

THE N-BOMB:
A study of attitudes towards English and Finnish terms
that refer to black people

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA
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Sanoilla on kahdenlaista merkitystä: konnotatiivinen ja konseptuaalinen. Tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään ensimmäiseen. Konnotatiivinen merkitys tarkoittaa niitä asioita, jotka assosioidaan sanoihin. Esimerkiksi, henkilö saattaa assosioida kipua sanaan ”piikki”. Konnotaatiot ovat pragmaattisia. Ne tulevat esiin sanan merkityksen sanakirjatietämyksen lisäksi myös kokemuksista, uskomuksista sekä ennakkoluuloista kontekstia kohtaan, missä termi yleensä ilmenee. Joskus väärinymmärrykset johtavat siihen, että sanaa käytetään väärin.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, minkälaisia konnotaatioita ihmiset liittävät tummaihoisiin ihmisiin viittaaviin sanoihin. Tätä varten on valittu 10 sanaa, joista 5 on englanninkielisiä ja 5 suomenkielisiä. Tarkoituksena on ollut selvittää, kuinka loukkaavina ihmiset pitävät kutakin termiä. Näiden tulosten perusteella on haluttu nähdä, mikäli näiden kahden kielen sanoilla on asenteellisia eroja. Lisäksi on haluttu selvittää, missä koehenkilöt ovat kohdanneet kyseiset termit.

Koehenkilöt ovat lukion abiturientteja. He ovat täysi-ikäisiä ja kaikki puhuvat suomea äidinkielenään. Englanti on heille vieras kieli. Testiin osallistui kaikkiaan 33 opiskelijaa, joista 5 oli miehiä ja 26 naista. 2 henkilöä ei ilmoittanut sukupuoltaan.

Aineisto kerättiin kyselylomakkeella, jossa oli kaksi kohtaa. Ensimmäisessä kohdassa koehenkilöiden tuli arvioida sanojen loukkaavuutta ja toisessa valita konteksti, missä on kyseiset sanat kuullut. Tämä aineiston keräysmetodi valittiin sen vuoksi, että saataisiin mahdollisimman luotettavaa tietoa varmistamalla henkilöiden anonymiteetti.

Saatuja tuloksia verrattiin sanakirjojen tarjoamiin määritelmiin sanoista. Kerätyn aineiston perusteella suurin osa koehenkilöistä oli tietoisia sanojen merkityksistä ja konnotaatioista. Suomen ja englannin kielen välillä ei ollut merkittäviä eroja. Merkittävät erot olivat konteksteissa. Vastaajien mukaan englanninkielisiä termejä kuuli enemmän eri medioissa, kuten televisiossa, musiikissa ja konsolipeleissä, kuin suomenkielisiä. Jälkimmäiset olivat yleisempiä julkisilla paikoilla ja ystävien tai perheenjäsenten käyttämänä.

Pienen otannan vuoksi tuloksia ei voi yleistää. Tosin tämä tutkimus tarjoaa kehyksen, mikä auttaa tulevia tutkimuksia tutkimaan konnotaatiota eri sanojen kohdalla.

Asiasanat: connotations, racist, attitudes

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1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Western world emphasises political correctness. Changes in the use and connotations of words have happened in such a fast pace that some people have not been able to keep up with them. Some have accepted these changes while others have opposed them. How come a word that was commonplace before is now considered inappropriate and even racist? The only answer to that is that times and attitudes change. Science has abandoned the idea of race yet it is still alive in peoples' minds as are the related terms. This often leads to unintended conflicts between people from different groups further increasing the gap between them. People need to realize that words reflect a person's ideas and attitudes. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the connotations before using a word.

The goal of this study is to establish the attitudes of a group of high school seniors towards different Finnish and English terms that refer to black people. The three main research questions are:

- 1) What are peoples' attitudes towards different terms that refer to black people?
- 2) Do attitudes differ between English and Finnish terms?
- 3) Where do people encounter these terms?

The answers to these questions were gathered from 33 high school seniors in the form of a questionnaire. The results are quantitatively analysed and reported. The reason for conducting a study like this is to establish how the selected terms are used and what kind of connotations they have.

The relevance of this study is that it explores peoples' attitudes. Finland is becoming more diverse which means that certain issues need to be addressed. The meaning and connotations of words are part of that. Some terms have an emotional effect on people and there needs to be an open discussion on them.

There are not many studies conducted on the attitudes towards Finnish and English words that refer to black people. Rather, they focus on one particular term like *neekeri* or *nigger*. In this paper these two words are studied in more depth than the other terms. This is because the other terms are derived from the two in their respected languages. In addition, *neekeri* and *nigger* are both powerful words in Finnish and English speaking societies.

2. CONNOTATIVE MEANING

The meaning and use of some words change in time. What is now a common and acceptable term could become old-fashioned and unacceptable surprisingly fast. Not all people are aware of these changes due to the fact that they do not use the word actively or it appears in an unfamiliar context. It is important to discuss these changes openly in order to reach a consensus on the proper use. For example, terms like *gay* and *queer* have other meanings besides noting homosexuality. Racial terms like *nigger* do not have nor had any other meaning besides noting the inferiority of black people (Asim, 2007:215).

Words have two types of meaning: conceptual and associative. When linguists talk about conceptual meaning they refer to the literal meaning of a word. Associative meaning, on the other hand, concentrates on the associations or connotations related to a word (Yule, 2004:114). In addition, Allan (2006:1047) explains that connotations of an expression are pragmatic that arise from encyclopedic knowledge about its meaning and also from experiences, beliefs and prejudices about the context in which the expression is typically used. For example, some people might associate pain with the word needle. In some cases the experience of hearing a word in certain context might be misleading to the hearer. These misconceptions can lead to improper uses of a word. Allan (2006) discusses this as follows:

Connotation is intimately involved with notions of appropriateness in language use; i.e. with pragmatic effect. For instance, racist dysphemisms occur when a speaker refers to or implicates the hearer or some third person's race, ethnicity, or nationality in such terms as to cause a face affront. Many such 'racist' terms can be disarmed by being used, without irony, as in-group solidarity markers by the targeted group; e.g. the use of *nigger/nigga* among African Americans. The negative connotations of some existing word often lead to its replacement (Allan, K, 2006, 1047).

There is no previous study done on this topic which concentrated on the same terms. However, it is important to note that studies concerning the English term *nigger* and the Finnish *neekeri* have been conducted. Some of the studies, like Rastas' (2007), concentrate on how the word is perceived in society by different groups of people. Asim studied the history and social effects of the term *nigger* in his book *The N-Word* (2007).

In his book, *The N-Word*, Asim (2007) discusses the same empowering effect as Allan (2006). Here is Asim quoting the American rapper Mos Def: "It's an act of empowerment. When we call

eachother 'nigga', we take a word that has been historically used by whites to degrade and oppress us [Black Americans], a word that has so many negative connotations, and turn it into something beautiful, something we can call our own. I know it sounds cliché, but it truly becomes a 'term of endearment'" (Asim, 2007:224). Both authors state that the way to depower racist terms is to empower one's self by using them in a positive context.

Events in Western history such as Colonialism have influenced the connotations of race related words. These words have been used to create and maintain an idea of white supremacy and black inferiority. Even though Finland was not a colonial power, information about colonized cultures and peoples reached its shores. For example, the Finnish term *neekeri* was first introduced in written Finnish in the 1800s. Through texts some Finns had the possibility to learn about the distant Africans. Those being depicted were slaves shipped to America or somewhere else in the 'West' from Africa. An 1860 encyclopaedia translated from German into Finnish condemned slavery in foreign countries. However, it depicted African black people as the unhappiest, living in naturalistic simplicity, strong, some tribes are able to do crafts. In addition, its description of black people is for the most part a complete opposite of the Western ideals of beauty. (Rastas, 2007:127). Both Rastas (2007) and Asim (2007) mention that in terms of character blacks were depicted as childlike but cruel.

The Finnish term *neekeri* has been considered controversial for some time in Finland. Some consider it offensive while others feel that there is nothing racist about it. In fact, they consider it to be neutral. According to Rastas (2007:129), it is impossible for the word to be neutral given its history. For the most part of its long history the word has had negative connotations. When it is not used to refer to black people it connotes social exclusion, poor quality or cheapness. Moreover, the examples given in the definition of the word *neekeri* show how the term connotes unpopular professions like magazine subscription salesperson or busboy (Tammi, 2003).

One way of explaining why some feel that the term *neekeri* is neutral is because they have trouble relating to the effect the word has. Finland has been predominantly white throughout its history. In the past twenty to thirty years Finland has become more diverse ethnically speaking. This kind of change in a fairly short period of time is an adjustment for all.

In her study, Rastas (2007:132) describes a new way of using the term *neekeri*. She has documented writings in which the term is used by racist, ignorant or less civilized people. The writers of these texts are not necessarily making a personal statement but rather showing how this word tells more about the user itself than the group of people it refers to. This is a more critical approach to the use of *neekeri*. She adds that it is up to the reader to distinguish this type of criticism employed by the writers. Rastas (ibid) calls the modern use of *neekeri* as ”juntin leima” (the mark of a hick). She explains that it can also be used in an anti-racist manner by the people it refers to. However, the user has to be certain that s/he does it in the right place.

Latomaa (2002:14) states that instead of being a linguistic problem, the use of the term *neekeri* is actually a political and social problem. She goes on explaining how in the past the term was used to note race and racial qualities, and even though modern science has abandoned the idea of race, the notion is still embedded in peoples’ minds.

It seems that both the English *nigger* and Finnish *neekeri* have come to be used as weapons of sort against racism. *Nigger* has an empowering effect while *neekeri* is used critically and in an anti-racist fashion. However, one should not over generalize and conclude that these uses are understood by every one. Misunderstandings are bound to occur. Rastas (2007:132) raises the question if this new use is harmless. In the US many have not fully understood who can use the n-word and why. One example of this was an American teacher who called his student *nigga* and then told the media that he thought it was comparable to colloquial terms like *dude* or *man* (Youtube, 2006). In Finland a teacher was sentenced to pay fines for calling a student *neekeri*. He claimed that he intention was not to offend the student (Keskisuomalainen, 1998).

2.1. The selected terms

This study concentrates on a total of ten terms that refer to black people. Five of these words are in Finnish and the other five in English. The selected dictionaries, *Oxford English Dictionary* (2008) and *Suuri solvaussanakirja* (Tammi, 2003), provide the definitions for each term. The reason for choosing these 10 words is that 8 of them are quite common in their respected languages while two are rarer. In Finnish the four most common terms are *musta*, *neekeri*, *nekru* and *mutiainen*. The

rarest of the Finnish terms is *neku*. In English the 4 most common words are *black*, *negro*, *nigga* and *nigger*. *Darkie* is the rarest of the group. The reason for choosing rarer words is to see whether the participants are familiar with them and their connotations or not.

The terms presented and studied in this paper range from common to rare. For example, the English term *darkie* is considered to be old fashion and thus probably unfamiliar to most native Finnish speakers. From what was gathered before collecting the data, the Finnish term *neku* is not that common either. Although it is not the main focus of this study it is interesting to see if contemporary high school seniors are familiar with the rarer words.

2.1.1 The English words

Oxford English Dictionary (2008) provides the definitions for the English terms featured in this study. The OED web page contains definitions for all of the selected English terms except for *darkie*. In addition, as a source it is reliable. The following list contains the terms and their definitions (OED, 2008).

Negro - "A member of a dark-skinned group of peoples originally native to sub-Saharan Africa; a person of black African origin or descent. In early use also applied to other dark-skinned peoples, esp. Moors." According to the etymology of the word, it was replaced by the term *black* in the 1960s to express racial pride. Currently it is considered to be out of date or even offensive in both British and American English.

Black - "Black man or woman. **a.** A person of 'black' skin; an African Negro, or Australasian Negrito, or other member of a dark-skinned race. In this sense it appears to be a translation of *Negro*, which was in earlier use."

Nigger - "A dark-skinned person of sub-Saharan African origin or descent; = NEGRO." According to the Oxford English Dictionary, this term is strongly racially offensive when used by whites to refer to black people. However, the term does not have the same negative connotations in written Black English and written representations of spoken Black English.

Darkie – A Black, esp. a Southern U.S. Black (usu. considered patronizing or mildly offensive).

Nigga – See *Nigger*.

2.1.2 The Finnish words

Suuri solvaussanakirja by Tammi (2003) provides this study with definitions for the four Finnish words. The reason for choosing this particular is because it contains definitions for both formal and colloquial terms. However, it is important to mention that the book only contains definitions for offensive words. Therefore, the fifth Finnish term *musta* (black) is not included in the book. Tammi (ibid) defines the four Finnish terms as follows:

Neekeri – Racist. A very dark skinned person of the negro race, dark skinned, black, African, Somalian; Humorous. A magazine subscription vendor; Military. A man whose task is to sit next to the supervisor and to fetch food and carry out the dirty dishes. (“Ras. negridiseen rotuun kuuluva hyvin tumma ihminen, mustaihoinen, musta, afrikkalainen, Somali; leik. lehtimies; sot.; esimiehen vieressä istuva mies, jonka tehtävänä on noutaa ruokaa ja kantaa likaiset astiat pois.”)

Neku – Racist. Neekeri, dark skinned, colored, person of African descent, Somalian, a refugee. (“Ras. neekeri, mustaihoinen, värillinen, afrikkalaisperäinen, somali, pakolainen.”)

Nekru – Racist. Dark skinned, colored. (“Ras. tummaihoisen, värillinen”)

Mutiainen – Racist. Neekeri, mulato, Somalian, African, a dark-skinned person; Gipsy; a refugee. (“Ras. neekeri, mulatti, somali, afrikkalainen, tummaihoisen ihminen; mustaihoinen; pakolainen.”)

Musta – Black.

The goal was to select words which would have a similar translation in both Finnish and English. For example, *neekeri* and *nigger* have similar connotations in their respected languages. This makes the analysis more meaningful as it clearly shows if there are any differences in attitude between the two languages. The method of study is discussed in detail in the next section.

3. METHOD OF STUDY

The data for this study was collected by using a questionnaire. This mode of collecting data was chosen due to the topic of the study. Face-to-face interviews could have been threatening to some thus compromising the reliability of the data. The fear of being labelled a racist could have caused some to change their answers in order to appear more politically correct. In addition, the questionnaire made it possible for the participants to remain nameless. This further ensured the

reliability of the data. In addition, the form was written in Finnish to further ensure that all the students understood what was required in each part. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect data concerning the level of offensiveness and the source/sources for each term.

3.1. The questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two parts (Appendix 1.). In the first part the participants had to evaluate the level of offensiveness based on their own opinion. There are ten words of which half are in Finnish and the other half in English. The scale ranges as follows: Very Offensive (Erittäin loukkaava), Somewhat Offensive (Jossain määrin loukkaava), Depends on the User (Riippuu käyttäjästä), Neutral (Neutraali), Cannot Say (En osaa sanoa), I have not heard the term (En ole kuullut termiä). The participants were instructed to check only one box per term.

In the second part the participants were asked to name where they have encountered the terms. In order to narrow down the number of sources this part provides 6 options to choose from. The participants were allowed to check as many sources as they wanted. The following sources are represented in the second part: Television/Films (Televisio/Elokuvat), Music (Musiikki), Games (Pelit), Public Places (Julkisella paikalla), Family/Friends (Perhe/Ystävät), I have not heard anyone use it (En ole kuullut käytettävän). The source Games (Pelit) refers to computer and console games.

3.2 Participants

The participants were Finnish high school seniors who were of age according to Finnish law. There are two reasons for choosing this group: age and knowledge. Since some of the words are considered offensive it is likely that the adults will not start using them without giving some thought to the consequences that might follow. In addition, at that stage in their studies they have learned about different cultures and studied different languages so that they could be assumed to properly evaluate the level of offensiveness for each word.

All of participants spoke Finnish as their native language. In addition, English was a foreign language to them. Therefore, it is important to note that the results are biased in favour of the Finnish

terms. The participants' knowledge of the English terms and their use is highly dependent on the context in which they appear.

The data was collected from 33 students 5 of which were male and 26 were female. 2 participants failed to mention their gender. However, since gender is not that significant of a factor their answers were not discarded. The reason for asking the sex of the participant is that it might give information whether there is a difference in attitudes between males and females.

The survey was conducted at participants' high school. They were given 15 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. Before taking the questionnaire the participants were told 3 important things concerning it. First, they were told about their right to not participate if they so chose. Every one decided to take part in the study with the exception of one student who was under aged. Secondly, the author stressed that the point of this study was not to categorize people as racist. The main emphasis was on the connotations of the words. Thirdly, instructions were given on how to fill in the questionnaire. Both groups were informed of these 3 things before answering the questionnaire.

4. HYPOTHESIS

It is expected that the majority of participants' encyclopaedic knowledge of the Finnish terms does not differ from the given definitions. However, the term *neku* is possibly not a familiar term to some of the participants. In my view it might be more common in other areas in Finland besides Tampere. I base this assumption on personal experience. I have mainly heard people from outside of Tampere use it. The English terms, on the other hand, might provide different results. The participants' knowledge of these words and their use is likely to be limited since it is a foreign language to most.

Since English is a lingua franca it is used in most mainstream video games, for example. With this in mind, it is likely that more participants have heard the English terms being used in a game than the Finnish ones. However, public places, friends and family will likely be more common answers when naming the sources for the Finnish terms.

5. FINDINGS

In this section of the study the results of the questionnaire are presented. First the Finnish words and connotations are studied and then the English ones. The reason for separating the two languages is that it is simpler to look at the results as well as to compare them.

First the results of the questionnaire are compared to the definitions given by the selected dictionaries. This way the differences between the participants' encyclopaedic and pragmatic knowledge can be established. Second, the results of both Finnish and English terms are compared to see if there are any differences. Even though the participants are likely to be more familiar with the Finnish terms some of the English words are quite frequently used in the different kinds of media. For instance, the terms *black*, *nigger*, *nigga* and even *negro* are used in music, television and video games.

After studying and comparing the data concerning the attitudes towards the selected words the sources for them are introduced and studied. The number of sources is limited in the questionnaire in order to obtain more cohesive data.

5.1. The results of the English words

Table 1. The English words

Termi	Erittäin loukkaava	Jossain määrin loukkaava	Riippuu käyttäjästä	Neutraali	En osaa sanoa	En ole kuullut termiä
Black	-	2	10	21	-	-
Negro	2	12	5	2	4	7
Nigga	6	6	11	1	3	5
Darkie	3	6	1	1	3	19
Nigger	15	6	8	-	2	1

According to the participants, the most neutral term in the group was *black*. 21 participants described it as 'neutral', 10 as 'depends on the user' and 2 as 'somewhat offensive'.

The term *negro* was described as somewhat offensive by most of the participants (12). Only two marked it as extremely offensive, 5 as depends on the user, 2 as neutral, 4 could not say and 7 had not heard the term.

In the case of the term *nigga* most participants (11/33) felt that the level of offensiveness depends on the user. Six participants marked it as being ‘extremely offensive’ and another six as ‘somewhat offensive’. One felt that it was neutral while three could not say. There were a total of five participants who had not heard the term.

The majority of the participants (19/33) had not heard the term *darkie*. However, three described it as ‘extremely offensive’, six as ‘somewhat offensive’, 1 felt that it depends on the user and 3 could not say.

Nigger is described as ‘extremely offensive’ by fifteen participants which represents the majority. Six considered the term as ‘somewhat offensive’. Eight participants felt that the level of offensiveness depends on who uses it. None considered it to be neutral. Two participants could not say while one had not heard the term.

5.2. The results of the Finnish words

Table 2. The Finnish words

Termi	Erittäin loukkaava	Jossain määrin loukkaava	Riippuu käyttäjästä	Neutraali	En osaa sanoa	En ole kuullut termiä
Neekeri	21	6	6	-	-	-
Nekru	20	10	3	-	-	-
Musta	-	1	5	25	1	-
Neku	10	8	2	-	1	12
Mutiainen	30	1	-	-	-	2

The term *neekeri* was described as extremely offensive by over half of the participants (21/33). Six people considered it as somewhat offensive while another six felt that its level of offensiveness depends on the user. The term was not described as neutral. All of the participants were familiar with the word and had an opinion of it.

The majority of participants categorized *nekru* as extremely offensive (20/33). Ten described it as somewhat offensive while three felt that it depends on the user. No one felt that the term in question is neutral. In addition, all were familiar with the word and had an opinion of it.

The term *musta* was mostly categorized as ‘neutral’ (25). One considered it to be ‘somewhat offensive’ and one could not say. 5 participants felt that its level of offensiveness depends on the user. One person’s answer was discarded due to the fact that s/he gave two answers when only one was required.

Ten participants categorized *neku* as ‘very offensive’, 8 as ‘somewhat offensive’ and 2 as ‘depends on the user’. One could not say while 12 had not heard the term.

Mutiainen is categorized as being extremely offensive by thirty participants. One describes it as somewhat offensive and two are not familiar with it.

5.3. Sources

The sources given in the questionnaire were narrowed down to five because it supplied a more cohesive result. Four out five of the selected sources represented the most common forms of media. ‘Family/Friends’ is not a form of media but people in both groups have an effect on a person thus making it an interesting subject of study. However, the internet was not included in the list since it allows more anonymity to its users than any other form of media. This in turn makes it possible to express more explicitly ones views.

5.3.1. The English sources

Table 3. The sources for the English words

Termi	Televisio/elokuvat	Musiikki	Pelit	Julkisella paikalla	Perhe/ystävät	En ole kuullut käytettävän
Black	29	24	11	10	7	1
Negro	19	7	2	3	-	12
Nigga	21	20	11	8	3	10
Darkie	4	1	-	-	-	28
Nigger	31	20	14	12	5	1

The two most common sources for the term *black* were television/movies and music. Television/movies were named as a source by 29 participants, while the number for music was 24. 11 had heard the term in a game. Surprisingly, 10 participants had heard it in a public place. 7 had heard a friend or a family member use the term. There was only one who had not heard the term being used in any context.

The term *negro* was reportedly most commonly heard on television or in movies (19/33). Seven participants had heard the term in a song. 2 participants had encountered the word in a game. 3 people had heard the term being used in a public place while none had heard a friend or a family member use it. There were 12 participants who had not encountered the word *negro* in any context.

21 participants had heard the *nigga* on television or in movies. There was not much difference between television/movies and music. 20 persons named music as a source. 11 people had heard the term in a video game. 8 participants had encountered it in a public place and 3 marked family/friends as a source. Surprisingly, 10 people had not heard the term being used.

Darkie had only been encountered by a total of 5 participants. 4 had heard the term on television or in a movie. There was one person who had heard it in a song. 28 participants had not heard the term being used anywhere.

Almost all of the participants had heard the term *nigger* on television or in a movie (30/33). The number of participants who had encountered the word in a song was 20. 14 marked games as a source. Public places were marked by 12 people and 5 had family members or friends who had used the term. Only one participant had not encountered the word in any context.

5.3.2. The Finnish sources

Table 4. The sources for the Finnish words

Termi	Televisio/elokuvat	Musiikki	Pelit	Julkisella paikalla	Perhe/ystävät	En ole kuullut käytettävän
Neekeri	27	19	3	30	22	-
Nekru	21	4	1	20	9	5
Musta	26	14	1	24	25	1
Neku	1	1	-	4	2	25
Mutiainen	10	3	1	19	12	5

According to the data, 27 participants had heard the term *neekeri* used on television or in movies. 19 participants, on the other hand, reported to have heard it in music. Only 3 persons marked video games as a source. 30 people had heard the term being used in a public place, whereas, 22 reported hearing a family member or a friend say it. All of the participants had heard the term being used in some context.

21 participants reported having heard the term *nekru* being used on television or in movies. Only 4 people had heard the word in music. There was one person who had encountered the term in a game. 20 had heard it in a public place and 9 reported having heard a family member or a friend use it. 5 participants had never heard any one use the term.

The term *musta* had been heard by 26 participants on television or in movies. 14 reported having heard it in a song. One person had encountered it in a game. 24 people had heard it being used in a public place while 25 had heard a family member or a friend use it. One participant had not heard the term being used in any context.

The data on *neku* differed from that of the previous words. Only one participant had heard it on television or in movies. Only one person marked music as a source. No one had heard it being used in a game. Public places were mentioned by 4 participants, and family and friends by 2. The majority of participants (25/33) had not heard the term in any context.

The term *mutiainen* had been heard on television or in movies by 10 participants. 3 marked music as a source. One person had heard it being used in a game. 19 participants reported having heard it in a public place. Family and friends were marked as a source by 12 people. 5 participants had not heard the term being used.

6. DISCUSSION

Over half of the participants described the term *black* as neutral. This result is not surprising since the term has been widely used in different types of media. This result supports Alan's (2006) definition of connotations and how experiences affect them. Positive and correct use of the word has affected the way people feel about it.

The majority of participants were unfamiliar with the term *darkie*. This might be due to the fact that it is an old term and out of date. It is possible that some of the respondents may have encountered it or just ventured a guess on the level of offensiveness based on the form.

Even though the participants are likely to have more pragmatic and encyclopaedic knowledge of the Finnish terms, the collected data does not reflect this fact. The overall opinion is in accordance with the definitions of each term. The data suggests that in the case of *nigga* most of the respondents could be aware of the empowering effect of the word. This is reflected by the fact that the majority claim that the level of offensiveness depends on the user. This might be partly due to the wide social discussion concerning the term in the United States. In addition, the issue has been brought up in various movies and lyrics.

The overall results of the English words were not surprising for the most part. The terms *black*, *nigga* and *nigger* are the most common words in every category besides the last one, 'I have not encountered the term'. These three words are connected in terms of political correctness and modern media. *Black* is considered to be the most appropriate term of the three, for example, *Black American*. *Nigger* and *nigga*, though offensive, have an empowering effect as well. Both terms are common in hip hop and rap lyrics.

The data collected on the Finnish terms does not contain surprising results. Mostly the participants' descriptions reflected those of the source material. This might be largely due to the air of political correctness in Finnish society.

While there is some controversy on the level of offensiveness of the term *neekeri*, most of the participants considered it as very offensive. There were some who reported that it depends on the user. This result could reflect Rastas' (2007:132) theory of the anti-racist use of the term by the very group it refers to.

The fact that most of the participants were not familiar with the word *neku* is not surprising. It is possible that the term is more common in some parts of Finland other than Tampere. On the other hand, it is possible that the word is out of date.

It is surprising that this many participants had heard every Finnish term except *neku* being used in a game. All of the words had been heard in song by the participants. The difference between music and games is that before the 1990's artists could use terms like *neekeri* without the fear of being labelled a racist. However, nowadays if a song or game contains a racially offensive word it will likely receive the 'mark of the hick' (Rastas, 2007:132). Therefore, it is likely that the games the participants referred to are made by amateur game developers for free use and download.

Age is a possible factor in terms of language and vocabulary. For example, the English words that the participants had heard a family member, a friend or someone in a public place use were possibly used by young people age 10 to 30. A possible explanation for this is the significant rise of the number of sources for English in the two or three decades. While both young and old have had equal access to these sources, the younger generations are likely to be more interested in them. To some the use of English terms is considered fashionable and cool. However, one cannot make the same assumption about the users of the Finnish terms. Even though the older generations might be more liberal in their approach to some Finnish words like *neekeri*, it still does not make them the only possible group who uses them.

In comparison with the Finnish terms, the English ones scored the highest in television/movies, music and games. This was to be expected due to the fact that American television programs and movies are in abundance in Finland. In terms of music American hip hop and rap artists are quite popular in Finland. In addition, most games are in English even if they were made by a Finnish developer. However, the Finnish terms scored the highest in terms having heard the term being used by a family member or a friend, or someone in a public place. This is not surprising considering that the participants live in Finland.

As was expected, *neku* and *darkie* are unfamiliar to most of the respondents. Possible regional factors may contribute to this in the case of *neku*. *Darkie*, on the other hand, is considered as being out-of-date thus increasing the chance of being unfamiliar to foreign speakers of English.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

Since this paper is a Bachelor's thesis, the range and depth of it is limited. Therefore, the number of participants and geographical location had to be limited also. The 33 respondents who participated in this study provide an idea of the current attitudes towards different racial terms in Finland. In order to obtain a more thorough result a larger study is required. This would require data collection from people from different parts of Finland. In addition, the participants in this study are high school seniors. Possible future studies could include a more diverse age group with different backgrounds. However, it is my personal opinion that people under 16 years of age should not be included in these studies. The reason for this is that people under 16 years might not have sufficient knowledge of the terms. Moreover, they could even learn new words with little idea of the proper use and context. People who are of age according to Finnish law should have a mature sense of how and when to use sensitive and possibly offensive terms.

The selected terms that are studied in this paper refer to black people. Perhaps future studies could concentrate on terms that refer to other groups as well. However, it is important note that some of the Finnish terms are used to refer to immigrants in general.

While the main focus of this study is not on whether descriptions differ between sexes or not, the respondents were asked to state their gender. Out of the 33 participants there are 5 males and 26 females. Two failed to mark their gender on the questionnaire. However, the significant difference in number between male and female participants does not supply any meaningful data. The difference in attitude between genders could be studied in more depth. This would require that the number of male and female participants to be in proportion.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper studied Finnish and English terms that relate to black people. In addition, this study has answered all three of the established research questions. The collected data suggests that the majority of the participants – 33 Finnish high school seniors – have sufficient knowledge of the connotations of the words represented in this paper. There was no significant difference in attitudes between Finnish and English terms and their connotations. However, the sources for these words differed. According to the data, the Finnish words were mostly encountered in a public place or being used by a family member or a friend. On the other hand, different forms of media were most commonly reported as sources for the English words.

In conclusion, it is the author's view that no generalisations can be made based on the collected data. For one, the number of participants is too small as is their geographic location. However, this paper is mainly a tool and framework for larger future studies on related topics.

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10. APPENDIX 1. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Kysely

Mies Nainen

1. Arvioi kuinka loukkaava kukin termi mielestäsi on.

Termi	Erittäin loukkaava	Jossain määrin loukkaava	Riippuu käyttäjästä	Neutraali	En osaa sanoa	En ole kuullut termiä
Neekeri						
Black						
Nekru						
Negro						
Musta						
Nigga						
Neku						
Darkie						
Mutiainen						
Nigger						

2. Missä yhteydessä olet kuullut kutakin termiä käytettävän?

Termi	Televisio/elokuvat	Musiikki	Pelit	Julkisella paikalla	Perhe/ystävät	En ole kuullut käytettävän
Neekeri						
Black						
Nekru						
Negro						
Musta						
Nigga						
Neku						
Darkie						
Mutiainen						
Nigger						