

**MAINTAINING THE HERITAGE LANGUAGE: YOUNG
ADULTS FROM IMMIGRANT BACKGROUNDS IN FINLAND**

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Monilla maahanmuuttajataustaisilla nuorilla aikuisilla on vaikeuksia säilyttää perintökieltään, mutta perintökielen ylläpitäminen tarjoaa kannustimia kuten sosiaalista integraatiota, kulttuuriperinnön säilyttämistä ja henkilökohtaista identiteettiä. Suomen koulutusjärjestelmän rajalliset resurssit ja tuki vaikuttavat kuitenkin kielen menetykseen. Maahanmuuttajien haasteita perintökielen ylläpitämisessä ovat assimilaatiopaineet, kieliarkuus ja resurssien puute. Vaikka tutkimus nuorten maahanmuuttajien perintökielen ylläpidosta Suomessa on vähäistä, tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet käytännön etuja perintökielen kehittämisessä.</p> <p>Täten, tämän tutkielman tavoite oli tutkia, miten maahanmuuttajataustaiset nuoret aikuiset Suomessa ylläpitävät perintökieltään sekä tuoda esiin erilaisia haasteita ja etuja, joita ilmenee kielen ylläpitämisessä. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tarjota kattava ymmärrys aiheesta ottamalla huomioon sekä nuorten miesten että naisten näkemykset iältään 18-25. Tavoitteen saavuttamiseksi tutkimus käytti verkkokyselyä, joka koostui 14 avoimesta kysymyksestä. Kysely suunniteltiin keräämään yksityiskohtaista tietoa osallistujien asenteista perinteiseen kieleen ja toimenpiteistä sen säilyttämiseksi. Kyselyn tarkoituksena oli myös saada selville osallistujien näkemykset perintökielen ylläpidon eduista ja vaikeuksista. Aineiston analyysissa on käytetty sisällönanalyysia.</p> <p>Tuloksien mukaan maahanmuuttajataustaiset nuoret aikuiset Suomessa kohtaavat haasteita perintökielen ylläpitämisessä. Näistä haasteista huolimatta ulkoiset ja sisäiset kannustimet lisäävät motivaatiota säilyttää perintökieli. Tarvitaan kuitenkin enemmän mahdollisuuksia ja resursseja, ja kielteisiä käsityksiä perintökieliä kohtaan tulisi käsitellä. Tämä tutkimus tarjoaa arvokkaita näkemyksiä poliittisille päättäjille ja kouluttajille, mutta sen tulokset ovat rajallisia eikä niitä voi yleistää. Kaiken kaikkiaan perintökielten ylläpidon tukeminen Suomessa on ratkaisevan tärkeää kielellisen monimuotoisuuden edistämiseksi ja osallistavamman yhteiskunnan luomiseksi.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, an immigrant is defined as "a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence" (Merriam-Webster n.d.). However, this definition only scratches the surface of the broader concept of immigration. There are various reasons why individuals choose to immigrate, including family reunification, employment opportunities, educational pursuits, or seeking refuge due to the situation in their country of origin (THL 2020).

Finland has a long history of accepting immigrants and providing opportunities for them to integrate into Finnish society. Many immigrants who have come to Finland have eventually obtained Finnish citizenship (THL 2022). Additionally, new immigrants in Finland are offered integration training, which can assist them in adapting to Finnish society (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment 2022). As a result of these integration efforts, many immigrants in Finland have been able to start businesses, pursue education, begin families, and find employment opportunities (THL 2022). By offering these resources and opportunities to immigrants, Finland has been able to benefit from the contributions of a diverse group of individuals.

According to the Finnish Immigration Service, in 2020, there were approximately 357,000 immigrants residing in Finland, comprising 6.5% of the total population (Finnish Immigration Service 2021). Many of these immigrants have started families of their own in Finland, with some having several generations living in the country. As a result, there are now many Finnish citizens who have immigrant backgrounds due to having immigrant parents, grandparents, and so on (Finnish Immigration Service 2021). Despite being born and growing up in Finland, these individuals with immigrant backgrounds may struggle to

maintain their heritage language, language that is passed down through generations from one's ancestors, which could be a vital aspect of their cultural identity (Kim 2015). While they have received Finnish education and become fluent in Finnish. However, the question arises as to how and why these individuals maintain their heritage language. Therefore, I have conducted this research in order 1) to find out how young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland maintain their heritage language as well as 2) bring to light the various challenges and benefits that arise when maintaining their heritage language.

2 HERITAGE LANGUAGE

Heritage language refers to a language that is passed down through generations from one's ancestors, and it plays a significant role in shaping an individual's cultural identity and connection to their heritage (Kim 2015). According to Valdés (2001), heritage language is defined as the language spoken in the home or community of a speaker's parents or ancestors, and it can be considered a form of bilingualism where an individual is able to communicate in two or more languages. The use and maintenance of heritage language have been shown to have many positive impacts on individuals and communities. According to García (2009), heritage language can greatly contribute to an individual's personal and cultural development by providing a sense of belonging and connection to one's heritage. Heritage language also allows individuals to communicate with family members and community members who may not speak the host country's language fluently. Heritage language is a vital part of an individual's cultural heritage. The language carries with it the history and the collective memories of a community and is a source of pride and identity for its speakers. Speaking the heritage language is a way to maintain the cultural traditions and customs of a community, which are often at risk of being lost due to assimilation into the host culture (Fishman 1991). Furthermore, heritage language can provide insights into the cultural values and beliefs of a community (García 2009).

Heritage language plays a crucial role in personal development, as studies have shown that individuals who speak their heritage language have a stronger sense of identity and self-esteem (Kim & Elder 2020; Park 2019). Moreover, heritage language proficiency can provide advantages in the global economy, particularly in industries such as international business, diplomacy, and tourism (Grosjean 2010). Bilingual individuals have also been shown to have cognitive advantages, such as better problem-solving skills and increased creativity, which

can be a significant asset in many professional settings (Bialystok 2017). Furthermore, heritage language provides a unique perspective on the world. Each language carries with it a different way of understanding and describing the world. By learning and speaking a heritage language, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of their culture and the world around them (Wei, 2018). They can also develop a broader perspective on cultural and linguistic diversity and appreciate the value of multilingualism (Cummins 2019).

As previously mentioned, despite the importance of heritage language, it is often at risk of being lost due to language shifts. Language shift occurs when a community or individual abandons their heritage language in favour of the majority language of the host country (Fishman 2017). This trend is particularly prevalent in second-generation immigrants, who may have limited exposure to their heritage language and community (Portes & Rumbaut 2014). To prevent language shift and maintain heritage language, families and communities can employ several strategies. One effective approach is to start language learning early (Fishman 1991). Children who are exposed to a language from a young age are more likely to develop proficiency and maintain it throughout their lives (Genesee et al. 2004). Parents can also foster language use at home by speaking to their children in the heritage language, providing books and other materials in the language, and encouraging language use during family gatherings and community events (Fishman 1991; Baker 2001). This approach has been shown to be effective in maintaining heritage language among immigrant families (Kibler & Hyltenstam 2008) and indigenous communities (McCarty 2011).

In addition, it is important for families and communities to create opportunities for language use outside the home. This can include enrolling children in heritage language classes, participating in cultural events and activities, and engaging with other members of the heritage language community (Baker, 2001). Overall, maintaining heritage language requires a concerted effort from families and communities, but the benefits are numerous, including preserving cultural identity, and improving communication with relatives and community members (Genesee et al. 2004; Kibler & Hyltenstam 2008).

2.1 Defining heritage language

In this bachelor's thesis, heritage language applies to all languages brought by immigrants to Finland. In other words, heritage language will only be discussed in the case of immigrants.

However, the languages that are not included in this study are Swedish, Saami, Romani and sign language. The reasoning behind this selection is due to the fact that Swedish is the official second language in Finland and similarly the rest of these languages are seen as minority languages in Finland (The Finnish National Agency for Education 2020).

There is a fine line when it comes to differentiating heritage language from mother tongue. Anita K. Sachariah Srinivasa (2022), a startup founder of BhashaKids, a public speaker, facilitator, mompreneur and learning coach, defines these two terms in a clear and concise manner. According to Srinivasa, the key difference between these terms lies in their association with the language spoken during early childhood. Mother tongue, she explains, is a language that individuals use seamlessly and persistently in their interactions with family, friends, and within their communities. It is a language that is acquired naturally and effortlessly from the environment in which one is raised. On the other hand, a heritage language is one that is inherited through family relations. While it may have been spoken during an individual's childhood, it is not necessarily used in their everyday interactions as an adult. In many cases, the main language spoken in their environment replaces the heritage language, resulting in a decline in proficiency.

2.2 Language maintenance incentives

The maintenance of heritage languages is an important issue that affects millions of people around the world. However, finding the right incentives, both external and internal, to maintain heritage language as an immigrant in Finland can be demanding at times. Several studies, including Yilmaz's (2016), have shown that when children from immigrant families start school and learn the host society's language, their heritage language skills, which they use to communicate with people from the same ethnic backgrounds, suffer due to the incentive of wanting to be accepted by the host society. Losing the competence for your heritage language can be damaging in many ways and can later on cause difficulties in identifying your identity. However, Yilmaz mentions that parents who realise the negative impacts this situation may have on their children place their children in heritage language schools in hopes to fix the situation. Although heritage language schools have proven to help maintain heritage language, Yilmaz reveals that it is inevitable how prevalent language loss is among people from immigrant backgrounds.

2.2.1 Extrinsic motivation

According to research, extrinsic incentives are the benefits that individuals or communities can gain from maintaining their heritage language (Fishman 1991). These incentives can be social, cultural, economic, and political (Giles & Coupland 1991; Piller 2011). One of the most significant extrinsic incentives of maintaining heritage language is social integration. As noted by Baker and Wright (2017), heritage language can serve as a bridge between individuals who share a common culture, history, and identity. By speaking the same language, individuals can create a sense of belonging and connectedness that can help to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers (Fishman 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). Another important extrinsic incentive of maintaining heritage language is cultural preservation. As explained by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004), heritage language is often linked to a culture's history, values, and traditions. By maintaining the language, individuals can also preserve the culture's unique identity and heritage. This is particularly important in today's globalised world, where many cultures are at risk of disappearing due to cultural assimilation (Fishman 1991; Piller 2011).

Economic incentives are also a significant extrinsic incentive for maintaining heritage language. According to Piller (2017), multilingualism is becoming increasingly important in today's global economy. Individuals who speak multiple languages are often more employable and have a competitive advantage in the job market. By maintaining their heritage language, individuals can acquire an additional language skill that can increase their economic opportunities (Grosjean 2010; Piller 2011). Additionally, political incentives are also an important external incentive for maintaining heritage language. As noted by May (2008), in many countries, heritage language is recognized as an official language or a minority language. By maintaining the language, individuals can assert their political rights and promote the recognition and protection of their language and culture (Grenoble & Whaley 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

2.2.2 Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic incentives refer to the personal benefits that individuals can gain from maintaining their heritage language (Mehan 2019). These benefits can be psychological and emotional. One of the most significant intrinsic incentives of maintaining heritage language is personal identity. Heritage language is often linked to an individual's identity and sense of self

(Fishman 1991). By maintaining the language, individuals can strengthen their cultural and linguistic identity, and reinforce their connection to their heritage.

Additionally, emotional benefits are also a significant intrinsic incentive for maintaining heritage language. Heritage language can evoke positive emotional responses, such as pride, nostalgia, and a sense of belonging (Gao 2016). By maintaining the language, individuals can experience these emotional benefits, which can enhance their overall emotional well-being.

In conclusion, the incentives for maintaining heritage language can be both external and internal. Extrinsic incentives can include social integration, cultural preservation, economic opportunities, and political recognition. Intrinsic incentives can include personal identity and emotional well-being. By recognizing and promoting the incentives of maintaining heritage language, individuals and communities can reinforce their connection to their cultural and linguistic heritage, and preserve their unique identity and history.

2.3 Limitations in Finland

The Finnish education system is legally required to provide mother tongue or heritage language instruction to students whose first language is not Finnish (Klemola 2019). This includes students who speak languages such as Sami, Romani, and Russian (Soininen et al. 2018). Additionally, foreign language instruction is also offered to students who have lived abroad for a significant period of time and wish to maintain the language they learned (The Finnish National Agency for Education 2020). However, there are certain policies and limitations regarding heritage language instruction in Finland. In order for free heritage language classes to be offered through the Finnish school system, at least four students must be enrolled, and a qualified teacher must be available to teach the language (Klemola 2019). This can be challenging for smaller minority groups who may not have enough students to meet this requirement.

One of the main challenges in maintaining heritage languages in Finland is the limited availability of resources and support. Heritage language speakers often have limited access to language learning resources, including books, media, and language courses (Soininen et al. 2018). This can make it difficult for them to maintain their language skills and can contribute to language loss. Furthermore, there is a shortage of qualified teachers who are trained in

teaching minority languages in Finland (Klemola 2019). This can make it difficult to provide heritage language instruction, and individuals may not have access to teachers who can support them in developing their heritage language skills. Additionally, there is often a lack of recognition and support for heritage languages in Finnish society (Soininen et al. 2018). This can make it challenging for heritage language speakers to feel valued and included in the host society, which can lead to language loss, as younger generations may not see the significance of maintaining their heritage language.

To sum up, the perception that Finnish is the dominant language in Finland can also be a limiting factor, as it can make it difficult for different heritage language speakers to feel included (Soininen et al. 2018). However, there are also numerous opportunities for increased investment in language education and increased recognition and support for other cultures (Klemola 2019). By working together to address the challenges faced by heritage language speakers, Finland can continue to promote bilingualism and multilingualism while also valuing the diversity of its cultural heritage. Ultimately, while there are challenges to maintaining heritage languages in Finland, it is crucial to support the linguistic rights of minority groups and promote linguistic diversity. Through increased investment in language education and increased recognition and support for heritage languages, Finland can continue to be a multilingual society that values the diversity of its own cultural heritage.

2.4 Heritage language maintenance challenges

When it comes to maintaining and developing heritage language, people from immigrant backgrounds are faced with challenging obstacles. Mentioned by Krashen, Tse, and Mcquillan (1998), these obstacles are: 1) lack of effort regarding interaction, books and alternative modes such as different media platforms; 2) the incentive to integrate into host countries culture, whilst being rejected by the heritage culture; 3) facing mockery when using heritage language with more skilled heritage language speakers as well as facing correction when making mistakes, resulting in language shyness; 4) the lack of heritage language teaching. These barriers, that are strongly linked to the development of heritage languages, are the core reasons why so many people of immigrant backgrounds no longer maintain their heritage language (Krashen 1998: 9).

According to Wong-Fillmore (2000), heritage languages are often minority languages that are not widely spoken in mainstream society, making it difficult to find resources and support for language maintenance. When individuals or families move to a new country or region, they may face pressure to adopt the dominant language and culture, leading to a loss of their heritage language (Wong-Fillmore 2000). Moreover, in the past, in order for the integration process to be facilitated, learning the host societies language was strongly prioritised for immigrants; however, due to the emphasis placed on learning the host society's language within several generations the ancestral language was no longer spoken by any members of the family (Campbell & Rosenthal 2000: 166). Additionally, children of immigrant families may also feel embarrassed or stigmatised by their heritage language, contributing to a reluctance to speak it in public (Giles & Coupland 1991). The lack of access to resources and support for language maintenance is another significant challenge facing individuals trying to maintain their heritage language. Heritage languages are often not taught in schools or offered as a second language (Fishman 1991), which makes it difficult for individuals and communities to find resources to learn or maintain their heritage language. Additionally, a lack of community support or access to native speakers can make it challenging to practise the language and maintain proficiency (Baker & Wright 2017).

Language shift is another challenge impacting the maintenance of heritage language. This can occur due to a variety of factors, including pressure to assimilate, lack of access to resources, and the use of the dominant language in social and professional settings (Fishman 1991).

Language shift can result in the loss of the heritage language and a disconnection from cultural heritage (Giles & Coupland, 1991). Therefore, maintaining heritage language is a challenging task for individuals and communities. The pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture and language, the lack of access to resources and support for language maintenance, and the impact of language shift are among the significant challenges facing heritage language maintenance efforts. However, raising awareness of the importance of heritage language and developing effective language maintenance strategies can help to address these challenges and support the preservation of cultural heritage through language maintenance.

2.5 Immigrants in Finland

According to Heikkilä and Peltonen (2002), up until the early 1980s Finland has mostly been an emigrant country, since then immigration has increased rapidly and emigration has slowly

decreased in Finland. A key factor that impacted the fast growing immigrant population in Finland was the deep economic recession in the beginning of 1990 (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002: 2). During this time period, the majority of immigrants were refugees and Ingrian Finnish returnees (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002: 2). Of these immigrants, the ethnic backgrounds were mainly from Russia, Estonia, Sweden, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Germany, United Kingdom, USA and Vietnam (Heikkilä & Peltonen 2002: 2). However this has steadily changed in the last couple decades; according to the 2021 statistics Finland, the majority of immigrants and people of immigrant backgrounds are from Estonia, Soviet Union, Iraq, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, China, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Turkey, India, Russia, Thailand and Syria. In terms of the reasons for migration, the majority of immigrants come to Finland for work or family reasons. The number of asylum seekers has decreased significantly in recent years, with 3,700 individuals applying for asylum in 2020 (Statistics Finland 2021).

Overall, immigration has been steadily increasing in Finland over the past decade, with the number of foreign citizens in the country increasing by more than 50% since 2010. Additionally, in 2021, Finland had approximately 470,000 people with foreign and immigrant backgrounds, out of all these people 388,000 (83%) were first-generation foreigners and 81,000 (17%) were second-generation foreigners.

2.6 Research gap

Heritage language is a fascinating and well-researched phenomenon that has garnered significant attention in recent years. Countless studies have been conducted on the benefits and challenges of maintaining heritage language, with researchers and authors alike using existing methodologies to test their hypotheses. For instance, the author, Krashen (1998), of the seminal work "Heritage Language Development", conducted an extensive quantitative study to investigate how heritage language programs can lead to practical advantages, reduced language shyness, and improved language skills for communicating with other heritage language speakers. Krashen and his colleagues (1998) have also explored the negative effects of language loss and highlight the benefits of heritage language development. Their findings support and reinforce previous research on this topic. Despite the abundance of research on heritage language, there is still a research gap when it comes to maintaining heritage language among young immigrant adults, particularly in the context of Finland.

While there are some studies on language maintenance among immigrants in Finland, they tend to focus on teaching children or older adults. For example, Protassova's (2008) journal article discusses teaching Russian as a heritage language in Finland, while Ansó Ros, Maijala, and Valkamo's (2021) article examines the role of teachers in heritage language maintenance courses in Finland.

Moreover, this research gap is especially noteworthy since young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland may have unique experiences and challenges related to language maintenance, such as navigating multiple language environments and balancing their identity as bilingual individuals. Similarly, language maintenance practices among young adults may vastly differ from those of other age groups, as young adults may have more freedom in deciding how to maintain their heritage language. Therefore, there is a need for research that specifically examines how young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland maintain their heritage language and what factors influence their language maintenance practices. This research could provide important insights into understanding the challenges and opportunities that young immigrant adults face in maintaining their heritage language, develop effective strategies for supporting their language maintenance efforts as well as inform policies and practices aimed at promoting linguistic diversity and cultural inclusivity in Finland.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Research questions and the aim of the study

The aim of the present study is 1) to find out how young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland maintain their heritage language as well as 2) bring to light the various challenges and benefits that arise when maintaining their heritage language.

Research questions:

1. How do young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland maintain their heritage language?
2. What challenges and benefits arise when trying to maintain a heritage language?
3. What are the major incentives when maintaining a heritage language?

3.2 Data and data collection

In this current study, the focus is on collecting data from young adults of immigrant backgrounds in Finland, ranging in age from 18 to 25. The aim of this study is to gain insight into the various methods people use to maintain their heritage language as young adults from immigrant backgrounds. In addition, the study seeks to understand the incentives for maintaining their heritage language, as well as the challenges and benefits that arise from doing so. To achieve these research goals, it is important to have a representative sample of participants from different ethnic backgrounds and language holders. This study seeks to

achieve a good balance in both male and female participants to ensure that the data collected is reflective of the diverse perspectives of the population under study.

The main method of data collection that was used for the study was an online questionnaire based study in which all questions were open-ended and in Finnish language. The online questionnaire link, along with a description of the present study, was sent to numerous subject associations email lists in the University of Jyväskylä. I chose to conduct an online questionnaire based study because the present study is qualitative. Moreover, due to the nature of this present study, I am focusing on qualitative research and with a qualitative study I am able to gain information regarding the different methods people use to maintain their heritage language as young adults from immigrant backgrounds. Moreover, the data collected for this present study allows me to compare participants with each other to find similarities regarding different incentives for maintaining their heritage language. Additionally, all collected data was used to analyse the different challenges and benefits that arise from maintaining heritage language as a person of immigrant background.

For this present study, compared to a close-ended questionnaire, an open-ended questionnaire is the better choice. Unlike closed-ended questions, which require respondents to select from a limited set of predetermined responses, open-ended questions provide respondents with the freedom to answer in their own words and express their personal thoughts, opinions, and experiences more freely. Additionally, open-ended questions provide a more spontaneous feedback as well as avoid bias responses from suggestive questions that close-ended questions might create (Reja et al. 2003). Open-ended questions encourage respondents to provide detailed and meaningful answers as well as allow respondents to express their thoughts and feelings in a way that is most natural and comfortable for them. Moreover, researchers, like Reja et al. (2003), Boruchovitch and Schall (1999), also acknowledge that there are disadvantages and certain limitations to open-ended questions, such as needing more time due to the meticulous process of coding as well as having more non-responses (Reja et al. 2003: 167). To elaborate, open-ended questions provide diverse and rich data for qualitative study, but there are risks such as not having clear enough questions or poor use of words that might ultimately hinder respondents from properly answering specific questions (Reja et al. 2003: 160). Similarly, there are also disadvantages if the questionnaire is on an online platform, this is due to possible technical difficulties that could lead the respondent to disregarding the questionnaire altogether (Reja et al. 2003: 160). However, open-ended

questions do not limit respondents/ participants to the certain set questions but rather highlights and enables respondents to express their personal opinions and experiences more diversely and uniquely without the researcher's influence like in closed-ended questions. Therefore, open-ended questions are being used for the present study (Reja et al. 2003: 161).

As previously mentioned, for the present study the questionnaire will consist of open-ended questions. With limitations and challenges of open-ended questions in mind, the objective of the study is well described and explained. Questions are meticulously thought out and well worded in Finnish, which will not only help respondents from misunderstanding questions but also avoid biased responses from respondents as well as non-responses. The questionnaire consists of 14 questions that are organised logically, avoiding important questions from being placed last (Boruchovitch & Schall 1999: 167). Each question took approximately two to three minutes to answer and the whole questionnaire ultimately took respondents only ten to fifteen minutes to answer. All the questions from the survey can be found in the appendix.

3.3 Participants

This bachelor's thesis aimed to investigate the attitudes and practices of young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland towards maintaining their heritage language. To achieve this goal, a questionnaire was conducted, which included male and female respondents aged between 18 and 25. The majority of the participants in the study are likely to have been born in Finland or immigrated to Finland at a young age, given that most respondents reported Finnish as their strongest language. The questionnaire had 23 participants, including 10 men, 12 women, and one other. This gender-specific approach was adopted to account for the potential differences in attitudes and practices of men and women towards heritage language maintenance.

Furthermore, the average age of the respondents was 22.13 years, reflecting the young adult demographic of the study. The aim of conducting research on young adults was due to the research gap in this specific area, but also to examine their attitudes and practices towards heritage language maintenance as they represent a generation that is more integrated into Finnish society than the previous generation of immigrants.

During the course of this study, an online questionnaire was administered for a period of approximately three weeks, and a total of 23 responses were received. The questionnaire was opened 400 times and was started by 40 respondents. However, 17 respondents discontinued the questionnaire as they did not belong to the target group according to the answers provided in the questionnaire.

The 23 respondents in this study represented a diverse range of ethnicities, with 16 different ethnicities being represented, including Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Japan, Italy, Chechen, Congo, Mongolia, Thailand, Germany, Philippines, China, Kurd, Somalia, Estonia, and Russia. In addition, the respondents spoke a variety of languages, with 21 different languages being spoken, including German, Spanish, Russian, Lingala, Swahili, Somali, Kurmanji, Filipino, Korean, French, Vietnamese, Turkish, Kurdish, Urdu, Mongolian, Thai, Japanese, Dari, Chechen, and the most commonly spoken languages being Arabic and English.

Of the 21 languages spoken by the respondents, 17 were identified as their heritage languages. These included Arabic, Urdu, Lingala, Swahili, Somali, Kurmanji, Chechen, Filipino, German, Russian, Mongolian, Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Estonian, and Dari. This diverse range of languages and ethnicities represented in the sample provides a rich source of data for understanding the attitudes and practices of young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland towards maintaining their heritage language

3.4 Research ethics

Questionnaires are widely used as a primary research tool to collect valuable information on a range of topics from diverse groups of people (Leung 2001). They provide important insights into attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and preferences. However, conducting a questionnaire requires careful consideration of ethical principles to ensure that the data collected is valid, reliable, and that the rights and welfare of participants are respected (Taherdoost 2016).

In the present study, the privacy and safety of all questionnaire respondents were given top priority. To respect and maintain confidentiality and privacy, the questionnaire will be fully anonymous (Halai 2006: 4). This ensured that individuals cannot be identified from the data collected. Full transparency and clarity was also provided when explaining the research goals, methods, benefits, and any possible risks of the research at the beginning of the questionnaire

(Tuomi et al. 2009: 131). In other words, individuals were well-informed about the purpose of the questionnaire, the types of questions they will be asked, and how their data will be used and protected.

Moreover, obtaining informed consent from participants is crucial when conducting a questionnaire. This means that all participants in the research will have voluntary consent, and they have the right to deny the use of their personal data as research material at any time (Halai 2006: 4). To ensure that all respondents understand what the research is about when giving their consent by filling out the questionnaire, I will make sure that all participants acknowledge their rights.

It is important to consider research ethics and data collection practices to ensure the validity and reliability of research findings while respecting the rights and welfare of participants. By following ethical principles, the present study aims to contribute to the existing literature on young adults from immigrant backgrounds and their heritage language maintenance in Finland.

3.5 Methods of analysis

Content analysis is a widely used method of analysis that can be utilised in various fields of academic research, especially in qualitative research. When it comes to the definition of content analysis Stemler (2000) quotes Holsti (1969) saying that content analysis is “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages.” Similarly, Harwood & Garry (2003) define content analysis as a tool to analyse different varieties of data, that enables the categorisation of phenomena and events in order to better understand them. Content analysis is a good method of analysis for qualitative data; therefore, due to the nature of this study, I am using content analysis as one of my methods of analysis. Content analysis is chosen as one of the methods for this research because it is not only specifically designed to focus on the very content of the collected data in relation to the present study, but also because enables the analysis of results from submitted questionnaire answers and categorises them into similar narratives to reveal common themes in immigrant language experiences and practices in Finland. To elaborate, using content analysis to analyse participants questionnaire answers allows information to be picked out in importance of relevance to the aims of this research. With all that said, because

I am aiming to find out how young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland maintain their heritage language, the method of content analysis is the best suitable method for this study.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Methods for maintaining heritage language

In the research questionnaire, a question was asked that aimed to determine with whom the respondents spoke their heritage language. The majority of the respondents reported that they only spoke their heritage language with their parents, family members, and close relatives. Some also mentioned that they spoke their heritage language with friends from the same ethnic background. However, a few respondents stated that they had lost touch with their heritage language and could only speak simple words or phrases.

“Jokapäiväisessä elämässä tuttujen sekä perheen kanssa ulkona tai kotona, puhelimella, tai kaupassa.”

“In everyday life with friends and family outside or at home, on the phone, or in the store.”

To further understand the usage patterns of heritage languages, a follow-up question was added in the questionnaire, which asked the respondents to indicate in what certain situations they used their heritage language. The majority of the respondents reported that they used their heritage language in everyday situations involving their family members or relatives. However, some respondents mentioned that they also used their heritage language on social media platforms, such as TikTok and messaging apps, to help maintain their language skills.

“Pyrin kuluttamaan somalinkielistä mediaa esim. Tiktokissa. Kuuntelen myös somalinkielistä musiikkia. Suuri osa ystävistäni puhuu somalian kieltä ja osallistun keskusteluihin, vaikka en aina osakaan vastata täysin. Ymmärrän kieltä paremmin kuin puhun.”

“I try to consume Somali-language media on e.g. Tiktok. I also listen to Somali music. Most of my friends speak Somali and I participate in conversations, even if I can't always answer fully. I understand the language better than I speak it.”

Interestingly, a few respondents mentioned that they used their heritage language in specific contexts, such as when praying, interpreting, shopping in international stores, or in humorous situations. Additionally, a couple respondents also revealed that they use their heritage language as a form of "secret language," particularly in circumstances where privacy is needed. This indicates that the use of heritage language is not limited to specific domains but is dependent on the context and situation.

“Kotona on tapana puhua omaa perintökieltä, jotta se ei unohtu. Mutta kieltä tulee käytettyä sisarusten kanssa, kun halutaan puhua salaisesti.”

“At home, I'm used to speaking my own heritage language so that it is not forgotten. But the language is also used with my siblings when we want to talk secretly.”

These findings have important implications for heritage language preservation efforts. The fact that most respondents only use their heritage language with family members and close relatives indicates a need for more opportunities for language use beyond the family circle. The use of social media and other digital platforms for language maintenance is also worth exploring as it provides an accessible and convenient way to maintain language skills. Additionally, the fact that heritage language is used in various situations underscores the importance of promoting the practical use of heritage languages in different contexts to ensure their vitality and sustainability.

Overall, the survey results suggest that the majority of young adults from immigrant backgrounds understand the importance of maintaining heritage language and strive to maintain it.

4.2 Maintaining heritage language through language courses

Towards the end of the research questionnaire, two interrelated questions were included. The first question aimed to determine if the participants had ever taken courses or classes to preserve their heritage language. Only 35% of the respondents responded with a “yes” and the rest, 65%, answered with a “no”.

“Lapsena kävin venäjän kielen tunneilla, joissa käytettiin samoja oppikirjoja kuin venäläisissä kouluissa. Opiskelin venäjää äidinkielenä näillä tunneilla noin 6-7 -luokan tasolle asti. Aloitin tunnit 1-luokalla ja lopetin 8-luokalla eli kävin tunneilla 7-15 -vuotiaana.”

“As a child, I attended Russian language classes that used the same textbooks as in Russian schools. I studied Russian as my mother tongue in these classes up to about the 6th-7th grade level. I started classes in 1st grade and finished in 8th grade, so I attended classes from 7 to 15 years old.”

Among the 65% respondents who answered “no”, many explained that they were never provided with the opportunity to attend heritage language courses or that there were no courses available for their specific heritage language.

“Alakouluaikana kävin vietnam kielen tunneilla pari vuotta, koska vanhempani laittoivat minut ja siskoni sinne. Lopetimme kielten tunneilla käymisen kuitenkin siitä syystä, että siellä harjoiteltiin mm. kirjoittamista ja lukemista vietnamiksi ja tunnit oli suunnattu niille, joiden äidinkieli on vietnam. Toisinaan, tuntien sisällöt olivat meille liian vaikeita. Olisimme tarvinneet tunteja, joissa opetetaan sitä itse kielitaitoa/puhumista/sanavarastoa. Olen sittemmin yliopistoaikana yrittänyt etsiä vietnam kielen alkeiskursseja, mutta niitä ei tällä hetkellä edes ole Suomessa (ei tarpeeksi kiinnostuneita opiskelemaan tätä kieltä).”

“When I was in elementary school, I took Vietnamese language classes for a couple of years because my parents put me and my sister there. However, we stopped going to language classes because they practised e.g. writing and reading in Vietnamese and the classes were aimed at those whose mother tongue is Vietnamese. In other words, the contents of the lessons were too difficult for us. We would have needed classes that teach the actual language skills/speaking/vocabulary. Since then, during my university days, I have tried to look for basic Vietnamese language courses, but at the moment there aren't even any in Finland (not enough people are interested in studying this language).”

These findings are not surprising given the various limitations and policies that exist regarding heritage language teaching in Finland. For instance, in order to receive free heritage language classes through the Finnish schooling system, there must be at least four students enrolled and a qualified teacher for the target language.

Despite the constraints and limitations, a positive outcome of this survey was that over half of the respondents, 61%, expressed that they would be interested in maintaining their heritage language if offered the opportunity in the follow-up question, “if you had the chance to take courses/ classes to help maintain your heritage language, would you?”. However, within the 39% of respondents that responded “no”, several explained their reasoning to their answer. One of the most common explanations was that they felt their heritage language was useless in Finland and not valued. Others felt that they already had sufficient language skills and did not see the need to take additional courses or classes.

“Olisin kiinnostunut kursseista, jotka ylläpitävät kielitaitoani tai kehittäisivät sitä. Olen esimerkiksi harkinnut yliopiston tarjoamia venäjän kielen kursseja, mutta niiden taso ei ole aivan riittävä omalle kielitaidolleni.”

“I would be interested in courses that would maintain or develop my language skills. For example, I have considered the Russian language courses offered by the university, but their level is not quite sufficient for my own language skills.”

Based on the responses provided by the participants in the survey, a prominent finding is that despite the availability of heritage language courses for minority languages in Finland, a large number of these language courses are deemed too advanced for many learners. The respondents have expressed their concerns regarding the suitability of the course content and structure, which has resulted in a significant gap between the learners' proficiency levels and the course requirements. This situation can have detrimental effects on learners' motivation, confidence, and willingness to continue their language learning journey, as they may feel overwhelmed and discouraged due to the mismatch between their language abilities and the course's difficulty level. Moreover, it may lead to a limited use of their heritage language and potential loss of their cultural identity, resulting in the loss of the minority language in the long run.

4.3 Challenges of maintaining heritage language

Language is an integral part of human culture and identity. It shapes the way we think, communicate, and perceive the world around us (López & Gutiérrez 2021). Based on the responses from the questionnaire, for the majority of the respondents, their heritage language is an essential component of their cultural identity. It is the language of their ancestors, their parents, and their community. However, as beneficial as maintaining a heritage language can be, it can also come with significant challenges.

According to the responses gathered from the questionnaire, a significant number of individuals revealed that they face linguistic challenges in relation to their heritage language. While many of the respondents are able to speak their heritage language, they encounter difficulties when it comes to reading or writing. Specifically, the majority of the participants highlighted that written language is more challenging than spoken language, as it involves a multitude of factors, including grammar, syntax, and vocabulary.

“Puhuminen on sujuvampaa, sillä käytän sitä lähes päivittäin, mutta kirjoittamisen ja lukemisen suhteen on haasteita.”

"Speaking is smoother, because I use it almost every day, but there are challenges when it comes to writing and reading."

As previously mentioned, a significant number of respondents reported that they were more proficient in speaking their heritage language than in reading and writing it. However, it was revealed that even speaking the language posed certain difficulties for many respondents. A common challenge that was brought up was the presence of varying accents within the heritage language, which made it difficult for them to maintain consistency in their own pronunciation.

“Alueiden eri murteet ovat haastavia. Koska ihmiset ympärilläni ovat irakilaisia, olen vahvasti saanut vaikutteita irakin murteesta. Sukulaiseni ovat Najafista ja pelkästään kaupunkien murteissa on suuria eroavaisuuksia. Jos juttelen ihmisen kanssa jonka tausta on esimerkiksi Baghdadista, saattaa olla useampikin lause joka menee minulta ohi. Puhumattakaan sitten eri maiden murre-eroista, esimerkiksi minulle egyptin-arabia on melkein kuin hepreaa, saatan ymmärtää koko puheesta pari sanaa vain. Myös itse arabian virallinen kirjakieli on minulle vaikeaa ymmärrettävää.”

“Different dialects are challenging. Since the people around me are Iraqi, I have been strongly influenced by the Iraqi dialect. My relatives are from Najaf and there are big differences in the dialects of the cities alone. If I'm talking to a person whose background is, for example, Baghdad, there might be more than one sentence that I miss. Not to mention the dialect differences of different countries, for example Egyptian Arabic is almost like Hebrew to me, I might only understand a couple of words of the whole speech. Even the official written language of Arabic itself is difficult for me to understand.”

Additionally, some respondents reported experiencing difficulty with proper pronunciation when speaking their heritage language.

“Vietnaminkieli on toonikieli ja ääntäminen tuntuu hyvin vaikealta. Myöskään minulla ei isän ja sukulaisten lisäksi ole juurikaan vietnamilaisia kontakteja eli ei ole mahdollisuutta kuulla tai käyttää sitä kieltä arjessa.”

“Vietnamese is a tonal language and pronunciation seems very difficult. Also, apart from my father and relatives, I don't have many Vietnamese contacts, so I don't have the opportunity to hear or use that language in everyday life.”

Moreover, it was evident in the respondent responses that most of the heritage languages were not widely spoken and due to that fact, it is challenging to find people with whom to practise the language with.

“Ei ole mahdollista puhua kenenkään kanssa joka olisi hengissä. Kieltä kuulee vain sekundärilähteiden kautta kuten netistä.”

“It is not possible to talk to anyone who is alive. You can only hear the language through secondary sources such as the internet.”

“Keski-Suomeen muuttaessani olen huomannut että täällä on aika vähän keskustelukumppaneita, joiden kanssa ylläpitää kielitaitoa. Täällä ei myöskään järjestetä kursseja. Kieltä on myös ollut vaikea ylläpitää ja oppia, sillä ns. rikkinäiseen somalin kieleen suhtaudutaan natiivipuhijien piireissä negatiivisesti.”

“When I moved to Central Finland, I noticed that there are quite a few conversation partners with whom to maintain language skills. No courses are organised here either. It has also been difficult to maintain and learn the language, because the so-called broken Somali language is viewed negatively in the circles of native speakers.”

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the most significant challenges of maintaining a heritage language is the lack of resources. In many cases, heritage languages are not as widely spoken or studied as dominant languages. However, another challenge that was revealed through the questionnaire responses was the influence of the dominant language. In the case of this current study, the majority of respondents' dominant language is Finnish. In many cases, people who speak a heritage language may also speak the dominant language in their country or region. The influence of the dominant language can cause people to use their heritage language less frequently or not at all (Fishman 2001).

“Kieli meinaa unohtua, koska ei tule puhuttua sitä eikä netissäkään näe sitä juurikaan. Vahva suomi aksentti, sillä olen puhunut suomea niin paljon kauemmin kuin viroa.”

“The language seems to be forgotten because it is not spoken and you don't see much of it on the internet either. A strong Finnish accent, because I've been speaking Finnish so much longer than Estonian.”

In some cases, people may even feel ashamed or embarrassed to speak their heritage language in public, which can further discourage them from using it (Fishman 2001).

“Kieli on hyödytön Suomessa ja ei arvosteta.”

“The language is useless in Finland and not appreciated.”

All in all, maintaining a heritage language can be a significant challenge. Lack of resources, lack of people to use language with, regional dialects, the influence of the dominant language are all factors that can contribute to the erosion of a heritage language. However, it is essential to recognize the value of heritage languages and to work to preserve them.

4.4 Heritage language maintenance incentives

The preservation of heritage languages is an important issue that affects many immigrants as they navigate the challenges of integrating their cultural heritage with the language of the host society. The incentives to maintain heritage languages can be both external and internal, but identifying and leveraging these incentives can often be a complex and demanding process.

External incentives, as revealed through questionnaire responses, show that cultural preservation is a significant motivator for maintaining heritage languages. The majority of respondents reported feeling a strong connection between their heritage language and their culture's history, values, and traditions. By preserving their heritage language, respondents also believed that they could preserve their culture's unique identity and ancestral heritage.

“Kieli on valtava osa somalialaista kulttuuria. Jos ei osaa kieltä, ei myöskään kunnolla pääse kulttuuriin sisään. Haluan ylläpitää somalialaista kulttuuriperintöäni ylpeydellä ja tuntea historiani paremmin.”

“Language is a huge part of Somali culture. If you don't know the language, you can't get into the culture properly either. I want to maintain my Somali cultural heritage with pride and know my history better.”

Internal incentives, on the other hand, reflect an individual's desire to maintain their heritage language for personal reasons. Respondents reported a deep sense of personal identity tied to their heritage language, with many feeling that it was crucial to reinforcing their cultural and linguistic identity. As Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) note, maintaining a heritage language can serve as a powerful means of strengthening an individual's connection to their heritage.

“Perintökieleni on erittäin tärkeä minulle, perintökieli ei ole vain osa kulttuuriani, mutta myös osa minua, se on minun identiteettiä.”

“My heritage language is very important to me, the heritage language is not only a part of my culture but also a part of me, it is my identity.”

By recognizing and promoting the incentives to maintain heritage languages, individuals and communities can reinforce their connection to their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Preserving heritage languages can help communities maintain their unique identities and history, while also serving as a valuable resource for future generations.

5 CONCLUSION

The current study has shown that young adults from immigrant backgrounds in Finland face various challenges in maintaining their heritage languages. To build on these findings, future research could focus on identifying the barriers that hinder the development and usage of heritage languages among this population (Fishman 2001; Wei 2021). For instance, studies could investigate the role of societal attitudes, family dynamics, and educational systems in shaping the heritage language maintenance practices of young adults (Cummins 2000; Shin & Komatsu 2019).

Moreover, promoting the use of heritage languages among young adults from immigrant backgrounds could be explored as a way to better support their cultural identities and sense of belonging (Fishman 1991). Research has suggested that heritage language maintenance can provide individuals with a sense of continuity with their past, cultural roots, and families, which can enhance their self-esteem, resilience, and social integration (Kim & Diaz 2019; Zhou 2021). Therefore, initiatives such as heritage language classes, peer support networks, and community events could be developed to encourage heritage language use and raise awareness of its value among young adults in Finland.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the attitudes and practices of young adults from immigrant backgrounds in maintaining their heritage languages in Finland. These findings have significant implications for heritage language education policies and programs in Finland. It is clear that there is a need for more opportunities and resources for individuals who want to maintain their heritage language (Cummins 2000). This could include government-funded programs, private language schools, and online resources that cater to the

diverse needs and preferences of young adults from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Wei 2021).

Moreover, it is essential to address the negative perceptions and attitudes towards heritage languages in Finland to promote and preserve linguistic diversity in the country. Research has shown that some Finnish citizens hold negative stereotypes and prejudices towards minority languages, which can create a hostile environment for heritage language speakers and learners (Virtanen et al. 2018). Therefore, policymakers, educators, and community leaders should engage in advocacy efforts that challenge these attitudes and promote multilingualism as a source of social, cultural, and economic enrichment (Cummins 2000; García 2009).

Overall, this study is important as it provides insights into the attitudes and practices of young adults from immigrant backgrounds towards heritage language maintenance, which can help inform policy-makers and educators on how to support and promote the maintenance of heritage languages in Finland. By addressing the barriers to heritage language maintenance, promoting heritage language use, and challenging negative attitudes towards linguistic diversity, Finland can become a more inclusive and welcoming society for all its citizens, regardless of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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7 APPENDIX : SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Ikä
2. Sukupuoli
3. Mikä on etninen taustasi
4. Mikä on perintökieleesi
5. Mitä kieliä puhut
6. Mitä kieltä puhut mielestäsi parhaiten
7. Mitä kieltä/kieliä vanhempasi puhuvat?
8. Kenen kanssa puhut perintökieltäsi
9. Missä tilanteissa käytät perintökieltäsi?
10. Mitä haasteita olet kohdannut oppiessasi tai puhuessasi perintökieltäsi?
11. Oletko käynyt kursseja ylläpitääksesi perintökieltäsi? Jos olet, missä kävit näillä kursseilla ja mikä sai sinut osallistumaan näille kursseille?
12. Jos vastasit 'ei' edelliseen kysymykseen, osallistuisitko kursseille, jotka auttavat ylläpitämään perintökieltäsi, jos sinulla olisi siihen mahdollisuus?
13. Mikä on ollut paras tapa ylläpitää perintökieltäsi
14. Miksi olet halunnut ylläpitää perintökieltäsi?