

**STRIVING TO BE “NORMAL”: EXPLORING IDENTITY
AND POSITIONING IN THE NARRATIVES OF A
MIGRANT WOMAN LIVING IN FINLAND**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This case study investigates the identity of an Afghan migrant woman who recently arrived in Finland, and the ways societal normative beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland are revealed in her narratives. This study considers identity from a poststructuralist and social constructivist perspective as a continuous work in progress and as articulated in interaction. Drawing on data from ethnographically informed observation and open-ended interviews carried out in the participant’s home, the present study adopts positioning as the methodological framework for the analysis. What it found was that the participant had, to some degree, internalized dominant societal normative beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland that she was exposed to in her daily life, and that these influenced her own sense of self. Specifically, learning Finnish and finding a job were viewed as the main signs of successful integration in Finland, reflecting mainstream discourses on the matter. Failing to meet these expectations, the participant of this study viewed herself as not “normal”, a notion further reinforced by her positioning herself as a struggling student in comparison to her peers in her Finnish class. However, this negative positioning at the level of the participant’s narratives was also challenged in interviews, where she would use her relationship with her audience and the space of her home as a resource to position herself in a more powerful and agentic way. The findings of this case study cannot be generalized, as it focuses the individual experiences of a single participant. Nevertheless, it hopes to provide a small “real life example” of what it means to be a migrant in integration training in Finland, paving the way for future research that could, through a larger case study with more participants, further explore the extent to which such dominant societal normative beliefs emerge in migrants’ narratives and, potentially, identify wider patterns or trends.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

This research project focuses on the identity of an Afghan migrant woman who recently arrived in Finland, examining what different subject positions emerge in narrative interviews. Identity is considered from a poststructuralist perspective as ever-changing and as articulated in interaction. This conceptualization of identity will be expanded on further in the theoretical background section below, along with a brief overview of Finland's immigration and integration history.

The interest for this work's topic stems from the fact that while a variety of studies have addressed integration and identity at the level of the classroom and the labour market in Finland (see Koskela, 2014; Masoud, Holm and Brunila, 2021; Pöyhönen et al, 2013; Iikkanen, 2019), not many have specifically focused on the context of the home. Indeed, the data for the present case study was collected entirely in the space of the participant's home, through ethnographically informed participant observation and open-ended interviews. Carrying out the data collection for this study in the home of the participant allowed to account for the non-linguistic resources that contributed to her positionings in our conversations, resulting in a more detailed account of her own sense of self and providing valuable information regarding the ways the surrounding space contributed to the articulation of her identity in her narratives. As such, this study will address the theme of migrant identity from a different perspective that is not that of the formal language classroom setting, nor that of labour market integration.

In addition to focusing on identity, this study will also address what normative societal beliefs about immigration and integration circulating in Finnish society are revealed in the participant's narratives as internalized by her, and the role they play in the construction of her identity. Although the findings of this case study cannot be generalized, by connecting the local, individual dimension of the participant's own identity with the broader sociocultural context she lives in, I hope to provide a "real life example" that could be used as a resource to find alternative ways to foster integration policies in Finland, contributing to the creation of other channels for people to find their place in Finnish society without solely relying on employment

(and the importance of language as a skill to accomplish it) as the marker of successful integration (Saukkonen, 2016).

The goals of this thesis can be summarised in the following research questions:

- 1) What subject positions emerge in the narratives of a migrant woman living in Finland?
- 2) How are societal normative beliefs about integration and immigration circulating in Finnish society revealed in her narratives?

Both questions will be answered by analysing the data through the lens of positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990; Bamberg, 1997). This approach to the data analysis will not only allow to highlight the participant's own sense of self, but also to connect it to the broader sociocultural context she lives in. Indeed, the following section will begin with an overview of immigration and integration policy in Finland, situating the study before moving on to its theoretical framework.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Narratives can serve many purposes, from remembering things to persuading an audience. Most importantly, it is through narratives that individuals make sense of their experiences. As put by Joan Didion, “we tell ourselves stories in order to live” (1979), and it is through these stories that our identities are articulated. Influenced by the “narrative turn in the social sciences” (Riessman, 2008; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000), this thesis is a study on identity as discursively constructed through narrative. The following section will provide an overview of the main theoretical concepts underlying this study. Specifically, after situating the study in the Finnish context, I will introduce the concept of identity as constructed in linguistic interaction, elaborating in particular on the notion of positioning as a useful approach to the study of identity. Finally, the last part of this chapter will overview a few studies done in the field, giving particular attention to studies that look at identity construction in narrative interviews.

Generally speaking, I define identity from a poststructuralist perspective, as “an ongoing work in progress” (Pavlenko, 2001, p. 139) that is co-constructed and dynamic. In other words, the individual is not a pre-given entity, but the result of ongoing relations of power that shape her (Foucault, 1986). In the context of the present study, this means that the participant’s identity is not fixed, but is continuously influenced by her position in Finnish society, bound by social expectations and discourses that are not always in her control. It is by negotiating these positions in interaction, then, that her identity emerges as socio-culturally constructed narratives which are, in the words of Block, “the product of the negotiating of subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present and future” (2010, p. 338).

This section will discuss how identification involves different levels, from the individual to the collective, and how these are inextricably interrelated and influence each other in the construction of the self. As mentioned above, the production of identity does not happen only at the level of the individual, but is a process fundamentally influenced by context. In the case of this study, this means considering how the

broader Finnish context and the discourses around integration and immigration in Finland may influence the participant's perception of herself. In order to do that, a brief overview of the subject of immigration and integration in Finland will be presented below. Finally, after having provided a theoretical framework for the study of identity and outlined the positioning approach adopted in this study, the final part of this chapter will address the growing relevance of narratives as an object of research in the social sciences, especially in the case of studies concerned with migrant identities.

2.1 Situating the Study

According to the Finnish Immigration Agency, both the words "immigrant" and "migrant" can be used to define "any person who moves to Finland with the intention to live there" (Migri). In the case of this study, these terms will be used to refer to individuals who have come to Finland as asylum seekers and have been granted refugee status, and who have either completed or are currently going through integration training, as that is the status of this study's participant. As research in the Finnish context (e.g. Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, 2015; Iikkanen, 2017, 2019; Intke-Hernandez and Holm, 2015; Koskela, 2014) predominantly uses the term "migrant" in the Finnish context, this will also be preferred in the current study. To further explore the Finnish context, the section below will discuss in more detail Finnish integration policy and discourses around integration and immigration in Finland.

2.1.1 Immigration and Integration in Finland

Compared to other European countries, Finland has become a destination for immigration relatively recently, starting from the late 1980s and experiencing a significant growth in immigration flows during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 that affected all of the EU (Saukkonen, 2016). After the first national integration act of 1999 (Saukkonen, 2016), Finnish integration policy was reformed with the the Promotion of Immigrant Integration Act of 2010 (Finlex). The Act defines integration as the "interactive development involving immigrants and society at large, the aim of which is to provide immigrants with the knowledge and skills required in society and working life, and to provide them with support, so that they can maintain their culture and language" (Finlex, 2010, Section 3,1). Integration is thus considered a two-way process involving both migrants and the host society and its institutions, which are also expected to adapt to the changing situation (Saukkonen, 2016, p. 5). Nevertheless, the policies enacted by the Finnish state have often been criticized for assuming an

excessively assimilationist approach, aiming to shape the behaviour of migrants to become more Finnish-like (Intke-Hernandez and Holm, 2015).

Another issue highlighted by research on Finnish integration policy and its effects is its disproportionate focus on what skills and knowledge migrants are expected to adopt in order to become accepted members of their host society, and not enough on the role of the host society itself (Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, 2015; Iikkanen, 2017; Saukkonen, 2016). Indeed, the main aim of Finnish integration policy appears to be to get newcomers to enter the labour market as soon as possible (Saukkonen, 2016, p. 9). This mirrors the overall trend in integration policies in Europe, where EU policies concerning integration continue to point out that employment is the fundamental aspect of integration and social inclusion (EC 2017; 2016). However, in the case of Finland, the unemployment rate among non-natives remains significantly higher than that of native Finns, especially in the case of women who were born in Middle Eastern or Sub-Saharan countries (Saukkonen, 2016). It is worth noting that these issues are not exclusive to Finland, but appear to be shared by other Nordic countries and Denmark (Saukkonen, 2016).

Moreover, as remarked by Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, even though all migrants are recognized as an integral part of Finnish society in principle, priority is often given to those migrant groups which can enhance Finland's international competitiveness (2015). In their article, they describe Finland's approach to migrant integration and its preoccupation with skills as "a mixture of humanitarian aims and discourses combined with a neoliberal stance on the labour market and the economy" (Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, 2015, p. 6). This is also reflected in the "migrant hierarchy" outlined by Koskela (2014) in her study on the experiences of belonging of highly skilled migrants in Finland. Indeed, she suggests that, in the Finnish context, "prevalent value judgements intersect to form an overall "migrant hierarchy"" where highly-skilled, preferably Western migrants are placed at the top (Koskela, 2014, p. 36). Migrants' skills and ability to successfully enter the labour market, then, have a central role in Finland's approach to immigration and integration.

With great emphasis being put on the acquisition of skills that allow migrants to find a job as quickly as possible, language learning has a fundamental role. As the policymaker interviews conducted by Pöyhönen and Tarnanen (2015) on the subject demonstrate, successfully entering the working life of the host society is considered the main goal of integration, and sufficiently mastering the language of the host society is a necessary step to achieve that goal. This discourse is reproduced by most stakeholders involved in integration training, reinforcing the notion that learning Finnish is the way for migrants to change their circumstances, avoid marginalization and find employment (Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, 2015, p. 115; Iikkanen, 2017). Finding employment is viewed as the primary indicator of successful integration, at the risk of

discounting other aspects of the integration process, such as participation in social life and developing a sense of community. This notion is reflected by integration programs which tend to concentrate on basic language instruction and vocational education (Iikkanen, 2019, p. 2, Saukkonen, 2016), with the primary goal of getting migrants to enter the labour market as quickly as possible.

The importance of learning the language of the society one intends to live in cannot be disputed, as it is a fundamental tool to connect with members of the host society. However, equating integration to successful employment is a kind of discourse that risks positioning migrants who lack Finnish skills as outsiders who are not integrated successfully. This is true particularly in a country with a “strong monocultural tradition” such as Finland (Iikkanen, 2017, p. 122). This is made evident by Saukkonen’s criticism of Finland’s current integration policies, which lack effective measures to carry out immigrant multiculturalism and focus disproportionately on expectations - at the center of which is the learning of Finnish - placed on immigrants, and not enough on the multicultural value that an actual two-way integration process can bring to Finnish society (2016). Indeed, he suggests that Finland needs to develop other channels for the newcomers to find their place in the host society, promoting integration and language learning in settings outside of the workplace as well (Saukkonen, 2016, p. 15).

In other words, learning Finnish is considered the key to access welfare, participation, and employment, and the responsibility for successful integration is predominantly placed on the individual and their ability to learn the local language. This discourse is often reproduced by migrants themselves as well, as emerges in Iikkanen’s ethnographic study (2017) examining the role of language in the experiences of exclusion and inclusion of recent migrant stay-at-home parents. Although the participants interviewed in her study could rely on English as an alternative language to communicate in Finland, they still believed strongly that developing a good command of Finnish was fundamental in order to be fully integrated into Finnish society and to really “belong” (Iikkanen, 2017).

Focusing on migrant workers’ own narratives about their career paths instead, Pöyhönen, Rynkänen, Tarnanen and Hoffman (2013) also look at identity and belonging alongside language skills. More specifically, their study focuses on the professional career paths of Russian IT experts living in Finland and their language learning and integration trajectories. Although the participant demographic of this study differs from the one in this thesis, Pöyhönen et al.’s work (2013) foregrounds participants’ own narratives in a similar way, bringing individual experience to the fore by focusing on participants’ storytelling in an interview setting. From this, a complex and multidimensional description of integration processes emerged. The study points out that learning Finnish was not the only path to find employment and

successfully integrate for the participants, although many of them still felt that learning the local language was something they should do to truly belong to the host society (Pöyhönen et al, 2013). In fact, the participants of the study were able to capitalize on other resources available to them such as other language skills, previous schooling and support from both family and their community. Some of them even took the opportunity to change their career path in Finland. Finnish language skills alone, then, were not the only factor mentioned by participants' in relation to their integration into the working life.

The relationship between language learning, belonging and integration is also explored by Iikkanen in her 2019 study on two migrant mothers living in Finland. Following their experiences of language learning and working life integration for a period of three years, her longitudinal study follows the participants' changing relationship to the Finnish language as it is described by them in interviews which were then analysed through a short story narrative approach. Specifically, her study is theoretically informed by the concept of investment (Darvin and Norton, 2015) in language learning observing how it changes over time alongside their language use. In their narratives, the two women recount how they successfully managed to enter the labour market and build meaningful lives in Finland, gradually investing more and more in the learning of Finnish, which eventually assumed a central role in their daily language practices. By relying on a narrative approach, Iikkanen was able to trace the individual language learning experiences of her participants and to highlight the highly contextual and social nature of the language learning and integration processes (2019, p. 17), something that this present study will also attempt to do. Indeed, my study's participant's narratives also focus on the importance of learning Finnish, with particular emphasis given to the role her language learning played in her integration and employment.

In fact, although with a group of diverse participants, the above-mentioned studies all highlight the central role of language learning in the integration process. Indeed, in Finland, language learning occurs predominantly in the first two years after a migrant's arrival as part of their individual integration plan that is drawn-up by the Finnish Employment and Economic Development Office (TE-Office) (Masoud, Holm and Brunila, 2021). This centrality not only powerfully emerges in official policies and stakeholder interviews, but is also echoed by migrants themselves, and is at times a cause of concern for them. In order to further investigate the connection between language, identity and integration, then, the present work will take up Iikkanen's suggestion of looking at the everyday lives of migrants, the circumstances and the experiences which they go through (2017, p. 126) to gain valuable insight into the way language and integration can shape one's sense of belonging and perception of the self. In particular, while most studies have focused on workplace or the language

classroom context, the present ethnographic case-study will focus specifically on the home context of the participant. It is through interviews and observations that took place in her own home that the main theme of this work - how her perceived inability to learn Finnish has impacted her identity - emerged. While previous studies have looked at the classroom context or integration into the labour market (see Koskela, 2014; Masoud, Holm and Brunila, 2021; Pöyhönen et al, 2013; Iikkanen, 2019), the home is a space that remains under-researched, specifically in the Finnish context. This gap informed my decision to carry out the present ethnographic case-study in the context of the home of the participant, hoping that this different perspective will allow to provide a more detailed and realistic portrayal of what it means to integrate and live in Finnish society outside the formal classroom setting, an area that still requires further research.

Indeed, greater awareness of the lives and experiences of newcomers can not only positively influence the general perception of phenomena such as immigration, but also greatly inform pedagogical practices and integration training development in ways that can foster better and more long-term involvement (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Miller, 2014), improving our understanding of how identity, language learning and integration intersect at the level of the individual. This is especially relevant considering the recent growth in diversity and immigration in Finland, with new voices, languages and cultures becoming increasingly relevant as an integral part of Finnish society (Laihiala-Kankainen, Pietikäinen, & Dufva, 2002), with the experiences of single individuals deserving greater attention.

In order to achieve this goal of focusing on individual experience, this work will investigate identity as it is produced in linguistic interaction. While identity is an extremely broad topic which has been the subject of widespread research from many different perspectives, it remains a crucial concept in the study of the relationship between language learning and the understanding of who we are as individuals, especially when we recognize its complex and multifaceted nature (Ruuska, 2020, p. 52). The section below will expand on the concept of identity as it is employed in this study.

2.2 Identity in Linguistic Interaction

In this case study, identity is understood as an ongoing cultural and social process realized on multiple levels, involving complex social relationships that are negotiated through language (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Norton, 2016). Thus, identity is not considered fixed, but (co-)constructed in social interaction within a specific context. Specifically, this study will focus on the identities that a learner of Finnish as a second

language produces in the context of several interviews taking place at her home. The sections below will outline the theoretical foundations on which this study relies for the study of identity, introducing Bucholtz and Hall's five fundamental principles for the study of identity (2005) and the concept of positioning as theorized by Davies and Harré (1990) and developed by Bamberg (1997).

2.2.1 Five Fundamental Principles for the Study of Identity

Bucholtz and Hall propose a framework consisting of five fundamental principles for the study of identity as produced in linguistic interaction (2005). These principles will constitute the theoretical foundation to explore the ways the participant of this study reproduces and challenges multiple notions of personhood and belonging in Finnish society. In particular, Bucholtz and Hall's "indexicality principle" will allow to recognize what identities are produced by the participant of this study and, through the concept of positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990), to identify the comparative elements that emerge in the identity construction process as it takes place in our interactions.

The rationale in selecting this theoretical framework over other conceptualizations of indexicality (see Johnstone, 2006; Silverstein, 2003; Blommaert, 2007) is based on the aim of this study, which is to focus on the perceived impact of language learning and the integration process on my participant's identity, rather than viewing the entire variety of identities utilized by her. Indeed, while the concept of indexicality can be a useful tool in sociolinguistics for the study of linguistic and cultural variation that characterizes Late Modern diasporic environments (Blommaert, 2007), the focus of this study is not on societal linguistic practices as they connect to identity framing. Rather, this thesis looks at how the study participant's narratives over time indexes various aspects of identity. Looking at identity framing through linguistic practices or focusing on the relationship between linguistic form and social meaning (Johnstone, 2006) would therefore fall beyond the scope of this study.

The five principles that constitute the theoretical framework for this study will be briefly described in the following section.

Bucholtz and Hall's first principle is the "emergence principle" (2005, p. 585). That is, identity is not the source of linguistic and semiotic practices, but rather their emergent product. From a poststructuralist perspective, then, identity is not fixed. Indeed, Norton defines identity as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (2016, p. 476). Identity, thus, emerges as the result of negotiation of one's position in the world.

This articulation of the relationship between the world and the self is always situated. Bucholtz and Hall account for this in their second principle, "the positionality principle", discussing what types of resources are available to speakers for

constructing their identities in interaction depending on context, both at the macro and micro level (2005). They distinguish three different levels of resources: “(a) macro-level demographic categories, (b) local, ethnographically specific cultural positions, (c) temporary and interactionally specific stances and participant roles” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, p. 592). Broader social categories, then, are a resource for identity construction alongside more local and temporary resources that are connected to a specific context. For instance, while being a highly respected medical professional in her home country, the participant of this study found herself in a completely different position in Finland. Her limited Finnish language skills and her refugee status placed her at the margins of her new host society, her past professional qualifications and the agency that came with it overshadowed by her position as an “outsider”. In other words, the social context determined and limited her options to perceive and present herself (Ruuska, 2020, p. 53). This connection between structure and individual agency has a long history in social theorizing (see Giddens, 1984) and is ultimately indebted to Marx, who originally made the point in 1852: “men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past, not in circumstance of their own choosing” (2000, p. 7).

While the main focus will be on the content of the interviews, it is also necessary to acknowledge the importance of the space the interviews took place in as a resource for identity construction. Indeed, her home influenced the way she positioned herself and the way she articulated her identity during our interviews, her Afghan style decorated living room acting as a multisensory discourse resource (Boivin, 2020) connecting her to her past self and her home country, which was still a central part of her present identity in her new life in Finland. In a way, her home space acted as a way for her to reclaim a more powerful position, connecting her to her past self.

Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) third principle, “the indexicality principle” is closely related to the second one, as it explains ways in which identity emerges in interaction. That is, how individuals employ the resources available to them to construct their identities. More specifically, Bucholtz and Hall define the “overt mention of identity categories and labels” and the “implicatures and presuppositions regarding one’s own or others’ identity position” in interaction (2005, p. 594) as indexical processes through which speakers can construct their identities. In other words, speakers position themselves in different ways, explicitly and implicitly, by displaying their evaluative and epistemic orientations to ongoing talk. The indexical nature of these processes resides in the fact that they refer to patterns of meaning-making that extend beyond the single speech situation, thus anchoring the speaker’s discourse into broader, situation-transcendent patterns. As a result, even when identity is entirely locally accomplished and would not exist prior to the speech situation, it still is

realized through a process of “pointing from within” which can be viewed as an indexical process. This is a slightly different approach to the notion of indexicality that sociolinguistics of globalization is traditionally concerned with, which usually focuses on how particular ways of speaking “point at” particular hierarchies of valuation - orders of indexicality - that have a broader scope beyond the single interaction (see Johnstone, 2009; and Blommaert, 2007).

Compared to this, Bucholtz and Hall’s notion of indexicality (2005) adopted in this study allows to focus on what identity positions emerge in the participant’s narrative and, by relying on positioning, to observe how the participant explicitly orients herself in relation to these identities. Indexicality, hence, is viewed as the way in which mentioning or presupposing categories anchors the single interaction to broader complexes of meaning-making, that in this case constitute the participant’s identity. As a result, the focus is primarily on the “what” of her narratives, and less on more pragmatic aspects of her language use. Given that, Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) definition of indexicality better fits the research context.

Positioning themselves, speakers claim what they are and, simultaneously, what they are not. This is Bucholtz and Hall’s fourth principle, the “relationality principle”. In other words, identification happens in terms of relations of similarity and difference. This is evident, for example, in the participant of this study’s identification as a “foreigner” in opposition to the “locals”, positioning herself as an outsider. Identification as something or someone always includes identification as not something or someone else (Ruuska, 2020, p. 53).

Finally, Bucholtz and Hall’s last principle is the “partialness principle” (2005), which recognizes that identity production is not just a deliberate, conscious process, but is the result of habitual practices that may remain implicit, as well as the result of negotiation in interaction, influenced by the local context as well as by larger ideological structures. This means that identity construction is a constantly shifting process which may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual, and in part shaped by constraints that are not necessarily under the control of the one producing such identity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, p. 606). The participant of this study, for instance, could not freely choose what identities to produce in our interactions, as her options were limited by her refugee status and language learner and, at a more local level, by my very presence as her audience.

Together, Bucholtz and Hall’s five fundamental principles constitute a “general sociolinguistic perspective on identity” that can be used as a starting point and guiding structure in the study of identity as an intersubjectively achieved social and cultural phenomenon that emerges from habitual practice, interactional negotiation, and is influenced by representations and ideologies (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005, pp. 586, 607-608). Recent work in the study of identity has increasingly focused on the ways in

which other dimensions of interaction can be resources for the construction of identity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). Specifically, they refer to DuBois' work on stance (2007) and to similar approaches that have emerged in a variety of fields. Of particular interest to the present study is the concept of positioning, as first developed in the field of discursive social psychology by Davies and Harré (1990) and expanded on in later research.

2.2.2 Positioning

Positioning is a notion often employed alongside identity and closely related to it (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). It was first defined by Davies and Harré as "the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (1990, p. 47).

Positioning, thus, emphasizes the role that interaction has in shaping identities and determining what roles are taken up by speakers in specific contexts. The joint narratives emerging from these interactions are not, however, linear and non-contradictory life stories, but rather the "cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 49) that are continuously negotiated and re-shaped in interaction. It is these narratives that will be the focus of this study on identity.

Furthermore, Davies and Harré (1990) distinguish two types of positioning: reflexive and interactive. The first involves one positioning oneself, while the second concerns the way what one says positions the other. Together these positionings produce identities that can be viewed as socio-culturally constructed narratives (Block, 2010, p. 338). In other words, individual identities are continuously located in conversation, and constitute dynamic story lines where different and multiple subject positions are engaged with at the same time. Individuals, then, strive to produce some consistent and coherent story about their lives and how they intend to live them (Baxter, 2016, p. 42).

Davies and Harré's distinction of reflective and interactive positioning is further developed by Bamberg (1997, p. 337). Attempting to bridge traditional narrative approaches and positioning, it should be recognized that Bamberg's approach is also indebted to Goffman's notion of footing, that is, "the alignment we take up to ourselves and others present as expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an utterance (Goffman, 1981, p. 128). Indeed, both positioning and footing are concerned with describing the identity work done in interaction while also acknowledging the emergent nature of context, focusing respectively on subtle interactional work and resource orientations of participants in interaction (Ribeiro, 2006, pp. 50-51).

More specifically, Bamberg (1997) identifies three levels of positioning, summarized by the following three questions:

- 1) How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported event?
- 2) How does the speaker position herself to the audience?
- 3) How do narrators position themselves to themselves?

The first question is concerned with the characters the participant constructs in her stories, and how she positions them when recounting events. The second, on the other hand, focuses more on the position and purpose of the speaker in relation to her audience, how she is presenting herself. The third question, finally, expands the scope of the analysis to include the way speakers may make claims about themselves that go beyond the local conversation (Bamberg, 1997). The first two questions, then, focus on the participant's subject positions at the levels of the interaction itself and of the stories she tells. Both these levels, in turn, contribute to the last one, that is, the participant's continuous referencing and orienting to social positions and discourses that go beyond the local here and now of the conversation (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 380). As a result, this framework allows for a two-fold view of identity, both as it is presented in narrative and as it is constructed in interactive engagement (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008; Bamberg, 1997). Since this study investigates the ways language learning and integration processes are perceived by the participant to affect her identity, the ways she positions herself in her narratives and how this positioning is influenced by the broader sociocultural context will also be addressed. This will be realized by focusing on Bamberg's level 3 positioning (1997), as it allows to explore "how the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regards to dominant discourses or master narratives" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, p. 385). In other words, Bamberg's level three positioning can serve as a "middle-ground construct" between talk-in-interaction approaches that exclusively centre on participant orientations at the local level, and "approaches that regard identity as basically determined by macro-social processes and only manifested in discourse" (De Fina, 2013, pp. 40 - 58).

The three levels listed in Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) positionality principle discussed above, then, will be used as guidelines to answer Bamberg's positioning questions (1997). By looking at the different positions listed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005, p. 592) - macro-level demographic categories, local positions, and temporary and interactionally and participant roles - and at the indexical processes through which they emerge in interaction, it will be possible to shed light on how the participant positions her sense of self in relation to mainstream attitudes and beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland, while also accounting for how these are relevant to the interaction taking place in the here and now of the interview (De Fina, 2013, p. 391)

This approach is particularly useful in cases where identity is fragmented and contested in nature, such as in the case of individuals who have moved across geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new, unfamiliar sociocultural environments with potentially destabilizing effects. This is the case, for instance, of migrant language learners, such as the participant of this study, who have left their home countries and find themselves immersed in a new, unfamiliar environment. Identity, then, is “a site of struggle” (Norton, 2016). In the case of this study’s participant, this struggle involved learning Finnish and finding her way in her new host society, positioning herself in different ways in relation to the identities available to her after having left her home country and arriving in Finland as a refugee.

An analysis of identity from such an interdisciplinary, constructivist perspective that specifically focuses on the identities of migrant second language learners is proposed by Block in his book “Second Language Identities” (2009). At its center is the concept of ambivalence, that is, the feeling resulting from the negotiation of difference that a search for balance in a new environment can entail, “the uncertainty of feeling part and apart. [...] The natural state of human beings who are forced by their life trajectories to make choices where choices are not easy to make” (Block, 2009, pp. 864-865). This state of ambivalence and destabilization is especially salient in migrant identities, as the experience of border crossing involves the negotiation and reconstruction of a sense of self, to find one’s place in a new, often unfamiliar society (Muller Mirza and Dos Santos Mamed, 2019). As a result, transforming, reinterpreting and retelling one’s stories becomes a crucial part of the process of “fitting in” the new environment. As Bauman (1999) puts it, “no thoughts are given to identity when belonging comes naturally”. It’s when “belonging” is not automatic, that identities - and the stories we tell about them - become relevant. Indeed, belonging is a central topic in the interviews in the present study as well, as its participant struggled to find her place in her new life in Finland. Block’s approach also relies on positioning, defining it as a process of engagement by the individual with others, whereby they situate themselves and are situated by others within a specific context. This positioning, in turn, influences the storyline produced by an individual in and through interaction.

Block’s analysis is of particular relevance for this study as it introduces the concept of ambivalence, which is used to highlight the particular condition of destabilization modern migrant identities may find themselves in due to their experience of border crossing, such as in the case of this study. In fact, he suggests “identification” as a more appropriate term over “identity”, where identification is both internal and external, as it is simultaneously conditioned by social interaction and social structures, and in turn conditions them, in what may be described as a two-way process where identity is constituted by and is constitutive of the social context (Block, 2007).

2.3 The Narrative Turn in the Social Sciences

The emphasis on narrative in this study is informed by the “narrative turn in the social sciences” (Riessman, 2008; Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000), which has led to an increased interest in first-person narratives as a source of insightful research data, especially in the case of studies focusing on migrant identities. Furthermore, Pavlenko & Lantolf propose a shift away from third-person accounts in favor of first-person narrative accounts, as they can “provide a much richer source of data”, by bringing to the surface aspects of human activity that more traditional approaches to research are not always able to capture (2000, pp. 157-159). Although Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) predominantly discuss written narratives, they also advocate going beyond written texts, and recognize the value of more detailed case studies investigating narratives produced in interviews, for instance. These, in fact, could provide greater insight into the ways individuals construct their notion of self and the reasons they provide to explain their actions through narratives, talking their experiences into meaningfulness (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Pavlenko, 2004).

Focusing specifically on the migrant and transnational context, Baynham and De Fina (2016) suggest that narratives are spaces where individuals’ selves can emerge in the form of storytelling, and where the expression and negotiation of belonging takes place. They also highlight the contribution of narrative-oriented research in shedding light on the relationship between identity, space and place, as well as its role in revealing the many discourse strategies and mechanisms through which narrators may index affiliations and emotional belonging in space and time (Baynham and De Fina, 2016). More generally, qualitative studies that focus on narratives, such as the present one, can provide knowledge about communities that can go beyond generalization and stereotyping (De Fina, 2003).

In particular, in the case of migrant language learners, this shift in perspective on narratives has allowed to move away from the idea of migrants as imperfect second language speakers, their stories analysed primarily to assess their language competence. Instead, it has led to a broader and more complex view that focuses on how migrant identities are influenced by the language learning process (De Fina and Tseng, 2017, p. 383). This has left room for studies that not only investigate how migrants narrate their language learning experience, but also how they connect it to other aspects of their identities, from gender to profession (see Miller, 2014; Vitanova, 2005; De Fina and King, 2011), thus bringing into the analysis the context where these narratives are produced as well, something that past research on L2 learners not always accounted for (De Fina and Tseng, 2017; Pavlenko 2007).

2.3.1 Migrant Identities in Narrative

Recently, greater attention has been given to the narratives that emerge in interviews, as is the case of De Fina's study, "Identity in narrative: A study of migrant discourse" (2003). Assuming identity as discursively constructed, De Fina's (2003) detailed discourse analysis investigates two basic aspects of the construction and expression of identity as they emerge in the "chronicles" of migrants who have crossed the border to the United States: the projection of the self into specific social roles, and the expression of membership to groups and communities. In the study, identities were displayed as well as assessed by participants through different categorizations and story orientations. In her analysis, De Fina (2003) focused on the different strategies adopted by the narrators to position themselves as either powerless or more agentic, in opposition to the "gatekeepers" of the immigration process, that is, the representatives of institutional power. What emerged was an extremely detailed analysis of the negotiation and representation of identities of Mexican migrants to the United States, proving how narrative discourse constitutes "a privileged locus for the study of identities", bringing to the surface a more subjective dimension of immigration (De Fina, 2003, p. 1). Although in a different context, the present study also looks at the ways a migrant woman positions herself in different ways in relation to representatives of institutional power - teachers and immigration officials in her case - and how her identity emerges from these positionings in her own narratives.

Similar identity displays emerge in Menard-Warwick's (2004) study of gendered narratives of two migrant language learners. Specifically, she looked at how the women in her study talked about themselves, how they evaluated their subject positions in the narratives they produced in interview, and how they made sense of their experiences. In particular, the study shows how participants' own attitudes toward language learning and, more generally, their sense of self, were influenced by their decision to either live out or resist the practices and positions they were ascribed by the dominant ideologies of their environments. For instance, their position in relation to a certain gender identity and the expected behaviours it entailed - such as being a homemaker and the primary caretaker of children - proved to be a crucial factor shaping the presentation of themselves in the narratives they produced, thus highlighting the connection between second language learning and gender identity.

Similarly, King and De Fina (2010) look at the reports of everyday life by migrant women, and how they portray themselves in informal interviews. While acknowledging the importance of gender in shaping participants' subject positions, King and De Fina (2010) emphasized the strong connection made by their participants between their language skills and their migrant status. For instance, the women in the study would frequently describe themselves as good and motivated language learners, something that allowed them to claim the position of "good migrants" who were

making an effort to fit in (King & De Fina, 2010). In fact, learning English was seen by the participants as necessary to improve and do “their part”, and choosing not to learn it was evaluated negatively (King & De Fina, 2010).

Overall, although with different contexts, the above-mentioned studies highlight how, by adopting a narrative-oriented perspective combined with interview data and a focus on positioning, it is possible to bridge the more local, situated aspects of identity as it emerges in interaction and the broader discourses and ideologies which can influence participants’ subject positions and their presentation of themselves. What is more, they highlight how participants’ position as migrants and language learners is often influenced and intersects with many other aspects of their identities, from gender and ethnicity to socioeconomic status. In the case of the participant of this study, for instance, this meant that her position as a refugee and language learner intersected with and was influenced by her identities of mother and main provider of her family.

The themes that emerged in the above-mentioned studies can also be found, to varying degrees, in the present study. For example, the powerlessness that newcomers find themselves in due to the lack of language skills and cultural competence, their position as language learners and students (and how this in turn affects their perceived status as migrants), or the gendered expectations that might be at play in the construction of their identities in their host societies, are all present in this research as well. In particular, in addition to the salient identities of migrant and language learner, the participant of this study also referred to other identities, such as that of mother, which often emerged in her narratives in connection with her desire to be able to provide for her son and lead a “normal life”.

Before examining these kinds of positionings in her narratives, the following chapter will outline the methods adopted in the data collection and analysis process.

3 METHODS

This section addresses the methods employed in the data collection and analysis in this study. First, I describe the data collection process and provide a description of the participant profile and the context of the research. Then, I discuss the nature of the data, focusing on narratives in interviews. Lastly, I address transcription conventions and ethical considerations.

This study is an ethnographically informed case study examining narrative. Yin (2014, p. 16) defines a case study as the investigation of “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context [...] especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident”. Such a holistic perspective that focuses on ordinary and everyday circumstances allows to gain insight into specific identity construction and social processes (Yin, 2014). This study adopts a constructivist paradigm (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014), based on the understanding that knowledge and meanings are subjectively created, as well as co-constructed and realized in situated interaction (Searle, 1995). Furthermore, the process of collection and interpretation of qualitative data is also considered inherently subjective (Willis, 2007). As summarized by Denzin (1994), such an interpretive approach centres on “socially constructed realities, local generalizations, interpretive resources, stocks of knowledge, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, and ordinary talk” (p. 502).

To answer its research question, this study combines interviews and participant observation, as to consider both the local dimension of the interaction and the broader context of the participant’s life experiences, and how she brings these to attention in her narratives.

As this is a case study, this work focused on interviews and observation of one single participant, whose profile will be outlined in detail in the section below. Similarly, ethical considerations and positionality will be addressed in a separate section below, which will also touch on how my own multicultural background influenced our relationship in the data collection process.

3.1 Participant Profile

The participant in this study (henceforth, Farah), is a woman in her early forties who has been living in Finland for four years and is in the process of completing language and professional training courses as part of her individual integration training. Currently unemployed, Farah lives with her son in a small one-bedroom apartment. She relies on the financial support of the Finnish state, which is connected to her attending the courses that are part of her personal integration plan.

In spite of arriving to Finland as an asylum seeker from Afghanistan seven years ago, she only started attending Finnish language classes in 2017, two years after her arrival, as there were no courses available for her prior to that. After completing three basic Finnish language courses, she is now attending a professional training course that is intended to prepare her for eventually completing the training to become a “lähihoitaja”, a practical nurse, a common professional path for many immigrants arriving to Finland (Tilastokeskus, 2016). As she was a highly qualified professional in her home country, her integration plan in Finland does not require her to go through basic education again, and only consists of language and professional training to allow her to enter the Finnish labour market as rapidly as possible. In addition to her mother tongue, a variety of Persian, Farah has basic English and Finnish language skills.

Aside from her son and her sister, Farah has no other family in Finland, but keeps in touch with friends and family abroad on a daily basis through instant messaging apps and social media. Her other social networks in Finland consisted of the migrants that attended either language and professional training courses with her or the afternoon language learning sessions at a multicultural centre in the city. She rarely mentioned spending time with her fellow nationals, and often preferred devoting her time and energy to learning as much Finnish as possible. In fact, her only regular opportunity for informal social interaction with local Finns outside of the context of the classroom were her afternoon visits to the city’s multicultural center, where I also was a volunteer. The main spaces of her life, then, were the school she attended, the multicultural centre, and her own and her sister’s homes.

3.2 Data Collection

The data for this study was collected over a three-month period, from February to April 2019, through open-ended interviews and participant observation. Combining the two provided a more complete picture of the context of the study, allowing to better triangulate the data produced in interview. It also allowed to enhance data

credibility and to cover contextual conditions that it would not have been otherwise possible to consider by exclusively relying on interviews (Yin, 2014; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The present study follows a similar methodological approach to that adopted by De Fina in her analysis (2013) of local identity displays in immigrant narratives, relying predominantly on open-ended interviews that allow the participant to share longer stories about her life and to direct the conversation toward topics of her choice. As suggested by De Fina (2013), this study also combines participant observation with interviews to gain a better understanding of what discourses, views and beliefs are presented by the participant, and how and why these are made relevant by her in our interactions. In fact, in his book "Learning how to ask: a sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the role of the interview in social science research", Briggs (1986) highlights that participant observation and informal interviews are not mutually exclusive, and that, on the contrary, the former can provide opportunities for the latter. It is crucial, Briggs argues (1986, p. 98), to systematically supplement interview data with other types of information, as this allows for a better understanding of the underlying communicative norms and practices of participants and their communities, which can in turn greatly inform the interpretative process in the data analysis.

I met the participant at her own house during weekends, for a total of eleven meetings lasting from three to six hours. I would often go visit her in the morning and stay over for lunch or tea and spend the day at her house. With the participant's consent, all of our meetings were audio-recorded, with the exception of instances where it was impossible due to practical constraints such as excessive background noise. Notes about the setting of interviews, topics discussed and my observations about the participant were written down immediately after the meetings and interviews had taken place, as I felt writing them during our conversation could have been disruptive.

3.2.1 Interview

The bulk of the data for this study comes from open-ended interviews, all of which were carried out in Finnish, our preferred language of communication. Rarely, and only when she struggled to express herself in Finnish, Farah would resort to English or translate words from Persian through an online translator app, but the conversation would immediately return to Finnish afterwards. Rather than asking direct questions, I first let instances of narrative storytelling emerge spontaneously in conversation, switching to asking more specific interview questions once a narrative surfaced, focusing on the topics brought up by the participant. These open-ended interviews, in turn, generated further storytelling. Indeed, open-ended interviews can be strongly narrative generating (Baynham & De Fina, 2016), even in the case of the shorter "small

stories” that emerge in everyday life conversation (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Georgakopoulou, 2009), where participants perform a variety of actions, incorporating evaluations and positioning themselves as they recount their life experiences. Narrative research interviewing, then, is not merely a means to an end, but rather a research instrument and object of analysis itself (Talmy, 2011).

This interviewing approach was made possible by the pre-existent rapport I had with Farah: at the time of the study, we had known each other for two years and had, over time, become friends. As my position and relationship to the participant are relevant factors affecting the data collection process, the topic will be discussed in more detail in a separate section.

In addition to the influence of our friendship on the study, it is necessary to acknowledge that interview as a method presents limitations in terms of their cultural appropriateness and accuracy, especially when significant cultural distance between participant and interviewer is present (Briggs, 1986), as was the case in this study. Indeed, this may result in possible misinterpretation of the interviewee’s responses. Furthermore, understanding participants’ answers as a direct reflection of their attitudes and thoughts may fail to consider the context-influenced, social and cooperative dimension of the interview (Briggs, 1986, p. 3). This is why participant observation was employed to complement the data collection.

As pointed out by Briggs (1986) and Polkinghorne (1996), interviews are “complex and multifaceted” communicative events where the stories we tell are always directed towards an audience and, in this sense, are a process of interactive negotiation that involves the listener even when they don’t directly intervene. That is, the audience becomes a co-author of the narrative product, as identity is constructed by both interviewer and interviewee within the social interaction (Lucius-Hoene & Depermann, 2000). Meaning making, hence, is a collective process that equally involves speaker and audience (Duranti, 1986, p. 243).

In other words, the way narrators tell their story is always influenced by and directed toward the listener, as well as other possible future audiences beyond the conversation. This meant that building trust with the participant was crucial. Fortunately, I had known Farah for a few years already at the point of the data collection of this study, which allowed the atmosphere of the interviews to be quite relaxed. Indeed, Farah felt comfortable asking questions about my thesis whenever she had any doubts.

Typically, Farah produced narrative accounts about herself and her experiences to justify her actions or attitudes, or to claim certain positions. The interview was thus an interactional occasion where she could articulate different identities by sharing her knowledge and experiences, positioning herself in relation to both the local context of the interview and the broader socio-cultural context of her life in Finland.

3.3 Narrative as Data

Narrative as a data source allows for a variety of uses and perspectives. In the case of this study, to answer its two guiding research questions, a multi-layered perspective will be adopted, with a particular focus on narrative identity as it emerges in the data. Moreover, this study's emphasis on narrative is influenced by the "narrative turn" in the social sciences (Riessman, 2008, Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000) that has led to an increased interest in first-person narratives as a source of data.

Researching autobiographical narratives allows to foreground participants' own voices and agency. Indeed, Erel (2007) argues that biographical methods are especially suited to foreground the agency and subjectivity of migrant women in research, and methods such as the one adopted in this study allow to give more attention to participants' own voice, and to the ongoing positioning taking place in interaction. In fact, Erel (2007) specifically criticizes approaches to research that have traditionally portrayed migrant women within a "deficit" framework, as dependent on men, victims of oppressive gender relations and family ties, highlighting how focusing on the self-representation that emerges- explicitly and implicitly - from migrant women's narratives can challenge these assumptions and bring their voices and personal experiences to the fore.

Narrative-based research, however, still deals with issues of significance, validity, and reliability (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). As far as the first is concerned, it should be considered that narratives - be it in the form of text or elicited through interviews - are personal, individual stories marked by conflicts and negotiation which cannot always be generalized. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Pavlenko (2004), the importance and meaningfulness of these stories lies in the fact that they foreground the situated, dynamic and diverse realities and personal challenges that individuals experience, providing insight into the general through the lens of the particular. Similarly, as far as validity is concerned, it should be kept in mind that choosing narrative-based research means recognizing the importance of individual stories as valid and useful tools for the analysis of identification processes, especially when narratives of conflict and re-negotiation of identities are concerned. Nevertheless, it shouldn't be forgotten that the stories that researchers tell are "never fully our own", and are the product of interpretative work (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 180).

Referring to narrative data, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008, p. 380) argue that it is a privileged mode "for tapping into identities, particularly constructions of the self". The data of this study consists of the narratives that emerged in the open-ended interviews and conversations over the research's three month data collection period. Specifically, particular attention was given to the subject of identity. As previously discussed, identity is here understood in terms of subject positions, as "the social

positioning of the self and other" (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005), emergent in discourse and the product of linguistic and semiotic practices. It is in part construction of one's own and others' perceptions, and in part influenced by broader ideological and cultural processes (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 586).

In the context of narrative research interviewing, Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) refer to the stories we tell about who we are and our lives as "narrative identity", that is, the ensemble of "storied nature of human experience and personal identity". In line with a preference in the field of narrative research, Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) focus on the longer and unitary autobiographical narratives elicited in research interviews, arguing that they provide a more representative account of a participant's identities while still remaining subjected to situational contingencies, as opposed to spontaneous, shorter-range instances of storytelling in interaction, which are more ephemeral in nature and often tied to a specific topic and situation.

On the other hand, in her recent research on identity work in narrative interaction, Georgakopoulou (2009) takes a step away from the above mentioned "archetypal" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2008) understanding of narrative, and emphasizes its performative and interactional nature instead. That is, moving away from a perspective on narratives as self-contained, monologic and autonomous units, Georgakopoulou (2009) suggests that greater emphasis be given to "stories in everyday talk", as these small narrative instances are the constructive means in the creation of characters in space and time, which in turn are instrumental for the creation of positions (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008, pp. 378-379). In other words, it is necessary for research in the field to move on from conceptualizing narrative as a single type of narrative - linear, unified and predominantly in written form - and to recognize the richness and diversity of narrative genres (Georgakopoulou, 2006).

As the aim of this study is to investigate the different identity positionings in the participant's narratives, I will consider relevant data to be any narrative instance that occurs in my interviews with Farah regardless of length. Instead, I will prioritize how she positions herself and others in her narrative accounts as well as in the interview interaction.

Consequently, the production of narrative is broadly understood in this study as a discursively motivated task, with narratives as sites of engagement where identities are practiced. This opens up the possibility of researching identity through the perspective of positioning, looking at how the actual work that individuals do in interaction connects to their sense of self (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, pp. 379-380) and allows them to produce themselves and their audience situationally as "social beings" in their storytelling (Bamberg, 1997, p. 336).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

3.4.1 Positionality

Given that interviews are collaborative achievements as well as locally situated social practices, it is crucial to acknowledge my role in the context of this study. As mentioned earlier, I was already acquainted with Farah prior to the study, and had already developed a close relationship with her. In spite of our age difference, she often referred to me as her friend or “sister”, openly sharing with me events and struggles of her personal life. However, especially when I helped her with her Finnish language homework, Farah would occasionally refer to me as her “teacher” (in Finnish, “opettaja”), acknowledging that our positions were not always those of two equals and recognizing the power distance existing between us, characterized by my status as native language speaker of Finnish and teacher at the multicultural centre. Indeed, as a native speaker and a Finnish citizen in Finland, I was undoubtedly in a more powerful position in our relationship, holding greater cultural, linguistic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977).

Nevertheless, as I am myself a half-Finnish half-Italian returnee who has only recently moved to Finland, Farah would at times call me a “maahanmuuttaja”, that is, she would consider me a fellow immigrant, something that probably contributed to reducing the power distance between us. Therefore, I found myself to be both an insider and an outsider at the same time: on the one hand, I was a friend, a “sister” and a fellow immigrant of some kind and, on the other, I was Farah’s “teacher”. Thus, while observing “from within” the research context allowed for greater insight into the participant’s identity construction processes and positioning in interaction, it also meant that my presence was noticeable and potentially biased her behaviour and responses.

Furthermore, it should be considered how my pre-existent rapport with the participant inevitably shaped my own expectations about this study, as I was already familiar with many of the topics brought up by Farah prior to its start. While these biases cannot be eliminated, they will be accounted for in the data analysis process. This will be achieved by considering both the participant’s and my own positionings in our interactions, as well as the role of the context - both at broader and at the local level - the interviews were conducted in. For instance, while I was indeed referred to as “teacher” by Farah, our conversations primarily took place in her home, “her own space”, where I clearly was a guest. In fact, it should not be forgotten that narratives produced in interviews are not artificial and decontextualized, but rather reflect the work of people engaged in real social encounters (De Fina, 2009, p. 238).

3.4.2 Informed Consent

Prior to the beginning of the study, the participant's informed consent was sought in Finnish and Persian. Personal details that could possibly identify the participant such as names, addresses or profession have not been included in the study, and the only reference to her is the pseudonym "Farah".

3.5 Data Analysis

To achieve its goal of investigating the subject positions of an immigrant newcomer to Finland, this study looks at narratives that emerge in interviews, relying on positioning as its methodological framework (Davies & Harrè, 1990; Bamberg, 1997; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2000). The analysis, then, will look at how the study's participant positions herself and others in her narratives. While the main focus is on interview data, the thematic analysis of field notes from participant observation will serve a complementary function, directing and narrowing down the interpretation of the audio recordings by identifying the main themes present in the interview. The observations present in my field notes will also provide information about my own reflections during the data collection process and about the space our conversation took place in.

As mentioned in the data collection section above, the data was collected during the eleven meetings I had at the participant's house, for a total of about 40 hours of recording and about 15 pages of field notes. While all the field notes were employed to inform the direction of the study by identifying the main themes that emerged in conversation, only a portion of the recordings – about 10 hours - were actually utilized at the beginning stage of the analysis and transcribed. Smaller segments of these transcripts will be analysed in more detail below, as they were found to best exemplify the main themes of the data and to best summarize the insights that were then employed to answer this study's research questions.

As discussed in the theoretical background section, particular attention will be given to Bamberg's level 3 positioning (Bamberg, 1997, De Fina, 2013), as a way of connecting the local identity of the participant to broader socio-cultural processes. This approach will be particularly useful to answer this study's second research question, as it connects broader societal normative beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland to Farah's local narratives, acting as a "middle-ground" (De Fina, 2013, p. 40) bridging the local dimension of the interview with the broader socio-cultural context of Farah's life in Finland.

3.6 Notes on Transcription

The data of this study consists of interviews and participant observation. While my field notes were written in English, all interviews were carried out in Finnish, the only language that the participant and I shared. After listening to all of my data, I chose to transcribe only a few selected interview sessions in their entirety based on their relevance to answer this study's research questions. Parts of these transcripts will be employed in the data analysis. They will be presented both in their original language (Finnish) and translated in English by me. The English translation will attempt to be as close to the Finnish original as possible. The transcription will follow the fairly simple transcript conventions used by De Fina (2013, p. 61) in her study on positioning level 3 in interviews:

Transcript conventions

.	at the end of words marks falling intonation
,	at the end of words marks slight rising intonation
!	animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation
(.)	micro-pause
[overlapping speech
(())	transcriber's comment
→	continuing intonation as in lists
@	laughter
(h)	laughter particles embedded in the rush of talk
-	self or other interruption
?	rising intonation in clause
::	elongated sound
“ ”	reported speech
<u>word</u>	emphasis
↑	rising intonation
> word<	faster speech
hhh	out breath

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data for this study was analysed in different stages. Firstly, a preliminary thematic analysis of the field notes taken over the three months of the data collection period was carried out to identify salient themes and patterns. This was then followed by a more detailed analysis of the actual interview data, excerpts of which will be discussed in the sections below. The analysis and following discussion are divided into two main sections, each one addressing one of the two research questions of this study.

Generally, the data analysis approach adopted in this study borrows from Riessman's definition of "narrative thematic analysis" (2008). This predominantly focuses on the themes that characterise the participant's narratives or, in other words, the content of the stories being told by Farah during our interviews. By narrative analysis, Riessman refers to a "family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form", and to an approach that is grounded in the study of the particular, and is therefore case-specific (2008, p. 11). Indeed, although this study presents findings that may be of some relevance at a more general level, its aim is to mainly focus on the participant and her own sense of self.

More specifically, Farah's short narratives were analysed through the lens of positioning, informed by Bucholtz and Hall's positionality principle (2005) and Bamberg's positioning levels (1997), as previously discussed in the theoretical background of this study. As suggested by Bucholtz and Hall, this analysis' goal is not "a matter of choosing one dimension of identity over others, but of considering multiple facets in order to achieve a more complete understanding of how identity works" (2005, p. 593). While these different dimensions of identity are discussed somewhat separately in the sections below for the sake of clarity, it should be noted that they are interconnected with each other in reality, and the boundaries between them are quite fuzzy. Although our interviews were usually quite long, the excerpts analysed below are kept short for the sake of readability. The original transcripts of the analysed sections can be found at the end of this thesis.

As mentioned in the methods, participant observation was employed alongside interviews to better triangulate the data and identify recurring themes in it. This resulted in extensive field notes from which I was able to identify the themes that appeared most frequently in our conversations and that were often explicitly addressed by Farah. These centred on her life as a migrant in Finland and on her language learning struggles, all of which influenced her own perception of herself. The sections below will illustrate and discuss these themes with the goal of answering this study's two research questions:

- 1) What subject positions emerge in the narratives of a migrant woman living in Finland?
- 2) How are societal normative beliefs about integration and immigration circulating in Finnish society revealed in her narratives?

First, Farah's multiple identities as they emerge in narrative through positioning will be analysed. Then, I will focus on the way societal normative beliefs about integration and immigration in Finland are revealed in her narratives, discussing their implications for Farah's sense of self.

4.1 Subject Positions in Narratives

4.1.1 Being a Student - Positioning of Characters in the Narrative

Being a student was one of the most salient subject positions to emerge in Farah's narratives, and a subject that was frequently mentioned in my field notes as well. More specifically, she often positioned herself in comparison to the other students in her Finnish course, reporting that everyone else seemed to have no difficulty following the teacher, but Farah found that "everything was difficult" .

(1)

1. F: Everything is difficult, the whole course is difficult. I don't know. The:::e
2. students-
3. E: Have you talked to the teacher?
4. F: The teacher, yes. But the students are good. The students read their
5. homework a little and they all speak ((Finnish)), and know what everything
6. means.

(24.02.2019)

In the excerpt above, Farah compares herself to her classmates. Specifically, this positioning involving a comparison to the “other students” is a move that, in line with Bamberg’s level 1 positioning (1997), sees Farah positioning her narrated self in relation to her classmates (the “other characters” in the narrative), who are portrayed as better learners of Finnish than her. Indeed, referring to the same Finnish course, she later goes as far as to state that she is a “zero”, as she cannot follow what the teacher says nor answer her questions. Evidently, Farah’s sense of self is influenced by her perceived ability to learn and understand Finnish.

Indeed, her short narratives focused on what it means to be a good student, as opposed to not being one. This often involved setting certain goals and expectations for herself, such as being able to speak Finnish better. In the excerpt below, which is from a different day, Farah and I are talking again about the Finnish course mentioned above. While the excerpts are from two separate instances, together they both illustrate a recurrent trend in our conversation that frequently appeared in my field notes.

This time she is telling me about her difficulties with understanding the teacher and answering to a question during a lesson about colors in Finnish. More specifically, I had just asked her how she felt about the new course, and how she had found it to be so far. Farah reiterates that this new course is difficult and that, differently from her classmates, she cannot speak Finnish well enough to answer the teacher’s questions yet.

(2)

1. F: I am a zero, I am a zero (.)
2. E: yes?
3. F: everybody in the course sits-, I at the course....this is not the first course,
4. this course is above...ehm...I don’t know. I will tell you...I told the teacher
5. “why does everybody speak ((Finnish)), I don’t [speak”
6. E: [yes
7. F: and “Farah this is difficult, you change- e::h course” but I “No::o! I like
8. you, I sit here” even if it was very difficult for me because- the teacher
9. asked, “Farah, you like...green..ah, [color”
10. E: [color,
11. “what”?
12. F: what is your color ((unintelligible))
13. E: o::h is it, “what is your favorite color”?
14. F: yes, yes!
15. E: [yes, so-
16. F: [...that I like!
17. E: so the best color [in your opinion

18. F: [yes
 19. E: ...for example my favorite color is blue.
 20. F: favorite color?
 21. E: yes.
 22. F: I didn't speak, I didn't...I don't know. "Farah, [color, what color...?"
 23. E: [yes, "favorite color"
 24. F: favorite color...I didn't, I didn't speak, everybody said "for me green,
 25. red..." and...I didn't, because I am a zero, zero, I am not capable!

(10.02.2019)

Once again, Farah tells me how everyone else in her course can speak Finnish and respond to the teacher's question about what their favourite colour is. When it came to her turn, Farah mentions not being able to respond, because she didn't understand the question. Even when recounting the event, Farah struggles to remember the word for "favourite colour" used by the teacher, which I eventually suggest, trying to ensure that I understood her correctly. In the telling of her story Farah not only evaluates her class as very difficult (lines 24-25), but also reiterates her initial point by stating again that she is a "zero", this time with more emphasis and resignation as she has just finished providing what she considers evidence for it (line 25). Considering Bamberg's (1997) first level of positioning, then, the positioning between the characters in Farah's story world is dominated by the opposition between Farah and her other classmates, their ability to learn and use Finnish acting as a separation between them. This opposition, however, is occasionally challenged by Farah during our conversations, as will be illustrated in the section below, which focuses on her positioning moves at the level of our interactions.

4.1.2 Challenging Identities - Positioning at the Level of the Interaction

Moreover, at the beginning of the conversation presented above, (lines 3-8) Farah mentions an exchange with her teacher about the level of her new course. At first, she reports how she told her teacher about her struggles, explaining how, as opposed to her classmates, she cannot speak Finnish well enough (lines 3-5). As a response, her teacher suggested Farah should switch to an easier course. However, Farah then tells me how she actually refused her teacher's offer. In fact, she disagreed with her teacher's comment, stating that she liked this teacher and that she would remain in this course, and she will "sit" there (lines 7-8), regardless of her difficulties following the lessons.

(2)

3. F: everybody in the course sits-, I at the course....this is not the first course,
4. this course is above...ehm...I don't know. I will tell you...I told the teacher
5. "why does everybody speak ((Finnish)), I don't [speak"
6. E: [yes
7. F: and "Farah this is difficult, you change- e::h course" but I "No::o! I like
8. you, I sit here"

(10.02.2019)

By telling me about how she made her own decision about which Finnish course to attend, Farah appears to reclaim a more agentic position. While the way Farah positions her narrated self in relation to her teacher can be viewed as another example of level 1 positioning, the way she positions herself in relation to me - her audience and only other participant in the conversation - is an instance of Bamberg's level 2 positioning (1997), which focuses on the way narrators position themselves in relation to their audience at the level of the interaction. In this case, her positioning move can be considered an attempt to counteract the less-powerful identity of "struggling language learner" that had emerged through her comparisons with her classmates, trying to portray herself in a better light in front of me, her immediate audience.

To discuss this level of positioning more accurately, however, it is necessary to address my role and my own position in our interactions. In fact, as previously mentioned in the participant profile section, I had first met Farah by volunteering at a multicultural center in our city, where I worked as a Finnish as a Second language volunteer teacher. As a result, our relationship was influenced by a teacher-student dynamic that put me in a more authoritative position. This may have influenced her motivation to appear as a "good student" to me during the interviews, despite her struggles.

Nevertheless, as discussed in the participant profile, Farah and I had become friends over time, our friendship at least partially overshadowing the power distance created by my position as teacher. This was further reinforced by the fact that, during my visits to her house, Farah would refer to me as her friend or sister, talking about her personal life and asking me about mine over tea and food. In a way, this new and more relaxed setting allowed her to take on a more powerful position, as I had become a guest in her house, while she had gained more control. This resulted in a somewhat "ambiguous" positioning by Farah, who oriented to me simultaneously as her teacher and as a friend and guest in her house.

Overall, although her perceived ability to learn and use Finnish appears to strongly influence her own sense of self, Farah attempts to challenge this to some

degree by positioning herself as a more agentic and motivated student in her interactions with me, trying to demonstrate her efforts and counteracting the identity of “struggling student” that emerged in her narrative, endeavouring to reclaim a more agentic self in opposition to the more resigned self that is associated to her exclamations about being a “zero”. In fact, another resource for challenging this negative identity was Farah’s home, which had a central role as the context where our interviews took place, as will be discussed below.

4.1.3 Farah’s Home as a Resource for Identity Construction

Indeed, Farah’s home was another major theme to emerge in my field notes, often in connection with her identity and the way she positioned herself during our conversations. More specifically, it can be argued that the space where Farah and I would spend our time during my visits also influenced the way she positioned herself and articulated her identity, acting as a multisensory resource (Boivin, 2020) that allowed her to connect her present identity and life in Finland to her past self and her home country.

All her living room walls were decorated with Afghan tapestry rugs, an embroidered map of Afghanistan hung right above her television, while a big Afghan rug covered the entirety of the floor, where we would often sit on pillows and drink black tea. Indeed, in addition to the very evident visual dimension, another multisensory resource (Boivin, 2020) that influenced Farah’s identity framing was the Afghan food she would always offer me during my visits, ranging from *Bolani* (Afghan “flatbread”) to desserts such as *Gosh-e-fil* (sweet fried dough) served with black tea. Therefore, in addition to the above-mentioned visual elements, taste and smell also pointed to Farah’s past self and her life in Afghanistan. All these elements allowed her to share with me a part of her identity that would not have been possible in any other context outside her home. Furthermore, they also acted as resources for her to position herself in a more powerful way, acting as the host and “master” of her house which, differently from the Finnish classroom, constituted a familiar and safe environment for her, one where I was the guest and she was “in charge”.

Offering me food and sharing with me the culture of her home country in the space of her own home, Farah was able to produce a more complex representation of herself, where the references to her past self allowed her to bring to the fore other aspects of her identity beyond the position of “struggling student”. This was reflected in her narratives, the homescape (Boivin, 2020) acting as a constant reminder of her life in her home country.

Indeed, in her narration Farah not only would compare herself to her classmates in Finland, but would at times explicitly compare herself to her past self in Afghanistan in her narratives. For instance:

(3)

1. F: In Afghanistan it was not the same as in Finland.
2. E: [yeah no.
3. F: [I think that my language, it was not the same
4. as Finnish.
5. E: because you studied in your own [language
6. F: [yes
7. F: yes I would speak and speak, I was a good student.

(03.03.2019)

(4)

1. F: It was not the same in Afghanistan. I was working
2. I think that in Afghanistan I would read, read and read, and I was a
3. good student-
4. E: so you remembered everything well?
5. F: ((in a low tone)) a good student
6. I was a good student, my supervisor, a midwife, my supervisor,
7. she knew me by name-
8. E: hm, so she knew your name...
9. F: out of two hundred people...midwives at work, at the hospital, she
10. knew my name

(15.02.2019)

As illustrated by the two excerpts above, life in Afghanistan was a theme that frequently emerged in Farah's narratives and is even more present in the space of her home, from food to decorations. Farah highlights how she "was not the same" in Afghanistan: she remembered what she learned in school more easily, and was such an accomplished student that her supervisor at the hospital used to know her by name. What emerges from these excerpts, then, is Farah's strong sense of having been a more successful student back in her home country, in contrast with her more resigned and less agentic self in Finland.

4.1.4 Summary

Overall, what emerges from Farah's narratives is a complex identity, where the apparently dominant subject position of migrant second language learner of Finnish is counterbalanced by different positioning moves that take place at the level of her narratives and within our interactions, both of which can be viewed through Bamberg's

level 1 and level 2 positioning (1997). At the level of the positioning of the characters within the narrated event (Bamberg, 1997), Farah's most salient subject position is that of a migrant language student who, compared to her classmates, appears to be struggling. This, in turn, has implications for the way she sees herself, as demonstrated by her resigned statement about "being a zero", a bad student.

Nevertheless, as pointed out by Bucholtz and Hall in their positionality principle (2005), macro-demographic categories are not the only resources for the construction of identity in linguistic interaction. Indeed, in addition to positioning herself as a migrant language student in her narratives, Farah also relies on more local, situated and context-specific positions to articulate her identity.

This happens, for instance, when Farah positions her narrator self in relation to her narrated self when recounting an interaction with her Finnish teacher. By telling her audience - me - a story where she disagreed with her teacher and chose to remain in a more difficult language course despite the advice given to her, Farah the narrator tries to challenge the less powerful and agentic identity of "struggling language student" that had so far characterised her narrated self. This type of positioning move falls under Bamberg's level 2 positioning (1997), which looks at how the narrator positions herself in relation to her audience. More specifically, Farah's positioning in relation to me can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim a more positive position in our conversation while simultaneously challenging the more negative position of "struggling student" she has attributed to herself in her narrative. Her efforts are further reinforced by the context of our interviews, Farah's home. In fact, the Afghan decor and her home's familiar tastes and smells all acted as multisensory discourse resources (Boivin, 2020) that allowed Farah to challenge the resigned self that had emerged in her narratives about her Finnish course, providing her other resources which she could capitalize on - her past position of a more accomplished student and professional - when constructing her identity in our interactions. What is more, the fact that all of our interviews took place at her house not only allowed me to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of her identity, but also let Farah take on the position of host while I was her guest, significantly changing the teacher-student dynamic that we had started out with at the beginning of our friendship.

After having discussed the subject positions that emerged in Farah's narratives, the following section will address the way societal normative beliefs about integration and immigration are revealed in her narratives and what impact these have on her own sense of self, thus answering the second question of this study.

4.2 Societal Normative Beliefs about Integration and Immigration in Finland Revealed in Narratives

The second question of this thesis focuses on how societal normative beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland are revealed in Farah's narratives, and their impact on her sense of self.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, Finnish integration policies tend to strongly emphasize the centrality of employment in migrants' integration process, prioritizing the acquisition of skills that allow for migrants to find a job as quickly as possible (see Saukkonen, 2016; Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, 2015; Iikkanen, 2019). Among these skills, Finnish has an essential role, as it is viewed as the way for migrants to change their circumstances, avoid marginalization and find employment and thus, successfully integrate into Finnish society (Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, 2015).

4.2.1 Not being "normal"

These normative beliefs about integration and language learning in Finland were also present in Farah's narratives in different ways. The excerpts below will provide examples of how these normative beliefs are made relevant by Farah, connecting broader discourses to her own lived reality and experiences.

(5)

1. F: I am not a normal person, not good, because-
2. E: ↑you?
3. F: Yes.
4. E: @@ ↑you are not a good person?
5. F: Yes, because, Elisa!
6. E: yes.
7. F: I am not normal, I don't have a job. I am studying for a profession. The
8. course, a small course is not good,
9. E: yes.
10. F: All the people in the course [go-
11. E: [yes,
12. F: go forward, they study and go home. It's not normal. I study one
13. profession,
14. once I go to work, I will be normal. A good person. Before I came to
15. Finland I had a job. I don't like being home.
16. E: yes, so you want to be normal again. So a job and [everything?
17. F: [normal.

18. @@@ yes, normal. Now I am not normal.
(06.03.2019)

As evident in the excerpt above and a recurring theme throughout my data, Farah uses the word “normaali” (“normal”) to indicate “being in the norm”, in opposition to her being “outside the norm”. In our conversation above, she emphatically explains to me how she is not a “good person” right now in her life, and how she is not “normal” because she doesn’t have a job. Employment, in this case, becomes a determining factor. As Farah puts it, she will be “normal” only once she has finished studying and started going to work again. Or, in her own words, she will be a “good person”. Once again, comparison is always present in her narratives, both between her present and her past self and between her and her classmates. Unlike her classmates, she sees herself as not really advancing toward what she defines as a “normal” life, with a job and good language skills. Indeed, among the skills needed to be “normal” and find a job, language seems to take a central position for Farah.

(6)

1. F: Everyday at home, I just sit. I don’t, don’t go out, I am alone. I think I am
2. not learning much. I don’t like the people from Afghanistan a lot, because they
3. speak a lot, but it’s not good, because now I need Finnish.
4. Ehm...I don’t like being home.

(03.03.2019)

In the excerpt above Farah remarks that because she is spending so much time alone at home, she is not learning enough. She also considers spending time with other people from Afghanistan as not useful for her, as her priority is learning Finnish. Staying at home, she concludes, is something she doesn’t like, as it prevents her from progressing in her language learning.

This notion of not being “normal” presented by Farah in her narratives appears to be present in her interactions with others as well. In fact, comments from other people in her life further reinforce her idea of not being “normal”, influencing her own sense of self, as will be illustrated below.

4.2.2 Societal Normative Beliefs Revealed in Interactions with Others

Learning Finnish appears to play a fundamental role in finding her way to being “normal”. Indeed, this attitude is also echoed by other figures in Farah’s life, as reported by her in the exchanges below.

(7)

1. F: yes I mean, my son-
2. E: hm?
3. F: he says "not home". I don't speak much ((Finnish)). "Why do you go
4. home? Go out, go to work, ((unintelligible)), to work....go".
5. I don't speak much, because now I...ehm...my home is not the problem, I
6. am normal, normal, at home. I don't speak much, he helps me...
7. He says: "Mom you are in a difficult course, you are not learning fast,
8. because you don't speak enough". It's true, I speak very little.

(03.03.2019)

In this excerpt above, Farah recounts an exchange she had with her son about her situation in Finland. Similarly to what Farah had said about not wanting to stay home and her need to learn more Finnish in order to be "normal", her son tells her that she should not stay home but find a job instead, and that she is not learning Finnish because she is not speaking it enough, and that her course is too difficult. After having reported her son's speech, Farah quietly expresses to me that she agrees with him. While in our interviews Farah would often tell me with pride about how she raised her son as a single mother in Afghanistan, it seems that their positions in the short narrative above have undergone some degree of change, her son taking on a more authoritative position toward his mother. This is probably due to the fact that her son, still in school, had learned Finnish faster and better than his mother and had found himself helping her, in a role reversal that was further reinforced by him seemingly having internalized mainstream attitudes and beliefs about what it means to successfully integrate in Finland, strongly emphasizing the importance of learning Finnish and finding employment. Finally, this emphasis on employment is also evident in Farah's reports of her encounters with an employee of the Finnish Employment and Economic Development Office, the *TE-Toimisto* (TE-Office), who was responsible for drafting Farah's personal integration plan.

(8)

1. E: because the TE-Office said that you don't have to go to *peruskoulu* ((lower level of comprehensive school in Finland))?
2. F: I don't go *peruskouluun* because [I...
3. E: [have already been-
4. F: one day before the summer I said, "I go to ***** ((name of the school))", I
5. study", and they said ", you have worked for sixteen year, you don't have to
6. go to *****((name of the school)).

7. E: hm, what about Finnish?
8. F: Finn- Finnish. No. She said “you have been in this course for a long time.
9. This course is good and then you go to work”. She said.
10. I didn’t say. The TE-office said. Now I only have a little Finnish. I don’t know
11. what this means.

(24.02.2019)

All excerpts above are examples of how normative societal beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland are revealed in Farah’s narratives. This happens both through Farah’s own words and through retellings of interactions she has had with others. For instance, it appears that her son has internalized the normative attitude that sees learning Finnish and finding a job as the acceptable way to successfully integrate into Finnish society (see Saukkonen, 2016), thus criticizing his mother for being unable to meet this expectation. His words echo the message promoted by other figures in Farah’s life, such as teachers and TE-Office employees.

Farah appears to have internalized this notion, at least to some degree. For instance, her choice to not want to talk with fellow migrants from Afghanistan can be seen as a choice to prioritize learning Finnish and integrating into Finnish society, avoiding anything that could hinder that process, even at the cost of losing connections with one’s own ethnic community. Indeed, it appears that her attitude is influenced by the assimilationist approach that characterizes Finnish integration policies’ approach, which has been criticized for aiming to shape the behaviour of migrants to become more Finnish-like (see Intke-Hernandez and Holm, 2015). Thus, not only such normative societal beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland are revealed in her narratives, but they also seem to have a substantial impact on Farah’s identity. This results in her placing the burden of successful integration predominantly on herself and on her abilities as a student and learner of Finnish as a second language, as well as her ability to find employment. By internalizing these attitudes, then, Farah constructs the category of “normal” in her narratives, where normality points to fitting in the norm, being a “good immigrant” and a “good student”, fulfilling the expectations that appear to be set on her by her host society. Struggling with learning Finnish and unemployed, Farah positions herself as “not normal”, as she has failed to meet these expectations. This kind of positioning can be viewed as an instance of Bamberg’s level 3 positioning (1997), which addresses how the participant positions herself in relation to dominant discourses. In Farah’s case, this is realised by her positioning herself as “not normal” in reference to the normative societal beliefs about immigration and integration that are revealed in her narratives.

Nevertheless, Farah appears to challenge this position of “being outside the norm” at times in our conversations. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, this is evident in her attempts to reclaim a more powerful position within the context of our interactions, challenging her position of struggling student by expressing her motivation to learn and telling me about her efforts. This is further reinforced by the multisensory discourse resources (Boivin, 2020) present in the space of her home. Indeed, the setting of our interviews was filled with decorations, smells and tastes from Afghanistan, all of which acted as resources for Farah to position herself in a more agentic and powerful way within the local context of our interactions. In fact, she says she is “normal at home” (line 6, excerpt 7).

However, it should be noted that even the references to her past life in Afghanistan are viewed through the lens of the same normative societal beliefs that lead Farah to conclude that she is not “normal” in Finland. For instance, she states that she was normal in Afghanistan (excerpt 5, lines 13-14), as she knew the language and was successfully employed in her home country, something she can no longer say about herself living in Finland. Overall, then, it appears that the normative social beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland, characterised by a disproportionate focus on employment and gaining the skills necessary to achieve it (see Saukkonen, 2016; Pöyhönen and Tarnanen, 2015; Koskela, 2014), permeate all of Farah’s narratives and the ways she makes sense of her reality and her identity in Finland, striving for a “normality”, that she had in the past.

4.3 Limitations

By answering its two guiding research questions, this study was able to provide a more comprehensive portrait of the life and identities of a migrant woman learner of Finnish. Nevertheless, one of its main limitations is that it focused on only one participant, thus making it impossible to make generalizations. This was partly addressed by adopting an ethnographically informed, longitudinal, three-month case-study approach, which allowed me to gain a more in-depth understanding of Farah’s sense of self and its connection to her life in Finland. In particular, what emerges from this study is that her sense of self is deeply intertwined with the dominant normative societal beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland. That is, her perceived inability to learn Finnish well enough results in her positioning herself as out of the norm, as someone who is not living up to the expectations set on herself by her host society and that she has, to some degree, evidently internalized.

A possible way to expand on what was introduced in this thesis could be to take up De Fina's recommendation for the study of level 3 positioning (2013), that is, to include the narratives of multiple participants to examine what recurring themes and patterns emerge across a community, and whether these connect with broader discourses at the societal level. For instance, future research could involve a larger scale study that would follow a bigger group of participants with a similar background to Farah's and investigate what kinds of subject positions emerge in their narratives, as well as what resources they rely on to position themselves, and to explore to what extent such dominant societal normative beliefs are shared by multiple participants. This way it would be possible to move past the limitations of the present case study and, potentially, identify wider patterns that could be more easily generalized. Moreover, exploring further the role of the space of the interview, especially in a context such as interviews conducted in the participant's own home, could be another area for further research.

Nevertheless, I believe there is value even in telling an individual's own story such as this one, as it allows to go beyond statistics and general assumptions about what it means to be a migrant language learner and offered a glimpse into the real experiences of such an individual. This kind of "real life examples" could, in fact, be used to inform the development of alternative ways to foster integration policies in Finland, building what Saukkonen (2016) defines as other channels for people to find their place in our society and not relying solely on employment (and the importance of language as a skill to accomplish it) as the marker of successful integration.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have looked at the identity of an Afghan migrant woman who recently arrived in Finland, focusing on the subject positions that emerged in her narratives during our interviews, and on how societal normative beliefs about integration and immigration in Finland were revealed in her narratives.

The data was collected in the space of the participant's home and consisted of both interviews and field notes resulting from ethnographically informed participant observation throughout the three months of the data collection period.

What emerged from this study was a complex portrayal of Farah's identity, analysed through the lens of a positioning approach as theorized by Bamberg (1997). Specifically, the most salient subject position to emerge in Farah's narratives was that of migrant second language learner of Finnish. This was realized by the participant positioning herself as a "struggling student" in comparison to her fellow classmates.

However, this positioning in relation to other characters in her narratives was counterbalanced by Farah's attempts to reclaim a more agentic role at the level of our local interview interaction, with her trying to present herself in a more positive light to me, her audience and interlocutor. This was not only accomplished in our conversation but was also reinforced by the space our interviews took place in, Farah's home, which was rich in multisensory discourse resources (Boivin, 2020) that allowed her to frame her identity in a more powerful way through reminders of her past life in her home country, creating a space where she could challenge the more negative positions that had emerged in her narratives.

Nevertheless, it is evident that Farah had, to some degree, internalized the societal normative beliefs about immigration and integration in Finland that she was exposed to in her daily life. Most importantly, she would often refer to "being normal" in her narratives. This normality, in turn, corresponded to meeting the expectations set by normative attitudes and beliefs about integration in Finland, whereby learning Finnish and finding a job are the main markers of successful integration (see

Saukkonen, 2016). Falling short of meeting these expectations, Farah positioned herself as “not normal”, not good enough in relation to these attitudes. Furthermore, this idea of normality was echoed by other people in Farah’s life as well, thus further influencing her sense of self. Indeed, the category of “being normal” appeared to permeate the entirety of Farah’s sense of self, as she also applied it to her view of her past life. In Afghanistan, she concluded, she was normal because she spoke the language and had a job.

While this case-study and the answers it offers to its research questions cannot be generalised, I hope to have offered a more detailed and realistic portrayal of the integration experience of a migrant living in Finland, and to have highlighted, at least partially, the impact that dominant attitudes and beliefs about matters such as immigration and integration can have on the identities of the individuals directly involved in these processes. It is my hope that this work will only be the starting point for further research on the subject, in order to contribute to the development of alternative paths to integration that go beyond assimilationist views and a predominant focus on employment as the main indicator of successful integration.

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APPENDICES - ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPTS IN FINNISH

(1)

1. F: kaikki on vaikea, koko kurssi on vaikea. En tiedä.
2. O::opiskelija-
3. E: oletko sanonut opettajalle?
4. F: Opettaja, joo. Mutta opiskelijat on hyvät. Opiskelijat kotitehtävät vähän luke
5. ja kaikki puhuu (suomea), ja tietää mitä kaikki
6. tarkoittaa.

(24.02.2019)

(2)

1. F: mä nolla, mä nolla (.)
2. E: joo?
3. F: kaikki kurssilla istuu-, mä kurssi...ei ensimmäinen kurssi, tämä kurssi
4. ylös...ehm...en tiedä, mä kerron sinulle...mä opettaja puhui "miksi kaikki
5. puhu, mä en [puhu"
6. E: [joo
7. F: ja hän "Farah tämä vaikea, sinä change- e::h kurssi" mä "e::i! tykkään
8. sinusta, mä istun" vaikka tosi minulle vaikea koska-
9. opettaja kysyy, "Farah, sinä tykkäät...vihreä...ah, [väri"
10. E: [väri
11. "mistä?"
12. F: mistä väri...((unintelligible))?
13. E: o::h onko se, "mikä on sinun lempi väri"?
14. F: joo, joo!
15. E: [joo, eli-
16. F: [...tykkään!
17. E: eli paras väri [sinulle
18. F: [joo
19. E: ...esimerkiksi minun lempiväri o::n sininen.
20. F: lempiväri?
21. E: joo.
22. F: mä ei puhunut, mä ei...mä en tiedä. "Farah, [väri, värinen...?"
23. E: [joo, "värinen"
24. F: ...värinen...mä ei, en puhunut, kaikki puhui "mä vihreä, mä punainen..."
25. ja...mä ei, koska mä nolla, nolla, en osaa!

(10.02.2019)

(3)

1. F: Afganistanissa ei sama kuin Suomi.
2. E: [niin ei.
3. F: [Mä ajattelen minun kieli, ei sama
4. kuin suomi.
5. E: kun sinä opiskelit sinun [kielellä
6. F: [joo
7. F: joo mä puhun puhun, mä olin hyvä opiskelija.

(03.03.2019)

(4)

1. F: Afganistanissa ei ollu sama.
2. Mä olin töissä mä ajattelen että minä
3. Afganistanissa min luin luin ja luin, ja olin hyvä
4. opiskelija-
5. E: eli sinä muistit kaikki hyvin?
6. F: ((in a low tone)) hyvä opiskelija
7. hyvä opiskelija, minun pomo, kättilö, minun pomo, kutsui minut minun
8. nimellä-,
9. E: hm, eli tiesi sinun nimen...
10. F: kaksisataa ihmistä...kättilöä töissä, sairaalassa, hän tiesi minun nimen

(15.02.2019)

(5)

1. F: en ole normaali ihminen, ei hyvä, koska-
2. E: ↑ sinä?
3. F: Joo.
4. E: @@ ↑ et ole hyvä ihminen?
5. F: Joo, koska Elisa!
6. E: joo.
7. F: mä en ole normaali, minulla ei ole ammatti. Mä luen ammattia. Kurssi, pieni
8. pieni kurssi ei ole hyvä,
9. E: joo.
10. F: Kaikki ihmiset kurssilla [menee-
11. E: [joo,
12. F: menee eteenpäin, opiskelee ja menee kotiin. Ei normaalia. Minä opiskelen
13. yhden ammatin, mä menen töihin, mä oon normaali. Hyvä ihminen. Ennen kun

14. mä tulin Suomeen mä olin töissä. Minä en tykkää olla kotona.

15. E: joo, eli sinä haluat taas olla normaali. Eli työ ja [kaikki?

16. F: [normaali.

17. @@@ joo, normaali. Nyt mä en oo normaali.

(06.03.2019)

(6)

1. F: Kaikki päivät kotona, istun. Mä ei, ei, ulkona, mä oon yksin. Mä
2. ajattelen että mä en opi paljon. Mä en paljon tykkää ihmiset Afganistanilainen,
3. koska paljon puhuu, mutta ei hyvä, koska nyt mä tarvitsen suomen kieltä.
4. Ehm...kotona mä en tykkää olla.

(03.03.2019)

(7)

1. F: joo mä tarkoitan, minun poika-
2. E: hm?
3. F: sanoo "ei kotiin". Mä en puhu paljon. "Miksi sinä menet kotiin? Mene
4. ulos, mene töihin, ((unintelligible)) töihin...mene".
5. Minä en puhu paljon, koska minä nyt..ehm...minun koti ei ole ongelma, minä
6. olen normaali, normaali, kotona. Mä en puhu paljon, hän mä auttaa...
7. Hän puhuu: "Äiti sinä olet vaikealla kurssilla, sinä et opi nopeasti, koska sinä
8. puhut vähän." Joo, mä puhun vähän.

(03.03.2019)

(8)

1. E: koska TE-toimisto sanoi että sinun ei tarvitse mennä peruskouluun?
2. F: mä en mene peruskouluun koska mä...
3. E: olet jo käynyt]
4. F: mä yksi päivä ennen kesällä mä puhun, "mä ***** ((name of the school)),
5. istun opiskelija", ja hän sanoi "ei, sinä kuusitoista vuotta töissä, sinun ei tarvitse
6. mennä *****" ((name of the school))
7. E: hm, mutta entäs suomen kieli?
8. F: suome- suomen kieli. Ei. Hän sanoi "sinä pitkä aika menet kurssille, kurssi
9. on hyvä, sitten sinä menet ammattiin". Hän puhuu. Mä ei,
10. TE toimisto puhui.
11. Nyt mä vähän suomea. Mä en tiedä mitä tarkoittaa.

(24.02.2019)