# FINDING *CULTURE* IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION:

## Constructing Meanings about Culture in a Multicultural Group Setting and Exploring the Significance of English with Immigrant Adult Learners

Master's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Kulttuurisesti responsiivinen pedagogiikka pyrkii parantamaan vähemmistöryhmistä tulevien opiskelijoiden opintomenestystä tekemällä oppimistilanteesta sopivamman kaikille. Tätä pedagogista suuntausta on kuitenkin useimmiten tutkittu koulujen kontekstissa nuoremmilla oppilailla ja aikuisopiskelijat ovat jääneet vähemmälle huomiolle. Tutkimusta aiheesta on tehty myös hyvin vähän Suomessa. Monikulttuurisuus kuitenkin lisääntyy myös Suomessa maahanmuuton seurauksena, ja suurin osa maahanmuuttajista onkin työikäisiä aikuisia. Globalisaation vaikutusten ja monikulttuurisuuden lisääntyessä myös tarve Englannin kielen osaamiselle kasvaa Suomessa, ja koulutusta ja työtä tehdään enenevissä määrin myös Englanniksi. Suomen ja tai ruotsin taitojen lisäksi Suomeen saapuvat maahanmuuttajat tarvitsevatkin usein myös taitoja englannin kielessä. Englanti voi toimia apukielenä, eli lingua francana, Suomen virallisten kielten lisäksi, tai joissakin tapauksissa olla jopa edellytys koulutuksen, työn, tiedon tai sosiaalisten suhteiden saavuttamisessa.

Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena on tarkastella monikulttuurista aikuisopiskelijaryhmää englannin käyttäjinä ja oppijina keskusteluaktiviteetin aikana, joka hyödyntää kulttuurisesti responsiivisen opetuksen periaatteita. Erityistä huomiota kiinnitettiin ryhmän maahanmuuttajataustaisiin jäseniin, joiden mielipiteitä keskusteluaktiviteetistä kysyttiin ja samalla selvitettiin myös heidän suhdettaan englannin kielen käyttämiseen ja oppimiseen. Tutkimukseen osallistui kaikkiaan seitsemän aikuista englannin opiskelijaa. Osallistujista neljä oli maahanmuuttajataustaisia ja kolme suomalaistaustaisia. Keskusteluaktiviteetin aikana ryhmän jäsenet vastasivat vuorotellen kysymyksiin ja samalla keskustelivat yhdessä omaan ja toisten ryhmän jäsenten kulttuuriin, henkilökohtaisiin muistoihin ja kokemuksiin liittyvistä aiheista. Osa kysymyksistä liittyi suoranaisesti kulttuuriin, kun taas toiset kysymykset olivat aiheeltaan neutraalimpia. Keskusteluaktiviteetin jälkeen maahanmuuttajataustaiset osallistujat osallistuivat puolistrukturoituun haastatteluun. Sekä keskusteluaktiviteetistä että haastattelusta kerättyjä nauhoitteita ja havaintoja käytettiin tämän tutkimuksen aineistona.

Tulokset osoittavat, että aikuiset englannin opiskelijat muodostavat merkityksiä kulttuurista monin eri tavoin, mutta erityisesti yhteisölliset menetelmät korostuivat. Keskusteluaktiviteetti oli osallistujille positiivinen kokemus, joka mahdollisti tutustumisen toisen kulttuuristaustaan syvällisemmin. Sekä kulttuuriin liittyvät että neutraalit kysymykset johtivat usein kulttuurista keskustelemiseen, mutta kulttuuria käsittelevät kysymykset saivat aikaan enemmän osallistumista ja keskustelua. Maahanmuuttajataustaiset osallistujat kertoivat englannin olevan heille tärkeä resurssi, joka mahdollistaa ihmisiin tutustumisen ja tulevaisuudensuunnitelmien toteuttamisen Suomessa. Osallistujat myös kokivat, että englantia on helpompi puhua ja opiskella muiden englantia vieraana kielenä puhuvien kanssa.



Asiasanat – Keywords EFL teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, culturally relevant education, adult immigrant learners, English in Finland

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Finland was classified more by emigration than by immigration until the 1980's and thus the number of immigrants arriving to Finland has been increasing slowly compared to many other European countries (Miettinen and Helamaa n.d.). However, changes in immigration have happened rather quickly in Finland: Over the past decade the number of immigrants arriving to Finland has nearly doubled (Official Statistics of Finland n.d.) and the arrival of new migrants during the past few years has resulted in a population growth of around 17,000 people per year (Miettinen and Salo n.d.). Most immigrants come from neighboring countries, such as Russia and Estonia, but also from more distant regions such as Iraq and China (Miettinen and Helamaa n.d.). Since the 1980's there has also been a shift in the reasoning for moving to Finland, as labor immigration has decreased and immigration related to refugee status and family unity has increased (ibid.). The influx of migrants during the last few years has resulted in a population growth of around 17,000 people per year, and the largest age group among these migrants is 25 to 34 year olds (over 25 % of migrants) and the second largest age group is 35 to 44 years olds (over 20 % of the migrants) (Miettinen and Salo n.d.). Thus, most people who come to Finland are adults in their working age.

Due to flows of globalization, English is often regarded as a lingua franca, or as the language of intercultural and international communication (Prodromou 2008). English as a lingua franca is characterized by its use between non-native English speakers, who use the language as an additional resource to manage everyday communication situations (Cogo and Dewy 2012). English has gained status also in Finland as a foreign language and as a lingua franca increasingly since the 1960's and nowadays it can be regarded as the most prominent foreign language in Finland (Leppänen and Nikula 2007). As the role and importance of English is growing in Finnish society, proficiency in English proves to be useful, and sometimes even a prerequisite when working or studying in Finland. To integrate into this society, adult migrants usually need to have access to educational services and later they might enter the workforce. As companies may prefer to change their official language of communication to English, this means that immigrants will need skills in English to get employed and to manage with work tasks. Skills in English might also prove to be useful when skills in Finnish are not yet sufficient in daily activities and when searching information online.

This study aims to increase knowledge on immigrants as English language learners and users in the context of Finland, as previously the focus has largely been on Finnish language learning and its effects to integrating into Finnish society (Iikkanen 2020: 65). Thus, more research is needed on immigrants and their relationship with the English language. Many education facilities and liberal adult education providers offer courses to adults where they can improve their skills in English. As immigration to Finland increases, this creates new requirements to organize English education also to these newcomers. As the biggest group of immigrants to arrive to Finland are working-age adults, special attention should be given to these groups of people, as besides Finnish or Swedish, proficiency in English is in many cases a facilitating factor to getting a study degree and to enter the working life.

However, teaching English to multicultural pupils might bring new challenges due to differences in cultural background, different native languages between pupils or pupils and teacher or different learning styles. Thus, education providers need to consider new ways to engage multicultural adult learners, and to consider culture as a crucial factor in learning and teaching. Previous studies have highlighted the benefits of discussing culture as a way to integrate newcomers into society and as a way to motivate the immigrant students' learning (e.g. Ladson-Billings 1995a; Chen and Yang 2017; Palojärvi-Serratti 2014). When the focus is on immigrant adults especially, previous study findings indicate that earlier experiences and schooling in the country of origin have an influence on how the person is able to adapt to studying in the host country (Alfred 2003). Although current research on education supports the implementation of culture and cultural background into adult education, most of the literature on this topic has focused on children and youth, rather than on adults (Rhodes 2018). This similar trend is visible also in Finland, as when immigrant learners of English have been studied in Finland, the emphasis has mostly been on studying children and youth (e.g. Myyrä 2019, Saarela 2013; Hirvonen 2010). Immigrant adults have received less attention, although they are the largest age group to arrive in Finland as newcomers.

Thus, this study explores culturally relevant education (CRE) with adult migrant EFL (English as a foreign language) learners. The study examines EFL learning from the perspective of immigrant adults in a multicultural group setting. The theoretical framework of CRE is applied, with the underlying assumption that "[c]ulturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings 1995a: 160). This means that student's cultural

background can be used as a tool to make learning more meaningful for multicultural groups. A conversation activity, which utilized strategies of CRE, as well as a target group interview were conducted with a multicultural adult EFL learner group and the results were analyzed by means of qualitative content analysis and cultural analysis. The aim was to explore how a conversation activity with features of culturally responsive teaching is received by a multicultural group with both immigrant and Finnish adult learners. Also, the aim was to ask the immigrant learners' views on the activity, as well as their views of using and learning English. In addition, the significance of English in their lives was explored and facilitating and prohibiting factors for using and learning English were discussed.

This study will begin by reviewing the current state of multiculturalism and immigration and also addressing its possible implications in Finland in chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses the significance of the English language, in relation to its status as a lingua franca in Finland. The significance of the English language to immigrants in Finland is also explored and previous studies on the topic are summarized. After that, in Chapter 4, the concept and practice of culturally responsive education is examined by reviewing the historical foundations, theoretical standpoints, practical activities and previous studies in the field. Next, the research design of this study is presented in Chapter 5. This chapter explains the aims of this study, research questions, as well as introduces the participants of this study, methods of data collection and lastly methods of data analysis. Chapter 6 is dedicated to presenting the findings of this study. Chapter 7 summarizes and elaborates the findings in relation to previous research, discusses limitations as well as considers the practical implications of this study. Lastly, the study is evaluated and further studies are proposed.

# 2 MULTICULTURALISM AND IMMIGRATION

Globalization has shaped and defined the world that we live in. The term "globalization" has appeared in both popular and academic texts since the 1960's to describe a multifaceted phenomenon: Globalization can be viewed from many perspectives, and it can be described to be "a process, a condition, a system, a force, and an age" (Steger 2003: 7.). Ritzer and Dean (2015) explain, how the concept of *flows* has been amply used when talking about globalization. They conclude that,

> "[b]ecause so much of the world has "melted" or is in the process of "melting" and has become liquefied, globalization is increasingly characterized by great flows of increasingly liquid phenomena of all types, including people, objects, information, decisions, places, and so on." (6)

Speaking in metaphoric terms, Ritzer and Dean (2015) conclude that things that used to be more solid, thus, more unchangeable and unmovable have begun to liquefy increasingly, or move and transport form one place to another. They add that this applies to people, information, goods and other things alike. One big characteristic of globalization is mobility, whether it be people, information, goods or services (ibid.). As Steger (2003: 8) concludes, "[a]t its core, then, globalization is about shifting forms of human contact." Thus, one way to understand globalization is to explore how people from different backgrounds come together to form new ways of communication.

Immigration is one result of this increased mobility of people. However, not all mobility of people is equal, as people have very different reasons to migrate to new areas, and it may be done voluntary or forcibly (Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojoki 2005). Immigrants bring with them their specific ways of experiencing the world, or in other words, their cultural background. Immigrants view the reality of the host country through the lens of their own cultural background, as "culture serves as a guide for interpreting reality" (Sobel and Taylor 2011: 28). Culture is something that is learned by citizens and passed on to next generations (ibid.). The definition of culture is disputed (Shweder and Beldo 2015), but scholars in social sciences usually view that culture entails human perspectives, values and interpretations, rather than physical artefacts (Banks 2006). Furthermore, culture can be seen as a "vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings 1995a: 160). This perspective on the effects of culture in learning is examined further in Chapter 5 in regards to culturally relevant education.

In this chapter, issues and perspectives related to culture, multiculturalism and immigration are explored. To understand multiculturalism, it is firstly crucial to understand what is meant by *culture* in itself. As this study focuses on culturally relevant education, which is derived from multicultural education ideology, the definition and understanding of culture is at the root of it all. Thus, the first section (2.1) of this chapter focuses on explaining culture. Next, multiculturalism is discussed through the lens of immigration (2.3). Both of these phenomena can be seen to be a result of the increased mobility of people, and ultimately, to be a result of globalization. The last section presents these phenomena in a context relevant to this study, as immigration and multiculturalism are discussed in the context of Finland (2.4).

## 2.1 Defining culture

In this study, culture is viewed to entail values, symbols, interpretations, perspectives (Banks 2006), understandings (Quinn 2005) as well as morals, customs and other capabilities which can be learned and internalized in social interaction and passed on to next generations (Quinn 2005; Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952). The crucial role of culture in teaching and learning is also emphasized (Sobel and Taylor 2011; Gay 2018; Ladson-Billings 1995a). Many different study fields, such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and education have offered their definitions on what the term *culture* entails. According to an early, but still popular (Shweder and Beldo 2015), definition of *culture* in the field of anthropology,

> "culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action." (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952: 357).

This definition highlights the multifaceted essence of culture, as well the nature of culture as a lens through which reality can be interpreted. Furthermore, it highlights that culture is something that can be learned and passed on to others, and it is both visible and hidden.

Over the years after Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) definition of culture, the idea of culture has been under a lot of debate (Shweder and Beldo 2015). Some scholars prefer to differentiate between material and non-material culture (Banks 2006), where non-material includes aspects such as knowledge, symbols, ideas, beliefs and morals. In contrast, material culture includes physical artifacts, such as art and other manmade objects (Banks 2006). As Banks explains, some scholars argue that material objects should be disregarded, or only the interpretation of the material artifacts can be included besides non-material to the definition of culture. Most social scientists believe culture to entail primary the non-material, as Banks clarifies that

> "[i]t is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies and not artifacts, material objects, and other tangible aspects of human societies." (Banks 2006: 71)

*World culture* is a term used to describe some universal elements of culture which have spread around the globe due to flows of globalization (Boli and Lechner 2015). This concept entails "the complex array of foundational assumptions, forms of knowledge, and prescriptions for action that underlie globalized flows, organizations, and movements", which are familiar and can be assumed to have significance for human action all around the globe (Boli and Lechner 2015: 225). World culture can entail assumably well-known contracts or laws, such as *the human rights law*, but the globalization of culture also leads to changes in human and group behaviour and attitudes (ibid.). However, similarly to the general definition of culture in itself, it is highly debated which elements can be considered to be part of world culture (ibid.). Also, even highly globalized world culture elements are reinterpreted and reproduced based on the unique context of the local culture, hence they can be glocalized (Robertson 1992; Boli and Lechner 2015). However, even the definition of world culture highlights the non-material aspects of culture, such as assumptions, forms of knowledge and traditional ways of action and interpreting the world, so the definition that is undertaken in this study combines these notions about culture.

The analysis conducted in this thesis is done partly in accordance to Strauss's (2005) and Quinn's (2005) work related to conducting cultural analysis, as explained in their book *Cultural analysis: a collection of methods* (2005). Therefore, it is beneficial to also examine how Strauss and Quinn (2005) view culture. According to Quinn, the book's authors' views on culture are based on

> "the assumption that people in a given group share, to greater or lesser extent, understandings of the world that have been learned and internalized in the course of their shared experience, and that individuals rely heavily on these shared understandings to comprehend and organize experience, including their own thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions and the actions of other people." (3)

Internalizations of cultural elements, such as ideas, are fundamental to the nature of culture, as cultural elements are often a natural part of shared experience of a certain cultural group, thus, they are "taken-for-granted assumptions" (Strauss 2005: 201). These different definitions discussed in this chapter all share notions about culture being mostly something non-material and based on collective and social interaction. Humans share and internalize within their communities these cultural aspects, such as ways of acting and interpreting the world. Culture should not be disregarded, as it is pivotal to being a human.

## 2.2 Defining multiculturalism and immigration

This study focuses on multicultural groups, and this focus on multiculturalism is motivated largely by our changing society. As globalization continues to shape the world that we live in, we have to face new realities and changing societal structures. The effects of it are reaching further than they have before, as immigration in its many different forms is increasing. As people from different backgrounds and cultures come together to the same physical space and time, it results in a new mixture of cultures and changes in societal structures. Multiculturalism can represent many differing ideologies (Trotman 2002). Some are based on diversity, some on understanding our past and present in our changing society, while some highlight equality and the importance of diversity (ibid.). Trotman (2002) states that multiculturalism can be simply understood as a different way to make sense of reality. According to him, "[c]oncepts of race, class, culture, gender, and ethnicity are the driving themes of a multicultural approach, which also promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten." (ix). Thus, multiculturalism promotes equal rights for all voices to be heard, especially those that would be easily silences, such as the voices of minority groups.

The difficulty in defining immigration is recognized in this study. Focus is being directed to definitions given in the context of Finland, as this is the most relevant approach considering the

scope of the study. In many statistics, the immigration status of a person can be determined based on factors such as country of origin, native language and family relations (Official Statistics of Finland n.d.). The Family Federation of Finland (Väestöliitto) regards people who have moved to a country and have resided there for at least one year as immigrants (Miettinen n.d.). Thus, they see that the label of immigrant only holds for people who live outside of their country of origin. On the other hand, the definition of "foreign background" is based on the notion that "[a]ll persons with at least one parent born in Finland are considered to be of Finnish background. Persons whose both parents or the only known parent were born abroad are considered to be of foreign background."(Official Statistics of Finland n.d.). Thus, person with a foreign background can be born outside of Finland or in Finland. Besides the difficulty of defining immigration, it is also recognized that the term *immigrant* can include negative connotations (Iikkanen 2017: 126). These different definitions can be argued to be all problematic in their own ways, as they are often ambiguous and might be just euphemisms for people who do not look or act like what is traditionally considered as *Finnish* (Paakkinen 2016: 7).

As to data collection regarding this study, it should be mentioned that the opinions of the participants related to their own background were asked and taken as truth. The participants were able to determine by themselves, if they felt that they have an immigrant background. The voice of the participants was respected, as it was not intended to place any predetermined labels on the participants' identity or background. However, the term immigrant is used in this study to refer to the participants of this study with foreign background, as well as when generally discussing immigration. Participants who reported to have immigrant background were informed that they would be labeled as immigrants in this study.

## 2.3 Immigration and multiculturalism in Finland

The aim of this subchapter is to explore immigration and increased multiculturalism in the context of Finland. In Finland, until 1980's the mobility of people focused more on emigration rather than on immigration (Miettinen and Helamaa n.d.). The changing direction from sending people to receiving people from abroad creates new challenges, "and Finland now finds itself on the way to becoming a multicultural society" (Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojoki 2005). Since

1990, the number of people with an foreign nationality has increased in Finland (Miettinen n.d.) and the influx of migrants during the last decades has resulted in a population growth of around 17,000 people per year (Miettinen and Salo n.d.). Although the number of immigrants is not as high as in many other European countries, the number of immigrants to Finland has increased quite rapidly: the number of people with foreign background has nearly doubled over the past 10 years (Official Statistics of Finland n.d.). The effects of immigration are probably most visible in bigger towns of Finland, as about 65 percent of people with foreign nationality reside in the 10 biggest towns in Finland (Miettinen n.d.).

As immigrants are very heterogeneous as a group in Finland, discussing them solely as one group of people is quite irrelevant (Paakkinen 2016: 13). However, for the purposes of providing an overview of the immigration situation in Finland, some generalizations can be made based on statistics. According to Statistics Finland, by the end of 2019, there were 423 494 people living in Finland who have a "foreign background" (Official Statistics of Finland n.d.). According to the Population research institute of Finland (Miettinen n.d.), three percent of people living in Finland are of foreign nationality. However, this number does not include immigrants who have been granted the Finnish nationality. During the year of 2019, altogether 9,649 Finnish citizenships were granted to people with foreign background (Official Statistics of Finland 2019). Between 1990 and 2019, the number of citizenships granted was the highest in 2017, with 12,219 citizenships (ibid.). As a reference, the number of citizenships granted in 1990 was only 899, so these numbers have been increasing substantially. However, there is no certain way to estimate the exact number of immigrants living in Finland as the numbers in different statistics can vary depending on whether the immigrant status is determined based on nationality, country of origin, native language, or the combination of these (Miettinen and Helamaa n.d.). For simplicity, population with foreign background are hereafter referred simply as immigrants or newcomers, while still recognizing that the concept and definition of immigrant is more complex than that.

The age structure of people with an immigrant background differs greatly from that of people with a Finnish background (Official Statistics of Finland n.d.) and this in turn has effects for the labor market in Finland. Newcomers are mostly working-age individuals (between the ages of 15–64) with 75 percent. The largest age group among them is 25 to 34 year olds (over 25 % of migrants) and the second largest age group is 35 to 44 years olds (over 20 % of the migrants)

(Miettinen and Salo n.d.). Thus, most immigrants are adults in their working age, while the age structure in Finland is much older. This influx of newcomers might be beneficial, as according to Busk et al. (2016), the younger age structure of immigrants in Finland is beneficial, as there are more working aged people to take care of the increasingly aging Finnish population. However, it might prove difficult for the newcomers to get employed. According to Paakkinen (2016), the average time for immigrants to get employed after arriving to Finland is three years. However, there is large variation between different immigrant groups (ibid.) As it is often highly appreciated by Finnish employers to have previous working experience in Finland, many immigrants enter the Finnish labor market by firstly working in entry level positions, such as in cleaning or catering business and these first jobs might not correspond with previous work or education background (Forsander and Alitolppa-Niitamo 2000).

Immigrant population in Finland also differs from the population with Finnish background when it comes to educational background and level of completed education qualifications (Official Statistics of Finland 2018). By the end of 2018, the statistic shows that the percentage of tertiary level qualification in the Finnish population (population with Finnish background) was 36 %, whereas it was 25 % in immigrant population. Similarly, more people in the Finnish population had secondary level qualifications compared to immigrant population, as this percentage was 40 in the Finnish population and 25 in the immigrant population. Most immigrants have lower secondary qualification or even less completed education, as 49 % of immigrants have not completed upper secondary education. This same statistic was 24 % for the Finnish population. Naturally, these statistics only accounted people who were 15 or older. However, it is worth noting that within the immigrant population, the education level varies significantly based on the country of origin (Kuuskoski and Puhakka 2014). In addition, "The group with no post-comprehensive level qualifications also includes persons whose qualifications attained abroad are not known" (Official Statistics of Finland 2018). Thus, some educational qualifications of the immigrant population are not known and hence not recognized in these statistics. The recognition process of immigrants' education seems to leave some education of immigrants unrecognized, if equivalent education is not to be found in the Finnish education system (Sorainen 2007). Furthermore, as Forsander clarifies (2013), for immigrants to get employed, the level of education is not as crucial factor as the value of their specific education in the local labor market. Thus, getting employed might prove to be more complicated

than it should be for immigrants in Finland, as previous education and work background might not be fully recognized.

# 3 ENGLISH IN THE CONTEXT OF FINLAND AND IMMIGRATION

As was discussed in the previous chapter, globalization has changed the world greatly, and multiculturalism and increased mobility can be seen as some results of this globalization process. This also affects the use and status of languages and shapes the language field of different societies. The English language has spread all around the world, as it functions as the universal language, as a lingua franca, in domains such as science, media and business, and thus allows international cooperation and connectedness between people around the world. The conceptualization of English has changed, as it is used by diverse populations to meet very diverse needs. According to Hynninen (2006), one method to study English as a lingua franca is to examine how it is represented locally, in a specific context. By understanding the phenomenon locally, one may also begin to understand it in a larger context (ibid.).

Thus, this chapter focuses on the use of English in the context of Finland by firstly discussing the nature of English as a lingua franca (3.1) and then discussing it in the context of Finland (3.2). Due to the focus of this study, special attention is directed to examining the role of the English language in the context of immigration in Finland (3.3). The last section (3.4) summarizes some previous studies that have been conducted on topics that relate to immigrant adults and their relationship to English and immigrant adults as English language learners in Finland.

## 3.1 English as a lingua franca

Nowadays, most communication in English takes place between non-native English speakers, instead of native speakers of English (Cogo and Dewey 2012: 25-26), which places English to a very special position in relation to other languages. In many cases, English is regarded as *a lingua franca*, the language of intercultural and international communication (Prodromou 2008; Cogo and Dewey 2012). English as a lingua franca is a language form that is commonly used between non-native speakers, who do not share a common native language (Cogo and Dewey 2012: 8). English as lingua franca speakers are usually defined as multilinguals, who use it as

one of their linguistic resources (Hynninen 2016: 11-12). According to corpus analysis done by Cogo and Dewy about the use of ELF (2012: 4), "speakers routinely exploit the language to fit the immediate communicative environment, adapting and blending English innovatively and resourcefully in order to achieve a jointly constructed means of conveying and interpreting meaning." In this study, English as a lingua franca users are seen as multilinguals, who can choose to use English or their other linguistic resources depending on the context.

Use of English has transformed as it has been used extensively by non-native speakers and as it has gained influence in new areas among new speakers. Studying EFL has gained popularity over the past few decades. It is relatively recent as a research practice, and the empirical practice is only around 20 years old (Cogo and Dewey 2012: 1-4). However, the phenomenon itself is not new (Cogo and Dewey 2012: 1-4). English has been spoken as a lingua franca for centuries, as it has served as the primary language of communication in intercultural settings at least since the colonial times in the 1500's (Cogo and Dewey 2012). Next, this changing status of English is discussed in the context of Finland.

## 3.2 The status of English in Finland

English has gained status also in Finland as a foreign language and as a lingua franca increasingly since the 1960's (Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 339). Nowadays, English can be considered to be the most important foreign language in Finland (Leppänen and Nikula 2007: 340). In most situations, people can easily get by with only English, since the English language has established its role in many areas of Finnish society, as education, business and media operate largely also in English (ibid.). The strong presence of English in Finland is noticeable in the everyday life: extensive national survey conducted in 2007 by Leppänen et al. (2009: 148) revealed that 90 percent report knowing how to speak English at least to some degree, 85 percent have studied it and 80 percent report encountering the language from time to time in their everyday surroundings. English is visible in Finland in the contexts of business, education and tourism and research, to name a few (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003). However, Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003) conclude that English is also often encountered in the daily lives of Finnish people, as also the mass media and popular culture is heavily consumed and broadcasted in English.

Increasing globalization and internationalization bring changes also in the domains of education and business in Finland. In many instances, English is adopted as the means of communication in many educational and business settings in Finland, and it is used as a lingua franca to communicate in international situations (e.g. Virkkula-Räisänen 2010; Jäppinen 2011; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta 2005). English also has a strong status in basic education as the most popular foreign language to be studied in schools (Hakulinen et al. 2009: 76-85). Besides the popularity of English as a foreign language in basic education in Finland, English is claiming its place as the language of instruction in higher education (Airey et al. 2017). More and more tertiary education providers in Europe are internationalizing their study programs in hopes of increased funding and international reputation (Smit 2010: 16-17), and Finland is not an exception in this evolution.

The presence of English is remarkable also in business. As many companies become more international, it reflects in the stronger status of English in the internal communication of the company (Hakulinen et al. 2009). Many companies have changed their official working language to English (Halukinen et al. 2009: 155). As Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005: 402) explain, "pan-Nordic corporations increasingly choose English as their corporate language. In practice, this language choice means that corporate level documentation and all reporting is done in English, and communication between different units is also mostly in English." Language competence is one constructing element of a person's professional expertise (Jäppinen 2011: 194). Thus, in addition to having competence in national languages in Finland (Finnish or Swedish), many workers are faced with demands to have sufficient language skills also in English. This required standard for English language skills may increase based on the complexity of the work tasks in question (Jäppinen 2011: 194). Thus, English has emerged as a prominent language in Finland, and citizens in Finland must have at least basic proficiency in English to manage in society effectively.

Hakulinen et al. (2009: 76) argue that English has taken a supremacy status in language education and ultimately this progression might lead to English having a dominating status over other foreign languages. In many ways, this is already a reality in education, as fewer and fewer people study other than English as their first foreign language in school (Hakulinen et al. 2009). According to Kumpulainen (2014: 12), by the end of basic education (pupils aged 15 to 16) 99

percent of pupils had English as their first foreign language. On the other hand, English can be seen as a tool to increase our intercultural and international capabilities as a society. As Leppänen and Nikula (2007: 340) state, "[t]he debates concerning English clearly display conflicting opinions and attitudes, and overall, the issue of English in Finland is highly controversial." These similar debates about the status and significance of English carry over to discussions of integrating immigrants, as similar debated about the importance of English are often asked. The next chapter focuses on adult immigrants and what kind of role English portrays in their lives in Finland.

## 3.3 The significance of English to adult immigrants in Finland

Immigrants arriving in Finland are faced with many demands and requirements. In addition to needing to learn the official languages (Finnish and/or Swedish), in many instances it is also beneficial and sometimes even crucial to have some competence in English. As the status of English elevates in the Finnish everyday life, such as education, working life and social media, proficiency in English becomes an important asset to get by in the new environment. The English language can function as a lingua franca that helps the newcomers to get by during their first years in the country, before they learn the official language (Nokelainen 2013; Jalava 2011). As immigrants who come to Finland are expected to integrate into Finnish society, they largely need similar competence in English as Finnish residents.

Integration services offer integration training, which focuses on teaching Finnish or Swedish and providing vocational support for the newcomers (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland n.d.). This training naturally focuses on teaching the official languages of Finland, and teaching English is not officially provided within these programs. Instead, immigrants might study English as part of their other studies, in case they are completing basic or higher education. Furthermore, immigrants might enroll in other English language courses provided by local adult education centers or other institutions. However, having insufficient Finnish (or Swedish) language skills is usually a prominent reason why an immigrant is unable to find employment (Kuuskoski and Puhakka 2014). Lack of skills in English might also prove to be problematic, as sometimes competence in English may be a prerequisite for enrolling into certain education programs or for finding employment in Finland (Suni 2011).

This study does not aim to undermine the importance of learning Finnish (or Swedish) in Finland, as it is quite natural to focus on the official language(s) of the country when discussing language skills of immigrants. However, this trend of focusing solely on Finnish skills can be questioned. Albeit the benefits that Finnish and Swedish skills can provide for immigrants in Finland, the value of it might not be completely factual, as it might be an overestimation (Forsander and Alitolppa-Niitamo 2000) or based on questions about national identity (Paananen 1999; Forsander 2013). Findings of Forsander and Alitolppa-Niitamo (2000) indicate that the link between good competence in Finnish and managing work tasks is not linear with immigrants in Finland. English-speaking participants who reported to complete lack of skills in Finnish still reported to be quite successful in regards to their professional careers in Finland (ibid). Thus, good proficiency in English might provide immigrants security in working life, regardless their skills in Finnish. Paananen (1999) argues that the Finnish national identity is largely based on linguistic factors, and the prominence of the Finnish language. Good competence in Finnish is seen by employers as a factor that indicated the level of dedication that immigrants have for living and working in Finland (ibid.). Often the value of the Finnish language is based on symbolic and social aspects, besides the actual usefulness of the language (Forsander 2013). Thus, the value of Finnish skills is often overemphasized by employers when hiring new employees even when the working tasks in question do not require good competence in Finnish. Previous studies have examined the significance and implications of language competence for immigrants in Finland and some relevant studies are summarized next, with the focus being on learning and using English.

## 3.4 Previous studies on immigrants as EFL learners and users in Finland

This section summarizes some previous studies which have examined immigrants as learners and users of English in the context of Finland. Some studies also include comparisons between the use and significance of Finnish and English for immigrants in Finland, and thus this topic is also briefly examined, as it is relevant considering the context of this study. In the context of Finland, immigrants have been studied as English language learners mostly in the school setting (e.g. Saarela 2013; Hirvonen 2010). Thus, the studies where immigrants are studied as language

learners, the focus seems to be in studying children and youth. However, there are also some studies to be found that examine immigrant adults in Finland (e.g. Razgulina-Lytsy 2012; Nokelainen 2013; Jalava 2011; Iikkanen 2020) When adult immigrant have been studied, the focus has been mostly in language usage and it's relation to their lives. This perspective has been studied for example by examining attitudes (Nokelainen 2013) and usage (Jäppinen 2011) of English in working contexts and its significance for integration (Jalava 2011). This chapter begins by summarizing some previous studies on immigrants as language learners and later also as language users. Lastly, the findings are summarized.

Saarela (2013) examined immigrant students' English language learning, the challenges it may impose as well as possible differentiation practices. The data were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews on five primary school English teachers. The results of her study indicated that for the most part, educational practices performed by the teachers were similar with immigrant and Finnish pupils, although teaching immigrant students proposed some new challenges, which were very individual and largely depended on previous education level of the child. The teachers proposed that differentiation practices as well as utilizing the students' home language to facilitate English language learning could be some possible solutions to these challenges.

Hirvonen (2016) also studied immigrant students in the school setting, with her focus being on demotivation and how to overcome it in English language learning. Findings reveal that reasons for demotivation are diverse: Some factors that were named include negative experiences with the teacher, unsatisfaction with classroom activities and course material, lack of experienced academic success and experiences of failure in class. The findings can be seen to partly correspond with theoretical standpoints of CRE, as academic success of minority learners is seen as a crucial factor to focus on when the aim is to make learning relevant for minority learners (Gay 2018; Ladson-Billings 1995a). Participants also expressed a need for more group-work and oral activities, as participants often believed that speaking English is the best way to learn the language. Although many reasons for demotivation were discussed by the participants, they reported to have overcome those demotivating factors quite successfully. Reasons for motivation to study English included "realising the status of English as a lingua franca, attitudes towards schooling, using English outside of school, and positive attitudes towards English" (95).

In a master's thesis work by Nokelainen (2013), immigrants working in Finnish university perceived skills in English to be especially beneficial for their integration when they were newcomers in Finland and still lacked language skills in Finnish. Using English provided a sense of security, as it functioned as a support language, which they could always rely upon when needed. There were six participants to be interviewed, two of which were native English speakers. The results of the study revealed that for all of the participants, their primary language at work was English, besides breakroom discussions with co-workers. They reported that in their current situation it could be possible to only manage by speaking English. However, they stated that acquiring more in-debt cultural knowledge requires learning also Finnish.

Similar observations about the importance of skills in English at the beginning stages of immigrants' lives in Finland were reported by Jalava (2011) in her master's thesis about the significance of English in refugees' integration process. 10 adult immigrants were interviewed, and the results indicated that the participants see English as a very important resource, which allows studying and working in Finland. It was seen as unlikely by the participants that they could complete an academic degree in Finnish, as learning Finnish was seen as a long process. Thus, studying in English was considered a more plausible option, as it allows the participants to complete a degree more swiftly. However, the importance of Finnish was highlighted when discussing working life, as participants felt that skills in Finnish are necessary for getting a job and managing working tasks in Finland. As the results of Nokelainen (2013) indicate, this might not be always the case, but having good competence in both languages is still beneficial for a more holistic integration into Finnish society. Participants in Jalava's study reported that they felt skills in English to be redundant once skills in Finnish have been required. Findings of Iikkanen (2020: 56) clarify that the motivation to learn Finnish in addition to English can be influenced by the long-term goals of the migrant; if living in Finland is thought to only be temporary, learning Finnish is not as high of a priority than for migrants who plan to stay for longer. Competence in English can be considered as an additional resource which allows communicating with Finnish people, as most Finns are competent in English (ibid.). However, findings of Iikkanen (2020) also speak for the importance of Finnish, as lacking skills in Finnish can ultimately hinder social integration.

The results of Jäppinen (2011) also discuss the relationship of Finnish and English in working contexts. L1 and L2 Finnish speakers from seven different companies were interviewed in order

to examine the level of sufficient Finnish skills in working contexts that require quick reacting. The results yielded similar results to Jalava (2011) and Nokelainen (2013), as English was seen as a language resource or as a lingua franca that could be used when Finnish skills were felt to be insufficient for the communication situation. Also, the status of Finnish was highlighted when discussing social interactions, which were usually maintained in Finnish. Thus, the immigrants were usually unable to join in the social interactions with co-workers unless they had good proficiency in Finnish.

Based on these findings, it can be summarized that skills in English prove to be very useful for immigrants in Finland, and the importance of these skills is the highest during the first years spent in the country. Some study findings indicated that some participants were able to manage daily activities and work solely by speaking English. However, these studies all highlight the necessity of having also Finnish skills, as getting employed, working, maintaining social interactions and acquiring cultural knowledge were seen to happen mostly in Finnish rather than in English. In addition, some findings report mismatch between expectations and reality: Studying in English was seen as a plausible option, as studying in Finnish was seen as too complicated process. However, if the intent is to also work in Finland after graduation, skills in Finnish would still be needed to get employed or to maintain social relations at work (Jalava 2011; Nokelainen 2013).

This study focused on immigrants as learners and users of English in Finland. This focus is relevant, as previous studies have largely studied immigrants in relation to learning and using Finnish (Iikkala 2020: 65). The importance of having skills in English is largely recognized in Finland (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2003), and most Finns have at least moderate competency in English (Leppänen et al. 2009). However, when it comes to questions about integrating immigrants to Finnish society, Finnish skills seem to be emphasized over skills in other languages. However, as findings of previous studies have indicated, skills in English seem to be beneficial for immigrants especially in the beginning stages of their integration process into Finnish society (e.g. Iikkala 2020; Jalava 2011; Nokelainen 2013). Thus, this topic should be examined more in detail. This study offers an unique approach to this issue, as it focuses on the effects of culturally relevant education in EFL learning context with multicultural adult learners. Next, culturally relevant education is further explained.

# 4 CULTURALLY RELEVANT EDUCATION

Many complementary education and research practices are dedicated to transforming education to better fit the needs of learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. This chapter explores the concept of culturally relevant education (later referred as CRE), which is a term used to synthesize two foundational strands of research in the field (Aronson and Laughter 2016; Dover 2013), namely of *culturally responsive teaching* and *culturally relevant pedagogy.* In the present study, this idea about teaching and pedagogy relies on the definitions provided by Gay (2010, 2018) and Ladson-Billings (1995a). Gay (2018) defines this type of teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of culturally diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them'' (36). The hypothesis of culturally relevant pedagogy is that "positive self-concepts, knowledge of and pride in one's own ethnic identity, and improved academic achievement are interactional" and that these skills and the awareness of them are relevant and important topics to be taught to students (Gay 2010: 32). Furthermore, this study recognizes the underlying assumption of CRE that "[c]ulturally relevant teachers utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (Ladson-Billings 1995a: 160). This means that student's cultural background can be used as a tool to make learning more meaningful for multicultural groups. Thus, learner's cultural background and past experiences can and should be made visible in the learning situation and this, in turn can promote better learning outcomes.

To understand CRE, it is important to first focus on the historical foundations. Thus, the historical groundings of CRE are summarized first, by discussing multicultural education and sociocultural learning theory (4.1). Next, the theoretical foundations are explored by reviewing the works of Gay in *culturally responsive teaching* and Ladson-Billings in *culturally relevant pedagogy* (4.2). Next, some practical activities to implement CRE in learning contexts are reviewed (4.3). Lastly, previous studies in the field are summarized (4.4).

## 4.1 History and foundations

CRE is grounded in the foundations of social justice in education and the works related to multicultural education (Sobel and Taylor 2011). Multicultural education is built on the principle that every student should have an equal right to learn (Banks 2010). “Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students – regardless of their gender, social class and ethnic, racial or cultural characteristics – should have an equal opportunity to learn in school “ (Banks and Banks 2010: 3). The concept of multicultural education derived from The Civil Right Movement and desegregation practices in the US in the 1960’s (Sobel and Taylor 2011). African Americans, and later on other minority groups demanded that education institutions should transform their educational programs to also reflect their historic and cultural experiences as well as personal and ethnic backgrounds (Banks and Banks 2010: 6). This evoked changes in the school setting to transform education to be more inclusive for diverse student populations (Banks and Banks 2010; Aronson and Laughter 2016). However, the actual changes in curricula were hurried, as only minority students took the new courses and the content of them was very simplified (Banks 2006).

Different concepts related to multicultural education began to appear in the education literature (Aronson and Laughter 2016), such as *culturally responsive* (Cazden and Leggett 1976), *culturally compatible* (Jordan 1985) and *culturally relevant* (Ladson-Billings 1992; Osborne 1996). Still presently, scholars continue to use slightly different terms to discuss teaching style and pedagogy that relate to this topic. Aronson and Laughter (2016: 163) point out that “[f]rom this foundation [of multicultural education], two primary strands, distinct from multicultural education, emerged in educational research”. The work of Geneva Gay (2002, 2010, 2013, 2018) represents *culturally responsive teaching*, which focuses more on the role of the teacher, whereas *culturally relevant pedagogy* illustrated by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2009, 2012) focuses more on “teacher posture and paradigm” (Aronson and Laughter 2016).

In addition to multicultural education practices, sociocultural learning theory functions as another foundation for CRE (Sobel and Taylor 2011). Furthermore, many studies that utilize aspects of CRE with adult learners rely on sociocultural learning theory as their theoretical foundation (Rhodes 2018). Sociocultural learning theory is grounded mostly in the works of L.S. Vygotsky (1978). The theory fits well with the fundamental assumptions of CRE, as

sociocultural theorist believe in the contextual nature of learning and that individuals construct meaning according to the knowledge that they have previously acquired (Alfred 2003). This notion of learning as the combination of the learner's past experiences and new information is also recognized in this study, as it is proposed that implementing learners' cultural background to the learning encounter makes the learning more meaningful for the learner (Gay 2018). Next, the theoretical foundations of CRE are explored more thoroughly.

## 4.2 Theory: Gay and Ladson-Billings

This section explores the theoretical foundations of CRE, by mostly reviewing works of Geneva Gay in *culturally responsive teaching* and Gloria Ladson-Billings in *culturally relevant pedagogy*. Gay's work focuses on the role of the teacher and teaching practices, while Ladson-Billings has focused more on pedagogy (Aronson and Laughter 2016). Their works are highlighted in this study, as they are the most cited scholars on their representative strands of CRE (ibid.) While the terminology used as well as the specific focus has differed between Ladson-Billings and Gay, the defining principles and teaching goals share many common features (Sobel and Taylor 2011: 18; Aronson and Laughter 2016; Acquah, Szelei and Katz 2020). As these slightly different research strands and concepts complement each other and share similar underlying goals and values, in this present study the framework is collectively referred to as *culturally relevant education* (CRE) (Aronson and Laughter 2016; Dover 2013). However, to better understand the underlying values and ideas of CRE, both research strands are further examined by using their respective terminology.

Culturally responsive teaching focuses on the role of the teacher as the deliverer of culturally responsive education and thus the teacher holds the main responsibility for making learning encounters culturally responsive (Gay 2013). Gay's work on culturally responsive teaching relies on racial and cultural competencies. These competencies include for example understanding differences in cultures as assets, valuing culturally different individuals and creating learning environments where differing cultures and origins are appreciated, critical reflection of cultural stereotypes, and utilizing cultural knowledge when planning teaching and curriculum. Gay sees culturally responsive teaching as "validating and affirming", as it creates meaningful bonds between student's family life and learning and between academic abstract

learning and personal sociocultural memories and experiences. This teaching style encourages teachers to learn about their student's cultures and background and also teaches learners to understand and appreciate their classmates' cultural heritages (Gay 2018: 37). Thus, it makes learning more meaningful and relatable for the learners and teachers by enforcing mutual understanding and sharing.

Culturally responsive teaching proposes a change in paradigm in the teaching style of minority students. It can therefore be used with people who do not benefit from the general pedagogical strategies used in classrooms, as these students may have such a background and personal history that makes it harder for them to learn from teaching that is equipped to serve best the majority population. Thus, Gay (2018: 32) suggests that "a very different pedagogical paradigm is needed to improve the performance of underachieving students from various ethnic groups – one that teaches *to and through* their personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments". Nevertheless, culturally responsive teaching is meant to be inclusive for people from all cultures and ethnicities, and every student can benefit from it (Gay 2018).

Culturally responsive teaching proposes also a change to a more positive outlook on student's characteristics and achievements. As Gay (2018: 32) explains, "learning derives from a basis of strength and capability, not weakness and failure". Underachieving minority students are often seen as lacking something, and their failures in academic goals are seen to derive from some deficit in their family history, personal characteristic or their ethnicity or culture (Gay 2018: 31-32). This mindset blames the student for not fitting into the "normal" teaching styles, instead of changing the teaching style to better fit the needs of these diverse students. It is useless to blame the personal and cultural characteristics for not achieving their full potential academically, as this will only do more harm to them. Instead, minority students should be encouraged, their cultural heritage should be celebrated, and their confidence should be lifted by giving them a chance to succeed academically, as "success begets success" (Gay 2018: 31). According to Gay, culturally relevant teaching can be a tool to create positive change in the classroom.

Similarly to Gay, Ladson-Billings (1995a) promotes cultural empowerment for students. She argues that culturally relevant pedagogy should be specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. She proposes that culturally responsive teaching relies on

three defining features: "(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order." (Ladson-Billings 1995a: 160). With adequate cultural competence, students develop a "dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture" (Ladson-Billings 1995: 467). Thus, both strands see focusing on academic performance as an important factor of CRE and community empowerment as a tool for success.

As Aronson and Laughter (2016) summarize, "Gay's focus on teaching primarily seeks to influence competency and methods", and thereby teachers' competence (166-167). Gay (2018) concludes that the roles and responsibilities of culturally responsive teachers are many and diverse. Whereas personal teaching strategies and personal preferences may vary from teacher to teacher, the ideological foundations, which lay at the basis of their teaching, should intermediate humanity, diversity, criticality and unquestioned and inclusive acceptance towards his or her students (Gay 2018: 52-53). Teachers who teach by means of cultural responsiveness are building bridges across the learned subjects and the personal history and culture of the student. Teachers should not "care about" but "care for" their students. Gay explains that whereas "caring about" indicates feeling empathy and paying attention to the wellbeing of a student, "caring for" takes a more active attitude towards caring and the teacher makes productive actions towards the wellbeing of his or her students. Whereas Gay focuses on the responsibilities of the teacher, the broader pedagogical focus to CRE employed by Ladson-Billings aims "to influence attitudes and dispositions" (Aronson-Laughter 2016: 166-167) and to ultimately change the current status quo in education (Ladson-Billings 1995b). Nevertheless, both strands ultimately believe in social justice in education and the learning situation "as a site for social change" (Aronson-Laughter 2016: 167).

## 4.3 CRE in practice

Unfortunately, in many cases there is a gap between theory and action. In the CRE literature reviews (Morrison, Robbins and Rose 2008; Rhodes 2018), there is a clear message about the complicated nature of implementing CRE to classrooms. Morrison et al. (2008: 444) concluded that problems in creating curricula with CRE can lie within its complex and demanding nature:

"Many teachers early on in their careers discover that they lack the time and resources to do the job they hope to do, which can include enacting culturally relevant pedagogy." Many CRE theories propose many different factors for teachers to take into consideration, thus some teachers may lack the time and resources to implement CRE, even though they would want to. According to Rhodes (2018), many theories advocate for CRE, but rarely studies have fully applied it to practice. However, the next section reviews some activities that are suggested by scholars who implement CRE in their teaching.

In her book, Ladson-Billings (1995) included many examples of what culturally relevant pedagogy can look like in the classroom. Teachers can for example try to create meaningful bonds between the student's home culture and the studied subjects. One teacher combined her love for poetry with her student's love for rap music (Ladson-Billings 1995: 161). She let her students bring their favorite rap music to class and the class then used those songs to learn and discuss poetry and literate and figurative meanings. Thus, the student's culture was utilized as a "vehicle of learning" (ibid.). Another teacher from Ladson-Billing's (1995) research also let the students utilize their home language when learning the "standard" English in class. When students were first asked to use the language they were most comfortable with, and then later to translate it to Standard English, they were able to combine their home culture with the school requirements. Their academic success in the use of Standard English improved, as well as their abilities to express themselves in their home language and the ability to alternate between these two varieties of language (ibid.). Williams (2013) aimed for similar goals, as her study focused on introducing African American Verbal Tradition (AVT) in university teaching classes to develop teaching strategies to preserve as well as improve African-American students' existing linguistic resources and cultural heritage.

Discussing cultural background can also be a teaching strategy which makes the learning situation more culturally relevant. One example of such activity titled "Exploring our Cultures" was presented by Sobel and Taylor (2011). The conversation activity designed for this study was inspired by this activity. The activity demonstrates how culturally responsive teaching can be implemented in a classroom. The activity was used as a tool for the students to "inquire, discuss, write, and share about aspects of their family history, cultural history, life experiences and personal attributes" (Sobel and Taylor 2011: 138-139). The activity was used by a 3rd grade teacher as a language and literacy experience to gain knowledge about the children, their cultural background and families. The activity included 12 prompts that required the student to

reflect on specific topics, such as family holidays, family rituals, customs etc. These reflections then could be written down or drawn and then later on shared with other classmates.

Janhonen-Abruquah et al. (2014) studied learning games conducted in multicultural settings, with the purpose of transforming home economics teaching to be more culturally relevant. The games combined home economics teaching with cultural topics with groups of adults, youth and children. These games could include activities such as discussing cultural topics, reacting to cultural statements, discussing likes and dislikes or smelling different spices. The results revealed that cultural boundaries were crossed, as students were able to learn about each other's backgrounds and share their own experiences as experts of their own culture. Playing these games was viewed positively by both the learners and the teachers, and discussion on cultural topics was often continued after the game was over. However, the authors reflected that "the risk is that some of the games are based on nationally dominated thinking and may, therefore, contribute to stereotypical perceptions and advance existing boundaries." (11). Thus, the manner in which different cultures were presented during the games was reflected by the teachers.

## 4.4 Previous studies on culturally relevant education

This chapter summarizes the standpoints, findings and central arguments of some previous research done in the field on CRE. According to a review of the literature on culturally responsive teaching with adult learners (Rhodes 2018: 33), "[i]n recent decades, educational research has strongly supported the incorporation of culture and cultural identities into adult learning environments". However, the framework has been mostly applied in school settings with younger learners, and adult learners have received less attention in the literature (Rhodes 2018). As there is only a limited number of studies that have utilized CRE as their framework especially with adult learners, the complete nature of CRE in previous research might not be fully grasped by only focusing on reviewing studies with adult learners. It can be argued that reviewing both adult learners as well as children provides a more complete understanding of the topic, based on the limited sources with only adult learners as study participants. Thus, this section aims to provide an overall review of the literature surrounding CRE, by focusing on

CRE implemented with adult learners, while also discussing some studies that have been done in school setting, as well as studies that focus on the perspective of the teacher.

CRE has been studied in many different settings, such as in schools (e.g. Strickland 2012; Lewis and Zisselsberger 2019), in adult or higher education (e.g. Chen and Yang 2017) and in integration projects for immigrants (e.g. Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojoki 2005). The theoretical foundation between the studies might vary, as aspects of sociocultural theory (e.g. Alfred 2003, 2009; Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojoki 2005), multicultural education (e.g. Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojoki 2005) or intercultural education (e.g. Bester 2016) might be applied, but further examination reveals that their aims are very similar with studies that specifically focus on CRE. Many studies aim to reveal the opinions of the teachers and the specific teaching strategies and motives for implementing CRE practices (e.g. Alisaari et al. 2019; Dover 2013; Borjigin 2017; Jeong 2014). Most studies have been conducted in the context of the United States (e.g. Brown 2017; Borjigin 2017; Chen and Yang 2017), but some studies can be found which focus on the same context as this study, and study CRE in the context of Finland (e.g. Alisaari et al. 2019; Palojärvi-Serratti 2014)

As mentioned above, some studies have focused on the teachers' opinions, motivation or strategies related to CRE. Jenkins and Alfred (2018) studied seven white professors in higher education to examine their motivation for implementing CRE in their teaching practices. Findings were based on interview data, and the findings highlighted the importance of transformative experiences earlier in life, which motivated them to start teaching for diversity. These transformative experiences often dealt with witnessing injustice. These experiences, as well as personal convictions led many of the participants to state in the interview about culturally responsive teaching that "it's the right thing to do". While teaching methods varied between teachers, most stated that it is important for the students to feel "secure and comfortable". Most importantly, teachers reported to see better academic success after implementing CRE in their classroom.

Similarly to Jenkins and Alfred (2018), Ladson-Billings (1995) studied teachers and their views on culturally relevant pedagogy, and likewise, found little uniformity between specific teaching strategies. Ladson-Billings (1995: 162) interviewed and observed eight successful teachers in African American majority schools. She found out that whereas the different teaching strategies of individual teachers differed greatly with no uniformity to be found among them, "the

philosophical and ideological underpinnings of their practice" were the driving forces in making them exceptional at culturally relevant teaching. Thus, the teachers' personal believes about the importance of providing CRE yielded actions towards it in the classroom.

As Rhodes (2018) explains in her review of the literature, most studies with features of CRE that have studied adult learners do not specifically name their framework as culturally responsive, but rather base their study on some selected features of the sociocultural theory. Specific teaching strategies, as well as the focus on teacher practices is still emphasized, however. Rhodes (2018) summarizes that many previous studies have focused on the notion of cultural identity, either from the perspective of the teachers or the learner. Some studies can be found that explore changes in teaching strategies and curriculum, which allow utilizing the cultural background of the learners as a tool for learning. These methods have been mostly studied with minority learners (Rhodes 2018). An example of a study that focuses on the sociocultural context of culturally relevant education with minority learners is by Alfred (2003), as the study focused on the sociocultural contexts in learning with Caribbean immigrant women, and her findings (2003: 242) suggest that "culture and early schooling socialization in the country of origin influence learning experiences in the host country". Thus, the cultural background and personal history of the student should be taken into account by educators of multicultural immigrant students. Alfred (2003: 256) proposes a question based on her findings, of "how best to facilitate the learning of culturally diverse learners so that they can gain voice and become active participants in the academic discourse community without sacrificing their raciocultural identity".

Sometimes practical activities can reinforce mutual understanding in multicultural settings and promote this type of inclusion that Alfred (2003) was perhaps referring to. Practical activities in multicultural integration projects have been studied in Finland by Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojoki (2005). Similar to notions from Rhodes (2018), although this study applied many features recognized in CRE, such as empowerment of whole group and establishing cultural understanding, the framework of this study was based on sociocultural learning theory by Vygotsky (1978), multicultural education and cultural sensitivity. The study examined 10 integration projects in Finland and the practical activities carried out within those projects to explore successful practices for cross-cultural integration. The groups were designed for different demographics, such as for families or unemployed adults. Most groups had people with immigrant background and Finnish background. Integration was reinforced by different

activities, such as playing sports, cooking or organizing cultural events. Results revealed that there were many issues within these projects, as finding common interests between majority and minority groups, inequality, lack of participation and exoticization of the minority culture. However, practical activities that tried to diminish the language barriers, such as "[m]ulticultural soccer [..] and theatre plays [..] were good examples of enthusiastic activities where cultural boundaries vanished." (365). Thus, it can be summarized that doing something practical together can help multicultural groups to feel a sense of togetherness. However, as this study only focused on projects that had practical activities, it leaves room to investigate how empowerment and mutual understanding would be built in a more traditional educational setting.

This task of implementing culturally responsive teaching in classroom settings was taken on by Chen and Yang (2017), as they studied three EFL learners with an Asian background, preparing for their university entrance test in an American college. Culturally responsive teaching strategies, such as "asking students to share their culture and beliefs on the discussion topics, accepting all answers without judgments and encourage sharing and communication" (82) were introduced to the study participants' teachers, and classroom activities were planned based on these strategies. The frequency of students' active participation during the lesson was measured before and after the introduction of new strategies. Results showed that when culturally responsive teaching strategies were implemented in the classroom instructions, active classroom participation increased. The students became more involved in classroom communication and their communication skills increased.

A few Master's theses have also explored topics relating to CRE in the context of Finland. In the following theses, CRE was not the main theoretical standpoint, but the results of the studies yielded similar notions to other studies about the importance of implementing the learners' culture in the learning situation as a tool to facilitate learning. Myyrä (2019) studied "the teachers' experiences and thoughts when it comes to the reality of teaching multicultural pupils and supporting their learning" (5) with the focus being on EFL multicultural education and teaching multicultural children. In her thesis, she focused on the teacher perspective, and collected her data through interviews and a web-questionnaire. The results highlighted multiple challenges that teachers face when teaching English to pupils whose first language is not

Finnish, but it was also mentioned that “cultural and linguistic diversity was seen as a resource that teaches both the EFL teacher and other pupils in the class” (64).

A thesis by Palojärvi-Serratti (2014) studied the social integration process of immigrants through interviewing teachers in social integration programs and observing Finnish second language classes. Similarly to Myyrä (2019), the study focused on depicting the voices and opinions of the teachers rather than the learners, but in this latter study the focus was on adults, rather than on children. The results indicated that learning was most effective when the learners could compare their cultural backgrounds and ways of doing things collectively as a group (Palojärvi-Serratti 2014: 65). Furthermore, guidance that validated the previous experiences of the learner and their ethnic background was thought to facilitate the learning process of the immigrants.

CRE has also been studied in relation to teacher training education in Finland. A study by Acquah, Szelei and Katz (2020), explored “modelling culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and its potential for facilitating preservice teachers’ pedagogical development.” Learning journals of 52 participants were analyzed using qualitative methods and it was examined how the participants could reflect as well as intend to reproduce culturally relevant teaching practices in their own future careers as teachers, after attending a university course in multicultural education. The learning journals of the teacher trainees indicated a strong desire to model culturally relevant teaching practices in their own future teaching, as 82% of the participants made references between the CRE practices and envisioned future practices as teachers. Having non-judgmental attitude, valuing diversity and the cultural background of students and establishing a good teacher-student relationship were some of the common reflection found in the learning journals, thus modelling was seen to promote reflection and possible future action towards culturally relevant teaching. However, as data were collected from an elective course, these preservice teachers might have already enforced ideas about CRE before the course, as they had chosen to partake in this specific course about multicultural education.

When summarizing these findings, it becomes apparent that CRE has been studied from many different perspectives that all highlight different aspects of the phenomenon. Understanding the struggles and opinions of the teachers is important, as they usually are the foremost implementers of CRE. It is relevant to consider what difficulties lie within implementing CRE in the learning situation, but interviewing successful teachers in that respect might shed some

light on the problems. Not much uniformity can be found between different teaching strategies that successful teachers use, but most share underlying values about the importance of diversity and justice. Studying CRE in relation to multicultural learners reveals that discussing culture results in better engagement in the learning situation, and this seems to be the case for both adult and child learners. Implementing CRE still had some downfalls, as it must be done it a way that is respective to the needs of the group members. Overall, discussing cultural topics resulted in better integration practices.

However, most of the literature on CRE in relation to language learning has been with learning or teaching English as a second language (ESL), especially in the context of the United States (Morrison et. al 2008). Thus, learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has received less attention. Studying other than the official language of the country of residence can propose new challenges for the learner, and the style of teaching may differ. As Chen and Yang (2017: 85) suggest, "future research should seek additional data from Foreign Language (FL) learning contexts that would help fill this research void and enable better understanding of the culturally responsive teaching strategies". As English is studied as a foreign language in Finland and this study also focuses on this specific context of implementing CRE in a multicultural setting, it is meaningful to explore this topic more thoroughly in this study to learn more about the topic and thus help fill the research void.

# 5 RESEARCH DESIGN

This is a case study that studied seven participants in a multicultural language learning setting. The nature of the research design allowed a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. This approach was deemed to be suitable and most appropriate, as the aim was to focus on the personal experiences and opinions of the participants and observe each participant as part of the multicultural group, but also as an individual language user and learner. Special focus was directed to participants with immigrant background.

Firstly, the aims of this research as well as the research questions are presented in the first section (5.1). The next section (5.2) provides more detailed information about the participants of this study. After this, the data collection methods and procedure are discussed (5.3). The data collection comprised of three main parts: a conversation activity, an interview and a questionnaire. Firstly, the participants were observed and audio-recorded during a semi-structured conversation activity, which was planned by the researcher and took inspiration from Sobel and Taylor (2011: 138-139). The data collection in the conversation activity is presented firstly (5.3.1). After the conversation activity, the focus group stayed for a group interview. Next, information related to the planning and execution of the interview is explained (5.3.2). As this study focuses on language as the primary mean to discuss culture, it is meaningful to discuss the relationship between language and culture by reviewing the theoretical background of cultural analysis (5.4). This chapter also explains the concept of discourse in relation to cultural analysis and discourse analysis. Lastly, methods of data analysis are presented and summarized more broadly (5.5).

## 5.1 Focus of the study and research questions

The aim of this study was to explore adult EFL (English as a foreign language) learners as active participants in the process of meaning-making while speaking English in a multicultural group setting. The topic was examined from the point of view of the language learner. The study applied culturally responsive teaching strategies in a multicultural setting, with both immigrant and Finnish EFL learners, though special focus was being directed to the opinions of immigrant participants. The first research question examined how a multicultural group of

adults responds and reacts to a conversation activity that utilized culturally responsive teaching strategies. The aim was to explore how both the immigrant and Finnish participants construct meanings about culture and react to the questions presented in the activity. The immigrant participants' opinions related to the conversation activity were also further explored. The second research question examined how the participants with immigrant background felt about themselves as English language users and learners. Special focus was directed to the significance of English proficiency as well as the facilitating and prohibiting factors when using English.

I approached these topics by examining them through the following research questions:

1. How does a multicultural group of adult EFL learners respond and react to a conversation activity that utilizes culturally responsive teaching strategies?
    - What methods are used to construct meanings about culture?
    - How do the group members respond to cultural and neutral questions?
    - What opinions do the immigrant participant have about the conversation activity?

2. How do the adult immigrant participants view topics related to English use and learning?
    - What is the significance of having proficiency in the English language in Finland for the participants?
    - Which factors facilitate learning and/or speaking English, and which factors prohibit learning and/or speaking English for the participants?

These research questions aimed to discover how adults with an immigrant background, as well as adults with Finnish background come together to construct meanings about culture during a conversation activity that encourages discussing cultural topics. It was observed what kind of methods the participants utilized to discuss culture and whether topics related to culture caused the participants to react differently than when answering questions that are more neutral in tone. In addition, the aim was to shed light on the significance that the English language holds for these immigrant participants, and how they perceived speaking and learning it in Finland.

## 5.2 Participants

I found participants for this study by visiting a liberal adult education center, and by being in contact with the teachers there. In December of 2019, I scheduled a time with one of the groups to conduct my study, and whoever was willing to participate in my study, could be present during that time. All of the participants of my study studied English as a foreign language at a liberal adult education center. They participated in English language studies as a hobby, and their classes were not part of any official study program.

This study has altogether seven participants. Before data collection begun, all of the participants read a privacy notice form and signed an agreement form to permit the usage of the gathered data for scientific purposes. For the purposes of this study, the gathering of personal information was very limited, as the general aim was to listen to the experiences of the participants and to observe them as a group, rather than to evaluate them solely based on their background. Furthermore, gathering and presenting less personal information allowed greater anonymity, which can be thought to be extremely important when studying people from minority groups. However, some background information was gathered from the participants. This information included their name, age, gender, nationality, Finnish and English language learning background and how long they have lived in Finland. This specific information was gathered to aid the research and to explain some possible findings related to speaking preferences, for example. For the background survey, refer to Appendix 1.

Three participants are native Finnish speakers and four have immigrant background and their native language is not Finnish. All of the participants were adults, with the average age being 42. Three of the participants were in their thirties, a couple in their twenties and a couple in their late sixties. Thus, the age range of the participants was large, which made the group even more diverse. Each participant was given a pseudonym during data analysis. I chose the pseudonyms for each participant based on popular names from the participants' country of origin. The pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants, while still maintaining individual recognizability of each participant. For more information on the study participants, refer to Appendix 2: Study participants.

As can be seen based on the information presented in Appendix 2, all of the participants who reported to have an immigrant background have a different country of origin, as participants reported to have been born in Czech Republic, Argentina, Afghanistan and Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Their pseudonyms for this study are Tereza, Lucia, Rayi and Sein. Two of the participants with immigrant background are females, one in her 20's and one in her 30's. Two of the participants with immigrant background are males, one in his 20's and one in his 30's. The participants with an immigrant background all reported the time they have lived in Finland, and this time ranged between participants from 4 four years to only two months. The immigrant participants also had variation in the time they reported to have studied English in the past. The amount of time they reported to have studied English ranged from two years of studies to studies since childhood. In addition to the immigrant participants, three participants with the Finnish background participated in this study. Their pseudonyms for this study are Mikko, Anne and Eila. Mikko is male in his 30's, and Anne and Eila are females both in their 60's. Mikko had studied English for about 12 years, Anne for 6 years and Eila for 3 years. They all reported to have stayed all or most of their lives in Finland and they all are native Finnish speakers.

My original plan was to solely study adult immigrants who study English in Finland, but when I had the chance to conduct my study, there were also three native Finnish speakers present, who did not have an immigration background (Mikko, Eila and Anne). Thus, I decided to conduct the first phase of my study, which consisted of a conversation activity, with all of the participants. This resulted in a study setup that studies a multicultural group, but specifically focuses on the immigrant participants. One of the teachers from the liberal adult education center also participated in the conversation activity, but more as a listener and commenter than an active participant. My role during data collection was to give instructions to the participants and to observe them. Similarly to the teacher, I also made comments when felt appropriate.

For the participants, the second part of the data collection consisted of filling in a small background survey and the third phase participating in a group interview. I asked only the participants who have an immigration background to fill in the background survey and to stay for the group interview. Therefore, seven people participated on the first phase of the data collection, and four of them in the latter phases. However, more background information was later on collected also from participants with the Finnish background due to changes in the

focus of the study. The different phases of my data collection will be discussed more thoroughly in the following section.

## 5.3 Data collection

The data collection for the present study consisted of three phases: conversation activity, background survey and group interview. As mentioned in the previous section, all of the participants joined in the conversation activity but only four of the participants were asked to fill in the background survey and stay for the group interview. The group interview took place straight after the conversation activity had ended. All of the four participants filled in the background survey before the conversation activity. The conversation activity lasted circa 50 minutes, and the group interview lasted circa 30 minutes. All of the phases of data collection were audio recorded with two audio recording devices. I also took notes while the group was completing the conversation activity, to later remember my visual observations.

In addition to taking notes, I also chose to be physically present during the data collection. I did not participate in the conversation activity fully, as I did not take a turn and answer a question or a statement, but I made comments or other conversational cues when other people were speaking. I chose to sit around the same table as the participants, to better observe them and to make my presence seem more natural. As I had already spent some time with the participants by participating in their English lesson one week before the data collection, I assumed that it would be best to maintain the same level of interaction during the data collection. By joining in their normal activities during the English lesson, the intention was to reduce the observer effect, make initial observations about possible study participants and to observe the typical behaviors of participants in that context (Bogdan and Biklen 2003). It is worth acknowledging that all of these factors probably played a role in the way that I chose to interact with the participants and, on the other hand, how the participants acted around me and how they chose to interact during data collection. It can be stated that as I took a more active role in the data collection process, meanings were constructed collaboratively, by both the researcher and the participants (Ruusuvuori, Tiittula and Aaltonen 2005).

During data collection, there were some minor disturbances, as during recording one could hear loud hammering from the hallway of the building. The hammering brought some distractions,

as some participants lost their train of thought while speaking and some were bothered by the loud noises. It can be predicted that the participants were also concerned whether or not the audio recording could catch their voices, because in the recording one can hear many pauses in speech when the hammering sounds take place. I suspect that this disturbed their natural way of speaking and made them be more aware of the fact that their speaking was audio recorded. Next, the conversation activity is explained more thoroughly.

### 5.3.1 Conversation activity

The activity that was used as a tool to collect data for the present study is called a "conversation activity" within this paper. The conversation activity was inspired by a language and literacy experience that was designed to a multicultural group of children to reflect and share their personal experiences and stories related to culture, family customs and traditions based on 12 prompts (Sobel and Taylor 2011). The activity presented in Sobel and Taylor's book was used as an inspiration and as a template, but it was modified to fit the purposes of this present study. Modifications included e.g. adding new prompts, questions and statements and omitting some. In addition, the final execution of the conversation activity differed from the activity presented by (Sobel and Taylor 2011), as this activity was adapted to function more as a conversation game rather than as a reflection experience. The conversation activity designed for this study can be found in Appendix 3.

The conversation activity required the participants to take turns in answering questions or expressing an opinion about a certain statement. From now on, I will be referring to these questions and statements that were chosen for this activity as simply *questions*. The activity had altogether 16 questions. The topics of most of the questions (questions 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14 and 16) were related explicitly to culture, personal memories, traditions and customs. The activity also included questions which were intended to be more neutral in tone (questions 6, 8, 11, 12, 15). There were more questions that related to culture than questions that were more neutral in tone, as the focus of the activity was to discuss topics related to culture. However, as this study also focused on comparing answers between neutral and cultural questions, some neutral question were included. The questions were printed out on a large colorful paper, and each individual question was numbered.

During the activity, the participants were seated around a table, and the paper with the questions and statements was situated on the table. The participants took turns answering the questions, and the questions which the participant was meant to answer was chosen using a random number generator. Within one turn, each participant was meant to only answer one question, and after he or she was finished, the turn shifted to the person sitting next to them. Although the structure of the activity was based on taking turns to talk, other participants could comment or ask further questions from the person who had their turn to talk. We continued this activity for four rounds, and then decided to finish, as the 60-minute-long class was about to end, and some of the participants had to leave. Before we had started the conversation activity, I had asked the participants with an immigrant background to stay for longer so we could continue with the group interview. In the next section, the interview and the background survey that were used for this study are explained.

### 5.3.2 Focus group interview

After the conversation activity was finished, all the participants with immigrant background stayed for a focus group interview. The focus group interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, and it was held right after the conversation activity was finished and the other participants, who were not part of the focus group, had left the room. The interview was semi-structured in nature, as there was a set of questions that were asked from the participants, but the conversation also evolved based on the answers of the participants. It is worth acknowledging that there was not enough time to focus thoroughly on all of the interview questions, as time was very limited. However, the focus group interview was the most feasible and profitable method of getting interview data from my focus group, as I will explain in this subchapter.

Interview was chosen as a complimentary method of data collection in addition to tape-recording the conversation activity because of the assumed usefulness of interviews, based on the assumptions of cultural analysis (Quinn 2005) as well as the realities and context of the data collection event. Interviewing is considered to be an effective method of data collection, when the aim is to perform cultural analysis (Quinn 2005). As Quinn summarizes, “interviews can provide a density of cues to cultural understandings underlying discourse” (7). In addition, interviewing can be regarded as the best method to be in direct interaction with the persons whose opinion voices the studied phenomenon (Nokelainen 2013: 36). There were also a few

contextual reasons, why group interview was the chosen method for this study. Firstly, it was the most attainable method, as the preferred time for interviews was shortly after the conversation activity had ended, so the participants could still easily recall the event. Thus, time was limited and there was no time to interview the participants separately, one after the other. Secondly, I assumed based on my previous experience with immigrant English learners that the group setting would create a preferable/safer environment to share opinions. I predicted that the participants could help each other in the process of meaning-making, as the language of the interview was English, which is a language that they are still learning. Thirdly, as mentioned previously, I did not know for certain until the data collection begun, who would be participating in this study. Therefore, taking all of these things into consideration, group interview appeared to be the most accessible as well as fruitful way to collect data from the participants whom I was most interested in studying.

The term group interview can be differentiated from group discussion (Ruusuvuori and Tiittula 2009). The interview style that unfolded during the interview could be categorized more as group interview rather than group discussion based on Ruusuvuori and Tiitula's (2009) classification, as there was not much discussion nor interaction between the participants, other than few comments that they shared with each other. Thus, the method of this study can be perceived to lie somewhere between an individual discussion, but done in a group setting. According to Krueger and Casey (2015: 6-7), focus group interviews usually have some defining features, most of which also applied to this study's setting. Firstly, focus groups should be small enough that everyone has a chance to share their opinion, yet large enough to provide a diverse range of opinions and views. As he explains, "small groups of four or five participants afford more opportunity to share ideas, but the restricted size also results in a smaller pool of total ideas" (Krueger and Casey 2015: 6). Thus, focus group size of four people in this study allowed every participant to have a chance to talk, but it limited the diversity of my data. Secondly, focus group members should have similar characteristics in something that is relevant to the research in question (Krueger and Casey 2015: 6-7). In this study, the aim was to interview adult participants who consider themselves to have an immigrant background, thus they had this factor in common. In addition, they all were English language learners. Thirdly, the aim of focus group interviews is to collect qualitative data, usually by interviewing several groups (Krueger and Casey 2015: 7). For this study, it was only possible to gather data from one focus group, hence the findings are not comprehensive in nature. Lastly, the questions

should be easy to understand by the participants, have a coherent structure and they should provoke the group to answer the topics of the research questions (ibid.). This was surely the aim with this study as well, as the language and topics of discussion were aimed to be simplistic in nature.

There are some things to be considered, when conducting interviews with immigrant participants. The interview outline was originally planned both in English and in Finnish, but participants preferred to speak in English. Thus, the interview was conducted completely in English. According to Nieminen, Larja and Koponen (2015: 40), in some instances, interviewing immigrant participants in English has proven to be difficult due to insufficient language skills, and they proposed that simplifying the interview language might facilitate understanding. Thus, the interview questions in this study were aimed to be simple and understandable, and I was prepared to also use Finnish as a support language, if needed. The interview was quite successfully conducted in English, as participants who were more skilled in English occasionally helped the other participants in understanding the questions. In addition to possible issues related to language, Nieminen et al. (2015) also reported that interviewers have noticed the immigrant participants to occasionally give socially desirable responses and to rather pretend to understand the question than to ask for further clarification. However, they conclude that these effects are not unique to studies with immigrant participants. During this study, it was sometimes noticeable that some participants had difficulty in understanding interview questions and sometimes they did not answer them fully, perhaps due to difficulties in understanding or in communicating in English. However, English was the most feasible language to conduct this interview, and it functioned as the lingua franca for both the interviewees and the interviewer.

## 5.4 Cultural analysis and discourse

This study applies methods of Cultural analysis as well as the concept of *discourse*, as introduced by Quinn (2005). This chapter summarizes the concepts and general assumptions of cultural analysis and the concepts of discourse. The aim of cultural analysis is to “tease out, from discourse, the cultural meanings that underlie it” (4). In other words, As Quinn explains, cultural meanings can be derived from implicit *clues*, which lie in what is explicitly stated.

Hence, the goal is to reconstruct the explicit discourse to find implicit cultural meanings in it. The approach employed believes that discourse "is the most important place where culture is both enacted and produced in the moment of interaction" (Hill 2005: 159). Thus, the material from which conclusions about culture are derived, is discourse.

This study does not focus on discourse analysis per se, but it is still beneficial to briefly explain the fundamentals of it to grasp the concept of *discourse,* which is the principal unit under examination in cultural analysis. Discourse analysis sees language as a social construct that is always connected to time and space (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 5). In another words, language use cannot be separated from its context. In the field of discourse analysis, context is a broad topic, covering for example historical time, geographical space, social constructs and customs and culture (ibid.). The relationship between these contexts and language is bidirectional, as the specific context in which language use takes place affects the way language is used. Some context may prohibit, allow or provoke certain type of discourses. This also applies the other way around, as language use creates and modifies the reality, or the context that we experience. Besides context, another important concept used in discourse analysis is "discourse". The definition of discourse is multidimensional, and this in turn reflects the multidisciplinary nature of discourse studies (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 13-14). Discourse, as a concept, can be defined as any of the following or some/all of them combined:

> "- An understandable way to use language
> - A conventional way of constructing meaning (about something)
> - Language use in a specific context
> - Conception of reality
> - An utterance that is larger than single sentence"
> (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019: 14, translated)

As becomes apparent from these complementary definitions, discourse conceptualizes language use, meaning construction and ways of understanding. These notions also correspond to definitions of culture which were introduced previously. Similarly to discourse, culture also can entail notions about understanding and meaning construction. Also, language use, or discourse, is a pivotal part of culture, as culture is thought to be shared, understood and learned in social interaction, which usually involves language use. This study also adopts a similar understanding about discourse, as described by Quinn (2005): In cultural analysis discourse is understood as language usage that consists of "segments of speech or written text longer than single words or sentences", which is fairly common definition used by linguists (4-5).

According to discourse studies, language is a resource, which can be used by the speaker flexibly according to their own skills and the specific conversational context (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2019). Thus, the language users' skills are one limiting factor, as well as the specific context where discourse is taking place. When discussing issues related to immigrants, this notion becomes pivotal, as these newcomers usually have many of these limiting factors: their language skills in host county's official languages might be still insufficient and they are placed in an unfamiliar context. As communication plays a pivotal role in the way we understand each other, mismatches in communication may lead to negative consequences, especially for minority students who do not understand the same cultural communication patterns as the main population. Thus, in cross-cultural contexts, the emphasis should be on *how* things are communicated, instead of *what* is actually said (Gay 2018), as persons cultural orientation is one factor that effects on how communication situations are understood and interpreted (Kim and Park 2015).

## 5.5 Data analysis

This chapter summarizes qualitative content analysis, the chosen methods of cultural analysis employed in this study, ethical considerations of data analysis and analysis procedure in practice. The methods of data analysis in this study rely on qualitative content analysis and cultural analysis. My study is qualitative case study, and the aim is to find relevance and meaning in the data collected. Thus, the analysis is data-driven. Content analysis can be summarized to be "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 2004: 18). It can give new insights and result in a better understanding of the phenomenon (ibid.). I also applied elements of cultural analysis (as explained by Strauss 2005 and Quinn 2005). The aim of cultural analysis in this study is to reconstruct the explicit discourse, or language use, of the study participants to find implicit cultural meanings in it (Quinn 2005). Methods of cultural analysis, especially in categorizing and interpreting discourse, were applied when analyzing the data.

Two proposed methods of cultural analysis by Strauss (2005) were applied in analyzing the data of this study, as they were found to be the most attainable methods for answering the

research questions of this study. *Keyword analysis* and searching for *cultural models without keywords* were the selected methods, and the aim of using them was to discover deep, cultural assumptions that are often left unsaid (Strauss 2005: 204). According to Strauss (2005), in keyword analysis, the task is to search for repeated words in discourse, which are expressive and carry importance to the speaker. The significance of the keywords can be analyzed by observing which words are associated to it in discourse and then to search for implicit meanings for the use of that keyword (ibid.). Keywords may be stressed in speech, or otherwise repeated or emphasized. Similarly, the method of searching for *cultural models without keywords* was explained by Strauss (2005). This method aims to discover cultural assumptions that certain discourses can portray. As Strauss (2005) explains: "When speakers describe an object or sequence of events, they omit details they assume they do not need to explain. [..] The narrative evaluation [the point of the story] reflects cultural assumptions about what is funny, shocking, embarrassing and so on." (208).

Besides focusing the cultural analysis on the participants, it was also important to reflect on my own cultural assumptions, as this ultimately affects how the analysis proceeds and which kind of interpretations are highlighted (Strauss 2005). It was understood that some cultural assumptions are left uncovered due to complex nature of culture and cultural differences between the participants and I. However, according to Strauss (2005), when analyzing data that is produced by someone who has a different cultural background, the researcher may be more alert to detect keywords and cultural models. Similar notions are made also in qualitative analysis, as Bogdan and Biklen (2003: 173) in their guide to qualitative research for education suggest to search for unfamiliarity in the discourse that the participants use. Thus, combining Strauss' (2005) methods with content analysis provided a more versatile way of examining cultural topics in the data.

Furthermore, the anonymity of the participants was considered in order to protect the participants' identity (Ruusuvuori et al. 2005) This was done by assigning pseudonyms for the participants and concealing or altering any other information that would risk their anonymity (ibid.) For example, if participants mentioned their home cities or any other too specific information, this was removed from the transcribed data. In addition, the relevance of nationality was considered. As the main task of the study participants was to discuss their cultural background, including information about their country of origin was deemed necessary.

As mentioned, all of the participants signed a consent form that specifically asked if they would allow their country of origin to be revealed in the study. All participants agreed to this, so this information was included in the study. In addition, the pseudonyms were chosen according to popular names in the participant's country of origin, to still make the participants more individually recognizable for the reader (see Appendix 2).

The first step in analyzing my data was to listen and transcribe the audio recordings from the conversation activity (Refer to Appendix 5 for transcription conventions). The transcribed materials were also time-stamped, so I could easily go back to the original audio-recordings, if necessary. The complete transcription was read through multiple times, while also listening to the audio-recording. However, it was made sure that the data were read through without a break two times to get a sense of totality and to facilitate concentration (Bogdan and Biklen 2003: 173). The transcribed utterances were color coded based on speaker. Throughout the analysis of the data, observations and interpretations were written down. These notes later on formed the categories that were relevant to my study. The appropriateness of these categories was further tested until suitable categories were formed (Bogdan and Biklen 2003).

After this, the data were divided, as it was necessary to direct focus on specific research questions. Transcription of the conversation activity was analyzed mostly separately from the interview, as both methods of data collection were mostly aimed at collecting data for different research questions. In addition, transcription of the conversation activity was further divided to answers relating to cultural and neutral questions. Answers were categorized based on the perceived neutrality or cultural nature of the question. Certain questions in the conversation activity were assumed to be more cultural in nature, while others were meant to provoke answers that do not discuss topics related to culture or past memories. Thus, I divided the transcribed data into *neutral questions* and *cultural questions*. Answers to cultural and neutral questions were further compared and analyzed. In the next chapter, the findings of this study are presented.

# 6 FINDINGS

The aim of this study was to examine how a multicultural group of adult EFL learners responds and reacts to a conversation activity that utilizes culturally responsive teaching strategies. In addition, the opinions of the immigrant participants about the conversation activity and about their relationship with English were explored. These topics were approached with two main research questions: *1) how does a multicultural group of adult EFL learners respond and react to a conversation activity that utilizes culturally responsive teaching strategies?* and *2) how do the adult immigrant participants view topics related to English use and learning?* This section presents the findings related to these questions.

Firstly, it was discovered that the participants used five different methods or approaches to construct meanings about culture. Later on, these different methods to construct meanings will be referred simply as approaches. The most popular approach was *collaborative meaning-making*, as most often, meanings were constructed collaboratively. Furthermore, meanings were quite often constructed by *comparing and referencing*, as past and present and different traditions were compared between and within participants' answers. Some participants used *additional resources* to construct meanings about culture, as gestures and use of the Finnish language was observed to occur quite often. Also, participants expressed *diversity within culture*, as culture was often discussed from many different perspectives and stances. In addition, some answers reflected *assumed unfamiliarity* and/or *assumed familiarity*. Most of these approaches could be used by the primary speaker, who was answering a question, and also by the listening participants. These approaches are presented more thoroughly in the first section of this chapter (6.1).

The second section (6.2) of this chapter explores the findings related to how the participants reacted and responded to neutral and cultural questions. It was discovered that approaches to construct cultural meanings were more commonly used when answering cultural questions in comparison to neutral questions. Similarly, questions that were considered "cultural" in tone usually resulted in more lengthy, complex and collaborative discussions than answers to neutral questions. However, the analysis related to this topic did not yield very definite results, thus the findings related to the effects of cultural and neutral questions are debatable.

Based on a short focus group interview with the participants with immigrant background, it was discovered that the participants had positive opinions about the conversation activity, and it was seen as one possible way to discuss and learn about other cultures. The activity was described as “useful” and “interesting” and participants stated that the activity allowed them to discuss more unique and detailed questions related to culture than would have been probable otherwise. Cultural questions were preferred over neutral questions by the immigrant participants, but cultural questions were also seen as something quite complex to answer. The participants suggested that the activity could be improved by letting all participants answer to one question, instead of changing the question each time. The third section (6.3) reviews more in detail these shared opinions about the conversation activity.

The last section (6.4) of this chapter focuses on the relationship that the immigrant participants have with using and learning English. Firstly, the significance of English language proficiency is reviewed based on the interview answers. It was discovered that the significance of using, understanding and learning English was commonly associated to topics of *social interaction, future opportunities* and *access to information.* English was seen as a valuable resource that enables and facilitates integration with other people and into the society. Secondly, it was discovered that certain factors and contexts facilitate, while other factors prohibit using and learning English. The main finding was that participants stated that the *lingua franca use* of English makes it more comfortable for them to speak English.

The findings are highlighted by reviewing excerpts from the conversation activity and interview. In some instances, the same excerpt can give evidence to many different types of findings, so in those instances one excerpt can be referred to in multiple occasions. Main speakers are referred by their pseudonyms and the term *others* refers to multiple or all of the listening participants in instances when it was not possible or necessary to determine who was speaking. For further details on transcription conventions that were used, refer to Appendix 5.

## 6.1 Approaches used to construct meanings about culture

The participants of this study used several different approaches to construct meanings about culture, whether it be the culture that they identify with or the other participant’s culture that

they were hearing about. These approaches are regarded as tools that were used in the process of meaning-making, when the aim was to discuss topics related to culture. Altogether five different approaches, some with subcategories, were regarded as most prevailing based on the frequency that were used during the conversation activity. These commonly used methods were 1) *collaborative meaning-making,* 2) *comparing and referencing*, 3) *additional resources, 4) assuming familiarity and/or unfamiliarity* and 5) *expressing diversity within culture*. Each of these will discussed in its own subchapter below.

### 6.1.1 Collaborative meaning-making

Collaborative meaning-making was an approach that was used often during the conversation activity. However, the prevalence of it seemed to increase as the activity continued and the answers at the beginning of the activity were not as collaborative. Actions such as *helping*, *asking questions* or *asking for help, use of humor and laughter* as well as *copying linguistic structures* were all considered to be acts towards collaborative meaning-making.

Helping and asking questions was usually done by the participants who were listening to some other participant's answer. Other participants often helped with finding the right words for something and they asked questions related to the topic. In one instance, Sein was explaining an art form that he considered to be typical to where he grew up, but he did not know the name for it in English. Most of the other participant could guess the word based on the gestures that he was making as well as the description that he provided. An excerpt of this discussion can be seen below in Example 1. The text provides an example of helping and asking questions (shown in bold text).

Example 1

Sein: When I was young, (ah) in the school the teacher teach how to make paper, with paper, like a dog or cat [laughing] [gesturing with hands] and flowers
Others: (H)
R: (oh) do you mean-
Others: **Origami!** [In a choir of voices]
Sein: (Uhm) I don't know what that mean
Tereza: Show him a picture
R: I will show you a picture
Eila: **Are you good it?**
Tereza: Yes! [Huhm] [Smiling]
Sein: @(uhm)
R: [Shows him a picture of an origami with her phone] Do you mean like this?
Sein: Yeah! Yes.

The use of humor or laughing was also something that was done mostly by the listening participants, as they reacted to what was being said by laughing or making jokes or by making subtle supporting noises or gestures. Copying linguistic structures was usually done by the participant whose turn it was to speak. Some collaborative actions usually followed one another, as helping usually resulted in copying a linguistic structure. Like copied linguistic structures, humor and funny stories were often contagious, as it resulted in many group members laughing and the story teller to also laugh at his or her own story. Example 2 contains an excerpt of an interaction that contains a humorous story told by Tereza, laughing by most listeners, helping done by Mikko and Tereza copying linguistic structures (helping and copying linguistic structures is shown in bold text).

Example 2

Tereza: Usually the men has to show that he can take care of the women, of the- of his wife and he is so strong and that mean he has to (eh) cut the (eh) wood. There is a like a @big [someone laughs] @piece @of wood like a (uh) it's from a tree, you cut the tree and it's part of the tree. And he have to cut it with a (uh) [gestures the motion of holding an axe and cutting something with it]
Mikko: **Axe!**
Tereza: **Axe**, yeah. And he have to like cut it in half-
Others: [someone bursts laughing] [a lot of laughter]
Tereza: and if he can do this it means yes you are strong you can take care to your wife.

Copying linguistic structures can be thought to be a form of learning in this instance, as participants learned a new word or their recollection of that word was reinforced by others. Similarly, example 2 is a good illustration of the observation that collaborative meaning construction was usually present in instances when the story was particularly humorous or engaging.

Collaboration was observed to increase as the activity continued, and during the last question all participants with Finnish background, Mikko, Eila and Anne, became inspired to construct the meaning of a Finnish midsummer. Other participants listened and laughed. The example illustrates many ways to be collaborative, as it includes the main speaker asking for help, others helping and also laughing. This conversation is shown below in Example 3.

Example 3

Mikko: And we have this tradit- tradition to burn this- (ehm) mikä on @kokko? [Asking in Finnish: what is kokko (midsummer pyre) (called in English)?]
Anne: Kokko, fire.
Mikko: We make a big fire.
Others: (ooh)

Mikko: We collect much trees and burn them. Yes, I have many childhood memories when we were on the lake and we were watching this big fire and then- In Finland, people who live on the countryside, they put these birch trees on their- on their…niinku, mikä on etupiha?[asking in Finnish: "like, what is etupiha (front yard) (called in English)?]
Eila: Front the door!
Anne: In front of the door
Mikko: Two birch trees… I don't know what is the meaning of that.
Others: [laugh]
Anne: Something, something [whispers]
Mikko: When I was, when I was a child my father always put two birch trees
Anne: Yes yes!
Mikko: On the front of the door.
Anne: Or grandfather
Mikko: (uhm) What else… Well, sauna! Of course sauna!
Anne: Swimming!
Mikko: Oh yes, swimming

Example 3 shows, how collaboration often resulted in lengthier answers, and the participants were more eager to continue their story if additional questions or other comments were made. In this example and also in other instances that were highly collaborative, participants often expressed agreement with what was being said (as was done by Anne in Example 3: "yes yes!"). As in this instance there were three participants with a Finnish background, they were able to construct the meaning of Finnish midsummer together by combining their information and stories of a common topic. However, it was observed that collaboration was attempted in any case, if the topic under discussion was familiar to the participants or otherwise engaging.

### 6.1.2 Comparing and Referencing

The method of comparing and referencing was done by 1) *comparing past and present* and 2) *making references* to earlier discussions or to other cultures. The aim of these approaches was to highlight cultural differences or similarities as well as to find common ground. Comparisons were often made between the current time and the past. Some questions in the conversation activity specifically encouraged the participants to share stories about their past (e.g. Question number 4: What is a game you used to play when you were a child?). However, some answers resulted in the participants comparing the past and the present time, which was not specifically asked in any of the questions.

When the immigrant participants compared the past and the present, it usually resulted in them also comparing their life and habits in Finland in relation to their former home country. Usually the aim was to highlight differences between previous and current habits and life circumstances.

Comparisons were done quite often when answering neutral questions. Thus, cultural talk was included in questions that were originally meant to only focus on the current situation. In example 4, Lucia discusses her changed habits on transportation, and therefore also makes comparisons between her habits in Finland and Argentina.

Example 4

Lucia: (eh) Well, **here** in [X city] in the city I usually walking because […], **but when I live in** [former home city in Argentina] I use a lot of the bus and the (eh) metro. Or the subway. (eh**) Here** I don't have (eh) a bike but I want to get one maybe in the spring. @How is to move my bike in winter time… But I am fine walking for now.

Lucia's answer is not very "cultural", as it only discusses her personal habits, and not habits of big groups of people. Nevertheless, these types of answers highlighted a desire to build and maintain a situated identity. As the immigrant participants shared stories about their former habits in their home countries, they usually also made relevant that their habits have changed since they have moved to Finland. Thus, it was felt necessary for the immigrant participants to tell about their former habits that took place in their country of origin, perhaps as these better describe their preferred habits and thus, their identity.

In addition to making comparisons, participants also preferred to make references to something that was said earlier by another participant. Thus, they made some references also to that other culture which was discussed earlier. Example 5 shows an example of a discussion where participants discovered the different ways childhood game "hide and seek" could be played. Earlier, Lucia had also talked about hide and seek, so Mikko made a reference to it in his answer, but elaborated how the game was played in his childhood.

Example 5

Mikko: When I was in school, we used to play **that same hide and seek, yes**, we had six wooden sticks on a plate and then one people stepped on that plate and sticks they are thrown onto grou- ground and then he collected all the sticks and then he had to seek others so they had some time to go hiding when the one was collecting the wood pieces.
Others: [oh]
R: Do you others have similar games?
Tereza: [Hmm] I don't think so
T: We just have hide and seek but without the sticks
Tereza: So this is like hide and seek, but without counting, with something else!
R: Yes, like hide and seek, but with… Like something that you explained-
Mikko: Sticks! Sticks!
R: When one is collecting them, others go and hide.
Tereza: [ooh] So it is the same as counting.
Lucia: Yes. Same as counting

Referencing an earlier answer was also done by Anne in example 7 below. Overall, it can be concluded that referencing was usually done to highlight similarities between habits or cultural traditions. In addition, referencing can also be considered as a way to be collaborative, as it often presents the speaker as an attentive listener.

### 6.1.3 Additional resources

It was observed that participants used *gestures* and the Finnish speaking participant also used *the Finnish language* as a method to communicate during the conversation activity. These two resources were grouped under the same category, as both were considered to have similar aims. Additional resourced were probably used to enrich the storytelling when explanations in English were felt to be insufficient. This usually was the case in situations when the speaker did not know certain words in English, or they felt that mentioning the word in English or gesturing something adds value to the story. All participants used gestures quite often, and mostly it was done in situations where the participants probably could not recall a specific word or phrase, or perhaps the participant was unfamiliar with the word altogether (see examples 1 and 2 above). In these situations, other participants were willing to help, as they often tried to guess which word the speaker was referring to, based on the gestures that the speaker was making. Thus, gesturing often resulted in helping, and this resulted in copying of the linguistic structure.

In addition to gesturing, Finnish participants used the help of other participants, as they sometimes asked in Finnish a translation for some word in English (See example 3 above). In this example, it is apparent that Mikko was unsure of how to explain the meaning of some words in English, and receiving help from other participants reassured him to continue. The help that other participants offered was not always completely accurate, but nevertheless it seemed to result in increased understanding. Thus, it can be argued that both gesturing and using Finnish during the activity had a similar goal, which was to ask for help and to convey meaning so the story could continue.

### 6.1.4 Expressing diversity within culture

Participants expressed in their answers pluralistic views of culture. These statements about diversity were expressed in many different ways. These discourses mostly expressed that

culture and cultural traditions are diverse, and sometimes also difficult to describe comprehensively. One way of talking about this diversity was to express how the participant's own home culture has adopted new traditions. This discourse was expressed in statements where participants mentioned some commonly known tradition or a phenomena, such as baby showers, but also emphasized that they do not recognize it as part of their own culture, as it has roots in some other country. This specific notion was clearly expressed two times by Lucia and one time by Anne. Below are excerpts (Example 6, 7 and 8) from all of those discussions. In examples 6 and 7 Lucia and Anne talk about how babies and newborns are celebrated in their culture. Example 8 is an excerpt from Lucia's story about a family tradition.

Example 6
Lucia: Well, maybe before, some mothers, some friends of the mother's organize a baby shower. But this not that so common, I mean, I suppose it's important for other cultures, not for @Argentina @originally. And after, (ehh) maybe if the baby is baptized, in a catholic or another religion there is a little celebration for the #born itself

Example 7
Anne: There is baby showers too, but they are not very Finnish, but they are now very usual. But we have then (öööö) the bab- baptism- what's that in Finnish- Ristiäiset? When the baby gets the name, then we have- in the family we have something to celebrate. Maybe drink coffee and eat @cake.

Example 8
Lucia: When my grandma was still alive we usually eating Sundays at her home and she do some pasta an- and every Sunday we go on the family to my grandma house and eat @pasta. I like it, it's like an- an-, she's not Italian, she is from Argentina, but in Argentina we have a lot of immigration from Europe like Italian and Spain and but she adopted this tradition of the pasta that they think it is more @Italian.

When Lucia and Anne were discussing baby showers, they described them as "not for Argentina originally" and "not very Finnish". Thus, they referred that although celebrating them has become popular, they still don't recognize the celebration as very Argentine or Finnish. Lucia's explanation for this is the origin of this tradition, and Anne offers no explanations, perhaps as she refers to Lucia's answer and agrees with her. Whereas baby showers were seen as more foreign, baptism and the celebration related to it was mentioned more neutrally, perhaps as more traditional to the specific culture.

Pluralistic views of culture were also expressed in answers that told about a specific phenomenon taking place within a cultural group, such as terrorism or drinking excessively. These phenomenon were not emphasized to be influenced by some other culture, but rather as something that occurs, but still something that the speaker does not identify with personally.

However, such discussions often shed light on participants' opinions on some of the issues in his or her culture or home country. In Example 9, Mikko discusses midsummer traditions, and in Example 10, Rayi explains some stereotypes which he perceives other people to have of his culture.

Example 9

Mikko: It must be this summer- summer holiday called juhannus. (uhm), people go to, people go to their usually to their cotta- cottages, mökki, which is on the beach of the lake and- they have usually drink- drink too much!
Others: [laugh]
Mikko: People, people are usually very drunk, yes, in my opinion
Anne: You too? [Whispers] [Laughs]
Mikko: No, not me!
Others: [laugh]

Example 10

Rayi: (H) Yeah unfortunately, (ehh) (um) so Afghanistan has a very, (um) because of war, it has a very black background, so most of people think most of people who live in Afghanistan are terrorists or something like that but in fact that is not true so, terrorist is just a maybe group or a few people but most of people in Afghanistan are not terrorist.

Both Mikko and Rayi share that they do not value certain features that are associated to their culture. Mikko emphasizes that although other people might drink excessively during midsummer celebrations, he does not do it himself. Other people react to this by laughing, and Mikko also smiles while he is discussing this topic. Rayi, on the other hand, discusses quite seriously the negative stereotypes that he perceives other people to have, and other people react to this by being silent and quite serious. Both discussions receive a very different reaction. Nevertheless, these discussions are examples of different perspectives that a specific discourse about culture can manifest.

There were also some answers that discussed the "different cultures" for a specific tradition within a country. Two answers to different questions are shown in Examples 11 and 12. In Example 11, Sein is discussing wedding traditions and in example 12 he is answering question number 9 (When people from other countries think about your culture, what do they usually think of?).

Example 11

Sein: In my country, there's two different culture #as #married. As for **my culture**, is- Islamic culture, wedding, is like (uh) firstly we have to go #mass and there is (uh) two sides.

Example 12

Sein: My country is Buddhism culture is many influ- influence. But some people think it's like #risqué, more risqué something like that because it's like many **rule**, so we need to follow the **rule**. If I, we didn't follow the **rule** it's like [!] (um) some **foreign** country, they think about us if we didn't follow the **rule they** think about we are **foreigners. [..]** Yeah. That's why **we need to** follow **their- our culture**. And, and there is (um) in Sunday or Saturday **we have to** go to the Pagoda temple and we usually do that. If we didn't do like that it seem… bad.

In Sein's answers, religion was highlighted as a factor that results in different cultural traditions and divisions within cultural groups. It can be assumed that Sein tries to explain his own culture, while still emphasizing that in his home country, different cultures collide and coexist. This emphasis is also visible in his choice of words, as can be seen by looking at the texts in bold font. He often made divisions between *us* and *them* in his answer. *Us* probably represents his own cultural and religious background, while *them* refers to other religious and cultural groups living inside his country of origin. The term *foreigner* is used to describe someone who does not act according to the cultural or religious traditions. Notions about *rules* and needing to follow them are also highlighted in his answer.

Diverse notions about culture were also visible when analyzing the different viewpoints from which a certain phenomenon was discussed. Discussions about war were few and not specifically encouraged in any of the questions in the conversation activity. However, two discussions about it peaked my interest, as they highlighted two very different ways of viewing it. These examples again highlighted these diverse perspectives about culture. The first instance of *war* being mentioned can be viewed in Example 10 above, when Rayi mentions it in relation to the "black background" of his home country. In this same answer, Rayi also mentions that "because of war, Afghanistan is a development country". Rayi's answer is serious and results in other participants being quite silent. In contrast, Mikko discusses the topic of war from a more positive perspective, as a way of forming positive national identity, as can be seen from Example 13 below.

Example 13

Mikko: I think, they think that we are very (H) (hmm) we have, because in the world war two, we were fighting against Russia and we were very strong… and… and sisu! We had good sisu.
Eila: @Okay
Mikko: Do you know what sisu means?
Others: [most said no, someone said yes]
Mikko: It means strength, good strength

Another instance that highlights the diversity within answers became apparent when reviewing answers to question 12 about sleeping preferences. Rayi's answer (Example 14) and Tereza's answer (Example 15) are shown below, as they highlight a different perspective to the topic, and again show how more lighthearted topics were received by laughter and comments from the listening participants, whereas more serious answers to the same question resulted in fewer comments.

Example 14
Rayi: (H) Yes. And the… I feel like my sleep is not well. (Hx) Sometime I- I used to eat sleeping pills, so I think maybe it's because of #tension or #stress I have about my family. Maybe it is because of that. (H) Yeah. Okay…. That's it.

Example 15
Tereza: (um) I usually go to sleep around 10 or 11 pm, its's like usual, but (um) sometimes because I don't have to early, so when I wake up little bit not very early, for example around eight or nine, I'm not feel sleepy in this (um) time like around 10 pm, so sometimes I go to sleep around (um) (um) (a) midnight. Midnight. It depends. So, but it's interesting because when I in Czech I go sleep (uh) always before 10. So I have to wake up to the work and I have to sleep earlier. So it's now it's getting @#latiest.
Others: [Laugh]
Eila: Do you like it? [laugh]
Tereza: (uh) I like it, but uh I don't like how I get to @sleep @more!
Others: [Laugh]
T: Yeah it sneaks up on you.

These examples demonstrate how certain topics can be looked and discussed from many different perspectives, which might be affected by past personal memories or experiences, values or shared cultural assumptions. As a result, some topics might be more sensitive to others.

### 6.1.5 Assuming familiarity and/or unfamiliarity

When analyzing the data, it became apparent that sometimes the participants answered in a way that revealed whether or not they believed other participants to be familiar with their culture or some specific topics that they were discussing. In other words, sometimes participants spoke very generally and left many things to the imagination of the listener, and thus assumed the participants to be already familiar with these topics. In contrast, sometimes topics were explained more thoroughly or the speaker asked questions to ensure that the listeners knew what he or she was talking about, and thus assumed the at least some of the participants to be unfamiliar with their topic of discussion. However, in most cases it was difficult to draw a line between assumed familiarity and assumed unfamiliarity as expressed by the speaker. It was not always possible to do detailed analysis of the answers, as they were very simplistic in nature.

As all of the speakers were language learners at different levels of English competence, some had better skills than others to express detailed meanings. Maybe some participants would have expressed themselves differently if they had had the linguistic resources for it. Also, it was not always sure what was assumed familiarity and what was just simplistic way of saying things.

When discussing wedding customs, the answers of different participants indicated that they might assume the listeners to have different levels of familiarity with their culture's traditions. Below are three excerpts (Examples 16, 17 and 18) taken from three different answers. They are presented here in chronological order, but other questions were discussed in between each reply, so they are not direct replies to each other.

Example 16:
Tereza: In Czech it's typical when it's after the wedding at church **when both said yes** and after when the husband and wife are going to the restaurant where will be **the lunch** they have to do few things.

Example 17:
Sein: In my country, there's two different culture #as #married. As for my culture, is- Islamic culture, wedding, is like (uh) firstly we have to go #mass and there is (uh) two sides. The girl side and the boy's side. They go in front of imam. **Imam is-, imam means, how do I say… Imam mean…**
Tereza: Kind of priest
Sein: Yeah. And then agreement, agreement letter or something sign and then we celebrate and some place and we celebrate and we cook meat and food and most of people are coming to eat.

Example 18:
Rayi: Then about the like wedding culture, so we invite many people so we make good food and the put good music @or the **of course we have separate plans for men and women**, yeah they are separate. All man have their own party and woman have their own party. Dancing, an- like some other game.

Some elements of assumed familiarity can be seen in Teresa's answer, as she very generally refers to the wedding ceremony at church as "when both said yes" and wedding ceremony including "the lunch". These traditions are not further explained, as she perhaps assumed them to be very familiar to the listeners. It can be noticed from Sein's answer, that he explains the wedding ceremony a bit more in detail than Tereza did. Sein tries to explain what *Imam* means and he also explains how men and women are situated during the wedding ceremony. These can be thought to be examples of assumed unfamiliarity. Rayi also explains that men and women have different agendas during weddings, but his use of the phrase "of course" before saying it can cause the listeners to believe that they should already know this information or

that it is very typical in Rayi's culture. More such examples would be needed to assess how the speakers refer to topics that they perceive as unfamiliar or familiar to other listening participants.

However, the difference between assumed familiarity and assumed unfamiliarity can be assessed in instances when the speaker was shifting between these two assumptions. The excerpt from Teresa's answer (as shown in Example 16) had such shift, and it continued as follows (shown in Example 19):

Example 19:

Tereza: [..] they have to do few things. Usually the men has to show that he can take care of the women, of the- of his wife and he is so strong and that mean he has to cut the wood. There is a like a @big @piece @of wood like it's from a tree, you cut the tree and it's part of the tree. And he have to cut it with a (uh) [gestures the motion of holding an axe and cutting something with it]

Mikko: Axe

Tereza: Axe, yeah. And he have to like cut it in half and if he can do this it means yes you are strong you can take care to your wife. And the wife has to show that she is like can take care about the household and about the men and there is a thing someone take a plate and throw it on the fool and the plate is like broken. And the wife has to use small. She has to clean it with a broom. Yeah, broom, and small like, she broom it and clean every pieces and they always take one of these pieces to take to take like for luck for this marriage. So this is @what @we @are doing in Czech.

In Example 16, Tereza started her story about weddings by telling things that are possibly more general, and she did not bother to explain them in much detail. Then, in Example 19, she mentioned traditions that are possibly more specific in nature. In these instances, she thoroughly explained these traditions, and thus assumed that the listeners had no previous knowledge about them. Other possible instance when there was a shift from assumed familiarity to assumed unfamiliarity can be seen in example 7 (and perhaps also in example 6) above, where baby showers are only shortly mentioned by Anne, but not explained any further. Perhaps information about baby showers is regarded by her as part of general knowledge, and she assumed others to be familiar with them already. However, she shifted to assuming unfamiliarity when she explained more thoroughly the traditions that she perceived as more "Finnish". Thus, assumed familiarity possibly leads to shorter and more general answers, whereas assumed unfamiliarity encourages the speaker to explain the topic more thoroughly.

To summarize all of these approaches, it can be stated that collaboration was the main approach used by the participants. Collaborative efforts increased as time passed, and collaboration was at its highest in discussions that contained a lot of laughter or humor, when familiar topics were discussed and when the speaker was searching for right words and others chose to help him or

her. Comparisons were done mainly by the immigrant participants, and referencing was done to highlight similarities between traditions. Gesturing happened quite often, and it was used as an additional resource to construct meanings when the right words could not be found. The Finnish language was also an additional resource that was used by the Finnish participants to ask and receive help. There was a need to sometimes express notions related to diversity, as sometimes participants wanted to clarify that they do not identify with certain aspects within their cultural background. Diversity was also visible when comparing answers to similar topics from different participants. Furthermore, participants sometimes assumed others to be familiar or unfamiliar with their topic of discussion, and this affected how detailed their stories where. Next, it is examined how cultural and neutral questions were received by the participants.

## 6.2 No such thing as "neutral"?

The conversation activity contained questions that explicitly related to culture (questions 3, 4 ,5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14 and 16, later referred simply as CQ's) and questions that were more neutral in tone (questions 6, 8, 11, 12 and 15, later referred simply as NQ's). Cultural questions encouraged the participants to recall past personal memories and to share stories based on these recollections (e.g. question 3: What is a game you used to play when you were a child?). Answering cultural questions also sometimes required the participant to more generally describe traditions of their home country (e.g. question 5: What is a typical wedding custom in your country?). In contrast, neutral questions usually required the participant to describe their personal habits (e.g. question 6: Tell us about a book that you have liked reading.) or simply to describe something general that is happening around them (e.g. question 11: How is the weather like today?). See Appendix 3 for all of the conversation activity questions.

When the answers to CQ's were compared to the answers that were given to NQ's, it was discovered that the approaches (which were discussed in the previous section) to construct cultural meanings were more commonly used when answering cultural questions. There were 9 answers given to neutral questions and 18 answers given to cultural questions. In addition to this, Mikko did not want to answer to one NQ and Sein chose not to answer to one CQ. Out of those 9 answers to NQ's, half of them (n. 5) had at least one recognizable approach to construct meanings about culture. In contrast, from 18 answers to CQ's, 16 of them had at least one such

approach. In most cases, discussion or answers that were given to CQ's lasted longer and were more often also accompanied by collaborative meaning-making from the listening participants. To summarize, CQ's resulted in more overall engagement and discussion, which was usually lengthier and resulted in the participants to use multiple different methods to construct meanings about culture.

It should be mentioned that this comparison does not tell the whole truth. Although CQ's resulted in more elaborative answers and to different approaches being used, half of NQ's resulted in comparisons being made, or to collaborative meaning-making. Thus, NQ's also triggered cultural topics to be brought up. Example of such situation can be seen in Example 4. Also, there were only half as many answers to NQ's as there were to CQ's, so they are not completely comparable in that sense either. In addition, the nature of the NQ's was quite different from the CQ's, as NQ's were often quite simple questions that solely required the participant to tell about themselves or their personal habits. In comparison, CQ's were often more complex in nature, and they required the participant to explain events and phenomena in a larger context than just their personal lives. Thus, answering CQ's required more effort, and also had greater responsibility, because the answering participant had to explain more complex phenomena.

## 6.3 Focus group's opinions about the conversation activity

Generally, the focus group viewed the conversation activity as a positive experience. They described the conversation activity as "interesting", "useful" and as a "good way to know other countries". Tereza explained that the activity allowed her to "hear about other countries and about other customs". Sein explained that the activity was useful for him as "everyone got a chance to talk". Lucia stated that the activity allowed topics to be discussed that would not probably otherwise be brought up. Her answer can be seen in Example 20:

Example 20
Lucia: I think that there is a good way to know the others countries, I mean it's not the questions that you maybe ask if you @don't @have @that @question.

Others seemed to agree on Lucia's comment. Thus, it can be predicted that this activity allowed the participants to discuss more specific topics than what would be probable in everyday situations.

The focus group stated that they preferred questions that allowed them to hear about other group members' culture and traditions. Each focus group member gave a different answer when asked which question or discussion they found to be the most interesting one. However, all of the named discussions related to CQ's. Questions that were named as most interesting are listed below in the order that they were mentioned.

- Tell us about a family ritual or tradition.
- When people from other countries think about your culture, what do they usually think of?
- What games did you play when you were a child?
- What is a typical wedding custom in your home country?
- In your home country, do you celebrate new babies being born to the family? How?

These questions and discussions were all ones that had been discussed for at least two different participants. Thus, it allowed the comparison between different cultures to occur. Perhaps it was also easier to remember questions that were answered multiple times. Participants stated that the reason why they preferred these questions was that they were able to hear about how certain things are done in other cultures besides their own. As Sein explained, hearing about wedding customs and childhood games was interesting because "it's different from my country. I just heard for the first time from other country, culture, and wedding. I saw it online, but now I heard". Thus, this activity was a way for him to discuss and hear about cultural topics in person, instead of just seeing such topics being discussed on the internet. In addition, it was interesting for the participants to hear how cultural stereotypes and assumptions are viewed within a specific culture, thus, from the point of view of a person who identifies with that specific culture.

When it was asked, how the activity could be improved, only one participant came up with a possible solution. Lucia said that more people could have answered the same question. This seemed to be agreed on by others as well, as they showed signs of agreement, such as nodding their heads. Thus, participants perhaps would have preferred the activity to be more dialogical.

Otherwise, the participants said that there was nothing to be improved. However, when discussing other topics, Rayi mentioned that for him personal questions relating only to himself were easier to answer than those that required him to talk about more complex phenomena, such as culture. His answer can be seen in Example 21 below.

Example 21
Rayi: (ahm) When, when there was a question like, like, personal question it is more easy, so, like for example, there was a question how many hours do you sleep at night. It is a little bit more easy. But when there was some question about culture, so because in our country, there live different nations, so they have different cultures, so, it's a little bit difficult to explain the whole (eh) culture of Afghanistan, in general. (H)Yeah.

In his answer, Rayi states that many different nations with different cultural backgrounds live in his country and this makes it more difficult to answer questions related to culture. From the example above, it can be hypothesized that for Rayi it was easier to talk about topics that related more directly to himself, than to larger groups of people, such as the community he perceives to share the same cultural background with.

## 6.4 The immigrant participants as English speakers and users

The immigrant participant's opinions related to their own language use and learning were also analyzed in more detail. Special focus was given to the *significance of English language proficiency* as well as *factors facilitating and prohibiting English language learning and use*, as the sub-questions under research question two focused on answering to these topics. These two topics are explored more in detail next.

### 6.4.1 The significance of English language proficiency

Participants felt that having good proficiency in English gives them many opportunities and allows them to communicate with people. English was seen as a valuable resource that enables them to better achieve goals related to social interaction and education and to achieve certain things, such as get new friends and access information. English language proficiency was emphasized by all of the participants in their answers, but from varying perspectives. In the focus group's answers, the significance of using, understanding and learning English was

commonly associated with topics of *social interaction, confidence, future opportunities* and *access to information.* These topics are now explored further by reviewing these common themes that were found from the interview data.

According to the focus group, English functions as a way for them to communicate with people. Lucia and Tereza explained that using English is the only way to communicate with people in Finland, as they do not feel competent enough to speak Finnish. In addition, both Lucia and Tereza added that they do not think that locals will know Spanish or Czech, which are their respective native languages, so English is the only resource that they can use to communicate with locals. Tereza emphasized that she studies English in Finland to make friends. She reasoned that speaking In English "is a way how I can meet someone and speak with someone". The importance of having good proficiency in English was mentioned to be crucial in Finland by all of the participants, but Rayi also mentioned its importance when traveling and in other intercultural communication situations.

As well as the general benefits that English proficiency gives in social interactions, the positive effects of English proficiency to personal confidence were also discussed in some answers. Learning English and becoming better at it was seen as a way to increase confidence about one's own skills in English. Participating in English learning group was seen as a method to increase confidence. Confidence was also seen to increase by learning more English. Confidence in one's own speaking skills was often seen as something that was worth improving and lack of skills was seen as an insecurity. All participants emphasized that they want to foremost learn to be better at speaking English. Sein explained that he is not a confident English speaker, as he often makes mistakes, and his solution to fix this insecurity is to keep learning more, as he stated that "I am not confidence, because sometimes I mistake [..] most of time I mistake, but I try to learn more and more". Confidence was also linked to being more comfortable in social interaction as Tereza explained that she feels "comfortable talking English with others, if you know a little bit about the language you can speak and not so worry about it". Thus, sufficient skills in English were a way to get by in social interactions and to also feel good about themselves when they are speaking English.

Besides the benefits that skills in English give in social interaction and in surviving basic communication situations, some participants emphasized the importance of it for their future,

especially when studying or working. These views were communicated in answers by Sein and Rayi. Sein explained that he benefits from having proficiency in English, as it will help him in his studies. He also mentioned that he sees skills in English to benefit his future. Rayi had similar opinions, as he stated that if he wants to study, he can find relevant resources for it in English. He also mentions that English has benefitted him in working contexts. He however did not specifically state that he believes that English would help him in working contexts in the future, as he was discussing his past during his answer.

Participants also saw the benefits of knowing English in relation to being able to access information online. As Rayi explained, many information sources are available in English, but not with his own native language. His answer can be seen below, in Example 22. Lucia and Sein had similar opinions, as they joined to speak for the significance of skills in English when trying to navigate online. They both felt that it is important to learn English to be able to access the resources found online. Their responses can be seen in Examples 22 and 23.

Example 22
Rayi: Yeah I think, English language is very importance, it's an international language, so if I travel, everywhere, English is the only key I can use to solve. My problem, so when I came to Finland, so, I passed many countries, so the only thing that help me a lot was the English language. Also, there is many resource if I want to like, study being in university or school everywhere. So, there is #many source I can find from internet with English language, I can't find that resource with my own language.

Example 23
Lucia: Just like he said [reference to Rayi's earlier answer] that all the resources in the internet are either in English or Suomi [Finnish].

Besides the benefits of being able to easily access information online, English was seen as an international language and as a "key" to solve situations by Rayi. In his answer, he highlighted that English was his only resource that he could use to survive in these new circumstances. Others seemed to agree on this notion, as they nodded and vocally expressed agreement.

### 6.4.2 Factors facilitating and prohibiting English use

According to answers from the participants, factors such as multicultural group setting and lingua franca use of English were seen to facilitate learning and using English. On the other hand, needing to speak English in larger group of people, or with native English speakers was

seen more negatively by the participants. Having a person with similar cultural background in the language learning situation was seen as both positive and negative factor: while it could facilitate understanding and make the situation more comfortable, it could result in less effort and thus prohibit further learning and speaking efforts.

Speaking with non-native English speakers was seen as a positive context to speak and learn English. When asked about when or in what situations the participants feel comfortable to speak in English, the participants were rather quick to come up with answers: It was said by Lucia that she feels more comfortable when she can speak with people who are not native English speakers. Her answer is displayed in Example 24.

Example 24
Lucia: Maybe with people from other countries I feel a little more comfortable because @everybody is- has their own accent. […] with people from other countries I feel a little bit more comfortable.

As the example above highlights, Lucia said that different accents and the non-native speaker status of the counterparty actually help her to feel more comfortable when she is speaking English with somebody. Lucia continued that making mistakes does not feel as bad in a situation where everyone is an English language learner. Other participants seemed to agree with this notion. In other words, the lingua-franca usage of English feels comfortable and easier to the participant, rather than having to speak with someone who is a native speaker.

Besides the nativity of the counterparty, the group brought up other factors. Tereza said that it is easier to speak in English when the speaking companion is not a stranger, but somebody who you already are familiar with. Other participants agreed with her point, and this interaction is presented in Example 25:

Example 25
Tereza: And I think it is easier when you are speaking with someone who I little bit know
Sein: Yeah!
Tereza: It's not like some random person, but if we know each other, this way it is like easier for me to speak with you and with other people. And as you said [looks at Lucia, refers to her earlier statement, displayed in Example 22] with citizens or with people from other countries, it's-
Lucia: I mean it is difficult for me to maybe understand a native English speaker
Tereza: Yeah yeah!
Lucia: Because they speak @faster @and well…
Rayi: Yes!

Based on the group's opinions, it could be hypothesized that this multicultural group likes to practice English in a setting similar to the conversation activity, as the group members were not strangers to each other and none of them is a native English speaker. Lucia said that one reason why she feels more comfortable to speak with people who are not native speakers, is that they speak more slowly than native speakers. Other group members seemed to agree with the opinions expressed by Lucia and Tereza.

Having a person with similar cultural background in the language learning situation was seen as both positive and a negative factor. Their conversation on the topic can be seen in Example 26 below.

Example 26:

Rayi: It would help so, in some point, if I don't understand, I would ask him. And he can explain that in my own language. It's good I think.

Lucia: Yes, I think that it will be easier, but, you don't have any translator, so you have to, (ehm) I don't know, so you have to talk about whatever with anybody without any give you a hint, how you say something, so I think that you can maybe learn a little more.

Tereza: I think I will try little bit less, if I have something from Czech republic in here, so I will not try to speak because maybe I will not have to speak so much if there is some my friend I will just ask him and maybe he will tell me it, so it will be like I am safe and he can tell it. So-

Sein: Yeah.

Tereza: Maybe I prefer this with- without another person.

Sein: It will- it may be helpful for me, but without uhm I don't know, so… It is okay.

The group proposed two differing points about this topic, as can be seen in Example 26 above. As Rayi and Sein both explain, this kind of scenario could be beneficial if clarification or help with understanding is needed. Other positive factor that was mentioned was a sense of safeness. Lucia and Tereza focused more on the possible negative aspects that such situation might include, as it might prohibit learning and speaking English. Lucia thinks that you have a better chance of learning English when you need to speak with others with no help from somebody else. Tereza explains that even thought a person from the same cultural/language background would bring a feeling of safeness, she would probably not try as hard to communicate herself. Sein had mixed opinions, as he agreed with Teresa's opinion, but it seemed that he also felt to do just okay without the help of another person who speaks his language. Overall, the group felt that having another person to count on would give reassurance, but perhaps prohibit the active language use and learning that would happen otherwise.

# 7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine how a culturally responsive conversation activity is received by a multicultural group of adult EFL learners, and how meanings about culture were built during the activity. Furthermore, immigrant participants' opinions related to the activity as well as to their English use and learning were explored. The topic was studied by approaching it with these two main research questions: *1) how does a multicultural group of adult EFL learners respond and react to a conversation activity that utilizes culturally responsive teaching strategies?* and *2) how do the adult immigrant participants view topics related to English use and learning?* To answer these research questions, seven adult English learners were studied as they took part in a conversation activity that utilized principles of culturally responsive education. Furthermore, a group interview was organized for four participants with immigrant background. The data gathered from the conversation activity were analyzed by methods of qualitative content analysis and cultural analysis and as a result several approaches emerged from the data revealing the diverse nature that culture can manifest in multicultural discussions. In addition, the interview data were analyzed by methods of qualitative content analysis, and the findings highlight participants' opinions related to English language use and learning in their special circumstance of living as newcomers in Finland. In this chapter, the findings of this study are firstly summarized (7.1) by reviewing some of the most prominent findings of this study. Next, the findings are elaborated and discussed in the light of previous research findings (7.2). Next, limitations of this study are considered (7.3), followed by implications (7.4). Lastly, the study is evaluated and recommendations for further research are proposed (7.5).

## 7.1 Summary of the findings

### 7.1.1 Multicultural group of adults as recipients of CRE

The first research question was *how does a multicultural group of adult EFL learners respond and react to a conversation activity that utilizes culturally responsive teaching strategies.* To answer this question, three more detailed sub-questions followed, which were all dedicated in answering different aspects of this more general question. Firstly, different approaches to

construct cultural meanings were highlighted in the findings. Secondly, answers to neutral and cultural question were compared and contrasted. And thirdly, immigrant participants' opinions about the conversation activity were asked. This section summarizes the most prominent findings related to these topics.

The analysis indicated that participants used many different tactics, or approaches, to construct meanings about culture. Five most prominently used approaches were discussed in this study. The most noticeable finding related to these approaches was the amount of collaborative effort to discuss the topics. Participants all used collaborative means to construct meanings about their own culture and also helped others in building stories about their cultures. Collaboration increased as the activity continued further, as the participants were more eager to be collaborative as time passed. The most prominent ways of being collaborative included asking question or asking for help, helping others, laughing and copying linguistic structures. Collaboration was observed to be at its highest when many participants joined in the conversation and this usually happened when the topic discussed could be classified as humorous, relatable to others or when the person speaking needed help in finding the right words.

Participants also chose to sometimes make comparisons or reference to previous answers. Comparisons were most notably done by immigrant participants when they were answering neutral questions, which were meant to trigger answers about the current situation or personal habits. In these instances, immigrant participants made references to their earlier life circumstances and compared their life here in Finland to their life in their home country. Comparing was also done by Finnish participants, as they sometimes compared past and the present, thus comparing was not solely done by the immigrant participants. References were quite often made between different participants in their answers, perhaps to highlight similarities between cultural traditions.

Other three approaches were not as commonly used, but still quite visible in the overall analysis of the conversation activity. These included additional resources of gesturing and using Finnish, expressing diversity and assuming familiarity and/or unfamiliarity. The approach to use additional resources included using hand gestures and asking for help in Finnish in finding the right words. In addition, participants sometimes expressed notions related to diversity. When

doing so, they discussed cultural traditions that have recently become popular due to flows of globalization, expressed that there are many different traditions within their home country or stated that they do not agree with certain cultural traditions or stereotypes that are associated to their own cultural group. Some notions of diversity were also detected when different participants discussed similar topics from different perspectives and thus received different reactions from other participants. Finally, the last approach dealt with assumed unfamiliarity or familiarity. In other words, in some answers participants were probably assuming that other participants were familiar with the topic that they were discussing. On the other hand, sometimes unfamiliarity was assumed by the speaker.

When analyzing the cultural and neutral questions (CQ's and NQ's), findings revealed that CQ's resulted in lengthier and more elaborative answers and in more approaches to be used to construct cultural meanings. However, the division between CQ's and NQ's was not clear-cut. When answering neutral questions, participants still sometimes discussed cultural topics in some ways (in 50% of the answers). There were not as many answers to neutral questions, as the activity contained fewer NQ's and the procession of the activity's questions was randomized.

Immigrant participants had generally positive opinions about the conversation activity. They regarded it as interesting and useful, as it allowed more unique topics to be discussed and differences to be compared. All immigrant participants named CQ's as their favorite. Negative sides of the activity included limited opportunities to discuss interesting topics and the complex task to explain culture.

### 7.1.2 Immigrant participants and English

The second research question of this study was *how do the adult immigrant participants view topics related to English use and learning*? This topic was approached by examining the significance that skills in English have in the participants' lives as well as identifying factors that facilitate or prohibit using and learning English. Overall, English was seen as a valuable resource that allowed the participants to fulfill their aims and goals related to social interaction and education. Furthermore, English was associated to access of information and to personal confidence. As participants all stated that they do not know enough Finnish no function fully

in society with it, they resort to using English to establish social relations, to study and to access information online. English skill were viewed as an important asset by all participants.

Using English was expressed to be easier and more comfortable when it happens between lingua franca speakers, thus, non-native English speakers. The use of different accents was seen as a positive factor as well. Non-native status of the counterparty also eases the fear of making mistakes when speaking English, as all of the speakers are language learners. Another facilitating factor to be identified was the familiarity of the speaking companions. Participants expressed that the person should be at least somewhat known or familiar beforehand. Big group discussions and the fear of making mistakes when speaking English were seen as factors that prohibit the use of English due to the participants feeling uncomfortable. Having a culturally and/or linguistically similar other in an English learning situation was thought to have both positive and negative aspects associated to it. While it would allow asking and receiving help in the participants' native language and feelings of safeness, it was also hypothesized to possibly prohibit effective language learning and speaking.

## 7.2 Relating the results to previous studies

As the findings of this study indicate, discussing cultural topics in a multicultural setting leads to a situation where the language learners apply many different approaches to construct meanings about their own culture, as well as to maintain collaborative discussions. Gay (2018) concludes that culturally responsive teaching encourages learners to learn about each other's cultural heritage and personal background and to build mutual understanding. As the participants in this study stated, they prefer to learn and speak English with people who they already know beforehand, as it is easier this way for them. Thus, it can be assumed based on the participants' answers that mutual understanding can make the communication and learning situation feel more comfortable for them. According to Gay (2018), hearing stories and discussing about classmates' cultural background can create mutual understanding and make the learning situation more relatable. Indeed, as the conversation activity was meant to provoke discussion about culture, it also functioned as a way for the participants to deepen their understanding about each other, their background and their home cultures. All immigrant participants stated after the activity that the main positive factor about it was the ability to hear

about other group members' cultures. In addition, the activity provided a way to explore topics below the mere surface level, as one of the participants, Lucia, explained that more unique questions resulted in hearing about things that would not have been brought up otherwise.

The conversation activity that this study took its inspiration from was designed for 3rd grade students, and the original activity was used so that the students could "inquire, discuss, write, and share about aspects of their family history, cultural history, life experiences and personal attributes" (Sobel and Taylor 2011: 138-139). Although the activity in this study was solely focused on discussion, it had otherwise very similar goals. Based on the immigrant student's feedback after the activity, the activity seemed to reach these goals. Participants had mainly positive things to say about the activity, such as being able to hear and share stories about cultural traditions and learning new unique facts about different cultures. In addition, it was seen as a positive factor that everyone got a chance to talk during the activity.

The findings of this study are an indication that CRE and using the learner's culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings 1995a) is something that should be considered as a facilitating factor when teaching English to multicultural adults. As my findings suggest, discussing cultural topics in a multicultural setting creates discussion and engagement, as there often are many differences to be found between past experiences and cultural traditions. In addition, it creates cooperative activity to take place as well as comparing and contrasting. The vast life experience of the adult learners is a positive factor in this sense, as it adds to the number of possible experiences to be discussed. The differences and similarities in cultural traditions and personal memories were found interesting to discuss by the participants. As Palojärvi-Serratti (2014) discovered when studying adult immigrants as Finnish language learners, learning was at its best when it was cooperative and cultural comparison could be made between participants. As can be seen, this similar approach of discussing cultural traditions can be also applied to teaching and learning English, or perhaps to any language for that matter. If the aim is to teach and practice speaking in a foreign or second language, it can be more engaging for the speaker to learn speaking skills by talking and hearing about topics that feel meaningful to them.

The findings of this study revealed that when the language abilities of the speakers were insufficient, they either used additional linguistic resources (in this case the Finnish language) or asked for help from others in English. In addition, hand gestures were often used when the

right words in English could not be recalled. Thus, this can be an indication that the participants were invested in telling their stories, despite making mistakes with their use of English. As an example, although Sein explained that he fears making mistakes, he still often tried to explain cultural traditions and customs that included words that he simply did not know. Thus, Sein explained later during the interview that his solution for not making mistakes is "to learn more and more". Making mistakes is a crucial part of trying to speak in a foreign language but speaking about meaningful subjects while learning can ease the tension of speaking in English.

Similarly to this study, strategies relating to CRE were also implemented in a case study by Chen and Yang (2017), as they studied how active classroom participation of EFL learners with an immigrant background changed once these students are encouraged to discuss and share opinions and experiences related to cultural topics. Their findings indicated that including cultural aspects to English classroom increases immigrant students' participation. In this study, this shift in participation can be examined by comparing the responses to neutral and cultural questions. As the findings revealed, answers to CQ's were lengthier and received more overall engagement by the group members. Thus, it can be considered that cultural topics increased the level of participation also in this study. However, for a more conclusive answer on this, more data would be needed. This activity could be tested by applying similar methods as Chen and Yang, as they measured the baseline participation before applying methods of CRE into the learning situation. Similarly, the conversation activity and its effects to the amount of participation should be explored by first observing the group during their normal learning activities, and then once methods of CRE are applied.

All of the participants of this study could be categorized as lingua franca users of English, as they speak it as a foreign language. Cogo and Dewy (2012: 4) explained how lingua franca users "exploit the language" as well as modify it, to collaboratively construct meanings. Similar activity was analyzed to happen within this multicultural group of adult learners, as their discussion was highly collaborative and used several different methods when attempting to discuss cultural topics. Users of English as lingua franca are regarded to use the language "innovatively and resourcefully" (Cogo and Dewy 2012: 4). In this study, participants often tried their best to tell stories and to achieve common understanding. This was sometimes done by asking help, blending hand gestures with talk and using Finnish. Participants also offered help, as there was a shared understanding that everyone in the group was a language learner,

and not an expert. In addition, sometimes new phrases were “invented”, probably in situations when the original word was not known or remembered but it was still considered necessary to try to come up with a suitable phrase (see Example 3 in section 6.1.1).

This lingua franca user status of the counterparty was also mentioned as a factor that makes speaking English more comfortable by the immigrant participants, as well as hearing different accents. As the participants were all lingua franca English speakers themselves, perhaps this was the most usual and most familiar context for them to speak and hear English. The reason for preferring lingua franca users also reflected the insecurities that the participants have about their own English language skills. Almost all of the immigrant participants mentioned at some point during the interview that they make a lot of mistakes when using English. They reasoned that when everyone is at the same level, thus a language learner, making mistakes or pronouncing words with one’s own accent does not feel as bad.

Similarly to findings of Jalava (2011), Jäppinen (2011), Nokelainen (2013) and Iikkanen (2020), the immigrant participants in my study viewed English as an important resource that can be used as a lingua franca when Finnish skills are not yet sufficient. All of the immigrant participants in my study had lived in Finland for quite a short time (4 years, 2 years, 3 months and 2 months) and most reported to have very limited skills in Finnish. Thus, it was not possible to explore how this topic would be approached if Finnish skills were felt to be sufficient for daily activities. However, based on some findings of previous studies (e.g. Jalava 2011, Iikkanen 2020), there are connections between Finnish and English studies. In Jalava’s (2011) study, the participants expressed that the importance of English decreased when necessary skills in Finnish had been acquired. Hence, it is probable that the importance of English is highlighted by immigrants when their Finnish skills are insufficient. In addition, the long-term goals of the immigrants may affect how they approach their Finnish studies (Iikkanen 2020), and this in turn can degrease or increase the value that is given to skills in English. Such conclusions about the relationship between Finnish and English cannot be made based on the findings of this study, but previous studies indicate that there may be underlying connections. However, both this study and previous studies share notions about English being a *key* (as was expressed by Rayi, one of the participants in this study) which can help to get by when faced with daily problems and activities.

The study participants in this study expressed somewhat similar opinions about the significance of English as participants in Jalava's (2011) study, as findings in both studies indicated that English is seen as a tool to acquire education. This might be the case, as increasingly more education providers have study programs also in English (Hakulinen et al. 2009: 76-85). However, according to findings of Jalava (2011), working in English was seen as a less probable option. The participants in this study did not emphasize the importance of English for future goals related to working, so it is not possible to compare the results of this study in that regard. However, some of this study's participants emphasized the importance of English especially in relation to communication. Tereza and Lucia explained that at the moment English was the sole language that they could use to have conversation with Finnish people and to get new friends here. They expressed that they are unable to communicate in Finnish or in their native languages with people in Finland and they believed that people in Finland know how to speak English. Acquiring and maintaining social contacts was also seen as an important factor for integration into Finnish society in findings by Jalava (2011).

World culture is a concept which describes cultural elements which have spread around the globe due to flows of globalization (Boli and Lechner 2015). When this study's participants were discussing traditions such as baby showers, they expressed to have noticed these kind of cultural traditions that are happening in their surroundings, but which they still do not identify as part of their own culture. They were felt to be prominent enough to mention, but it was still regarded as necessary to highlight that the tradition originates from somewhere else. Elements of world culture are debatable (Boli and Lechner 2015), but it can be argued that the effects of globalization and world culture can be made visible also by examining stories about cultural elements. Even though both Lucia and Eila mentioned to have baby showers as part of their respective cultural traditions, it was left to imagination how these traditions still might differ from one another, or how they have been glocalized to fit the unique context of the local culture (Robertson 1992; Boli and Lechner 2015).

Several factors probably affected how the participants were able to communicate and chose to use different approaches to construct cultural meanings. Their level of competence in English was probably one of the biggest affecting factors. None of the participants were inactive during the activity, as all of them were engaged and commented on others stories as well as shared their own stories. However, some differences in the level of participation could be noticed.

Form the immigrant participants, it was observed that Tereza was the most collaborative and active participant, as she was eager to comment, ask questions and help others. Her own answers were also very elaborative. Tereza reported to have studied English for about 10 years. Lucia was also quite active during the conversation activity, and she reported to have studied English since she was a child. In contrast, Rayi and Sein were not as active in some respects. Rayi reported to have studied English for two years, and Sein reported to have studied English a little bit as a child, and more after graduation. From the Finnish participants, Mikko was observed to be the most active and collaborative. He reported to have studied English for about 12 years. Eila was also quite active during the game and she reported to have studied English for 6 years, whereas Anne had studied English for 3 years. However, it is recognized that many other factors, such as personal preferences, attitudes towards certain topics of discussion, personality traits and the specific contexts affected their choices and ways of being in that situation.

When discussing the findings of this study, it is also important to consider the ethical questions that it may raise. Sometimes cultural topics are simply difficult to discuss, as was explained by one of the participants, Rayi. In addition, discussing certain topics may trigger memories or emotions that are not pleasant, and such negative emotions probably will not benefit the learning in that situation. On the other hand, challenging topics are as important to discuss as more lighthearted topics, as they reveal different perspectives and possibly reinforce mutual understanding. Some answers in the data revealed how certain topics can be discussed from various perspectives. Discussing for example about war or sleeping preferences can ultimately result in very different answers. It is important to consider, how to ensure a safe environment to also discuss topics that might be sensitive to some participants, or trigger hard emotions. It is also necessary to emphasize that answering always has to be voluntary. Also, as the teacher and the group begin to understand each other's backgrounds better, difficult situations might be easier to overcome. CRE encourages the teacher and the whole classroom to learn about each other's personal backgrounds and to learn how to appreciate them (Gay 2018: 37). However, this mutual learning should always take place in a context that feels comfortable for all of the participants.

## 7.3 Limitations of the study

While this study contributes to the literature on CRE with adult learners, it also has some limitations. As this study is a case study, the findings only provide a very limited view to the issues discussed. Generalization based on the findings is not possible, but the study can, however, provide suggestions for further research. These limitations are next examined more in detail. Firstly, limitations lie within the limited scope of this study. Only one conversation activity was organized, thus all the data were gathered during this one singular period of time. As a result, only seven people participated and were studied during the conversation activity, and four people were interviewed afterwards. Interviewing more immigrant participants could have yielded very different results, as the observations made and the opinions heard of only four people with immigrant background provides a very limited view of immigrants residing in Finland. Similarly, interviewing also Finnish participants instead of only immigrant participants could have resulted in more diverse opinions about the conversation activity and opinions related to the use and learning of English could have been better compared during the group interview.

Similarly, having multiple data gatherings and organizing multiple conversation activities with the same group could have yielded more comprehensive results, as stated previously. The discussion could have been more diverse and carefree after the first data gathering, as the tension of a new situation would have been eased. It would have also enabled comparisons to be made. However, having only a few participants ultimately allowed me to focus better on their individual answers and to develop a throughout analysis of their opinions. Also, organizing multiple data gathering events was not possible at the time due to limitation in participants' availability and other time restraints. Moreover, observing the same participants during multiple occasions would have allowed better understanding of the group dynamics and closer familiarization with the immigrant participants' cultural traditions. Hence, misunderstandings when interpreting the data could have been avoided better. In addition, this could have brought to attention subliminal cultural biases that were present when analyzing the data. However, I tried my best to represent the participants justly and to always consider my own cultural understandings and attitudes when analyzing their statements about culture.

The context of the interview probably also affected on the credibility of the interview results. Although participants had mainly positive things to say about the activity, it must be considered that in that specific interview context, it was probably difficult to give critical or negative feedback about the activity, as the researcher was asking for this feedback. Other factors probably also affected the statements given during the interview, such as difficulties in understanding or communicating in English and giving answers which are thought to be expected by the researcher (Nieminen et al. 2015: 40). Having the participant fill an anonymous survey could have revealed more detailed opinions about the successfulness of the activity, as possible negative comments could have been told without the pressure of stating them out loud. However, studies done by Nieminen et al. (2015) reveal that having written questionnaires when studying immigrant participants has its own set of problems.

## 7.4 Implications

The implications of this study's results are examined next. This study provides foremost implications for teaching immigrant adults, but also for adult learner groups in general. As the results of this study reveal that immigrant participants had positive opinions about the conversation activity that utilized methods of CRE, such activities should be implemented as one important part of curriculum when teaching adult immigrants. This study's findings were in accordance with previous findings in that adult learners see leaning and speaking about other cultures as relevant and interesting. When speaking about adult immigrants, discussing their vast life experiences can be utilized as a way to increase cultural knowledge of the whole group. Therefore, as CRE is meant for also people from the majority culture, hearing more about the minority cultures can be a way to increase cultural understanding within the majority group and to facilitate mutual understanding.

Multicultural group setting is a fruitful context to discuss cultural differences. The results of this study did not directly address the opinions of the majority group members, but results still indicated that participants with Finnish background were willing to discuss cultural topics and to be collaborative when doing so. When both majority and minority cultural traditions are discussed, it can create more equal cross-cultural exchanges. Thus, discussing culture equally from both the minority and majority groups' perspectives should be implemented as one

learning strategy for multicultural groups. Moreover, learner groups with only members from the majority culture could invite guests from minority cultures and use this method of equal cultural discussion in order to learn new things about each other's' cultures and to increase intercultural competence. This activity type can be utilized for language learning purposes, but possibly also for activities that aim for integration and for cultural exchange.

Moreover, this study provides implications for teaching English to adult immigrants. As the findings revealed, skills in English proved to be very important for the participants in this study, so more opportunities for learning English should be provided. Participants stated that skills in English allow them to fulfill social goals as well as to access education in Finland. Albeit the study results do not aim to downplay the importance of learning also the official languages Finnish and/or Swedish, the importance of English in Finland should not be underestimated. English lessons should be provided for immigrants who feel that they need them, and study groups with both Finnish and immigrant students should be formed to increase mutual cultural understanding. As the participants implied that they foremost need practice in their oral skills, practicing speaking should be a pivotal part of curriculum in study programs with adult immigrant learners. As became apparent based on this study's results, discussing cultural traditions and learning about differences can be a way to practice oral skills in English. By modifying the activity presented in this study, it is also possible to practice other skills, such as writing or listening skills in English.

## 7.5 Evaluation of the study and recommendations for future work

Ladson-Billings (1995a) emphasizes that culturally relevant pedagogy is not only for minority students, but its benefits can be utilized with the whole group that may also include learners from majority culture. Thus, multicultural group setting with both Finnish and immigrant background learners was a preferable way to test a conversation activity with aspects of CRE. The fundamental aim of culturally relevant pedagogy is collective empowerment that is achieved by fulfilling these three basic criteria: 1) improving academic excellence, 2) developing cultural knowledge and by 3) improving "critical consciousness" of the whole group (Ladson-Billings 1995a: 160). Next, it is considered how this study was able to fulfill these goals.

Firstly, it is important to consider that it is not possible to estimate how academic excellence was improved by only observing the participants for one lesson. However, as the focus of this study was on conversations, this study's effects to speaking skills can be evaluated in some degree. One way of improving academic excellence in English is to practice speaking it. Participants in this study were able to discuss topics freely, and to help each other and to ask for help when needed, and thus keep learning more while doing so. All of the immigrant participants stated that they need more practice especially in speaking English. Immigrant participants in a study by Hirvonen (2010) believed that practicing speaking skills is the "first and foremost" way to advance skills in English, and they thus hoped for more activities that would allow them to practice speaking (71). Thus, this activity could be one possible way of improving academic excellence in English, if such activities were continued for a longer period of time. Secondly, it can be assumed that building cultural competence was one of the main achievements of this study. Immigrant participants stated that the most positive factor of this study was hearing about other group members' cultures and customs. The diversity and detailed nature of the questions was also appreciated, and the participants were able to hear things that would probably otherwise not been discussed. Thirdly, as this study had participants with varying backgrounds and ages, they ultimately were able to learn new things about each other, and about each other's cultures. Discussing sensitive topics, such as war or negative stereotypes, can reinforce critical thinking, as it may lead to seeing the topic from many different perspectives. In this study, themes related to culture and personal memories were sometimes discussed from very different perspectives, as told in stories by people from different cultures.

Thus, the activity utilized in this study is one way to implement CRE in the learning situation, as long as it is done in a way that empowers the learners, and not the opposite. As previous findings on the successfulness of cross-cultural integration programs indicate, there is a lot that can go wrong in multicultural settings (Janhonen-Abruquah and Palojoki 2005). Inequality between the majority and minority group, unwillingness to participate or exoticization of the minority members' culture were some of the named problems. These problems within these programs could be left undiscovered, if they were not asked. Similarly, one aim of this study was to ask the opinions of the minority learner, and not solely focus on observations or on the opinion of the teacher. By asking feedback from the immigrant participants, it became apparent that whereas culture is an interesting topic to discuss, sometimes explaining it can be difficult,

and thus discussing it can also become more of a negative experience. Thus, it is crucial for future studies to focus more on the opinions of the learners themselves, as they are the ones whose lives CRE is mainly trying to positively impact.

Albeit the importance of carrying out small-scale case studies that focus on individual opinions more carefully, future studies should also aim to interview and observe larger groups of immigrant participants as recipients of CRE in similar settings to this study. This would provide more opinions and more targets of development to be discovered. In addition to focusing solely on immigrant participants, studying multicultural groups can also be beneficial, as the results may reveal how teaching multicultural learners should be approached, both in adult and child education facilities. The activity presented in this study could also be modified to better examine some of the findings presented in this study. For example, it would be interesting to investigate how elements of world culture and glocalization are expressed when discussing culture, as globalization and mobility of people might have changed how we are viewing culture today.

Overall, CRE should be better applied in the context of Finland. As the Finnish population is becoming more diverse in many different ways, for example culturally, linguistically and ethnically, hearing different perspectives is crucial to reinforce mutual understanding and to better match curriculum with current needs of the learners. The voices of the immigrant learners should be heard, and their opinions should not be silenced, as their opinions reveal the ultimate effectiveness of multicultural education. Thus, multicultural opinions should be explored in education to make learning more relevant for all.

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## APPENDIX 1: Background information survey

**This is a study about cultural aspects of English teaching with adult immigrants.**

1) **What is your gender? / Mikä on sukupuolesi?**
- ☐ Male / Mies
- ☐ Female / Nainen
- ☐ Other / Muu

2) **How old are you? / Minkä ikäinen olet?**

_____

3) **What is your native language or what are your native languages? Mikä on/mitkä ovat äidinkielesi?**

_____

4) **In which country were you born? / Missä maassa olet syntynyt?**

_____

5) **How many years have you studied English? / Kuinka monta vuotta olet opiskellut englantia?**

_____

6) **Do you also study Finnish at the moment? / Opiskeletko myös suomen kieltä tällä hetkellä?**

- ☐ Yes / Kyllä
- ☐ No / Ei
- ☐ No, but I have studied in the past / En, mutta olen opiskellut ennen
- ☐ No, but I will start studying it in the future / En, mutta tulen opiskelemaan sitä tulevaisuudessa

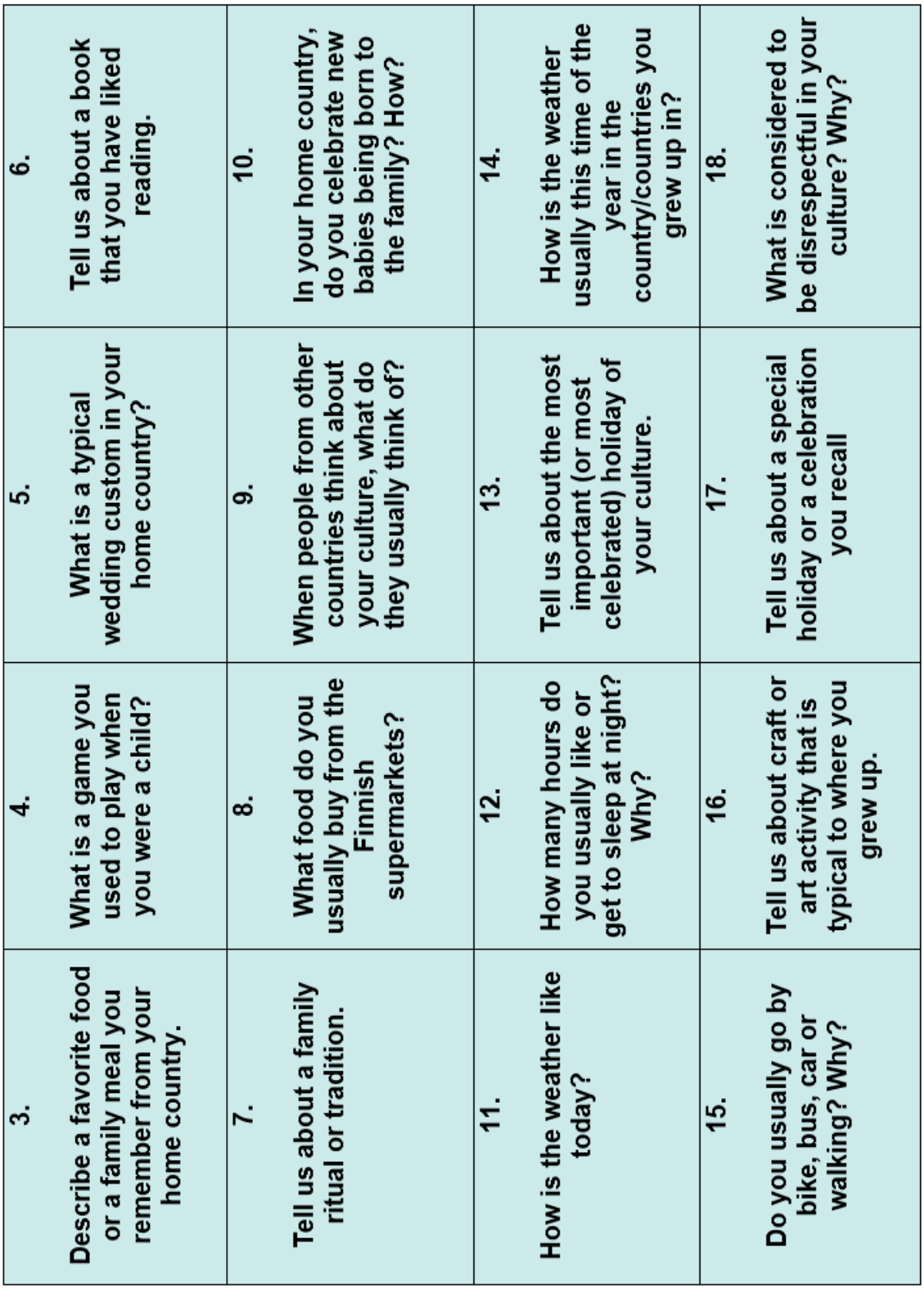
7) **How long have you been living in Finland?**

_____

## APPENDIX 2: Study participants

| Pseudonym | Tereza | Lucia | Rayi | Sein | Mikko | Anne | Eila |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | Female | Male | Male | Male | Female | Female |
| **Age** | Ca. 20 | Ca. 30 | Ca. 30 | Ca. 20 | Ca. 30 | Ca. 60 | Ca. 60 |
| **Country of origin** | Czech Republic | Argentina | Afghanistan | Republic of the Union of Myanmar | Finland | Finland | Finland |
| **Native languages** | Czech | Spanish | Dari | Burmese, Rohingya | Finnish | Finnish | Finnish |
| **Time spent in Finland** | 3 months. | 2 months. | About 4 years. | Over 2 years. | Most of his life. | Most of her life. | Most of her life. |
| **English studies** | About 10 years. | Since childhood. | About 2 years. | When he was a child, but only studied a little. Continued studies in adulthood. | 12 years. | About 6 years. | About 3 years. |
| **Finnish studies** | Does not study Finnish currently, but plans to start in the future. | Studies Finnish currently. | Studies Finnish currently. | Studies Finnish currently. | Native speaker | Native speaker | Native speaker |

**APPENDIX 3: Conversation activity questions – Game board**



# APPENDIX 4: Interview outline –topics of discussion

**Opinions about the conversation activity:**

- What did they like about it? Why?
- What did they dislike about it? Why?
- How the conversation activity could have been improved?

**Experiences during the conversation activity:**

- Favorite questions or discussion topics
- Easy moments (in regards to communicating in English)
- Difficult moments (in regards to communicating in English)

**General questions about learning and using English:**

- When is it easy to speak in English? / In which situations is it easy to speak in English?
- When is it more difficult?
- Reasons for studying English
- Reasons for studying English in a conversation group

**Questions about culture & learning English:**

- What are some good qualities of a teacher?
- The significance of having another person who speaks the same language as you in the English classroom
- The significance of having another person who comes from same cultural background as you in the English classroom

## APPENDIX 5: Transcription conventions

| | |
|---|---|
| New speaker turn | Mikko: (pseudonym followed by : ) |
| Researcher (speaker turn) | R: |
| Class teacher (speaker turn) | T: |
| Most/all participants, who were not the main speaker | Others: |
| Pause | . |
| Longer pause | … |
| Cut-off word | Wor- (a dash) |
| audible inhalation | (H) |
| Audible exhalation | (Hx) |
| laugh symbol marks laughter during word | @you’re @kidding |
| vocalism | various notations: (uhm), (öö), etc. |
| unintelligible | ### |
| transcribed words are uncertain | #you’re #kidding |
| sentence start | Capital initial |
| Visual observations or other remarks | various notations: [others laugh], [gesturing] |