

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**THE ADJUSTMENT OF FINNISH EXPATRIATES IN BRITAIN WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE**

A Case Study

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää kuinka suomalaiset ekspatriaatit kokevat vieraaseen kulttuuriin sopeutumiseen ollessaan työkomennuksella Iso-Britanniassa. Erityisesti tutkielmassa painotetaan kokemuksia englannin kielen käytöstä, kulttuurienvälisestä kommunikaatiosta sekä henkilöstöhallinnosta. Tutkielmassa selvitetään: 1) Minkälaisia eroja ekspatriaatit ovat huomanneet viestinnässä, organisaatiokulttuurissa ja elintavoissa? 2) Mitä ekspatriaatit käsittävät termillä ”kielitaito”? 3) Minkälaiset viestintätilanteet koetaan erityisen haastaviksi? 4) Minkälaista tukea ekspatriaatit ovat saaneet työnantajaltaan ja kuinka kansainvälisen henkilöstöhallinnon käytäntöjä voisi parantaa?

Aineisto koostuu kolmestatoista puolistrukturoidusta teema-haastattelusta. Koska kaikki haastateltavat edustavat samaa suomalaista yritystä, kyseessä on tapaustutkimus. Haastateltavien joukossa on mukana kolme puolisoa sekä viisi jo takaisin Suomeen palannutta työntekijää. Ennen haastatteluja ekspatriaateilta kerättiin sähköpostitse taustatiedot. Lisäksi heille lähetettiin muutamia haastattelukysymyksiä, joiden tarkoituksena oli auttaa heitä orientoitumaan haastattelutilanteeseen. Kestoltaan noin tunnin mittaiset haastattelut nauhoitettiin ja litteroitiin tarkempaa laadullista analyysiä varten.

Huolimatta siitä, että ekspatriaatit pitävät englantilaiseen kulttuuriin sopeutumista melko helppona, haastateltavien kertomuksissa on havaittavissa kulttuurishokille tyypillisiä piirteitä. Suurimpana muutoksen kokevat ne, joilla ei ole aiempaa ulkomaan kokemusta ja joiden komennukselle lähtöä koskeva aloite tulee työnantajalta. Ekspatriaattien käsitys kielitaidosta muuttuu komennuksen aikana kokonaisvaltaisemmaksi siten, että kulttuurin vaikutus kielen käyttöön tiedostetaan aiempaa paremmin. Komennuksen alkuvaiheessa ekspatriaattien kieliongelmat painottuvat lingvistiseen kompetenssiin. Myöhemmin haastavina viestintätilanteina pidetään etenkin pragmaattista kompetenssia vaativia kielenkäyttötilanteita. Suomalaisen ja englantilaisen viestintäkulttuurien eroista korostuvat kohteliaisuus ja ’small talk’. Organisaatiokulttuurien suurimpana erona pidetään valtaetäisyyttä. Työnantajan tarjoamaan tukeen ollaan kohtuullisen tyytyväisiä, mutta samalla toivotaan systemaattisempaa otetta kansainväliseen henkilöstöhallintoon.

Ekspatriaatit hyötyisivät aiempaa yksilöllisemmästä tuesta. Tukea voitaisiin parantaa myös tarjoamalla kieli- ja kulttuurikoulutusta, jossa huomioitaisiin kulttuurienväliset erot.

Asiasanat: expatriate. communicative competence. adjustment. intercultural communication. international human resource management.

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1. INTRODUCTION

These days it is not just the most adventurous spirits that go to live abroad. For increasing numbers of people, it is simply a necessary part of their career path. At the same time, it is both an opportunity and a challenge to experience the way of life of a foreign culture. The move of employees from one country to another is not always as easy as it may sound and there is a growing stock of research concerning expatriate issues to help people tackle the multidimensional nature of expatriate assignments.

The current study focuses on examining the adjustment and communicative competence of Finns living and working in Britain as well as their implications on international human resource management. Expatriate adjustment has already been studied quite elaborately as large firms are sending more and more people on international assignments. However, the viewpoint adopted in these studies has often been linked to career management and job performance although questions of personal satisfaction have also received some attention (e.g. Sappinen 1992, Mendenhall and Oddou 1995b, Peltonen 1998, Suutari and Brewster 1998, Tahvanainen 1998).

Much less attention has been given to the role of communication in the expatriates' adjustment process. Although the importance of communication in the adjustment process is recognised at least in intercultural communication research, I have found only few studies on expatriate adjustment that consider linguistic issues on any deeper than the surface level. There is not much research done on culture-specific communication of expatriates in multinational corporations either (Chapel 1997). Any factor that has a major affect on the adjustment of expatriates is worth studying since only by understanding the effects and relationships between the different factors can we improve the effectiveness of expatriate assignments and relevant support systems.

In this study, specific attention will thus be given to linguistic issues and communication differences between the Finnish and British cultures where they

are related to the expatriate experience. The analysis will be done by utilising the applied linguistics' concept of communicative competence and its implications to intercultural communication. Focus will be on the expatriates' own views and experiences on their language skills and their perceived adequacy in the target culture. This will help us better understand the different factors affecting expatriates' foreign language use and their effects on success in communication and adjustment in a foreign country.

However, since there is a need for research on expatriate adjustment that is comprehensive taking into account the employing organisation, non-work-situations, the host country and personal life of expatriates (Neovius 1996, 1997, Kauppinen 1993, Forster 2000), the current study tries to cover some of these aspects of adjustment too. In order to incorporate these various dimensions of expatriate assignments in the study, a case study approach with qualitative methodology was chosen.

The analysis section of the research will cover three main themes. Firstly, the expatriates' overall adjustment to England will be discussed. This includes a brief description of expatriates' motivations and expectations as well as employer support regarding the assignment. Secondly, issues related to language, communication and culture will be examined. The second theme encompasses expatriates' views on language, their language use, perceived differences in culture, communication and organisational culture and the challenges these differences cause for expatriates. Thirdly, international human resource management is considered from the expatriate point of view. The last one of the main themes incorporates the previous themes, adjustment and communication, and brings forward their relevance to expatriate management practices and training. There are not many studies on the adjustment of Finnish expatriates, yet Finnish companies are becoming more and more international so that the need for information on the above factors is likely to increase among professionals dealing with expatriate issues.

2. AIMS

By examining the research data, the study tries to explain how the different components of communicative competence manifest themselves in the adjustment of Finnish expatriates in Britain. Expatriates (people working abroad for a certain length of time for a company based in the home country) have been chosen as the research data, because they have a chance to put the full range of their communicative competence into practice while staying in the target country. The fact that the informants are immersed in the target culture makes it possible to examine the culture-related dimensions of language use. This increases our understanding of the possible pitfalls in English-Finnish communication and how to cope with them. In addition, the role of the employer in the expatriate adjustment process will be examined providing feedback to the company on their expatriate management practices.

Applied linguistics will benefit from more information on how adult language learners perceive their foreign language proficiency and learning in a natural environment. As this study tries to capture in more detail the sort of challenges Finnish expatriates face in their English language use, it also aims to find out what areas of communicative competence are the most problematic ones for them. The new information is useful to company language teachers and teachers at language schools, who give employees pre-departure training. It can help them in concentrating on the right things when designing language training for expatriates. If the pre-departure language and other necessary support is tailored according to the particular needs of expatriates, they are better equipped to meet the demands of the adjustment process and the move from one culturally different environment to another will be easier for all.

Analysing the expatriates' stories will hopefully contribute not only to the better understanding of the role of communication in their situation but will also shed more light on the whole expatriate experience – what they perceive important, difficult, easy or where there is room for improvement. Research can help the people in human resources to understand the possible problem areas in the

adjustment process and offer more back up in the necessary areas. The growing stock of knowledge in expatriate research will therefore be relevant to people in international human resource management and those who are involved in expatriate training or other support activities. It would be beneficial also for future expatriates themselves to know what exactly to expect when agreeing to go on an international assignment, including the cultural and linguistic issues discussed in this study.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Fields of study

3.1.1. Applied linguistics

The area of linguistics that is relevant here is applied linguistics and, more particularly, the theory of communicative competence. Unlike theoretical linguistics, applied linguistics is not so much about producing theories about language per se as it is about consuming, or using, those theories for practical purposes in language use (Sajavaara K. 2000). Since one of the aims of this study is to explore expatriates' experiences in foreign language use, applied linguistics suits the current context. The fact that research questions in applied linguistics arise primarily from the people and communities who use the language makes it interdisciplinary in nature. This becomes evident even in the current research where intercultural communication and even international human resource management intertwine with applied linguistics.

In order to examine the expatriates' second language use in more detail, the concept of communicative competence was chosen to help define the different areas of language proficiency that are relevant to the expatriate context. The first one to introduce the term communicative competence was Hymes (1971) when he

divided the concept of competence into two entities; linguistic and communicative. According to Hymes (1971), linguistic competence provides the speakers with grammatically correct expressions while it is communicative competence that enables them to choose from all those grammatically correct ones those that are appropriate in terms of social norms in a specific situation.

Chomsky (1980) and Edmondson (1981) have explored the same issues but named them slightly differently. Chomsky (1980) has adopted the term grammatical competence that corresponds much to Hymes's (1971) linguistic competence. He describes it as a cognitive state encompassing form and meaning and their relation (Chomsky 1980:59). To be able to use the knowledge provided by the grammatical competence in order to achieve their goals, the communicators have to employ what Chomsky (1980) calls pragmatic competence. By pragmatic competence he means the "knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use, in conformity with various purposes" (Chomsky 1980:224). Edmondson (1981) has chosen to use communicative competence to refer to what Chomsky (1980) and Hymes (1971) have called grammatical and linguistic competence respectively. Edmondson (1981:7) describes communicative competence as a theoretical construct that can be conceptualised in sets of rules or conventions that express what a person can do in a conversation. The actual use of communicative competence Edmondson (1981) calls social competence. The same way that Hymes (1971) and Chomsky (1980) brought up the appropriateness of language use when they described communicative and pragmatic competence, Edmondson (1981:7) notes that social competence means one should be able to achieve communicative goals without losing face by applying socially accepted behaviour.

Regardless of the rather confusing naming practices, the main distinction regarding competence so far, has been the 'knowledge what' (cf. Hymes's linguistic competence; Chomsky's grammatical competence; Edmondson's communicative competence) and the 'knowledge how' (cf. Hymes's communicative competence; Chomsky's pragmatic competence; Edmondson's social competence). Yet others have used the term communicative competence to refer to all areas of competence as understood above, including both 'the

knowledge what' and 'the knowledge how'. It is in this all encompassing way that communicative competence is to be understood in the current context. Furthermore, the point of view here is to apply the concept of communicative competence to intercultural communication situations and to second language learners i.e. expatriates. Communicative competence will be introduced in more detail later in section 3.2.

3.1.2. Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication research deals with communication patterns between people from different cultures with focus on interaction between individuals (Jandt 1995). Research in intercultural communication provides an extensive amount of general information on cultural differences in communication and a solid basis for this kind of study that examines the experiences people have in interacting with members of a different culture and adjusting to a foreign country. Regardless of the differences in communication between different cultures, virtually any communication, including language use, has two major functions: the information function and the relationship function (Scollon and Scollon 1995). In all cultures, communication is used to convey information and to indicate relationships between and among participants (Scollon and Scollon 1995). However, cultures differ in how much importance is put on each of these functions (Scollon and Scollon 1995).

The importance of intercultural communication for this study stems from the interactive nature of the relationship between language and culture. A language cannot be truly understood without knowing the culture that generated the language. As Haslett (1989:20) says, "culture provides the shared tacit knowledge that enables members to understand and communicate with one another". Even though it is impossible for anybody to know all aspects of their culture and each member of the culture has their own unique view of the culture, the views of the members of a particular culture overlap sufficiently for them to co-ordinate their behaviour in everyday life (Gudykunst 1997). As Carbaugh (1997:226) aptly

remarks, “the crucial variable when treating culture and communication is not fundamentally the language that is used, but the patterns in which the language is used, and the cultural meanings associated with them”.

In his works on intercultural communication, Gudykunst (e.g. 1998) uses the concept of stranger when referring to people from groups other than our own, be they cultural, ethnic, social or other. When communicating with strangers we are inclined to base our interpretations on our own symbolic systems. Since the effectiveness of a communication situation depends on the extent to which the participants interpret the meanings similarly, communication with strangers needs special attention from the participants. Focusing on the communication processes we have with people from other cultures and trying to see the process from their point of view makes it easier to predict and explain strangers’ behaviour accurately. (Gudykunst 1998).

The better knowledge of the local language and culture the expatriate has, the better chances there are that messages are interpreted similarly and misunderstandings can be avoided. However, learning a second or foreign language is not enough for successful intercultural communication – it is only the first, albeit important, step (Clyne 1994). The culture and its value systems that we have acquired through years of exposure affect not only the way we use our mother tongue but also the way we use all the other languages we have acquired (Clyne 1994:1).

Communicating in a foreign language requires that there be awareness of the intercultural dimension of the communication process (Binon and Claes 1995:323). If the expatriates’ language proficiency is not accompanied with a corresponding mastery of cultural aspects of communication behaviour the natives may well interpret the message much more unfavourably than was intended (Du-Babcock and Babcock 1996:10, Babcock and Du-Babcock 2001:13). In light of the above observations, it would be risky even to suggest that knowing a foreign language would automatically result in successful communication with the native speakers. When saying something in a foreign language, people choose not only

the words to put in an utterance but also the way to say the utterance. These decisions are affected by the speakers' culture and they are not always conscious. Yet, the speakers' choices affect how the listeners interpret the meaning.

Since in intercultural communication situations the listener represents different culture from the speaker and is using his or her own culture as a reference point when trying to grasp the meaning of the utterance, there is a greater risk of misinterpretation. When the speaker is fluent in the foreign language but is unable to apply the culturally appropriate ways of communication, the native speakers may be misled by the words. Therefore Du-Babcock and Babcock's (1996, 2001) caution on the possibilities of false and negative interpretation in native – non-native communication seems justified.

Expatriate assignments involve a change in culture that extends to the workplace. Compared to their Finnish colleagues, who travel abroad for work only short periods at a time, expatriates' situation is different in that they have to adjust to a whole new organisational culture at work. Hofstede (1980, 1997) has done extensive research on how cultures differ as regards to organisational culture. In the early 80's, he released the results of his extensive research on cultural criteria, or 'mental programming', where he explored the differences in thinking and social action in 40 countries (Hofstede 1980). Hofstede's (1980, cf. also 1997) study that later included ten further countries in the sample discovered four major dimensions that vary from one culture to another: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and masculinity-femininity.

The power distance dimension deals with social inequality and the relationship with authority (Hofstede 1997). Hofstede defines it as "*the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally*" (1997:28, italics original). For example, in a small power distance culture subordinates prefer a boss who is democratic whereas in large power distance cultures they prefer what Hofstede (1997:37) calls a benevolent autocrat.

The second dimension of organisational culture that Hofstede (1980) found relates to ways of dealing with uncertainty. People in high uncertainty avoidance cultures feel more threatened by uncertain or unknown situations and have a greater need for written and unwritten rules than people in low uncertainty cultures.

The dimension of individualism-collectivism involves the relationship between the individual and other people. In individualist cultures people are expected to take care of themselves and ties between individuals are loose while in collectivist societies people tend to have larger and more cohesive in-groups that provide protection for the individuals and receive their loyalty in return.

The masculinity-femininity dimension involves the sex roles socialised in a particular culture. In masculine cultures, social gender roles are more clearly distinct whereas in feminine cultures they overlap. In other words, in masculine countries men are expected to be more assertive and tough while women are expected to be tender and modest. In feminine countries both sexes are allowed to show feminine qualities. (Hofstede 1980, 1997).

The table 1. below shows how Finland and the UK scored along the four dimensions of organisation culture in Hofstede's (1997) research. Their respective rankings among the over fifty countries included in Hofstede's (1997) data are also shown.

Table 1. Organisational culture: The scores of Finland and the UK

	Uncertainty avoidance	Power distance	Masculinity	Individualism
Finland	59	33	26	63
UK	35	35	66	89
Difference	24	2	40	26
Rank: FIN	31. / 32.	46.	47.	17.
Rank: UK	47. / 48.	42. / 44.	9. / 10.	3.

Source: Hofstede (1997)

On the basis of Hofstede's (1980) research, Finland and the UK are quite similar in terms of power distance. According to Hofstede (1980), the dimension of organisational behaviour where the two cultures are likely to differ the most based on their scores is masculinity. There are rather clear differences between the uncertainty avoidance and individualism scores of the countries too.

3.1.3. International human resource management – IHRM

International human resource management is a common denominator for the expatriate people by providing the organisational framework for their assignments. The IHRM personnel have an essential role in co-ordinating international transfers and acting as a link between the employer and the employee. Thus, information collected from expatriates has implications for them too.

Whilst handling all the normal human resource management procedures such as planning, recruiting and compensation, people in IHRM are faced with increased complexity in their tasks (Strömmer 1999). As compared to the human resource management that is restricted to the home country, IHRM demands more attention to detail and various procedures that require comprehensive information gathering. Dealing with international assignments inevitably means dealing with more variety. Besides IHRM issues being more complicated in nature than the ones in the home country, they are accompanied with greater problems and difficulties. Nevertheless, managers and human resource personnel should be able to serve and support the expatriates as well as their employees in the home country. (Strömmer 1999).

Providing adequate training and support is a way to guarantee that expatriates will not end up being in a disadvantageous position when they agree to take up an assignment abroad. When asking an employee to accept the assignment, the employer is asking a lot more than simply to accept a job – they are asking the person to move to a foreign culture and, in many cases, uprooting the whole

family unit. This increased involvement in the employees' personal life and the responsibility that follows is one reason why employers should do their best to ensure the successful adjustment of the expatriates and the families that accompany them.

Another reason why it is wise for the sending organisation to integrate the development and training of international staff into the other areas of human resource management as Baumgarten (1995) suggests, is that it is not just the technical competence of the expatriates that guarantees their successful job performance (Oddou and Mendenhall 1995). Since most of the expatriates are experts in their field, they will be likely to conquer the technical problems they counter. The sorts of problems the expatriates are less likely to have ready-made tools for are those connected with their adjustment process and communicating with the host country nationals. If the expatriates are not sensitive to cultural differences in their working environment, they risk alienating the host nationals they are supposed to work with (Oddou and Mendenhall 1995). This means that in order to operate successfully in the host culture expatriates should also possess various non-technical skills related to things they could take for granted in their home country, such as language, environmental factors, local customs, thinking patterns and organisational culture. These are examples of competence areas for which IHRM can help provide expatriates with the necessary problem solving tools (Mendenhall and Oddou 1995b).

Despite the employer's need to guarantee the success of expatriate assignments, it has been found that Finnish expatriates regard continued lack of support, training and preparation to be existing deficiencies in their companies' IHRM (Suutari and Brewster 1998). Yet before the IHRM practices and support systems can be improved we need to know what exactly are the things that require improvement. To answer that question, this study tries to define at least some of the competence areas where Finnish expatriates and their spouses feel the need to develop their skills and knowledge, especially regarding the British cultural context. At the same time, the expatriates have a chance to share their views and ideas concerning IHRM.

3.2. Communicative competence

There is no general agreement on how exactly to group the different elements that constitute communicative competence. Here the views of Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983), Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson (1984), Binon and Claes (1995) are combined and modified to suite the current context where the concept is applied to expatriates. The three main components of communicative competence that are used in the current context are the linguistic, pragmatic and strategic competencies. In addition, fluency is also regarded as a part of communicative competence (Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson 1984, Binon and Claes 1995).

3.2.1. Linguistic competence

The linguistic or grammatical component has naturally been included in all the models of communicative competence and nobody can deny its importance as the basis for all language use. Linguistic competence consists of knowing and being able to use the basic rules of a language, such as vocabulary, word formation, grammar, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale, 1983, Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson 1984, Binon and Claes 1995). It is crucial for any language learning and it is a necessary foundation for acquiring the other competencies in a language. However, whereas this part of communicative competence is concerned with the literal meanings of utterances, the others have to do with more subtle knowledge of language use.

In their discussion on the intercultural dimension of communicative competence, Binon and Claes (1995) have included a referential component. By referential component, they mean the knowledge of different fields of experience and their relationships, e.g. sports, economics, politics (Binon and Claes 1995). Because for a second language learner the referential component of communicative

competence largely consists of knowing vocabulary related to a specific field, it is closely linked with linguistic competence.

3.2.2. Pragmatic competence

According to Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson (1984), pragmatic competence entails pragmatic and discourse knowledge combined with linguistic competence. They see it as a link between the speaker's linguistic competence and his or her actual language use. Thus, pragmatic competence covers the actual and appropriate language use in specific situations taking into account the speaker's intentions. According to Clyne (1994), in intercultural situations like the ones the expatriates are facing, communication breakdowns are more likely to occur at the pragmatic level as opposed to the linguistic level of communication.

Neither Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983) nor Binon and Claes (1995) use pragmatic competence when defining the different elements of communicative competence. Instead, they refer to discourse and sociolinguistic competencies. Canale and Swain's (1980) sociolinguistic competence included not only the ability to use sociocultural rules of language use but also rules of discourse. Later Canale (1983) separated the two aspects into two entities in their own right; sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. Binon and Claes (1995) further differentiate between sociolinguistic competence and the sociocultural component of communicative competence. Correspondingly, Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson (1984) bring up social competence as a separate but necessary complement to communicative competence.

Instead of introducing a separate sociocultural component (Binon and Claes 1995) or social competence (Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson 1984), the current research follows Canale's (1983) recognition of the culture-specific aspects of sociolinguistic competence. Thus, pragmatic competence, and sociolinguistic competence in particular, include the knowledge of the interlocutors' culture. In the case of expatriates and second language learners in general, it means the

ability to communicate appropriately in another culture and taking into account the interlocutors' cultural background, including their customs, values and so forth.

Here the sociolinguistic and discourse competencies are seen as parts of pragmatic competence but they are treated separately in so far as it contributes to a better understanding of what aspects of pragmatic competence are relevant in a given context. Making the distinction helps to specify what areas of pragmatic competence, be it social or discourse, are relevant to each context. In other words, pragmatic competence is seen as a comprehensive notion embracing both the sociolinguistic and discourse competencies. Naturally, like all the other competencies, also pragmatic competence makes use of linguistic competence.

3.2.3. Sociolinguistic competence

Sociolinguistic competence is particularly important and helpful when the speaker's intention cannot be interpreted directly from the literal meaning of the utterance (Canale and Swain 1980). It refers to the appropriate use and interpretation of language in different sociolinguistic contexts that can vary in their topics, role of participants, setting, norms, conventions and so on (Canale 1983). Sociolinguistic competence thus enables the interpretation of social meanings (Canale 1983). In addition, it implies the appropriateness of meaning (communicative function, attitudes, ideas) and form (verbal, non-verbal) (Canale 1983). For example, sociolinguistic competence helps the speaker to decide whether to use the phrase "thank you, sir" or "cheers, mate" in a specific context.

3.2.4. Discourse competence

Discourse competence means the capacity to produce and comprehend different types of discourse (Binon and Claes 1995). It suggests the ability to combine

grammatical forms and meanings into unified written or spoken texts in different genres (Canale 1983). The unity of a text is achieved by two means, cohesion in form and coherence in meaning (Canale 1983). Through the structural linking of utterances by means of cohesion devices, such as pronouns and conjunctions, cohesion facilitates the interpretation of a text (Canale 1983). Coherence has to do with the relationships among the different meanings in a text, be they literal meaning, communicative functions or attitudes (Canale 1983). Expatriates need discourse competence in, for example, compiling a business letter, giving a presentation or when bumping into a colleague outside the working environment. In each of these situations, they use their discourse competence to decide what kind of things they are going to say and they need their sociolinguistic competence to decide in what way they are going to say it. These decisions are not made independently. Rather, one affects the other so that discourse and sociolinguistic competencies interact and overlap to constitute pragmatic competence.

3.2.5. Strategic competence

When the other areas of communicative competence prove to be inadequate, strategic competence is used to compensate for the communication breakdown (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale 1983, Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson 1984). Communication strategies, including both verbal and non-verbal action, are used not only to solve communication problems but also to improve the effectiveness of communication (Canale 1983) and to manage communication situations in accordance with the speaker's intentions (Binon and Claes 1995).

Examples of communication strategies include direct request for help from the other interlocutor or literal translation by using the speaker's mother tongue (Faerch, Haastrup and Phillipson 1984). Stern (as quoted by Canale and Swain 1980:31) has pointed out, that strategic competence is most likely to be acquired through experience in real-life communication situations and not through classroom practice. Strategic competence is crucial for expatriates because as

second language learners of English there are likely to be inadequacies in the other areas of their English language competence.

3.2.6. Acquiring communicative competence in a second language

When people think of what knowing a foreign language means, they often only think about the aspects included in the linguistic competence. However, it takes more to communicate successfully than knowing some words and grammar and putting them together. One can understand the words in a foreign language and still not understand the meaning of what is being communicated (Seelye 1993). As Duranti (1997:20) states, being a competent speaker of a language means the ability “to do things with that language as part of larger social activities and uses of language”. For second language learners this ability presupposes integrating knowledge of the target culture with knowledge of the language.

In one’s native language, a person starts acquiring communicative competence of that particular language and its culturally appropriate applications early in life. Second language learners have had much less time to acquire the communicative competence in a given language than its native speakers have. Furthermore, second language learning has not normally taken place in a natural context but in a classroom environment which often contributes to the learners not developing much functional language ability (Ellis 1994). Not acquiring the language in its natural environment means that the learners do not go through the same socialisation process as the native speakers do. Thus, language learners are in a greater risk of growing unaware of contextually correct language use. If knowledge of the target language is not integrated with knowledge of the target culture when teaching foreign languages, people may go on assuming that the foreign language is merely a codified version of their mother tongue referring to and embodying their own interpretations of culture (Buttjess 1991). This is why people like expatriates, who move to a foreign country, may feel at first that their language abilities do not meet all the demands of their new environment.

As far as the English language is concerned, it is often taken for granted that it is a language that most Finns speak, more or less fluently. A study of the language skills of Finnish civil servants discovered that some even thought it shameful to attend English courses since everybody was supposed to master the language already (Sajavaara A. 2000). In general, the civil servants did master the grammar and vocabulary of their own field (Sajavaara A. 2000). What were found to be causing problems in language use, were the limited vocabulary in areas other than their own speciality, inadequate communication and social skills as well as restricted knowledge about the target culture (Sajavaara A. 2000). Huhta (1999) has found similar aspects of language use to be problematic for business personnel. Participation in spoken situations and presentations were found to be the two most challenging communication situations with cultural understanding holding the third place (Huhta 1999).

Finns who need to use English at work do not generally have many problems in language use concerning the linguistic competence. Nevertheless, they do experience inadequacies in the referential component of linguistic competence. This poses difficulties for communication situations especially outside their working environment where vocabulary is not restricted to their own field of expertise. However, it was pragmatic competence, including sociolinguistic and discourse knowledge, and their culture-sensitive application that Finnish civil servants and business people considered the most challenging aspects of communicative competence when communicating in English (Sajavaara A. 2000, Huhta 1999). It is just these oral and interactive language skills that the expatriates are going to need during their assignment when they need to interact with the local people at work and in their free time.

When talking about expatriates, it must be remembered that compared to Finns working in Finland, expatriates' use of English is even more varied and so are their needs regarding communication skills. As mentioned earlier, when working in another culture, it is not just the language that changes in the working environment. In addition, the organisational culture is likely to differ from the one in the home country. Furthermore, the expatriates' English language use is not

restricted to the working environment – as it may be in the case of civil servants and business people based in Finland. Outside work, expatriates need also to take care of daily routines and establish new social networks in a foreign language and consequently their communicative competence in English is put under further strain.

Because of the interdependence of culture and communication and the fact that expatriates are usually non-native speakers of the language spoken in the country of their assignment, the expatriates have to modify the communicative competence they have acquired in their home country and in their mother tongue in order to successfully operate in the host culture. As second language learners, the expatriates have to process actively the information they receive from their host culture and its communication patterns and adapt their communication behaviour to meet the demands of their new environment.

3.3. Cultural differences in communication

Being a skilled master in all the areas of communicative competence can sometimes prove to be a difficult task even in one's own mother tongue and when it comes to using a foreign language, the task of the communicator is further complicated. When people are unaware of all the aspects of communicative competence, they are susceptible to simply applying the rules from their own language and culture to their communication in foreign language (Wolfson 1983, Clyne 1998). Cultural perceptions guide our interpretation of the behaviour of others (Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1997). In fact, a study by Yli-Renko (1989) suggests that transferring the Finnish culture-related communication patterns into English language communication is the most problematic area for Finns in intercultural communication. Using one's own culture-related conceptual categories can lead to misunderstandings when conversations are not interpreted according to the other participant's conceptions.

Sajavaara and Lehtonen (1997:274-275) have listed some characteristics that are typical of Finns as communicators. They include passive participation and observation especially in public or where large numbers of people are present. Finnish politeness is also passive – it is thought considerate to leave other people in peace. Partly resulting from this, others’ opinions are not actively opposed and argumentation in general is considered difficult. Finns hold on tightly to their right to listen and being silent is accepted. In discourse, there is little backchannelling. Long pauses are common and they do not have to mean the loss of floor. This results in little simultaneous talk. The Finnish cultural tradition being closed and highly uniform makes Finns suspicious of anything foreign and different and so the threshold to open up a conversation with a stranger is high. Furthermore, in intercultural encounters Finns appear reserved. Finns use silence to avoid losing face that might result from communicative failure. The Finnish school system and old teaching methods may have contributed to the fact that Finns tend to be highly dysfluent. Controlling language production consciously leads often to “social non-fluency” resulting in “reduced social sensitivity, frozen non-verbal behaviour, and clumsy social participation” (Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1997:275). However, it must be remembered that above mentioned characteristics may differ from how Finns act and communicate in their mother tongue.

Sajavaara and Lehtonen (1997) draw a rather gloomy picture of Finnish communication. It seems that when they are describing the intercultural communication behaviour of a typical Finn, they are, in fact, describing typical intercultural communication of a Finn who has not had much previous experience in situations involving intercultural communication. It would be unfair to claim that Finns who have had more experience in communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds would be so compelled by their own cultural norms of communication that they would not be able to adjust their behaviour accordingly and reach social fluency.

The patterns of language use that are typical of Finns are also discussed by Carbaugh (1997). He mentions the Finnish desire to speak ‘properly’, especially in public and with strangers. This means that speakers should not state the obvious

but say something that is worthy of everybody's attention and be personally committed in what they say. Harmony should be preserved and contentious topics avoided in communication. (Carbaugh 1997).

Another study trying to discover the strengths and weaknesses in the intercultural communication of Finns has been conducted by Yli-Renko (1989). In her study, English speaking people who live in Finland were asked about their experiences in communicating with Finns in English. Yli-Renko (1989) searched answers to two main questions: how do the English speaking people living in Finland perceive and experience communication with Finns in English and what differences are there in everyday modes of behaviour between the native speakers of English and Finns. These issues Yli-Renko (1989) links to education and discusses intercultural communication as an aim in language teaching. She stresses the importance of taking all aspects of communicative competence into consideration and mainly uses Canale's (1983) definition of the concept.

The research data for the Yli-Renko study (1989) was provided by English speaking members of the American Women's Club, their husbands and people from the British and Canadian Embassies. The information was gathered by using a Likert-type questionnaire and 10 open-ended questions. The informants, about 150 persons, had to answer questions concerning things like intonation, acceptance of silence, greeting and meeting people, paying visits to homes and differences in non-verbal communication.

Dealing with the different aspects of communicative competence in the Yli-Renko (1989) study seems slightly biased. For example, there were nine questions under the heading 'grammatical competence', but only two questions on sociolinguistic and strategic competencies, one on each. This left only one question on politeness to cover sociolinguistic competence and one question on argumentation to cover strategic competence. The open-ended part of the study was concerned with manners so it partly compensated the smaller number of questions on sociolinguistic and strategic competencies in the first part. Emotional aspects of intercultural communication were also studied, although no reasons were given

for the fact that they were given special attention and not, for example, dealt with under the heading of culture-related behaviour.

The results are nonetheless interesting, giving rather detailed information on how Finns are perceived by English native speakers in intercultural communication situations. One of the findings was that Finns were seen to master the English grammatical forms quite well but some other aspects of grammatical competence did cause problems. The natives saw wrong word choices, limited vocabulary and errors in pronunciation causing difficulties for Finns in their oral communication in English. Furthermore, Finns were applying their own culture-related rules of communication even when in intercultural communication situations, such as using little non-verbal communication and being silent. According to the American and British evaluations, Finns use hardly any non-verbal communication. In general, the English speaking people considered Finns to be more formal in many communication situations than what they were accustomed to in their own cultures.

There were also some instances where the Americans and the British perceived the Finnish way of communicating differently. Politeness is a clear example of this. Most of the Americans thought that Finns mastered the polite use of English language rather well whereas the majority of the British people considered Finns unaware of polite English language usage. This probably results from the different views the Americans and the British have on politeness. Politeness may be expressed in a different way in American and British English so that it seems more stressed in the latter. In addition, the British pointed out the difference between the sense of humour between the two nationalities. The Americans brought up the fact that also many Finns are aware of; we have a very good passive understanding of English but language production, speaking itself, causes more difficulties.

Since English people put great value on oral communication in general, it seems only natural that they perceived Finns as too shy, silent and guarded in intercultural communication (Yli-Renko 1989). The same observation on Finnish

shyness and guardedness has been made by Lewis, a Briton who after living in Finland agrees with Sajavaara and Lehtonen (1997) in that silence does not mean failure to communicate but is “an integral part of social interaction” in Finland (Lewis 2000:274). In Britain, on the contrary, sociable discourse on topics such as the weather - often called small talk - is a means of showing solidarity and friendliness towards other people, be they neighbours or complete strangers.

Yli-Renko (1989) has shown that one has to be careful not to lump all English-speaking people together since they can have differing views on the norms of communication. Yet, she found many clear patterns that may be used in explaining miscommunication between the Finns and English native speakers. Yli-Renko’s (1989) study brings up important aspects of language use that can cause problems in intercultural communication between the English and Finns – differences in the level of formality, the use of small talk and silence, politeness rules, even sense of humour. These are some of the aspects that Finns going on an assignment to England should be aware of.

The informants in Yli-Renko’s (1989) study were all living in Finland and so they had experience in communicating with Finns and they were more used to the culture-specific features that we employ in our communication. This is the not case in my own study where the Finns that are interviewed have to use the English language in its natural environment. My study will complement Yli-Renko’s (1989) by looking on the other side of the picture – how Finns perceive the English way of communicating and how they think they are coping with it. Having both sides of the story makes the picture of communication between these two cultures more complete.

As several researchers (e.g. Yli-Renko 1989, Törnroos, Berg and Bergman 1991, Carbaugh 1997, Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1997, Clyne 1998) have pointed out, it is not so much the grammatical aspects of foreign language use of Finns that cause troubles in the eyes of the native speakers, but the way Finns use the language – the Finnish way that originates in the Finnish culture. In fact, when interacting with foreigners, native speakers are rather tolerant of errors in syntax and

pronunciation (Wolfson 1983). It is the violation of the rules of speaking, i.e. norms of interaction, that causes misunderstandings. Communicating according to the rules of one's own community instead of the rules of the host community can be interpreted as bad manners by the native speakers since they are unlikely to be aware of sociolinguistic differences between cultures (Wolfson 1983). Furthermore, businesspeople may get away with, or are even expected to use English as a lingua franca and obey their own culture's rules of communication in international contexts where they are operating in a 'no man's land'. However, as soon as expatriates arrive in England they are provided with a specific cultural context where the vast majority of people will obey certain rules of communication conditioned by that particular culture and who will judge the expatriates' communication behaviour by to those rules.

3.4. The expatriate assignment

The terms expatriate and sojourner both denote a person who is living outside his or her home country or familiar surroundings. However, in research there are certain contexts where one or the other is normally preferred. For example, research in management and human resources tend to use the term expatriate so that from the company point of view, an expatriate is an employee who is sent to work in another country by his or her employer for a period of at least twelve months (Deroure 1992:21).

Sojourner refers to a person who spends a certain length of time (usually six months to five years) outside his or her familiar surroundings and usually intends to return home (Furnham 1988). Yet, not all people who travel from one place to another qualify as sojourners. For instance, immigrants usually intend to stay in the host country permanently and tourists do not spend such a long time in their destination. Motivation also differentiates sojourners from other travelling people. Although the definitions of sojourner do not usually include any mention of an employer, sojourners' usually have more goal-oriented and specific motivations for their stay abroad than, for example, the two above-mentioned groups, tourists

and immigrants. Typical sojourners include diplomats, students, voluntary workers, businesspeople, and foreign workers (Furnham 1988). Sojourner is a broader concept than expatriate is, but since expatriates generally qualify as sojourners, research on sojourner adjustment contributes also to the current context. What is important from the point of view of the current study is that all the interviewees have been through the adjustment process at some point and can share their experiences on cultural and linguistic differences between Finland and Britain.

According to Adler (1997), completing a project abroad is the main purpose for international assignments in multidomestic companies and it is linked also with career development. Companies applying global business strategies when managing expatriates aim at organisational development through international transfers (Adler 1997:235). In global businesses, the importance of managers' international experience, language and culture related skills increase as the weight put on nationality decreases (Strömmer 1999:314). On the basis of comments by Adler and Strömmer, it can be concluded that the higher the company's level of internalisation, the more variables there are to be taken into account both at the organisational and individual levels. When the level of internationalisation is high, the employee should manifest individual competencies needed particularly in a global context. Yet, the organisation should be able to integrate the employee's competencies into the company so that they contribute to organisational development.

As the company moves away from the export and multidomestic stages and towards the multinational and global stages, the need for rigorous cross-cultural training increases (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992:109-110). Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall's demand for cross-cultural training is reasonable for it helps the employees to acquire the language and culture related skills mentioned by Strömmer (1999). In the long term, as the employees' have strengthened their skills in practice, the training will also bear fruit to the organisational development of the company.

The European Union report (Deroure 1992) on professional mobility in Europe lists some factors that should be taken into account when deciding on an expatriate assignment because if they are not considered in advance they can hinder the adjustment in the new host country. When the expatriate has family, questions relating to the schooling of children, the spouse's career and ageing parents in the home country have to be settled. Besides these family reasons, Deroure (1992:43-46) also recommends that language and culture related issues be considered in advance in order to prevent them having negative impact on the adjustment.

Traditional selection processes stress the professional and technical competencies at the expense of adaptation and communication skills (Deroure 1992). No company wants to send an incompetent person on an expatriate assignment so it is only natural that the technical and professional skills are emphasised. In practice, however, the role of other skills is more crucial than the selection criteria might imply. The success in technical and professional areas relies much on the general adaptability and efficacy in the cultural environment of the target country. Thus, in order to make the best of his or her technical skills, the expatriate has to be able to make use of his or her adaptation and communication skills in that specific cultural environment. This includes, of course, target language skills and general knowledge about the host culture. (Deroure 1992).

According to Strömmer (1999), good language proficiency is a central selection criterion when making decisions on international recruitment. In many companies where they send people on global assignments, the language courses are not obligatory and courses offering information on the target country and culture are even less often available (Deroure 1992). While the expatriate candidate's professional abilities and previous success in the home country remain on the top of the list when a company is making the choice on who to send abroad, courses on the host country and the language are considered useful among those who have already been through the experience (Suutari and Brewster 1998).

Considering the observations by Suutari and Brewster (1998), Strömmer (1999) and Deroure (1992), it seems that people who are not experienced expatriates themselves, tend to underestimate the role intercultural communication skills have in expatriate adjustment and the success of assignments. Having an expatriate background would be beneficial for those deciding about assignments and relevant support since it would make them more sensitive to the needs of people going on international assignments.

The European Union report (Deroure 1992) shows that not even when talking about countries within Europe is expatriation a simple matter. Besides the job itself, there is a long list of other things to consider when moving an employee from one country to another. This is where the international transfer training programs come into picture. It is wise for employers to use such programs since the costs of an international assignment failure are high and training programs are a way of preventing them (Tyson and Jackson 1992:222). Besides preventing the possible costs of an expatriate failure, cultural and language training together with other relevant support contribute to the overall well being and satisfaction of expatriates in helping them orienting towards the new challenges.

Osland (1995) uses the myth of “the hero’s adventure” conceptualised by Cambell (1968, as quoted by Osland 1995) to understand the expatriate experience. The basic plot in all hero’s adventure myths has three stages: “*separation* from the world, *initiation* involving penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing *return*” (Osland 1995:4, italics original). For her study, Osland (1995) gathered data by interviewing 35 returned U.S. expatriates. She then transcribed and analysed the interviews to see if the concepts related to the three-stage hero framework could be applied to the expatriates. The expatriate stories Osland analysed supported her hypothesis. Like the myth’s hero, the expatriates went through an initiation stage when they first arrived to the foreign country. This lasted normally for about six months and was considered a demanding period, during which the person’s abilities to adjust were put to a test and new learning was expected continuously.

Osland (1995:117) brings up an important reason for why expatriates should be sent on their assignments. Namely, besides being valuable to the company for their professional skills, expatriates have a crucial role in keeping the far-flung multinationals integrated. Because of their ability to understand the policies in both the subsidiaries and the headquarters in the home country, expatriates can act as mediators to prevent misunderstandings. When unsolved, these misunderstandings could create and add to the harmful we-they attitude. When the subsidiary or the headquarters does not understand the other party's actions, expatriates' experiences in seeing both sides of the story make them able to explain why things are done the way they are and explain the logic behind actions that might at first seem irrational (Osland 1995). In other words, international transfers and expatriates with shared objectives can contribute to better co-ordination and control within the organisation as well as provide critical information (Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall 1992).

Despite the benefits gained from sending people abroad, there are also reasons why it is not always wise to do so. One of Osland's (1995) findings was that people who have been ambivalent about going abroad tend to be less adjusted than people who were excited about leaving, a particularly important factor being the expatriate's willingness to learn new things. This means that companies should be wary of pushing their people to go on international assignments when there is lack of enthusiasm from the employee's part (Osland 1995). Unfortunately, in some firms, turning down international assignments can sometimes mean risking one's career (Osland 1995).

3.5. Culture shock

Culture can be viewed as encompassing everything that makes us aliens in a foreign country (Alho, Lehtonen, Raunio and Virtanen 1994:113). To a large degree, our cultures operate in an unconscious level and it takes years to learn and internalise. We become more aware of our own culture when it is contrasted with some other, unfamiliar culture. When moving to a foreign country, becoming

aware of this contrast causes culture shock. The concept of culture shock was first introduced by Oberg (1960, as quoted by Furnham and Bochner 1986). Hofstede (1991:260) has defined culture shock as “a state of distress following the transfer of a person to an unfamiliar cultural environment”.

Winkelman (1994:4) brings up four major issues that cause expatriates distress, i.e. culture shock, when moving to their host country. First, the move is likely to provoke physiological and psychological stress reactions that are normal in new situations. Secondly, it is common for the expatriates to experience cognitive fatigue. Having to consciously learn new ways of behaving, communicating and interpreting information is a tiring effort compared to the unconscious process through which the expatriates have internalised and operated in their own culture. Thirdly, as the expatriate moves to a new cultural setting, his or her social roles are altered and eliminated, as the expatriate has to adopt new ones in order to fit into the new environment. This leads to what Byrnes (1966, as quoted by Winkelman 1994) calls role shock. Lastly, Winkelman (1994) suggests that culture shock entails also a personal shock which results from losing one's personal intimacy and support system including interpersonal contact with friends and other close people. Schuman (1975, as quoted by Jensen 1995) further recognises language shock as a factor affecting the adjustment period. It is caused by feelings of insufficiency when operating in the foreign language due to problems with, for example, finding the correct words.

Researchers have tried to capture the progression of adjustment in various diagrams, the most popular ones being the ‘U’- and ‘W’-curve. Some researchers, like Hofstede (1991) and Torbiörn (1982) use the term culture shock to refer more specifically to the lowest point of the ‘U’-curve. Regardless of numerous efforts since the late 1950's when the notion of the ‘U’-curve of acculturation was first coined, there is no general agreement on what exactly should be the shape of these curves. Furnham and Bochner (1986:132) have concluded that the hypothesis on the ‘U’-curve is both too generalised and vague to be used in predicting or understanding expatriate adjustment. Recently some support has been found to the ‘W’-curve hypothesis (Hauptert and Schnettler 1999).

Although no one has come up with a universal theory that would enable us to explain and predict the precise advancement of adjustment and culture shock, the views on phases in which the adjustment process progresses are more or less the same among researchers. Oberg's (1960, as quoted by Furnham and Bochner 1986) four-stage model is still used as a basis for describing the adjustment to another culture. According to this model, at first the person moving to another culture is fascinated by his or her surroundings and goes through what is called a honeymoon stage. Only after the initial period of enthusiasm is the sojourner really faced with the differences in concepts, values, language and so on that exist between the two cultures. This leads to frustration and anxiety, which characterise the second stage of culture shock, the crisis. The culture shock may manifest itself in many ways, such as bouts of depression, aggression, substance abuse, alienation from others, homesickness, insomnia or oversleeping (Mendenhall and Oddou 1995b). Once the expatriate conquers the negative feelings, he or she enters the recovery stage, learning more of the local language and cultural rules. Finally, the sojourner gets to the adjustment stage and is adequately equipped to operate effectively in the host culture.

A variety of factors affect culture shock and expatriates' reactions to it, for instance, previous experience with other cultures, the degree of preparation, individual psychological characteristics and social support networks (Furnham and Bochner 1986). Nevertheless, previous experience of living abroad does not make people immune to culture shock (Torbiörn 1982). However, despite the fact that previous experience is likely to ease the expatriate's initial adjustment to the host culture and thus may alleviate culture shock, previous international experience is not a guarantee for intercultural effectiveness (Kealey 1990).

In addition, the degree of difference between the person's own and the host culture affects how culture shock is experienced (Furnham and Bochner 1986). My own study deals with Finns going to England and many would perhaps assume that this sort of a move would not cause too many problems - after all, in Finland everybody is supposed to speak English. However, Kauppinen (1993:4-5) points out that cultures that are linguistically and economically similar to each

other can cause culture shock too. In accordance with Kauppinen's (1993) view, Osland (1995:84) says that even though many people expect there to be few problems in moving from country to another when in both countries the people speak the same language, this usually proves to be a mistake. Her study includes many examples of Americans moving to London and being puzzled by the English people and their way of life. In fact, Osland says that Americans experience some of the worst cases of culture shock in England because they are lulled into thinking they will easily adjust because of the common language and heritage. Kauppinen's (1993) and Osland's (1995) observation is supported by other researchers, e.g. Forster (2000). In his study on British expatriates, Forster (2000) notes that some of the expatriates moving to superficially similar cultures, like the USA, were just as likely to have adaptation problems than people going to more exotic countries. So if not even native speakers of English can be saved from experiencing culture shock when moving to a country where their mother tongue is spoken, why should we think that Finns would cope any better?

Though the word "shock" has many negative connotations, many authors (e.g. Brislin and Yoshida 1994, Cushner 1994, Adler 1997) have pointed out that culture shock can be perceived as a positive thing. It has thus been argued that culture shock, in fact, is a prerequisite for culture learning and can advance self-development and personal growth. Going through culture shock indicates that the expatriate is becoming an active participant in the surrounding host culture instead of isolating him- or herself in an expatriate ghetto (Adler 1997). Kealey (1988) has actually found some evidence suggesting that expatriates who experience severe acculturative stress in the beginning of their assignment will ultimately become the most successful.

3.6. Expatriate adjustment

Studies on expatriate adjustment most often define adjustment as "the degree of a person's comfort (or satisfaction) with various aspects of a new setting" (Kauppinen 1993:2). Ady (1995) regards adjustment as the extent to which the

sojourner thinks she or he is meeting the demands of the new environment and to what extent the environment meets her or his needs. Adjustment involves flexibility so that in order to adjust to a foreign culture the expatriates have to be able to receive and adopt new information about the environment and integrate it with their worldviews (Alho 1994:90). Based on this new information the expatriates should also be able to modify their behaviour so that it is concordance with their own expectations as well as with the expectations of their new environment (Alho 1994:90).

As Gudykunst and Kim (1992:217) state, the communication process underlies the adaptation process – adaptation occurs in and through communication and as an outcome, the expatriate masters the identification and internalisation of the significant symbols of the society. Through communicating with the new environment, the expatriate is aiming at relieving the stress of initial culture shock that results from the loss of familiarity in the living environment. Successfully adapted expatriates have achieved a desired level of proficiency in developing a satisfactory relationship and communicating with the host society – especially with those situations and individuals that are relevant to their daily routines (Kim 1995:179).

In addition, Deroure (1992) brings up the linguistic and cultural obstacles to successful expatriate adjustment. Behind every language, there is a culture and access to the culture is the main tool in accessing the economic and social system of the host country (Deroure 1992:45). Improved host communication competence contributes to increased abilities in social skills and in building up social support networks. There is evidence that social support is an important aspect of sojourner adjustment (Furnham and Bochner 1986:250-251). Leaving the home country involves also leaving friends, relatives and other social networks which leads to a dramatic reduction in the sojourner's support networks. Social support covers any sort of aid a person can offer to another in a problematic or stressful situation. The support can be tangible (e.g. lending money), informational (e.g. giving advice) or emotional (e.g. comforting words) (Spitzberg 1997). Another explanation about sojourner adjustment is offered in terms of social skills deficit. The new cultural

environment simply expects different, new kind of behaviour and at first, the sojourner lacks the ability to act according to the new norms.

Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) have conducted extensive research regarding international assignments and they have developed an integrated model of international adjustment to guide other research done in this area. According to the model, expatriate adjustment has three dimensions: adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with the host country nationals and general adjustment to the foreign culture and non-work environment (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991).

In their study, Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) tested the Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) model of the dimensions and determinants of expatriate adjustment. In addition to just testing the model, Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) added some factors to extend it. Apart from positional factors like hierarchical level, they tested the effects of individual factors', such as previous international assignments and language fluency, on the adjustment process. The researchers used a quantitative method and collected large amounts of data by using questionnaires. Surveys were completed by 452 expatriates from 29 different countries who were assigned to 45 host countries by multinational U.S. firms. The data was then statistically analysed. The results that are of particular interest to my study are to do with the findings on language fluency. Fluency was assessed simply by asking respondents to report what languages they spoke and how fluent they were on a scale from 0 to 3 (0 = none, 1 = poor, 2 = average, 3 = very good).

Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) found that language fluency aids expatriates particularly in the interaction adjustment, i.e. socialising with individuals in the foreign country. Previous experience in international assignments seemed to have the same effect. A bit surprising, perhaps, were the results concerning role conflict. A person experiencing role conflict agrees, for example, with the following kind of phrase: "I receive incompatible requests from two or more people" (Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999:6). Correspondingly, a person who

feels he or she has a clear role at work is more likely to agree with the following statement: “I know exactly what is expected of me” (Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999:6). It was found that the negative impact of role-conflict on adjustment was stronger for expatriates who were fluent in the host language than it was for those with only moderate target language skills (Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999:11). It seems that being fluent in the host language exacerbates the effects of role conflict on any of the three dimensions of adjustment, i.e. adjustment to the job, to non-work environment and to interacting with the host-nationals. Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) explain that this might be due to the more fluent speakers being more aware of the contradictory demands and that less fluent speakers might not even notice the conflicting signals.

The results of the study stress the multidimensional nature of expatriate adjustment and show that language affects the expatriate adjustment process in an important way. Furthermore, the Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) research shows that the relationships between different factors can be complex (cf. results on language fluency and role-conflict).

As far as foreign language learning is concerned, there are new challenges to be met in the host country even after acquiring fluency in the foreign language as the exposure to the culture expands and the person’s vocabulary needs extending (Osland 1995). In the expatriates’ hero tales, Osland (1995:48) mentions the lack of language ability as one of the so called threshold guardians that could prevent the expatriates from accomplishing their mission. Besides being directly related to their effectiveness at work, language ability makes integrating to the local culture a lot easier. Another thing that can act as a threshold guardian, are the expatriate communities (Osland 1995). These can be very helpful in the beginning of the expatriate adventure because of their capacity to offer social support and information as well as allowing the expatriates to be understood and accepted in their own cultural terms. However, as the assignment progresses the expatriate communities can start working against the adjustment of expatriate families especially if no other kind of contacts are being made to the local community.

Osland (1995) found that expatriates who had a cultural mentor (“a magical friend” in terms of the hero mythology) fared better in adjusting to their host culture compared to those who did not have a cultural mentor to turn to. A mentor can be a member of the host culture who is willing to guide the newcomer in her or his adjustment process. The role of the mentor can also be performed by other expatriates, by compatriots or third country nationals, somebody at the headquarters or by social or commercial networks, such as churches or business associations. What all good mentors have in common are the ability to develop a trusting relationship with the expatriate, willingness and capacity to translate cultural meanings and desire to protect the expatriate from danger or cultural errors. Co-operation is of course needed also from the expatriates who must be open-minded to the suggestions of their mentors. (Osland 1995).

Osland (1995) identified four different areas of adjustment on which the mentor had a positive effect. Firstly, she says that expatriates with cultural mentors ended up being more fluent in the host language. Secondly, they considered themselves better adapted to both work and the general living environment. Thirdly, they were more aware of the paradoxes that go with the expatriate life, indicating a better entry into and understanding of the host culture. Lastly, they received higher performance appraisal ratings, not only from themselves but also from their supervisors. (Osland 1995).

Though she does not concentrate on linguistic questions but rather discusses the adjustment process in general, Osland’s (1995) comprehensive dealing with the topic gives the current study a solid frame of reference, particularly because of its methodology. Osland (1995) mainly used interviewing to gather the data although she did use some statistical analysis to support the qualitative data. Her way of dealing with the material really seems to have brought out the real experiences of expatriate people – something that I am aiming at myself. Osland (1995) uses inserted extracts of the interviews to highlight the expatriates’ stories, which makes the text lively and close to real-life instead of just dealing with statistical facts. Furthermore, the interview protocol used by Osland (1995) can be seen at

the end of the book, which was helpful when designing the interview structure for the present study.

3.7. Intercultural effectiveness

Complementing the term expatriate adjustment, the concept of intercultural effectiveness has been introduced to better pinpoint what exactly is needed to be able to operate successfully in a foreign culture. Winkelman (1994:8) summarises the main dimensions previous research has found intercultural effectiveness to include. They include the ability to communicate effectively, establish interpersonal relationships, understand and adjust to a foreign culture, cope with psychological stress and deal with different social systems.

Several researchers (Torbiörn 1982, Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992, Kealey and Protheroe 2000) have proposed three-dimensional approaches to international assignments and factors related to their effectiveness. They all have basically the same elements: the expatriate; the job; the culture and host-nationals. These three together are at the core of expatriate assignments and their interplay affects the adjustment and satisfaction of the expatriate as well as the overall success of the assignment. Torbiörn (1982:173) stresses the importance of the expatriate's competence (i.e. professional requirements), the particular cultural context and the personal and family adjustment of the expatriate. Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992) acknowledge the three following dimensions of expatriate adjustment: adjustment to interacting with the host-nationals, adjustment to the job and to the non-work environment.

Kealey and Protheroe (2000:4), who have compiled a more detailed list of qualities needed for intercultural effectiveness, define an interculturally effective person as somebody who "is able to live contentedly and work successfully in another culture". Kealey and Protheroe (2000) propose the three following components that help achieve intercultural effectiveness: the ability to communicate with people from the host culture; to adapt professional skills to

local conditions; and to adjust personally to the environment. In addition to these main components of intercultural effectiveness, Kealey and Protheroe (2000:6) bring up the organisational aspect i.e. how well the assignments are managed as a factor affecting the success of international assignments. Altogether Kealey and Protheroe (2000) have included nine key factors in their profile of an interculturally effective person: an understanding of the concept of culture; self-knowledge; knowledge of the host country and culture; adaptation skills; intercultural communication; relationship-building; an attitude of modesty and respect; organisational skills; personal and professional commitment.

As a basis for intercultural effectiveness there has to be understanding of the concept of culture (Kealey and Protheroe 2000). The expatriate has to be aware of how culture affects people and the influence his or her own culture is going to have on life in a foreign country. The expatriate also has to know more precisely his or her own personal motivations as well as strengths and weaknesses concerning overseas living. Besides being aware of the cultural luggage they are taking abroad, interculturally effective people have knowledge and desire to learn more about the host culture including things like history, geography, socio-economic conditions and local management practices. Adaptation skills are important for achieving intercultural effectiveness – the expatriate has to be able to cope with the inevitable culture shock and actually enjoy the challenges of living in the new host culture. (Kealey and Protheroe 2000).

Interculturally effective people have good socialising skills that enable them to socialise productively with local people (Kealey and Protheroe 2000). In their behaviour, they demonstrate a modest and respectful attitude towards the host culture not imposing forcibly their own culture's way of doing things on the local people. Intercultural effectiveness includes having organisational skills thus finding balance and consensus between locals and foreigners and their sometimes conflicting ways of doing things. Lastly, interculturally effective people are highly committed to the assignment, both personally and professionally, and they see it as a two-way process wanting take part in and contribute to their local community in the host culture. (Kealey and Protheroe 2000:9-11).

The capacity to define the main similarities and differences between one's own and the host culture's communication style helps the expatriate to achieve intercultural effectiveness (Kealey and Protheroe 2000). It is possible for expatriates to become more effective in their communication with host country nationals when they are aware of alternative ways of interpreting communication messages. For example, it is important for the Finnish expatriates to acknowledge the difference between their own language use as non-native speakers of English and the language use of the local native speakers of English. Although English is used as a lingua franca between non-native and native speakers of English, both groups interpret communication messages according to their own the cultural value systems (Clyne 1994). So while the expatriates do use English in communicating with their host country nationals, they are judged by the native speakers according to their own English – not Finnish – cultural norms.

Intercultural communication is essential for operating in a foreign country and if the expatriates want to be effective they should participate in the local culture, preferably using the local language (Kealey and Protheroe 2000). Cui and Van den Bergh (1991) have confirmed that communication competence, including the ability to initiate, establish and maintain relationships, is a good indicator of intercultural effectiveness. Being fluent in the target language is highly beneficial for the expatriates because language is the main instrument for communicating with and taking part in the local culture, which in turn enhances adjustment. Moreover, communication competence, cultural empathy and communication behaviour have been found central in achieving intercultural effectiveness (Cui and Van den Bergh 1991).

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Since this study aims in gaining in-depth information on the real-life experiences of Finnish expatriates in Britain, a qualitative approach has been adopted for the current purposes. The main reason for this is that qualitative methods gives more

room for the expatriates' own stories to be heard than quantitative methods. Qualitative methods allows the informants to bring up the issues they feel are of particular importance. Experienced expatriates possess an enormous stock of knowledge that should be taken into use in helping future expatriates and those training, managing and supporting them. Using only quantitative methods would not enable this since they tend to involve strictly structured themes and answering options. Because much of the previous research is quantitative and has involved mainly American expatriates, there is a need for more in-depth qualitative analysis concerning expatriates from other countries (Neovius 1997).

Truly comprehensive understanding of any phenomenon cannot rely solely on numbers and statistical facts. Studies providing only statistical information, like the one by Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley(1999), need qualitative analysis to complement the picture as Neovius (1997) has pointed out. Qualitative analysis can help explain the statistics of quantitative analysis – the real-life experiences behind the numbers. After all, managing people means managing individuals with their experiences, differing stages of life, personality traits and so on.

Personal face-to-face semi-structured interviews were considered the best way to gather this sort of qualitative data because they offer the expatriates an opportunity to tell about the ups and downs of their assignments in their own words - without the restrictions of pen and paper and written text. Furthermore, interview situations enable instant clarification of questions and answers by both parties so that misunderstandings and inadequate responses can be minimised. In addition, the motivations behind the informants' answers become more accessible to the researcher when this kind of two-way communication is possible (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000:34). Understanding the underlying motivations will later help in guiding the analysis and interpretation process to the right direction.

It was reasonable to involve just one single employing organisation in the study because it allows company-specific conditions to be taken into account more specifically. For instance, discussing the expatriate management practices makes more sense when all the expatriates are commenting on the same company

allowing the company to have relevant feedback. Furthermore, the mass of information is easier to handle when there is at least some consistency regarding the informants' background. For example, the organisational culture and working environment are more or less the same for everyone. The question of confidentiality is also easier to tackle when there is only one party involved. However, since the present research involves a limited number of informants from the same organisation, it is subject to the same limitations any case study is. One has to be cautious in making far-reaching conclusions regarding other organisations on the basis of the results from this study. What a case study may lose for being so small-scale, it gains in giving depth to the analysis.

Regardless of the fact that all the expatriates interviewed for this research now work for the same Finnish multinational company, there is some variance in what kind of a relationship they had with the organisation to start with. One of them had come to England before the merger of late nineties so that at that time she was employed by a company that was only later to become part of the organisation now in question. A couple of the interviewees had not signed an expatriate but a local contract to begin with. Since their move to England had not followed the same procedures as the others', they were not able to comment on the formal IHRM practices. In this context, however, all of the interviewees will be referred to as expatriates.

The expatriates were first approached via e-mail and asked about their willingness to take part in the research. All of them agreed to it and some even brought up new names and ideas for me to work on. In fact, in two cases, it was the expatriates' themselves that suggested that I interview their spouses. The importance of spouse's adjustment to the new environment is stressed in many expatriate studies but still there seems to be few that have included them in their analysis. For example, Osland (1995) who also employs mainly qualitative methods in her study of thirty-five expatriates does not use spouses as informants. So although some of those who were first contacted had to cancel their participation in the study because of personal reasons, it seems that the expatriates are more than happy to share their experiences.

After the initial agreement from the expatriates, their background information was gathered via e-mail. Besides such basic background information as education and marital status, the questionnaire included questions on the expatriates' language proficiency, previous experience abroad, pre-departure training and so on (see appendix 1). The background information helped in constructing the theme interviews and in profiling them according to each participant's particular situation. A pilot study was conducted with an outsider to test the interview structure in order to make sure that the questions asked will provide the right kind of data. Testing the interview protocol also gave a better idea on how long it would take to go through all the themes.

The interviews were built around six main themes: the role of the employer, adjustment to the foreign culture, the English language, cultural differences, repatriation and international human resource management (see appendix 2). The interview usually proceeded so that the themes were covered in the above order. First, the expatriate's situation before the assignment was shortly discussed as well as the role of the employer in the pre-departure arrangements. Then the interviews moved on to cover the time spent in England. The interviewees told how they experienced living in England and whether they had had difficulties in adjusting there. Language and communication issues followed next. The expatriates were asked what they understood by the term "language proficiency" and how they felt about their own English language proficiency. They also discussed what kind of differences they had perceived between the two cultures. Finally, those interviewees for whom it was relevant, shared their thoughts on repatriation and expatriate management practices

Before the interviews, the expatriates were sent a list of some of the main themes and questions. The lists were provided to give them an idea of what to expect and make orientation to the actual interview situation easier. They also made the interviews run smoother and helped in staying within the given time frame. The interviews were conducted in the workplace, either in the expatriate's own office or a negotiation room or the expatriate's home.

The interviews lasted approximately an hour each and they were tape-recorded. The tapes were then transcribed for analysis. Unfortunately, in a couple of cases the quality of the recordings was not as high as expected so that some words and phrases were left unclear. The inadequacies were not, however, so great as to hinder the interpretation of the interviewees' viewpoints.

It is not easy to gain access to people who are still on their assignments and living in a foreign country. For example, all of Osland's (1995) interviews were done after the return of the expatriates back to their home country. However, there are certain benefits to meeting expatriates in their natural environment. I was lucky enough to go and meet eight of the interviewees in England. I visited not only the towns they lived in but also their workplace, even home and met many people informally. For a researcher, to be able to have a glimpse of the environment that the interviewees are constantly referring to is a definite advantage. It gives their words more depth making it easier to grasp the essential in their respective expatriate experiences.

5. DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Data material

Altogether thirteen expatriates were interviewed for the study; seven of them women and six men. At the time of the interviews, the expatriates were aged between twenty-seven and fifty-six years. On average, the expatriates had begun their first assignment when they were in their early thirties. Those who had a general interest in working abroad and had initiated the assignments themselves typically left abroad younger than employees whose assignments were initiated by the employing company.

The first interviewee had moved to England in the early eighties, the last one in 2000. Most of the interviewees had begun their assignment in the mid-nineties. The length of time the expatriates had spent in England varied from nine months to twenty years, some of them having been to England twice. Though some of the interviewees had left for England alone, many were married and accompanied by their families. There were three instances where I had the possibility of interviewing both the husband and wife of an expatriate family.

The interviewees varied greatly in how much previous experience they had from abroad. There were only a few interviewees that did not have any experience of living abroad before their first expatriate assignment. The majority of expatriates had spent quite long periods in a foreign country even before their assignment in Britain. Some had worked as an au pair or studied in another country, others had done their practical training or worked in shorter projects abroad. A couple of the interviewees had lived in an English-speaking country as a child.

The company's official language being English, the expatriates mainly spoke English at work. Most of the expatriates' educational background included engineering or commercial studies – the first one usually applying to men and the latter to women. Apart from English, other languages such as Swedish and French were used particularly by people in sales. In addition to contacts with the home office, Finnish was also widely used among compatriot co-workers in offices where there were many Finnish expatriates. Generally, the expatriates had studied English for at least ten years before moving to England and they seemed to be rather knowledgeable of languages. Apart from English, they had all studied at least one other foreign language at school, several of them knowing as many as four or even five foreign languages.

Five of the interviewees had already completed their assignment and returned to work in Finland so they were able to comment on their experiences of repatriation. Eight of them are still living in England. None of those still in England could say for sure the date of their return and some said their lives were now in England and that they are likely to never return to live in Finland.

5.2. Getting started and adjusting to England

5.2.1. Motivation and expectations

More than half of the expatriates in this research had initiated the assignment themselves. Although many of the interviewees now had family, many of them were single or at least had no children when first moving to England. Those who had initiated the assignments themselves said they had a general interest in working abroad and had actively sought for such an opportunity. According to Adler (1997), the possibility for intercultural experience (e.g. seeing other cultures, learning a new language) is the most often mentioned reason for accepting an international assignment already among graduating MBA's.

Besides considering international experience valuable as such, the expatriates considered the assignment to be a useful experience from the point of view of their own career. It was seen as an opportunity to develop one's professional competence and increase possibilities for career advancement in the future. In other studies, better economic conditions abroad and increased prospects for promotion in future have also been quoted as motivational factors by expatriates (Borg 1988). Two of the respondents in this study, instead of just stressing their desire to work in a foreign country, emphasised their need to get out of Finland simply because they were bored and wanted new challenges. Desire for new experience, or wanderlust, has been found to be one of the most important reasons for employees to apply or accept a foreign assignment in earlier studies too (Borg, 1988).

The assignments initiated by the company often involved a period of negotiation in the beginning between the employer and the employee. Unlike the expatriates who had initiated the assignments themselves, those asked to move abroad by the company were not necessarily in a position to accept the job offer straight away, for family or other reasons. Fortunately, although there is a risk of more adjustment difficulties when the employee is ambivalent about the assignment

(Osland 1995), the expatriates in this study after accepting the job offer took their assignments as a challenge and embarked on them with an open mind. Usually the reason the expatriates gave for why their initial “no” to the employer’s offer had changed into “yes” was that they started considering the assignment as a once-in-a-lifetime –opportunity not to be missed.

There emerged three main things that the expatriates expected to gain from their experience. Firstly, they saw the assignments as a chance to develop themselves professionally and being beneficial to their careers. Secondly, they wanted to improve their language skills and become more fluent in English. Thirdly, the expatriates regarded the time abroad as an enriching experience that made them more aware of other culture(s) and was thus valuable in itself. Parents particularly appreciated that the assignment enabled them to provide their children with knowledge and skills in two cultures and languages instead of just one.

5.2.2. Employer support

The time available for the expatriates to prepare themselves for the move to England varied but usually, it was a couple of months at a minimum. This complies with Forster’s (2000) recommendation that married staff should be given an absolute minimum of at least two month’s notice. Expatriates who had always wanted to gain international experience and who had actively sought an opportunity to work abroad reported being psychologically prepared for the move. For those who were asked to move to England by their employer, the situation was different in that they needed more time to get adjusted to the idea of moving away from Finland. If the employee is first unwilling to move abroad, it is wise for the employer to allow enough time for the attitudinal change since negative attitudes may turn against the employer in the long run.

In general, the expatriates – both those who had initiated the assignments themselves and those whose assignments were initiated by the company –

considered the time available had been sufficient. Finnish expatriates in another study also considered two to four months to be sufficient time to prepare for a foreign assignment (Suutari and Brewster 1998). Nevertheless, many interviewees thought that some extra time could have been useful since there are so many things to take care of both in Finland and in England before the move is even technically possible. This applies especially to expatriates with families. Decisions have to be made on housing arrangements, spouse's career, education of children and so forth.

Thus, this study agrees with earlier recommendations that whenever feasible, expatriates and their dependants should be given as much time as possible – an absolute minimum of two months, preferably four or more - to adjust to the idea of moving and preparing themselves for the assignment (Forster and Munton 1991, Forster 2000). Longer time enables effective planning and enhances a sense of control over events which in turn is likely to alleviate the stress associated with relocation (Forster and Munton 1991).

In addition, some would have wanted to have more time to find out about their future living environment beforehand. On top of the employees' normal workload, there are so many practical arrangements involved with the move that they may not have the time and energy to get to know the target country.

Interview extract 1.

“ when I came here I did not know very much when I came here I did not even know the country I did not even know how many people there are living here what kind of a country this is the system here what kind of a system this is ”

”sillon ku tuli tänne niinku ei ees tienny tätä maata en mä ees tienny et kuinka paljon täällä on asukkaita minkälainen tää on niinku täällä tää järjestelmä niin tämmönen minkälainen tää on tää systeemi”

Some basic information about the society and culture of the country was considered useful according to many first time expatriates since their own knowledge was limited and not necessarily up-to-date.

The expatriates' answers are consistent with previous research results on what kind of help companies usually offer their employees. The help that the expatriates received from their employer usually involved at least taking care of the paperwork and the logistics of moving. Those, for whom the opportunity was provided, were particularly happy about the visits to England and their future hometown before the actual assignment. Preliminary visits that were offered also for the expatriate spouse were thought to be essential since they enabled the couple to plan their life in England together, deciding about the schools for children and housing. According to a study of almost two hundred Finnish expatriates, this sort of aid, i.e. help with arrangements and prior visit to the foreign organisation, is provided by over 70% of employers (Suutari and Brewster 1998). Overall, the interviewees' comments on employer support are in line with other Finnish (Neovius 1997, Suutari and Brewster 1998) and British (Forster and Munton 1991) expatriate studies in that relocation support provided by companies tends to leave out personal circumstances such as spouse's employment and schooling of children and concentrate solely on the employee and more tangible forms of support like contract and logistics.

Most of the interviewees also had help in finding an apartment, though this was usually organised on a rather informal basis. Those who had to stay in temporary accommodation at the beginning of their assignment criticised it heavily. This is no surprise since relocation stress is strongly linked with living in temporary accommodation (Forster and Munton 1991). The interviewees emphasised the importance of having permanent accommodation right from the start because the move to a foreign country is stressful and chaotic enough without the uncertainty of not knowing where you are going live and for how long. The situation for expatriates who have children is further complicated since the educational system in England differs from the one in Finland and they have to decide which school

to choose for their children. Those who had received help in this matter were grateful for it.

Besides the above, the expatriates had received informal support and advice from co-workers in England and from colleagues in Finland who had been working in England before them. Being able to discuss with people who had already been through the expatriate experience was thought to be very useful because they understood and could empathise with the expatriates' concerns. The interviewees said that the Finns who were already in England made sure that everything went alright.

Interview extract 2.

“there were other Finns here already and you got information from them so that you did not have to come here completely blindfolded”

”täällähän oli noita muita suomalaisia jo nii sitä kautta sai tietoo että ei tullu ihan sokkona”

Asking questions and discussing with somebody who has already been through the same experience and knows the way of life in the new culture is likely to have a calming effect for it reduces the uncertainties related to the move. Expatriates who had been in the country longer often acted as what Osland (1995) calls cultural mentors for the newcomers in giving them advice on how to cope with the life in England. The advice and understanding received from more experienced colleagues was considered very valuable and it was brought up particularly by those embarking on their first long stay in a foreign country. In fact, co-worker support, like logistical support, has been found to be a significant positive predictor of expatriate adjustment (Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999).

No formal pre-departure training was available for the expatriates and only few had received reading packages or other material on their future living environment. Only one of the interviewees acknowledged having been familiar with things like culture shock and adjustment process before the move to England.

The reported lack of cross-cultural training is no surprise for previous studies have repeatedly found that only few companies provide it (Gertsen 1990, Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992, Forster 2000). According to Suutari and Brewster (1998), information packages are provided for twenty six per cent and country- or culture-related training for ten per cent of Finnish expatriates. Yet cross-cultural training has been found to improve expatriate adjustment and job performance (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992) and it is perceived as necessary by expatriates (Suutari and Brewster 1998).

However, language courses could have been organised had the expatriates specifically asked for them. Some of the expatriates had such good language skills in English having lived in an English-speaking country earlier that language training was unnecessary. Although a couple of the expatriates had attended an English language course shortly before their assignment, these had not been linked with the expatriates' situation per se. Language training is more commonly offered to expatriates as pre-departure training than cross-cultural or country specific training (Gertsen 1990, Deroure 1992, Suutari and Brewster 1998). Almost four out of ten Finnish companies are estimated to offer pre-departure language training to their expatriates (Suutari and Brewster 1998). Once in England, some of the interviewees were able to attend language courses there. Although it was sometimes hard for the expatriates to find the time for the courses, they were found very useful and expatriates seemed to be motivated to improve their language proficiency.

Some of the expatriate spouses took the initiative in their own hands and organised language training for themselves or their children. Even though the parents knew that language acquisition would be likely to come naturally to young children once they are settled in the target language environment, they wanted to support their children in the process. A good example of a practical solution was the Finnish student of English that one of the families recruited as an au pair to go to England with them for the first months of their assignment. Another spouse took private language lessons from an English student who had earlier been an au pair in England. In both cases, the spouses were more than satisfied with their

arrangements. The first one was happy about the way their au pair could even go to school as a teacher's assistant and help the children adjust there. The latter had found the au pair to be a particularly good English teacher because as a former au pair she was familiar with the situation the spouse was going to face as a housewife in England.

5.2.3. The adjustment process

There are quite clear differences in how the adjustment process is experienced among expatriates. Those who initiated the assignment themselves or had previous experience from living abroad seemed to be the quickest to adjust to their new host culture. Correspondingly, expatriates whose assignments were initiated by the employer or who had not lived abroad before, experienced the changes of the adjustment process more profoundly. As far as previous experience is concerned, the same applies to expatriate spouses for whom the change was perhaps even more drastic. The expatriates' own personality also seem to affect how the adjustment process is perceived and experienced. Yet, the links between specific personality traits and the ease or difficulty of adjustment are difficult to establish (Torbiörn 1982:174). Nevertheless, when the expatriates described their own or their children's adjustment, they often mentioned personality as a factor explaining the level of satisfaction. Even more so, they used personality to explain the perceived adjustment of other expatriate families, be their Finnish or some other nationality. Usually, the traits that the expatriates had perceived to help in the adjustment had to do with things like being outgoing and open to new things and not fearing to feel embarrassed even if one's skills in the new culture sometimes proved inadequate.

Apart from differences in experiencing the adjustment process there was also variance in the expatriates' recollections of it. There were some that either simply did not remember it very well anymore or just could not recognise any special phases in the process. Still there were several who elaborately and in some detail explained how their adjustment to England had progressed.

There were certain characteristics common to most of these descriptions of how the adjustment process progressed. The beginning of the assignment was characterised largely by feelings of excitement as if the expatriate was on holiday. However, the interviewees also reported experiencing what Winkelman (1994) called cognitive fatigue. The first few months involved feelings of confusion and exhaustion related to the information overload in the new surroundings and having to concentrate constantly on speaking a foreign language.

The initial stage of excitement and confusion was followed by a phase that the interviewees called “routine”. During this stage the expatriates and their families settled down in England and established their own way of living in their new neighbourhood. According to many of the interviewees, this settling down period lasted around six months. It involved also establishing themselves in the workplace and being accepted by English colleagues and subordinates. Thus, the expatriates’ answers comply with Osland’s (1995) research results of expatriates going through an initiation stage of about six months at the beginning of their assignment.

Once the thrill of moving to a foreign country had ebbed away and routine set in, many of the expatriates also started feeling annoyed and irritated by things that are different to Finland. The frustration is summarised in the following comment made by one of the expatriates.

Interview extract 3.

“in Finland everything works and nothing breaks down here everything breaks down and nothing works”

“siellä Suomessa kaikki toimii eikä mikään hajoa täällä kaikki hajoaa eikä mikään toimi”

Comments like the above were triggered by memories of separate hot and cold taps in the bathrooms, draught from the windows and general living conditions that were considered of lower standard than in Finland. Another expatriate

described what the move from honeymoon stage to the crisis stage feels like in the following words-

Interview extract 4.

“you then slowly start to realise that this is normal this is everyday life and then you plunge into the normal stage and then you learn to notice that quite many things are different it starts to annoy you because they are more difficult they actually start to irritate to frustrate quite a bit some things really get to you”

“rupee pikku hiljaa oivaltaa et tää on niin kun normaalia tää on ihan päivittäistä arkee ja sit kaveri tipahtaa siihen niin kun normaalitasolle ja sit niin kun oppii huomaa sen miten aika monet asiat on erilaisia alkaa niin kun harmittaa kun ne on vaikeempia vähän oikeestaan ärsyttään aikalailla turhautuun siis sua ottaa aika lailla pannuun jotkut asiat”

This third phase is characterised by comparisons to how things are in Finland. The Finnish way of doing things is seen as the norm from which the English way deviates and is therefore seen as inferior. It is these cultural differences that cause frustration and make the expatriates feel irritated. This is a typical characteristic of the crisis stage of culture shock (Winkelman 1994). The crisis phase is also a learning period for the newcomers. Frustration is a sign that the expatriates are actively processing the cultural meanings in their environment. Eventually, the expatriates gain understanding on why things are different and learn to cope with them.

Interview extract 5.

“you learn to understand that this is it and then things starts going better”

“sää niin kun opit ymmärtään et tää nyt on niin kun tää sit ja se ehkä lähtee meneen paremmin”.

This is when expatriates felt that things finally started running smoothly and they were able to concentrate on the real thing.

Though the expatriates' adjustment process seems to follow a certain order it does not mean that one stage excludes another. Rather, there are ups and downs even after the crisis period is over although the euphoria of the beginning is unlikely to return. In addition, even if the differences that characterised the third stage were understood, some of them did not necessarily stop frustrating. Furthermore, a few of the expatriates said that holidays in Finland brought about contradictory feelings and after about two years in England they started feeling home-sick.

Those who did not report having culture shock 'symptoms' in the beginning of their assignment were mostly people whose first time in England had been so long ago that they had difficulties remembering the initial feelings, people who had previous experience on living in an English-speaking country or people who were not actively involved in the local community. None of the interviewees who had already repatriated to Finland particularly emphasised the initial frustrations of adjusting to England whereas those still living there described quite elaborately the trials and tribulations at the beginning of their assignments. This does not necessarily mean that the repatriate interviewees had not experienced culture shock in England. Rather, it means that in order to study experiences of culture shock it is better to use informants who are still living in the foreign culture since they seem to be more in touch with the adjustment process while still surrounded by the culture that provoked the "shock". Yet, it must be noted that culture shock does not affect all the people the same way but that there is variation in how individuals experience the stress of culture shock (Torbiörn 1982).

When the expatriate families were asked who had the hardest time adjusting to England, there were usually two types of answers the expatriate spouse being mentioned in both. Some said the adjustment was the most difficult for the parents because they had to change their accustomed ways of thinking in the new culture whereas their children seemed to be more flexible and adjust without difficulty. Others said it was the children and the expatriate spouse who had the hardest time.

Not all children adapt quite so quickly and while the expatriate is busy at work the spouse is left at home taking care of day-to-day errands in a foreign country and using a foreign language.

The expatriate spouse

All the expatriate spouses had been in working life in Finland but only one of them worked in England for a while. This confirms what Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992) have concluded earlier on the rather high involvement of Finnish women in working life compared to some other nationalities. According to their research on Finnish and American expatriate spouses, over seventy per cent of Finnish women work before the assignment (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992).

While in England, the different nature of the English day-care-system, legislation that restricts leaving children home alone and having small children made staying home a natural choice for the Finnish expatriate spouses in the study. Therefore, for the expatriate spouses moving to England usually meant not only a change in their living environment but also a change in their social roles, from being a working mom to becoming a housewife. Again, the current study supports the earlier findings that most women who follow their husbands abroad have to give up their career in the home country. Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992) found that only twenty per cent of the Finnish women worked during the assignment. According to the same researchers, after returning to the home country, over seventy per cent of Finnish expatriate spouses resume their careers. The percentages for the American expatriate spouses are much lower and although over fifty per cent of them work before the assignment, only thirty per cent return to working life when back in America. Only one of the three spouses interviewed for this study had repatriated to Finland but she was already back in working life. It seems that at least compared to American women, the Finnish women seem to be more career-oriented.

Not working meant that the spouses were at first left without the everyday social contacts that working life had provided them before. Because of the reduced social contacts, the expatriate wives are at a greater risk of becoming socially isolated than their working spouses (Torbiörn 1982).

Interview extract 6.

“although it was said that it is going to be hard and and but you did not (...) it is so hard and it did not it was harder than you expected (...) you did not have relatives or friends and every time in Finland when you go to a shop every time you saw someone you knew and had somebody to go to have a coffee with or something”

”vaikka sanottiin et se on tulee olemaan vaikeeta ja ja mut ei sitä kuitenkaan (...) on niin vaikeeta et se ei kuitenkaan sit päässy oli vaikeempaa mitä odotti (...) ei ollu sukulaisia eikä ystäviä ja aina kun suomessa kun meni kauppaankin ni kauppareissulla aina näki tuttuja ja oli kahviseuraa ja semmosta”

In a new culture a lot of initiative, even determination, is needed to build the social networks and spheres of activity that, the job and friends in Finland used to cater for. The situation is easier for those working since they are in daily contact with their colleagues. Furthermore, the expatriate spouses with their changed roles meet more challenges because the wives' contacts with the host culture are more direct than the employees' (Adler 1997) and they have to deal with the general living conditions day in day out (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992). All the spouses interviewed for this study had found their own ways of compensating for the change. They started studying, took up a new hobby, were actively involved in their children's school and free time activities and so on.

Although it is acknowledged also by the spouses themselves that it can be complicated to find a suitable job for them in the host country, there seems to be a certain need at least to explore the chances available. Despite the fact that the spouses felt rather comfortable with their new roles in England, some said there was a danger of boredom. One of the spouses in this study expressed her interest in finding more about job opportunities in England and a slight disappointment in

not receiving any help in the matter from the company. Forster's (2000) research on thirty-six UK-based companies revealed the same kind of results. Expatriate spouses wanted more information on the assignment, culture shock and job opportunities in the host country (Forster 2000).

Children

Within the scope of this study, it was not possible to have first-hand information on how the children of the expatriate families experienced the adjustment process. However, the parents shared their view on how their children had reacted to the change. As opposed to their parents, the children are never the initiators of the assignments. Thus, the differences in how the children coped with the change were not so much to do with their motivation than with their personal characteristics. Some said that their children had adapted to the new situation surprisingly quickly and effortlessly, others mentioned there having been some difficulties. For example, some parents said some of their children were a bit shy and critical of themselves especially at the beginning of the assignment when everything was new.

The age of the children also seemed to have an effect on adjustment, those closer to puberty being more likely to experience more difficulties in integrating to their new social environment. This complies with the views that children under thirteen tend to have less difficulty in adjusting to a new culture than teenagers (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992). Although there may well be other reasons for why older children tend to have more adjusting difficulties, it could be argued that these difficulties partly arise from the effects a person's age has on language learning. Linguistic learning ability is relatively high until the early teen years (Torbiörn 1982). When reaching puberty the child's efforts to learn the host language are forced to become more conscious compared to younger children who learn the new language more unconsciously.

Overall, the interviewees' reports supported Törbiörn's (1982) findings that children are quicker than adults to reorient themselves to a new cultural environment and Ellis's (1994) views that they are faster language learners. Some of the parents noted that because of their native-like language fluency and manners, the children would easily pass as natives. Considering the magnitude of changes that children have to go through when they have to move to a foreign country with their parents – change of school, language, friends etc. – they display great adaptation skills. Still, sometimes they need some extra support from adults in their efforts and these expatriate parents had used plenty of imagination in providing it. Some of the parents had organised so that that the children were able to attend private English lessons or even spend some time in an English-speaking country before the assignment.

5.2.4. Living in England

Though the quality of housing in England differed from what the expatriates were used to in Finland, they were generally satisfied with their living conditions. Particularly those living in a small town or village were happy about their new living environment. As regards bigger cities, some disadvantages were mentioned, such as higher cost of living and the parents' greater concern for the safety of their children. The latter involved quite a big difference to the circumstances back home in Finland. In England, it was out of the question to let children stay out and play by themselves for safety reasons.

Interview extract 7.

"if you go to town here and and some five six year old toddler disappears from you suddenly your first thought is where the heck did it run now there your first thought is who took him and there is quite a big difference there"

"jos täällä menet kaupunkiin ja ja joku semmonen viis kuus vuotias taapero tosta rinalta se yht äkkiä häviää niin se on ensimmäinen ajatus että mihin hemmettiin se nyt juoksi siellä ensimmäinen ajatus on se että kuka sen vei ja siinä on aika iso ero"

The parents felt bad about restricting their children's coming and going and the children were not that happy about it since in Finland they had been used to a lot of freedom. The move to England affected also the expatriate children's school days. The British schooling system differs from the Finnish one and days are normally longer. Since expatriate assignments usually involve long working hours, the expatriates themselves are not left with much free time either. The interviewees did not, however, really complain about it for they thought it was usual to work long hours when on an assignment. After all, usually assignments meant that some project had to be finished within a certain time. Nevertheless, in addition to normal housework and spending time with family, many still found time to do sports and familiarise themselves with their environment.

At the beginning of the assignment, it was common to feel a bit lost and lonely when the social support networks were left in Finland. This applies especially to single expatriates who did not have a family to accompany them. The importance of building new social support systems in the host country was demonstrated in the expatriates' willingness to take initiative in getting to know their English colleagues and neighbours. The expatriates' need to build social networks supports Furnham's (1988) conclusion on the significance of social support in sojourner adjustment. There were quite a few Finns living in one of the towns where some of the interviewed expatriates lived. Although Finnish expatriates generally did keep in touch with their compatriots when possible, they did not generally refrain from socialising with the locals. This could be considered as an optimal situation since while the expatriates were able to receive support from like-minded people they did not fall into the trap of isolating themselves from the local community and thus hindering adjustment (Osland 1995). Some recognised the danger socialising only with compatriots could have on the adjustment and were careful not to limit their contacts to just other Finns.

Being active in building social networks was essential since, from the Finnish point of view, it was not that easy to make friends with English people. For example, many said with disappointment that neighbours appeared friendly but kept their distance so the initiative to get acquainted was left to the expatriates.

For the newcomers it may be difficult to make contact with their local neighbours particularly when the neighbourhood is well established. By considering the demographical aspects of a neighbourhood and choosing one that reflects the expatriates' own situation - like some of them had done - it is possible to facilitate the adjustment process. Moreover, several of the interviewees noted that the English do not generally invite people to their homes as often as is customary in Finland. It seemed to many that, the whole culture of visiting people was different to the one in Finland. For example, according to one of the expatriate spouses, the Finnish "coffee and bun" culture did not prove very successful among their local friends so she gave it up altogether and started serving just mugs of coffee.

Another thing that often came up in the interviews was that the English seemed to keep their work and personal life separate. Personal relationships at work rarely developed into friendship outside work. Partly this was thought to result from the fact that people lived so far apart from each other. Socialising with colleagues after work would have simply been too much of an effort when travelling to and back from work took such a long time.

For the expatriate spouse the importance of taking initiative in building social relationships is emphasised because they have more time and need to socialise than their husbands who spend days working (Adler 1997). However, the majority of the female interviewees - also the ones who were in working life in England - felt it was particularly difficult to make friends with English women. Some said it was easier to become friends with other foreigners. A couple of the interviewees suggested that it might be due to differences in how career or family oriented English and Finnish women are. English women were viewed more traditional and family-oriented than Finnish women who were seen as more career-oriented. When the female interviewees had small children, they provided her a natural way to get into contact with the local women. Starting a new hobby was also mentioned as a good way to get to know local people.

Expatriates' connections to Finland remained tight throughout the assignments. This helped them fulfil the role that expatriates generally have according to Black,

Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992) as co-ordinators of shared objectives within the company. Expatriates working as technical specialists exchanged information and experiences with colleagues in the home country. In addition, people in sales including those who had permanently settled in England kept in contact with the offices in Finland. In the same way, that communication with the home office is essential for the expatriate, it is important for other members of the family to keep in touch with friends and relatives back home. New technology such as the Internet, e-mail and mobile phones make it possible for the expatriate and their family to maintain relationships with people in Finland on both professional and personal levels. Keeping up both the professional and personal contacts in the home country facilitates the expatriate's return.

An ideal length for an expatriate assignment seemed to be from two to four years. One of the interviewees who had been in England twice, thought that people should not go abroad for only one year because it is really only after a year that one is fully equipped for working in the new culture. Correspondingly, if one stays in a country longer than four or five years it becomes more difficult to return to the home country because everything from work and social networks to children's schooling seem to be in the country of assignment.

Regardless of the initial difficulties related to a normal adjustment process, the expatriates generally seemed well adjusted to living in England. For those three interviewees who now shared their lives with an English partner, the adjustment had obviously been more than successful. The others expressed their content particularly with their living environment, especially when it included picturesque English countryside. On the basis of the interviewees' descriptions on their every day lives, it seemed that it had set to a certain pattern with work, family, friends and hobbies that pleased them. A few said that although they did miss Finland every now and again, they would not want to go back there just yet.

The complaints they made were mostly linked to the crisis period of adjustment and although they still recognised the differences between England and Finland, they had learnt ways to cope with them. Many demonstrated the sort of behaviour

Kealey and Protheroe (2000) consider as a sign of adaptation skills, an important constituent in intercultural effectiveness. For example, they had maintained a positive attitude towards their assignment and setbacks were described with humour. Furthermore, they were active in getting to know their new living environment and had found enjoyable past time activities to replace their hobbies in Finland.

5.3. Communicative competence: communication, language, and culture

5.3.1. Expatriates' views on language

In the expatriates' views on language, three main themes came up. The separate yet overlapping functions that emerged from the data were the expressive, instrumental and interactive functions of language. The interviewees' answers to the question "what does language proficiency or knowing a language mean to you", involved things that one could do or achieve with language. This implies that language proficiency has a very practical relevance to expatriates and that for them language serves more than just the relationship and information functions proposed by Scollon and Scollon (1995).

Usually the expatriates first brought up the expressive function of a language. They thought that language proficiency means the ability to express themselves. One should be able to express his or her thoughts and ideas in speech and writing in the target language without having to alter the original message.

Secondly, language has an instrumental function for the expatriates in that language proficiency enables them to achieve set goals in the target culture. Many used the Finnish word "*pärjätä*" (as in "get along" or "cope") to explain their view. The expatriates stressed that it is important to get things done and be able to handle normal routines in the target language. A proficient speaker of a language should be able to get along linguistically in communication situations in both

personal and working life. The expatriates said that one should be able to manage not only varying types of business conversations but also be able to talk about things that are not related to their job. Furthermore, some of the interviewees pointed out that in order to achieve their communicative goals, it is necessary for the expatriates to be capable of modifying their language use according to context thus emphasising the pragmatic component of communicative competence. Being aware of the need for contextual modification of communication did not, however, always mean that it came naturally to the expatriates. One example where the Finns knew they had to modify their own way of communicating so that it better corresponded to the English norms was when writing business letters.

Interview extract 8.

"I had to write so in a way I gave the person who knew more about their [the English] conceptions than me I gave it [the paper] to that person for proof reading saying put the necessary 'would you pleases' there"

"joutu kirjoittaa niin kyllä mä sen sitten annoin tavallaan sille kaverille joka siinä enempi ties niitten käsityksestä mitä on mä sille sen annoin oikoluettavaksi että pistä sinne tarvittavat 'would you please' "

To achieve the goal of appearing polite was something where many looked for help from the more experienced ones.

Thirdly, according to the expatriates, language proficiency means that the communication is a genuinely two-way process where both parties understand the message the same way. Language acts as a means for interaction between the expatriates and the local community thus serving the relationship function of language described by Scollon and Scollon (1995). The expatriates' language proficiency should be good enough not only to enable them to express themselves in a way that the locals are able to understand them but also good enough for them to understand the locals' speech. Good language proficiency helps to minimise misunderstandings in non-native – native communication. It is important that the expatriates and locals understand messages the same way because minimising

misunderstandings contributes to improved effectiveness in communication (Gudykunst 1998) and misunderstandings in business can be costly.

For the expatriates, to say that you know a language means that you are able to operate appropriately in a foreign language environment, both at work and in the free time, so that you are able to express yourself, achieve your own objectives and interact socially with the local people. Without adequate language proficiency in the target language, the expatriates' capacity to carry out the above-mentioned functions is at risk.

5.3.2. Change in the view on language and expatriates' language use

The expatriates were asked whether their views on language and what is needed for communication in a foreign language had changed after their arrival in England. Their answer was "yes". The complex nature of language had taken the expatriates by surprise. Although the interviewees had studied English for many years at school, learning to use English in its natural environment had been more difficult than what they had anticipated.

As a result of living in England, the interviewees gained a deeper understanding of the multidimensional nature of languages in general and the nuances of English language use in particular. When in Finland, speaking English was thought to be "a piece of cake" as one of the interviewees put it. However, as soon as the expatriates were really immersed in the English language environment they became painfully aware of the richness and variety of the native speakers' language use that did not always adhere to their preconceptions of grammatical or phonological correctness. One of the interviewees gave an example of how the locals' pronunciation did not correspond to what he had been taught at school.

Interview extract 9.

”grammar and what we are taught are not really God-given they were surprised there I remember always when at some English class there was a teacher who taught how to pronounce and then when somebody for example pronounced ‘pub’ as ‘pub’[u] it was a terrible crime and when we went there [England] everybody pronounced it ‘pub’ [u]”

”kielioppi ja se mitä meille opetetaan ni ei kovin jumalan sanaa oo et ne ihmetteli siellä mä muistan aina kun jossain tota englannin tunnilla oli opettaja joka opetti miten lausutaan ja sit ku esimerkiks ku joku lausu esimerkiks pubin sillee et ‘pub’ ni se oli hirvee synti ni sit ku mentiin sinne ni kaikki lausu et ‘pub’ ”

Those of the interviewees, who had lived in an English-speaking country before their first assignment in England, had good English communication skills to start with. The above-mentioned changes in perceptions of foreign language use were not so drastic for them.

After the initial language shock that usually lasted a couple of months, the interviewees said that they had got used to the English language around them and all the expatriates considered their English language proficiency now adequate for their job. Nevertheless, some said that there is still room for improvement and things would go smoother if their English was better. When communicating in English, they have to remember to make sure that both parties interpret the messages the right way. A couple of the interviewees pointed out that the longer you stay in England, the more you realise how little you actually know the language.

At work, the communication situations that the expatriates meet include talking on the phone and face-to-face with colleagues, subordinates, superiors and clients, attending meetings, writing reports, e-mails and so on. The interviewees are faced with language use that varies from very sophisticated standard or office English to local dialects. Most of the interviewees use English also in non-native – non-native communication situations having non-native speakers of English as co-workers or friends. Though communication situations outside the work context

were generally not thought to cause difficulties some thought they could be rather challenging too. The question on the adequacy of the interviewees' language proficiency outside work did not emphasise the initial adjustment period. Although the interviewees now considered their language skills adequate, later in the interviews, they brought up several situations where their English language skills had proved to have limitations. These are discussed in the section 5.3.4.

5.3.3. Differences in culture and communication

In addition to deepening their understanding of linguistic issues during their stay in England, the interviewees had also become aware of certain aspects of communication, culture and organisational culture that are different to what they were used to in Finland. Noticing these differences made the expatriates perceive their own Finnish habits in a new light and modify their own, typically Finnish, behaviour. Some things that were thought normal and acceptable when in Finland could now seem awkward when contrasted with the English way of communicating or doing things.

The Finnish expatriates perceived the English people to be polite and skilled communicators who enjoy using their verbal talent. The expatriates considered the English language to be rich and expressive and said that the natives frequently use humour to liven up communication. As compared to Finns, the English were thought to be particularly skilful in argumentation. The English were also seen to be more tactful. They handled difficult situations more discreetly than Finns and rarely lost their temper. Frequent use of idioms and phrasal expressions were seen to be typical of natives' speech.

Many had noticed that in England the speakers' social background is reflected in their speech style. The way a person speaks – the accent used, the words chosen etc. – was thought to give away more information on a British than a Finnish speaker. This might be because the lines between different social classes have traditionally been more rigid and clearer in Britain than in Finland where the

relationship between a particular social class and variety of speech is not as fixed. These social structures – or their absence – are reflected in the language.

Politeness

One of the most frequently mentioned differences between the Finnish and English way of communicating was politeness. When in England the expatriates realised that, they might very well be perceived as rude if they kept on behaving and communicating according to their Finnish norms of politeness. The English people were said to be very understanding of imperfect language use by non-native speakers in general, but not remembering to say “please” was almost unforgivable. Moreover, it was not just what the expatriates said, but how they said it. According to the interviewee who has been in England the longest, when Finns talk Finnish among themselves, to the English it can sound as if they are having a fight. She said that nowadays that the Finns and the English have worked together for so long, the English have become to understand that the Finnish way of communicating is just different. This was confirmed by one of the local Englishmen during an informal conversation. He said that in the beginning when the Finns first started working there in England, the organisation suffered a slight culture shock because their ways of communicating and doing things were so different.

The expatriates had perceived the same effect as so many researchers (e.g. Wolfson 1983, Yli-Renko 1989, Törnroos, Berg, and Bergman 1991, Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1997, Carbaugh 1997, Clyne 1998) that as non-native speakers their incomplete mastery of linguistic competence was rather well tolerated by the locals but lack of skill in pragmatic, especially sociolinguistic, competence was frowned upon. Moreover, the interviewees’ comments support the findings of Yli-Renko (1989) that British native speakers of English perceive inadequacies in the Finns’ English language use regarding politeness.

The expatriates thought polite English language use had not been emphasised enough when they were taught English at school. Since there does not exist a corresponding word in Finnish, at first they had to specifically remind themselves to use “please”. When the interviewees did learn the polite English language use, they sometimes grew so comfortable with it that the Finnish norms of politeness seemed inadequate – even when in Finland.

However, the expatriates thought that too much politeness is no good either. From the Finnish point of view, the English were thought to go sometimes overboard with politeness so that it is occasionally used to cover up problems and to avoid confrontation.

Interview extract 10.

“I have noticed for example already back then that people everybody is for example very polite here and they promise and say that we will do this but then nothing really happens so here it is in a way it goes with the essentials of politeness like yeah yeah we will do this yeah you say you are going to take care of something and then nothing happens”

“sen mä oon esimerkiks huomannu huomasin jo sillon että ihmiset kaikki on esimerkiks kauheen kohteliaita täällä ja luvataan ja puhutaan että tehdään näin mutta sitten ei kuitenkaa mitään tapahu et se on täällä se niinku kuuluu peruskohteliaisuuteen et juujuu näin tehdään joo otetaan asia hoitaakseen mutta sitten siitä ei tuu mitään”

The above passage from an interview tells something about us Finns too. The expatriates’ view that the English people tend to express things in a positive and polite way even when things are not going so well, reflects the expatriates’ own, Finnish, tendency to communicate in a more direct way.

The English behaviour described in the above extract is related to another difference the expatriates had noticed between themselves and the locals. In Finland there is greater concern for uncertainty avoidance and so punctuality and obeying rules is more common than in England – Finland scored 59 in Hofstede’s

(1997) uncertainty index while the corresponding score for England was 35. In a strong uncertainty avoidance culture there is an inner urge to work hard and time is money whereas in a weak uncertainty avoidance culture time is only a framework for orientation and workers tend to be hardworking only when needed (Hofstede 1997). One of the interviewees exemplified the difference with the word “now”: when the Finns hear the word, they hear “now”, while the English hear “in a minute”. More importantly, both act and – unless these underlying meanings of words are understood – interpret the others’ behaviour according to their own conception of the word. In the above paragraph the strong uncertainty avoidance culture of the Finnish expatriate conflicts with the weak uncertainty culture of the English worker.

Small talk

The expatriates further mentioned small talk as a differentiating factor between the Finnish and English way of communicating. Like politeness, small talk was seen to have its pros and cons. The good thing about it was that it made the English people seem friendly and approachable. Generally, the English were seen to be more used to starting a conversation with strangers and getting to know new people. The expatriates noted that, for example, in Finland it is not unusual to take the lift without greeting or saying a word to others whereas in England remaining silent in the same situation would be considered rude or odd to say the least. The downside of small talk was that real friendship seemed harder to achieve. In Finland it was thought to be the other way around: getting to know new people does not come naturally but once you do get to know them, you actually get to be friends.

Like politeness, small talk conventions are an example of how pragmatic competence varies across cultures. As was the case with “now”, the source of confusion and frustration about small talk for expatriates lies in the different functions and meaning the Finnish and the English people attach to the same words. A few of the expatriates expressed their frustration because they felt that

phrases associated with small talk such as “how are you” were used superficially in England since nobody really wanted hear their answer. When the phrase “how are you” is used in the English culture the relationship function of communication is emphasised and less weight is put on the informative function whereas in the Finnish culture the phrase entails also more of the information function. Finns tend to interpret messages more literally so that for a Finn a phrase such as “how are you” presupposes an answer with some information value. However, for the English people it is not so much a straightforward question but a way to show friendliness and solidarity towards other people (Lewis 1995, Clyne 1998).

In the Anglo-Saxon world sociable discourse, i.e. what we often call small talk is used for establishing relationships rapidly (Lewis 1995). From the Finnish point of view then, the English way of using sociable discourse may seem superficial. When the expatriates used their Finnish frame of reference to interpret the English politeness and friendliness they were easily disappointed.

Interview extract 11.

“I moved there they [neighbours] were really nice invited to come over and but then it was just in the beginning”

”mä muutin sinne ne oli hirveen ystävällisiä kutsu kylään ja mut sitte vaan niinku se oli se alku”

Many of the interviewees made similar comments to the above saying that on the surface the English seemed friendly yet it was rather difficult to get to know them better. On the basis of their culturally conditioned expectations of communication behaviour dynamics, the Finnish expatriates were anticipating the conversations to have more profound effects on the other participants’ future behaviour. In this respect, talking has a clearly different function for the Finnish and the English people (Lewis 1995).

Nevertheless, there are reasons why the expatriates should actively try to increase their skills in small talk. Learning to use small talk and its culturally appropriate

applications is important because of the social function it has in the workplace as a tool for establishing, expressing, maintaining and reinforcing interpersonal relationships between colleagues (Holmes 2000). Small talk typically occurs at the boundaries of social encounters, for example, at the beginning or an end of a meeting and its omission may well be interpreted as bad manners by the native speakers (Holmes 2000).

The interviewees said that Finnish communication is more straightforward, even snappy, compared to typical English communication. For example, in meetings, instead of going straight to the point, the English like to chat about things that are not strictly related to the actual subject matter. They also prepare their listeners to what they are going to say, as if to soften the blow, and are more likely to stray from the point than their Finnish colleagues. For a Finn who is unaware of the English small talk conventions it may take a bit of getting used to.

Interview extract 12.

"the thing that is rather difficult for Finns is that the English are quite friendly they are so exceedingly polite here so if you if you for example invite twenty people somewhere and then want to show and present something to them then you'll just have to be quick in saying good morning thanks for coming you know like it's really nice that you could make it blaa blaa and then you have to do a bit of small talk for quite a while before you start talking shop"

"no se mikä suomalaiselle on aika vaikeeta niin englantilaiset on aika ystävällisiä täällä ollaan niin kauheen ylitsevuotavan kohteliaita eli jos sä jos sä nyt vaikka kutsut porukkaa parikyt henkee johonkin ja sit haluat niille jotain näyttää ja esittää niin kyllä nyt pitää äkkiä heti sanoo että 'good morning thanks for coming' niinku sille tavallaa heti niinku et onpas mukava et ku tulitte blaa blaa ja sitte pitää jutella ensin mukavia siinä aika pitkän aikaa ennen kun mennään aiheeseen"

Becoming aware of cultural differences such as the above is crucial for the expatriates to operate successfully in a foreign country. Since it is usually people in positions of power who determine the amount and distribution of small talk in workplace interactions (Holmes 2000), learning the appropriate ways to use small

talk is particularly important for expatriates since they often are in managerial positions.

A couple of the interviewees brought up the importance of cultural sensitivity at work. According to them, the expatriate's ability to interpret the host nationals' communication correctly and being able to adjust one's own communication accordingly make a difference in getting the job done. Being diplomatic and polite – not forgetting to apply the local standards of diplomacy and politeness – in order to not offend the host national colleagues and subordinates is important also when the local practices have to be changed.

5.3.4. Communication challenges for expatriates

Linguistic competence

The beginning of the expatriate assignment was characterised by communication difficulties related to linguistic competence, particularly its phonological component and the expatriates' own fluency. Those who did not have much previous experience from an English-speaking country reported having difficulties some in speaking and understanding English. They were surprised at how difficult speech-production was at first when communicating with native-speakers. The interviewees said it was tiring having to constantly communicate in a foreign language. Frustration was a common element of the expatriates' first few weeks and months when words did not come to mind easily and it was hard sometimes to understand the locals' accent.

Understanding the many varieties of English posed an extra challenge for the expatriates because of the different pronunciation in contrast to the more standard variety they were used to hearing before. Second language learners in general tend to depend more on the physical shape of the speech for its intelligibility so that deviations from the accent used in learning contexts causes them relatively more comprehension difficulties than it does for those acquiring their first language

(Pihko 1994). The expatriates said that it often took a while to get used to listening and understanding people they did not know especially if they spoke fast and used an accent the expatriates were not familiar with. Particularly the dialects of people from Scotland, Liverpool, Manchester and Wales were considered difficult to understand. Furthermore, background noises such as the din of the paper mill at work and the hubbub of people at the pub hampered communication more than they would have in a Finnish language environment.

Besides dialects, another thing that repeatedly came up in the interviewees' answers on challenging communication situations was talking on the phone. Differences in the overall structure of a phone conversation required the expatriates to modify their discourse competence when talking on the phone with English people. Furthermore, in order to appear as a competent communicator, knowledge of certain phrases used in this particular context was necessary. The English way of handling phone conversations differs from the Finnish one in that the British people usually do not introduce themselves at the beginning of a phone conversation. Some thought this was confusing since extra time was needed at the start of conversations to read between the lines and try to figure out whom they were talking to.

Considering the above, one of the most challenging everyday communication situations for the expatriates would be having a phone conversation with somebody speaking fast in a dialect that is difficult to understand. All the interviewees had to deal with these kinds of situations. Those at work had frequent contacts with people from areas where people spoke a dialect that the Finns considered difficult to understand. Spouses who were not working were not saved from these particular communication challenges either as many lived in these areas or in their immediate surroundings. Furthermore, the spouses had to take care of many of the arrangements of everyday life, which meant talking on the phone for them too.

Some said that communicating outside the working environment was more demanding than communicating at work, mainly due to inadequacies in the

linguistic competence and what Binon and Claes (1995) call the referential component of communicative competence. Several situations or topics were mentioned where the expatriates felt that vocabulary and procedures called for extra attentiveness. At work one interviewee said that designing was rather demanding because of the detailed technical description it required in English. Outside the working environment, particularly having to deal with legal terminology and bureaucratic language use was considered tricky, e.g. opening a bank account, going to the doctor, buying a car, taking an insurance, signing contracts. Exchange students have reported the same handicap due to the lack of appropriate terminology in dealing with bureaucracy while abroad (Ball 2000). In addition, the expatriates are met with frequent use of jargon at work and slang expressions in everyday spoken language.

Moreover, in non-work contexts the scope of conversations is likely to cover more subject areas than at work. The conversation may flow more freely into various directions that the expatriate may or may not be familiar with. References to, for instance, the culture and history of the country often contain information that is relevant in order to understand the meaning of what is being communicated but the expatriate is rarely fully aware of their various connotations. Besides, outside the working environment not even those expatriates who are in managerial positions have the benefit of being in a position to control the conversational flow like they often have at work.

Eventually, the expatriates' linguistic competence was modified so that it increasingly corresponded to the demands of their new language environment. Switching languages became easier with time for the interviewees so that it did not really make a difference which of the languages they were using themselves. After a while they also got used to hearing and understanding the different varieties of English. However, despite the fact that the expatriates' fluency and listening skills increased rather quickly after their arrival in England, still after the initial language shock there remained aspects of language use that were considered more challenging than others. Especially the use of phrasal

expressions and prepositions was sometimes thought to be problematic and require conscious efforts to get them right.

Pragmatic competence

The English learnt at school was considered inadequate particularly in situations where pragmatic competence including sociolinguistic and discourse competence played a major role. A few of the expatriates told that although they could very well communicate in English, they did not always succeed in expressing themselves in English as sophisticatedly as they would have wanted. It was not always clear to the interviewees how one should behave and use language in a particular real-life social situation. One of the expatriates exemplified the kind of communication skills that are not taught at school and mentioned the following situations.

Interview extract 13.

“you go to buy milk and how how are you doing and so on or what do you say to your colleague in the morning and when you go to a meeting how do you shake hands with everybody or not do you go and sit down”

“sä meet maitokauppaan ja ‘how how are you doing’ ja näin pois päin tai mitä sanotaan työkaverin kanssa aamulla ja kun mennään palaveriin niin miten kätellääks kaikkia vai eiks kätellä mennäks istumaan”

These are quite simple everyday situations in one’s own mother tongue but when one moves to another culture the language used in these situations does not always straightforwardly translate to the target language. Before one can feel at ease in even these everyday situations one has to acquire the culturally determined communication behaviour and pragmatic competence, e.g. politeness and small talk conventions, that go with the language.

Several of the interviewees noted that active participation in large groups in general proved to be rather demanding. For example, at work the expatriates had to attend meetings and negotiations. The interviewees agreed that these are situations that can be rather challenging also when operating in one's own mother tongue, but having to operate in a foreign language requires extra attention. One is not able to react and take the floor as quickly in English as in Finnish. Many said that they have to formulate the starting words more carefully which takes time. This means that the others may already be talking about something else when they would be ready to share their view on a particular issue.

In addition to the longer time needed to react in English, another thing that made meetings and negotiations communicatively challenging for the expatriates was the English way of communicating things more indirectly compared to the Finnish way. The expatriates had to learn to read between the lines and interpret implicit meanings. The sensitivity to nuances and ability to interpret indirect language use correctly is important especially in negotiations.

Interview extract 14.

“they [the English] try to express negative things in a positive way so then you have to interpret what the other one is really saying in a negotiation situation it is a bit difficult and particularly for many Finns that come from our paper mills to negotiate and you really have to make sure you know how things are going because the Finns are used to a certain type of English (...) at school”

“negatiivisetkin asiat yritetään kääntää positiiviseksi ni sitte pitää tulkita et mitä tää keskustelukumppani oikeen sanoo neuvottelu-tilanteessa se on hieman hankalaa ja varsinkin monelle suomalaiselle kun meiltäkin tulee sitten tehtaalta neuvottelemaan ja pitää katsoa tosiaan et ymmärtää missä mennään koska nää on tottunu tiettyyn tiettyyn englantiin (...) koulussa”

In the above extract of an interview one of the expatriates points out again that expatriates face demanding communication situations where the Finnish way of interpreting communication is likely to prove inadequate. The ability to interpret

indirect language use appropriately is another pragmatic skill that the expatriates have only rarely learned at school.

Besides negotiations and meetings, subtle communication skills are needed also in other situations at work. Several of the expatriates said that at work they had to in a way sell their own ideas to others and convince other people of their own point of view. For expatriates who are in supervisory positions, it is important to be able to get subordinates to commit to their current job.

Argumentation and conflict situations in general were mentioned as communicatively difficult. Handling complaints and difficult customers was also considered problematic until the expatriates' gained a deeper understanding on what linguistic strategies they should employ in those situations. It seems that the Finns' pragmatic competence was not always adequate when they were confronted with the natives in situations that required argumentative skills.

As non-native speakers the expatriates are not as practised in utilising their sociolinguistic and discourse competence in demanding communication situations as native speakers, but the fact that English is only their second language is not likely to be the only reason for the perceived inadequacy of pragmatic competence when faced with confrontation. Resulting from the Finnish desire to preserve harmony (Carbaugh 1997) and the tradition of passive participation (Sajavaara and Lehtonen 1997), the expatriates are simply not used to opposing others' opinions. The interviewees' comments thus support Sajavaara and Lehtonen's (1997) view that Finns generally consider argumentation difficult. The fact that the English people were considered skilled communicators, who actually enjoy argumentation, further accentuated the Finns' tendency to avoid confrontation.

Strategic competence

The strategies the interviewees said they used to cope with difficulties in English communication included repetition, rephrasing, clarification requests and requests to the natives to slow down the pace of speech. These are part of the expatriates' strategic competence. It was said that the English are very polite and helpful towards non-native speakers when they had difficulties in communication. Being skilled communicators and experienced in managing different types of communication situations, as the interviewees noted, the English usually ensured the smooth flow of situations where the Finns might not have been so comfortable in operating in English.

It is worth noting that the components of strategic competence that the expatriates brought up can be used to compensate communication difficulties caused by inadequacies mainly in linguistic competence when there are problems in speech production and listening comprehension. Difficulties related to the expatriates' linguistic competence characterised the early stages of the assignment after which it improved as they got used to the local dialect and their own language fluency increased.

Other communication challenges that the interviewees mentioned, such as interpreting indirect language use, presentations, persuasion and argumentation were mostly caused by inadequacies in other competence areas than linguistic competence per se. What made negotiating, persuading, convincing and so on even more communicatively demanding was that they required the conscious mastery of more than one competence area at the same time. When faced with these kind of communication challenges, strategic competence has again a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of communication.

Yet, strategies like repetition and clarification requests are usually not sufficient alone when dealing with communication challenges that originate from other than the linguistic competence. The expatriates had come up with applicable solutions also to some of the more challenging aspects of English communication, like

politeness and participation in-groups. One of the interviewees said that whenever possible, he tried to organise it so that he could communicate face-to-face with people preferring to see only few people at a time. This way he was better able to control the communication situation and minimise misunderstandings.

Another example of how the Finnish expatriates tried to enhance their pragmatic competence and ensure the effectiveness of their English communication was found at one of the branches where there were quite a few Finns working. The one who had been there the longest acted as a kind of a cultural mentor or mediator between the Finns and the English. As was described in the interview extract 8 in section 5.3.1. the other Finns actively sought her help especially regarding written communication where the norms of politeness caused them trouble. She would modify their text so that the level of politeness met the local norms and was appropriate to the context.

5.3.5. Differences in organisational culture

As regards to British organisational culture, the expatriates' conclusion was that it really is different to the Finnish one. The expatriates were asked what sort of differences exactly they had noticed between the two. One of the most often used words the Finnish expatriates used to describe the English organisational culture was "hierarchical". As the expatriates elaborated the notion, it seemed to be linked to such things as bureaucracy, communication, organisational structure and leadership style.

After living and working in England, the expatriates had come to consider the Finnish organisational culture to be typically democratic and employees in Finland having wider job descriptions than in England. In Finland the expatriates had been used to working in teams whereas in England they had noticed a kind of "every man for himself" –mentality dominating at the workplace. The comments support Hofstede's (1997) scoring of the two cultures along the individualism-collectivism dimension where England was the third most individualistic culture

and Finland only the seventeenth. According to Hofstede (1997), in cultures that score high on individualism it is typical for people to think that everyone grows up to look after him- or herself only. Furthermore, in individualistic cultures management is seen as management of individuals whereas in collectivist cultures it is seen as management of people (Hofstede 1997).

The expatriates' notions on the differences in organisational culture also support Hofstede's (1997) view that the Finnish organisational culture is typically feminine whereas the English one is typically masculine. According to Hofstede (1997), in feminine cultures like Finland the stress is on equality and solidarity whereas in masculine cultures like England the emphasis is on performance and competition among colleagues. Therefore, the Finns tend to strive for consensus while the English are used to more assertive and decisive leadership. It seems then that masculinity, the dimension on which the cultures of Finland (score 26) and England (score 66) most differ according to Hofstede (1980), is a significant factor in explaining the differences in organisational cultures perceived by the expatriates.

However, there seems to be more than masculinity to explain why the English organisational culture strikes so hierarchical to the Finns. Although the differences in masculinity and its implications on decision-making may partly explain why the Finns perceived English organisational culture to be so hierarchical, it alone does not account for the differences the expatriates perceived in taking initiative. Like one of the interviewees said, initiative or the lack of it is not the same thing in England and as it is in Finland. What can be interpreted as initiative behaviour in one cultural context, can be stepping on other people's toes in another.

Interview extract 15.

"at first I thought that secretary girls for example always sat and waited that somebody would come and ask them to do this and that and me if I knew for example that someone had a trip abroad coming I bought the ticket and I did stuff on my own initiative but it is not about initiative you know it is a Finn knows that this needs to

be done so he or she just does it even if it is beyond their territory whereas the English do not dare they are they have to know exactly what they can do here and here like this and they can't move beyond and then they go and ask"

"mä tykkäsin alussa että sihteerityöt esimerkiks istu aina ja odotti että joku pyytää et no tee tämä tee tämä tee tämä ja mä taas jos mä tiesin esimerkiks et joku on lähdössä ulkomaille ni mä ostin sen lentolipun ja mä niinku touhusin oma-alotteisesti mut se ei oo siitä oma-alotteisuudesta tiekkö kiinni se on suomalainen tietää että tää pitää tehdä niin ne tekee sen huolimatta siitä et meneekö se ehkä vähä niinku yli heiän reviirin kun taas englantilaiset ei uskalla ne on niitten pitää täsmälleen tietää että että tota noin mä voin tästä ja tähän näin sen yli mä en voi mennä ja sit ne käy kysymässä"

Initiative or the lack of it seemed to be connected with role descriptions, which in turn are related to another dimension of organisational culture, namely the power distance dimension. For a Finn who is used to more flexible working roles and using his or her own initiative the sort of English behaviour described above may seem odd at first. The English secretaries in the above paragraph are expecting to be told what to do by their superiors. This is characteristic of subordinates in organisational cultures where there is large power distance while employees in organisations with small power distance expect to be consulted rather than given orders (Hofstede 1997).

According to the expatriates' answers, in England people tend to stick to their territorial status and the powers that go with it and expect the others to do the same. In England the need to obey hierarchical rules overrides the need to show initiative more often than in Finland. The expatriates thus felt that in England power is more concentrated and people focus on their own responsibilities instead of working together to achieve common goals. When the English employees do not use their own initiative and problem-solving skills automatically, the Finns who are using their own cultural frame of reference regarding organisational culture and work roles can easily just think that "the English do not use their heads", as one of the interviewees put it.

The fact that the expatriates considered English organisational culture to be hierarchical to the extent that it was usually the first and the most often used word to characterise the differences between the two organisational cultures is surprising since on the basis of Hofstede's (1980) research power distance is the one dimension on which the scores of Finland and UK are the closest to each other with only two points separating them. One explanation for this unexpected result might be that since 1980 when Hofstede (1980) first published his research results, the organisational cultures have changed so that Finland has become even less hierarchical. Then again, the above paragraph that so well illustrated the power distance differences between Finnish and English organisational cultures was told by an interviewee who first started working in England in the beginning of the eighties.

In light of the present research, Hofstede's (1997) suggestion that the power distance differences between countries do not necessarily change through time but that they may all be moving to a lower level seems thus unlikely presuming that the original positioning of the two cultures along the power distance dimension was correct. In fact, many of the expatriates said that they had perceived the organisational culture in England changing to the direction of Finland so that it is becoming less hierarchical and teamwork oriented. On the basis of this study, it seems that Finnish and English organisational cultures are further apart from each other along the power distance dimension than Hofstede (1997) expected. Another explanation for the contradictory results could be that although the direction to which power distance levels move may be the same for these two cultures but the speed they are moving is different.

The concentration of power that the interviewees had noticed has implications for communication too. The expatriates said that communication flows vertically in the English organisation whereas in Finland it flows more horizontally. Many of the interviewees actually gesticulated with their hands to demonstrate how the information in their English working environment first goes up from one supervisor to another and then back down again through different hierarchical levels. The expatriates felt that communication can sometimes be inadequate

especially between people on the same level of hierarchy, because things usually had to be passed on to superiors and get their acceptance first.

Furthermore, the way things are communicated is different in England because of the hierarchical structure of the organisational communication culture. One of the interviewees noted that in England it is not acceptable to talk to your superiors in the same way as in Finland. In Finland it may be okay to talk to your superiors almost as if you were talking to your friend, but in England speech style has to be modified more so that it corresponds to the interlocutors hierarchical status and complies with the general power distance within the organisation. The Finnish expatriates, however, said that they do not always play by these English rules of communication and use the more horizontal, Finnish way of communicating at work.

“Bureaucratic” was another word commonly used to describe the English culture in general and the expatriates used it to describe the organisational culture too. There are lot of rules and regulations and forms to be filled. Combined with the narrow job descriptions and vertical flow of information this leads to things not happening quite as quickly as what the expatriates had been used to in Finland. The expatriates found the formal organisational structure rather frustrating since they had to obey certain – sometimes rigid – regulations.

5.3.6. Areas of improvement in the expatriates' language proficiency

During their assignments, the expatriates' language proficiency had changed from being passive into active and they had become more fluent and confident speakers of English. Writing skills were not considered as the main area of improvement, although a couple of the interviewees mentioned them too. Rather, the interviewees emphasised the verbal side of communication when asked how their language proficiency had improved. All the expatriates reported increased skills in listening comprehension and said that they were now better able to understand the natives' speech regardless of speaker's dialect or interfering factors such as

background noise. However, some of the spouses said that they were slightly disappointed in how slowly they learned the language because they had less contact with the native speakers than their working partners.

The interviewees' pragmatic competence had improved as they reported being capable of handling a greater variety of communication situations than before. Also their linguistic competence had improved mainly because their knowledge of vocabulary had extended to cover more subject areas. According to previous research on exchange students there may not be much advancement in the structural accuracy when foreign language acquisition takes place in natural contexts but rather it is the sociolinguistic competence that improves due to a stay in target language environment (Regan 1995). The interviewees' stories support this view. The expatriates said they had learned to use more idioms, colloquial expressions and polite forms of English language. They reported having become more sensitive to situational factors and were able to adapt their communicative behaviour according to the norms and demands of a given situation. One of the interviewees mentioned as an example that she had learned to handle difficult customers over the phone – something that had been quite a challenge when she first started working in England. The expatriates had learned what could be called “communicative fine-tuning” and so increased their pragmatic competence in English.

5.4. The expatriate experience

5.4.1. Return to Finland – thoughts on repatriation

Returning back to Finland after a long time in a foreign country usually generated positive feelings among the repatriates although it was not always that simple to start their life anew in the home country. Generally, the repatriates did not have to worry too much about the practical arrangements of the return such as the logistics of moving. Although the return shock experienced by repatriates has been often mentioned in research literature and it is agreed that it can in fact be

sometimes even more difficult than the actual culture shock in the host country, the majority of the five interviewed repatriates did not report any major difficulties in adjusting back to the Finnish culture and way of life.

The rather easy repatriation of the Finns is probably due to none of the repatriates being away from Finland for more than five years at a time. In addition, the English culture is relatively close to the Finnish culture when compared to, for example, some Asian cultures. Returning expatriates and spouses who have completed multiple or long foreign assignments in a country very different to their own have a much higher risk for problems upon repatriation (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992). Nevertheless, it must be remembered that some of the interviewees have decided not to return to Finland at all and one moved back to England having tried it.

However, repatriation was not always without its complications even for the Finns returning home from England. Aspects of repatriation that did cause concern were not related to the Finnish culture as such but rather to the move itself, like the timing of the return, children's education and the spouse's employment in Finland. What was found to be problematic in some cases was that parents were left quite alone with arranging their children's move from one educational system to another. Furthermore, there was disappointment in how little there were possibilities to actively keep up the language proficiency the children had acquired in England. Nevertheless, the children were reportedly as happy as their parents to return home and particularly pleased to regain their liberty to come and go more freely than in England.

The changes and availability of suitable openings in the home organisation are not easy to predict especially as the return of the expatriate itself may not necessarily follow the original plan (Torbiörn 1982). Arranging an appropriate job for the repatriate in the home organisation upon return can be complicated even if the employer and the employee agree on the timing of return. In some cases, a transition period was needed – and patience from the repatriate's part – before the repatriate could be designated a suitable role in the home organisation.

Thinking about returning home was not relevant to all of the interviewees still living in England, but those who commented on it seemed to have mixed feelings about going back to Finland. On one hand, they were looking forward to it. On the other hand, some of the expatriates were troubled about how the return would affect their children and the expatriate spouses were concerned about their possible return back to working life in Finland. Regardless of the seemingly effortless return of the repatriates, these concerns seem justified.

5.4.2. The aftermath

During the interviews, the expatriates were asked what they thought they had gained from their assignment in England. Everybody agreed that the experience was beneficial as regards both their personal and professional lives. Even the spouses who did not work during the assignment thought and hoped that they would be able to apply what they had learned in England in their future work in Finland. Improved language proficiency was something that the whole expatriate family could make use of later on in their lives.

The expatriates said they had benefited a great deal professionally from their assignment. They had made useful contacts and learned a lot so that they had got a better picture of their own field of expertise. The expatriates' answers are in accordance with Adler's (1997) conclusions that the things expatriates learn during their assignments are not so much to do with the technical side of their job as they are with managerial skills. This is of course not to say that expatriates did not learn technical skills at all, but that their skills in managing people usually improve even more drastically due to the demands that the foreign environment imposes on them.

The assignment also contributed to the expatriates' personal growth and cultural understanding. In addition to gaining insight into the English culture, the interviewees thought they were now better prepared to move to some other, novel, culture after having been through the adjustment process once. Several of the

expatriates brought up increased self-confidence, mentioned also by Adler (1997), as one of the benefits of their assignment. Getting one's life started in a foreign country is a demanding project and after succeeding in it the expatriates had a stronger belief in their own abilities to handle complicated situations. Increased self-confidence together with improved language skills made the expatriates also more confident communicators who are not afraid to open their mouth in a foreign language. On the whole, they thought the assignment was an enriching experience since they became aware of cultural differences and learned to tolerate and respect diversity – values that the parents were happy to pass on to their children.

None of the interviewees answered “no” when they were asked whether they would be willing to go on an assignment again in the future. Some said “yes” straight away and others added that it might, in fact, be very likely. The rest just said that although they are not considering the possibility at the moment it is not out of question – “never say never” as a couple of the interviewees put it. The expatriates were of the opinion that once you have been on one assignment it is easier to take up another one.

However, an offer of a new assignment would not be accepted automatically. The expatriates thought moving abroad for work would be the easiest for single people and couples without children. According to the expatriates, children were not necessarily an obstacle for going on an assignment but the age of children is crucial when the parents are deciding whether to accept the offer or not. When the employees have children in their pre-teens and older they seem to be most likely to turn down an assignment for family reasons. Teenagers are in a sensitive age as far as schooling and establishing relationships are concerned. Adaptation to a new culture is likely to be easier for younger children who are still more dependent on their parents and making friends is not as delicate a matter as it may be for those in their puberty. Children closer to the age of twenty may well be independent enough not to follow their parents abroad if they do not wish to and so the parents are not necessarily so tied anymore to their offspring in making a decision about an assignment. The expatriates' comments comply with earlier studies, where children who are the wrong age, i.e. teenagers, have been found to be one of the

top reasons why people would reject an international assignment (Adler 1997, Gertsen 1990).

Apart from children, other family-related reasons for turning down an international assignment according to previous research is the spouses' unwillingness to give up their own career (Adler 1997, Gertsen 1990). Although all the three spouses interviewed in this study had left their jobs in Finland when moving to England it seemed that they did not want it to be taken for granted that they automatically took years off from their career. The interviewees did not emphasise location, career or job related reasons in their answers on why turn down a new assignment. Yet, these were mentioned often when asked why they wanted to take up an assignment in the first place as reported in 5.2.1..

There were two opposing views on where the expatriates would want to go to for a new assignment if the occasion arose and they got to choose. One group of interviewees thought they would rather move to a country other than England and preferably to a country where English was not the first language spoken. These people thought that since they had already lived in England, they would rather experience something different and even learn a new language. The others said they would not want to move to a new linguistic environment anymore. After one foreign experience they would prefer going to a country where they would not have to take the challenge of learning a new language on top of learning new working practices.

5.4.3. The interviewees' advice for future expatriates

Based on their own experiences, the interviewees gave some advice for those considering an assignment abroad. This section presents the main points that the interviewees thought every expatriate-to-be should consider beforehand. These included the expatriate's professional and technical competence, adequate preparation, family issues, housing, language proficiency and psychological adaptability.

First of all, the expatriate's own competence and the needs of the company should be compatible. Nobody should be sent on an assignment without previous working experience of the kind of a job they are going to be positioned for in the country of assignment. Expatriates should not be required to learn the job, language and culture simultaneously, one at a time is demanding enough.

Secondly, people about to move abroad for work should prepare themselves and, if they have, their family members for it well in advance. They should look for information about the host country, its culture and customs. For instance, if the expatriate was going to England it would be useful to be aware of the hierarchical nature of British organisational cultures that had taken many of the interviewees by surprise. A visit to the host country was strongly recommended for future expatriates and their spouses and it has been recognised as an important aspect of expatriate support in other studies too (Forster 2000). In an ideal situation, there would be somebody to show them around and assist the expatriates in deciding about residential areas, schools and so on. Colleagues in the work place and people who have been in the same area before were considered the best resources of information in this respect.

Thirdly, it was acknowledged that when the expatriate has children who are following him or her to the host country, the pre-departure preparations are even more important. The parents should be prepared to give their children time to adjust to the new culture. Although young children often demonstrate surprising adaptability, they should not be expected to adjust in a blink of an eye. Even children in the same family may react very differently to the move and parents need to be sensitive to their needs.

The interviewees stressed the importance of choosing suitable housing and neighbourhood because of the effects it has on the well being of the expatriate family who usually start with no social networks in the area. It should also be taken into account that costs of living may be different to one's home country in the country of assignment. Particularly at the start of the assignment it would be wise to have a little extra money to cover expenses in case getting things sorted

takes longer than anticipated. This relates to another thing the interviewees said future expatriates should be prepared for when moving to England, namely bureaucracy.

The relevance of good language proficiency was emphasised. The more fluent the expatriate was in the target language, the better. If possible, the spouse and children of the expatriate should also update their language skills before the assignment. As far as British communication was concerned, the expatriates reminded that it really is important to be polite in England. Being diplomatic and remembering to say “please” makes a difference in getting things done in good spirit.

Lastly, the interviewees recommended foreign assignments as a useful and enriching experience to be embarked on with an open mind. Practical advice for future expatriates included being active and starting a new hobby to make new friends. Expatriates should have a sincere desire to experience another culture not forgetting the old saying “when in Rome do as the Romans do”.

5.6. IHRM and expatriate support

5.6.1. Evaluation of the expatriate support system

The expatriates’ views on the adequacy of employer support varied. On one hand, many said they had a feeling that they would always get help if they just asked for it. They were particularly satisfied with the company doing all the paperwork and being able to visit England before their move. The expatriates got assistance also from their colleagues and other Finns in the host country so that informal help within the company was many times close at hand. Those who were more satisfied with the current state of affairs were usually expatriates who had previous experience from abroad, no family responsibilities and a solid knowledge of the English language already before their assignment.

Yet on the other hand, the interviewees said that the employer did not actively offer support other than was necessary regarding the formal side of the assignment, paper work, contracts etc. Outside these formal contacts, there was not much communication between the expatriates and the human resource personnel in the home country. Some said that even though they knew they could get assistance, it was not enough since they simply did not know what kind of information and help to ask for. This comment was typically made by those on their first assignment and with no previous experience on living abroad. Thus some kind of cross-cultural, pre-departure training was hoped for at least for first-timers. The expatriates' view on the inadequacy of pre-departure training and other support is consistent with previous research that has found the same deficiencies to exist in many international companies (Suutari and Brewster 1998, Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992, Forster and Munton 1991, Forster 2000).

Although some of the more internationally experienced expatriates were more or less satisfied with the level of employer support, there were still quite a few who said they would have wanted it to be more comprehensive. In addition to the support that had been provided by the company, the interviewees thought that tailored information packages and training would be good ways to improve the support system. Like the UK expatriates in a recent study (Forster 2000) who considered cross-cultural training an important form of expatriate support, many of the interviewees in the current research suggested that target language and culture related training be provided for the expatriates in order to better equip them for their lives abroad. Assignment previews and language training for expatriate families are recommended also by Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1998).

The spouses said that they were not really involved in the process at all. Some of the expatriates pointed out that even if they themselves were internationally experienced, the spouse and children could have benefited from more support in the form of culture and language training. This complies with previous studies recommending that the employer should provide more information on the assignment to the employee's spouses (Baumgarten 1995, Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999, Forster 2000) and continue supporting them once in the host country

(Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999). Ideally, culture-related training and information should include all members of the expatriate family (Hofstede 1980).

5.6.2. Suggestions for pre-departure expatriate support

Having at least some concrete information package to get familiarised with expatriate and culture related issues would have been considered useful by many of the interviewees. On the basis of their own experience in England, the interviewees brought up some topics that could be covered in information packages and training for expatriates. More detailed information would be welcomed on things like taxation, social security, pension, banking, schooling, public transportation, free-time activities and health care in England. It would be important for the expatriates to know also how their assignments affect their rights and obligations regarding the Finnish system after the assignment.

The expatriates suggested that training and other support could deal with both general concepts of culture and expatriate adjustment as well as culture-specific characteristics of the country of assignment. The expatriates were asked to comment also on language training, which will be discussed later in section 5.6.3.

As for the subject areas that the training could include, the following were mentioned: the culture and history of the country and area where the expatriates live and those near-by, local customs and language. The need for more information on local customs, culture and business practices is evident also in the Forster (2000) study, where over eighty per cent of expatriates consider them as essential or very important. It would be useful to provide tailored information on these matters according to needs of the expatriates (Forster and Munton 1991).

5.6.3. Suggestions for expatriate language training

The most important thing about language training from the expatriates' point of view seemed to be that it should prepare them for the kind of everyday life communication situations they are going to face when they arrive in England. The training should activate the expatriates' language proficiency. In other words, the expatriates should be taught how to put into operation what they have earlier learned at school so that they can feel prepared for everyday use of the target language. All agreed that the training should involve a lot of practice in conversation skills making the expatriates more confident in producing English in spontaneous language use situations. The expatriates' views are in accordance with the Ball (2000) study where conversation and listening skills were considered the most useful areas of language preparation for a stay abroad.

Besides improving the expatriates' fluency in everyday situations, the training should concentrate on improving their pragmatic competence which usually was just the one area of language use the interviewees considered the most challenging. Some doubted that the aspects of foreign language use that are the most difficult to learn could not be taught beforehand, others thought there is still room for improvement in language training as far as preparing expatriates for their assignments is concerned. The expatriates would benefit most from training that concentrated on communication situations the expatriates considered particularly challenging such as presentations, argumentation, participation in groups, phone conversations and so forth. These all presuppose taking into account the mentality and customs of the people in the target country.

However, practice in linguistic competence should not be forgotten. Although the expatriates were confident about their knowledge of English vocabulary in general, some suggested that some vocabulary of their own field of specialisation be included in the training. This might be a good idea especially for those holding a technical position since fluency in the host country language has been found to be important factor in interaction adjustment particularly for the technical expatriates (Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999).

Another area of linguistic competence where the interviewees said more practice would be useful in was listening comprehension. In an optimal situation, the expatriates could attend courses held by a native speaker. Having a native teacher would be one way of exposing the expatriates to authentic speech before the assignment although the dialects and accents of real-life native language users cannot be covered by any one language trainer. Exposure to colloquial language use at a native speaker speed can ease the immersion in the host language environment particularly for persons who are not used to listening and communicating face-to-face with native speakers (Ball 2000). The expatriates suggested that it might be a good idea to integrate language training with other training so that for example, the country of assignment and its culture could be introduced to them using the local language.

Some interviewees pointed out that the role of pre-departure language training depends also on the level of language proficiency the expatriate already has. Some might be in need of a more in-depth and long-term language training to start with. A few of the expatriates with family thought that children could benefit from a short language training too to help them get hold of the foreign accent, rhythm of speech and some basic vocabulary. Furthermore, not all expatriates have had to actively use English for a long time before their assignments and those who have, may be more used to dealing with people who also speak English as a foreign language than to native speakers. Being constantly surrounded by native English speakers requires profound knowledge of the language as the previous discussion on communicative competence has shown.

A couple of the expatriates said that language training would be useful not only before their assignment but also after they have arrived in the new host country. Then they can apply what they learn straight away in real life and the teaching feels more meaningful as they are able to already process their own experiences in class. As mentioned earlier, a couple of the interviewees did attend language courses in England and they perceived them to be effective. Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1992) argue that, in fact, language training provided both before the

assignment and in the host country is indispensable to the effectiveness of expatriate managers.

5.6.4. Suggestions for improvement in expatriate management

Characteristics of good IHRM practices

The interviewees called for a company approach to expatriate management that would be comprehensive and systematic yet flexible and dynamic. The expatriates would like there to be a bit larger organisation to take care of employees' foreign assignments. This was considered necessary and justified because of the relatively large size of the company. The full expatriate assignment process of selection, training, family support, compensation and repatriation demands a co-ordinated approach to expatriate management (Welch and Welch 1994). As far as the expatriates knew, there were no regular follow-ups of expatriate assignments. Compiling and maintaining mobility audits would help the company to identify those employees who may be more likely to encounter difficulties and benefit from additional relocation support (Forster and Munton 1991).

The interviewees justified their hopes for a more comprehensive expatriate management practices by saying that if the company is aiming at sending employees abroad in the future, it is wise to concentrate on expatriate management and make the first assignment as positive for the expatriates as possible. If the expatriates' first experience of an assignment is made positive, they are more likely to take up on a second assignment. Insufficient expatriate management can result in negative effects not only on the personal lives of the expatriates but also on their attitudes towards the company and expatriate assignments in general (Forster and Munton 1991). Especially difficulties in relocation can affect employees' attitudes towards their employer and result in reluctance to relocate or even in voluntary turnover of experienced staff (Forster and Munton 1991, Neovius 1996) especially since repatriates generally are in a good position to enter the labour market (Strömmer 1999). For instance, in the US

one in every five repatriates leaves the company within a year after returning to the home country (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992).

Several of the expatriates pointed out that it would do the company good if the expatriate system was more dynamic. This implies that the movement of expatriates from one country to another should grow in overall volume and it should not be one-way as it has been to a large extent up until now. Rather, people also from other countries than Finland should be able to go on foreign assignments more often within the company's foreign divisions. Sending host country nationals on global assignments is suggested also by Black, Gregersen, and Mendehall (1992). Besides enhancing the flow of information, one benefit would be the reduction of the we-they –attitude that easily prevails in situations where the expatriates mostly come from the parent company.

On the basis of the interviewees' answers, international assignments in the company seem to be currently approached from the point of view of the multidomestic or multinational business strategies as defined by Adler (1997), whereas the expatriates would like the company to apply more the sort of approach associated with global business strategy. This suggests that the company should adopt a strategic-proactive rather than tactical-reactive approach to the staffing of international assignments (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992). Sending mostly home country nationals to foreign assignments is associated with business strategies in multidomestic companies, while the mobility of host country and third country nationals suggested by the interviewees is characteristic of global business strategies (Adler 1997).

Flexibility was another thing that the interviewees called for. Taking up and starting the assignment should be made as flexible as possible so that the expatriate can work efficiently in the host country right from the start. Proper expatriate support frees the expatriate's resources and enables him or her to concentrate on cultural adaptation instead of managing fundamentals like sorting paperwork, housing and transportation (Winkelman 1994). The less the expatriate

will have to worry about the fundamentals, the better he or she will be able to focus on work-related issues (Winkelman 1994).

Some of the expatriates thought the company would benefit from having a reserve of potential expatriates growing. The idea is that it would make staffing assignments easier when more employees would be aware of such possibility and would have had time to acquire relevant skills. This implies the sort of on-going training policy that has been suggested by Forster (2000) and Baumgarten (1995). Forster (2000) recognises that international assignments are processes instead of just one-off events. Thus the relevant training programmes could also be more process-like in nature starting months or even years before the assignment and continue for some time in the host country environment (Forster 2000). Baumgarten (1995) too recommends a cumulative approach to training and career planning where competencies required during international assignments are started to develop early on in an employee's career. This would increase the dynamic and flexible nature of the organisation that the expatriates called for.

Organisational support

In accordance with Forster and Munton (1991), and contrary to a commonly held view of expatriate support equalling just pre-departure training and operative human resource management, many of the interviewees thought that expatriate support should not end when the expatriate family has arrived in the country of assignment. Often the expatriates had in fact received informal and valuable help from their co-workers in the receiving organisation. Help and support after the arrival in the new host country is important since many of the problems expatriates encounter occur only after their relocation (Forster and Munton 1991).

Guidance to the job itself is important and some said that this had been lacking or been less efficient in England than in Finland. The importance of a mentor in the new job has been stressed by expatriates in other studies too (Forster 2000). If possible, there should be a long hand over period with the previous jobholder

(Forster 2000). The receiving organisation should be prepared to provide sufficient guidance for the newcomer in his or her new job even though the expatriate has previous experience from a similar job in Finland since the working practices are likely to vary from one country another. A long hand over period is likely to make the expatriate feel more comfortable and secure about starting in the new job. It will also improve the expatriate's performance appraisals following the move (Forster 2000). This is worth noticing since one quarter of expatriates report relocation having a clearly negative effect on their work performance (Forster and Munton 1991).

Furthermore, expatriate support does not always have to be tangible to be prominent and appreciated by the expatriates. In order to enhance the effectiveness of expatriate assignments it is recommended that the company pursues at fostering a supportive organisational culture both at the home and host country organisation (Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999). Hofstede (1997) recommends that the people in the home organisation who are in contact with the expatriates should acquire the same cultural sensitivity that is required of the expatriates in order to create a truly understanding and supportive atmosphere. Some of the interviewees communicated a slight disappointment in that they were left in their own devices without anybody in the home organisation asking if everything was alright after they had arrived in England. Simply making the expatriates and their family feel that they are being taken care of is important too. Empathy can be shown just by a short e-mail or a phone call asking if everything is alright. Therefore, on the basis of the current study and some other researchers' experience (e.g. Forster and Munton 1991) the employer's fear of this sort of behaviour being interpreted as an intrusion to the expatriate's personal life seems unwarranted.

Family affair

Since a long-term assignment abroad affects all members of the expatriate family, the spouse and children cannot be considered simply as onlookers in the process.

An international assignment is not simply a work issue (Forster and Munton 1991). As one of the interviewees said, “job satisfaction alone is not enough”. Throughout the entire duration of the assignment, the expatriate’s own satisfaction and cross-cultural adjustment is strongly affected by his or her family (Shaffer and Harrison 1998). It is natural then that the interviewees thought the sending organisation should invest in the expatriate’s family. In this respect, the interviewees echoed much the same views as Forster and Munton (1991) in that expatriates would welcome a more personalised approach to relocation from their employer. The expatriates in the Forster (2000) study also emphasised the importance of family support in managing international assignments.

Together with culture novelty, spouse adjustment has been found to be one of the most important factors affecting the expatriate’s general adjustment (Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley 1999, Torbiörn 1982). By taking into consideration the spouse’s situation, the employer conveys a caring attitude that may not be measured in the quantitative sense of the word but which the employees appreciate. For example, one of the spouses would have been interested in knowing more about job opportunities in the host country but had not received any significant help from the expatriate’s employer in the matter. Forster’s (2000) recent study on UK expatriates and their dependants report that this is in fact one of the biggest causes of criticism among expatriates when they evaluate employer support.

Housing and living conditions were emphasised in just about every answer on important forms of expatriate support. During the assignment, the expatriate family’s standard of living should remain at least at the same level as it was in the home country. A move abroad often means that the expatriate family changes from a two-breadwinner family into one where only one of the parents is working. This means that the employer should be able to compensate the decrease in family income since people cannot be expected to move abroad if it means lowering their standard of living. The decrease of income in dual-career families has been long ago reported to be a reason why many turn down an offer of international assignment (Torbiörn 1982).

The same way that the interviewees would welcome support from the employer after their arrival in the host country at the beginning of their assignment, they would also welcome it after completing the assignment when they have returned back to Finland. Sometimes there may be organisational changes or family reasons that require negotiation between the expatriate and the employer in order to reach a mutually satisfying agreement on the timing of the return. In situations where there are contradictory interests, it is still important to maintain a two-way channel of communication and a supportive atmosphere.

Expatriates as a resource

The expatriates need not be viewed simply as consumers of IHRM. They are also a valuable resource to the employing organisation. As was pointed out by some of the expatriates themselves, an effective and easily available resource in improving the expatriate support is provided by those who already are or have been on an assignment. Also the host-country nationals of the receiving organisation could be utilised in pre-departure briefings and training for the newly arrived in the host country (Forster 2000).

The expatriates and repatriates possess large amounts of information that can be used to the benefit of future expatriates and the whole organisation also after the assignments are over. The employer's task of finding a suitable job to the repatriate in the home country can be demanding because the status and responsibility of the post-assignment job should be in line with the job the expatriate had during the assignment (Neovius 1996). Yet, it is crucial since it should also take advantage of the acquired skills and experience of the returned employee (Neovius 1996).

Interview extract 16.

“it is a great resource or growth of mental capital for the company that people go round in different units they bring knowledge pass on what they have learned this is not thought out as a whole so there is mental capital that is not taken advantage of”

“se on iso voimavara tai henkisen pääoman kasvu yritykselle että ihmiset kiertää eri yksiköissä ne tuo tietoo vie oppimaansa eteenpäin tätä ei kokonaisuutena mietitty joten henkistä pääomaa jää hyödyntämättä”

Unless this aspect of the expatriate process is carefully thought out, the organisation ends up under utilising its resources and much of the so-called silent knowledge is wasted.

6. IMPLICATIONS

Now that the data has been analysed, it is time to draw together the main conclusions and consider what has been learned. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications of the research and bring forward possible ways to improve the expatriate management system in the employing company and Finnish organisations in general.

6.1. The Finnish expatriates' adjustment to England

Although the interviewees in this research thought the English culture to be relatively easy to adjust to, it was obvious that Finnish expatriates do not adjust to England in a blink of an eye regardless of the perceived similarity of the two cultures. The more inexperienced the expatriates are internationally, the more likely they are to dive deeper in the adjustment curve of the beginning – if they want to get involved in the local life that is. The results thus comply with previous

research in concluding that culture shock is experienced also when moving to a culture that is rather similar to one's native culture (Kauppinen 1993, Osland 1995, Forster 2000) but that previous experience in that particular culture may safeguard against it (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992).

On the basis of my own observations and comments made by some of the interviewees, it seems that the relationship between the expatriates' own language proficiency and their adjustment is two-directional. For those with good language proficiency to start with it is easier to establish relationships with host country people and as they have more frequent and close contacts with host country people are likely to improve their language proficiency more drastically. People, whose English language proficiency is lower to begin with, may be in danger of becoming less adjusted and less effective since the development of their communicative competence is not boosted by native speaker interaction so intensively.

However, it is not just the different culture and language that makes expatriate adjustment such a challenge. Building social networks in England had proven to have its complications especially for the female expatriates. Particularly those women who did not work or have small children did not have a natural way of getting into close contact with English women and even those who did reported the same difficulties regarding social networks. Expatriate families with children were met also with concerns about the adjustment of their children.

Despite the seemingly effortless adjustment of the Finnish expatriates to Britain, there were cultural differences at the workplace that required the expatriates to consciously modify the way they behaved and interpreted the others' behaviour. The cultural differences at the workplace between the UK and Finland were explored using Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of organisational culture. Although Hofstede's (1980, 1997) research was helpful in understanding many differences between the two organisational cultures, it failed in predicting what the expatriates considered as the most significant difference, the power distance. The expatriates' comments on hierarchy and power distance ran counter to Hofstede's (1980)

research on how Britain and Finland differ in this respect. Contrary to Hofstede's (1980) research results, which suggested similarity, the expatriates felt there were to be rather significant differences in the power distance dimension between the two cultures. On the basis of the current study, it seems that even though Hofstede's (1980) research can be useful in pinpointing the areas where organisational cultures differ, it is not necessarily successful in explaining the mutual positioning of different cultures along the dimensions.

At the beginning of their assignment, many of the expatriates experienced a language shock characterised by inability to comprehend the local accent and frustration at one's own lack of fluency. Most of the interviewees were now happy with their own English language proficiency, but there had been areas in their communicative competence that, especially at during the language shock period, were considered inadequate. Difficulties related to the linguistic competence, particularly listening comprehension and speech production were typical for the first few months of the assignment.

Although the English slang and jargon continued to puzzle the Finns even after the first months in England, communication problems after the language shock period were more related to the pragmatic and strategic competencies than the linguistic one. For example, small talk and other phrases the English associate with certain social situations were not always that evident to the Finnish newcomers. Other aspects of communication where the expatriates' pragmatic and strategic competencies were put to a test included supervisor-subordinate communication situations where the expatriate was in a superior position and aimed at committing the subordinate to the current job. Participation in large groups, such as meetings and negotiations, were considered demanding as well.

As a result of living in England and becoming aware of the cultural differences, the expatriates became to change their view on what is needed to be a proficient speaker of a language. Immersion in the target language environment made them realise how much more than the language you actually need to know in order to successfully communicate with people from a different culture.

Interview extract 17.

“I don’t think it is the communication situations that they are restricted to the language they are restricted to the culture you don’t know what the things are it is not necessary the language”

“en mä usko että ne on ne viestintätilanteet ne siihen kieleen rajottuu vaan ne rajottuu siihen kulttuuriin et sä et niinku tiedä mitä ne asiat niinku on ei ne välttämättä siihen kieleen”

This was something not all of the expatriates were prepared for after having learnt English at school. In fact, the interviewees perceived there to be a gap between the English language proficiency they had learned at school and the English language proficiency they needed during their assignment. It resulted mainly from the lack of practice in pragmatic competence and cultural aspects in language teaching. In order to close the gap between what the expatriates had learnt at school and what was actually needed in order to communicate in the target language environment during the expatriate assignment, they had to change their views and modify their communicative competence.

The expatriates had to start taking into account the cultural differences between their own culture and the target culture in their language use. As one of the expatriates commented on the differences between the Finnish and the English way of using language:

Interview extract 18.

“well I don’t think they [the differences] are so much related to the language itself rather they are related to general things like the way culture of doing and dealing with things”

”no ei musta ne ei kieleen liity ne liittyy niinku yleiseen asioihin niinku tapaan kulttuuriin tehdä ja hoitaa asioita”

For the Finnish expatriates in England these differences included such things as politeness, small talk and a more indirect way communicating as well as the differences in organisational culture mentioned above.

6.2. Implications for language training

Resulting from the strong relationship between culture and communication, providing expatriates with language training courses such as “Business English” or “Business Communication” is not enough. These kinds of courses often dismiss pragmatic competence (Huhta 1997), which according to this and other studies (Holmes 2000, Clyne 1994) causes more trouble to the expatriates than the business language itself. For example, one way to help expatriates to learn the pragmatic skills needed in an English language working environment is to integrate material from realistic soap operas that are set in workplaces into language learning teaching (Holmes 2000). Comparing the material from the target culture with the learners’ own would further aid the learners to recognise the culturally accepted content, distribution and functions that small talk has at work (Holmes 2000). Awareness of differences in communication between cultures helps the expatriates to relate to the cultural frame of reference that the locals are applying when speaking English thus enhancing the effectiveness of communication.

Exposure to authentic native speech is also essential in making the expatriates-to-be used to hearing English at a native speed and native pronunciation. Preferably, the language trainer would be a native speaker from the country or area that the expatriates are assigned to. Since this may not always be possible, the trainer should at least make the expatriates aware of different varieties of English, be they dialects or accents. For example, because the English speakers’ social background is reflected in their speech, particularly expatriates working at mills who need to communicate with people at all levels of hierarchy hear a large variety of native speech around them.

Because the expatriates' language proficiency affects their ability to master different communication situations at work and in their personal lives, thus affecting their adjustment, it is important that they are prepared for the assignment also linguistically. Good language proficiency makes it easier for the expatriates to do their job where subtle communication skills are required to express themselves and interpret the others appropriately.

Since it seems that earlier language education has not succeeded in providing employees with the intercultural and pragmatic competence required in operating in the target language environment this study agrees with Gertsen's (1990) and Jensen's (1995) statements that language training should be considered essential for people embarking on international assignments. However, the expatriates' needs for language training vary individually. The more internationally experienced employees who have worked or lived abroad before have acquired these skills by experience but those with no previous experience are in a disadvantageous position while moving abroad.

Language training for expatriates should aim at closing the gap the interviewees had noticed in their language proficiency by concentrating on those aspects of communicative competence that the expatriates regarded as most challenging. By identifying those expatriates – not forgetting expatriate spouses and children – who are more likely to be at risk of becoming less adjusted because of inadequate language proficiency and providing them extra training could improve their interactional adjustment and contribute to increased intercultural effectiveness in the host culture. Huhta (1997) has already recognised the need in Finnish companies in general for a holistic approach to language with intercultural understanding and more tailored training solutions. Moreover, so far language training has rarely been directly integrated in company strategies and personnel development plans in companies (Huhta 1997).

6.3. Implications for employer support and IHRM

The interviewees' views on what other training and support the employer could provide for the expatriates and their families were very much the same as those proposed by Strömmer (1999). She mentions altogether six forms of support that are central in the expatriates' orientation to their assignments: language training, mentoring or tutoring by former or current expatriates, visit to the host country, information package on the host country, training on culture and guidance to the host country organisation and expatriate post (Strömmer 1999).

The interviewees welcomed information and training that would help them tackle both culture-general and target culture specific issues of adjustment. Their comments support Hofstede's view (1980) that culture general training is not sufficient alone since culture shock is also culture-specific i.e. the successful acculturation of a person to one culture does not mean that he or she will not experience culture shock in another culture.

Furthermore, integrating a psychological view of the expatriate adjustment into the training would be useful. Although making expatriates aware of most common psychological reactions to change in cultural environment is not likely to prevent culture shock as such, it is important because it can ease dealing with the symptoms (Gertsen 1990). The two-level approach suggested by some of the expatriates is considered necessary also by Gertsen (1990) and Black and Mendenhall (1990 as quoted in Winkelman 1994) who say that it facilitates adjustment, performance, skills development and effectiveness in the host country.

Training and support by the employer equips the expatriate with a cultural survival kit. The training, however, no matter how effective it is, cannot provide a cure for every difficulty the expatriates may come across. What the training can provide is awareness of cultural issues, a sort of beginner's guide to the many aspects of expatriate life, but it is the expatriate who is responsible for using that knowledge to his or her benefit. The role of pre-departure training in particular is

to make the expatriate aware that more knowledge and skills are required and how to acquire them (Torbiörn 1982, Hofstede 1997, Gertsen 1995).

Like training, other areas of expatriate support should be integrated in the IHRM and business strategies of companies with mobile staff. The current study has brought forward the opinions of those who are the objects of IHRM. The expatriates proposed several qualities of good IHRM practices they considered beneficial to the employing company. They called for a holistic system characterised by flexibility making the managing of international staff more systematic and dynamic.

The following table 2. on good IHRM practices is based on the expatriates' comments, previous research and my own perceptions. The purpose was to integrate these multiple perspectives in order to define some qualities that are perceived relevant for the development of expatriate management at the organisational level.

Table 2. Qualities of good IHRM practices

QUALITY	RELEVANCE TO THE ORGANISATION
Systematic and comprehensive	to cover all aspects of expatriate management and integrate them to other areas of strategic management
Dynamic and flexible	to enable quick response when specialised staff needed in various locations
Increased mobility	to guarantee transmission of skills throughout the organisation and to avoid us-them attitude
Audits	to make up a record of employee competencies including cultural and language skills
Follow-up	to identify possible problem areas and to prevent failure of assignments
Expatriates seen as a resource	to enhance organisational development
Personalised	to secure adequate support and prevent failure of assignment

Once the organisational framework for IHRM is available and well planned, it is possible to concentrate on expatriate support in more detail. This means concentrating on expatriates on a personal level. There are certain basic features of expatriate support that are relevant to every international assignment. In addition to those mentioned before in earlier sections, such as logistics of moving, help in finding suitable housing, paperwork and visit to the host country prior to the departure, I want to introduce one more aspect of expatriate support that should be integrated in the expatriate support system, namely the needs assessment.

It would be advisable that each international recruitment would start with a needs assessment, a discussion with the expatriate and possible dependants. The purpose of the discussion is firstly to inform the expatriates and their dependants about the assignment and the forms of support available and secondly to detect any need for additional support. Discussing the effects of the assignment on the expatriate's career is also recommended. Although some of the questions the expatriates and their dependants have may not be answered, it is wise to provide a forum for open discussion between the employee and the employer.

Each expatriate has their personal profile when it comes to life situation and respective support needs regarding the assignment. Covering factors that are likely to affect the expatriate's adjustment and success in the country of assignment in the discussion make it easier to target additional support. On the basis of the present study, at least the factors mentioned in table 3. should be considered in the needs assessment discussion. After the discussion, both the employer and the employees are more aware of who are affected by the assignment, what kind of job-related, cultural and language skills the expatriates already possess and what kind of an approach the expatriates have towards the assignment.

Table 3. Considerations for IHRM: Personalised expatriate support

PERSONALISED EXPATRIATE SUPPORT			
Dependants	Single	Married	
		Dual-career	Single-career
Family status	No children	Children	
		Young	Teenage
International experience	Previous international experience	No previous international experience	
Target culture experience	Previous experience in the target culture	No previous target culture experience	
Work experience	Experienced in the job	No previous experience in the job	
Language proficiency	Fluency in the target language	Lack of fluency in the target language	
Motivation	Self-motivated assignment	Company initiated assignment	
Attitude	Change perceived as a opportunity	Change perceived as a threat	
NEED FOR IHRM SUPPORT	BASIC NEEDS FOR IHRM SUPPORT	INCREASED NEED FOR IHRM SUPPORT	

Going through all the factors in table 3. with the expatriates helps the HR people define what kind of support is needed. For example, if the expatriate has previous experience in the target culture but no previous experience in the job, he or she may not need target culture specific training but could benefit from having a mentor for the first few months in the new job. In general, the more the expatriates' current situation falls into the right-hand column, the more likely they are going to need additional support in addition to the basic support provided for all.

A more systematic approach such as the one described above would benefit international companies in the long term. Promoting organisational culture that

emphasises cultural awareness and long-term learning and application of these issues throughout the organisation will provide the company with synergies and competitive advantage in the future (Domke-Damonte 2001). Well-planned support systems and follow-up would be likely to contribute to increased effectiveness of expatriate assignments and satisfaction of employees and their dependants. Furthermore, by creating more structured procedures for the movement of people the company could access the stock of knowledge that expatriates possess and use that knowledge to ease the life of future expatriates as well as to enhance organisational development.

Having experienced people who know their job inside-out technically and are mentally equipped to live and work in a foreign country is a great advantage when situations and needs in the company's foreign divisions change quickly. In order to effectively respond to future changes, companies operating in the world market need managers who understand both local foreign needs and global trends and can successfully work with people with different cultural backgrounds (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992). Expatriate assignments can be a very effective way to develop the skills and knowledge that are required from future managers (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992).

Showing that the employer cares about their employees even when they are out of sight conveys that the employer values their resources. What the interviewees were saying was that foreign assignments should be made clearly a positive thing as a whole since even though the expatriates may welcome the challenge, the assignment always entails also making sacrifices and compromises. Having a reputation for good expatriate management practices helps the company hold on to skilful employees as well as to attract new qualified expatriates.

CONCLUSION

When people with no previous experience of living in a foreign culture agree to go on an international assignment, they are rarely aware of the multitude of challenges they are going to face. The main driving forces behind the employees' decisions to work abroad were the desire to develop themselves professionally and acquire skills needed in an international working environment. Whilst the assignment is an opportunity for all this, it is also a character building experience during which the employees gain valuable experience about communicating with other cultures. In several areas of life, the expatriates have to change their views on things they earlier could take for granted. As the expatriates aspire to become more fluent speakers of the target language, also their view on language changes. The expatriates gain a wider perspective on communication, as language and culture become more intertwined in their minds.

Although the Finnish interviewees considered themselves to have rather good English language proficiency to start with, they thought that previous language teaching was not completely successful in preparing them for communicating in the target language environment. The perceived inadequacies in one's own language proficiency were mainly due to lack of practice in spontaneous English language use and cultural differences in communication. On the basis of this research, the main areas of communication differences between the Finns and the English people seem to be related to politeness, small talk and directness. Especially at the beginning of their assignment the Finns were applying their Finnish way of communicating much the same way as Sajavaara and Lehtonen (1997) and Carbaugh (1997) have defined it. During their assignment, the expatriates acquire skills in politeness, small talk and other aspects of pragmatic competence and instead of sticking to their Finnish way of communication they learn to use these skills to their benefit. Listening comprehension, speech production as well as increased ability to master a greater variety of communication situations were areas that the interviewees thought they had most developed communicatively since they arrived in England.

Areas of communicative competence other than linguistic competence took longer to learn and were still considered more of a challenge after years in England. Considering the expatriates thought the teaching of English at school had concentrated mostly on linguistic competence it is no surprise that communication situations where the other competence areas were essential posed more difficulties. The expatriates reported also rather noticeable differences in organisational cultures between Finland and England. The most important finding in this respect is that the expatriates' experiences are counter to Hofstede's (1980, 1997) views on which dimension of organisational culture Finland and the UK should differ the most. According to Hofstede (1980, 1997), the two countries should differ most as regards masculinity and least regards to power distance. However, the Finnish expatriates working in England considered power distance as the most significant difference.

Although the Finnish respondents considered England a relatively easy country to adjust to, many of them described phases of adjustment that were similar to culture shock. Besides to the change of culture and language, the shock-like reactions seemed to be connected to the loss social networks. It took time and effort to establish new ones in England. Although mastering communication situations at work is essential, the expatriates' need for language proficiency outside the working environment is at least as important for their adjustment and well being since it affects their ability to establish meaningful relationships in the target culture.

There is a need to integrate intercultural communication into language training especially when it comes to adult language learners whose language use is as varied as the expatriates'. Since the inadequacies in expatriates' foreign language proficiency result largely from cultural differences in pragmatic competence, teaching language per se is not enough. Raising awareness of these differences and practising skills to conquer them is possible if the training is more exhaustive.

Interviewees who had no previous experience, had a family to accompany them and whose assignment was initiated by the employer, felt the strongest need for

training and other employer support. Besides reporting the expatriates' feedback on where the company's IHRM has succeeded and where there is still room for improvement as regards managing international assignments, the present study integrated various viewpoints on how to improve the overall IHRM system. In their feedback, the expatriates did not comment only on how the company could improve the expatriates' situation, but also on how they as expatriates could benefit the company. The holistic approach to expatriate management proposed by many researchers (Baumgarten 1995, Neovius 1996) is supported by the expatriates in this study. The employees recognise that long-term strategic planning in IHRM helps the organisation to maximise the human capital gained during international assignments.

The case study approach has been useful in providing detailed information on the expatriate experience and how the British culture is experienced by Finnish people living there. However, in order to verify the results of this study, including the perceived difference in power distance, more research on a larger sample of expatriates has to be done. Hofstede's (1980, 1997) conceptions on how cultures differ need to be examined in more detail so that the mutual relationships between different cultures become clearer. As to cultural and language training, it would be interesting to study what kinds of differences there are between the adjustment and job satisfaction of expatriates that have received such training and those who have not. In addition to collecting more data from Finnish expatriates, it would be good to include also people from the target culture in research when studying communication between different cultures. The host country nationals' perspective on intercultural communication and the expatriates' language use would help further define what needs to be done in order to enhance intercultural effectiveness between the expatriates and the host country nationals.

“Effective global managers ‘know that they don’t know’.

They assume difference until similarity is proven rather than assuming similarity until difference is proven.”

(Adler 1997:87).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire on background information

HENKILÖTIEDOT

- Nimi?
- Ikä?
- Äidinkieli?
- Siviilisääty?
- Koulutus ja tutkintoala sekä valmistumisvuosi?

TYÖ

- Kauanko olet ollut yhtiön palveluksessa?
- Mistä lähtien olit Englannissa?
- Suomeen paluun ajankohta?
- Ulkomaankomennuksen aikainen asema organisaatiossa?
- Työnkuva lyhyesti?
- Tämänhetkinen asema organisaatiossa?
- Motiivi/syy ulkomaankomennukselle lähtöön (esim. tuliko aloite yhtiöltä ja miksi vai haitko itse mahdollisuutta lähteä Englantiin)?
- Muu aiempi kokemus ulkomailta (mikäli useita vastauksia, erota tapaukset toisistaan kauttaviivalla, esim: ruotsi/ranska; opiskelu/työ jne. josta käy ilmi että vastaaja on opiskellut Ruotsissa ja ollut töissä Ranskassa)
 - missä
 - tarkoitus (esim. opiskelu, työharjoittelu, työ)
 - ajankohta ja kesto
 - oleskelun aikana pääasiallisesti käytetty kieli

KIELITAITO

- Englanti
 - montako vuotta kaikkiaan olit opiskellut englantia ennen työtäsi Englannissa?
 - kuinka kauan olet yhteensä oleskellut englantia puhuvassa maassa?

- Muu kielitaito (mikäli vastauksia useampia erota toisistaan kauttaviivalla kuten kohdassa 'muu aiempi kokemus ulkomailta')
 - kieli?
 - montako vuotta olet opiskellut?
- Mitä kieliä tarvitsit työssäsi Englannissa?
- Jouduitko työssäsi tai vapaa-ajallasi kommunikoidaan muiden kuin suomalaisten ei-natiivien kanssa englannin kielellä (jos kyllä, niin mainitse oliko kyseessä työ- vai vapaa-aika sekä kyseessä olevien ihmisten kieli- ja /tai kulttuuritausta)?
- Tarjosiko yhtiö englannin kielikoulutusta ennen ulkomaankomennusta? Jos kyllä, osallistuitko?
- Tarjosiko yhtiö muuta valmennusta, esim. kursseja tai tietopaketteja kohdemaan kulttuurista tai kulttuurienvälisestä viestinnästä yleensä? Jos kyllä, niin mitä? Käytitkö mahdollisuuden hyväksesi?
- Oliko englannin kielen taitosi mielestäsi riittävä työhösi Englannissa?
 - valitse seuraavista vaihtoehdoista sopivin
 - kyllä / enimmäkseen / osittain / ei
- Oliko englannin kielen taitosi mielestäsi riittävä työajan ulkopuolella, esim. vapaa-ajan harrastuksissa, paikallisten ihmisten kanssa kommunikoidessa ja arkisten asioiden hoitamisessa?
 - valitse seuraavista vastausvaihtoehdoista sopivin
 - kyllä / enimmäkseen / osittain / ei
- Tässä voit lopuksi vielä mainita, mikäli sinulle tulee mieleen jokin itsellesi tärkeä tai muuten mielestäsi mainitsemisen arvoinen aiheeseen liittyvä asia, jota en yllä kysynyt tai jota haluaisit itse haastattelu-tilanteessa käsiteltävän

Appendix 2. Theme interview structure

ODOTUKSET JA MOTIIVI

- Mitä etukäteen odotit asumiselta ja työskentelyltä Englannissa?

ALKU – SUOMEN PÄÄ

- Kauanko aikaa valmistautua?
- Minkälaista apua sait yhtiöltä?
- Pidetkö saamaasi apua riittävänä?

PERHE – VALMISTAUTUMINEN MUUTOKSEEN

- Millä tavalla yhtiö huomioi oman ja perheesi tilanteen?

SOPEUTUMINEN VIERAASEEN KULTTUURIIN

ASUMINEN

- Minkälaisella asuinalueella asutte?

PERHE

- Miten perhe kokonaisuudessaan on sopeutunut uuteen ympäristöön?
- Mikä / Kenellä on ollut vaikeinta?
- Lasten hoito- ja koulujärjestelyt?

SOSIAALISET SUHTEET & VAPAA-AIKA

- Mitä teet vapaa-aikanasi?
- Minkälaiden ihmisten kanssa olet tekemisissä?
- Oletko ystäväystynyt paikallisten, englantilaisten kanssa?
- Minkä verran pidät yhteyttä Suomeen?

TUKI & NEUVOT

- Keneen olet pystynyt tukeutumaan sopeutumisprosessiin liittyvissä asioissa?
- Yhteydet muihin ekspatriaatteihin?

- Minkälaiset yhteydet ovat yhtiöön/kotimaan organisaatioon nyt Englannissa oloaikana?

ENGLANNIN KIELI

KIELITAITO

- Mitä käsität termillä 'kielitaito'? (termi, jota käytetään usein, mutta mitä se sinusta on?)
- Miten käsityksesi kielitaidosta on muuttunut Englannissa olon aikana?
- Mitä vaaditaan hyvään kielitaitoon 'oikeassa elämässä' kokemustesi mukaan?
- Minkälaisissa asioissa / tilanteissa huomasit, ettei koulussa opittu kielitaito riittänytkään?
- Miten olet selviytynyt noista tilanteista?

KIELITAITO & SOPEUTUMINEN

- Millä tavalla oma kielitaitosi on vaikuttanut sopeutumiseesi ?
- Mitkä asiat omassa kielitaidossasi ovat auttaneet + ?
- Mitkä asiat omassa kielitaidossasi ovat vaikeuttaneet - ?
- Minkälaisiin asioihin kielitaito ylipäättään vaikuttaa?
- Kuinka hyvin hallitset arkipäivän sanaston?
- Minkälaisia viestintätilanteita kohtaatt vapaa-ajallasi natiivien kanssa? ks. yllä
- Minkälaiset tilanteet ovat haastavimpia, mitkä enemmän rutiinia? Miksi?
- (Kuvaile jokin tyypillinen viestintätilanne vapaa-ajalta (työn ulkopuolelta), joka ei sujunut niin kuin odotit tai jossa tunsit olosi epämukavaksi / turhautuneeksi.)
- Miten selviydyit noista tilanteista?

VIESTINNÄN HALLINTA

- Minkälaisissa asioissa/ tilanteissa sinulla oli ymmärtämishäiriöitä?
- Murteet ja aksentit?
- Minkälaisissa tilanteissa olet kokenut, että sinua ei ymmärretä tai tulet väärinymmärretyksi?
- Miten sujui/sujuu oma puhuminen?

- Kuinka hyvin koet pystyväsi hallitsemaan kommunikaatiotilanteita natiivien kanssa?
- Osallistuitko keskusteluun yhtä paljon kuin jos keskustelisit suomalaisten kanssa suomeksi?
- Pystyitkö esim. ottamaan puheenvuoron itsellesi, tuomaan omat mielipiteet esille ja puolustamaan niitä?

ARVIO OMAN KIELITAIDON KEHITYKSESTÄ

- Missä asioissa kielen suhteen olet mielestäsi eniten kehittynyt Englannissa oloaikaikasi?
- Missä asioissa on vielä kehittämistä?
- Jos olisit uudestaan lähtö-tilanteessa, haluaisitko etukäteen kielikoulutusta? Miksi?
- Muun perheen osalta?
- Suosittelisitko lähtöä suunnitteleville? Miksi?
- Entä kielikoulutus paikan päällä?
- Minkälainen kielikoulutus olisi ollut hyödyllistä tulevaa varten - Minkälaisesta etukäteen annetusta kielikoulutuksesta olisi voinut olla hyötyä Englannissa asumisen ja työskentelyn kannalta?

KULTTUURIEN VÄLISET EROT

KOMMUNIKOINTI

- Millä tavalla englantilaisten tapa kommunikoida mielestäsi eroaa suomalaisesta?
- Minkälaisia tilanteita näistä eroista on aiheutunut?

MUU TIETOUS

- Jos olisit uudestaan lähtö-tilanteessa, haluaisitko tällaista tietoa?
- Suosittelisitko lähtöä suunnitteleville?
- Mistä asioista olisi ollut hyödyllistä tietää etukäteen?

- Tuotiinko missään esille muuttoon ja muutokseen liittyviä psykologisia tekijöitä (kulttuurishokki, lasten reagointi, identiteettiin liittyvät kysymykset, sopeutumis-prosessi, 'expatriate adjustment' –ilmiö)?

REPATRIAATIO / AJATUS PALUUSTA

VAIHEET

- Minkälaisia erilaisia vaiheita osaat erottaa Englannissa oloajastasi?
- Millaiset esim. ensimmäiset 3kk olivat?

PALUU

- Miltä tuntuu ajatus paluusta Suomeen?

SADONKORJUU

- Millä tavalla Englannissa olo on vastannut alussa mainitsemiasi etukäteis-odotuksia?
- Millä tavalla uskot voivasi hyödyntää Englannissa saatua kokemusta Suomessa (työelämässä tai muuten)?

UUSINTA

- Lähtisitkö uudestaan Englantiin tai muualle ulkomaille töihin? Miksi?

NEUVOT TULEVILLE EKSPATRIAATEILLE

- Mitä neuvoja antaisit ystävälle, joka on lähdössä ulkomaille puolison työntakia?

IHRM – HENKILÖSTÖJOHTAMINEN

EKSPATRIAATTI – JÄRJESTELYT

- Ennen lähtöä – Englannissa oloaikana
- Miten arvioisit yhtiön ekspatriaatti –järjestelyjä + / - ?

- Mitä neuvoja antaisit kansainvälisistä siirroista vastaaville henkilöstöihmisille?