

“THE BEST THING IS LAUGHING AT OUR  
DIFFERENCES”:

Intercultural couples’ views on their  
relationship and its effects on the construction of  
identities.

Master’s thesis

Minna Leppänen  
University of Jyväskylä

University of Jyväskylä  
Department of Languages  
English  
December 2016



## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta - Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos - Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä - Author Minna Leppänen	
Työn nimi - Title "The best thing is laughing at our differences": Intercultural couples' views on their relationship and its effects on the construction of identities.	
Oppiaine - Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji - Level Master's thesis
Aika - Month and year December 2016	Sivumäärä - Number of pages 58 + 1 appendix
Tiivistelmä - Abstract <p>Vaikka monikulttuuristen avioparien määrä on kasvussa niin Suomessa kuin muuallakin maailmassa, heitä on kielitieteissä tutkittu suhteellisen vähän. Monikulttuuriset, ja samalla usein monikieliset parit ovat ainutlaatuisessa asemassa identiteetin rakentumisen kannalta; monikulttuurisissa avioliitoissa elävät ihmiset elävät jatkuvasti kahden erilaisen kulttuurin ja kahden tai useamman kielen ympäröiminä. Kaikki tämä puolestaan vaikuttaa heidän identiteettiensä rakentumiseen.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus perustuu poststrukturaaliseen käsitykseen identiteettien rakentumisesta. Sen mukaan ihmisellä voi olla useita erilaisia identiteettejä, jotka muokkaantuvat vuorovaikutuksessa muiden ihmisten kanssa. Avioliitto on yhteisönä erityisen merkityksellinen identiteettien rakentumisen kannalta, sillä siinä kaksi ihmistä on niin tiiviissä vuorovaikutuksessa toistensa kanssa. Se, että aviopari ei jaa samanlaista kulttuurista ja kielellistä taustaa vaikuttaa tähän vuorovaikutukseen ja sitä kautta identiteettien rakentumiseen.</p> <p>Tutkimuksella oli kaksi tavoitetta. Ensimmäinen tavoite oli selvittää monikulttuuristen parien mielipiteitä parisuhteestaan ja erilaisten taustojen vaikutuksesta siihen. Toinen tavoite oli selvittää miten yksilön identiteetit rakentuvat monikulttuurisessa parisuhteessa ja kuinka kumppanin erilainen kulttuurinen ja kielellinen tausta muokkaavat niitä. Tutkimusta varten haastateltiin teemahaastattelun keinoin kuutta monikulttuurista avioparia, joista neljä asuu Suomessa ja kaksi ulkomailla. Yli kuusi tuntia haastattelumateriaalia analysoitiin myöhemmin sisällönanalyysia käyttäen. Tutkimuksessa selvisi esimerkiksi, että kielivalinnalla on suuri merkitys monikulttuurisessa parisuhteessa, sillä kumppani jonka äidinkieli valitaan yhteiseksi kommunikaatiokieleksi on usein paremmassa asemassa erityisesti ristiriitilanteissa. Pariskunnat myös havaitsivat selkeän yhteyden omien identiteettiensä ja parisuhteen välillä: kumppanin kulttuurisesta taustasta ja äidinkielestä tulee usein myös osa henkilön omaa identiteettiä.</p> <p>Koska tutkimuksessa haastateltiin vain kuutta pariskunta, sen tuloksia ei voida yleistää. Haastatteluista kuitenkin voidaan nostaa esiin teemoja, joita olisi mielenkiintoista ja hyödyllistä tutkia lisää, esimerkiksi monikulttuuristen identiteettien vaikutus lasten kasvatukseen ja kielivalintoihin.</p>	
Asiasanat - Keywords Intercultural couples, identity, poststructuralism, thematic interview, content analysis	
Säilytyspaikka - Depository Kielten laitos	
Muita tietoja - Additional information	



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	7
2 INTERCULTURAL COUPLES.....	9
2.1 Defining intercultural couples.....	9
2.2 Communication in intercultural couples.....	11
2.2.1 Language choice.....	11
2.2.2 Effects of different cultural backgrounds on communication.....	12
2.3 Previous studies on intercultural couples.....	13
3 THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY.....	15
3.1 Constructing cultural and national identities.....	15
3.1.1 Cultural identities.....	16
3.1.2 National identities.....	18
3.2 The relationship between language and identity.....	18
3.2.1 Constructing identities through language.....	19
3.2.2 Bilingualism and identity.....	20
4 THE PRESENT STUDY.....	22
4.1 Research questions and aims.....	22
4.2 The couples.....	23
4.3 Methods of data collection and analysis.....	23
4.3.1 Thematic interview.....	25
4.3.2 Content analysis.....	27
5 FINDINGS.....	29
5.1 Language choice.....	29
5.1.1 Reasons for language choice in intercultural couples.....	29
5.1.2 Motivation to study each other's L1.....	32

5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of intercultural relationships.....	34
5.2.1 Challenges related to language.....	34
5.2.2 Challenges related to culture.....	37
5.2.3 Dealing with challenges.....	40
5.2.4 Advantages of intercultural relationships.....	42
5.3 Identity construction in intercultural relationships.....	43
5.3.1 The importance of mother tongue.....	44
5.3.2 Language barrier causing otherness.....	45
5.3.3 Cultural and national identities.....	47
6 DISCUSSION.....	51
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	55
Appendix 1: Interview questions.....	59

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Bi- and multilingual families have been the subject of linguistic study for many years. So far research has mostly focused on the language choice of the children in bilingual and bicultural families and not as much on the language choices of the parents and the possible effects that these language choices have. According to Piller (2002: 19), the lack of research might be due to the fact that, in certain contexts, intercultural marriages have been seen as a societal problem leading to language conflict.

However, as Piller (2002:133) points out, "the bilingual couple is one of the few places where language choice is truly an option and, therefore, it can be used to better understand intercultural communication and the relationship between language and identity on the whole". In other words, due to the unique linguistic circumstances that bilingual (and intercultural) couples live in, research on these couples can reveal something new about language and identity in general.

Furthermore, research on intercultural couples is now more relevant than ever, since marriages between partners from different linguistic and cultural background are on the rise worldwide. For example the number of Finns who marry non-Finns is constantly increasing (Tilastokeskus 2014); in 2014, there were 71 300 intercultural married couples in Finland, which is 4 % more than in the previous year. This trend is similar all over Europe. It is, therefore, evident that intercultural couples need to get more attention in linguistic research.

There are two main aims in the present study. Firstly, it aims to find out how people in intercultural relationships see themselves as a couple; what kinds of positive or negative sides can the couples identify in having two different linguistic and cultural backgrounds mixed in one relationship. According to Lainiala and Säävälä (2013), different cultural backgrounds and experiences can cause conflicts in romantic relationships, which might explain the higher divorce rate of intercultural marriages compared to monocultural marriages. Furthermore, not sharing the same mother tongue can cause problems in communication, which might in some cases lead to dissatisfaction in the relationship. Additionally, the choice of communication language in the intercultural couple is not always an easy one and can affect the

relationship in several ways. In a bilingual romantic relationship one or both partners are positioned as “native” and “non-native speaker”. Piller suggests that language choice in the bilingual relationship may be an “act of identity” that proclaims their chosen identity to the world. Therefore, the language choices of bilingual couples can be investigated to better understand the linguistic construction of identity. As people in intercultural relationships daily navigate between two cultures, and two or more different languages, the intercultural couple can offer a unique view on the relationship between language, culture and identity as a whole.

The second aim of the present study is to find out how being in an intercultural relationship affects the construction of a person’s identity. According to Davies & Harré (1999: 89) “An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which he or she participates.” This means that a person’s identity is not something we are born with but rather something that is constructed throughout our lives in interaction with others. This idea is the basis of the poststructuralist perspective on identity, which sees identities as multiple and constantly changing.

Language can be seen as one of the major elements in identity construction, since language and identity are “ultimately inseparable” (Joseph 2004:13). Intercultural contexts are particularly interesting in the study of identity construction, because it is in such contexts that people often reflect more about their various cultural and linguistic identities (Fougère 2008:188). In addition, as Bystydzienski (2011:46) states, “one consequence of domestic partnership is identity transformation”. This is due to the fact that when partners come together to form a partnership, it always requires negation and a certain level of personal transformation. The transformation is, perhaps, even greater in an intercultural relationship where partners do not share the same cultural background and experiences. Furthermore, as at least one of the partners in a bilingual relationship is always communicating with their spouse in their second or even third language, it is likely to also affect that person’s thought processes and, essentially, identity.

Six intercultural married couples, living both in Finland and abroad, were interviewed for the present study. The couples were asked questions about their relationship as well as the changes they could identify in their identities that are due to being in an intercultural romantic relationship. These thematic interviews were then transcribed and analysed using content analysis.

Chapter two of the present study focuses on intercultural couples. Firstly, the term *intercultural* is clarified and the choice of using this term in the present study is explained. Secondly, the unique features of intercultural couple communication are discussed. Thirdly, some studies concerning intercultural couples and their identities are presented. Chapter three, in turn, explores the concept of identity, focusing on the poststructuralist perspective on identity construction. Chapter four introduces the methodology of the present study after which, in chapter five, the findings of the present study are discussed. Lastly, the limitations of the present study and possibilities for further research are discussed in chapter six.

## **2 INTERCULTURAL COUPLES**

### **2.1 Defining intercultural couples**

In order to understand what the term *intercultural couple* means, one must first define the term *culture*. According to Bustmante et al. (2011:155) scholars nowadays tend to agree that culture is “a learned meaning system of shared beliefs, values, norms, symbols, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of a group utilize to make sense of their world and one another, as well as foster a sense of shared identity and community.” This definition of culture emphasizes the fact that culture is something that people learn in interaction with others. Furthermore, it acknowledges the relationship that culture and identity have. In addition, Bustmante et al. (2011:155) point out that much of culture is not consciously taught but unconsciously experienced. The term *intercultural*, consequently, refers to the interaction between people from different cultures.

Bystydzienski (2011:45) suggests that all domestic partnerships are, in a way, intercultural because all partners come into a relationship with different experiences and personalities. Furthermore, men and women can be seen as representatives of different cultures even when they originate from the same countries, because their experiences of the world are automatically different due to their genders. However, as Bystydzienski (2011:45-46) puts it "Intercultural couples - - in addition to situational and personality (and in heterosexual relationships sex/gender) differences, also wrestle with ethnicity, race, class, religion and nationality – factors that provide extra substance for potential conflict and negotiation." What this means is that intercultural couples have experienced different cultural upbringings that affect, either consciously or unconsciously, their identities, personalities and even their expectations of the relationship.

Married couples who do not share the same cultural or linguistic background or the same nationality have been called many different names depending on the emphasis of the research. For example, Piller (2001) uses the term *linguistic intermarriage* to refer to couples who have different mother tongues, while other researchers have used the term *cross-national marriage* to refer to couples who originate from different countries (Cools 2004:23). In the present study, the term *intercultural couple* is used because it covers many aspects of the issue including different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, and religious backgrounds.

In the recent decades, there has been a growing trend on intercultural marriages in all of Europe (Lainiala & Säävälä 2013). In Finland, nearly ten percent of all marriages contracted in 2009-2010 were between a speaker of a national language (Finnish, Swedish or Sami) and a speaker of a foreign language (Statistics Finland 2012). In the urban Helsinki area this figure is even higher. Although the exact figure is difficult to determine, it is clear that globalization has caused the number of intercultural couples to rise significantly in the past decades worldwide (Bustmante et al. 2011:154). As a result, academic interest into this long overlooked topic has grown and lead into much needed research.

## **2.2 Communication in intercultural relationships**

Communication is an important factor in all relationships, especially in romantic ones, where it is used to create and maintain intimacy and satisfaction. According to Cools (2004:16) "Communication is the key process that generates and maintains intimacy, and has the primary impact on people's experience of their relationships."

Intercultural communication, in turn, refers to discourse between people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This communication is carried out in a lingua franca or in one of the communicators' mother tongues (Cheng 2003:1).

Therefore, couples who do not share a mutual mother tongue are in a unique position in terms of couple communication; it is always intercultural and one or both of the partners is always communicating in their second or third language. Therefore, language choice is one of the major decisions that intercultural couples face early on in their relationships. In the following chapter reasons for language choice in intimate romantic relationships are introduced. After that aspects of the relationship between communication and culture are discussed.

### **2.2.1 Language choice**

In any intercultural encounter, the first thing that needs to be decided is the language in which the interaction is going to be conducted. In a romantic relationship, where communication plays a big part in the relationship satisfaction, language choice is a particularly interesting and important one. Siguan (1980) identified five possible reasons for language choice in a bilingual marriage. The first one, "le territoire," i.e. the language of the monolingual area where the couple live, is what Piller (2001) identified as the primary factor in language choice in bilingual couples. The other possible factors according to Siguan (1980) are: "Diglossie," meaning the choice of the more prestigious language if the couple live in a bilingual area; "loyauté linguistique," in other words the choice of the non-native or less prestigious language for reasons of solidarity; "langue de l'homme et langue de la femme," which refers to the tendency for the language of the male partner to be chosen over the language of the female partner; and "facteurs individuels," i.e. choices that do not fall into any of

the previously mentioned categories. It is to be noted, however, that this categorization was created over 30 years ago and nowadays, in the rapidly globalizing world, there might be some other factors that affect language choice in intercultural couples. Also, one could say that the last category, “facteurs individuels” is rather a broad one and that there too many reasons that could fall under this category. However, Siguan’s (1980) categorization can be used as a starting point for identifying reasons behind language choice in an intercultural relationship.

One might argue that the preferred language choice on an individual is always their mother tongue. Piller (2013) suggests that this puts the person using their mother tongue in an intercultural communicative situation in a powerful position, while the use of second language always entails a certain amount of relinquishing control. Therefore, the language choice in an intercultural relationship is not only an act of identity, but also an act of positioning and power distribution; whatever the reasons behind the language choice are, they always have consequences in the relationship.

### **2.2.2 Effects of different cultural backgrounds on communication**

Culture and communication have a strong connection. According to Cheng (2003:1) “This is because culture can influence the communicative behaviour and style of an individual either directly, through the socialization of the individual within the culture, or indirectly, as the individual learns the language of the culture.” Therefore, intercultural couples often have different styles of communication, as well as having different mother tongues. Furthermore, according to Cheng (2003:2), people in intercultural communicative situations often have different communicative goals for the conversation due to their cultural differences. They can also differ in rules and conversational strategies of a conversation. This puts intercultural couples in a unique position; they live their lives with a partner whose communicational style might differ significantly from their own. As communication is a big part of modern

western romantic relationships, different communication styles are likely to also affect the quality of the relationship.

One consequence of not sharing the same cultural background in a communicative situation is that it can lead to misunderstandings between speakers. Di Luzio et al. (2001:214) analysed miscommunications and misunderstandings in intercultural situations and found that miscommunication can stem from several reasons including ambiguity and indirectness, the difference between what is said and what is intended or disturbance of mutual knowledge. Especially the reason last mentioned can become an issue with intercultural couple communication; both partners may think that they are talking about the same thing and understanding each other when in fact, they lack mutual knowledge and therefore make different interpretations of the discussion. However, as Di Luzio et al (2001: 237) note “a different interpretation or inference that initially led to a misunderstanding may be solved and clarified by a common repair, even if the misunderstanding is based on interculturality.” This requires, however, the recognition of the miscommunication, which is not always easy.

### **2.3 Previous studies on bilingual couples**

Ingrid Piller is one of the most notable researchers in study of bilingual couples. She studied bilingual couples living in Germany by recording and analyzing their private conversations on bilingualism and relationships (Piller 2002). She found that the couples did not see a problem in mixing two cultures into one relationship, but had constructed a so-called cross-cultural identity based on the two different cultures as well as non-national identities, such as age, class, education or profession. Piller points out, however, that the even though the couples come from different countries, their cultural background is still somewhat similar (Western-European) and the findings of the study might be different if the couples came from very different cultures. Piller found that the community language is a strong indicator of the language bilingual couples use for communication. She also found that couples

mostly use the language they use, whether it is the majority or minority language of the community, out of habit. In other words, the couples stick to the language they used when they first met. According to Piller, this can probably be explained by the close relationship between language and identity. Furthermore, she found that even though the language of the community is often a strong indicator of the language choice, there is a tendency to choose the language of the male partner. Piller suggests that being a foreigner and having to use a non-native code places a person in a doubly weak position. Hence, the compromise to let one partner be the native and one partner be the native speaker may be favorable to a more equal distribution of power in a relationship.

Muikku-Werner (2007b) conducted a small survey (a questionnaire via email) on bilingual couples, living in Finland and abroad, and published the results of four couples' answers in an article entitled *Kärsii, ei kärsi - parisuhde ja kaksikielisyys*. She was interested in the questions of language choice, the connection between one's mother tongue and identity and how having children affects the languages used in the home. She found that the main reason for language choice for many couples was that there was no other option since one of the partners did not speak the other one's L1 at all in the beginning of the relationship. She also found that the couples did not recognize a strong connection between the language they use and their own identities. In her article, Muikku-Werner admits, however, that this study is limited, since all the informants are of similar backgrounds and the questionnaire also had its limitations.

Lempinen (2013) interviewed 16 Finnish-Czech bilingual couples and families, living either in Finland or in the Czech Republic. She was particularly interested in language choice in bilingual marriages, as well as how the language choice affects the children in the family. Even though the term "language skills" is mentioned in the title of the study, it is not the focus of the study; in fact, the term is not even sufficiently defined. Lempinen found that, in most cases, the couples chose the language of the relationship according to where they lived. Additionally, she found that the husband's mother tongue was more likely to become the language of the

relationship than the wife's. The results of this Pro Gradu thesis are, therefore, similar to Piller's (2002) findings. Furthermore, all the couples thought it was important to raise their children as bilingual, which might indicate that the couples had formed intercultural identities that they want to pass on to their children.

Cools (2004) studied intercultural couples living in Finland. The aim of her qualitative study was to find out, through multiple interviews, what kinds of challenges intercultural couples living in Finland meet, how they experience their relationship and what is the couples' attitude towards culture. Communication and relational dialectics are in the main focus of the study. She found that the couples saw their different cultural backgrounds affecting their relationship in issues like language and daily interaction routines, traditions and celebrations, repeated negotiations and adaptation. The couples also reported experiencing increased sensitivity to differences and similarities as well as uncertainty of the future, as many of the couples were not sure about where to live long term. Cools also found that the support of family and friends was thought to be especially important in intercultural relationships, as intercultural adaptation entails both the disruption of established support networks and the challenge to develop new ones.

### **3 THE POSTSTRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY**

#### **3.1 Constructing cultural and national identities**

Identity as a concept is difficult to define and is constantly under debate (Hall 1999:19; Du Gay and Hall 2011:1; Edwards 2009:16). The term *identity* comes from the Latin word *idem*, meaning "the same". Hence, traditionally, identity has been seen as a fixed and permanent part of a person that is there from birth; something that remains untouched even when the person's surroundings, relationships and other living conditions might change. The definition of identity, however, has evolved over the years. According to the poststructuralist view on identity, a person can have several identities which are constructed through interactions (Fougère 2008:188). This

view sees cultural identities as multiple, which means that people can be members of several ethnic, social and cultural communities and can re-position themselves and modify their previous selves without having to completely lose their old identities. Furthermore, the poststructuralist perspective sees identities as not something we are but as something we do; identities are negotiated and constructed in discourse. According to Watt et al. (2010: 14), "each of us performs a repertoire of identities that are constantly shifting, and that we negotiate and re-negotiate according to the circumstances." In addition, as Edwards (2009:16) points out, the term *identity* can refer to as person's subjective sense of self, as well as to markers that define group membership.

In the following chapters, identity construction is discussed from three points of view: cultural, national and linguistic. However, even though these topics are introduced in their own chapters in the present study, it is to be noted that all aspects of a person's identity are connected to each other and, therefore, according to the poststructuralist view, making a clear cut between these different identities is nearly impossible.

### **3.1.1 Cultural identities**

'Culture' is another term which is notoriously difficult to define. For the purposes of the present study, I have chosen Spencer-Oatey's (2008:3) definition of culture as "a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour." This definition takes into account the many aspects that the word 'culture' contains, with an emphasis on social groups. According to Spencer-Oatley (2008: 4-6) cultural regularities can affect people's behavior, fundamental values, basic assumptions and even their communicative interaction.

In an intercultural marriage partners come from different cultural backgrounds that affect the way they think, how they see the world and, essentially, how they construct their identities. Therefore, the intercultural couple also offers a unique perspective on the relationship between culture and identity. In an intercultural relationship, where partners come together from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, at least one of the partners is not living in their native country but finds themselves positioned as “migrants” (Piller 2001:211). According to Hall (1999:12), living as a migrant in a country highlights a person’s own “otherness”, causing them to pay extra attention to cultural differences and similarities. This forces them to think about, and eventually reconstruct, their own identities.

Piller (2002: 265) points out that in a cross-cultural marriage, “two people form a private relationship - their own in-group - but at the same time they meet as representatives of mutually exclusive larger groups, such as those of migrant and native, of non-native and native speaker, of women and men.” In her 2002 study, Piller found that many people in intercultural marriages have hybrid identities, meaning that they identify themselves in several different ways and in several different categories. However, against a popular belief, bilingual people are not always bicultural (Grosjean 2010:108). For example, a Finnish person may use Finnish, English, and Swedish in everyday life but really only live within the Finnish culture. Yet, as Grosjean points out, many bilingual people are also bicultural. According to Grosjean (2010:116), the process of becoming bicultural is dual: there is the way the members of the cultures one is a part of categorize the person and there is the way one categorizes him-/herself. By engaging in intercultural relationships, couples have to reposition themselves, even those who continue to live in their own native country.

As Bystydzienski (2011:48) points out, some personal traits of an individual are considered fairly stable. These include characteristics such as being shy, outgoing or intelligent. However, she states that “cultural identity is acquired through identification with those groups individuals find subjectively meaningful” (Bystydzienski 2011:48). This means that people living in multicultural contexts are

more likely to have fluid identities and identify themselves with several cultures at the same time, depending on their personal identifications. Furthermore, Bystydzienski (2011:50) claims that people who permanently emigrate from their native countries to establish a relationship with someone from a different cultural background to their own are “called upon to reinvent their identities”. These people often incorporate aspects of their partner’s identity as they live together and are constantly faced with the differences and similarities between them and their partner.

### **3.1.2 National identities**

According to Hall (1999:45-51), national identities play a major role in how people in modern societies define themselves. Hall suggests that these national identities are *imagined*; they are based on a set of traditions and narratives, which make people feel that they are a part of a continuum that creates the nation. According to Hall (1999:58), in the globalized world, national identities are slowly losing their meaning and are replaced by new, hybrid identities.

Piller (2001:217) found that especially women in intercultural relationships felt that they were no longer viewed as natives of their original national communities after entering a cross-cultural marriage. Piller found a gendered pattern: women were seen as having passed from their original national identity to that of their husband, whereas men did not have the same experience. Piller hypothesizes that this difference in perception is due to an outdated but deep-rooted idea of ownership and marriage, where a woman becomes “the property” of another nation when she marries a man from that nation. Piller points out that this is not just a perception of others, but people in intercultural relationships do actually really change. Time spent away from the country of origin can cause language and culture gaps, causing people to feel like strangers in both places.

### **3.2 The relationship between language and identity**

It is widely accepted that language has a strong bond with identity. According to Joseph (2004: 188), there is no real separation between language and identity because they are “completely bound up with each other on every level.” We do not use language only to communicate, but also to make sense of the world around us. Watt et al. (2010:9) go as far as saying that researchers have realized in the recent decades that language does not just reflect who we are but it makes us who we are. Language both reflects our multiple identities to the outside world and enables us to conceptualize the world around us.

#### **3.2.1 Constructing identities through language**

As mentioned, language plays a big part in identity construction. According to Di Luzio et al. (2001: 272), we define our social identities through discourse, i.e. “through the words we choose, the topics we discuss, the way we structure discourse and conversation, and the participants we select as interlocutors.” This means that we bring our multiple identities into all interactive situations and, essentially, show who we are through our linguistic choices. This is called “positioning”; In an interactive situation, all participants, native or non-native speakers, are constantly positioning themselves with the language they use and also evaluating their partner. Additionally, Di Luzio et al. (2001: 276) note that native/non-native interactions are often characterized by asymmetry of power, due to one person interacting in their first language and one person in their second or even third language.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004:22-23) categorize several linguistic practices that people use to negotiate identities in a multilingual context. These include language choice, code-switching and code-mixing, the use of new linguistic varieties and the use of different rhetorical strategies. People in multilingual contexts are constantly positioning and re-positioning themselves by using these different linguistic strategies and by doing so, they create new identity narratives. Pavlenko and

Blackledge (2004:27) emphasize that “individuals are agentive beings who are constantly in search of new social and linguistic resources which allow them to resist identities that position them in undesirable ways, produce new identities, and assign alternative meanings to the links between identities and linguistic varieties”.

Language is also important in constructing national identities (Watt et al. 2010:15). According to Watt et al. (2010:15) language has a tendency to act as a unifying feature in a particular nation, creating invisible bonds between people. Speaking the same language can confirm to a person as well as their surrounding community that they are a part of that nation. However, as Watt et al. (2010:15) point out, this is not always the case; sometimes people can speak the same language and have very different interests, such as religious ones. Furthermore, it has long been acknowledged that language creates cultural unity within a nation.

### **3.2.2 Bilingualism and identity**

Bilingualism can be defined in several different ways, using numerous categories and scales, which are based on factors such as proficiency and function (Romaine 1995:11). At one end of the spectrum is the idea that a person can be viewed as bilingual only if they have a “native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield 1933:56), which often means that they have grown up speaking the two languages from birth. This strict view on bilingualism was supported by the lecturer and diplomatic interpreter Christophe Thiery (1978: 146), who wrote: “A true bilingual is someone who is taken to be one of themselves by the members of two different linguistic communities, at roughly the same social and cultural level.” This kind of bilingualism demands equal fluency in the two languages and having no accent in either language (Grosjean 2010:20). Grosjean points out that, even today, this view is the most widespread notion of bilingualism among the general public, even though this kind of bilingualism is relatively rare.

The more recent definition of bilingualism, which is nowadays adopted by many researchers, is not based on fluency, but rather on function. Grosjean (2010:22)

defines bilinguals as people “who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives”. This is also the definition of a bilingual person I have opted for in the present study. This view puts emphasis on language use and does not require equal competence in the two (or more) languages. According to Grosjean (2010:22), most bilinguals use their languages for different purposes in different situations and with different people and, in addition, these languages can change many times across a person’s lifespan. Different languages can also bring out different sides of a person’s identity and personality; one might appear, for example, more talkative or outgoing in one language than in the other.

According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004:5), a majority of research on the relationship between language and identity has been made through a monolingual lens. They criticize this “monolingual and monocultural bias view”, suggesting that it fails to take into account the complex linguistic repertoires of bi- and multilinguals living in the contemporary global world. Therefore, more research into the construction of a bilingual person’s identities would be required.

### **3.3 Communities of practice**

As mentioned earlier, the poststructuralist view sees identities not as something that people are but as something that people do. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464), the context where people do identities are called communities of practice. They define communities of practice as “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations –in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour.” A person can be a member of several communities of practice, such as the family, the workplace, a group of friends, an athletic team or a church group, at any given time of their lives.

According to Jucker and Kopaczyk (2013:7), there are three criteria that are crucial for a community of practice: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared

repertoire. Mutual engagement means that a group of people engage in shared practices; in other words, group of people who do things together, for example daily routines and activities. The second criterion refers to a group of people who are engaged in a mutual enterprise, for example a project or an organization, or an enterprise that is not so easily defined. The third criterion, a shared repertoire, refers to “a repertoire of recourses shared and developed by its members” Jucker and Kopaczyk (2013:7), which may be linguistic, such as shared vocabulary, or non-linguistic, such as gestures and actions. For most people, a marriage, or any other form of long term couple relationship, is a major community of practice they are engaged in and is therefore highly important in identity construction.

## **4 THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **4.1 Research questions and aims**

In an intercultural relationship, couples navigate between two or even three languages on a daily basis and, furthermore, two different cultures are constantly intertwined with each other. Having two different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can affect the relationship between romantic partners. The first aim of the present study is to find out how people in bilingual relationships see themselves as a couple; what kinds of positive or negative sides can the couples identify in having two different linguistic and cultural backgrounds mixed in one relationship.

As discussed in previous chapters, the connection between language and identity is indisputable. The second aim of the present study is to find out how being in a bilingual relationship affects one’s identity. The present study is based on the poststructuralist perspective on identity, which sees identity as being something that people do in several different communities of practice throughout their lives (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 1992: 464). The key assumption is that marriage, or any other form of romantic long-term relationship, is one of the major communities of practice people are engaged in and is therefore highly important in identity construction.

Consequently, the research questions are as follows:

- 1) What effects on the relationship do bilingual couples see in having two different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds?
- 2) How does being in a bilingual and -cultural relationship affect one's identity?

## **4.2 The methods of data collection and analysis**

Six bilingual couples were interviewed for the study. The interviews took place between December 2015 and March 2016. All of the interviews were conducted in the couples' homes or their family member's homes by the couples' own request.

The data was collected using the method of thematic interview (chapter 4.2.1) after which it was analyzed using content analysis (chapter 4.2.2).

### **4.2.1 Thematic interview**

The aim of the present study was to collect qualitative data from the participants, which is why an interview was chosen as the data collection method. Due to the very personal nature of the research questions, a thematic interview suited the present study best. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001:34), a thematic interview allows the interviewer to ask further, clarifying questions and is more flexible than, for example, a questionnaire. Additionally, according to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001:36), a thematic interview is an effective method of gathering descriptive examples on a phenomenon. Since the number of interviewees in the present study was relatively low, it was important to find a method that allowed the participants to talk about their experiences as freely as possible. According to Eskola and Suoranta 1998:88), a thematic interview has become a very popular form of collecting qualitative data due to its flexibility and, at the same time, thoroughness. These were the most important reasons why a thematic interview was chosen as the data collection method in the present study as well.

A thematic interview can be structured in several different ways, varying from fairly strictly organized set of questions to a list of three or four very broad topics that the interview covers. According to Eskola and Suoranta (1998:87), a thematic interview consists of a few predetermined topics and it is the interviewer's responsibility to make sure that all the topics are covered at some point of the interview. Compared to a structured interview, a thematic interview allows the participants to express their opinions in a more uncontrolled manner, which is why it was the most suitable method for the present study. However, some elements of a semi-structured interview can be found in the present study: a list of questions was prepared for each theme, but not all of them were asked from all the couples. The two predetermined themes that were chosen for the interview in the present study were:

- 1) The couples' own views on the positive and negative sides of an intercultural relationship.
- 2) The effects of being in an intercultural relationship on the construction of a person's identities.

These topics were chosen to give answers to the research questions. The first category of interview questions had to do with the positive and negative sides that different cultural backgrounds bring to the relationship. The second set of questions had to do with how all this is connected to identity; how has being in an intercultural relationship affected the partners' identities. Additionally, the choice of language is important in any form of intercultural communication, especially in a romantic relationship. Therefore, language choice was also an important topic to cover in the interviews to find out what kinds of effects the couples saw in having different mother tongues. All topics were covered with all of the couples, but not to the same detail. The participants were allowed to talk more about topics they found interesting and omit questions that they found uninteresting or irrelevant. This method ensured that the data really reflects the thoughts and opinions of the participants (Eskola and Suoranta 1998:88). All the interview questions can be found in the appendix.

In the present study, the couples were interviewed in their homes with both partners present. Since the present study aims to discover intercultural couples' thoughts of their relationships, it was a logical choice to interview the partners together at the same time. This also allowed them to negotiate their answers and have a dialogue on the interview topics. In many cases, the partners added something to each other's answers or gave a different opinion or a point of view on the same topic. The questions that had to do with identity were asked from both partners. The choice of location was initiated by the couples themselves: when asked, where they would like to be interviewed, all of the couples chose their own home. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed for later use.

#### **4.3.2 Content analysis**

The interviews were analyzed using data oriented content analysis, which is a three-step process including simplifying, clustering and finally abstracting the data with the help of previous literature (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2011:108-113). This method aims to give a general, clear and coherent description of the phenomenon in question. Firstly, the data is simplified by looking for important, meaningful units in the data and leaving out everything else. The selection of meaningful units is guided by the research questions and aims. In the present study, the interview questions were divided into two themes according to the three research questions. In the first stage of data analysis, the data was simplified using these same two broad categories:

- 1) positives and negatives of intercultural relationships
- 2) Identity construction in an intercultural relationship

In this stage, some of the data turned out to be irrelevant in terms of the research questions in the present study. For example, some of the couples went into great details describing how they ended up together, which was important in making a personal connection with the couples, but not relevant to the research questions.

After the initial simplification, the data was further organized into categories. These categories included, for example, *problems in communication due to culture, dealing with miscommunications, feelings of otherness and the importance of mother tongue*. Finally, the categories were grouped together in order to reach conclusions; Additionally, in the present study, where participants were purposely chosen to represent different types of intercultural couples, it was important to compare and contrast the themes that emerged from the data.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011: 96) data oriented content analysis is always subjective and does not even aim to objectivity; the researcher always analyses the data from his/her subjective point of view. Therefore, the results of the present study cannot be generalized. However, the present study aims to look deeper into a phenomenon that may have been previously overlooked: the construction of identities in an intercultural relationship.

## **4.2 The couples**

For the present study, six couples were interviewed. The couples were chosen based on a number of criteria. Firstly, the partners had to have different mother tongues in order to qualify as a bilingual couple. Secondly, one of those mother tongues had to be Finnish. This choice was made in order to make comparison between couples easier. In three of the couples the other mother tongue was English and in the other three couples the other mother tongue was something other than English. However, English had to be the primary language of communication in all the couples. This allowed comparison between couples in which only one partner uses their L2 and the other their mother tongue and couples in which both partners use their L2 as the main language of communication.

Four of the couples currently live in Finland and two of the couples outside of Finland. This choice was also made in order to allow comparison. At the time of the interviews, the couples had been together for very different amounts of time, varying from less than three years to 45 years. Since the focus of the present study is on

intercultural couples themselves, it was not important if the couples had children or not. Hence, some of the couples have children and others do not. Also, it was not relevant whether the couples were married or not, but they were required to have lived together for more than a year. However, all the couples that were finally chosen for the study are, in fact, married. The couples were mostly found through personal connections and through social media.

Basic information of the interview couples is introduced in the following table and short narratives below.

Table 1: Basic information of the interview couples

	Mother tongues		Country of residence	Years in the relationship	Children together
	♀ a	♂ b			
Couple 1	Finnish	English	England	2,5	1
Couple 2	Finnish	English	Finland	12	2
Couple 3	Finnish	English	Finland	45	3
Couple 4	French	Finnish	Finland	3	-
Couple 5	Finnish	Polish	Poland	7	1 on the way
Couple 6	Finnish	Arabic	Finland	2,5	-

Couple 1: Husband is English and wife is Finnish. Lived together first in Finland for about a year before moving into England to start a family. They have one child together and husband has one son from a previous relationship. Husband has not formally studied Finnish. The couple are in their 20's and 30's.

Couple 2: Husband is Irish and wife Finnish. Lived together in two English-speaking countries for several years until moving to Finland for children's school a few years ago. Husband has studied Finnish and can communicate in Finnish quite fluently. The couple are in their late 30's.

Couple 3: Husband is Irish and wife Finnish. The couple have lived in Finland for decades, but the husband never formally studied Finnish. However, he now speaks it fluently. The couple are in their early 70's.

Couple 4: Wife is French and husband is Finnish. The couple have lived in Finland for all of their relationship. Wife can understand Finnish and can communicate in Finnish in everyday situations. Husband does not speak French. The couple are in their late 20's and early 30's.

Couple 5: Wife is Finnish and husband is Polish. The couple lived in Finland for the first four years of their relationship, after which they moved to Belgium for a year and are now living in Poland. Both partners can understand each other's L1 but do not speak it. The couple are in their late 20's and early 30's.

Couple 6: Wife is Finnish and husband is Algerian. The couple have lived in Finland for most of their relationship after initially being in a long-distance relationship. Neither partner speaks each other's L1. The couple are in their early 20's.

When quoting the couples later on in the present study, the interviewees are identified with the couple's number and the letter a for wife and b for husband.

## 5 FINDINGS

### 5.1 Language choice

In any intercultural encounter, the participants must decide which language the interaction is going to be conducted in. This choice not only affects the quality and effectiveness of the interaction but can also put the participants in different positions depending on their language proficiency in the chosen language. In the following chapter reasons for language choice in intercultural couples, as well as the partners' motivation to study each other's first languages are discussed.

#### 5.1.1 Reasons for language choice in intercultural couples

All of the couples interviewed in the present study have chosen English as their mutual language of communication. This was already clear when looking for participants for the study, which means that it cannot be seen as result as such. However, the present study is particularly interested in *why* English was chosen as the main language of communication in the relationship. Interestingly, the reasons for choosing English in the beginning of the relationship were very similar in all the couples; English simply was the only language of communication at their disposal at the time. Therefore, English was not only the easiest, but often also the only choice. Examples 1 and 2 show how obvious the couples saw the choice of English as the main language of communication in the beginning of the relationship.

- (1) "English was (-- the easiest choice (.) yeah really" (1b)
- (2) "It [English] is the one foreign language we both speak" (5a)

This reason for language choice was not explicitly identified by Siguan (1980) over four decades ago. However, it can be categorized under the section "facteurs individuels". Since the 1980's, when Siguan made his categorizations, English has become even more the lingua franca of the world, meaning that it is often the easiest and the most convenient language choice for many intercultural encounters. This also seems to be the case with intercultural couples in the present study.

Even though some of the couples have lived in two or more countries during their relationship, the language of communication has remained the same. However, one of the couples mentioned that the country of residence does somewhat influence the language choices in the home (example 3).

- (3) “Yeah maybe just the move to Finland was like a bigger change because then [husband] started learning more and [daughter] was speaking more Finnish at home as well so (.) that kind of was a game-changer then that [husband] was under pressure to speak a bit more Finnish” (2a)

Both Siguan (1980) and Piller (2001) identified the language of the country of residence, “le territoire”, to be a major factor in the language choice in intercultural couples. In the present study, however, since it was one of the requirements when looking for participants for the study that the couples speak English together, “le territoire” did not seem to play such a big role in the language choice. However, as quote (3) above reveals, a lot of times when couples move to a country where English is not spoken as L1, it gives them pressure to learn the language of that country and start speaking it at home as well. This might be due to the fact that partners who do not speak the language of their current country of residence, can often feel like outsiders in that country. More about the feelings of being an outsider due to language is explained in section 5.3.2 *Language barrier causing otherness*.

Interestingly, even though most of the partners who did not speak their partner’s mother tongue in the beginning of the relationship have eventually learned to at least understand it, all of the couples in the present study have stuck to English as their main language of communication. This result was the same in both couples where English is one of the partner’s L1 and where English is neither of the partners’ L1. Couples gave multiple reasons for this, the most common of which was that even though they are slowly learning each other’s first languages, their language skills are not yet on the level they would hope. Some couples also mentioned that they are sticking to English out of habit and that changing the language of communication would seem unnatural, like the participant in example 4.

- (4) "I guess I could speak to [my wife] in Polish (.) but I got so used to speaking English that it doesn't even come to my mind that I could speak in Polish" (5b)

This indicates that couples learn a way of communicating with each other early on in the relationship and the language they have chosen then becomes a part of their couple identity; changing the language of communication would also change something in the couple's way of being together. This also supports the idea conveyed by Watt et al. (2010:9) that language does not just reflect who we are but it makes us who we are. When we get used to seeing our partner in a certain way, it is difficult to change that perception later on in the relationship.

All of the non-native English speakers interviewed for the study said that their language skills in English were at a relatively high level already before the relationship, which made the choice of language easy. Therefore, none of the couples said that everyday communication causes major problems in the relationship. Furthermore, most of the non-native English speakers noted that their English skills had improved during the relationship. The interviewee in example 5 explains how she spoke good English before the relationship, but how being in the relationship has made her language skills in English more fluent and precise.

- (5) " I think I spoke very decent English honestly but -- I probably was more able to transmit the ideas I wanted than actually choosing the right nuances and right words to really convey what I wanted to say" (4a)

The non-native English speaking partner in the relationship is often therefore learning from their partner, not only vocabulary and grammar of the English language, but also ways of communicating. In the couples where both partners speak English as their L2, both partners learn English together as the relationship continues, as well as learning each other's L1s in the process (see section 5.1.2).

Even though English is the primary language of communication in all of the couples, code-switching happens quite often. Code-switching occurs in many situations in the couples' everyday lives, but especially when communicating with the extended family, in particular with the older members of the family who might not speak any

English. In example 6 the interviewee gives an example of a situation where she might speak Polish.

- (6) “[I speak Polish] only rarely (.) very short sentences(.) if his grandparents ask me directly something” (5a)

In fact, communicating with in-laws was one of the main reasons couples gave for studying each other’s L1. Couples gave many examples of situations, for examples Christmas dinners, where they have felt the pressure to speak their partner’s L1 with the in-laws, in order to better fit in with the family. Other reasons for code-switching include situations with the children where they might choose to switch the language mid-conversation, and dealing with words and topics that require using very specific vocabulary in the target language. An example of this that one couple gave was talking about Finnish foods, for example *mämmi*, that do not have a direct translation in the English language. In those cases code-switching is the only way to refer to that specific food.

For the participants in the present study, one reason for language choice was clearly the most significant one: convenience. For all of the couples interviewed for the present study English was the easiest language choice and couples had not even considered speaking another language in the beginning of the relationship. However, as the relationships progressed and the couples’ living conditions changed, partners often started learning each other’s mother tongues as well. In addition, having children and dealing with each other’s extended families often brings on the pressure to learn each other’s first languages (see chapter 5.1.2).

### **5.1.2 Motivation to study each other’s L1**

Even though English was seen as a natural choice as the language of communication, all of the couples thought it is eventually also important to learn each other’s first languages. This was seen especially important in couples who had or were planning to have children. The couples mentioned that they can find many benefits in raising their child bilingual and that both languages of the parents are equally important.

One of the interviewees, who at the time of the interview had recently had a baby with his wife, states how important it is to him for the baby to grow up bilingual (example 7).

- (7) “Like I said I’d like [the baby] to be bilingual (.) and I would like to speak to her in both languages -- Everyone on the Finnish side want [the baby] to learn Finnish (.) so does all of my family because (.) like when someone is bilingual (.) it’s a great future” (1b)

This reveals that people living in intercultural and bilingual relationships are quite sensitive to language-related topics and value the ability to fluently speak in two or more languages.

The couples, where neither of the partners speak English as their L1, saw their linguistic situation, in terms of raising their children, a bit more complicated than the couples where English is one of the partners’ first language. One couple in particular, who were expecting their first child at the time of the interview, mentioned that they have given this topic a lot of thought. This couple mentioned that the language they use in the home will most likely change now that they are having a child (example 8).

- (8) “Well the baby will be quite a good motivator that I will improve my Finnish skills because at the moment I have low motivation (.) I’m not keen to learn Finnish (.) but now I’ll be kind of forced” (5b)

This couple also mentioned that not being able to understand the language that their own child speaks with their partner would make them feel like an outsider in the household. This motivates both of them to learn each other’s L1s at least enough to be able to understand what their partner is speaking to their child.

As mentioned, all of the couples saw great value in learning each other’s first languages. However, the couples gave many reasons to explain why their learning process was not moving forward. Nearly all of the couples found that learning their partner’s L1 requires a lot of time and conscious effort that many of them feel that they do not have. The most common reason that the couples mentioned for not learning their partner’s L1 was lack of time, as can be seen from examples 9 and 10.

From example 10 it can also be noticed that the fact that partners do not have time to learn each other's first languages is seen as a problem which needs to be resolved.

(9) "I was gonna get them [Finnish books] out at home (.) but it's been such a busy year" (1b)

(10) "That's more of a time-management issue now that I hope will be resolved soon"  
(4a)

Another common reason for not learning each other's first languages was that the couples felt that they do not get enough opportunities to practice their foreign language skills. Especially the couples living in Finland mentioned that since almost all Finns speak some English, there is no need to switch into Finnish. Furthermore, some of the interviewees also blamed their partner for their unsuccessful language learning. In a lot of cases the non-native English speaker is reluctant to speak their own first language to their native English-speaking partner, even though this might help them learn the language faster. Couples, who had this problem, mentioned that the reason behind it is simply habit; once couples start communicating in one language in the beginning of their relationship, they find it very difficult to change the language later on. This has to do with the identity that the partners have constructed together as a couple; one of the interviewees even mentioned that they feel more comfortable speaking Finnish with anyone else but their own partner. This might be due to the fact that language has such a strong connection with our identities and who we are as a person, that when speaking a different language we might communicate differently or it might even bring out a different side of our personalities. When partners are used to seeing each other in a certain way, it is not easy to change that perception.

## **5.2 Advantages and disadvantages of intercultural relationships**

The intercultural relationship has many qualities that make it different from monolingual relationships. The couples interviewed for the present study pointed out both advantages and disadvantages that they could identify in their

relationships, as well as strategies for overcoming the problems. These aspects are discussed in the following chapters.

### 5.2.1 Challenges related to language

None of the couples interviewed for the present study found language to be a major problem in the relationship; speaking a foreign language to your partner does not seem to affect the quality of the relationship, at least to the extent of causing major problems in the relationship. In example 11, the interviewee explains this by saying that even though she cannot always translate exactly what she wants to say, it does not get in the way of her husband understanding the intended message.

(11) " I mean it's not a problem (.) I just have to explain what it is (.) and I don't feel like it really matters that I don't know it in English (.) because usually he gets what I mean anyways". (5a)

This indicates that bilingual couples have learned a way to communicate with each other in a way that they can get their message across without necessarily being able to use the exact words for everything. In a communicative situation there are always other factors that affect intelligibility, such as context, body language and facial expressions, which means that being able to translate everything accurately is not necessarily needed.

However, even though all of the couples said that they are quite confident and comfortable speaking English with each other, they did mention some challenges that occur when two people who do not share the same first language are in a relationship together. Most non-native English-speakers in this study mentioned that sometimes they find it difficult to find the right words in English to express how they really feel, especially in emotional situations. This can cause frustration and miscommunication between partners. In examples 12 and 13, the interviewees describe how they have to pay more attention to the words they choose when they are communicating in their second language. These examples also show that

intercultural couples are aware of the fact that sometimes even arguments can be caused by not finding the right words to express emotions.

(12) "Sometimes you don't get the exact meaning (.) you have to watch out for your words because they're stronger or (.) not the same meaning" (5b)

(13) "Or sometimes just (.) you are too tired and grammar makes it so that it gets another meaning." (4a)

The problems in communication can be seen most clearly in emotional situations, where speaking one's L1 would feel easier. This can be seen as another indication of the relationship between language and identity; emotional topics are often easier to deal with in one's mother tongue. Almost all of the couples said that it is during arguments that not sharing the same first language causes the most problems. Some of the interviewees even mentioned that during arguments they can sometimes switch to their L1 in order to let their feelings out more freely. One interviewee mentions in example 14 that sometimes the communication problems have made her feel like they might not even be compatible with her husband because they do not speak the same first language.

(14) "Even just changing the language mid-argument kind of suggests that (--) there is that kind of undertone that maybe we're not compatible because (.) you know (.) we can't understand each other" (2a)

On the other hand, some of the couples said that speaking English makes them choose their words more carefully, which might benefit the relationship. In examples 15 and 16, the interviewees mention that speaking their second language makes them put more effort into the communicative situation than they would in their first language.

(15) "I guess in English I tend to put more effort into the conversation than in Finnish (.) when I use Finnish it's just like on autopilote" (4b)

(16) "I think I'm a bit sharper and carry myself a little bit better in English (.) so I might be a bit better-spoken or make more effort to finish my sentences (--) I would use

Finnish quite liberally (.) make up my own words or just not finish sentences or not be very precise with my expressions and in English I kind of try to get to the point quicker." (2a)

Piller (2013) claims that the person using their L1 in a bilingual relationship is often in a more powerful position than the partner using their L2. In the present study, this can be seen in the non-native English speakers' remarks about not being always able to express what they want, especially in emotional situations. Furthermore, one of the native-English speakers in the study mentions in example 17 that he has a certain advantage because the language used in communication is his first language.

(17) "I'm worried that it happens more often than not that (.) sometimes you [wife] don't talk 'cause you don't know how to say it -- I don't have a problem with getting my way (.) I've got lots of different ways (.) I can make it clear (.) but sometimes I feel a bit pushy but (.) I just want to be understood." (1b)

Another interviewee, who is not a native English-speaker, mentions in example 18 that it is sometimes difficult to express herself in English when she is tired. This puts her native English-speaking husband in a more powerful position, because he does not have to struggle with language even if he is tired.

(18) "If I was sleep-deprived it would be hard to get words out (.) or I couldn't express myself or (--) you can't make your point as eloquently as the person who's the native" (2a)

From comments like these it could be concluded, as Piller (2001) stated in her study, that speaking one's mother tongue really puts them in a more powerful position compared to the non-native partner. The participants in the present study, however, did not mention it to be a major problem in the relationship, only that they occasionally notice it. It could be, however, that there is an underlying positioning of power due to language that the couples themselves are not necessarily even aware of.

### 5.2.2 Challenges related to culture

Many of the couples in the present study believe that their occasional miscommunications do not derive necessarily from not sharing the same mother tongue, but rather from cultural differences. As Spencer-Oatey (2008:3) states, culture is “a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.” This means that the culture we have grown up with affects almost all aspects of our lives, either consciously or unconsciously. However, according to the couples in the present study, most of the cultural differences that can be seen in the couples’ everyday lives are small and do not often cause problems after the first months or years of the relationship. In example 19, the interviewee gives examples of everyday things that she has noticed that are noticeably different in her and her husband’s cultures.

(19) “Yeah I guess there are smaller things (.) but -- I mean it’s not a problem just different ways that people like (.) spend holidays or that kind of thing (.) like different traditions sure” (5a)

Many of the couples in the present study mentioned that different ways of spending holidays and other celebrations are the most visible part of having two cultures in one marriage. It is often during major holidays, such as Christmas, when couples have to negotiate where and how to spend their time. All of the couples in the present study, however, did not see this as a major problem in the relationship but said that they are able to make compromises over these things.

Sometimes, however, cultural differences affect the relationship negatively. For example, one couple mentioned that the biggest factor that causes communication problems in their relationship is different styles of communication; in some cultures, it is common for the participants in a conversation to talk over each other, ask a lot of questions and challenge the other person’s point of view, whereas in other countries, such as Finland, this kind of behavior can be considered impolite or even rude. This kind of difference in communication styles is almost inevitable in intercultural

communication and it is a result of two different sets of cultural systems and traditions (Cheng 2003:1). In example 20, the interviewee has noticed that his wife's communication strategies are different to his own. In this case the French way of communicating has made the Finnish husband feel like often he is on the defensive position in the relationship. In the French culture, it is common to ask questions and interrupt the other speaker mid-conversation, whereas in the Finnish culture this is often considered rude. This couple mentioned this issue to be an occasional cause for conflict in the relationship.

(20) "I don't think the language causes problems (.). I think the cultural differences may be a bigger thing -- I think there are differences in the way that you (.) take part in a conversation -- I mean (.) from my point of view the French way of conversation is a bit more aggressive than the Finnish -- I guess the difficulty is that sometimes it [the French way of communicating] has made me feel -- it kind of puts me in defensive position" (4b)

Two of the couples mentioned that their families' attitudes towards the intercultural marriage have brought challenges into their relationship. These couples have felt that some of the members of their families have had some reservations towards intercultural relationships in general. The families' worries about intercultural relationships may concern, for example, different styles of parenting or different ideas of gender roles in a relationship. The couples, whose families have had some negative attitudes towards the relationship believe that the negative attitudes stem from conservative values and traditional views on marriage and relationships in general. Also, having different religious backgrounds seems to affect the families' attitudes towards the relationship. In example 21, the interviewee, who is from a catholic French family, mentions that her family's view on marriage is different from the Finnish view. In example 22, the participant, who is also married to a partner from a different religious background, says that her husband's family's attitudes, combined with the language barrier, have made her feel out of place at times.

(21) "I think the culture of Finland is a problem in my family because (.) like I said (.) in their mind women are under men somehow (.) it may have more to do with religion than culture in their case" (4a)

(22) "It also comes with that we have different religions (.) well Christians both but he's Catholic and I'm Lutheran so -- well now I'm getting used to it but in the beginning it was a bit uncomfortable that- (.) especially when there where older people and the Polish language -- I felt so out of place (.) like I don't belong there" (5a)

From all the participants' answers it is obvious that the families' attitudes often have an effect on the quality of the relationship in general, both positive and negative. Some couples, whose families were supportive of the relationship from the beginning, mentioned this to be a major positive side in the relationship. The support from the families is considered to be highly important and the couples who lack this support mentioned it to be a major strain in the relationship. It can, for example, affect how the couples choose to spend their holidays or even cause arguments between partners. However, some of the couples mentioned that even though some family members had had some concerns about the relationship in the beginning, they have changed their minds as they have gotten to know the new partner.

One common thing that all the interviewed couples mentioned to be a challenge in the relationship is settling down in one country. With intercultural couples it is inevitable that at least one of the partners always lives away from their home country, which makes the decision on where to live long term often problematic. Both partners' home countries are often an option for settling down in and the decision ultimately comes down to, for example, finding employment or children's education. Finding work is often the biggest issue, especially for the partner who is not living in their own home country. Being unemployed in a foreign country can cause frustration and even affect the quality of the relationship. Examples 23 and 24 demonstrate the uncertainty that is often present in intercultural couples' everyday lives.

(23) "Our original plan was when [the son] was gonna leave school we were gonna come back here (.) but who knows where we'll be" (1b)

(24) "We both want to stay in Finland but right now we can't tell for sure." (4b)

This uncertainty about where to live long term is seen by many intercultural couples as a both positive and a negative side of the relationship. On one hand it can cause problems between partners, but on the other hand it can open new doors and possibilities to the couple and the whole family.

### 5.2.3 Dealing with challenges

People in intercultural relationships seem to have one important, common attribute: they are able to compromise. When two people from different backgrounds form a relationship, there are several things that require negotiation. These include minor things, such as food and holidays, as well as major decisions, such as where to live and which languages to speak to your children. Many of the couples interviewed for the present study admitted being very good at making compromises, which they also found to be important for the quality of their relationship. They value aspects of each other's cultures and are able to "make the best of both worlds" The participant in example 25 puts it quite simply: she values aspects from both cultures and sees neither as a superior.

(25) "Sometimes you appreciate some aspects of one culture more than the other (.) and the other way around" (5a)

Many of the couples interviewed for the present study said the same thing; they think that both partners' cultures are equally valuable and important and that they are able to choose the best parts of both into their everyday lives. When some things clash in the two cultures, the couples seem to be able to make compromises. This might suggest that, perhaps, people who enter intercultural relationships are adaptable in the first place, or perhaps that being in the relationship has made them that way.

The most important tool that the couples said they have to deal with problems in the relationship is seeing the humor in it; the couples admitted that problems are

inevitable but that laughing it off is the best way to handle the situation. In example 26, the interviewee specifically mentions humor and taking things lightly to be the best way of dealing with culture and language related problems in the relationship.

(26) "I think it's the ability to laugh about stupid things (.) when you make a stupid mistake or (.) when something really clashes in our cultures it's like (.) oh my God (.) why are you doing it (.) It's like making fun of it but nicely -- we are bound to have this kind of miscommunication (.) it's my third language and it's your [husband] second language so you have to accept it I guess." (4a)

The couples also reported that learning each other's mother tongues has a positive effect on the relationship; some couples stated that it has made them understand each other better and made cultural and linguistic differences more visible and easier to deal with. This emphasizes the important meaning that language has in the way we conceptualize the world around us. In example 27, the participant explains that after he had learned some Finnish, he also started to understand the way his wife sees the world a bit better.

(27) "I think at first when I lived here and was going to the Finnish class (.) a lot of pennies dropped for me that year (.) like oh (.) that's why [wife] says it like that (-- when you learn the other language (.) I could see that she was sometimes just translating a common Finnish sentence into English that in English sounds a little bit harsh like (.) give me that (.) but it sounds okay in Finnish" (2b)

#### **5.2.4 Advantages of intercultural relationship**

Despite some problems that intercultural couples often face, there are many positive sides to intercultural relationships as well. The main thing that almost all the couples mentioned was that they think that being in an intercultural relationship makes them more tolerant and open-minded and that they have more possibilities in life due to being in the relationship. Examples 28 and 29 show that intercultural couples really value the new possibilities and perspectives that being in the relationship has brought them.

(28) "It sort of makes your life richer in a way because you learn about new ways of thinking" (5a)

(29) "Perhaps for me (.) it's that it widens my perception of the world because I am (.) how should I put it (.) I'm rooted to my origins (.) I live 60 km from where I was born (-- ) I would say it enriches my life" (4b)

These examples show that partners in intercultural couples are open to learning new things from each other and from each other's cultures.

Another major advantage that the couples in the present study mentioned is feeling at home in both partners' home countries, which not only brings them new perspective but also provides them with more possibilities in life. Especially the couples who have lived in both partners' home countries for longer periods of time have strong social networks and support systems in both countries and they feel like they could live in either place. Furthermore, the couples want to make sure that their children also construct this hybrid identity, teaching them aspects of each of their cultures and home countries. This can be seen in everyday life, such as food and holidays, as well as teaching other cultural issues from both countries.

### **5.3 Identity construction in intercultural relationships**

According to the poststructuralist perspective, people construct their identities in interaction with others and in several communities of practice during their lives. As marriage is one of the most important relationships and communities of practice most people have in their lives, it is bound to have an effect on how the person identifies him-/herself and also on how the rest of the community sees that person. In the present study, the couples were quite aware of the changes that have happened in their cultural, linguistic and national identities due to being in an intercultural relationship.

### 5.3.1 The importance of mother tongue

As most researchers now agree, language and identity are very tightly connected. Especially evident is the connection between one's mother tongue and emotions. Even though intercultural couples have no problems getting their point across in a foreign language, they admit that in certain situations it would be easier to speak their L1. In examples 30 and 31, the interviewees admit that speaking Finnish, which is their mother tongue, feels easier in many situations because it comes so naturally to them or because they do not have to go through a translation process when trying to get their message across.

(30) "Sometimes when I'm emotional I would like to speak in Polish so I have like one layer less to think about." (5b)

(31) "Speaking Finnish is just so natural (.) comes so natural (.) and especially now on this holiday I've noticed that I speak more (.) when I speak Finnish (.) 'cause I still have to think about English(.) all the words (.) I don't speak that [much] (.) 'cause it's like harder (.) it's like exhausting a bit more than speaking Finnish" (1a)

However, the process of translating the intended message into L2 seems to become more and more automatic over time. For example, one of the interviewees, who has been married to a native English-speaking person for over forty years says that speaking English has become so automatic to her that she often does not even realize that she starts speaking English to her Finnish friends and family. According to this interviewee, speaking English is just as easy for her as speaking Finnish and, consequently, she often thinks in English as well. This interviewee also says that she is just as talkative, if not more, in English as she is in Finnish. This could suggest that over time, if one's L2 is frequently used in everyday life, it can become just as easy to speak as one's L1 and it can have the same connection to one's emotions as the L1 does.

The two Finnish speakers in the present study, who are currently living outside of Finland, especially emphasized the meaning of the Finnish language to them. Both of them say that speaking English regularly is important to them, not only for the connections with their friends and families in Finland, but also for their own

connection with the Finnish language. Both of these interviewees have made connections with Finnish people living in their new home countries and they get together with them regularly to speak Finnish. This is another example of how important one's L1 is, even when speaking L2 also feels easy and natural.

### 5.3.2 Language barrier causing otherness

A common problem that intercultural couples face is that one or both of the partners may feel like an outsider in certain situations or even daily, due to problems with language. This also became evident in the interviews in the present study. Most of the interviewees who do not speak their partner's L1, found it challenging at times to connect with the partner's family and the surrounding community and culture. In example 32 the participant describes how he feels when people around him are speaking in a language he does not understand. It causes him to feel like an outsider in the situation. This interviewee even said that occasionally he feels like everyone is laughing and talking about him, even though he fully knows they are not. This was mentioned also by another participant in the present study. In example 33, the interviewee talks about how language can act as a barrier or as a connector between people. She has realised that if she spoke Polish, which is her husband's mother tongue and the language of the society surrounding her, it would be easier to make friends and feel at home in the place where she is currently living. This is a strong indicator of how language can build communities and either include or exclude a person from the community, depending on their ability to speak and understand that language.

(32) "Yeah like say when people talk to you or there's talking going on and you haven't got a clue -- I mean they could have been saying anything -- it's the main basis of fear actually (.) I mean not understanding" (1b)

(33) "It's really hard to make friends with Polish people (-- ) because I feel like if I spoke Polish it would be probably easier to get to know more people" (5a)

In example 34, the interviewee explains how he sometimes feels like he becomes almost a different person when he tries to speak Finnish with Finnish people. He feels that he could connect with his Finnish team mates better if he spoke Finnish more fluently. Especially trying to be funny and understanding jokes seems to be especially difficult in one's L2.

(34) For me yeah I see a massive difference (-- one case where it's the most [obvious] is in the football team (.) like I'm just not the same person (.) and I know they think I am a little boring hehe (-- I often find like we could be talking about a subject and we'd be having a joke and I would keep up with the conversation but it's almost like I'm on a treadmill running really fast and I have to keep up with them (.) and when I think of something funny to say they've moved on to the next subject" (2b)

The couples in the present study can also recognize the positive changes in their lives after learning to speak, even a little bit, their partner's mother tongue. As well as helping communication with their partner, learning the language helps to connect with the surrounding culture and makes them feel a part of the surrounding society. In example 34, the interviewee specifically mentions that she feels more included in the society because she has learnt some Polish and, consequently, can follow conversations around her better.

(35) "Now I can follow the conversations (.) I'm better in the conversations sort of (.) or I don't feel so (.) outsider because I know now what's going on" (5a)

This, again, is an example of how language acts as a social marker; when one understands and speaks the language spoken around them, it shows to the surrounding community that he/she is a part of that community. Furthermore, it can make the migrant themselves feel more like they are a part of that community, when they can speak the language spoken around them. It is, therefore, quite obvious that being able to communicate in a lingua franca is not sufficient in order to make an immigrant feel a part of the new home country, but it requires learning that country's language(s) as well.

### 5.3.3 National and cultural identities

As noted by Hall (1999:12), living in a foreign country may occasionally highlight a person's own national identity. Seeing the differences in one's own behavior and in the behavior of the members of the surrounding society can often make a person notice the unique features of their own culture more clearly. The interviewees who are currently living away from their home country also mentioned this, like in example 36, where the interviewee says that the differences between her and the people around highlight her own "Finnishness".

(36) I definitely don't feel like I'm Polish (.) even though I'm surrounded by the country and the language (.) yeah I guess I still feel like very Finnish (.) I mean sometimes it even accentuates it -- the fact that I live abroad (.) because there's some differences anyway" (5a)

Hence, being in an intercultural relationship does not seem to make people lose their own national identities, quite the opposite. People interviewed for the present study, who are living abroad also said that it is very important for them to keep in touch with their family and friends back home. Furthermore, they said that, while living abroad, they actively seek out connections with their fellow countrymen in their new home country, which helps them feel connected to their roots. In example 37, a Finnish woman living in England mentions how she has found some Finnish connections over in her new home country.

(37) "Yeah well I Skype quite a lot in Finland and I have these two Finnish ladies (.) live like quite nearby to us and we get together sometimes." (1a)

It seems to be that when living abroad, coming from the same country can unify people even though they would not otherwise have that much in common. For most people, connections with people from the same country of origin seems to be something that helps them settle into their new home countries. However, one of the interviewees specifically mentioned that she "does not find it that important" to have French connections in Finland. The reason she gave for this was that she has so many friends from all over the world living in Finland that she does not need the French

connection. Furthermore, this interviewee also stated that she does not feel particularly French herself, and that there are many things in the French society that she does not like. Therefore, it seems that the stronger one identifies with their own nationality, the more likely they are to seek out people from their home countries when they immigrate into a new one.

Even though people in intercultural relationships do not lose their old national identities, they often adopt their partner's nationality as a part of their own identity as well. As a consequence, intercultural couples feel that they have hybrid identities, and that they could feel at home in either of the partners' home countries. This connection to both partners' roots is especially important to those couples who have children.

(38) "I feel like it [Finland] is still my home (.) or the place where I came from and (.) the cultural environment and the people here are very important to me so (.) I think it's very important to keep in touch with them and keep the connection there -- I don't wanna lose that part either (.) and now that we're having a baby I hope that the baby will feel like it has two home countries" (5a)

Many of the interviewees stated that they feel that they have adopted a part of their partner's national and cultural identities as a part of their own, like the participant in example 39.

(39) "This is difficult to say because I know that everyone's Irish if their granny was Irish or something but I do identify as Irish too to a certain extent because my kids are Irish and I know so much about the culture and history (.) and Irishness is such a big part of my life (.) and the foods we cook and the books we read and following the news (.) I think I can say that I'm a little bit Irish". (2a)

One of the interviewees, who has been living in Finland for over forty years brings up the issue of feeling homesick. Even though this interviewee is happy with his life in Finland, he admits regularly missing home. He also mentions that even though he has the Finnish citizenship, he still sees himself as Irish and identifies himself with

that country and culture. Most of the interviewees in the present study, who are living outside of their home countries, also mentioned feeling this way.

(40) "I mean (.) I am tremendously proud of being a Finnish citizen (.) but also Irish (.) I mean (.) the blood is probably green. - Don't get me wrong (.) life has been very good to me here [in Finland] (.) but despite everything (.) I'm just ferociously homesick all the time." (3b)

Some couples also mentioned that they feel more international due to being in the intercultural relationship; to them, national identities do not play a major role in their own identity construction. A lot of these couples stated that they want to travel, see new places and do not want to settle into one country, like the participant in examples 41 and 42.

(41) "I don't feel that my nationality really influences me (.) like I could live in Finland (.) or I could live in other countries" (5b)

(42) "I've recently been thinking like (.) if I was where I wanted to be I wouldn't be anything -lish 'cause (.) I don't want to stop in one place (.) we've talked about that a lot" (1b)

National, cultural and linguistic issues are constantly present in intercultural couples' lives. Therefore, intercultural couples need to constantly reconsider and negotiate their multiple identities as their language skills, living conditions and cultural environment change. This makes people in intercultural relationships quite sensitive to things to do with culture, language and nationality. However, the way that people in the society see the couple can be very different from the way the couple identify themselves. In example 43, the interviewee expresses her frustration with people seeing her and her husband a certain way, even though they might not know them at all.

(43) "It's almost annoying when people call us a white couple because (.) my god do you know how different our cultures are (.) we might appear as a same cultural couple but just spend a day in our house and you will see that there is a gap here" (4a)

This is an example of a case where one identifies him-/herself in a certain way that does not match their appearance to the surrounding community. It also demonstrates how important it is for people to be able to identify themselves in the way they want, without any pressure from outsiders.

One of the interviewees, who has been living in Finland for over four decades mentions that returning home for a visit can sometimes cause him to feel like an outsider in his own home country (example 44). This is because he is not involved in the everyday lives of the people back home and not necessarily always aware of what's happening in the Irish society.

(44) "When you go home (.) you're a bit different (.) your brother will say to you they don't use that word anymore and things like that (-- ) so you feel a little bit out of it  
(3b)

This would suggest, as Piller (2001:217) that sometimes people who have immigrated from their home country into another one can feel like they do not fully belong into either place. Piller says the reason for this are "language and culture gaps" that are caused by the time spent away from the country of origin.

## 6 DISCUSSION

For a long time, intercultural couples were not a major interest among linguists. Nowadays, however, as the number of intercultural couples is constantly growing, it has been understood that intercultural couples can offer interesting insights on several topics in linguistic research, including sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

The aim of the present study was to gain information on intercultural couples' personal experiences on their relationship and its effects on their identities.

According to the poststructuralist perspective on identity, people construct their multiple identities in interaction with other people. Since, in most people's lives, marriage is one of the most important communities of practices in which they construct their identities, it seemed obvious before starting this research project that intercultural couples were in a unique position because the issue of language, culture and nationality is constantly present in their everyday lives. In addition, having been in an intercultural relationship for many years myself and having discussed with many other people in similar situations before, I had a feeling that intercultural couples would have a lot to say about topics related to identity, language, culture and nationality.

The interviews confirmed that people in intercultural relationships are sensitive to issues related to language and culture. One of the main findings of the present study is that intercultural couples are very aware of the changes that have happened in their identities due to being in the relationship. All of the couples interviewed in the present study mentioned that their partner's culture has affected them in a way that it has become a part of their own identity as well. It seems that intercultural couples often form a "couple identity" where the two cultures, traditions and languages are mixed into one relationship, with both affecting each other. People in intercultural relationships do not lose their own original identities either; they still value their home nations and cultures.

Language choice is an important aspect of an intercultural relationship. The results of the present study indicate that once the couple start communicating in a certain

language, it is not common to change that language even when the couple learn more and more of each other's first languages. This might suggest that language has a strong connection with personality and that changing the language of communication can change something in the communicative situation or even make a difference in the person's behavior. All of the couples interviewed in the present study had chosen English as their primary language of communication, because it had seemed like the easiest and, in many cases, the only choice in the beginning of the relationship. However, the couples said that they were motivated to learn each other's first languages and that the main motivation for this were the couple's children to whom they wanted to speak in both partners' first languages.

People in intercultural relationships are constantly reconstructing their national and cultural identities in interaction with their partner. It seems quite evident that being in a relationship with a person from a different background is bound to affect one's identity in many ways. Also, it can affect the way that the surrounding community sees that person. For people in intercultural relationships it is important to be able to be who they are without getting labels from other people.

Having two different languages and cultures mixed into one relationship is not always unproblematic. The couples in the present study identified two major issues that arise from having two different backgrounds. Firstly, not sharing the same mother tongue can cause communication problems, when partners are not able to get their message across as clearly as they would like. Furthermore, the other person can often misinterpret the intended message, which can cause miscommunication or even arguments. Also, if the chosen language is one of the partner's mother tongue, it can sometimes put them in a more powerful position, especially during arguments. Secondly, different cultural backgrounds can cause problems in intercultural relationships. These can include arguments on how to spend holidays or on how to raise children. Also, different religious backgrounds can sometimes become a problem, especially in cases where the extended families have very strong religious views. However, as one of the main findings to come out of the present study, people in intercultural relationships seem to be highly adaptive and tolerable to different

situations. They are often open to living in either (or neither) of the partners' home countries and making changes in their own behavior in order to make their partner's life easier. The couples interviewed in the present study say that being in the intercultural relationship has made them more open to different possibilities and has given them more opportunities in life.

The present study was motivated by my own interest in bilingualism, sociolinguistics and experiences in being in an intercultural relationship. The method of data collection seemed natural from the beginning; in order to find out about people's personal views and opinions about something, the best choice is to ask them. Therefore, thematic interview was selected as the data collection method. The interviews concentrated on two major themes, identity and the relationship, with questions covering topics such as language choice and cultural differences. The interviewees were allowed to speak more about the issues they found important and less about the issues that did not seem relevant to them. In hindsight, the interview questions could have been more detailed in the first interview in order to get more out of the interviewees. By the second interview I learned to make more follow-up questions which helped me get more information from the interviewees. After conducting all the interviews, I was left with over six hours of recorded data, which I then transcribed and analyzed using content analysis.

Even though the six interviews in the present study were quite revealing, the number of participants is so low that no generalizations can be made based on the present study. There is one Finnish person in each of the interviewed couples, which means that while the results may accurately describe intercultural couples in the Finnish society, the couples were too homogenous to make any generalizations. However, as three of the couples had one partner with English as their L1 and three couples who use English as their mutual language despite it not being either partner's first language, it was possible to make comparisons between these two different kinds of intercultural couples. The interviews gave these six intercultural couples a chance to get their stories told in depth, and as such, they can be considered representatives of intercultural couples where one of the partner's is Finnish.

As the number of intercultural couples is constantly growing in Finland and all over the world, there is more and more demand for research in this once overlooked area of sociolinguistics. Also, as our view on identity continues to evolve, there will be more possibilities to study the construction of identities from several viewpoints. The next step from the present study could be to investigate how intercultural couples pass their own hybrid identities onto their children and which languages and values they choose to teach them. This might be beneficial, for example, when planning bilingual education.

## 7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bloomfield, L. (1933). *Language*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bustamante, R. M., Nelson, J. A., Henriksen, R. C. Jr., & Monakes, S. (2011). Intercultural Couples: Coping with Culture-Related Stressors. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 19(2), 154-164.
- Cheng W. (2003) *Intercultural Conversation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co. Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. (23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2016).
- Cools, C. (2004). Relational dialectics: Theoretical considerations on intercultural couples. Lisensiaatintutkielma, Jyväskylän yliopisto. Viestintätieteen laitos, puheviestintä.
- Coulmas, F. (1997). *The handbook of sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1999). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. In R. Harré & L. van Langehove (Eds.), *Positioning Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Di Luzio, A., Günthner, S., & Orletti, F. (2001). *Culture in Communication : Analyses of Intercultural Situations*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Du Gay, P., & Hall, S. (2011). *Questions of cultural identity*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage.
- Edwards, J. (2009). *Language and identity: An introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fougère, M. (2008). Adaptation and Identity. In Spencer-Oatey H. (ed.) *Culturally speaking: Culture, communication and politeness theory* (2nd ed). London New York: Continuum.

- Goncalves, K. (2013). *Diskursmuster - Discourse Patterns : Conversations of Intercultural Couples*. Berlin/Boston, DE: De Gruyter. Retrieved from <http://www.ebrary.com>
- Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and reality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hall, S., Lehtonen, M., & Herkman, J. (1999). *Identiteetti*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Heller, M. and Levy, L. (1992) *Mixed marriages: life on the linguistic frontier*. *Multilingua* 11 (1), 11-43.
- House, J. and Rehbein, J. (2004). *Multilingual communication*. Amsterdam Philadelphia: J. Benjamins.
- Joseph, J. E. (2004). *Language and identity: National, ethnic, religious*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jucker A, and Kopaczyk J. (2013) *Communities Of Practice In The History Of English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Lainiala, L. and Säävälä, M. (2013). *Intercultural marriages and consideration of divorce in Finland: Do value differences matter? The population research institute*. Accessed 10.10.2016 <http://vaestoliitto-fi-bin.directo.fi/@Bin/2ca9a1885ac8ac37a31f19d6d7905d58/1476104054/application/pdf/2861591/WP4Lainiala%26Saavala.pdf>
- Lempinen, H. (2013). *Kaksikieliset parit ja perheet : Tsekkiläis-suomalaisten pariskuntien ja lapsien kielitaito ja kielivalinnat*. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto.
- Miller, R. S., Perlman, D. and Brehm, S. S. (2007). *Intimate relationships*. (4th ed). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Muikku-Werner, P. (2007a). *Kaksikieliset parit*. *Virsu III: Suomalais-ugrilaisia kohdekieliä ja kontakteja*, 117-129. Joensuu: Joensuun yliopistopaino.

- Muikku-Werner, P. (2007b). *Kärsii, ei kärsi – parisuhde ja kaksikielisyys*. In Salo, O.-P., T. Nikula & P. Kalaja (eds.) *Kieli oppimisessa - Language in Learning*. AFinLAN vuosikirja 2007. Suomen soveltavan kielitieteen yhdistyksen julkaisuja no. 65. Jyväskylä. s. 115–136.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). *Social identity, investment, and language learning*. TESOL Quarterly, 29(1), 9-31.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity, and Educational Change*. Harlow: Longman/Pearson.
- Pavlenko A, Blackledge A. (2004). *Negotiation Of Identities In Multilingual Contexts* [e-book]. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. (5<sup>th</sup> December 2015).
- Piller, I (2001). *Linguistic intermarriage: Language choice and negotiation of identity*. In Pavlenko, A., Blackledge, A., Piller, I., and Teutsch-Dwyer, M. (eds.) *Multilingualism, second language learning and gender*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Piller, I. (2002). *Bilingual couples talk. The discursive construction of hybridity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Piller, I. (2013). *Language choice in bilingual, cross-cultural interpersonal communication*. Linguistik Online, 5(1). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.13092/lo.5.1015>
- Riley P. (2007). *Language, Culture And Identity: An Ethnolinguistic Perspective* [e-book]. London: Continuum. Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), Ipswich, MA. (3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2015).
- Romaine, S. (1995). *Bilingualism*. (2nd ed). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ruusuvuori, J., Nikander, P. and Hyvarinen, M. (eds.) (2010). *Haastattelun analyysi*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Ruusuvuori, J. and Tiittula, L. (eds.) (2005). *Haastattelu: Tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus*. Tampere: Vastapaino.

- Siguan, M. (1980.) Education and Bilingualism in Catalonia, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 1(3): 231-242.
- Spencer-Oatey H. (2008). *Culturally speaking : Culture, communication and politeness theory* (2nd ed). London ; New York: Continuum.
- Statistics Finland (2012) *Taulukot tilastossa: Siviilisäädyn muutokset*, Available at: [http://pxweb2.stat.fi/database/StatFin/vrm/ssaaty/ssaaty\\_fi.asp](http://pxweb2.stat.fi/database/StatFin/vrm/ssaaty/ssaaty_fi.asp) (10<sup>th</sup> October 2016).
- Thiery, C. (1978). True Bilingualism and Second Language Learning. In Gerver D. and Wallace H. S. (eds.), *Language Interpretation and Communication*. New York: Plenum, 145–153.
- Tilastokeskus (2015). *Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT): Perheet* [verkkojulkaisu].ISSN=1798-3215. Vuosikatsaus 2014, 2. Perheistä neljä prosenttia kokonaan vieraskielisiä . Helsinki: Tilastokeskus (1st Decmber 2015).
- Tuomi, J., and Sarajärvi, A. (2011). *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi* (7th edition). Helsinki: Tammi.
- Vestergaard, T. (1999). *Language, culture and identity*. Aalborg: Aalborg U.P.
- Watt, D. L., and Llamas, C. (2010). *Language and Identities*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

## Appendix 1: Interview questions

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. How long have you been together?
2. How did you meet?
3. Where do you live now and how did you end up there?

### THE INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIP

1. As a bilingual couple, which language(s) do you usually speak together?
2. Why was this language chosen?
3. Under which circumstances do you use another language?
4. Has your language use changed in the course of your relationship?
5. How well do you spoke each other's languages before the relationship?  
How about now?
6. Does speaking two different mother tongues affect your relationship in your everyday life?
7. Give an example of a situation where it has been obvious that you come from two different cultural backgrounds.
8. Has it ever caused problems? What are the biggest challenges you face as a bicultural couple? What positive sides does it have?
9. What is the biggest positive that you have gotten in your life due to being in an intercultural relationship?

### LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

- 1) Does the language you use affect your behavior/personality/thinking?

- 2) Do you feel as comfortable using your L2 as you L1 as the language of the relationship?
- 3) Do you feel that being in a bilingual relationship has affected your L1?
- 4) How has being in a intercultural relationship affected your sense of identity?
- 5) How can this be seen in your everyday life?
- 6) What nationality do you identify yourself with? Do you feel Finnish/English/Irish etc..?
- 7) Do you have Finnish contacts in your current home country (American/Irish...)? How important are they?