

THEN AND NOW: LANGUAGE, ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY, AND THE FINNS OF  
LAKE WORTH AND LANTANA, FLORIDA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION .....	4
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	
LANGUAGE TRANSMISSION .....	6
FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICY .....	8
LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE .....	11
ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY .....	12
Status.....	15
Demographics .....	16
Institutional Support.....	17
ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE .....	18
CRITICISM OF ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY THEORY .....	19
ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY AND THE FLORIDIAN FINNS	
Status and Institutional Support .....	21
Demographics .....	23
3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	24
4. METHODOLOGY .....	25
5. FINDINGS.....	31
Reflections on Lake Worth and Lantana’s Finnish Community in 2018 .....	31
Where Does Your Loyalty Lie: Then and Now .....	33
Travel Between the U.S. and Finland: Then and Now .....	36
Perceptions of Language Proficiency .....	37
Language Policy and Practice: If You Don’t Use It, You Lose It .....	40
Finnish Education and Literacy .....	47
Perceptions of Finns and Cultural Identity .....	49
6. DISCUSSION.....	50
7. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION.....	59
8. REFERENCES .....	62

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study looks at the language ability of ethnically Finnish adults who live in South Florida and have spoken Finnish as children. All have Finnish-speaking parents, and all grew up in the respectively the same area—the Palm Beach County area of Florida, mainly in the sister towns of Lake Worth and Lantana, which was a major point of settlement for Finnish immigrants from the 1950s to the 1980s (Spiegel, 2016). The study aims to retrospectively look at the development of the Finnish and English languages in people from these areas, as well as at how the ethnolinguistic vitality of the South Floridian Finnish community has influenced their Finnish language maintenance. The community in which someone lives is also highly influential in determining what language one speaks, the manner in which it is spoken, and even the way these languages are perceived (Zhang, 2010). The question is: now as adults, to what level has the Finnish language been maintained and most importantly, why? How has the surrounding Finnish community influenced their language ability?

This is an important study because only one-fourth of second-generation US immigrants are considered to be fluent in their heritage language, i.e. able to speak, comprehend, read, and write the native language of their parents. Of the other three-fourths, English becomes the dominant language by the time they graduate from high school (Verdon et. al 2013).

However, the benefits of gaining and maintaining a heritage language are tremendous and recognized. On a national level, large numbers of people able to communicate in two or more languages is a significant economic and commercial gain (Sohrabi 1997), and on a personal level, benefits include, but are not limited to, cognitive skills such as metalinguistic awareness and capabilities, working memory, attention, a heightened skill in abstract and symbolic

representation, mathematics, and an increased performance in “executive functioning tasks” (Adestope et al., 2010; McLeod et al., 2013; Bialystok, 2011; Gathercole et al., 2010).

Language transmission is when a language is passed down in a family setting from one generation to the next—i.e. from parents to children. Language maintenance, then, is the preservation and development of the transmitted language into the teenage and young adult years. These two concepts have been explored extensively among many people groups; however, there is a gap in this research among the Finns and Finnish Swedes of Florida, a large number of which immigrated between 1960 and 1980 and now have adult children and perhaps even grandchildren (Kultalahti 1989).

Finns are not strangers to the United States, the first major wave of immigrants from Finland to the US coming in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of which traveled to live in climates similar to Finland, such as Michigan and Minnesota. Some, however, went to Florida.

Though the reason for the migration is unclear, as are the years of migration—some say that the Finns began to arrive in Florida in the 1920s, others say that there was a large influx in the 1960s and 70s—there are several theories, and perhaps all are true.

Some theorize that the reason for immigration was that the Finns came to wait on the New York socialites that vacationed in Palm Beach. One theory speculates that the Finnish copper miners in the Great Lakes areas moved to South Florida for the warmer weather. Another says that Finns migrated to South Florida as railroad workers in the early 1900s (Tzortzsis 1999).

Nevertheless, the immigrants and snowbirds (local jargon for people who winter in Florida and then return to their prospective Northern homes for the rest of the year) began buying property, settling in Lake Worth and Lantana, and Little Finland emerged (Tzortzsis 1999). By the 1960s

and '70s, the middle-class neighborhoods in Lake Worth, a city in the southern part of the sunny state of Florida were "dominated by a lot of Finnish people," many of whom established businesses and acquired jobs within their communities (Hafenbrack, 2005), the population swelling to around 20,000 (Boccio, 1988). The Palm Beach County area was cited to have the largest Finnish population outside of Scandinavia at that time (Hafenbrack, 2005).

The research looks at this immigration period because this is when the people being interviewed grew up, and as the research is largely retrospective, of memories and recollections, it is important to give evidence of records from that time. However, interestingly enough, there was not a lot of public records of South Florida's Finnish population after about 2000, so the public presence of the Finns has decreased.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### **Language Transmission**

According to the University of Iowa's Jason Rothman (2009), "A language qualifies as a heritage language if it is a language spoken at home or otherwise readily available to young children, and crucially this language is not a dominant language of the larger (national) society." It refers to actual language ability, not merely the feeling of identification to a particular culture (Rothman, 2009). Many factors play into what causes people to maintain their heritage language. One, of course, is language transmission—the transfer of a heritage language from parents to children in the home.

A benefit of language transmission was observed by Morales (2005), who noted, for example, that second generation children can function as language brokers and translators for migrant families when the first generation has not adequately acquired the national country's language. Children being able to speak and communicate in the language of aunts, uncles, and grandparents also creates for the possibility of a close-knit family. On a wider scale, the ability to speak the heritage language also strengthens community ties between families of similar background (Tannenbaum and Howie 2002; Ward and Hewstone 1985).

The shift or attrition of a language within a generation creates a divide in family communication, weakening ties between generations (between grandparents and grandchildren or even parents and children), making it difficult to discipline, communicate, and/or even form a close relationship between them, which is why the transmission of a language between generations is so important (Wong Fillmore 200; Portes and Hao 1998). For many that are not fluent in their parent's language, poor self-esteem and feelings of embarrassment regarding their heritage culture are prevalent, most likely influenced by the generally negative approach towards immigration and the speaking of other languages in the United States (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). The concept is circular. Parents and grandparents are such important and influential ingroup members in the lives of their children. Thus, children with close relationships with their family are more likely to perceive the language in the manner their parents do and be more likely to maintain the language (Luo and Wiseman 2000). Language transmission and maintenance with even one heritage language speaking parent is possible if the parent is consistent in communicating to the children in the heritage language (DeCapua, Wintergerst, 2009).

### **Family Language Policy**

This is where family language policy comes into play. Linked to language transmission, it refers to both the spoken and unspoken plan of the family regarding how and what language will be used in the home (Schiffman, 1996; Shohamy, 2006). This would mean, for example, that the family has expectations—usually initiated by the parents—for what language will be learned and used in the home, and family language policy as a whole includes the manner in which they go about implementing that, be it through extracurricular activities, literature, media, and/or by merely maintaining the use of a non-host country language at home. According to Schwartz (2008), the three governing factors of family language policy are teaching a child to read in the heritage language, the child's own attitudes, and the parent's own language patterns in the home.

If family language policy is important in the transmission of a language to a child, it is also therefore important in the maintenance of a language within a minority community (Pillai, Soh, Kajita, 2014). Although it is generally the parents' motivations and wishes that produce family language policy, there are many other people that also play a role--the children, for instance, as well as any other family members, or perhaps even nannies, au pairs, housekeepers--people who either live in the same home or are frequently present, as well as neighbors (Spolsky 2012).

Maintaining family language policy in the transmission of the heritage language is incredibly difficult without the help of third-party influences such as literacy programs, extended family members, and the effort of the community. It does, in fact, take a village to raise a child.

Because of birth order, age, and gender, the children themselves differ in language ability within the home, the first-born receiving the most intensive language immersion, with the immersion getting progressively weaker with later-born children. One causal process is when the eldest begins school and makes host-language friends, he or she brings the language home and begins

to speak it with his or her siblings (Wong Fillmore 1991). As a result, the language between co-ethnic peers and even siblings is usually the host-language, and the youngest in the family is usually host-language dominant, speaking the heritage language very little (Kravin 1992, Tuominen 1999).

Although most parents express a desire that their children speak both languages—they wish their children to speak the heritage language in order to maintain “family cohesiveness” and the host language so that the child will excel in life (Luo and Wiseman 2000)—and many even adamantly profess allowing only the heritage language in the home, but they often do not hold to that conviction. Thus, when communication occurs between parents and children, it ends up being a mix of the host language and the heritage language, which is detrimental to the children’s vocabulary development of the heritage language, a factor which has been found to cause a lessened desire in the children to speak the heritage language at home (Schwartz, 2008). In fact, research shows that there is often discrepancy between the parents’ language ideology and the actual practice of language at home; it is the children, who “can be powerful promoters of switching to the host language,” reflecting the actual language policy of the home (Schwartz 2008).

For this reason the language pattern is usually as follows: between parents—adult to adult—the heritage language, between parents and children, a mix of the host language and the heritage language, and amongst the siblings and their peers, the host language, although that was subject to change, depending on the topic and the interjection of the parents (Kang 2015).

The mix of language between parents and children also depended on the topic at hand. In a study of Korean Americans, Kang (2015) noted that the heritage language was used for home and family related matters, such as discipline. Also, if the children wanted something they thought

their parents would not give, they tended to ask in the heritage language. For school related matters, the host language was more prevalent between parents and children. Other research indicates that sometimes the primary language of the second-generation immigrants moves completely to the host language. Although understanding the heritage language, they answer their parents only in the host language (Kuo 1974a).

However, some parents, wanting to provide more academic training in the language, enroll their children in extracurricular language schools of the heritage language. Although not playing a primary role in the transmission and maintenance of the heritage language, these are significant. When the school presents the literature of the heritage language in an expressive and enthusiastic manner, it has been shown to cause a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between a child's vocabulary acquisition and their desire to speak the heritage language at home. Family language policy, after all, is largely related to the desire of the child him- or herself to speak the heritage language. Also indicative of a child's own desire to speak the language is his/her relationship with his/her family and the parent's attitude toward the language (Luo 1993). However, the transmission of a heritage language in the home, from parents to children, is usually easier and more successful than the maintenance of that language into the child's teen and young adult years (Chumak-Hortatsch 1999; Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

## **Language Maintenance**

As mentioned earlier, research has shown that in immigrant families a language usually shifts from the native language, referred to as the heritage language, to the host country's language within three generations. The first generation of immigrants, while speaking some English, usually prefer to use their mother tongue as their home language, but their children--the second generation—are bilingual, with an increasingly strong preference for the host country's language, speaking English with peers and siblings, and oftentimes, as they grow older, even beginning to speak the host country's language with their parents. The third generation—the second generation's children—usually speak only a smattering, if any, of their ancestral language (Fishman 1978). There is, however, research showing that language shift, or the shift from the dominant use of one language to another, can also occur faster, in only one generation (Jia and Aaronson, 2003).

It is true, however, as the children grow older, if they acquire more outgroup peers than ingroup peers, the influence the parents have over their children is overshadowed by these peer's influence, causing the children to lose the heritage language and speak the host language more dominantly. The same principle applies if they acquire peers of the same ethnic background. While the parent's influence still diminishes due to the children growing up, the influence of the heritage language speaking ingroup peers causes the children to maintain their heritage language (Luo and Wiseman 2000).

Ultimately, language maintenance is a choice governed by values, desires, and motivations. The surrounding community and the desire to belong makes a significant difference. Success stories among adults usually include a few of the same essential factors, one of them being that both parents have the same heritage language, another, friends of the same ethnic origin, and the third

being a supportive ethnic network and community (Alba et al. 2002; Hulsén et al. 2002). Verkuyten (1992) argues that a high ethnolinguistic vitality of a group, producing “a more positive attitude toward ones’ own ethnic identity would be associated with a higher level of ingroup preference” (p. 741). This means that the more one identifies with a given group, the more “intra-group similarity, attraction, and shared uniformities in behavior,” language included, does one exhibit (p. 742). Wong (1988) observed that foreign born Chinese immigrants that immigrated to the US at an early age use their native language as a type of banner for “ethnic pride,” as well as a cushion for adjustment in the US. The native-born US Chinese did not require the adjustment cushion and thus were more likely to lose the language. Young immigrants, as opposed to native-born children of immigrants, tend to keep their language while the native-born children tend to lose it.

### **Ethnolinguistic Vitality**

The theory of ethnolinguistic vitality refers to that which “makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations” (Giles, et al 1977). In other words, it is what causes ingroup cohesiveness within a larger context. It refers to the feeling of belonging, pride, and identification that the members of what is usually a minority ethnic group amidst a larger dominant group feel towards their own minority ethnic group. It is what causes them to act in a similar way, holding to their cultural values and mannerisms both individually and as a group. A high ethnolinguistic vitality is truly a collective pride in an ethnic identity; a low ethnolinguistic vitality is the opposite. With the former, the group will “survive and thrive,” the

members turning to each other when put in contact with outgroups; with the latter, a group will most likely disintegrate (Giles, et al 1977).

However, how does one measure ethnolinguistic vitality? Of course, there are the opinions of the people within the minority, and that is a perfectly valid identifier, but in order to thoroughly and accurately understand the buoyance and strength of a group, for that is what ethnolinguistic vitality is, there must be more than what people think and say about it. In other words—there must be—and usually is—a reason why the minority is held in the certain regard that they are, and why the people express that regard in the way that they do. For example, media can be a factor. If the dominant group, which is usually in control of the mass media in the area, begins to perceive a local ethnic group with a high ethnolinguistic vitality as a threat in whatever sphere of influence, be it economic, social, or governmental, they may begin to portray them negatively in attempt to cause the rest of the dominant outgroup to negatively perceive and interact with the minority, thus lowering their morale.

Therefore, what are the underlying factors that contribute to the reception of a certain minority within a dominant community? There are, in fact, three structural, causal factors that weaken and/or strengthen the ethnolinguistic vitality of a group which Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) have observed and compiled, and these structural factors, in turn, are influenced by Tajfels' theory of intergroup relations and social change and Giles' theory of speech accommodation. To understand what drives the ethnolinguistic vitality of a group, we must first understand these two theories.

The premise of Tajfels' theory is that socially, people categorize themselves into groups, which forms their social identity. For example, someone may be categorized as Caucasian, or a student, a sister, or Finnish, or Christian. The hierarchy of the groups is determined by comparison

between the groups; everyone wants to belong to a group that brings them pride and satisfaction in identifying with it. If one belongs to a group in which they cannot take pride, the individuals of the group will take measures to “climb the social ladder” by either coming into direct competition with a more dominant, prominent group, or by raising their social prominence in some other way. If they perceive that this is not possible, they will either attempt to leave their group to assimilate into the higher groups and/or raise their individual status by making personal changes such as in attire, manner of speech, political views, etc (Giles et al 1977).

Along with this same thread of thinking, Gile’s theory of speech accommodation refers to the tendency of people to, according to circumstance, change their manner of speech, including the patterns, pronunciation, etc, that they would typically use. Depending on how much they desire to gain the approval of the person they are communicating with, they will attempt or not attempt to converge with the speaking style of that person (Giles et al 1977). This principle applied to cultural differences, is, in fact, one way that different ethnic groups have maintained their distinctiveness in outgroup situations, by keeping their distinct speech patterns and nuances to emphasize the difference between themselves and the person or persons with whom they are speaking.

As we have seen, language is one of the primary determining factors in group identification. If one wishes to identify with a group, he or she will speak in the manner of the group. The perception of categorization, identity, and comparison between groups, which can also be drastically influenced by mass media, aforementioned, can cause an ethnic group to either maintain their speech patterns in order to remain separate and distinct from the dominant group, or can cause them to converge with the dominant group in order to seek assimilation.

Tajfel's social categorization, identity, and comparison combined with Gile's theory of speech accommodation is the groundwork for how the three structural elements of ethnolinguistic vitality operate. The two, working together, determine whether the factor is labeled "low" or "high." Keeping that in mind, Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor's (1977) structural, causal elements of ethnolinguistic vitality are as follows: status, demographics, and institutional support.

i. Status

The first of these causal factors is Status, which is the opinions of both the dominant group and of the minority itself towards the minority group. Status refers to the amount of prestige that the group has through economic, social, sociohistorical, and even language influence. The higher the status and influence, the higher the ethnolinguistic vitality. Groups that are able to gain and/or maintain financial influence in an area through establishing and developing businesses, buying stock, and making a financial mark in the community are more likely to have a high status, which contributes to high ethnolinguistic vitality. Social status is closely related to this, referring to both the self-esteem of the ingroup as well as the outgroup's perception of them. Again, high esteem raises morale while low esteem lowers it.

Also, sociohistorical symbols play another factor. Some ethnic groups have rich histories of struggles, wars, and victories, which leave meaningful, shared symbols that the ethnic minority can pull on to unite themselves. Groups that have histories they wish to hide or are ashamed of usually fall into a lack of group vitality. The same goes for their language. If their language does not have a high status in the global or community scope, they are more likely to wish to keep it hidden, thus weakening the ethnolinguistic vitality of the group, as language is one driving factor that unites a minority.

ii. Demographics

Demographics refers to the population of the group as well as how they are situated within the territory. Groups with high vitality are more likely to be situated in a way friendly to group communication. For example, if the numerical density of an ethnic group is high in an area, the ethnolinguistic vitality of that group is more likely to be higher than a group that might have just as many numbers but be more widely dispersed geographically. The sheer size of an ethnic group is also a determinate. The larger the population, the more likely they are able to influence their surrounding territories—people who immigrate and have large families in the host country increase the vitality of their ethnic group.

Of course, along this same train of thought, marriages within the ethnic group are conducive to the growth and strength of the group, but keeping the bloodline “unmixed” with the other surrounding ethnicities is not generally practical. Thus, in the case of ethnolinguistically-mixed marriages, ethnicities with a high status—with influence both socially, lingually, and financially—are more likely to retain the language. The language of low status ethnicities in mixed marriages is usually displaced by the host language. For obvious reasons, the retention of language over generations can be an indicator of the ethnicity’s ethnolinguistic vitality. This thesis takes a closer look at this theory.

Another influencing demographic factor is obviously immigration, through which a “planned or unplanned” influx of one linguistic group’s into another country can “swamp” another’s language, perhaps even the position of the dominant language. (Giles et al 1977). Immigration laws can be put into place to contribute to this social and economic dance, assuring that this will be prevented. Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (p 314) observed that migrants who move into an area where separate linguistic groups are in overt or covert competition appear to be more willing (for

obvious economic reasons), to adopt the language and culture of the dominant rather than that of the subordinate linguistic group. In this sense, migrant groups often appear as a threat to the linguistic groups whose collective future is in jeopardy in the intergroup context.

For example, the Canadian municipality of Montreal in the French Canadian province of Quebec has, among other ethnic communities, a Greek community that has been considered a threat to the French Canadian community because, instead of learning French, they learned English, thus strengthening the dominant community and weakening the French Canadian community.

Emigration can also contribute to the level of an ethnolinguistic group's vitality. When young, capable adults and families, vital to the growth and strength of a community, move for greater employment opportunities or to search for work due to economic hardships, their ethnic language is usually forgotten and replaced by the local language of the place they have relocated to, thus weakening not only the language's vitality but also that of the ethnic group.

### iii. Institutional Support

Institutional Support refers to the representation of the language group amidst formal and informal dominant, outgroup institutional settings such as the "mass media, parliament, governmental departments and services, the armed forces, and the State supported arts. Of crucial importance for the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups is the use of the minority language in the State education system at primary, secondary, and higher levels" (Giles et al 1977, 316). Linguistic groups that have positioned themselves so that they are represented in both formal and informal institutional organizations are more likely to maintain a high vitality and therefore thrive as a group. If they do not defend their own rights and interests, who will?

### **Ethnolinguistic Vitality and Language Maintenance**

The ethnolinguistic vitality of an ethnic group is one vital factor in the determination between language maintenance and shift. The attitude an immigrant holds of his or her own ingroup community of course influences an immigrant's perception of his/her own immigrant ingroup's ethnolinguistic vitality. When the ethnolinguistic vitality of a group is high, language maintenance within the group is more likely. When the ethnolinguistic vitality of a group is low, language shift is more likely (Luo and Wiseman 2000). Thus, a high ethnolinguistic vitality of a group causes the immigrant to be more likely to maintain the language.

Giles and Johnson (1987) saw that while it is easy to maintain a language in a home and ingroup environment, it is "unrealistic" for an ingroup member to "diverge totally in public domains" with the ingroup (heritage) language. They would naturally have to convert to the host language, resulting in language shift. In order to maintain the heritage language and their ethnic identities, it is essential for the language exposure to come not only from family connections, but also from ethnic peers and from an ethnic community network (Luo and Wiseman 2000).

In other words, an immigrant cannot expect their host country counterparts to begin to learn their language, rather, the immigrant is to learn the language of the majority in order to survive within the context. The only way to survive without learning the host language is to enter a preexisting ethnic minority in the host country with ethnic language shops, lawyers, religious establishments, etc. This is possible and has been done with various cultures in the United States—Chinatown in New York, Little Finland in Lake Worth, FL, Little Havana in Miami, FL and the list continues. However, as Zhang observed in his research of Chicago's Mandarin and Fujianese speaking immigrants, there will be contact with the host country people and language—if not deeply

personal, at the least their children will be exposed, and that in itself will bring the host culture home (Zhang, 2010).

This returns to Fishman's 1997 model of three generational language shift, already addressed.

The first generation speaks their native tongue and prefers company that speaks the same language. Their children, as soon as they are old enough to go to school, provided they go to a host language school, begin to adopt the host language to manage in the outgroup, or host country, as the peers they acquire from the school are all outgroup. Thus their ethnic language maintenance begins to weaken (Luo and Wiseman, 2000). The first generation's grandchildren, on the other hand, having grown up within the host country's outgroup, prefer that language over the language of the ethnic ingroup.

### **Criticism of the Theory of Ethnolinguistic Vitality**

The theory of ethnolinguistic vitality has been criticized in its "conceptualization and application" even by its authors (McEntee-Atalianis 2011). This refers to its surveys, one of which is the Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire, which was found in various studies to inaccurately predict language maintenance, to be independent of the immediate sociolinguistic surroundings, and to not take into account ethnic media use and bilingualism (Ehala 2011).

These findings seemed to suggest that the SEVQ did not collect the information that it promised to—the ability to "differentiate between subjects who are likely to maintain their language and those who might prefer social mobility into the dominant majority" (Ehala 2011, 188).

Rather, a more beneficial, thorough method of research, as opposed to merely the use of one questionnaire, would go about

adopting multiple methods of data collection allowed us to replicate and confirm findings across different sources of data, pursue issues in more depth, and open up new areas of investigation, while also identifying apparent anomalies or contradictions in our data and limitations in our instruments. Moreover, we also found that different methods afforded variable degrees of control and authority over the type, presentation and interpretation of the data by the researcher and the researched, and permitted an exploration of macro- and microprocesses permitting both a broad and narrow interpretation of the data (McEntee-Atalianis, 2011).

Another criticism of this method has been that it provides only the attitudinal factors towards the ethnic group and language rather than accounting for the language maintenance of a group, and in order for the true cause of language maintenance to be discovered, other sociolinguistic surveys had to be administered (Yagmur, 2011). Yagmur (2011) argued that even if an ethnic group may be perceived as having a low vitality, the group may find the means to maintain its language if its members are dedicated to the group. Elaha (2010) inserts that “the sustainability of a small language does not depend entirely on the size of the community or on external conditions beyond the control of the community and language revitalisation activists; sustainability also depends on the disposition and attitudes of the speech community.”

This study seeks to use both quantitative and qualitative methods, and looks at the influence ethnolinguistic vitality—the attitudes of the people—has on language maintenance, and recognizes that although the results may be valid, the research is not comprehensive, and therefore also does not comprehensively reflect the reason for an ethnic group’s maintenance of a language.

## **Ethnolinguistic Vitality and Floridian Finns**

As the aim of this thesis is to look at the language maintenance of the Finns in South Florida as influenced by the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Finnish community in that area, this portion of the thesis will look at the three influencing structural factors of ethnolinguistic vitality (status, demographics, institutional support) as applied to that community.

### **i. Status and Institutional Support**

Beginning in the early 1900s, when the Finns began to establish themselves in the States, including Florida, many men found employment in construction, and their wives became house cleaners and took care of the children of the wealthy. Ethnic bakeries and hotels were also established in order to “bring cohesion to the community” (Tzorztic 1999).

In 1988, Boccio of the Sun Sentinel, a newspaper in Palm Beach County, FL, where Lake Worth is located, said that there were:

two Finnish-owned cab companies, bakeries, a Finnish news journal, a phone directory, radio shows, travel agencies, hotels, churches and even a rest home for Finnish immigrants. Professionals such as Finnish doctors and attorneys have offices in the area.

“We have such a concentration of businesses that cater, in a large part, to the Finnish community. It helps those who arrive from Finland feel at home. It certainly helps to carry on the knowledge and culture of the country,” said another Finnish resident of the area to the Sun Sentinel. The ethnic community was close-knit, and there was almost no need to speak English

as there were shops, churches, club-houses, and virtually everything else needed for life, all offered in Finnish.

This reflects the Zhang's (2010) idea that for an ethnic community to sustain itself without the members having to learn the host language, there must be a solid network of ethnic social and business establishments within the community.

To reiterate, social recognition is to what extent, and in what manner, the dominant group acknowledges the minority ingroup. As to the Finns in Palm Beach County, the local American newspapers had nothing but good to say about the Finnish community and its individuals. In 1993, Josh Bennett, of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, wrote in a Palm Beach county newspaper, the Sun Sentinel, this note:

The Finns began arriving in South Florida in the 1920s and although few are aware, these immigrants from "The Land of the Midnight Sun" now make up the largest permanent Finnish population outside Scandinavia. Perhaps the reason so many Floridians are oblivious to the Finns' presence is that these industrious and self-reliant people do not riot, stage protest marches or demand rampant social services. Their inherent modesty prevents them from making spectacles of themselves. Their schools are highly rated, their per capita crime rate is the lowest of any community of similar size in Palm Beach County and their neighborhoods, while not opulent, are always neat and clean. The Finns have set an example that all who seek asylum here would do well to emulate.

The Finns have been so respected in the Palm Beach County community that there is even a monument dedicated to them in Bryant Park, a prominent local park near the tourist beach in

Lake Worth. From this, we can draw the conclusion that the influence of the Finnish population has been quite significant in that area.

The amount of positive social recognition and the large network of Finnish ethnic establishments indicates a high ethnolinguistic vitality.

ii. Demographics

Either numerical density in a small area or merely a large population itself is likely to strengthen an ethnic group's vitality. South Florida has been said to have the largest population of Finns outside of Finland, but that statement was made almost four decades ago. The current population of South Floridian Finns is no longer in its heyday, and rather, is in decline. The cultural hub is fading away, as noted by Josh Hafenbrack of the Sun Sentinel. The 2000 US census found that there were less than 5,000 Finns in Palm Beach County, 10 percent less than in 1990. It is reported that the younger population of Finns speak perfect English, marry Americans, and assimilate much more so than did their parents. They are "more open and ready to mix with the world...certainly much more educated" said a resident of the Palm Beach area of the younger generation. They are said to be mostly business people and "adventure-seekers," and some of the previous generations "worry the next generation has adapted too readily to American living" (Tzortzsis 1999).

However, Mika Roinila, a professor at the State University of New York, noted to the Sun Sentinel that "the Lake Worth –Lantana area is a very solid community with Finnish-ness. All the activities are in the Finnish language. In other parts of the country, they're doing everything in English" (Hafenbrack).

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Thus far we have looked at language transmission, or the passing down of a heritage language from one generation to the next within the context of home, and we have looked family language policy, or the spoken or unspoken plan of the family in regards to language use, and then, after examining those, we considered how these two combined pertain to language maintenance.

We have also looked at the theory of ethnolinguistic vitality—the strength of an ethnic group, along with some of its criticisms, and how the theory can influence the language maintenance of an individual and even of a whole ethnic group. Considering all of the above factors, and that the Finnish community in the South Florida area of the United States has a resident population that is now quite small, with numbers in decline despite their rich history in the area, the Finns in South Florida, Palm Beach County area, are prime candidates for this research.

This means that Finnish language fluency level of the current Finns in the area is pivotal in the continuation of the community's maintenance of the language, which is the focus of this study—their language processes, choices, and habits, beginning from heritage language acquisition in the home, to the processes and motivations used in keeping and practicing the language as an adult, or in contrast, in not practicing or keeping the language, leading either to heritage language maintenance or to language shift.

Usually, the family language policy in the home impacts language transmission levels, providing the basis for language maintenance later in life. The research questions, of course, as they ask of past events, are subject to the memories and recollections of the individuals interviewed, so it

must be considered that the data comes through not only the filter of personal perception but also through the filter of time.

RQ 1) What factors and attitudes contributed to heritage language transmission during childhood?

RQ 2) How has language ability and preference develop over time?

Every people group has a perception of themselves, be the perception positive or negative. This can also be referred to as ethnolinguistic vitality, a term which will be used as defined by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977): the degree to which a group is "likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations" (p. 306). This leads to the last research question, which is as follows:

RQ 3) How has the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Finnish community affected their language maintenance?

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning that people attribute to things in their lives. It is about people and how they deal with and react to life (Wiley, 2015). Because the nature of this study considers how a person's language has developed within its surrounding context, to acquire basic socioeconomic and educational factors, I opted to use questionnaires (to gather demographic information such as education, place of birth, time lived in South Florida, marital status, and age) combined with semi-structured interviews, which provide for more flexibility in

the conversation, as opposed to structured interviews, which lack open-ended questions, or unstructured interviews, which would have been too loose in form to properly guide (Zacharias, 2012). Within the semi-structured interviews, I used a response-guided approach, meaning that I came to the interview prepared with questions, but followed up the participant's answers to each question with spontaneous ones to gather more specific information. Despite the time-consuming nature of conducting interviews, they were deemed more conducive to the study because if the person interviewed were to merely write the answers in a questionnaire, it would not provide the opportunity to probe for more insight; if the answers were written in an unclear manner, there would be no opportunity to ask for clarification (Thomas, 2003). Therefore the semi-structured, response-guided approach was decided on in addition to the questionnaire.

All of the participants were over the age of 18 but had Finnish parents (or at least one Finnish parent) who had spent the majority of their childhood and young adult years in Finland and had moved to the United States or North America as adults. Their children, my interview participants, had either been born in the States or had come to live the North America before the age of seven. This research refers to these people as "Finns," despite the fact that they are United States citizens. In the process of determining the guidelines for who to interview, I chose include the family's land of origin and the age of arrival in North America over the feeling of cultural identity or even legal citizenship because these concrete points of identification were more specific than the term "Finnish." This, of course, narrowed the pool of possible interview participants, but for convenience, the research refers to the participants as "Finns."

Johnson and Newport (1989), in their study of second language acquisition, observed that "if one is immersed in a second language before the age of 7, one is able to achieve native fluency in the language" (p 78). In other words, there was no difference between their language and that of a

native's as long as the participant was exposed to the second language, be it Finnish or English, before the age of 7. As research has shown language transmission and maintenance is possible for a child with one heritage language speaking parent, such participants were also included, providing that the one parent spoke Finnish fluently (DeCapua, Wintergerst, 2009). First generation immigrants who had moved to the United States after the age of 7 were not interviewed.

Over the course of the spring of 2018, I interviewed nine people from Finnish backgrounds that fell within the guidelines of the research. Ten people were initially interviewed, but one, in retrospect, did not meet the requirements, having lived in South Florida less than the required amount of time.

The interview questions were divided into three categories: questions about the participant's own perception of the Finnish community's ethnolinguistic vitality, questions about their language development, including the family language policy of their childhood homes, and questions regarding how they perceived their opinion of the Finnish community had influenced their language ability, motivation, and maintenance.

To obtain participants, I contacted three Facebook community pages of Finns in South Florida, and through that channel obtained two interviews, one of which was not used. The majority of the participants were people already known to me. They were contacted directly by phone or also by Facebook Messenger. The interviews were conducted in the spring of 2018, held in private homes or in quasi-private public settings such as Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts. Before or during the interview, the participant was requested to fill out the form regarding their demographic and family information, and the interviews themselves were recorded on a cell phone and later,

transcribed. The lengths of the interviews ranged from around 10 to 50 minutes. All nine interviews combined were just over three hours.

The purpose of the questionnaires was obtain a written record of information that could possibly affect the participant's language preference and motivation and view of the Finnish community. These details included the education level, age, marital status, and length of time the participant had lived in Florida. As a researcher, I was curious to see if any of the above factors had influenced their investment into their Finnish cultural identity as well as in their language ability, or if certain age groups held certain characteristics or thinking patterns in common, or if marital status played a role in an individual's motivation to maintain a language (I found it did). Also included was a chart that the interviewee filled out regarding self-perception of language proficiency--not only of their own, but also of their parent's, both at the time of the interview and during the participant's childhood. The years of age to which the term "childhood" referred was left up to the participant to determine. The chart was on a scale of one to five, one being the lowest and five being the highest. Although I did not specifically refer to these records of language proficiency perception during data analysis, the concept did come up during some of the interviews regardless.

Of the interviews, four women and five men participated, the average age being 37.4, the oldest individual being 56 and the youngest, 20. One had only one Finnish-speaking parent; six had parents that spoke both languages—Finnish and English—and two had parents that spoke only Finnish. Five participants were married--two to Americans, three to Finns or Finnish-Swedes. Two sets of siblings were interviewed, a pair of sisters and a pair of brothers. The set of brothers had grandparents who had moved to New York from Finland when their son (the father of the interviewed brothers) was young. The father had married a native, Finnish-speaking, Swedish

Finn. Therefore, both the brothers and their father matched the requirements of this research and participated in the interviews.

The majority of the participants also have similar religious backgrounds, nearly all having, at some point in their lives, a history of attendance at the same Finnish church in Lake Worth (The Finnish Pentecostal Church, or Kotikirkko). They also knew, or were at least acquainted with, the others. That being said, while the research is representative of this group of Finns, they are nonetheless quite an exclusive selection from the area, so the results cannot be said to be reflective of the entire Finnish population in Lake Worth, Florida but rather only of this specific group. The church is fairly established in the area, having been founded in 1957. It began as a Finnish language church, but in 2009, English language services were added to the Finnish services (*Kotikirkon Historiaa*, n.d.). I have personal contacts from the congregation, so although the interview participants are of all ages and from all walks of life, the majority do hold this church in common. Being myself part of the community, it was quite easy to find interview participants, and the interviews were more conversational in nature as the majority of the people were already known to me. Emic researchers, of course, have an in-depth understanding of the community they are researching but also may take for granted information that others find surprising. All of the interviews were conducted in English, although a few Finnish words or phrases were used here and there.

The process of data analysis took some time, and between steps there were often several weeks or months. First, I transcribed the interviews. After reading and rereading them, taking note of common thoughts, experiences, and opinions, all the while underlining, highlighting, and jotting notes, I recorded the various themes from my notes into a separate list, keeping each participant separate. These lists I saved in another document and then printed out. On my hands then, I had

nine lists of themes on separate pieces of paper, one list per interview participant. These lists I cut up into individual slips, one theme per slip, and I began sorting these into common groups and categories, putting like thoughts or ideas with like thoughts or ideas.

In other words, from the transcribed interviews, I developed a list of themes on a document individual to each participant, derived from the participant's statements and narratives. When I had assigned a list of themes to every participant's interview transcription, I made sure that each separate item on the list of themes had the participant's name, printed the lists out, and cut them up to organize into categories. All of the experiences, thoughts, viewpoints, perceptions, and emotions that the interviewees had in common were put together, so that the data was organized to reflect themes rather than participants. I then asked myself the question, "What did the people who said these things common things have themselves in common?" Following this line of reason, I attempted to form coherent conclusions.

The data analysis was theory-guided, meaning that the preexisting research and theories regarding language maintenance, transmission, family language policy, and ethnolinguistic vitality served as a framework for the research and gave it direction. The data gathering process did not set out to "prove" any theory true, looking for evidence of the theory within the social context. Rather, it set out test if the social environment among the Finns of South Florida would line up with previous research. The interview questions were of course influenced by theory, meaning that the answers to the questions asked would relate to the topic of the theory, whether they proved the theory true or not. I labored to create neutral, open-ended questions. The data analysis process itself was more organic, allowing codes and themes to emerge rather than "looking" for specific, pre-set themes. If I noticed a common train of thought, the thoughts were coded, or labeled, and put together for analysis.

## 5. FINDINGS

That being said, several themes emerged throughout the interviews that were common to almost all of the participants. The overarching categories were as follows: both positive and negative perceptions of Finns; thoughts about the lifestyle and culture of the Finns in the Lake Worth area, including but not limited to the general, overarching community as a whole, the assimilation of the younger generation and their lack of involvement or feeling of belonging to the Finnish community, childhood involvement in the Finnish community, and travel between Finland and the States both now and in the past. Then there was the perception of their own Finnish identity (which was not an expected result), language use, levels, and value, and last but not least there was language education.

### **Reflections on Lake Worth and Lantana's Finnish Community in 2018**

Regarding Finnish culture and community in South Florida, one prominent theme was an awareness of the shrinking population of Finns and the decrease in their societal prominence. The Finnish tourist boom of decades past has died down, and permanent residents have taken their place. The Finnish population is said to be aging, and because of the decrease in

immigration and tourism and the natural course of life, it is shrinking. The demographics of the area are also changing. Quite a few of the participants mentioned the heavy Caribbean and Latin American influence. According to several of the participants, Spanish would be a more useful language to know than Finnish.

There is still, however, evidence of the impact and presence of the Finns, if more of days gone by. Residential areas have lots of Finnish signage, especially in older gated communities and apartment buildings; there are also common men's and women's saunas in many apartment buildings. The annual festival, FinnFest, or Finlandia Days, is still celebrated, although it is said to be smaller than in previous years and to have less Finnish vendors.

...I'm not in it, but they had the Finlandia Days [this year]; there were like, 4 or 5 Finnish companies, vendors, everyone else was not Finn.... I didn't go—but I remember back when, in the '90s, I was there with my company...and there was probably 50 Finnish companies, Finnish-owned companies, like not from Finland, from here. Everyone was in business; everyone had their own business, of they had their little boutiques, whatever, it was big! Now its like, pfft...I'm sure they still have their things, but it's changed quite a lot.

Not to say that the generation of Finns that brought Finland to the States is not still living or active. They have been very active, but mostly amongst themselves, so much so that many did not find the need to even learn English. One interview participant, age 50 at the time of the interview, says of his parent's generation, that

There's people that lived in this country--moved here 30 years ago and still don't know a lick of English because they surround themselves around Finnish people. That's unfortunate that they're not bilingual.

He gives a very good example as to why the older Finns who did not speak English then still do not now by explaining his own use of Finnish in his daily life.

Well, I use a Finnish insurance agent; I had a Finnish doctor, till adulthood. Finnish bakery, Finnish car mechanic, Finnish real estate agents, and also in my business later on in life, I um, I sold a lot of boats to Finland, so I used it on a daily basis, so, with Finnish

costumers. And of course Finnish church. So it's pretty easy—pretty easy to be Finnish in Lake Worth, Lantana. Almost as easy as being Spanish...There's less Finns. Less probably that are my age than from when I was younger, but still easy to [live in South Florida and speak only Finnish]. And that's a problem.

The children of these “Finnish pioneers” in Florida are more involved and integrated into the American society, and, while they desire to maintain their connection to their Finnish identity, they also wish to embrace the country in which they live. They see the previous generation's lack of interest in adjusting and integrating into their surroundings as unfortunate. One reason for this viewpoint could be because a language barrier calls for a translator. If a tourist needs a translator, it is understandable as well as temporary because of the temporary nature of the person's visit. However, if a person cannot speak the language of the country in which they reside, they have to be very dependent all the time on others to communicate with nationals.

### **Where Does Your Loyalty Lie: Then and Now**

Most of the adult children of the first generation Finns (including the majority of the interview participants) are uninvolved with or feel disengaged from the Finnish community as a whole, their use of language being more family-focused than community-focused. They identify more with the dominant American culture, with the here and the now, and although some may

think of “keeping the bloodline,” or marrying another Finnish-speaker, it is a thought that does not always come to pass, or then, that changes with the course of time. It is not something that is viewed as necessary and is not prioritized. The priority is, of course, the country in which they live, and unlike their parents, they do not have the recollections of “life back there” to draw on or to make them feel nostalgic. Their community, while it may have an element of uniqueness in that it does not originate in the U.S, regardless, it is still in the U.S. They also realize that the unique, non-American element of their lives is an element that is not needed in their daily life.

...We work with so many English-speaking people, so it's like, you don't start thinking in Finnish, and since we live in America, and the main language is English. It's kind of difficult to speak Finnish because we're...dealing with English customers. But the family keeps the Finnish going. Um, I think [the Finnish community is] pretty strong. Like, my dad said they're not in their heyday—but there's more older folks here than youngsters, the older folks are still trying to keep it up, doing their best to keep the Finnish strong here...I don't know much about the Finnish community—I don't pay attention because we live in Florida, in the United States, so I'm not thinking about the Finnish—I'm thinking more about the English, so.

And once this younger generation of Finns becomes of age and marries an English-speaker, they disappear from the Finnish scene, and the need for Finnish in their personal lives diminishes.

...for a lot of us, once you get married you go incognito—that nobody even knows that you are Finnish... I would say that most have married Americans, like I can think of...three people from my...group, cohort, that married Finns. Um, one of those I feel was purely coincidental. So, everyone else has...not specifically [gone] out looking for a Finn, for the most part. I would have liked to. I dated a Finn in high school, and then thought, well, turns out that was way overrated. His Finnishness was a detriment! So I did not look for that again...I wasn't going to make it a criteria...I don't feel like I had to give anything up by marrying an American. It didn't change my life at all. Like, if I want to make Finnish food to share with him, you know, that's fine. We traveled [to Finland] together. It does make it harder to maintain the language, but maintaining the language becomes less and less important because the people that I have in my life that only speak Finnish are fewer and fewer.

Most participants mentioned that although they currently feel quite disengaged from the Finnish community, as children they were much more involved because of their parents. Many did everything, except school, with Finns—church, friends, vacation, etc.

...up through high school...all my friends were Finnish, if they didn't live in our neighborhood...and I was so involved in that [Finnish] church...And as a family we were going to Finland lots of summers... 'Cause my parents had only Finnish friends, and so we were friends with their kids. (Laila Barns)

Having close Finnish friends as a child was not uncommon:

There was a connection [with my Finnish friends] that I never felt I had with my American friends, even though my two best friends were um, Libby and Grace... We went all the way from elementary school to high school together... Both came from Christian homes, I visited both of their churches, we had sleepovers and all that... but I never felt I was as connected to them as I was to my friends at church, or even my friends in Toronto, or Thunder Bay, wherever they came from. And it was that Finnish heritage... Religion... wasn't a distinction. So it had to have been. And I don't know if it was because... with the Finnish youth, our parents were friends... Like my mom knew Mr and Mrs, but they didn't visit each other and have coffee and fellowship, but my parents did with my other [Finnish] friend's parents... It was more of a family, in that direction, than it was to my school friends.

In other words, the Finns of the generation before my interview participants—their parents—associated mostly with other Finns. Their closest, and in cases, only social contacts shared a similar background, so their children grew up quite surrounded by children also with similar backgrounds. These children did go to English-language schools in the US, however, and naturally made friends there, so they were perhaps more acculturated than their parents, especially if their parents also worked with other Finns.

For their parents, speaking Finnish was a point of connection and even of trust in the work life, if they worked with Finns. One participant whose father had owned a business, said that while he himself did not need Finnish so much in his everyday life now, the ability to speak Finnish in the area had opened up a whole world of possibilities and made life more secure. The familiarity to the culture made work agreements among Finns feel more secure.

A lot of times [Fins] end up knowing each other, or somebody knows each other. It's a—it's a way to connect with people. And oftentimes, there's, you know, a cabinet guy, a flooring guy. You know, there's always somebody who you trust.

The ability to speak Finnish also made someone belong. "...if you can communicate in Finnish, it just makes you part of the group. It's the connection, it's like you're one of us, even if you want to be or not. It's the tie that binds." Although the majority of the interview participants did not express a pressing desire to work with or even to know other residential Finns, there was an acknowledgement that the Finns who had immigrated from Finland—their parent's generation—did like to spend most of their time with other Finns because they shared a language and a background and understood each other. Quite a few times the older generation was described as insular. Interestingly enough, although their children did not express a need to surround themselves with Finns that lived in Florida, quite a few mentioned that the common ground of a shared background and language did create somewhat of an immediate bond with a new acquaintance.

...I think its like that with any—any cultural group is they like to, you know, Finns like to do business...and...hang out with other Finns because they have a lot in common...They talk about their homeland and the birch trees and the saunas...when they were little—I think my parents do too—eating lots of fish and how beautiful it is, all the berries, and mushrooms, and lakkas...and if I meet someone who's Finnish, or if I see their name, I immediately go to that with them. I never let a moment slip by without making a comment if I meet somebody new. Like, 'Hey I'm Finnish too!' You know, you bond. You're bonded because of your culture.

### **Travel Between the U.S. and Finland: Then and Now**

Visits to Finland fell into the category of being more common in childhood memories than in the current reality. Amongst the people interviewed, however, there is still the perception of a "revolving front door" in Florida, the concept that Finns from Finland visit Florida and Finnish Floridians visit Finland, but several of the participants admitted that they themselves have not

visited Finland in many years. One participant, 56 years of age, was “sad to say” that it had been around 19 years since she had last visited. Again, childhood summer visits to Finland were common, even if trips over the ocean were not commonly being made now. Those that were born in the States, although having visited Finland as children, do not have the same need to return as their parents did and instead find different pursuits within their birth country. “I have a pretty good idea of what [Finland] is,” reasoned a participant who had visited Finland frequently as a child but had also seldom visited as an adult.

I haven't been to Finland for 20 years. We used to—I used to visit Finland every summer—every year, but um, not recently. We've had vacation properties in Tennessee, and we've had an RV and things, so there's been plenty of things to see here in America.

For many, however, childhood trips to Finland were essential in solidifying their language ability. For example, there was one participant who had only one parent that spoke Finnish, but he would regularly visit his grandmother in Finland during the summer. She did not speak English, and while he admits to speaking broken Finnish today, he does speak it, and these trips made the difference.

### **Perceptions of Language Proficiency**

All, despite some only having visited Finland a few times throughout their lifetime, still spoke Finnish and were proud of their heritage and their language ability. One such participant noted how, in regards to language ability, one summer visit to Finland as a teenager had taken an unexpected turn.

I'll never forget I went at 17 to work in Finland for a summer at an ice-cream shop. And at that point I still felt that I had very good Finnish. I was still in the Finnish church, Finnish at home, singing in the choir, and I remember starting to chat with some of the...younger young adults who would come eat...ice cream...and they were like, 'Where are you from?' And I'm like, 'Where do you mean?' And they were like, 'You have such a grandmother's Finnish.' And realizing that...obviously my parents never kept up with Finnish nykyajankielta [language of the day], so whatever I learned was whatever they had left Finland speaking, which was late '60s, early '70s, and then [I spoke] whatever these... Finnish American words that I learned here, or then, you know how there's Turun murre [Turku accent] and Helsingin—you know—and so I used a whole conglomeration of words, and the young Finns in Finland were like, 'Where the heck are you from?...Embarrassing... Like, what have you taught me? Like, I felt like I didn't know Finnish. I always thought I was good at Finnish. 'Cause all the old people here—'oh, you speak Finnish so well; you speak Finnish so well,' and then you go into Finland, and they're like, 'what kind of an old lady language are you speaking?'

The Finns that had grown up in America thus found that the language they spoke was often “fossilized,” meaning that while the Finnish in Finland had developed and changed, the same language in the States had not undergone the same process because of distance and lack of similar, surrounding influences. Finding that their Finnish language ability unexpectedly singled them out among peers in Finland, it could lead to even a sense of betrayal, having been led at home to believe they could speak the language well, and having even left the comfort of home to visit Finland, only to find that they had been misled, if not intentionally, into believing an unrealistic picture of the reality.

Finnish Americans have a predicament. While they live in America, they are perhaps not completely American culturally and still feel affiliation to Finland because of parents and surrounding community. For a young person who has grown up in this situation, and who has not visited Finland often, it is natural to be upset when they find they do not “fit” in Finland either.

She was not the only one who expressed conflicted emotions of her Finnish vocabulary during her visits to Finland. Others had also had similar experiences.

...then I would go to Finland, and I would realize that I don't have the vocabulary for like, a lot of tasks for daily life, because when I'm here, I don't ever go to the pharmacy in Finnish; I don't go to the bank in Finnish; I don't do any of those kinds of things, and so when I've had to do them in Finland, I just look like an idiot... But yeah, that was a little bit humbling to realize, like, but it's hard, because my accent is very good, so I sound native. So when I'm in Finland, speaking Finnish, and I suddenly come across words I don't know, they're like, "Are you dumb? Like what do you mean, like you're kidding. You're kidding, right?" And I'll switch to English to show like, "No, listen, I speak American English flawlessly, like I don't sound like a Finn. Like, I really am American. I have Finnish parents; that's why my Finnish is good, but my vocabulary is awful because I grew up there."

Growing up in an environment that did not require steady, daily use of Finnish meant that many words for everyday concepts went unlearned. In the States that was not a problem because there was no need for Finnish vocabulary, but in Finland it was problematic not only because of the hindrance to communication and living, but also because of the native-like pronunciation of the traveler. Her accent did not identify her as a foreigner or as someone who had not grown up in Finland, so people assumed she had spent, if not her whole life, a majority of her life in Finland. Naturally, that assumption would include that she had acquired the vocabulary for common, everyday tasks like banking and going to the pharmacy, which she had acquired in English, not Finnish. This put her on the defensive in Finland, in the awkward position of explaining why she did not know the words for these common, everyday tasks.

### **Language Policy and Practice: If You Don't Use It, You Lose It**

Weak vocabulary as well as the deterioration of language from disuse was something a majority of the participants mentioned. There were varying reactions to this, however. One mentioned that his minimal vocabulary as well as the lack of need for Finnish in his surroundings caused a lack of motivation for using Finnish, but others indicated that they would like to upkeep the ability to speak, for multiple different reasons “I want to get better at it. It’ll be easier for me to talk to Finnish people. It was easier [to speak Finnish as a kid]...I’ve gotten worse at it. I use it, but not as often,” said one young man. Another mentioned that although speaking Finnish was a “second nature” to him as a child, now he notices that due to lack of use, his language skills are more difficult to use and does his best to improve them in his every-day life.

“...isn’t as good as it used to be...I don’t use it...I really wish I spoke better Finnish. That is something that I—I would like to develop. Like, when I’m with my mom, I’ve told her many times that I prefer to try and always speak Finnish, just because I wanna develop that. And especially one that nobody knows. So it’s like a secret language. Like, I try and speak Finnish with people at work with customers. And I know that I speak broken Finnish, but I try—I would prefer if I spoke better Finnish...because it’s always good—it’s impressive for women; you tell them you speak two languages, they really enjoy that.”

Most participants did mention their lack of vocabulary and a general awareness of deteriorating language skill.

So like, I took an online quiz to test your Finnish vocabulary level, and so, what’s interesting about it is that because I don’t use it for—like I never had to use it for school, I never had to use it for business transactions in the world, or whatever, that my vocabulary is very basic, and so I do essentially have like an elementary school vocabulary. You know, I don’t read in Finnish, I don’t read books, I don’t read newspapers, I don’t read magazines, and I don’t read the internet, and so [I have] extremely colloquial, basic interactions with, like, some specialized vocabulary that I’ve gathered over my life.

Another interviewee expressed an awareness of a plateau in her language development. “It needs to develop. I think it developed to a certain point, and then it stopped. Kertakaikkia! ...I mean it’s stayed the same for a lot of years—the level of the, you know, Finnish.” s

Involvement at the Finnish church was mentioned as an aid in improving language ability.

A lot of people still speak Finnish there. We're still doing the sound there, so we have to know the Finnish language so we know what we're doing. It's been increasing since we've been doing the church thing. It's been pretty good.

Another such participant, who also uses his Finnish in church with older people and to communicate with his family in business or social settings, said that his language ability was “not bad, but not good...I can have a conversation with somebody, no problem.” He “didn't want to lose the second language. It's kinda unique to always have a second language. People ask if you can, you know, explain it to them. I wouldn't want to lose it.” Several were quite intentional about practicing the Finnish they have so that they do not run the risk of losing it.

One participant gave a detailed description of her language development and awareness. She said that she never gave thought to the dual-language environment in which she lived until she lived on her own, after which she became intentional about maintaining the language with regular visits to Finland. In her description, she included the surprise she felt when her English-speaking husband accompanied her, and she realized that her relatives in Finland spoke English! She had been so motivated to practice her Finnish in Finland before, that when the necessity to speak English with them arose because of the presence of her husband, she was astounded!

Through high school I never gave it any thought. It was just a part of life. [My parents] always still spoke it, we still went to Finland regularly, were in [the Finnish] church all the time, and so it was just a thing; like these are the life spaces where you speak English, these are the life spaces where you speak Finnish, these are the life spaces where you can speak both...And then, leaving home, realizing that if I want to keep this skill, which is important to me to keep it, that I need to practice. It's just, I'm not the kind of person to speak to my parents every day...So it just got, the opportunities got less and less. But I've made sure I go to Finland...on an every five year schedule, then I went seven years, and now it's been like, two years, two years. And when I'm there, I try to be really intentional to only speak Finnish...But it's funny, like when I took [my husband] there, I can't really...use it as such a practice opportunity because its rude to him, but it's funny because I'm like “huh! All these people that all my life—it turns out they do speak

English, but I've been struggling to speak Finnish with them!"...Until [he] was with us and then it was like, "Oh look!"

Although they all expressed that they wished to upkeep the language, many realized the obstacles in the way because of a lack of daily use. Below is one description of a participant's motivation to upkeep Finnish and the typical use for the language, now and as a child.

Um, I have phases of my life, where I'm like, ok, I'm going to practice my Finnish and we're going to be Finnish, and we're going to do this, and then it falls back to English...It's just so much easier. Raising my kids, yes, they start with Finnish. So it's just basically in the home. I still speak Finnish to my parents and mother-in-law, but that's about it. And [my husband]. We'll speak Finnish sometimes. That's in the home. But I have no use for it otherwise. You know what I mean? And going back—you asked about whether I ever studied Finnish—I never studied, but I did learn to read it because of singing in the choir. You know, and I had never realized it, because my mom asked me—like, you can read Finnish! And I'm like, yeah, I sang in the choir for seven years or something—like six years. So it wasn't like a, um, I should speak better Finnish. And it's possible that I do speak better Finnish than I think, but I'm just very self-conscious about it.

Another, when asked about how her language ability has changed with time, mentioned that she now speaks Finnish with an English accent, "I'm sure it did [change]. I think I have an English accent in my Finnish now, even though it's the pure Finnish from Central Finland. I think there is an accent."

So although there is a general awareness of language limitations, there is also an underlying desire to speak the language anyway, especially in family situations, though that can also present a problem. Certain fields of work use very specialized vocabulary, and if the work is in English, there is no reason to have the knowledge of the Finnish translation. However, work can be a common topic at family functions, and if the family function is conducted primarily in Finnish, work can be challenging to discuss.

However, on the flip side regarding employment, one interview participant found a job as a young adult in the 1990s at a bank, which then resulted in a crash course in Finnish banking

terminology because of the massive amounts of Finnish tourists to Florida at that time. The attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001 changed all this, however, and banking restrictions were placed on tourism.

There were local Finns, snowbird Finns, and Finns coming from Finland every year...but then after, I think it was after 9/11, the whole industry changed... They changed the rules and the laws and everything...So then [my customers] became Americans...Um, so my Finnish actually improved in my young adult years...

Mentioned by quite a few participants was language switching and mixing during conversation between co-ethnic peers. Quickly switching between English and Finnish while conversing with another Finn was evidently incredibly easy to do for the interviewees, “Fingliska,” also referred to as “Finglish,” were the terms used by several to describe the concept.

Even today, my Finnish friends, a lot of my Finnish friends, we speak Finnish, or as we like to say, Fingliska. Uh, a little combination, but I’m still—I can speak half a sentence in Finnish and half in English without missing a beat.

The ability and practice of this was seen almost as a given. “Doesn’t everyone?” asked one, when questioned whether or not he mixes the languages.

Also mentioned a few times, in addition to mixing the languages, was the habit of creating “new” Finnish words if vocabulary was lacking. One participant mentioned that as children she and her brother had had their own language, creating words from a mix of the two languages. Another interviewee said that because of her limited Finnish vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, she takes the linguistic steps necessary to make herself understood when speaking Finnish, taking the liberty to create, modify, combine, or translate words to relay her thoughts. Although she said she knew that what she was saying was probably not correct, it did not seem to bother her as long as she was understood.

I found that half of the individuals interviewed had parents who had an only-Finnish rule in the home, half did not. However, almost all said that Finnish was the dominant language in the home, if not among peers or siblings, and the ability to speak Finnish was prized. Note below one observation regarding a childhood home's family language policy and that of other, extended family.

When I was a young boy, my father opened the front door of the house and said, boy, outside of that door you can speak whatever language you want, but in my house we're speaking Finnish...Especially my father was very determined to keep the Finnish heritage—the speaking. Which I'm very thankful for. I have several cousins that can't even say hi to their grandma in Finnish. And they were my age. I say shame on my aunts and uncles for not doing that.

The maintenance of the language was viewed as not only an issue of pride and of maintaining identification with the homeland, but also as evidence of how much extended family was valued. Feeling proud to speak Finnish is a trait that many of the initial immigrants to Florida have tried to pass down through the generations. Their children, the generation of people I interviewed, feel their parent's influence when they rear their own kids.

...That's what was spoken to me and how I was spoken to, and so that's how I speak to babies. And I feel like because my parents are still alive and my mother in law is still alive, it was important for my children to learn, because it's important to them. They are somewhat proud that their grandchildren at least understand it. Um, I don't think—I don't think my either side would be upset or angry if my kids didn't speak Finnish, but it's probably a pride thing of oh look, we've taken the time to continue our language, our culture this way.

However, interesting to note was that participants who grew up in homes with less strict language rules were more likely to be laissez-faire about their own children's language acquisition, especially if their spouse is not a Finnish-speaker themselves. "Finnish-ness" becomes more of a cultural aspect than a linguistic one because of the difficulty of teaching and maintaining a language that not necessary to daily life.

Yeah, you don't be specific about it. You know because I don't like, like, I don't feel like I had to give anything up by marrying an American, like it didn't change my life at all. Like if I want to make Finnish food to share with him, you know that's fine. You know we traveled there together. It does make it harder to maintain the language but maintaining the language becomes less and less important because the people that I have in my life that only speak Finnish are fewer and fewer. And when I go to Finland, it turns out that not speaking Finnish isn't really a detriment, and so like, for me it's just like a personal skill, but it's not a limitation. And so, I've accepted that my children won't speak Finnish. When I was younger I wanted them to, but it's ok, that they don't.

This is true especially if the grandparents are also English-language speakers. The loss of the language is then merely the loss of language rather than the loss of relationship. One interviewee who has a sibling with children that do not speak Finnish, reflectively said that, "You know, and in a way it makes me sad for them, but it's like... It would be really, really hard to maintain at this point. So I know they know a few words because of my parents, but my parents speak English to them."

One participant, married to an American, says that:

But um, yeah, the community is getting smaller or less prevalent now, I mean I feel like if I really wanted to learn it, or become, like, actually consider myself literate in it, it'd almost be more beneficial for me to learn Spanish at this point, like in South Florida. Because, I mean, there's so much more—everything in Spanish. It's mostly the, uh, I don't know, I guess you can make your parents happy or the going back to Finland, but as far as the use here in South Florida, it's not that significant. And...my wife, she wants to um—she wants me to speak Finnish to our son...like just so that it helps—it's supposed to help, I don't know, their brains to learn a second language, it's supposed to be—do better in school, but I don't feel like I'm capable of teaching him the language properly because I don't think my vocabulary's that great. I can barely read it that well, and I don't use it much, so I feel like I'd be doing it incorrectly, and it'd just be words here, just be like, yeah, vocabulary words...Sure, yeah, it'd be great; it's just putting in the time and effort so that I could actually make it so that I could use it a lot better, it's not really there. As of today in South Florida it's not anything I really need. I mean even if I have family members that come here, and they speak mostly Finnish, they understand English, so sometimes—they'll speak Finnish to me, and I'll respond in English, so I can usually communicate with a lot of my family members, especially if they're younger. A lot of times they speak really good English. It might be useful if I planned on going back to Finland, but I don't see it as a need.

While his wife is supportive of the language, even wanting him to teach it to their children, he sees this to demand a lot of effort and dedication. The lack of necessity for the language decreases the importance of maintaining it and simultaneously the motivation to do so. Also supporting previous research is his statement that he responds in English to Finnish. Kuo's 1974 research states that sometimes the second-generation immigrant's dominant language will move entirely to the host language, that despite understanding the heritage language, the language they use will be only the host language (Luo and Wiseman 2000).

Also notable was that although most of the interviewees spoke mainly Finnish with their Finnish-speaking parents, the use of English was more dominant for all among siblings and peers. Two mentioned that as younger children, Finnish had been dominant, but by the age of ten at the latest, English had become the most prevalently spoken language with their peers. One of these had spent two years living in Finland as a child, and the other had parents who spoke little to no English. However, even these two transitioned to English with their peers before becoming a teenager.

However, there remained a sense of "us" and "them," the Finns bonding closer to each other than to the dominant ethnic group, connecting the families and the whole Finnish community. Though English was the language of choice between co-ethnic peers, the ability to speak Finnish was used as a way to say something without their American friends knowing—a "secret language." This was very commonly mentioned.

Other than as a secret language, Finnish was also used (then as well as currently) as a way to compete, show off, or impress the opposite sex, "It's impressive for women; you tell them you speak two languages—they really enjoy that." It was seen as not only a way to stand out from the

crowd, to be “more” than a “normal American” and above the status quo, but also as a skill that helped in learning other languages too.

...because I took Spanish in grade school, and so I had a lot of Hispanic friends. So, they would all speak a different language, and I’m like, well, I speak—I know a different language too. Though it was never—like, yeah, I don’t know. Maybe just to show off in a way that oh, I do speak a different language. And then, my pronunciation of Spanish was very good because I spoke a different language, and so I expelled—excelled, no expelled—I excelled in even Spanish classes because my pronunciation was good.

English, however, was referred to as the “heart” language, the language of choice (because of the ease of its use) when expressing deep thoughts, ideas, and emotions. However, the ability to speak Finnish was very positively viewed—as a welcome addition to the ability to communicate in English or any other language, if unnecessary to everyday life. Granted, some participants were very adamant in maintaining the language because of close family that spoke only Finnish. It was called “a richness,” “a gift,” something that “makes other languages easier to access,” and “a definite benefit.”

### **Finnish Education and Literacy**

However, none of the participants had ever had any formal, professional education in Finnish or about Finnish. They had all either learned to read by themselves or had had family members, such as a parent or sister, guide them. Several had been involved in the local Finnish church, and others had been exposed to popular Finnish media as children—some even to only Finnish media. Exposure to Finnish-language children’s characters and cartoon serials such as Muumi and Röllipeikko were mentioned as having a part in learning to read Finnish, as well as, of course, the Finnish alphabet book—Aakkoset.

Again, however, all expressed that they did not feel their current Finnish literacy skills were up to par. Despite being able to read, they did not do it well, or as well as they thought they should. Also, the changing nature of language presented a challenge. New words and current, changing slang made reading Finnish newspapers, magazines, and even social media difficult. This was, however, not seen as a serious impairment, although some did take some measures to improve their reading skills.

I think I'm equally, in speech, but I never went to school for Finnish, so reading is more difficult, and writing is pretty challenging. But I speak it fluently. And since I rarely need to write it or even to read it, that's not a big handicap.

Another participant:

I started buying, at one point, kind of like chapter books for children as just as an entry level—to get fluent with reading. When I was babysitting a five year old...they had just moved to Florida, and so he didn't speak any English, and they wanted me to read them their bedtime story, which was going to be a chapter out of a Moomin book, and he stopped me and was like, "Are you dumb?" You know, like, "What's wrong? Why are you reading so slowly?" Because Finnish words are so long, so I kind of have to sound them out to figure out where are the compound words, like, what am I actually saying, so he was just like, "You don't read like a regular adult; you must be slow." And then [there are] a couple of books that are the Finnish version of some of the favorite English books from when I was younger, because it's frustrating. I'm used to reading so fast in English that I don't like to read in Finnish because it's too slow. I'm too impatient. And so I've chosen to buy [Finnish] books that I know very well in English so that I don't have to...be looking up words constantly because I know what the story is.

## **Perceptions of Finns and Cultural Identity**

The perception of the characteristics of the Finnish people as a whole was quite positive. They were viewed as financially stable and independent, frugal, hardworking, trustworthy, integrous, and also as known but unknown in the community, or in the words of one participant, as “not loud and proud.” Also mentioned was that Finns had played a large part in establishing Lake Worth and the surrounding area. Many of the buildings and houses in the area had been built by Finns; they were known to work with their hands in fields such as carpentry, architecture, and flooring. They were also known for their work ethic and for the quality of their work. One participant, a business man, said that he had never run into problems disclosing his heritage; on the contrary, in business it had even served as a benefit.

However, a dissatisfaction with division among the Finnish community was mentioned twice—that instead of competing against each other, a Finn should stand with another Finn in support. They were also called stubborn, stoic, rude, inflexible, and arrogant, so not all impressions were positive. The two participants that seemed to have the most conflict with their Finnish identities were sisters who have a parent who was quite “negative” about being Finnish, and their description of their perceptions of their ethnic identities reflected that. Both of these sisters have married Finns or Finnish-Swedes, however, and both mention that being Finnish is an integral part of their identities, although it presents some conflict, as thus expressed by one of the sisters:

It’s something that very recently within the last few years I have tried to figure out myself, like am I proud, am I embarrassed, am I... you know, how do I feel? I almost feel like I have an identity crisis. Because I’m not Finnish, and like, for the siirtolaiset that have come here, I don’t—I don’t really have a connection with them. You know, there’s some sort of a disconnect. Because they are Finn; I’m much more American than I am Finnish. But then, you turn around, with my American friends, I find myself being raised so Finnish culturally that I’m not American either. You know, so its like my mom has a negative—for the most part—thought of being Finnish and Finnishness and whatever.

She has no idea where it came from; she's tried to think about it. She does not know. And slowly, it has affected me, and it affects, like--my sister is also very negative....

Later, in reference to her cultural identity conflict, she adds:

So, I don't know. It's cool to be Finnish. It's cool to have that little, whatever, it is a weird, love-hate relationship. There's parts of my life where I'm like, why do I have to be so Finnish, like why can't I be more open; why can't I be more American in that way. I don't know, because I obviously know you, so I'm gonna sit here and talk to you. If I didn't know you, it would take me a little bit. I guess that's American too, but I always take that as, 'there's my stupid Finnishness coming out.' You know what I mean? Yeah, so.

None of the participants were completely embarrassed or ashamed of their Finnish heritage, however; in contrast, everyone was positive about it, making comments that being Finnish was "part of your uniqueness," "cool," "not boring." One described his thoughts this way: "Um, I'd say I'm proud to be Finnish. It gets a lot of attention...what language are you speaking, what is that, where are you from? You know, I have blond hair, so."

Neither was the American-ness of the participants unmentioned, to be fair. Comments such as "I'm American, and that's ok," "it's important to support on where you live," and I'm "focusing on the US," were made.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The next section will re-examine the literature review in light of the interviews from the Finnish people in the Lake Worth/Lantana areas of South Florida and then briefly summarize that information to answer the research questions.

Morales and Hansen's (2005) observation of children operating as language brokers and translators for migrant families did not apply to the Finns interviewed primarily for two reasons. First of all, either the parents of the participants spoke English as well as Finnish, or if they did not speak English, the network of the Finnish community in South Florida was elaborate enough from the 70s-80s and even 90s that they could survive without needing English, therefore relieving their children from the role of translator. However, as the community ages and grows smaller, this may change. The Finnish community has more reflected Zhang's 2010 research with Chicago's Mandarin and Fujianese-speaking immigrants, which observed that for an immigrant to survive in a new country without learning the national language, they must enter a preexisting ethnic minority in the host country with ethnic language shops, lawyers, religious establishments, etc. Lake Worth and Lantana, Florida, had all of these. There were only two participants whose parents spoke mostly or only Finnish, and they themselves spoke both English and Finnish. While neither mentioned acting as language brokers for their parents (because of the widely-networked Finnish community), their parents were exposed to the host language of the States at least through their children if not through other sources.

Also, the interviews supported both Tannenbaum and Howie's research (2002), which said that being able to speak and communicate in the language of aunts, uncles, and grandparents creates for the possibility of a close-knit family, and on a wider scale, also supported Ward and Hewstone's research (1985) that community ties between families of the same heritage language are strengthened because of the common language. All of the interviewees said that Finnish was a family language and sometimes a language between friends. A few mentioned how the language as well as the culture is a bond between Finns, even Finns who don't know each other, and this is understandable because it is immediate common ground from which to draw. Wong

Fillmore (2000) stated that if language shift or attrition occurs and the language is not passed on, it creates a divide in family communication, weakening ties between generations, and this concept was brought up as negatively viewed, even as disdained. On the flip side, for some, of course, because of their parent's lack of English proficiency, language attrition is something many Finns in Florida wish to avoid, and purposefully look to avoid, by practicing Finnish regularly with their parents. Interestingly enough, one such interviewee has children and grandchildren who do not speak Finnish as well or at all, which falls in line with Fishman's previous research, which states that language usually shifts to the host language within three generations.

However, as stated earlier, as long as one parent speaks the heritage language and is consistent in communicating to the child in the language, it is possible for transmission to occur (DeCapua, Wintergerst, 2009). This research had only one such instance, but it proved true. The interviewee's mother was the only parent who spoke Finnish, and he still speaks Finnish, if brokenly. Of course, regular trips to Finland as a child and a grandmother who did not speak English attributed to learning to speak.

The family language policies of the childhood homes of the people interviewed fell on two sides—either a strict “Finnish-only” rule was enforced, or there was no strictly enforced, spoken rule, but Finnish, because of the comfort of its use to the parents, was more dominantly used than English. Those that now have children that came from homes with strict Finnish-only rules, their children all speak Finnish, if brokenly. Interestingly enough, those that came from homes where Finnish was spoken but not strictly enforced, their desire and motivation to pass the language down to their own children is noticeably weaker than those from homes with strict language policies. However, the children coming from homes with strict, Finnish-only rules, do have

more of an uphill battle to maintain the language than did their parents did because of increasing integration into the national culture and because of the lack of necessity for Finnish in every-day life. English is their dominant language, and Finnish, while important to them as a family language and even as a work and church language, is not as essential to or as prominent in their lives as perhaps is in their parent's.

Thus, we can see the dominance of the host language in second-generation American Finns.

Although many of their parents required Finnish to be spoken in the home, supporting the observations of previous research that family language policy is important in the transmission of a language to a child (and important in the maintenance of a language within a minority community), it is not the only required maintaining factor for a heritage language in a community (Pillai, Soh, Kajita, 2014). Other factors, such as a thriving network of ethnic establishments, institutional support (such as in banks and other legal sectors), and relational contacts, can also aid in the maintenance of a language within a community. From this research and these interviews, it can be seen that the influx of tourism from Scandinavian countries caused a need for Finnish-language speakers in the States in the 80s and 90s, but after the Twin Towers were attacked in 2001, the possibility for work in those languages and in those sectors, at least, dropped because of the changing U.S. laws, decreasing South Florida's measure of institutional support for Finnish.

Other factors helpful in language transmission and maintenance are extracurricular activities, literature, media, and/or use of a heritage language in the home (Shohamy, 2006). Some of the participants had access to Finnish media as children. Others were limited to only Finnish media. Others (most) had been, at one point or another, involved with the Finnish church, and all had spoken Finnish at home.

One other point is that, while education in the heritage language is found to cause a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between a child's vocabulary acquisition and their desire to speak the heritage language at home, none of the people interviewed had received any schooling in Finnish or about Finnish, so it is no surprise that all expressed that they felt their literacy skills were weak, and that all, for the exception of one, said that they felt their vocabulary had either plateaued in its growth or that it was lower than average (Luo 1993). Several did express, however, that while they themselves felt that their Finnish could be better, they suspected that it might be better than they think. Interestingly enough, this did not always cause a lack of motivation but rather a longing to maintain the language, despite being aware of the difficulties of maintenance.

Two of the participants testified to the impact marriage can have on a language ability after leaving the home of their parents. These two were sisters who had both married Finnish-speakers and have maintained their Finnish. As to siblings, birth order, and language strength levels, they have two brothers who are either single or married to non-Finns. The brothers have had and still have the "weakest Finnish," and speak to their parents nowadays in half Finnish and half English. All of those interviewed, however, including the sisters, admitted that the dominant language between them and their siblings or peers growing up was English (Kravin 1992).

Previous research has stated that the main reason parents want their children to speak the heritage language is to maintain "family cohesiveness;" I found quite a mixed response to this (Luo and Wiseman 2000). Of the participants interviewed, five had their own children. Of the three with children that married Finns or Finnish Swedes, all of their children speak some measure of Finnish—one mentioning that, "they will speak English to me all the time, unless they hear someone at the store speaking Finnish. 'Aiti! Siel' on suomalaisia!' I'm like, 'shh!'"

English is the strongest language of her children, but Finnish, again, holds some status and cultural value, causing a bond between even strangers of the same background, but it is not necessary in the home.

Another mentioned her parent's and in-law's views of her own children's language ability, crediting the need to for her children to speak Finnish to them and to the way she was brought up. However, of the two with children that have married non-Finns, their children do not speak or understand much Finnish, or they do not feel confident to teach their children the language.

The background of a person's spouse is one factor, of course; Luo and Wiseman (2000) observed that the second-generation immigrant's dominant language shifts to the language of their peers or in this case, to the language of their spouses, even if the spouse encourages the heritage language. American Finns do go "incognito" from the Finnish scene if they marry a non-Finn. If looked for, the Finnish community is there, but the younger Finns, especially the ones that marry into the dominant culture, do not see the need to speak a language that is not needed in daily life and do not see the need to pursue a community that is so limited in possibilities, as the current Finnish community is in Florida. While the demographics of the population in South Florida has changed in the last two decades, it is still true that Finnish Americans who marry into the same cultural background are more prone to keeping their cultural identity, even into the next generation, as we have seen. However, most of the younger Finns are not prone to marry other Finns, so the current ethnolinguistic vitality of the younger generation of Finns is decreasing.

The everyday necessity or use for Finnish is not there as it was in the 70s, 80s, and 90s.

Interestingly enough, of all of the married participants, all of those that were married to Finnish speakers expressed some sort of motivation to maintain the language, despite English being the dominant language, and all of those that were married to Americans expressed appreciation for

the language for reasons of intellectual, personal enhancement and of the “joy of knowing a second language.” The maintenance of the language was thus positively perceived regardless of life situation.

In regards to South Floridian Finns and the definition of ethnolinguistic vitality, that which “makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations,” 8 out of the 9 people interviewed commented or insinuated that they felt “disconnected” or “uninvolved” from the Finnish community, regardless of whether or not they were married to a Finn (Giles, et al 1977). A positive view of Finnish as a language, family culture, and identity were very prevalent, but being involved in a larger Finnish community in South Florida was not very commented on. In fact, most commented that the community was “dying,” or “aging,” “getting smaller,” despite evidence of a greater influence in the past (Finnish signs in residential areas, saunas in the apartment buildings, etc). Even annual Finnish festivals, although mentioned as evidence for the Finnish impact in the community, were referenced as not as “Finnish” as in past decades. However, the fact that Finnish people had played a large part in the construction and development of Lake Worth was also common knowledge. Of the three measuring factors of ethnolinguistic vitality—status, demographics, and institutional support—all showed signs of past vitality for Finns but current regression in vitality levels.

Finns had a high status because of their role in founding the community. However, again, the cultural demographics have changed and the remaining Finns themselves had become very insular, Finns for Finns rather than Finns in and for the surrounding, host-culture community. However, amongst the interview participants, the children of the Finns who moved to Florida around the 1960’s and 1970’s, there was a strong sentiment that Finns in the States should move

their mental attentions back to the States. While there is no longer a need for a public Finnish voice, per se, ethnic Finns as Americans can integrate, impacting the current community by contributing with their skills, talents, and abilities.

There is, however, still some institutional support in South Florida in regards to the club houses and cultural centers of the Finns in South Florida. There are also two churches in which Finns can involve themselves.

Some surprising factors of my research was the concept of the “secret language,” something all of the participants mentioned. Finnish was a language of belonging, something that bonded co-ethnic peers or family members together and allowed them to communicate amongst each other without the outside, dominant group understanding what they were saying. That, combined with that most of the participants’ closest friends—as children if not as adults—were of the same ethnicity, caused for a strong feeling of belonging and even delight.

However, besides the above reasons, personal motivation, and pride, Finnish is not a necessary language even for people of Finnish descent in South Florida today. The small, aging Finnish community, the decrease in immigration, the rise of other minority languages, and the dominance of English, all contribute to the shift among young people to the American society. Finnish is optional but not necessary. It is held dear and prized as a skill of high value, but is not essential to life. This shift has been seen time and again in research.

I now briefly summarize the above information to answer the research questions:

RQ 1) What factors contributed to heritage language transmission during childhood?

Of those interviewed, all had childhood homes where Finnish was spoken to them. Although none went to school in Finnish or for Finnish, all had parents that spoke predominantly Finnish.

Many were exposed to Finnish media and books, and almost all went to a Finnish church at one point or another, and most also made frequent trips to Finland as a child. Some had parents that spoke little or no English. For almost all, their whole childhood community was Finnish.

RQ 2) How has language ability and preference developed over time?

Most reflected that their Finnish proficiency level has now regressed or stayed the same, though if Finnish was involved outside of the home, it may be improving. Marriage, family and/or work, have been causes for maintenance, although family has been the prominent cause. Most felt that their language ability had declined because of the lack of need for it outside of the home, as the surrounding Finnish community has begun to age and shrink in size. Aside from one family, every participant expressed that their use of Finnish has now been limited to family use, or more specifically, to use with parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles. However, marriage has also played a role in why Finnish has been maintained or to why it is used—if their spouse is of the same ethnicity and speaks the same language, while the use of Finnish is still within family, it expands the possibility for use, if not the necessity for use. Those that needed Finnish for work or church expressed that that involvement improved their language levels. Not many travel to Finland anymore, and even the motivation to improve their literacy skills has declined because of a lack of need and because of the difficulty.

RQ 3) How has the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Finnish community affected their language maintenance?

The surrounding Finnish community did not play a highly motivational role in motivating participants to speak Finnish, for the exception of those that are involved at the church. The current Finnish community, itself, generally does not motivate to use Finnish, as it is aging and

growing smaller with time. There is no need, per se, for Finnish, but the intrinsic and cultural desire to speak is still there. “Finnish-ness” also created an immediate point of common ground among strangers.

However, there was much reflection on the Finnish community of past decades, its strength, and the resulting effects. Current Finns in the community can benefit from the community’s strong ethnolinguistic vitality of previous decades by enjoying the resulting positive regard the dominant American public has of the Finns, even if the current community is fading away.

## 7. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

This research began in the fall of 2017 and lasted until spring of 2019, so while there has been plenty of time for reflection and analysis, there also may be details that were lost over the course of time. One weakness of this study is the small amount of data. While data saturation was obtained quite quickly in some aspects, it would have been beneficial to gather more narratives to see if and how the experiences of these nine interviewees line up with others.

Also, the research could have been set up as a case study because nearly all of the interviewees had the church in common. While the Finnish community in Lake Worth and Lantana is quite small, not all attend the same church or are even religious, so the familiarity of the participants with each other and their common beliefs may have played a factor. I also personally knew many

of the people I interviewed, as well as their families, so I drew some information from my previous knowledge of them rather than from the data I had gathered.

One interesting discovery during this research was the conflict that visiting Finland can bring. The language of Finns who grew up in America definitely singles them out from Finns who grew up in Finland. In Florida, being able to speak any kind of Finnish is a “door” into the Finnish community; it makes someone belong. In Finland, however, that same language ability may be the very factor that singles them out from the crowd and excludes them. Also, another unexpected factor was the influence of a spouse’s background. The participants who had married people from Finnish backgrounds were more adamant about maintaining the language and passing it down to their children. Those that had married English-speakers were not as determined. Also interesting was the impact of the rules and expectations in the childhood home. Those from families where Finnish had been strictly enforced were more likely to marry Finns as well as upkeep the language. Those that were from families where Finnish was spoken but not demanded were less likely to marry a Finn or feel the need to pass the language down to their children. The link between the language rules of the childhood home and spouse could be further explored.

Also, this research strengthened and confirmed existent research as well as expanded on what is already known. For future research, it would be recommended to gather more data, and delve deeper into other concepts presented in the interviews that this project did not have time to explore, such as the impact of the Finnish Pentecostal Church on the Finnish community in South Florida, dual culture identity and resulting underlying conflict, the impact of a parent’s cultural perceptions on a child, and what motivates a person to keep a language and a cultural

identity. This research looked mainly at language ability, but much of the results and interviews dealt with motivation and identity. This could be further explored.

In conclusion, although Finnish may not be necessary for the Finns in Lake Worth and Lantana, there is still a deep appreciation and a pull toward the richness and even mystery that it brings to life.

Maybe it's because you hear about Finland; growing up, your whole life, you hear a different language—and it is something...it's something ihmeellinen [wonderful]; it's something different; it's something magical in a way that you somehow want to hold on to. Like, does that make any sense?

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