child Welfare Act. A few mentions of these bodies are “1) social and health-care services and child day care, 2) education services, 3) youth services, 4) police services [...]”. In addition to the employees having a duty to notify, any person concerned with the well-being of a child or children can notify the social work office, including the parent, parents or custodians of the children in question themselves as mentioned in Section 25a (88/2010) of the Finnish Child Welfare Act. Both the duty to notify and the request by the parent, parents, or custodians for support, can include unborn children under Section 25c (88/2010) – Anticipatory Child Welfare notification, of the Child Welfare Act (2007).

1.3.2 Around-the-Clock Facilities in Child Welfare

Although foster care is the primary substitute-care service for children whose sufficient growth and development requires out-of-home placement; in many cases the child may show difficult symptoms of mental health or behavioral problems that a foster family is not equipped to deal with. In these cases, children are placed by the authorities in a Child Protection facility (THL, Lastensuojelulaitokset, n.d.). According to data provided by THL, 34% of children receiving substitute Child Protection services were placed in facilities during the year 2022 (THL, tilastoraportti, 2023).

According to section 57 of the Finnish Child Welfare Act (2007), institutional care can either be a part of open care services or intended for long-term substitute care. The requirements of these facilities are specifically described in the Finnish Child Welfare Act, chapter 10, (2007).

In addition to the above-mentioned facilities intended for children, some facilities provide around-the-clock services for the whole family as part of open care services according to Section 36 (30.12.2014/1302) of the Finnish Welfare Act. In some cases, the child or children may receive this service with their family as a form of an emergency placement, where the child's health and development are deemed in immediate danger and therefore cannot be left alone with the parent, parents, or custodians without supervision. These facilities are usually in the form of rehabilitation facilities, where parents or custodians live temporarily with the children for the workers at these facilities to ensure a safe growth environment, supporting the parents in this upbringing task and strengthening the resources of the family¹ (THL, Perhekuntoutus, 2022).

This research focuses specifically on around-the-clock facilities intended for the whole family, referred to from here on as *family units*. No official translation for this term exists and therefore the term family unit is translated literally from the Finnish word *Perheyksikkö*. Most of these units provide family rehabilitation in an institutional form (THL, 2022). The following text will give an overview of the unit in question and the services provided within it. The information mentioned below can vary depending on different units and is therefore not intended to be generalized to all the units around the country. In addition to this, and per the requirements of the research permit acquired by the city in which this family unit is located, the unit's name and location will not be specified.

Becoming a client at the family unit in question is based on an assessment by a social worker after drawing a client plan as specified in the Finnish Child Welfare Act Section 30 (12.4.2019/542). It is noteworthy, that in the case where the family unit placement is offered as part of open-care services, this requires the consent of the parent, parents or custodians of the child and the child themselves, in the case where the latter is 12 years of age or older (THL, Kiireellinen avohuollon tukitoimi, 2023). As the placement is part of an open-care procedure, the child is primarily placed with their parent, parents, or custodians (THL, Sijoitus avohuollon tukitoimena, 2023). This placement is voluntary and offers the whole family around-the-clock rehabilitative support in a planned and goal-oriented manner, to ensure a safe environment for the child or children's upbringing (THL, Perhekuntoutus, 2022).

The family unit in question has a team of seven counselors, an occupational therapist, a nurse specializing in mental health and substance abuse work, a house-keeping professional, and a senior counselor who acts as a team manager. The unit

¹ Translated from Finnish into English by researcher.

houses four families at a time, for an average period of thirty days. According to interviews conducted with the workers, their main task consists of working closely with the family to determine what kind of support the family needs during and after the placement period. Working with the family happens both during everyday interactions and structured family meetings. When it comes to clients at the family unit in question, the majority are Finnish speakers. Many clients however are non-Finnish speakers with immigrant backgrounds. Despite being entitled to the same services as their Finnish-speaking counterparts, many challenges concerning both workers at the unit and non-Finnish-speaking clients affect the interaction and communication between workers and clients at the family unit.

1.3.3 Immigrants as Child Welfare Clients in Previous Research

In this research, the term *non-Finnish-speaker* is used as an alternative to the terms *immigrant* or *person with an immigrant background* to emphasize the linguistic aspect of communication between workers and clients as opposed to the ethnic, national, or cultural one. Clients who have a different ethnic or national background than or in addition to Finnish yet have sufficient Finnish language proficiency to communicate with workers in Finnish are not targeted in this study. Being a non-Finnish-speaker in this research thus entails both a linguistic and a cultural dimension.

Seeing how the recent increase in immigration and asylum-seeking has affected the demographic of clients in Social Welfare Services in Finland in general and Child Welfare specifically (THL, 2023; Anis 2008); looking into the way services have adapted to this client group has the potential to help develop services and ensure equality and equity in providing services for these clients. Although there is no factual data concerning the number of non-Finnish speakers or people with immigrant backgrounds receiving Child Protection services in Finland (Niekka, 2010, p. 7), the number of non-Finnish speakers in Finland, in general, was estimated at almost half a million people – or some eight percent of the population – at the end of 2022 (Väestörakenne, 2023). According to an article published by Yle in 2019, Children with immigrant backgrounds represented 22% of children receiving Child Welfare services in Helsinki (Vuolteenaho, 2019). These numbers provide insight into the size of the potential client pool and therefore highlight the need to assess the services these clients receive.

This being said, some research has been done in studying the presence of non-Finnish-speaking clients in Child Welfare in Finland. Such clients are often referred to as *immigrants* or *people with immigrant backgrounds* (see Pösö, 2005; Anis, 2005 and 2006; Heikkilä-Dskalopoulos, 2008). A scholar who is prevalent in this field of research is Merja Anis, who has written a multitude of articles on the topic. Anis is also the coordinator of Lampe-project conducted by the University of Turku in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and several universities such as the Universities of Helsinki and Jyväskylä. The project aims to answer questions regarding

immigrants as Child Welfare clients and to find ways to improve the services provided by the Child Welfare System for people with immigrant backgrounds in Finland. The project looks into the experiences and service needs of parents and young people of legal age (Tutkimus etsii keinoja parantaa maahanmuuttajien parissa tehtävää lastensuojelua, 2021). This project is extremely important in developing Child Welfare services conducted in culturally and ethnically diverse environments. Other projects including "As a Parent in Finland" (Finnish: Vanhempana Suomessa) also aim to increase trust between immigrant families and the authorities in order to increase the chances of immigrant families accessing services and requesting assistance when needed, especially regarding parenting challenges (Skogberg & Laajasalo, 2021).

Anis (2006) has addressed the topic of immigrants and people with immigrant backgrounds as Child Welfare clients extensively in her Doctoral dissertation "Social Work and Immigrants. Interaction and Interpretations of Child Protection Professionals and clients". Her research answers questions related to social workers' own experiences and also issues related to Child Protection clients themselves from various perspectives such as identity and cultural issues. Anis' (2006) study shows that Finnish social protection work with immigrants is mainly viewed by social workers as adaptable, equitable, and culturally sensitive and that clients are seen as actors and partners in the interaction. According to Anis, getting to know a client's culture can uncover resources and solutions to the client's problems. In the study, social workers expressed advocacy for their clients and often sided with the clients against structural inadequacies. Social workers showed flexibility and a will to adapt to different client situations and their problems. Anis' study also uncovered that social workers bestow identities on immigrant clients. Clients with a refugee background were, for example, considered 'difficult' and their often traumatic problems raised a threshold for workers to deal with their cases. Cultural aspects were thus considered problematic. In addition to this, while being encouraged to maintain their own culture and language, clients were perceived as favorably adaptable when they showed interest and made efforts to learn the Finnish language and adapt to Finnish society. Anis draws attention to the fact that the process of adaptation into Finnish society should be understood by workers since it entails many difficulties that could surface as Child Protection concerns.

In her study, Anis (2006) proposes that social workers seem to grant clients agency, both as adults and as children. Workers seemingly valued the clients' opinions and made sure that children's perspectives were reinforced and noted (p.96). Anis points out the various experiences of racism faced by immigrants on a daily basis and how this affects them on a mental level (p. 92). Anis criticizes the idea that clients are seen as representatives of their culture and the categorization of clients according to their cultures. She calls on social workers to assess every client's situation individually based on their own life experiences and social situations (p.99). She also calls on workers to be aware of what they consider to be culturally obvious and to strive to see clients' situations from various perspectives and not only from a cultural one (p.94).

She also points out that many issues that immigrant parents deal with are not specific to this client pool such as exhaustion, mental health, or substance abuse. Neither are the differences in opinion that cause challenges between children and their parents (p.90), all of which can cause concern from a Child Welfare perspective.

Similar research has been conducted in other countries, where experiences of immigrants as child welfare clients have been studied. Tempo (2022) draws attention to the emotional aspects of immigrant families dealing with Child Welfare authorities. The researcher concludes that “[S]trong negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, sadness and fear characterised the parents’ experiences and dominated their descriptive accounts.” (p. 259). These emotions were found to be in correlation with resistance to receiving services and therefore also increased the risk of children of immigrant background being taken into custody (p. 255). Another study conducted in Sweden, however, found that the immigrant background of families did not increase the risk of out-of-home placement between Nordic-born and non-Nordic-born children, as opposed to the effect of other social factors such as unemployment, substance abuse, or mental health issues (He et al., 2020, p. 8). These findings resonate with a study conducted in the USA as a comparison between Latino-born and US-born children of Latino origin who come to the attention of Child Welfare workers. Dettlaff et al. (2009) found that “immigrant families are significantly less likely to experience high family stress, actively use drugs, or exhibit poor parenting skills than their native-born peers.” (p. 781). The researchers attribute this to the potential fact that immigrant families have a high motivation to integrate into the host country after undergoing various challenges related to the immigration process (p. 781).

Despite existing research in matters concerning immigrants in Child Welfare, there is a lack of research done on mapping the perspective of social counselors and communication with non-Finnish-speaking clients in Child Welfare in Finland and the experiences of these counselors in day-to-day interactions with these clients, especially in around-the-clock units. Social counselors in Child Welfare and especially in around-the-clock units work closely with clients on a day-to-day basis, as opposed to social workers who, due to increased workloads and case numbers, have less and less time to interact with their clients (Valvira, 2022). Therefore, focusing on the experiences of these counselors can provide insight into challenges that are not yet considered by researchers in the field. Addressing this topic can increase awareness of challenges faced by both clients and counselors and help develop services in the Child Welfare sector.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN CHILD WELFARE

The previous chapter explored the Finnish Welfare system and non-Finnish-speaking individuals as clients of this system, with a focus on around-the-clock family units. This theoretical framework will focus on understanding the conceptual communicational aspect of the interaction between non-Finnish-speaking clients and the workers of the around-the-clock Child Welfare facilities.

2.1 Child Welfare as a Site of Institutional Communication

Social Work is often considered work that requires a “calling”, as workers drawn towards this field mostly do so because they want to help others in socially challenging situations requiring assistance or interventions. Many of these interventions have potentially life-altering consequences on the lives of clients and thus dealing with these situations requires workers to have certain appropriate communication skills. These skills are not necessarily acquired solely due to interest in the work or field or the client’s situation. In fact, without the proper instruments, a worker might communicate with a client in a way that proves to have negative effects on the client’s situation, despite the worker’s good intentions. Therefore, workers hardly ever interact with clients as representatives of themselves as people and rather as workers and employees representing a certain institution or organization often governed by specific laws and rules that workers cannot be flexible in. Child Welfare is one such institution. The previous chapter demonstrated the extent to which Child Welfare services in Finland for example are specifically structured and organized based on certain laws, policies, and treaties.

To explore the institutional nature of communication in Child Welfare, many researchers have paid attention to the interaction between workers and clients to explore how communication is used (Van Nijnatten, 2001, 2006), what communication skills

are used (Forrester et al., 2007) and to what end (Altman, 2008; Kemp et al., 2009; Maiter et al., 2006). Van Nijnatten (2006) for example looks at what he refers to as *meta-talk* or *meta-remarks* employed by Dutch Family Supervisors in their communication with the clients to achieve certain “institutional goals” (p. 337). According to the author, this meta-communication takes the form of “comments or directives about how the talk is to be understood [...]” (p. 335). Through analyzing the meta-communication between Family Supervisors and Child Welfare clients, Van Nijnatten (2006), points to the asymmetry of the relationship between the two. Although the Family Supervisors’ job entails providing help and guidance to the family, the author shows how through institutional communication the Family Supervisors can assert authority and control. In addition to this, analyzing the interaction between the Family Supervisors and the client shows that the Family Supervisors are not only ones who direct the conversation while focusing on details that they deem important but also their position enables them to influence future legal decisions concerning the family’s situation. Van Nijnatten (2001) describes the relationship between Family Supervisors and clients as “a co-operative, respectful relationship” (p. 709), in which the Family Supervisor is still the one holding the authority. This institutionalization is apparent in the fact that despite attempting to work in collaboration with the family, the Family Supervisor has the authority to provide the family with a written order that the family has to follow despite their disagreement. Despite this, workers “[...] tend to highlight the ‘positive’ (welfare, helping, supportive) character of their work. In doing so, they leave the formal and legal aspects of their job aside” (Van Nijnatten, 2001, p. 715). This strategy employed by workers is to lessen the authoritative and institutional gap between them and the clients to build a positive relationship with these clients.

To facilitate this complicated relationship and to ensure clients’ positive engagement, Forrester et al. (2007) distinguish skills used by workers in the social sector and especially in Child Welfare. The scholars draw attention to three important skills from current literature: empathy, focusing on open-ended questions in interviews as opposed to closed ones, and using reflections; despite their own study having “surprisingly” dichotomous results. In addition to the above-mentioned meta-communication and communicative skills, scholars such as Altman’s (2008) have drawn attention to the expectations that clients have from workers such as being straightforward, honest, and reliable. Clients expect workers to have “good knowledge of their situations” (p. 50), which positively impacts clients’ engagement with the services offered by Child Welfare Services and the plans constructed by the Child Welfare workers for these clients. This shows that the institutional nature of communication is not only imposed by the workers but also expected by the clients. Altman’s (2008) ’s United States-based research shows that clients distinguish the worker as a person from their role as a part of an institution and blame the “system” when a worker is not doing their job properly by assuming that the worker is only following rules imposed on them. However, clients are not the only ones who blame the system when the workers’ job is lacking.

Workers themselves have mentioned institutional and organizational discrepancies that keep them from carrying out their work properly. Some of these hindrances are portrayed as “systematic issues” in Altman’s study such as “making sure the workers have enough time to do their work, adequate supervision and training, and the presence of support services that can enhance worker effectiveness and efficiency” (2008, p. 54).

Despite being important aspects demonstrating the institutional nature of communication in Child Welfare, the above-mentioned features such as meta-communication, communication skills, and positive attributions of workers are not the only strategies at the disposal of workers in interaction with clients. When facing clients who are not proficient in the common language or the native language of workers, workers have to rely on additional instruments to be able to build a positive relationship with clients, ensure their engagement in services, and allow clients access and understanding of their rights and what is expected of them. This will be discussed in the following section.

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence - building shared understanding.

“If people cannot speak a given language fluently, and/or if proficient speakers use it in ‘unhelpful’ ways, it will be very difficult for them to understand each other.” (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 82).

Considering communication outside of the theoretical and academic sphere, language is what most people would probably consider the key element in a communicative setting. However, as the above-mentioned quote suggests, being fluent in a language is not enough to guarantee common understanding between interlocutors. To approach this, I will explore the concept of Communicative Competence introduced by Hymes (1967) and further developed by scholars in various fields. I will focus on this concept from an intercultural perspective i.e., Intercultural Communicative Competence. To do so, I will first define a few key concepts to help grasp this bigger concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence.

Since the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence entails the notion of culture, I will provide a brief definition of the notion of culture according to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), since their definition is one that I rely on in this study. In their book *Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence*, the authors introduced the notion of culture in this context as “[...] a primitive theoretical term, concerned with enduring yet evolving intergenerational attitudes, values, beliefs, rituals/customs, and behavioral patterns into which people are born but that is structurally created and maintained by people’s ongoing actions” (p. 7). This definition emphasizes the dynamic aspect of culture and allows people agency in determining how culture

develops, changes, and evolves. Based on this perspective, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) then introduce Intercultural Competence as “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world” (p. 8). The term *competence*, however, would not be so easy to define.

According to the Cambridge online English dictionary, *Competence* is defined simply as “the ability to do something well” (Dictionary.cambridge.org). In their book *Intercultural Interaction: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication* (2009), Spencer-Oatey and Franklin deduce aspects of competence in intercultural communication context based on various definitions, models, and approaches by researchers in the fields of psychology, linguistics, foreign language education, and business and management studies. The two components they end up proposing are *appropriateness* and *effectiveness*. Where *appropriateness* “draw[s] attention to the importance of context” (p. 54) and the ability of interactants to modify their behavior according to the demands of the communicative situation, *effectiveness* “draws attention to the complex layers involved in successfully conveying meaning and achieving both transactional and relational goals” (p. 55) by recognizing the dynamic nature of the interaction. This study adopts the notion used by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) called Intercultural Interaction Componence which they have used as a kind of umbrella term and to emphasize the notion of interaction between interlocutors. They define Intercultural Interaction Componence as “the competence not only to communicate (verbally and non-verbally) and behave effectively and appropriately with people from other cultural groups but also to handle the psychological demands and dynamic outcomes that result from such interchanges” (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 51). Although competence in this context includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence, these will not be explored in this chapter as our focus is on interactive situations. Hymes (1967) explains this by saying:

“We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (p. 60).

When applied to the context of around-the-clock Child Welfare facilities and the Family Assessment unit, workers and non-Finnish-speaking clients are then constantly navigating communicative competence skills beyond common languages and linguistic skills, that allows for mutual understanding despite the lack of a common language.

Seeing how there is an abundance of characteristics, components, and models of Intercultural Interaction Componence, listing and analyzing these is beyond the scope of this study. Leung et al. (2014) claim that “Recent reviews (e.g., Holt & Seki 2012, Johnson et al. 2006, Paige 2004, Spitzberg & Changnon 2009) include more than 30 intercultural competence models and more than 300 related constructs” (2014, p 490). These reviews have presented detailed multidisciplinary conceptualizations of the

topic. The following is an example list of characteristics provided by Leung et al. (2014) as a guide to communicating in a more interculturally competent manner with individuals from different cultures:

“Speak more clearly and slowly than usual; pause and emphasize key words Increase redundancy, i.e., repeat and paraphrase; avoid unnecessarily technical words, slang, and idioms; restrict the range of your vocabulary; use short sentences; use transparent sentence structure; avoid contractions; use more yes/no questions [...]” (p. 97).

The components and traits mentioned above represent only a fraction found in theories and conceptualizations of Intercultural Competence studies. These could be useful when developing intercultural communication and interaction skills. They are also important in situations where ensuring a good relationship built on trust and mutual understanding between workers and clients is vital in achieving the well-being of clients. Arguably, this list of skills could still be useful in cases where for example public service providers with little-to-no experience in intercultural encounters are interacting with clients with immigrant backgrounds. Many scholars advocate for the assessment of Intercultural Communicative Competence and aim to demonstrate how developing more pertinent models can help assessors such as foreign language teachers “systematically develop students’ intercultural attitude, knowledge and skills by following a five-stage instruction process” (Gu & Zhao, 2021, p. 255).

It is however important to note that many scholars can agree that lists such as these are essentialist in nature and tend to regard cultures as homogenous entities regrouping entire nations and communities while disregarding the “difference within difference” and the “diversity from within” (Dervin, 2017, p. 32). Scholars such as Borghetti (2017) draw attention to the ethical aspect of assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence and argue that “Teachers can make the difference in the development of intercultural competence through their own behaviours, critical attitudes, motivations, expectations and so on, just as they do for other values, which are not marginal simply because they are not assessed” (p. 9) and consequently questioning whether Intercultural Communicative Competence should be assessed at all.

2.3 Child Welfare and Public Service Interpreting

The previous two sections dealt with the institutional nature of communication in Child Welfare and the conceptualization of Intercultural Communicative Competence with its role in facilitating communication in an intercultural setting such as one between Finnish workers in an around-the-clock family unit and non-Finnish-speaking clients in the facility. This section will take a more concrete step into one of the main communication tools used by workers at the family unit to allow non-Finnish-speaking clients access to crucial information in their languages.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Finland, same as other European societies, is rapidly increasing in its diverse demographics due to immigration flows. With ethnic and national diversity comes linguistic diversity. This linguistic diversity is bound to produce some challenges between service providers and clients accessing these services especially when the latter are public and when there is a lack of common language between the two parties. The authorities in these cases are required to take steps to close this communicative gap. Despite apparent linguistic diversity, and according to the Finnish Language Act Chapter 1 Section 1, it must be noted that the national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. If we regard the Finnish Constitutional Act Chapter 2 Section 6, everyone residing in Finland is equal before the law. No one can be discriminated against based on gender, age, ethnicity, language, religion [...]. Subsequently, this should entitle people to the same rights and services, including Child Welfare services. Despite this, a lack of proficiency in Finnish and Swedish can present a hindrance in accessing services or fully benefitting from them. This is where Public Service Interpreting (henceforth PSI) comes in.

Although PSI and *community interpreting* are often used interchangeably (see Balounová, 2021; Moore, 2019; Rillof & Buysse, 2015; Schuster & Baixauli-Olmos, 2018), the term refers to verbal interaction between a public service-providing representative and a service user both whom do not have a common language and therefore require an interpreter who has access to both languages (Schuster & Baixauli-Olmos, 2018). In fact, Chapter 3 Section 18 of the Finnish Language Act ensures that any individual in Finland has the right to use their language before the authorities via an interpreter that the authorities are required to provide free of charge. According to Rillof and Buysse (2015),

“In communities characterized by ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, public interpretation and translation services are instrumental in equipping all sorts of public service providers (such as local authority services, schools, employment agencies, hospitals, welfare organizations, and Child Protection agencies) with the tools to deal with the linguistically complex reality of speakers with limited proficiency in the official language(s) of the community” (p. 190).

Since Child Welfare services are considered a public authority, service providers are required by the Administrative Act Chapter 5, Section 26 to provide interpreters for clients who do not possess sufficient proficiency in Finnish or Swedish to fully comprehend the communicative event taking place with authorities.

It is however noteworthy that “PSI often involves high-stake encounters which may possibly entail life-changing decisions for public service users’ futures” (Pölabauer & Topolovec, 2020, p. 15). Especially in a sensitive situation such as Child Welfare, the setting of PSI is often asymmetrical where the Child Welfare professional represents a member of a national majority and the client that of a national minority (Balounová, 2021). This can make the client who is in a vulnerable position to perceive the interpreter as “[...] an advocate, friend, or an ally” (p. 14). Situations like this call for PSI to be as regulated as possible, to avoid misunderstandings. The concept of

neutrality is also stated in the article by Pöllabauer and Topolovec (2020). However, some organizations such as The California Healthcare Interpreters Association discussed by Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2021), make interpreters as “patient advocate” (p. 220) one of the interpreters’ main roles. This can arguably be in contradiction with the concept of *neutrality* and is why interpreters need to be aware of their own country’s and/or municipality’s code of conduct and regulations.

In her article, Balounová (2021) elaborates on the concept of *neutrality* of interpreters and draws attention to the fact that achieving neutrality is still extremely difficult as interpreters can be under a lot of stress and anxiety having to listen to the harsh realities of the clients they interpret for. *Neutrality*’s importance lies in its ability to potentially distance the interpreter from the client and the situation, and hopefully reduce the severity of this anxiety. It is therefore important for interpreters working in the public sector to be adequate and well-trained.

This is not to say that an interpreter does not have an impact on the interpretation setting. In fact, according to Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2021), an interpreter “is an active participant who dynamically influences how the discourse develops” (p. 219). According to Pöllabauer and Topolovec (2020), the idea that an interpreter is only a person who “acts as an invisible language conduit has been rejected by scholars” (p. 19). The interpreter is in fact a vital component of the interpretive setting as the only one who speaks both the languages of the client and the authoritative figure of the public service provider.

As previously mentioned, PSI should be regulated to ensure proper conduct on the part of the interpreter and to protect the rights of both client and worker to get their messages across to the other party as they intended it. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) provides a guide on its web pages when it comes to working with non-Finnish speaking clients in Child Welfare with a clear emphasis on PSI. THL reminds professionals in Child Welfare not to use children or relatives of the family as interpreters, something that Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2009) agree on within their chapter. THL also reminds workers to always make sure to order an interpreter well in advance providing the latter with as much detail about the case and meeting as possible to allow the interpreter to prepare themselves if need be; or to abstain from taking on the case if they feel that they are not equipped to handle it. THL also recommends workers reserve twice as much time for a situation where the clients require the presence of an interpreter and use easy and clear language constructed in short sentences (THL, n.d).

Due to recent technological advances, interpreters are available both in face-to-face meetings as well as in remote interpretation (RI) mediated by communication software. In addition to language and cultural barriers, online meetings using interpreters can pose challenges for all parties involved in the case of bad Internet connections or faulty hardware such as speakers, microphones, and computers malfunctioning. In addition to this, Pastor and Gaber (2021) demonstrate an abundance of

experiments and research conducted in the field showing results of negative psychological and physical impacts on interpreters using RI. The researcher still demonstrates mixed feelings and attitudes from the RI users towards this technology since RI still allows “higher degrees of comfort, interpreters’ availability, and increased productivity” (p. 74). The fact remains that RI has been widely used in recent years, especially after the COVID-19 virus outbreak to limit face-to-face contact. It is also likely that RI will continue to gain popularity due to its convenience.

Whether through adhering to checklists on intercultural competent behavior, using the institutional jargon of Child Welfare and social work, or through the challenges of using PSI; social counselors and workers in the Child Welfare sector have to constantly navigate various communication tools, strategies, and techniques to accommodate the communicative diversity of their clients. So, how do these workers experience this communication and what other tools and strategies do they utilize to achieve a shared understanding? The next chapters will attempt to answer these questions.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this study, I set out to answer the following two research questions:

1. how do workers experience day-to-day communication with non-Finnish-speaking clients?
2. how do workers experience using the assessment methods at their disposal to work with non-Finnish-speaking clients?

The following section will describe the data collection method and briefly touch upon the process of recruiting the participants for the study. Some ethical issues that have arisen during the research process will also be described. Following that, a description of the data analysis method and process will be provided followed by some considerations regarding the validity and reliability of the research.

4.1. Data Collection

The data collection was based on semi-structured interviews with seven workers in one of Finland's around-the-clock Family Assessment Units. The participants were recruited by sharing a brief description of the research and a request to be interviewed in a private WhatsApp group where all full-time workers of the unit in question were members except for the senior counselor. Workers were also contacted individually and urged to take part in the study. The senior counselor was contacted and requested to share the information with substitute workers who had experience working with non-Finnish-speaking clients at the unit. The participants who were later interviewed were all full-time counselors at the unit.

The data collection method of interviews was chosen because of its long-standing tradition in conducting qualitative research. Interviews have been used to gain access to the realities of the individuals and bring forward their perspectives about their experiences (Roberts, 2020, p. 3187). The interviewees were all permanent workers at the facility who had been working there between two and three years. All of the

workers spoke Finnish as their first language. The latter was not specifically inquired about but came about during the interviews. I did not consider doing group interviews, as I estimated that participants might feel uncomfortable expressing their thoughts in front of colleagues and this might either hinder the truthfulness of responses or cause participants to omit valuable information for the research.

The interviews were divided into roughly four stages. The first stage included introducing the topic of the thesis and going through privacy notices and consent forms. The second stage started with the following question "1. Could you tell me about the around-the-clock facility where you work?"². This question's purpose was to establish how long workers have been working in the facility, their perception of what their main tasks are, and a description of the client base according to the workers. The aim was to ease the workers into the following interview questions and establish the framework. The third stage included the main interview questions that were based on the research questions. These were aided with sub-questions when needed. According to Roberts (2020), good main interview questions can be very limited in number, as they would guide the interview into answering broadly when formed well (pp. 3193–3194). The two main questions were as follows:

1. What kind of experience do you have communicating with non-Finnish speaking clients in day-to-day interaction?³

2. What kind of experience do you have communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients using assessment methods?

I had prepared a list of follow-up questions "[...] to ensure that various dimensions of the experience are explored, so that researchers do not end up with a surface account of what transpired and how the phenomenon of interest was experienced" (Roberts, 2020, p. 3195). This list included questions such as:

- "What do you think are the most important means of communication in general?",
- "How do you know that you have succeeded in communicating your message with a non-Finnish-speaking client?",
- "What do you think are the most challenging aspects of communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients?",
- "Do you have development ideas for these methods that can promote mutual communication between the employee and the client?" etc.⁴

The final stage of the interview process was in the form of an open-ended question where I asked participants if they had anything else they wanted to add, that I might have either overlooked or not covered in my questioning.

Questions in their original form in Finnish presented in the same order:

² Kerrotko ympärivuorokautisesta palvelusta, jossa työskentelet?

³ Millainen kokemus sinulla on viestinnästä ei suomenkielisten asiakkaiden kanssa arjessa?

⁴ "Mitkä ovat mielestäsi tärkeimmät viestintäkeinot yleensä?", "Mistä tiedät, että olet onnistunut viestimään/kommunikoimaan viestisi ei-suomenkielisen asiakkaan kanssa?", "Mitkä asiat ovat mielestäsi haastavimpia kommunikoidessasi ei-suomenkielisten asiakkaiden kanssa?", "Onko sinulla kehitysideoita näihin työkaluihin, jotka voivat edistää työntekijän ja asiakkaan keskinäistä viestintää?"

Despite having semi-structured interview questions, I made sure to ask the questions in similar formats to ensure that participants got the same opportunities to cover the same topics. However, the order in which follow-up questions were introduced depended largely on the interviewees' responses and the flow of the conversation. Not all of the follow-up questions were asked to all the participants as many covered the topics of their initiative based on the main questions and were therefore not in need of guidance. During the interviews, I tried to confirm my understanding of the interview responses by using probes such as "Do I hear correctly that...", "Do you mean that..." etc. I also made sure to start my questions in an open-ended fashion to provide room for participants to elaborate if they so wished. The interviews lasted between 31 and 52 minutes and generated around nine pages of transcripts each. They were conducted either in the participants' homes or in various libraries.

4.2. Ethical considerations

The research was conducted based on data collected from one of Finland's around-the-clock assessment centers. According to the instructions of the city where I did the data collection, the name of the facility, its location, and the city where it is located are not reported here. Before conducting the study, I applied for a research permit from the city in which the study took place. The research permit was granted for a year during which the research had to be conducted and detailed conditions for its conduction were listed in the permit. The conditions listed are as follows⁵:

- The research report cannot contain identifiable research subjects.
- The research cannot lead to expenses for the Social and Health Care Services division.
- The researcher is committed to following the European General Data Privacy Rules (GDPR) laws according to the data protection law 1050/2018 and other existing laws for researchers.
- The researcher will present the findings of the research on request and free of charge for [the city's]⁶ Social and Health Care Services Division.
- The electronic research report or its link will be sent for the use of the social and health care services to the email address ██████████⁷. Finished reports are at the use of the personnel on the intra-webpages of the Social and Health Care Division.

The research strictly followed the European General Data Privacy Rules (GDPR) and ensured that the identities of the interviewees were anonymized as emphasized both through the university's ethical research guidelines and the research permit

⁵ The original conditions were stated in Finnish. This English translation is provided by the researcher.

⁶ The city name is omitted as per the guidelines of the city where the research was conducted.

⁷ Email address omitted.

acquired through the city. The data gathered and analyzed was stored in the university's secure drive to which no one but me has access. This data can only be accessed through a VPN connection that requires individual university credentials. The data was not shared with outsiders. Interviewed participants were provided with a participation consent form, a privacy notice, and a research notification before the interview. These documents were also covered with the participants in the first stage of the interview process.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim in the language of conduct by me as a Finnish speaker. After reviewing the data, I located passages from the material that were interesting for the study. I then translated them into English. The translations were made by me as a Finnish and English speaker and checked by the thesis supervisor. To avoid "an additional layer of complexity that can affect both the validity and reliability of the data with which a researcher works" (Guest et al., 2012, p. 99), the transcripts were not translated as a whole and only relevant extracts and quotes were translated into English. To increase the level of transparency and reliability of the research, quotes from the transcripts were displayed in their original language i.e., Finnish. I also made sure to use a generous number of quotes as "[t]hey are the foundation upon which good qualitative data analysis is based" according to Guest et al. (2012). They also help justify the use of the specific chosen themes. Data from interviews that represented "deviant cases" were not excluded from the coding process and the findings as they can "lead to novel and invaluable insights" (p. 97). These steps were seriously considered throughout the whole process of the research.

It is especially important that I reflect on my position as a researcher while conducting this study. As mentioned in the very opening of the introduction, I am myself a social counselor in the field of Child Welfare in Finland. In fact, the main motivation for the research stems from my own experiences working with non-Finnish-speaking clients in the field and observing and discussing the experiences of colleagues. These observations and discussions have allowed certain views and opinions to form around the topic at hand regardless of my attempts to use increased reflexivity to maintain an unbiased stance. It is also relevant that I am myself an immigrant to Finland and am of mixed ethnical background. It is therefore worth mentioning that this makes it even harder for me to distance myself from the subject of non-Finnish-speakers as clients of Child Welfare and engage with it solely from an academic perspective. As Creswell (2007) put it "Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (p. 38). I have therefore paid attention not to allow my views to influence those of participants and reflect on my interpretation while writing this paper.

3.1 Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted through a Thematic Data Analysis (TDA) of the interview transcripts. The choice of TDA was made because I aim for a “relatively low level of interpretation” of the data findings. Instead, the point is to transmit or “describe” (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 399) what participants want to share from their own experiences with minimal interference from me as the researcher. TDA also allows for the categorization of the findings and to “identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants’ lived experiences [...]” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). I chose TDA because, unlike the common conception that it is not a method in itself, I agree with Braun and Clarke (2006) that “thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (p. 78). With this method, I aimed to distinguish the major themes that the workers express when it comes to communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients. The study categorized the answers from the interviews and discerned themes around which the workers experience their day-to-day interactions with the clients and how they experience using the work and assessment methods with clients.

When analyzing the data, I applied an approach that was somewhat between an inductive and a deductive one. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “You can either code for a quite specific research question (which maps onto the more theoretical approach) or the specific research question can evolve through the coding process (which maps onto the inductive approach)” (p. 84). I relied on my research questions to remind me of the elements I was looking for when coding the data, but I was still open to exploring what more the data could tell me that I might not have considered in my research questions. I was also constantly open to the idea of changing my research questions if my data had led me to do so. During the analysis stage, it was not clear to me if the model I was adopting as an epistemological approach to the data was an essentialist or social constructionist one. Although I aimed to “report[s] the experiences, meaning and the reality of participants” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81) within their interactions communicating with clients, which would fall within the essentialist approach; it is undeniable that “how events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81), therefore falling within a more social constructionist paradigm. Therefore, it is most likely a contextual model where the social context imposed on the workers affects their experiences when it comes to communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients.

The themes were identified on a semantic level meaning that I did not aim to excessively interpret participants’ experiences but aimed to communicate the topics or themes that they felt most concerned them and that they communicated in the interviews (2006, p. 87). This was accomplished by combining recurring codes based on

topics the participants addressed from the data set of the interview transcripts into themes.

Color codes	significance	number of mentions
RED	Indispensable	= > 18
ORANGE	Important	10 > 18
YELLOW	Significant	3 > 10
GREEN	Dispensable	= < 3

Table 1 Color codes and determining significance based on reoccurrence.

Codes or topics that had above three mentions in the participants answers were considered while ones that had a number less than three were not. The initial number of identified codes was forty. After identifying initial codes and regrouping them into themes based on their recurrence rate in the data set, I ended up with four main themes. These are as follows:

1. Verbal communication
2. Non-verbal communication
3. Assessment methods as an effective means of communication
4. Participants' attitudes

3.2 Validity and Reliability

A methodological consideration to discuss is the validity and reliability of this research. To discuss the latter, I will rely on Guest et. al (2012). Validity according to the author is "assessing what one is intending to assess" (p. 3). This means that the findings of the study would in this case be aligned with the research questions and the intended topic of the study. As for reliability, it is described as the "consistency when repeating or comparing assessments within a study" (p. 4). This means that if I were to use the same interview questions again with a different group of workers in a similar facility, I would get the same or at least remarkably similar findings. So, to what extent have the validity and reliability been achieved in this study?

As mentioned above, during both the data collection and data analysis stages, this research did not rely on multiple methods, which would have allowed for increased validity and reliability. However, the data collection method was reflected upon and well-structured, despite consisting of semi-structured interview questions. The interview questions received feedback from the thesis supervisor and were altered accordingly. The research was conducted by one researcher so there was no research team that would enable comparing different initial codes and data. However, again, the thesis supervisor did provide feedback on the final themes. The latter

applies to the translation of the quotes, which also received feedback from the thesis supervisor.

Although I did not have the codes and themes checked against my data by my thesis supervisor (Ibrahim, 2012), the importance of this feedback should not be underestimated. In fact, according to Guest et al. (2012), "feedback can then be used to revise definitions and recode if and where necessary. Although this method is very different from conducting formal ICA, it is still a big step toward addressing potential problems with both validity and reliability." (p. 16). In addition to receiving feedback, Guest et al. (2012), emphasize the "importance of quotes" (p. 18), which I attempted to use with every theme introduced in my findings- section. I also included verbatim quotes in the original language of interview conduction and transcription in addition to the English translation to increase transparency which in turn, increased validity.

4 RESULTS

In this study, I set out to find answers to the following research questions:

1. How do workers experience day-to-day communication with non-Finnish-speaking clients?
2. How do workers experience using the methods at their disposal to work with non-Finnish-speaking clients?

By transcribing and analyzing interviews conducted with workers in one of Finland's around-the-clock family units, I distinguished four main themes. Since the focus of the study was on the experiences of workers, all the themes draw in one way or another to the experiences of workers with communication either through language, non-verbal tools, attitudes, etc. These themes will not be discussed in any particular order.

4.1 Verbal Communication

4.1.1 Participants' Perspectives on Language Proficiency

Even though the topic of the study and research questions were stated and repeated for the participants during the interviews when asked about experiences communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients, workers still mentioned clients with limited Finnish-speaking proficiency and somehow included clients with English-speaking proficiency in their descriptions. Workers thus interpreted non-Finnish-speaking clients as clients who have another language besides Finnish as their first language with an emphasis on the ability to communicate in English but did not exclude clients who have some proficiency in the Finnish language. This distinction can be equally confusing to clients as it is to workers since clients might feel like they have a certain level of proficiency but are not necessarily aware of the limitations of this proficiency:

"... ehkä se hankalin homma siinä on, että tavallaan kun monet, jos mä kysyn vaikka, että puhutko sinä suomea, 'puhun puhun puhun puhun', mutta sitten taas tavallaan [...] sitten tulee ilmi, että kun mä sanon jotain asioita, niin sitten [...] hän ei sitten kuitenkaan niinku ymmärrä sitä" (Participant 5)

"... maybe the most difficult thing about it is that in a way when many people, if I ask, for example, do you speak Finnish, 'I speak I speak I speak I speak', but then again in a way then in practice [...] it turns out that when I say certain things, then [...] s/he then doesn't, however, understand it" (Participant 5)

Despite managing to communicate with clients to some extent using various non-verbal communication strategies, participants still felt that having a common language with clients is important. This was justified by the nature of the topics workers and clients need to communicate about in Child Welfare.

"Vanhemman täytyy olla niinku avoin ja osallistua siihen työskentelyyn ja yksi on myös siis kieli, että pitää olla yhteinen kieli ja jos sitä yhteistä kieltä ei ole niin sitten siihen pitää olla joku apu, että varmasti tullaan niinku puolin ja toisin ymmärretyksi on kuitenkin vakavista asioista kyse, kun on lastensuojelu taustalla" (Participant 2)

"The parent has to be open and participate in that work, and one thing is the language, so there has to be a common language, and if there is no common language, then there has to be some help to make sure that we will be understood on both sides since it is about serious matters when it concerns Child Protection" (Participant 2)

The comment above shows the importance of the tools, especially the PSI, in ensuring appropriate communication between workers and clients. The common language requirement is thus not restricted to the client and worker as long as both feel understood in the communicative setting.

Participants also pointed to the fact that the language proficiency level changed drastically based on factors such as understanding abstract versus concrete concepts, for example, talking about how to wash baby bottles versus why baby bottles need to be washed. Workers in this case can demonstrate how baby bottles are supposed to be washed by performing the act but struggle linguistically and semantically when they need to talk about the importance of sterilizing baby bottles to accommodate a baby's underdeveloped immune and digestive systems. When asked what things are easier conveyed to clients than others, one participant had the following to comment:

"jos meidän palveluun miettii, niin semmoiseen mitkä on ei abstrakteja [...] et helppo on näyttää mistä jääkaapista, missä on pesukone mistä käännät mut sit vaikka, että jossain ruoka ja ruokailutilanne [...] vaikka joku leikki-ikäinen lapsi [...] niin se tai vuorovaikutus et niinku ottaa puheeksi niinku tavallaan siinä arjessa [...] silloin kun mennään semmoiseen vuorovaikutukseen ja johonkin niinku vaikka lasten kasvatukseen liittyvään aihepiiriin niin ne on niinku niitä hankalia missä sitten elekieli ei sit aina niinkun [...]" (Participant 3)

"So, if you think about our service, what's not abstract [...] it's easy to show from which fridge, where the washing machine is, where to turn it from, but for example, in a food and dining situation [...] for example a toddler [...] so that or [the topic of] interaction, that these are discussed in the day-to-day [...] when we go into [the topic of] interaction and matters like raising children, they're the tricky matters where body language doesn't always like [...]" (Participant 3)

Another participant describes what they found most challenging when communicating with clients that had limited Finnish language proficiency enabling them to comprehend parts of the conversation, but not all of it:

"vaikeinta on silloin, että asiakas saattaa ymmärtää, että mitä mä haluan hänen tekevän ja tekee sen mutta hän ei välttämättä ymmärrä, että miksi [...] että se sen mä oon kokenut kaikesta hankalammaksi" (Participant 4)

"The most difficult thing is when the client may understand what I want her/him to do and does it, but s/he doesn't necessarily understand why [...] that is what I have found most difficult" (Participant 4)

The participants expressed some levels of frustration in these situations with the limitations of their resources to communicate with clients in a way the latter fully understand as understood from the quotes.

When asked whether participants felt that it was the cultural differences or the lack of a common language that played a more vital role in ensuring understanding between workers and clients, many felt it was the lack of a common language. One participant justified this as follows:

"just se yhteinen kieli [...] ja varsinkin [...] jos on niitä hankalia ja vaikeita asioita niin kyllä niistä on tosi vaikea puhua [...] niistä on vaikea puhua suomen kielellä suomenkieliselle, jolloin mä tiedän, että me molemmat ymmärretään saatikka sitten, et on ihminen, että mä en tiedä kuinka paljon hän ymmärtää ja hän ei ehkä tiedä mitä hänen tulisi ymmärtää edes" (Participant 2)

"It's the common language [...] and especially [...] if there are those tricky and difficult topics, then it's really difficult to talk about them [...] it's difficult to talk about them in Finnish to a Finnish speaker, when I know that we'll both understand, let alone when it's a person that I don't know how much s/he understands and he might not even know what he should understand" (Participant 2)

This quote downplayed the importance of culture by explaining that the situation would also be difficult with a Finnish-speaking client with whom there is a shared cultural understanding of certain topics and therefore it is more challenging when there is a lack of common language. Non-Finnish-speaking clients, therefore, seemed to encompass clients with limited to no Finnish or English language proficiency and not just the lack thereof.

4.1.2 Public Service Interpreting (PSI)

When talking about communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients, PSI seems to be the main topic of discussion. All seven participants evoked various aspects of the use of interpretation services both in everyday situations and during structured meetings using methods. Participants drew attention to the fact that the setting between non-Finnish-speaking clients and workers differs in its structure from a setting with a Finnish-speaking client: there is a "strange" third party involved, the interpreter, which alters the dynamic between the worker and client especially when discussing

sensitive topics, which are prevalent in a Child Protection context. Participants also pointed out the uncertainty of what is being interpreted to and from the client and how the message is being transmitted across. In many cases, participants felt that there was either a lot that wasn't being interpreted or that the interpreter was not sticking to what the worker was saying:

"Minusta on hankalaa myös tai jotenkin en mä tiedä epämieluisaa mut niinku se tulkin käyttäminen on musta vähän niinku sillai [...] varsinkin jos on puhelin tulkkaus [...] kun enhän mä tiedä mitä hän kääntää ja sitten että kuka siellä on kääntämässä että se on jotenkin kauhean persoonatonta että se kun me muutenkin istutaan pienessä tilassa ja siellä on niinku vieraita ihmisiä saatikka sitten että siellä on joku täysin vieras ihminen joka joutuu sitten niinku kääntämään ne hankalat asiat siellä perheelle niin se on musta jotenkin kaikella tapaa sellainen niinku herkkä." (Participant 2)

"I also find it awkward or somehow, I don't know, unpleasant, but using an interpreter is a bit like [...] especially if it's telephone interpreting [...] when I don't know what he/ she is translating and then who is translating, it is somehow terribly impersonal that when we're already sitting in a small space and there are so many strangers there, let alone that there's a complete stranger there who has to interpret the difficult things to the family there, I think it's kind of sensitive in every way" (Participant 2)

Another participant expressed doubt by expressing the following:

"[...] enhän mä tiedän mitä se tulkki puhuu sitten sen asiakkaan omalla kielellä niin mä en voi olla satavarma, että osako se kertoa juuri sen asian mitä minä sanoin" (Participant 7)

"[...] I don't know what the interpreter is speaking in the customer's language, so I can't be a hundred percent sure that he/she was able to say exactly what I said" (Participant 7)

In addition to this, participants felt that there are technical difficulties concerning audibility and connection issues that add a layer of complexity to an already sensitive situation. Participants also understood that the multiple varieties within a specific language meant that the interpreter and the client would not always understand each other.

On a more practical note, participants described challenges such as interpreters for the language in question not always being available in Finland and therefore the language of interpretation used is not the client's "first language". Using interpreters in general also reflected on the temporal aspects as meetings take more time with an interpreter than with a Finnish-speaking client. This also meant that the topics planned could not be covered in totality due to time restrictions caused by the interpretation process. Since interpreters can only be used during specific situations and within administrative hours due to a lack of resources, workers in the family unit tend to cover other topics and issues concerning the client that cannot be covered without an interpreter which causes the meetings to deviate from their original focus.

These findings resonate with Križ and Skivenes (2010)'s findings on the use of interpreters in Social Work in England and Norway. In their study, social workers described interpretation as "... time-consuming and might adversely affect the quality of assessments and slow down the decision-making process" (p. 1360). Findings in

their study also support the findings of the current study when it comes to mistrusting what is being interpreted and the implications of interpreters belonging to clients' ethnic communities.

4.2 Non-verbal Communication

To ensure "successful" communication, both clients and workers seem to utilize a variety of strategies in the form of non-verbal communication. These strategies varied from attempting to create a relaxed and trustful environment through humor, kind facial expressions, and laughter; to the use of body language such as giving a "thumbs up" for encouragement and approval. Both workers and clients at the family unit were also active in using pictures, drawing stick figures, using online services like Google translate, maps, websites, etc. When asked about the non-verbal means workers use to communicate with non-Finnish-speaking clients, one participant lists some of these tools in the following comment:

" Jonkin verran ollaan käytetty pikapiirtomista eli ihan kynä ja paperia tikku-ukkoja piirretty ja sitten ollaan käytetty kuvia aika paljonkin, on kuvia ihan seinillä, ollaan käytetty , että piirretään esimerkiksi kellotaulu ja kellon viisareita. ollaan käytetty, vaikka kylvetyksestä niin kun näytetty video ja sitten ihan semmoisia tota niinku esineillä mallinnettu, että on käytetty, vaikka nukkea ja nukella näytetty jotain imetysasentoja tai miten kynnet leikataan nukelta tyyliin niin niitä on." (Participant 4)

"We've used a bit of quick sketching, so pen and paper, stick figures have been drawn, and then we've used pictures, there are quite a lot of pictures on the walls, we have used... that we draw, for example, the face of a clock and the hands of a clock. When it comes to bathing, we have shown a video and them like modeling with objects, using a doll and showing breastfeeding positions or how to cut nails on a doll for example, there are many of them." (Participant 4)

Another participant commented the following:

"Varmistamalla yhä uudelleen ja uudelleen tai sitten mä käytän paljon itse elekieltä ihan näyttelystä tai näytän siis esitän sen tilanteen ja yritän varmistaa sen että onko asiakas ymmärtänyt sen" (Participant 1)

"By making sure over and over again or I use a lot of body language myself performing or acting, so I present the situation and I try to make sure that the client has understood it" (Participant 1)

In fact, participants acknowledged the skillfulness of clients in relying on these strategies to communicate:

" Ja sitten tota niin näitä jotain Google kääntäjiä ja muita niin kyllä tuota meidän asiakkaat itse osaa nää vieraskieliset aika sujuvasti kaivaa sitten esille" (Participant 3)

"And then, of course, these Google translators and others, yes, our clients know, these foreign speakers, quite fluently then to dig them out" (Participant 3)

In addition to concrete non-verbal ways of communicating, participants seemed to be aware of the emotional state of both worker and client in the communication situation and its possible impacts on the communication process. Workers often referred to the “atmosphere” and how it impacts the mood and how workers expressed themselves and the reaction of the clients. Workers seemed to be aware that the more positive the atmosphere was the better clients were receptive to what the workers were trying to communicate, and the more workers felt comfortable being creative in their ways of communication utilizing humor, especially as a means to break down the language barrier that could be experienced as adding a layer of “awkwardness” between worker and client.

”Silloin jos ilmapiiri on kevyt niin silloin on tavallaan niinku sitä väljyyttä tehdä niitä niinku mokia siinä viestinnässä [...] mut sitten jos se ilma piiri on niinku kireä tai jännittynyt niin sitten jotenkin sitä lähtee itsekkin sellainen miettimään että on ehkä aika hiljainen ja miettiä tarkkaan mitä sanoo ja miten sanoo ja joo silloin se on hankalaa [...] sitten taas jos ilmapiiri on tosi hyvä niin sitten tulee niinku höpöttelyä tai yritettyä edes höpöttää laajemminkin joo.” (Participant 4)

”Then if the atmosphere is light, then there is a kind of space to make mistakes in the communication [...] but then if the atmosphere is tight or tense, then somehow one begins to think that maybe one should be quite quiet and to think carefully about what to say and how to say it and yes, then it is difficult [...] then again, if the atmosphere is really good, then there will be babbling or even attempts to babble more widely, yes.” (Participant 4)

These findings address the importance of non-verbal communication, especially in situations where a common language between interlocutors is not available. Showing bodily cues that convey friendliness and trust can go a long way. This is especially true in a situation where the relationship between the interlocutors is asymmetrical and is prone to tension due to this. This importance requires awareness of both parties to create an atmosphere where everyone can navigate different communication strategies at ease to find their way of expressing themselves.

4.3 Assessment methods as an effective means of communication

When asked about their experiences using the assessment methods as mediums of communication, participants felt that there is a cultural aspect imposed by the methods that do not necessarily take into consideration other ways and perspectives such as different eating, sleeping, and parenting habits and customs. This is expressed as being unfair to the clients as they could be judged and “evaluated” on a scale that they do not adhere to even though their way of doing things is not in contradiction with the Child Welfare laws. One participant expressed this point by saying the following:

”Kun ihmiset tulee ihan eri taustoista niin me ei voida niinku, että nää menetelmätkin [...] vaikka me käytettäisi näitä meidän menetelmiä [...] niin se tuntuu niin jotenkin hullulta [...] kun ne ihmiset on ihan toisenlaisesta [...] että jotain päivärytmiä me isketään [...] meillä on niinku tapana, että me isketään, että aamupuuro syödään tuohon aikaan ja

ylipäänsä syödäänkö jossain kulttuurissa puuroa? [...] ja lounaat ja muut, niin [...] nää on tosi oleellisia, että me niinku arvioidaan sitä ja niinku tehdään tosi pitkälle johtopäätelmiä sen mukaan, miten ne noudattaa niin ei ne noudata sitten kuitenkaan muuta, kun se meidän jakson ajan koska me sanotaan, että meillä pitää noudattaa tätä ja me kirjoitetaan sinne lausuntoon, että onko ne tullut lounaalle tai päivälliselle [...] ja sit kun ne menee kotiin ei kuitenkaan tee niin" (Participant 3)

"When people come from completely different backgrounds, these methods [...] even if we use these methods of ours [...] it feels somehow crazy [...] when these people are from completely different... that we impose some daily structure [...] we usually impose that the morning porridge is eaten at a specific time and in general do people even eat porridge in some cultures? [...] and lunches and others, so [...] these are essential, that we assess this and make really far-reaching conclusions according to how they [the daily structures] are followed, but they only follow them during our period, because we say that here this should be followed and we write in the final statement, whether they have come for lunch or dinner[...] and when they go home, they don't do it anyway" (Participant 3)

Participants also felt that the language used in the methods is often too abstract and culturally bound. Sometimes the language cannot be translated verbatim, and the concepts expressed could be foreign or simply unknown to many non-Finnish-speaking clients even in their native languages for example words such as *vuorovaikutus*, referring to all forms of interaction and communication, *sijoitus*, as in placement, and *huostaanotto* as in taking into custody. Much of this is because the language used is specific to Child Welfare and parenting from a Finnish perspective. This is similar to the understanding of abstract versus concrete concepts which was discussed under a couple of the previous themes.

Despite pointing out the merits of using assessment methods many workers feel like being present in the day-to-day situations and potentially going through them later with an interpreter is much more effective than scheduling meetings to go through premade assessment methods that do not always align with the client's needs and that do not reach the client in the same way as concrete examples from day-to-day situations do:

"niin siinä arjessa oleminen ja niiden tilanteiden läpikäyminen [...] ja kun on aina lapsista kyse ja siitä vuorovaikutuksessa ja näin, niin se tapahtuu arjessa ei niinkään paperilla. Paperilla sä voit niin kun kertoa minulla on "hyvä vuorovaikutus" [lapsiin] sitten kun näkee, ei puhu mitään, vaikka jos näin voi kärjistä, niin kyllä ne on ne arkitilanteet ja sen takia tuo työ on niinku itse on minun mielestäni erittäin ihanaa" (Participant 1)

"so being present in the day-to-day and going over those situations [...] and since it's always about the children and the interaction and so on, it happens in the day-to-day not so much on paper. On paper, you can tell me, "The interaction is good" [with the children], then when seen there is no communication, if one exaggerates, so yes, it is the day-to-day situations and that's why this job is, in my opinion, very wonderful" (Participant 1)

Many participants expressed the need to develop the content of the assessment-methods in a way that is more inclusive to non-Finnish-speaking clients and most importantly have them officially translated into multiple languages.

"mä toivoisin, että mulla olisi niinku kaksi samanlaista paperia ja toinen olisi suomeksi ja toinen olisi arabiaksi ja se olisi käännetty niinku ihan ammattikäyttäjälle ja mä tiedän, että se on niinku oikeasti ihan tismalleen sama asia niin kyllä se mun mielestä mä saan sen

mun asian niinku varmemmin tuotua esille samoin kuin se asiakas, että me ihan oikeasti, että hän ihan oikeasti tietää mistä mä puhun ”(Participant 2)

"I wish I had two identical papers, and one was in Finnish and the other was in Arabic and it was translated for a professional user and I know that it's really exactly the same thing, then yes, in my opinion, I am able to bring up the matter more confidently, as well as the client, that we really, that s/he really knows what I'm talking about "(Participant 2)

As could be understood from the quote above, the need for translating the content of the methods is to ensure that clients have the same opportunities as Finnish-speaking clients to read and understand what the assessment methods entail and not be dependent on the fluctuating interpretation of interpreters.

4.4 Participants' Attitudes

4.4.1 Culture versus Language in Communication

According to the participants, cultural factors seem to play a big role in communication. In fact, workers compared situations they had with non-Finnish-speaking clients to situations with Finnish-speaking clients as a way to either express a discrepancy in services and resources or to justify the challenges of certain situations as being applicable to both Finnish- and non-Finnish speakers.

Participants also note that cultural aspects such as expected gender roles of the parties involved sometimes caused friction during meetings for example, in the case where one or the other in a couple is expected to take a more active role in communication while the other is expected to be more passive. Another example is the case where the interpreter and client are of different genders. One participant describes how women would have trouble discussing issues such as abortion with the presence of interpreters sharing the same or a similar national or cultural background. Some clients had problems discussing certain intimate topics when the interpreter was of the opposite gender. Participants also felt that gender could play a part in, for example, concealing parts of the conversation.

"Me ollaan myös mietitty sitä, että kun on näitä kulttuurieroja ja miehen ja naisen asema on niin kun eri kulttuureissa, niin meidän täytyy myös kauhean tarkasti miettiä sitä sitten, että vaikuttaako se, että onko se tulkki mies vai nainen [...] niin miten se vaikuttaa varsinkin jos puhutaan jostain tämmöisestä, että taikka, että mies on jotenkin niin kun ei nyt väkivaltainen, mutta siis käyttäytyy niin kun jotenkin suomalaisella mittapuulla mitattuna niin kun jotenkin alistavasti tai jotenkin sitä naista kohtaan tai vaimoan kohtaan ja sitten tämmöisestä asiasta pitäisi puhua [...] niin sitten se, että vaikuttaako se tulkin sukupuoli siihen tai kulttuuriin niinku, että jos he puhuu samaa kieltä ja on samasta kulttuurista ... niin me ei edelleenkaan tiedetä mitä se mitä sen niinku tulkki kääntää tai mitä se mies puhuu kääntääkö tulkki sen miehen puheen sitten niinku meille suomeksi oikein [...] että ne on tosi vaikeita ja hankalia asioita joihin liittyy sekä se kielimuuri että se kulttuuriero." (Participant 2)

"We have also thought about the fact that when there are these cultural differences and the status of men and women is different in different cultures, we also have to think very

carefully about whether it affects whether the interpreter is a man or a woman, how does it affect, especially if we are talking about something like for example that the man is somehow [...] like not particularly violent but behaves like, when measured by Finnish standards, somehow dominantly or somehow towards the woman or his wife and then we should talk about this kind of thing [...] so does the gender of the interpreter affect that or the culture so that if they speak the same language and are from the same culture... we still don't know what the interpreter is interpreting or what the man is saying, will the interpreter translate the man's speech then into Finnish correctly for us [...] they are really difficult and tricky things involving both the language barrier and the cultural difference." (Participant 2)

Some participants pondered the effect of culture versus language in challenging or facilitating a communication situation. For example, whether the understanding of some abstract concepts was due to the lack of semantic equivalent in another language or the lack of the concept as a whole in a certain culture.

"Vähän riippuen siitä että siitä asiakkaan taustasta, onko hän esimerkiksi tullut vaikka suoraan jostain Syyrian leiriltä mistä on ollut 5 vuotta vai tuleeko hän jostain niinku Jeddasta niinku niin onhan siinäkin vähän eroja heidän niinku siis se perusymmärryksen kanssa silloin kun mennään näihin tällaisiin ei konkreettisiin asioihin eli sitten tällaisia just varhainen vuorovaikutus ja miksi me puhumme siitä että vauvalle pitää jutella ja seurustella ja olla ja tällaista niinku sanottaa ja miksi ei pidetä kännykkää vuoden ikäisenä ja niin tällaisissa asioissa kyllä se on tosi tosi haasteellista sitten." (Participant 7)

"Depending a little on the client's background, whether s/he came directly from a camp in Syria where s/he has been for 5 years, or whether s/he comes from somewhere like Jeddah so there are a few differences with their basic understanding when talking about these not concrete things so like early interaction and why do we talk about the fact that the baby needs to be talked to and be socialized with and be with and things like this, like using words and why not use a cell phone at one year old and things like this, then yes, it is really, really challenging then." (Participant 7)

This quote demonstrates that in addition to language proficiency based on how long a client has resided in Finland, the very premise of the client's cultural and national background plays an important role in his or her ability to comprehend abstract concepts related to parenting.

In addition to this, all of the workers unanimously expressed elements of cultural sensitivity and awareness by attempting to approach communication with an open mind. Workers often give the clients the benefit of the doubt and try to come up with solutions to navigate the conflictual situations that might arise from operating with different sets of beliefs and cultural practices, especially when it comes to parenting.

"Eli kulttuureissa toimitaan eri lailla ihan niinku ylipäätään ja sitten se vanhemmuus ja kasvatus käytännöt voi olla erilaisia ja esimerkiksi, että kaikki niinku ruokailu ja arkirytmii niin kun suomesta siirrytään johonkin toiseen maahan niin hyvin erilainen että mikä on se normi niinku lapsen kanssa." (Participant 6)

"So, [people] act differently in different cultures, and then the parenting and upbringing practices can be different, and for example, everything like eating and the daily structure, so when you move from Finland to another country it's so different that what is the norm with a child." (Participant 6)

Workers often expressed an understanding of how their own cultural backgrounds, personal, and lived experiences impact their communication with clients and their view on their practices.

"Siihen vaikuttaa tietysti meidän ohjaajien oma historia ja tausta" (Participant 1)

"It is of course influenced by our, counselors, own history and background" (Participant 1)

This comment shows that workers can ponder on their role within the communicative relationship with the clients and reflect on what influences their ways of interacting with non-Finnish-speaking clients.

4.4.2 Client Agency

When describing the communication situations with non-Finnish-speaking clients, workers seemed to generally have the clients' best interests in mind. This translates into workers attempting their best to communicate successfully with clients, therefore adopting many strategies to make this happen.

The majority of participants emphasized certain techniques to ensure the client's understanding such as repeatedly confirming whether or not the client has understood what is being communicated. According to participants, clients were not re-grouped into a homogenous group and their differences were acknowledged based on culture, nationality, language group, and individual lived experiences. When asked about imagining a specific assessment tool that could be useful to non-Finnish-speaking clients in general, one participant had the following to say:

"En mä niinku tavallaan pysty niputtaa myöskään niinku vieraskieliset olisi niinku joku yksi [...] Että, OK, että jaetaan niinku suomenkielisiä, vieraskielisiä, koska ne voi olla ihan niinkun eripuolilta maapalloa sitten taas keskenään ihan eri kulttuureista" (Participant 3)

"In a way, I am not able to group foreign speakers either like there would be one [...] like OK, let's separate Finnish speakers, foreign speakers because they can be from different parts of the world, and then again from completely different cultures" (Participant 3)

This comment and others like it showed an understanding of the diversity within immigrant groups and non-Finnish-speaking groups with an attempt to treat clients as individuals. Participants did not seem to seek an easy way out of complex situations when confronted with language or cultural barriers but actually tried to accommodate the communication needs of clients from various backgrounds. This was done for example by using short sentences and avoiding slang words that might be difficult to understand.

"Tavallaan pitää sen keskustelun sellaisena, että kysyy sellaista mihin mä tiedän, että hän pystyy vastaamaan, että yksinkertaiseen kysymykseen yksinkertainen vastaus" (Participant 2)

"In a way, [I] keep the conversation as such, that [I] ask something that I know she/he can answer, a simple answer to a simple question" (Participant 2)

Workers also seemed to not impose their understandings or thoughts of what's in the client's best interest and seem to acknowledge that the clients are very resourceful and have a part to play when it comes to "successfully" communicating with the workers. When asked about when the workers considered working with a client successfully, participants answered the following:

"Että olisi sellaisen tilanteen jälkeen tunne, että kaikki ovat saaneet puhuttua ja ovat ymmärtäneet tilanteen ja asian, niin silloin hyvin" (Participant 1)

"That there would be a feeling after such a situation that everyone had been able to talk and had understood the situation and the matter, then well." (Participant 1)

Also:

"loppuviimeksi tarkoitus on selvittää perheen kanssa yhdessä, että mitä tukea tämä perhe jakson jälkeen tarvitsee." (Participant 1)

"Ultimately, the purpose is to find out together with the family what support this family needs after the period." (Participant 1)

These comments show that it is the client's perspective which is the one that matters and whether or not the client has had the opportunity to express himself or herself instead of relying on what the worker has understood.

4.4.3 Need for Intercultural Competence Training.

All of the participants in the study expressed a dire need for cultural competence - cultural sensitivity training. Some workers drew on their own backgrounds to justify this need by expressing their lack of knowledge and lack of understanding of other cultures and how to approach people from different national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

"[...] Meidän ohjaajienkin omat taustat saattaa olla hyvinkin rasistisia". (Participant 4)

"[...] Our own backgrounds as counselors could be very racist" (Participant 4)

This particular participant felt that because of their potentially even "racist" background and upbringing, they have worked hard to change their views of non-Finnish-speaking clients. This participant drew attention to the fact that working on their ethnocentric views on their own was not always enough and that they needed some cultural competence training to be better equipped to work with clients from different ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds.

The participants described many situations where there were elements of prejudice, mistrust, and/or misunderstandings between workers and clients based on language or cultural differences.

"Jos ei itse ole valmis puskemaan itseään niinku ulos siitä mukavuusalueelta, niin sittenhän se jää semmoiseksi peloksi ja jää niitä ennakkoluuloja" (Participant 1)

"If one is not ready to push oneself out of that comfort zone, then it will remain as fear and the prejudices will remain" (Participant 1)

Another participant pondered the same idea saying:

"Jos mulla on voimakkaat ennakkoluulot tai se pelko tai muu, niin se estää sen vapaan viestinnän kyllä tai ainakin hankaloittaa sitä tosi paljon, että silloin jos mulla on epämielittävä olo toisen seurassa, johtuu se oikeasti hänestä itsestään ihmisenä tai mun omista ennakkoluuloista ja peloista niin mun on vaikea niin kun lähestyä ihmistä." (Participant 4)

"If I have strong prejudices or fear or something else, then it prevents free communication indeed, or at least makes it very difficult, so that if I feel uncomfortable in the company of another person, whether it is really because of him/her as a person or my own prejudices and fears, then I have difficulty approaching the person." (Participant 4)

Despite this, the workers always described their core tasks as being in the best interest of the client. They were still open about the challenges communication situations imposed, the frustrations, and the way they experienced them in general. Participants used words such as "harmillista" (meaning something to be too bad) and "turhauttavaa" (meaning something to be frustrating) to describe how they experienced situations where they could not communicate directly and effectively with clients. Interestingly, participants often described the communication process as a two-way street, but they still described, knowingly or unknowingly the steps they took to facilitate communication and ensure clients' understanding.

Participants criticized the lack of any cultural sensitivity, diversity, or cultural competence training either during their previous studies or as a part of training for the work they do as counselors in an around-the-clock Child Welfare facility. Participants emphasized the importance of providing such training to workers in Child Welfare where the number of non-Finnish-speaking clients is constantly rising. They drew on the fact that the topic of Child Welfare is decisive and sensitive in people's lives and should therefore be assigned a respective importance when it comes to workers' training. One participant said the following regarding this:

"Kun katsoo tulevaisuuteen, niin mä itse uskon, että maailma vaan koko ajan enempi ja enempi kansainvälistyy. Kulttuureja tulee enempi, mikä lisää ymmärrystä, mutta tavallaan sosiaalihuollon [...] ammattihenkilökunnan pitää pysyä perässä, että kyllä me tarvitaan oikeasti niin kun työvälaineitä, opastusta, ohjausta, koulutusta, kaikkea, että miten me kohdataan näitä asiakkaita. Että tällä hetkellä mulla on itsellä se pelko, että me ollaan vähän niinku jäämässä kehityksen jalkoihin. Että toivotaan, että tulisi semmoista, niin kun tän puolen osaamista" (Participant 4)

"When you look to the future, I personally believe that the world is constantly becoming more and more international. There will be more cultures, which will increase understanding, but in a way, Social Welfare's [...] professional staff needs to keep up, that yes, we really need work tools, guidance, steering, training, everything, and how we face these clients. That at the moment, I myself, have the fear that we are a little behind in development, so hopefully there will be competence in this field." (Participant 4)

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

There is a growing interest in research regarding non-native speakers and immigrants as clients of Child Welfare in various countries. On a quantitative level, research is interested in both the number of immigrants as Child Welfare clients compared to the natives and native-born clients and the factors that are potentially affecting these numbers (see for example Dettlaff et al., 2009;). On a qualitative level, researcher have studied what happens in interaction between workers and immigrant clients and tried to understand how much aspects such as culture for example potentially impacts the said interaction (see for example Heikkilä-Daskalopoulos, 2008; Avrushin & de Haymes, 2018; Linjala, 2013; Tembo, 2022). Being a qualitative study, this thesis is interested in the experiences of the workers with communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients in one of Finland's around-the-clock family units both on a day-to-day basis and while using assessment methods.

The findings show that workers had rather unanimous experiences and expressed largely the same ideas when describing their experiences in both settings. These are summarized in Table 2. The findings also show that communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients presents the workers at the around-the-clock family units with challenges different from communicating with Finnish-speaking clients. The workers themselves show awareness of the impact of their own backgrounds on their prejudices and attitudes toward non-Finnish-speaking clients but expressed frustration in not always knowing how to navigate the cultural differences between them and these clients and still achieve the goals of the assessment period at the family unit.

This raises the question regarding Intercultural Communicative Competence training and assessment and whether it could still be implemented in training employees working with non-Finnish-speaking clients, especially in the social sector

RQ 1.	Experiences with day-to-day communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication with non-Finnish-speaking clients requires innovation in employing non-verbal strategies: drawing, mimicking, leading by example, etc. - The use of PSI does not completely solve the linguistic gap and instead comes with its own set of challenges. - The emotional state of both worker and client affects the understanding in communication in the absence of a common language. - Communication between workers and non-Finnish-speaking clients requires cultural sensitivity and awareness of their prejudices and stereotypes.
RQ 2.	Experiences with communication using the assessment methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Documents and methods should be systematically translated into multiple languages. - The various backgrounds of non-Finnish-speaking clients need to be taken into consideration when applying the assessment methods to non-Finnish-speaking families' situations. - Work with non-Finnish-speaking clients' situations should focus more on day-to-day observations as opposed to using assessment methods.

Table 2 Summary of the findings in answer to the research questions

including Child Welfare Services. On their website, THL provides some insight into their views on “cultural competence and cultural sensitivity” in client work. Despite not being presented as a model per se, THL provides general guidelines that encourage workers to be respectful of people regardless of their cultural backgrounds “and creating and fostering an atmosphere of non-discrimination in society”. THL urges workers to be mindful of their own prejudices, respect diversity, and avoid assumptions and generalizations (THL, 2021). These guidelines are broad and could apply to any individual whether they are an immigrant, a native, or a native-born client without emphasizing differentiating people based on their cultures.

The findings also show that relying solely on PSI as a means of bridging the linguistic gap between workers and non-Finnish-speaking clients is not a long-term solution. Despite offering relief in some situations, the challenges surrounding PSI still make it unreliable in building rapport between workers and clients. Workers still need to consider multiple aspects in the interpreting setting such as culturally imposed gender roles and the professionalism of the interpreter. In fact, Bondarchuk and Kugai (2022) argue that an interpreter is not only an expert in the languages s/he interprets but also in the field of communication. The researchers claim that “This requires the interpreter to have a high general and worldview culture, professional competence, great erudition, interpersonal skills, tact, constant desire to enhance knowledge, focus on sociocultural values and ideals” (p. 51). These qualities were however not expressed by the participants of this study when describing their encounters with interpreters in their work. Many participants complained about the lack of professionalism of interpreters which made the meetings with clients longer and more difficult.

In addition to this, assessment methods and tools need to be revisited from a broader cultural perspective that is not limited to the Finnish one. This includes assessing the assessment methods from a diverse inclusive point of view that takes into consideration the various living styles, parenting styles, spatiotemporal conceptions, etc. of people from different cultural backgrounds. In the least, the systematic professional translation of the assessment methods and tools into languages often represented in the client pool can provide some relief to both workers and clients, regardless of the presence of PSI. This could allow both worker and client to not rely solely on the interpretations of the interpreter and provide some clarity during the family meetings. This has the potential effect of reducing mistrust and negative emotions on the part of all parties during family meetings. A similar conclusion is also drawn by Lanesskog et al., (2020) when researching the type of institutional support needed in the USA to enhance services for Latino families in a Child Welfare agency. The researchers see the translation of documents as not only important from a legal perspective and “from a human rights perspective, but also from the perspective of providing workers with the tools they need to serve clients to the best of their abilities” (p. 451).

Luckily, these issues mentioned above are somewhat being addressed and many organizations in Finland are actively working on providing employees working with non-Finnish-speaking clients with tools to facilitate communication and increase awareness and understanding of both intercultural matters, but also of workers’ attitudes towards non-Finnish-speaking clients. For example, organizations are conducting projects, seminars, and training to support this purpose, some of which are mentioned in Table 3.

Organization	Project, course, or seminar, etc.
THL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PALOMA Center of Expertise in Refugee Mental Health Work (THL, 2021) - As a Parent in Finland (Skogberg & Laajasalo, 2020) - Online course on anti-racism for professionals (THL, 2023) - Mental health of immigrants living in Finland (THL, 2021) - Supportive conversation skills for reception centers - mental health for asylum seekers (TAVATA) (THL, 2023)
Mieli ry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mental health skills for immigrant students (Mieli ry, 2023) - Encounter and Support (KOTU) -Mental health first aid course for immigrants (Mieli ry, 2023) - A child's mind, language, and culture training for early childhood education (Mieli ry, 2022) - PASEK-project for promoting the mental health of refugees (Mieli ry, 2023) - MIOS - Mental well-being and inclusion in multicultural Finland (Mieli ry, 2023) - Vamos Mieli - group activities for multicultural young people aged 16–29 (Mieli ry, 2023)

City of Helsinki	- Multidisciplinary Action Model for Young People of Immigrant Background (Innokylä, 2023) - MISI-project for disregarding extremist thinking and learning conflict-solving skills (Minun Silmin, Sinun Silmin, n.d.)
Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.	Integration.fi website

Table 3 examples of organizations aiming to raise awareness regarding working with immigrants in Finland.

These mentions are not restricted to the Social Welfare or the Child Welfare sectors and include other sectors such as mental health, education, and employment. It is noteworthy that despite touching on the topic of families, children, and young people, not many projects and training exist for workers working specifically in the Child Welfare sector. This is what the LAMPE project mentioned in a previous chapter is trying to change in addition to the new multidisciplinary action model aimed at immigrant youth and their families being developed in Helsinki.

5.2 Conclusion

This study set out to research the experiences that workers in one of Finland's Child Protection family units have in communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients both in day-to-day interaction and through the use of assessment methods. The study aimed to investigate whether the current communication means available in Child Welfare at the disposal of the workers are sufficient to optimize and facilitate the communication between workers and non-Finnish-speaking families at the facility in particular and in Child Welfare in general.

The analysis of seven semi-structured interviews with seven workers at one of Finland's around-the-clock family assessment units revealed four main themes that depicted the communicational experiences of these workers. These themes are:

1. Verbal Communication
2. Non-verbal communication
3. Assessment methods as an effective means of communication
4. Participant's attitudes

The most interesting finding was that regardless of the absence of a common language and the challenges surrounding the use of interpreters, both workers, and clients managed to creatively utilize non-verbal communication and several strategies to ensure they got their messages across.

Clients are depicted as active agents in the communication process and workers as students continuously learning and growing alongside new communication challenges. Both parties therefore display communication competence that allows them to

communicate successfully and together fulfill the objectives of the interaction in a way appropriate to the context. As described by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) “[c]ompetent communication is interaction that is perceived as effective in fulfilling certain rewarding objectives in a way that is also appropriate to the context in which the interaction occurs” (p. 53). The findings also revealed workers’ various developmental needs such as increasing intercultural competence of workers through various training programs and investing in proper interpreting and translation services.

5.3 Limitations, Evaluation, and Future Research

5.3.1 Limitations

As with most studies, this one too has limitations. One of the main ones is the fact that the research was conducted in the same sector in which I have worked for many years. My own experiences as a Child Welfare counselor could have hindered my subjectivity during the study. I had to be aware of my possible impacts on the interview settings and attempted through increased reflexivity to adopt “a self-critical approach on the researcher’s part about how one’s own preconceptions affect the research” (Cohen-Miller & Boivin, 2021, p.49). It was, therefore, crucial for me to make clear the change in my role from “worker” to researcher” during the interviews. I needed to externalize myself from the discussion and redirect the conversation back to the worker and their own opinion on the matter, regardless of whether the situation described was something I had myself experienced before. In addition to reflexivity concerning the worker status that I share with Child Welfare workers; I need to be aware of the implication of my immigrant background on my role as a researcher around the topic of working with non-Finnish-speakers and my possible biases in this regard.

There are several additional limitations to this study on a methodological level and theoretical level. On the methodological level, in this study, I relied on a single data collection method being interviews, and a single data analysis method being Thematic Data Analysis. The latter was conducted solely based on the interview transcripts which is something criticized by Ibrahim (2012) as he considers that “[b]y gathering data using different instruments, (e.g. observation, questionnaires with interviews on one study) with participants in different environments, Thematic Analysis will produce and present the data more effectively and reflect the reality of the data collection” (p. 41). The lack of triangulation of data in this study can also be criticized with the work of Guest et al. (2012), as they consider that “by accumulating multiple points of reference, researchers can minimize the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods, single-observer, and single-theory studies” (p. 10). This thus increases the risk of bias in this research. The reason for the limited use of methods and diversity in

the participant pool is due to the small scale on which this study is conducted, lack of resources, and time restrictions.

On a theoretical level, one of the limitations of this research is the argument that the study lacks a theoretical basis as I did not rely on a particular theory as a starting point for the research. Instead, I focused on concepts such as *intercultural communication* and *competence*, and *PSI*. It could also be argued that this study lacks extensive concept definitions such as for the very contested concepts of *culture* and *intercultural communication*. Broad concepts as the latter can be approached from many perspectives, something that the scope of this research does not allow for. It is however important that the researcher acknowledges the existence of these essentialist and social constructionist views of culture that in turn reflect on the concept of intercultural communication.

Despite being both a Finnish and English speaker, addressing the topic of the Finnish Welfare System in English was to some extent challenging. Although I relied mostly on translating terms according to English translations of the Finnish Welfare Act or THL websites, I still struggled with finding satisfyingly adequate translations for certain words. I also had trouble finding the appropriate uses for the terms “Child Welfare” and “Child Protection” both of which are one term in Finnish, “lastensuojelu”. Pösö (2014) draws attention to the fact that “[t]he major challenges in such academic communication are in the translation process to find the ‘right’ and ‘fair’ English terms and expressions to address something that originally does not exist in the English language.” (p. 617). The author draws attention to problematic translations within the English translation of the Finnish Welfare Act and the complexity of the translation process in the Social Work field in general and Child Welfare in particular.

5.3.2 Evaluation

The process of getting workers at the facility to accept being interviewed took weeks since there was an overwhelming hesitation from the workers. Many later stated that after hearing the topic of the research, they felt like they had nothing to contribute to the topic. This quickly proved to be an inaccurate assumption. The number of interviews by the end was, in my estimation, adequate considering the size of the study at hand. Although initially preliminary, my research questions have not changed since the drafting of my research plan.

The scope of the research questions relying on the experiences of the workers at the family unit with communicating with non-Finnish-speaking clients was achieved with broad open-ended questions specifically about this said experience. Concerning thesis supervision, I believe I relied too much on myself at the beginning of the process since I have never really been good at requesting feedback for my writing. In retrospect, I should have been more proactive in requesting meetings with my thesis supervisor. This did however change by the end of the research process. I was able to

request feedback and assistance when I needed it, which helped guide the research in the direction I was aiming for but had trouble reaching.

The findings of this study resonate with other studies conducted in other countries, which have also considered communication between immigrants and workers in Child Welfare. However, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on social counselors working and interacting around-the-clock with non-Finnish-speaking clients as opposed to social workers who usually have limited interactions with clients due to their workload and limited time and resources. This aspect gives insight into the creativity workers have to adapt to ensure communication on mundane daily matters in addition to important assessment-related communication.

5.3.3 Future Research

Regardless of its limitations, this research can potentially benefit future research in the fields of Child Welfare in Finland and also in the Social Work sector where non-Finnish-speaking clients are increasingly prevalent. Understanding how linguistically and culturally diverse clients affect the work of social workers and counselors in the social field can help further develop both training and increase resources for the workers to permit them to accommodate the different needs of clients. This study could also help structure the use of interpreters and increase the standard required for becoming a public service interpreter. Using the experiences of the workers at the family unit could help policymakers adjust the study requirement for students in the social sciences and add focus on intercultural competence skill development. These potential developments benefit both workers and clients and subsequently society as a whole and potentially future academic work in the field.

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