IMMIGRANTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS CUSTOMER SERVICE IN ENGLISH IN OULU

From a questionnaire study to a qualitative approach to attitudes

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Master’s Thesis aims to examine what kind of attitudes immigrants have towards customer service in English in Oulu. The interest lies in exploring how immigrants perceive customer service situations in Oulu when the mutual language is English. More specifically, the current study focuses on finding out whether Finns’ English skills and the quality of customer service in English is dependent on factors such as the age or the gender of the person providing the customer service. Additionally, the aim is to examine how immigrants perceive the customer service in different official agencies and between different service providers in Oulu. Another objective is to find out if immigrants conceive the customer service to be connected to the customer’s language choice (Finnish or English) or the customer’s ethnicity or nationality. The data for the current study comprises of a combination of a questionnaire study and a group interview. Ten immigrants completed the questionnaire in the autumn 2015, as a part of the Master’s Seminar course. The responses of the questionnaire study were further utilised in a group interview of five immigrants, where the responses from the questionnaire were presented to the group interview participants as controversial claims in the autumn 2016. This way the two studies can be seen to form a continuum, where the development is directed from a questionnaire study to a qualitative approach to attitudes.

In the current study, a distinction has been made between two types of services. On the one hand, the interest is broadly in the English customer service that immigrants receive from different service providers in Oulu, including both private and public institutions, such as shops and libraries. On the other hand, the focus is on the customer service provided by different official agencies. More specifically: Kela [The Social Insurance Institution of Finland], the Police and the services offered by City of Oulu and especially the multicultural services. The reason for including a wide range of services to focus on stems from the desire to form a broad overview of immigrants’ attitudes towards customer service in English in Oulu. Hence, the research includes services which immigrants are expected to use more or less on a daily basis, for example, shops in the centre of Oulu, grocery stores and libraries. In addition, it is seen that these services do not have a distinct customer service in English.

In contrast, the different official agencies presented in this study represent services that most immigrants need to use when moving to Finland. Thus, it seems reasonable to expect that such official bodies would be geared towards serving immigrants, and in consequence, would have a distinct focus
on customer service in English. It is also noteworthy to specify that although different official agencies, such as Kela or the Police, as well as different public and private institutions may have information on their web pages in several languages, the focus here is on the customer service of the local offices in Oulu. Thus, the current study is concerned with face-to-face communication, including customer service on the phone but excluding any written documents or web pages. Out of the official agencies examined in this study, Kela has a service number providing customer service both in Finnish and in English. However, Kela does not provide the possibility of calling directly to local offices. The local office in Oulu does not have a separate customer service in English because the personnel has preparedness to use English. If other languages besides English are needed to use, an interpreter is utilised (P. Pyykölä, personal communication, October 18, 2016).

Although it is possible to contact the police office in Oulu, they do not offer separate customer service in English, neither on the phone nor at the police station. Regarding the service desk of licenses and permits for foreigners at the police station in Oulu, the language of the customer service is primarily Finnish but English is also used, especially when serving foreign customers (S. Karhu, personal communication, September 15, 2016). Similarly, the immigrant services of City of Oulu do not have a separate customer service in English, but the personnel has preparedness to use English, although, in many cases, the mutual language is not English (J. Röntynen, personal communication, September 15, 2016). This could be because the services are provided for refugees and returnees, who might not speak English when arriving in Finland. Furthermore, the multicultural centre of City of Oulu, Villa Victor, offers information and assistance in several different languages, including Finnish and in English (“Information and assistance,” n.d.)

Although the term immigrant is commonly used in everyday language, it is necessary to specify its meaning in the current study. The Finnish Immigration Service defines an immigrant to be “a person who moves into a country” (“Glossary,” n.d.). Immigration as such is defined to be “the action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country (“Immigration,” n.d.). The EMN [European Migration Network] further explains that in a global context an immigrant is a non-resident, both national and alien, who intends to remain for over a year in a specific country (“Asylum and Migration Glossary,” 2014, p. 157). The EMN also defines the concept of temporary migration and short-term migrants separately. These terms encompass the idea that a person moves to a foreign country for a period of at least three months, for example, for business or holiday purposes (“Asylum and Migration Glossary,” 2014, pp. 265, 281). In comparison, a distinction is made with people who involuntarily leave their homes, further separating them into refugees and asylum-seekers. A refugee is a person who has to leave his home country because of, for example, persecution of race, religion or
nationality. An asylum-seeker is a person who does not yet possess the status of a refugee, but asks for a right of residence in a foreign state (“Glossary,” n.d.). In consequence, it is necessary to specify that although both the EMN and the Finnish Immigration Service consider the terms immigrant and migrant border terms for each other, in the current study the term immigrant is used to cover all the aforementioned sub-groups of immigration, including refugees, asylum-seekers and short-term migrants (“Asylum and Migration Glossary,” 2014, pp. 157, 187; “Glossary,” n.d.).

There are various reasons for immigration. Reasons for migrating can be classified into four different categories: economic, social, political and environmental. Economic migration encompasses finding work abroad or moving to another country in order to work. In social migration people migrate in order to be close to their friends or family members or to improve their quality of life. In political migration people escape political persecution or war, and an environmental reason for migrating is caused by a natural disaster. Reasons for immigration can also be classified either as pull or push factors. Pull factors, which attract people into moving to a particular area, are, for example, higher employment, safety, political stability, and a lower risk of natural hazards. On the contrary, push factors are the factors that make people leave an area, for example, war, poverty, or lack of safety. Usually migration is a combination of both push and pulls factors (“Why do people migrate?,” n.d.).

In Finland, the number of immigrants has been growing over the years. Nonetheless, it is not straightforward to estimate the exact number since it can be measured based on nationality, mother tongue or country of birth (“Maahanmuuttajien määrä,” n.d.). Based on citizenship, the number of foreigners in Finland in 2015 was 229,765. This includes people who do not have Finnish citizenship. The five biggest nationality groups were Estonian, Russian, Swedish, Chinese and Somalian (“Population, Foreigners,” 2016). Also Oulu has become more multicultural over the years, due to increasing immigration. In 2015, there were approximately 5,235 foreign nationals in Oulu, resulting in 2.6 % of the residents of Oulu being foreign nationals. The number has steadily grown over the years since, for example, in 2013 the number was 4,665, whereas in 2014 it stood at 4,948 (“Väestökielen mukaan,” n.d.). The three largest groups of foreign nationals in Oulu in 2014 were Asians, people from EU-countries and Africans (“Origins,” n.d.).

One of the factors which has contributed to the increase in the number of foreigners in Oulu, and in Finland in general, is the recent influx of asylum-seekers. Under international agreements, Finland is obliged to receive people in need of international protection, amidst of what is cited as the ‘world’s worst refugee crisis since the Second World War’ (“Turvapaikanhakijoita,” n.d.). For example, in the 2000s, the number of asylum seekers in Finland was approximately 1,500 or 1,600, but in 2015 the number stood at 32,476 (“Turvapaikanhakijoita,” n.d.). This means that the use of English in Finland
is increasing, due to growing number of communication situations including international contact. This creates a need to observe the position of English in Finland, and the way in which Finns use English when communicating with foreigners. When immigrants move to Finland, they do not know Finnish and the only mutual language is often English. The importance of communication becomes of paramount significance especially in customer service situations since inadequate customer service may have a negative impact on an immigrant’s life. As Garrett (2010) states, it can affect the life opportunities and the quality of life of the recipient of the service (p. 121). This also serves as the motivational background of the current study.

This study is organised in six main sections. Following the introduction, the second section focuses on the linguistic situation in Finland. To begin with, different languages and the rights of different language speakers are discussed, after which a closer look into the position, meaning and use of English in Finland is provided. Section three focuses on attitudes: first, the early definitions within the mentalist and the behaviourist traditions are discussed, after which the more contemporary approach on attitude research, and the main theoretical framework used in this study, is presented. Later in the section, the focus shifts from general attitudes to languages attitudes, discussing the main concepts and definitions of them. In the fourth section, the purpose of the study and the methodology are presented. This encompasses the discussion of questionnaire, group interview, the qualitative attitude approach and qualitative content analysis. Section five presents the respondents of both studies and the analysis of the questionnaire study and the group interview. Finally, in the last section a conclusion is presented.
THE LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN FINLAND

This section presents a brief overview of the linguistic situation in Finland. To begin with, the section 2.1 discusses the different languages and language rights in Finland and seeks to clarify the different language speakers’ entitlement to customer service in their mother tongue in Finland and to discuss the importance of English as one of the languages used in customer service. The following sub-section 2.2 further elaborates this matter, as it discusses the position, meaning and use of English in Finland. Furthermore, the section elucidates Finns’ attitudes to and use of English by presenting some of the results of a nationwide study on English in Finland. Finally, the terms customer, customer service, service quality and customer service delivery are defined in the final paragraph.

2.1 Languages and language rights in Finland

Finland is considered a monolingual country and linguistically fairly homogenous, irrespective of its bilingual status (Saarinen, 2012, p. 158; Sajavaara, 2006, p. 224). However, officially, Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. At the end of 2015, the total population of Finland was 5,487,308, of which 329,562 people living permanently in Finland were foreign language speakers. This means that six percent of the population spoke other languages than Finnish, Swedish or Sami as their mother language. First on the list of foreign language speakers was Russian (72,436), followed by Estonian (43,087) and Somalian (17,871) (“Number of persons speaking national languages,” 2016). English language speakers were the fourth largest group, with the estimate of 17,784 speakers (“Population by language,” 2016).

In general, languages spoken in Finland are categorised into four different groups, depending on their legal status (Saarinen, 2012, p. 169). Finnish and Swedish have the strongest status and are considered legally equal, as safeguarded by the Constitution and the Language Act (Ministry of Justice, 2013, p. 14). Secondly, the Sami languages are acknowledged by a separate law, which states the linguistic and cultural rights of the Sami population. Thirdly, the Constitution states Roma and Sign languages as minority languages. In other words, as stated by the Ministry of Justice, the Language Act safeguards the realisation of the rights described in the Constitution: it ensures the right to use the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, before authorities (“Language Legislation,” 2013). Furthermore, in addition to these aforementioned three categorisations, it is also stated in the
Constitution that all other language groups are entitled to develop their language and culture. Nonetheless, in the light of the growing number of immigrant languages in Finland this can be interpreted in many ways (Saarinen, 2012, p. 169). The number of immigrants and immigrant languages has started growing from the 1990s, and the linguistic landscape in Finland has undergone drastic changes due to immigration over the past ten to twenty years (Saarinen, 2012, p. 158). More specifically, Ministry of Justice states the following about foreign languages and their speakers’ rights in Finland:

The right to service in Finnish or Swedish does not depend on nationality. Therefore foreign citizens have the same rights to use these languages before the state authorities and the courts and in bilingual municipalities. Under the Administrative Procedure Act, persons who do not know Finnish or Swedish have, on the initiative of an authority and to guarantee their rights, the right to interpretation in a matter that becomes pending. (Ministry of Justice, 2013, p. 16)

Hence, the citation clarifies that foreign nationals are entitled to getting service in either of the official languages, Finnish or Swedish, but persons who do not know these languages have the right to use interpreters. Ministry of Justice does not mention the use of English in Finland, as it states that “it is not required in the Constitution that a separate act be enacted for other language groups than for the national languages and the Sami languages” (“Language Legislation,” 2013). However, immigrants arriving in Finland do not know Finnish or Swedish and need to rely on English as a mutual language with Finns in everyday situations before they learn either one of the national languages. This means that English is of central prominence in customer service situations in Finland.

2.2 English in Finland

Although Finland is a bilingual country, the eminence of Swedish is not as strong as the one of Finnish. However, Finnish society has become more multilingual, and especially English has influenced Finland in a large scale and has become the most important foreign language in Finland. In 1960–1980, English was a language which could merely be used in cross-cultural communication. Nonetheless, already in the early 2000s the role of English began to transform completely. Consequently, English is used today even in situations where the two national languages could be used (Leppänen & Nikula, 2008, p. 16). As in many other countries, the growth of English is due to several societal and cultural factors: after Finland joined the EU in 1995, language practices received
new relevance amid international communication. Furthermore, mass media and advanced information technology have been major factors in the significance of English in Finland. With the success of Nokia, Finland has turned into a networking society, and English has become an important language in the business world. Global culture influences are also strong in Finland, and this is especially noticeable in youth culture. Moreover, television, movies and other media have brought the influence of English to the everyday lives of Finns. Several economic factors, such as international trade relationships and an increase in tourism and immigration, have also contributed to the current, prominent position of English in Finland (Taavitsainen & Pahta, 2008, p. 29–30).

English also has a strong role in language teaching in Finland. Finns study many languages but English has gradually become the most popular and widely studied foreign language. In Finland, the compulsory school education lasts for nine years, during which all pupils must study at least two languages other than their mother tongue. For most, foreign language learning starts in the third grade, and the first compulsory language can be, for example, English, French, German or Russian. Yet, the most common selected and offered A1 language is English (Leppänen et al. 2011, pp. 20–21). A1 language is the language that starts in the third grade and is a compulsory language for all students (Kumpulainen, 2014, p. 42). A1 language is studied extensively throughout the school years and the learning target is “independent, functional proficiency in that language” (Leppänen et al. 2011, p. 21). Over the years, English has had a solid position as an A1 language and has managed to maintain that position (Kumpulainen, 2014, p. 44). The second compulsory language is called B1 language, starting in grade seven and usually being Swedish or Finnish. Students can also choose a second foreign language, starting latest in the fifth grade (A2 language) and another optional language in the eighth grade (B2 language) (Kumpulainen, 2014, p. 42). Entering the upper secondary school, students are obliged to continue studying these previously chosen A1 and B1 languages, also having the opportunity to take more languages (Leppänen et al., 2011, p. 21).

The prominence of English in Finland has also been taken into consideration in the new National Core Curriculum for compulsory basic education. The National Core Curriculum was renewed in 2014 and has been implemented from August 2016 (“The new curricula,” n.d.). In the new curriculum it has been acknowledged that pupils use English on an increasing level in their free time, and this informal learning is taken into consideration when planning the teaching. Moreover, emphasis is laid on diverse communication and cultural diversity. Pupils are encouraged to communicate more in English and to acquire data in English in other subjects. Hence, integrating English into other subjects is highlighted in the curriculum (Perusopetuksen opetuksen perusteet, 2014, pp. 219, 348). Furthermore, learning outside the classroom, utilising games, virtual environments, and technology
in general, are of importance in the curriculum (“The new curricula,” n.d.). Besides compulsory basic education and the upper secondary school, English is also notable in higher education in Finland. Many courses in universities are taught in English, and a great deal of research is conducted in English in Finnish universities (Taavitsainen & Pahta, 2008, p. 31).

The adoption of systematised language policies and the language education in Finland has affected the way Finns view foreign languages and especially English. In other words, emphasis on language education, effective language teaching and students’ long-term commitment in studying English have all contributed to the success of English in Finland. Finns’ English proficiency is generally high, and it is internationally considered that Finns have good English language skills (Leppänen et al., 2011, p. 22). Finns also feel rather confident using English, after studying it extensively over the years. According to a nationwide study on Finns’ attitudes towards English conducted by Leppänen, et al. (2011), Finns self-assessed their English language skills to be relatively good, but the findings also indicated that Finns experience feelings of inadequacy and a desire to improve their English skills. The people who use English actively, positively correlated with living in the city, being highly educated or being a manager or an expert. These people also use English whenever they have a chance, while for example, manual workers and less educated only when they have to. The results indicated that English would have more significance to younger people, and they would use it more actively (Leppänen et al., 2011, pp. 59, 119, 127). All in all, the survey suggested that Finns rarely use English actively in their daily lives but consider English to be more important than Swedish and even in some cultural contexts more important than Finnish. Finns use English most commonly, when traveling, working and studying. However, the active use of English most often involves some kind of international contact (Leppänen et al., 2011, pp. 161–162).

Such international contact could be a customer service situation where Finns need to provide customer service in a foreign language, as it is the case in the current study. In consequence, it is necessary to specify the terms customer and customer service here. The term customer can be defined as “anyone who receives products or services; customers can be internal or external to the organization and are the foundation of any business” (Kendall, 2006, p. 3). Furthermore Kendall (2006) defines customer service to be “the interaction between the customer and a representative of the organisation - "" and comprises the idea of “transactions aimed at meeting the needs and expectations of the customer, as defined by the customer” (p. 4). Aarnikoivu (2005) adds that in this interaction the person providing the customer service embodies the company’s values and expresses them through his or her behaviour. The company’s customer friendliness determines how successful the customer service encounter turns out to be (Aarnikoivu, 2005, p. 16). Similarly, in this study, it is
perceived that the person who is providing the customer service is responsible for the quality of the communicative situation in which the services are provided. Thus, the quality of the customer service also depends on the ability to use other languages besides one’s mother tongue. Furthermore, in the current study, the quality of customer service refers to both personal communication but also to the outcome of the customer service situation. In other words, whether the customer gets the services she or he needs.

A closely related term is *service quality*, which is “a global judgement or attitude relating to a particular service; the customer’s overall impression of the relative inferiority or superiority of the organisation and its services” (Kendall, 2006, p. 4). A so-called SERVQUAL measure on service quality separates five service quality dimensions, on which the customer focuses: reliability (company’s ability to perform the promised service), responsiveness (willingness to help customers), assurance (the knowledge and politeness of the employees), empathy (helpful and individual attention towards the customer) and tangibles (physical facilities, et cetera) (Kendall, 2006, p. 7). The first four service quality dimensions serve as a background in the current study, in order to elucidate what kind of factors are referred to when discussing immigrants’ views on the quality of the customer service. The act of providing the customer service is referred to as *customer service delivery*. However, as Schneider and White (2004) state, the term encompasses both the product of the delivery and the process of the delivery. Nevertheless, the focus here is on the process. In other words, how the service is delivered (as cited in Fogli, 2006, p. 266). However, these terms are not distinctly used further in the study but the term service quality is seen to encompass these aspects.
3 STUDYING ATTITUDES

Attitude is a term relevant to many fields of research and the concept of it is prominent in the fields of psychology, sociology, sociolinguistics pedagogy and politics, amongst others. Attitude is also a term that is commonly used in different every day contexts: we all have an idea of what an attitude is, and we freely use it in everyday speech to refer to different evaluations of people, objects and issues. As Erwin (2001) states, attitudes are present in our daily lives where they direct our behaviour in social situations, help us to arrange our experiences into personally meaningful wholes and enable us to interpret the situations at hand. However, defining this common term scientifically can prove to be more complex. The majority of the scientific definitions of the term include the notion of attitudes presenting mental preparedness. Still, there are substantial differences in the way different authors define the concept of attitudes (Erwin, 2001, pp. 2–3). The term has evolved over the decades, and the concept has been viewed in diverse ways by different authors over time (Fazio & Petty, 2008, p. 1). Therefore, this section introduces the most noteworthy and influential definitions of attitudes, as well as the major developmental guidelines in attitude research. Further on in the section, the concept of language attitude is also discussed.

3.1 Defining attitudes

One of the very first usages of the term appeared in experimental psychology in the late 1800s. Yet, it was not until the 1900s when sociologists and psychologists began to imbibe the concept of attitude in relation to individual differences (Fazio & Petty, 2008, pp. 1–2.) For example, Gordon Allport (1935) viewed that the emergence of the attitude concept within social sciences stemmed from the aspiration to acquire a term which had an emphasis on social and cultural aspects, shifting away from references to biological and hereditary influences on behaviour (as cited in Fazio & Petty, 2008, pp. 1–2). Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) are often acknowledged as presenting one of the earliest definitions of attitudes and bringing attitudes to a place of central prominence in social psychology. Their definition characterises attitude as “a state of mind of the individual toward an object” (as cited in Erwin, 2001, p. 4). This definition encompasses the idea of an orientation towards a specific object and raises the question of the core meaning of the “state of mind,” as well as the process of certain objects becoming the focus of an individual’s attention (Erwin, 2001, p. 4). However, the later definition of Thurstone (1931) discussed some of these issues, as he defined an attitude to be an
“affect for or against a psychological object” (as cited in Erwin, 2001, p. 4). His definition implies psychological objects to be the focus of attitudes and attitudes being principally positive or negative affects (Erwin, 2001, p. 4).

A few decades later, Gordon Allport (1954) presented perhaps the most famous definition of attitudes, suggesting that an attitude is “a learned predisposition to think, feel and behave toward a person (or object) in a particular way” (as cited in Erwin, 2001, p. 5). First, Allport (1954) proposed that attitudes are learnt, and thus, socially constructed, and that people are not born with positively or negatively loaded attitudes towards certain objects. Second, Allport (1954) emphasised predisposition (as cited in Erwin, 2001, p. 5). Erwin (2001) describes this to be “a tendency to respond in certain either positive or negative ways” (p. 6). In other words, as Erwin (2001) elaborates, the form of the attitude determines what one sees, and in addition, governs the individual’s interpretations of specific situations (p. 6). Finally, Allport’s (1954) definition encompasses the idea of particular responses, implying that attitudes involve cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. This refers to what is often called the triadic, tripartite or three-component model (as cited in Erwin, 2001, p. 6). This is discussed in detail in the following section. Furthermore, more recent contributions to attitude research are presented, for example, by Icek Ajzen. Ajzen (2005) perceives an attitude to be “a disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution or an event” (p. 3). The next sub-section discusses the general theoretical backgrounds of the mentalist and the behaviourist approaches on attitudes. As the first half of the current study can be seen to represent the mentalist approach, it is seen necessary to present the starting point of the current study.

3.1.1 Attitudes as mental constructs: the mentalist and the behaviourist approaches

The definitions of attitudes presented in the previous section are one of the most noteworthy and acknowledged definitions, which have influenced attitude research over time and functioned as a directional foundation for the development of attitude research. Furthermore, two dominant psychological approaches have been recognised in attitude research: the mentalist (or the cognitive) approach and the behaviourist approach. However, most attitude research follows the guidelines of the mentalist view. In the mentalist approach attitudes are viewed as internal constructs, due to which it is seen that the study must rely upon individuals’ reports of their introspection (McKenzie, 2010, pp. 21–22). These kinds of methods are often referred to as direct methods and they encompass
such research tools as surveys and interviews (Kalaja, 1999, p. 49). The different methods when studying attitudes are discussed more in detail in section 3.2, which focuses on language attitudes. Nevertheless, the mentalist view emphasises the quality of an attitude as an “internal state of readiness,” which after a given stimulus will affect the individual’s responses (McKenzie, 2010, p. 21). It can be perceived within the mentalist view that attitudes consist of “three classes of response - - to a stimulus, or attitude, object” (Zanna & Rempel, 2008, p. 7). The three components are affective, cognitive and the behavioural (Zanna & Rempel, 2008, p. 7). In consequence, this multicomponent view of attitudes is often referred to as the tripartite, triadic or the three-component model (Erwin, 2001, p. 13).

The popularisation of the tripartite model on attitudes is accredited to Milton and Rosenberg in the early 1960s. They suggested that an attitude consists of “how we feel, what we think, and what we are inclined to do about an attitude object” (Zanna & Rempel, 2008, p. 7). Fazio and Petty (2008) perceive that the affective, cognitive and behavioural components serve as a foundation for our attitudes, and attitudes are formed on the basis of beliefs, affect or behaviour (pp. 133–134). First, the affective component is seen to encompass feelings towards an attitude object. In relation to the current study, this could mean, for example, the feelings that foreigners have towards English spoken by Finns. The emotional content of attitudes is often seen as a scale, ranging from positive to negative. It is also argued that affective reactions can occur prior to any conscious recognition or realisation of the attitude object, and thus, people can experience affective reactions to an object, despite the involvement of cognition. Second, the cognitive component includes thoughts and beliefs. For example, some people might think that good proficiency in English is connected to later success in working life. Here the attitude consists of two aspects: belief (the possibility that the object is characterised by a certain attribute) and value (how favourable or unfavourable this attribute is) (Erwin, 2001, pp. 13–14; Fazio & Petty, 2008, p. 134). Finally, the behavioural component involves acting according to our attitudes (Erwin, 2001, p. 14). As the three-component view encompasses the idea that attitudes are a combination of all three components (cognitive, affective and behavioural), it is a representative of the multicomponent view. Some theories support definitions which emphasise a unitary approach on attitudes (Zanna & Rempel, 2008, p. 7). A unitary approach on attitudes is of central prominence in the second mainstream approach, the behaviourist approach, which is presented in the following paragraph.

The behaviourist approach is greatly concerned with the behavioural component of attitudes. According to the behaviourist approach, attitudes “can be inferred from the responses that an individual makes to social situations” (McKenzie, 2010, p. 21). Behaviourists believe that attitudes
are responses to a stimulus, and thus, there is a significant correlation between attitudes and behaviour. In other words, all human activity can be broken down into behavioural units. The behaviourist research is considered to be more straightforward as it does not include, for example, self-reporting from the respondents but focuses more on observing external human behaviour (McKenzie, 2010, p. 21). In other words, it can be perceived that the mentalist and the behaviourist approaches differ from another in terms of emphasising different aspects of attitudes. It is especially the role of beliefs, feelings and behaviour in the concept of attitudes that are viewed differently between these two approaches (Zanna & Rempel, 2008, p. 7). However, there are also similarities between the mentalist and the behaviourist approaches. Both approaches perceive attitudes as something people learn during socialisation, that is to say, in childhood and in adolescence (McKenzie, 2010, p. 21). Moreover, attitudes are seen as internal qualities, mental constructions or learnt predispositions to value an object in a certain way. Thus, attitudes are seen as somewhat permanent (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 19). Vesala and Rantanen (2007) refer to these traditions as dispositional attitude theories due to their perception of attitudes as internal, separate characteristics (p. 19).

Various kinds of criticism have been presented towards the dispositional attitude theories. Vesala and Rantanen (2007) separate three different types of critique. First, the role of context is not sufficiently taken into account in the dispositional attitude theory. When focusing on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour, such attitudes which fall upon certain behaviour should be studied, and thus, the importance of context emphasised. The second critical standpoint suggests that social psychology should not focus on attitudes but on the verbal construction of social reality. According to this viewpoint, people may present conflicting comments even in a short period of time. Finally, the third critical standpoint views that attitudes are social by nature (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 20–22). In conclusion, more current views recognise the concept of attitudes but not in a similar manner as the mainstream attitude theories. An example of a more contemporary approach to attitude research is the qualitative attitude approach developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007), which is also the theoretical and methodological basis of the current study. Their approach could be defined as a methodological approach, which consists of both theoretical and practical postulates (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 11). The theoretical background and the core perceptions of the qualitative attitude approach are presented in the next section.
3.1.2 Attitudes as social phenomena: the qualitative approach to attitudes

In addition to the emergence of conventional ways of seeing and studying attitudes, new theories started developing alongside with them. Attitudes were no longer seen as static and straightforward constructs as before. It is considered that the book *Discourse and Social Psychology* (1987), by Potter and Wetherell, opened a new way of perceiving and defining attitudes. Kalaja (1999) elucidates the change in perceiving attitudes by describing that when studying, for example, language attitudes, the question no longer was “What is person A’s true attitude towards a specific language?” but emphasis was rather laid on the way people express their attitudes in different situations and on why people express their attitudes in the form of X in a certain situation and in the form of Y in another situation, in addition to investigating their reasons for doing this. Therefore, attitudes were starting to be perceived as socially constructed, being a part of a discourse where people express their opinions for or against something. Attitudes were seen to be dynamic, and it was acknowledged that they could change from one situation to another, and even within the same situation, depending on the arguments and the interlocutors (Kalaja, 1999, pp. 62–63).

One such researcher who emphasised the social nature of attitudes was Michael Billig. Billig (1991) considers attitudes to be argumentative phenomena by which people construct their relationship to the social world (pp. 143–144). Billig (1996) sees that attitudes are attached to argumentation, and hence, defines an attitude to be a standpoint or a position in a point of contention (as cited in Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 15). Consequently, attitudes should be approached as phenomena which can be recognised in argumentation, which as a term is understood as commenting on controversial questions (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 31). A Billig (1996) emphasises, the concept of expressing attitudes becomes much more complex in the context of rhetoric argumentation since people tend to use direct and indirect expressions for expressing their attitudes. They can also formulate the same stance in multiple different ways and change their views in the course of one discussion. Thus, the role of argumentation varies in communicative purposes, and this may affect the way different stances are expressed (as cited in Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 35).

However, the idea that attitudes are visible in discourse and communication has also been studied through different terms. John Du Bois (2007) uses the term *stance* and *stance taking* when referring to the the act of positioning oneself in the view of something. Du Bois (2007) states that “stance has the power to assign value to objects and to position social actors with respect to those objects - - (p. 139). In other words, Du Bois (2007) views that a stance is a public act coming to existence in
interaction. It is achieved through overt communicative measures, such as language. By taking stances, participants of a discussion evaluate objects (objective) and position the other stance takers (subjective), as well as align with other subjects (intersubjective). Hence, three important aspects are present when taking a stance: objective, subjective and intersubjective (pp. 169, 170–171). As a conclusion, both Billig (1991, 1996) and Du Bois (2007) perceive attitudes to be intersubjective and dynamic.

Similarly, the qualitative attitude approach developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007) is located in the field of social sciences, and the term attitude is seen as an important social psychological concept (Vesala & Rantanen, 2011, p. 16). Therefore, their approach founds upon the notion that attitudes are social by nature. Attitude is seen as a phenomenon which is formed and constructed in social reality, and hence, can be shared. It is also a communicative phenomenon, which is used in social interaction (Vesala & Rantanen, 2011, p. 28). Consequently, understanding and taking into account the communicative situation as a whole is one of the corner stones of the qualitative attitude approach. This means that when observing the communicative aspect of attitudes, it is important to take into account not only the argumentation expressing the attitude but also the situation as a whole: the person expressing the attitude, the formulation of the attitudes in sentences and the target of the expressions (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 26). Thus, attitudes are not inherent or internal since they are recognisable in the social reality. However, the approach does not disregard the aspect that attitudes are phenomena connected to an individual, and to one’s personal experiences, since individuals express, produce and respond to them, and attitudes are an individual’s communicative adhesion to the social world (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 28–29).

In terms of content, Vesala and Rantanen (2007) elucidate that attitudes encompass the idea of value judgements. This means that an individual makes value judgments towards certain objects, which can be socially or culturally significant or special, and the content of those judgements can be negative or positive by nature (p. 28). The qualitative attitude approach is not only the study of value judgements but also the study of where value judgements are connected. The key question becomes the context and the quality of the attitudes in that specific context. Thus, it is important to ask, who is making the value judgements and in what way are they being made (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 18). This is because people can express different attitudes in different situations and use different argumentative ways when expressing their attitudes. Thus, the qualitative attitude approach focuses on what kind of attitudes there are possible to occur in certain situations, and how these value judgements are connected to the different actors in that situation, as well as their internecine relationships. Also the wider social and cultural context becomes significant (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 30–31).
Accordingly, when an individual takes a stance to something and gives justifications for it, the combination of these two can be seen to form attitudes. Hence, the stance itself is not an attitude but solely an expression of it (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 38, 40). These attitudes are approached by classifying the variation that is attached to the stances and their justifications. First, the content and the form of the stances, their positivity or negativity, or the direct or indirect nature of the expressions are some examples of the classification criteria. However, even stances which appear similar can have different justifications. Stances can be further sub-grouped based on the justifications and the similarities and differences between them (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 39–40). This is based on Billig’s (1991) perception that when people take a stance in favour of something, they also present a counter-position against something, and it is expected that attitude holders justify their position and give critique to the counter-position (p. 143).

Nevertheless, an important part of the interpretation of the attitude is to recognise the object of the attitude. Although comments would arise based on the controversial claims that have been presented to the participant of the study, it is not evident that the object of the commenting can be deduced solely from the claim (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 41). In addition to recognising the object of the attitude, the subjects presenting the attitude require further interpretation. In an interview situation, the subject commenting on a claim approaches the claim from a certain subject position. This is commonly the main reason why the person was chosen to be interviewed since the person represents a certain social category, being a representative of, for example, a profession or an age group. These social aspects set a framework from which the individual approaches the situation, and this further justifies the social nature of attitudes (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 42).

In the qualitative attitude approach it is expected that although people can express only one kind of attitude, multiple different attitudes can occur even during one discussion. In other words, one person can express multiple attitudes. Even when commenting on one controversial claim, the quality, manner and the target of value judgments can change. People can also make value judgements from different subject roles or change their attitudes after re-considering their stance (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 39). Furthermore, because of the change in the subject position, comments on certain claims can be followed by counter-attitudes to the same topic. For example, people can express their attitudes from a professional point of view but then approach the topic from another point of view, representing another type of subject (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 42–43). Billig (1991) sees that the person has “taken the side of the other,” due to a change in the rhetorical context and usually by “reception of new, persuasive information (pp. 145–146). This urges the person to alter the direction of their expressions (Billig, 1991, pp. 145–146). Finally, also the relationship between the stances and
justifications can alter. For example, justifications of opposing stances can still refer to one single value. According to Vesala and Rantanen (2007), this situation would be considered to include two separate attitudes. They further add that also a reverse situation is possible, where two attitudes have different justifications but similar stances (p. 53).

As the diversity of attitudes is seen evident in a communicative situation, Vesala and Rantanen (2007) highlight that this is the foundational reason to look for attitudes and acknowledge their existence. In everyday life, it is common to assume that the attitude someone expresses is an indicator of a permanent characteristic of personality, although people want to avoid such assumptions to be made of themselves. This can be one explanation for the diversity of expressions (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 36). Hence, one attitude can be formulated and expressed in various ways, but internal consistency regarding to the content of the expression is still existing and observable. Comments are not directly attitudes but expressions of them in the social reality, and people have a reason for expressing them in certain forms in certain situations (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 37–38).

The many different attitudes people can express in one communicative situation further validates the social nature of attitudes. As attitudes are social constructions, they can be formulated in the course of argumentation but also be created along with it (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 48). Different justifications formed during the discussion can be of various types, such as, references to generally accepted norms and values or personal experiences. Therefore, the framework is that the interviewees construct their attitudes by commenting on the controversial claims (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 47, 53). Reasons for expressing attitudes and justifying them in different ways are of abundance: attitudes aid people to organise their external world. People may strengthen their social identity, construct their own identity, and delineate different social groups. Attitudes are present in the way people perceive themselves, that is to say, in self-awareness, which is social by nature. In other words, attitudes help people to classify each other in certain groups and anticipate certain behaviour in the future. Also these functions further validate the social nature of attitudes since many of their functions are related to the social world (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 26, 50).
3.2 Language attitudes

Language attitudes are attitudes precisely about language. This encompasses not only the idea that people have attitudes towards a person who speaks a different language from them but also towards a person who speaks the same language as themselves, but for example, a different regional variant or a dialect. In other words, people have language attitudes towards different languages or language speakers (Kalaja, 1999, p. 46). Moreover, the term language attitude is considered a hypernym, under which a variety of different, specific attitudes can be found. The study of language attitudes is a fairly new line of research, and according to Kalaja (1999), it is considered to have started around 1960s, when Lambert studied Canadians’ language attitudes towards English and French. Since then, language attitudes have been studied from many different viewpoints by sociologists and social psychologists in Great Britain and in Canada, and by sociolinguists in the USA (Kalaja, 1999, pp. 46–47).

Baker (1992) lists some of the key areas language attitude research has focused on: attitudes to language variation, dialect and speech style, to learning a new language, to a specific minority language, to language groups, communities and minorities, language lessons, to the uses of a specific language and to language preference and the attitude of parents to language learning (Baker, 1992, p. 29). Garrett (2010) also further adds that people hold attitudes towards different aspects of language, such as words, grammar, spelling and punctuation, dialects, pronunciation and accent. Thus, a language attitude could be described to be an attitude towards different aspects of language (p. 2). Furthermore, language attitudes can be measured at an individual level or at the level of a group or a community (Baker, 1992, p. 10; Kalaja, 1999, p. 48). Sociologists have often studied language attitudes from the viewpoint of communities. From this viewpoint, the focus could be on the status of different languages and language speakers in different communities, such as French or English speakers in Canada, the characteristics of a good standard language, or the kind of structures that are considered grammatically correct in British English. Respectively, sociolinguists and social psychologists have been focusing on the viewpoint of individuals and groups in language attitude research. Their aim has been to study the language attitudes of specific individuals or groups, for example, towards a certain regional variant or towards speakers of a specific dialect (Kalaja, 1999, pp. 48–49).

Language attitudes are often considered prominent and vital when discussing the preservation, restoration, decay or death of a language. Baker (1992) sees that “the status, value and importance of
a language is most often measured by attitudes to that language” (p. 10). He sees that such attitudes may be measured at the level of an individual or the level of communities. In consequence, attitude research, such as national surveys, provides information on the state and vitality of a language in a certain community. The research results can function as indicators of communities’ beliefs, perceptions and preferences but also indicate changes in the general perception of a certain issue. Consequently, the research findings can have an effect on the implementation of a certain language policy, or help the officials to predict the success of such policy (Baker, 1992, p. 9). As the current study does not directly cover the concept of languages attitudes in relation to language restoration, preservation or such, it can still provide useful information of English in Oulu. Immigrants’ views and experiences of customer service in English can further aid different organisations and companies in Oulu to develop their services. This is because, as Garrett (2010) states, language attitudes are prominent in our everyday lives in many ways. They are involved in both the reception and production of languages: they influence our reactions to other language users but also help us to predict the responses we receive regarding our own language use. All this contributes to the choices we make while communicating. We try to gain the specific responses we expect from other people, and this might lead us to alter our speech in various ways. For example, we might try to be seen as friendly, intelligent, and open-minded with our way of communicating (Garrett, 2010, pp. 21–22).

In order to identify different attitudes, either direct or indirect methods have traditionally been recognised as the main methodological approaches in language attitude research (Garrett, 2010; Kalaja, 1999). Both direct and indirect methods base on the conventional, mentalist way of seeing attitudes and represent the framework of the mainstream research (Kalaja, 1999, p. 60). Furthermore, as stated earlier, the mentalist approach views attitudes as internal constructs, due to which studies within this discipline rely upon methods which consist of individuals’ reports of their introspection, for example, by using questionnaires (McKenzie, 2010, pp. 21–22). Also the first half of the current study can be seen to represent the mentalist approach. However, the current study mainly builds upon the qualitative approach to attitudes, and subsequently, on the discursive and rhetoric traditions. Hence, this study moves from a questionnaire study to qualitative approach on attitudes, the methods of both of which will be specified more in detail in chapter 4. Nonetheless, as it is necessary to represent the starting point of this current study, the following paragraphs present the direct and indirect methods used in attitude research.

Direct methods encompass questionnaires and interviews (Kalaja, 1999, p. 49). These methods enable the researcher to ask directly from the respondents about their attitudes, for example, towards a specific language or a language use situation. Questionnaires and interviews consist either of open or
close-ended questions. Open-ended questions mean that the respondents answer in their own words. The respondents of the study can be asked, for example, to listen to a speech sample and then describe the speaker with their own words. Close-ended questions mean that the respondents choose one alternative of all the ones that the researcher has provided. Thus, respondents may be asked to choose an alternative that best describes their own attitude towards a specific matter. A commonly used method in language attitude research is, for example, to provide different claims, such as, “British accent is beautiful,” and ask the respondent to answer with yes or no or by choosing the right option from an attitude scale (strongly agree – strongly disagree) (Kalaja, 1999, p. 49).

By comparison, when using indirect methods in language attitude research, the subjects of the study do not know that their language attitudes are being investigated. The most commonly used method is the matched-guise technique, which is used to evaluate the research subjects’ primary reactions to a speech sample. The matched guise speech sample includes speakers who represent, for example, a certain regional variant. The subjects of the study are asked to listen to the audio and evaluate the speakers. The basic assumption behind the study is that the way we speak affects the way in which people categorise us into different groups, and it is only after this that they evaluate our personality (Kalaja, 1999, pp. 49–50). Nonetheless, both the direct and indirect methods have received critique. For example, a list of claims with a fixed set of answer options to choose from has been considered too restrictive: research participants are not given an opportunity to justify their views or to present opposing views. Such research presents a problem of artificiality, with no connections to the everyday life (Kalaja, 1999, pp. 60–62). As a conclusion, the view that the mentalist and the behaviourist traditions have on attitudes, in combination with the research methods they utilise, as well as the limitations these method present, the qualitative attitude approach was chosen to be the theoretical and methodological framework for studying language attitudes in the current study. In consequence, the following paragraph charts language attitude research in Finland, as a background for the position of the current study in its field.

In Finland, the research on language attitudes, and more specifically attitudes towards English, has mostly been from the viewpoint of Finns. One of the most prominent attitude studies in Finland took place in 2007, when a nation-wide survey on Finn’s uses of, attitudes to and perceptions of English was conducted. The data was collected by random sampling and by using a questionnaire, and the total number of responses was 1,495. The results of the survey indicated that English has a strong presence in Finland, and it is the most commonly used foreign language, towards which Finns have positive and practical attitudes. The survey also revealed that there are some socio-demographic differences in the proficiency and use of English in Finland. Younger generations and people who
live in cities use English more and are at a higher English proficiency level. In general, the survey indicated that languages are studied more by the young, women, city dwellers and by highly educated people (Leppänen et al., 2011, abstract, 62). However, language attitudes from the viewpoint of immigrants have not been researched in a similar scale in Finland. As a conclusion, it could be stated that language attitude research from the viewpoint of immigrants has been minimal in Finland. Furthermore, very little research has been made on intercultural customer service in Finland, and the need for further research is evident, presenting new prospects to language attitude research in Finland.
4 MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

This section provides a description of the material and methodology chosen for this study. It is divided into two main sections: the first section introduces the research questions and presents the objective of the study. The second section focuses on the methodology used in the current study and is further divided into four sub-sections. The first sub-section discusses the different aspects related to a questionnaire study, while the following sub-section discusses the different aspects related to a group interview. Subsequently, section 4.2.3 presents the conducts of both studies. Finally, qualitative content analysis is discussed in the last section, and the conduct of analysis is presented.

4.1 Research questions

This Master’s Thesis aims to examine what kind of attitudes immigrants have towards customer service in English in Oulu. The interest lies in exploring how immigrants perceive customer service situations in Oulu when the mutual language is English. More specifically, the current study focuses on finding out whether Finns’ English skills, and the quality of customer service in English is dependent on factors such as the age or gender of the person providing the customer service. In addition to this, the interest is in how immigrants perceive the customer service in different official agencies and between different service providers in Oulu. Another objective is to find out if immigrants conceive the customer service to be connected to the customer’s language choice (Finnish or English) or the customer’s ethnicity or nationality.

In exploring the kinds of attitudes immigrants have towards customer service in English in Oulu, the research questions are as following:

1. How do immigrants perceive the customer service in English in different official agencies and between different service providers in Oulu?

2. How do immigrants perceive Finns’ English skills?
   More specifically, what kind of social factors are connected to Finns’ English skills and how do immigrants see Finns as English speakers?

3. In the opinion of immigrants, what affects the customer service from the customer’s side?
More specifically, do immigrants perceive that their language choice and their language competence as customers affect the customer service? In addition to that, do immigrants perceive that the customer’s ethnicity or nationality affects the customer service?

4. What kind of attitudes do immigrants express in the communicative situation of this specific group interview?

4.2 Methodology

The current study is primarily qualitative research. Qualitative research is characterised by a comprehensive approach towards collecting material from natural settings and utilising ways that enable the target group’s authentic views to be heard (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009, p. 164). Qualitative findings develop from three different ways of collecting material: in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observation and written documents (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Such methods are, for example, group interviews, observation and analysis of various documents (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2009, p. 164). The material for this study was provided by questionnaires and a group interview, combining two kinds of qualitative methods. The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. This way the questionnaire combined both quantitative and qualitative features, which are difficult to separate from each other, often appearing in the same study and complementing each other. Qualitative and quantitative research can be combined at different levels in research and in material (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, pp. 136–137).

Furthermore, as the current study combines two kinds of qualitative methods, both the questionnaire and the group interview could be presented as independent studies. As Saldaña (2011) states, some researches incorporate several different methods in order to “gather a broader spectrum of evidence - “(p. 31). However, in the current study the questionnaire is seen as a foundation for the group interview, as the results of these two studies cannot be directly compared to each other. Hence, the two methods form a continuum, in which the questionnaire represents a conventional basis from which the research, as it develops, is directed towards views that are more contemporary. In other words, as the research process advanced, using a questionnaire to study immigrants’ attitudes did no longer seem a sufficient method on its own. The theoretical and methodological framework developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007) presented a more in-depth and a more up-to-date way of studying attitudes. According to their framework, the participants of the group interview comment on
controversial claims. Thus, the questionnaire study presented an opportunity to derive authentic, empirical material for the group interview, and the claims were derived and further developed from the questionnaire responses. A more detailed description of the aspects of the questionnaire and the group interview, as well as the procedures related to them, are discussed in the next sections.

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The use of a questionnaire represents survey-research. In survey-research, information is collected in a standardised form from a group of people by using a questionnaire or a structured interview. A sample of individuals is chosen from a certain group of people, which in this case was one of the many Finnish language teaching groups (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 134). Furthermore, the questionnaire used in the current study combines features from different forms of interviews. The close-ended questions represent structured interview, in which the design and order of the questions is the same for every respondent, and the respondent chooses one correct alternative out of many. The open-ended questions represent semi-structured interview, in which the questions are the same for everyone, but the respondents answer with their own words (Eskola & Vastamäki, 2001, p. 26).

There were several reasons for choosing the questionnaire to be a primary method in this study. First, questionnaire is an effective and a time-saving way of collecting material from various people simultaneously. Furthermore, questionnaires enable the presentation of multiple questions, which are in the exact same form for every respondent, enhancing reliability (Valli, 2001, p. 101). Questionnaires also provide a better form of anonymity than, for example, personal interviews. This diminishes social desirability bias, which means that respondents do not reveal their real attitudes but the ones that they ought to have (Garrett, 2010, pp. 44–45). In addition, the researcher does not influence the questions and embarrassing or sensitive topics can be asked more easily (Walliman, 2010, p. 97). Furthermore, the use of open-ended questions in a questionnaire allows the respondents to answer with their own words, without suggested answers. The respondents’ knowledge on the specific issue is acknowledged, as well as the most essential and important phenomena in their answers (Hirsjärvi, et al., 2009, p. 201).

Nevertheless, there are also disadvantages when using questionnaires. The respondents may answer to the questions in the wrong order or read the latter questions in advance, which may affect the answering process. There is also a possibility of misunderstanding the questions and providing inaccurate or off-topic answers. If such situations occur, asking to supplement the already existing
answers can prove to be problematic (Valli, 2001, pp. 101–102). Furthermore, the researcher cannot be certain if the respondents answered thoroughly or honestly to the questions, or how they perceived the questions or were acquainted with the issue under discussion (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 95). Finally, since the questionnaire should aim at being simple, complex questions are not possible (Walliman, 2010, p. 97). This might restrict what kind of questions can be asked.

Hence, it is important to formulate the questionnaire in an appropriate manner. The questions should be as clear and as simple as possible. Moreover, the questions should be short and specified and avoid ambiguity and double-meanings. Word-choices should represent simplicity and basic vocabulary, and the questions should not be leading. The most general questions, such as questions concerning background information, should be placed in the beginning of the questionnaire, whereas the most specific questions in the end of the questionnaire (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, pp. 202–203). The most sensitive topics should also be placed towards the end part of the questionnaire. Moreover, it is important to take notice of the length of the questionnaire. If the questionnaire is too long or there are too many questions, the respondents easily answer less thoroughly or ignore some of the questions. Consequently, the questionnaire should be clear and logical and include a sufficient amount of instructions for answering (Valli, 2001, pp. 100–101). These aspects were taken into consideration in the questionnaire used in the current study. Instructions for answering were placed in the beginning of the questionnaire, followed by fast-to-answer, close-ended questions about the respondents’ background information. By comparison, questions concerning personal experiences and opinions of customer service, were placed in the end part of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also fairly short, as it took 20–30 minutes for the respondents to answer to all of the questions.

4.2.2 Group interview

In order to complement the questionnaire study, a group interview was chosen to be the second method for the current study. Group interview was chosen because the method of a semi-structured interview is utilised in the qualitative attitude approach, developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007), and because the qualitative attitude approach is the main theoretical and methodological framework of current study. Furthermore, group interviews are useful for gathering qualitative data, and they can be used for a wide range of topics. As Walliman (2010) states, with correct preparation it can be used for even very sensitive topics (p. 99).
Group interview can be defined in different ways. Some researchers, such as Patton (2002), characterise group interviews as focus group interviews, while others, such as Flick (2009), differentiate group interviews, focus group interviews and group discussions from each other. Patton (2002) states that “A focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Groups are typically 6 to 10 people with similar backgrounds who participate in the interview for one to two hours” (p. 385). Patton (2002) uses the term “focus” in connection with the term “group interview” in order to emphasise that the topic of the group is narrowly focused, as it seeks to examine reactions to a specific issue. Furthermore, the group itself is focused by being designed homogeneously. Also the participants’ interaction, responses, and in general, the time management is kept focused, introducing a sharp focal point in all aspects of the interview situation. However, Patton (2002) underlines that a group interview is not a problem-solving session, decision-making group or solely a discussion but specifically an interview (Patton, 2002, pp. 385, 388).

When organising a group interview, several factors should be taken into consideration. One of the most evident aspects is the role of the moderator. The term moderator will be used here because, as Patton (2002) underlines, it encompasses a specific function of the interviewer, which is the moderation and guidance of the discussion. The term also conveys the idea of a two-way communication between an interviewer and an interviewee, whereas the term interviewer implies the idea of solely asking questions (p. 386). Moderator is an important part of both group interviews and group discussions, although its role and function can vary depending on the method. One of the most important tasks of the moderator is to produce informality in the discussion and create an atmosphere in which the participants feel confident discussing even personal experiences, attitudes and opinions (Flick, 2009, p. 195, 199). This was especially important in the current study since the topics in the group interview covered, for example, racism in customer service. Hence, prior to the interview an attempt was made to highlight the informality and casualness of the interview and present it solely as a discussion, rather than an interview. The moderator should also be able to mediate between different participants and make sure that each participant is given a chance to contribute to the discussion: this includes preventing single participants from dominating, as well as encouraging reserved members to take part in the interview (Flick, 2009, p. 195, 199). In the current study, this was done by directing certain questions to the more reserved participants and addressing them individually.

Furthermore, the moderator should be able to balance between different directive and indirective attempts to moderate the interview (Flick, 2009, p. 195). Flick (2009) distinguishes three different ways by which the moderator can practice these attempts. First, in formal direction of the group, the moderator controls the agenda and fixes the beginning, course and the end of the discussion. Second,
in topic steering, the moderator introduces new questions and steers the conversation towards the desired topics, intending to expand and deepen on certain topics and aspects of the discussion. Third, steering the dynamics of the interaction includes, for example, asking provocative questions and directly addressing the reversed members of the group (Flick, 2009, p. 199). A combination of these methods was utilised in the group interview. Formal direction of the group was included by fixing the beginning and the end of the discussion and controlling the length of commenting on each claim. Topic steering was utilised by asking additional questions of certain comments, with the desire to produce more profound commenting on certain topics. For example, when the participants discussed different service providers in Oulu, additional questions were asked about the customer service in certain places, such as, at the hospital. Finally, some questions were intentionally presented in a more provocative way, in order to produce further discussion, for example whether the participants feel irritated of Finns’ shyness in customer service situations. The reserved participants were also addressed individually.

Patton (2002) also brings forward the issue of cross-cultural interview, stating that “cross-cultural inquiries add layers of complexity to the already-complex interactions of an interview” (p. 391). The possibility of having misapprehensions in the interview increase, and they might be harder to detect due to false notions about shared meanings. Words also take different meanings and forms in different cultures, and some words or ideas cannot simply be translated directly. Furthermore, the interview situation is made more intricate and challenging by the need to use to translators and interpreters, possibly affecting the original response of the interview participant to the extent that the researcher is not sure whose perceptions are in question. In addition to phenomena related to language, social norms might be different in a cross-cultural interview. Some topics might be deemed sensitive or intrusive by representatives of certain cultures more than by people from other cultures, and hence, the researcher should pay close attention to the formulation of the interview questions. In order to get valid, reliable and meaningful information, particular sensitivity and respect for differences, as well as accepting other’s values and norms, should be practiced in a cross-cultural interview environment (Patton, 2002, pp. 391–394). Therefore, no translators or interpreters were used in the group interview, and claims encompassing sensitive topics were not formulated to be too confrontational.

Flick (2009) separates different kinds of groups and begins with the categorisation of natural and artificial groups. A natural group exists in everyday life and can even be related to the issue of the interview. By comparison, artificial group is put together for that particular interview and has been formed according to certain criteria. Furthermore, Flick (2009) draws a distinction between homogenous and heterogeneous groups. Members of a homogenous group have a similar background,
whereas members of the heterogeneous group differ from each other in characteristics that are relevant to the core purpose of the study and the research questions (pp. 197–198). In the current study the group represented an artificial group because it was put together for this particular study. Although all of the participants were students at the same adult education centre, not all of them studied in the same group. Furthermore, the group was homogenous in the sense that all of the participants were immigrants, but highly heterogeneous in the participants’ individual backgrounds.

Group interview was chosen to be the second method for gathering material for various reasons. Firstly, collecting material is effective since it is possible to get answers from several people simultaneously, and the interaction between the participants improves the quality of the material since the participants are apt to providing checks and balances on each other, eliminating extreme views (Flick, 2009, p. 196; Patton, 2002, p. 386). The similarities or diversities between the different views can also be quickly assessed during the group interview (Patton, 2002, p. 386). Furthermore, as with interviews in general, the asset is that the moderator can repeat questions, correct misunderstandings and clarify the responses with the interviewees (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002, p. 75). The moderator is also able to judge the quality of the answers and further encourage the participants in their answers (Walliman, 2010, p. 100).

Group interview has an interactive aspect in collecting material, and the interaction found in the group produces insights that would be less accessible otherwise. It is seen that one of the advantages of a group interview is that attitudes and opinions are studied in an environment that is more natural and attached to everyday forms of communication than, for example, the common one-off meeting with the interviewer and the interviewee (Flick, 2007, p. 195, 197). Hence, for instance, attitudes presented to the interviewer are not disconnected or isolated from everyday forms of communication, and the group interview may resemble everyday situations, “in which opinions and attitudes are produced, expressed and exchanged” (Flick, 2009, p. 197). The group interaction becomes a reconstructive instrument, which helps individuals to form their opinions more appropriately. Although consensus might be formed within the group and the group opinion might be expressed in discussion, it can be argued that it also exists independently outside the situation (Flick, 2009, pp. 197).

Still, group interview has some limitations. Firstly, organising the interview requires effort in finding the right time and place, suitable for all participants. Facilitating the interview requires social skills since the moderator must manage the interview situation. The number of questions that can be asked is restricted, and the response time per participant is also limited (Patton, 2002, pp. 386–387). Furthermore, the group dynamics can be challenging for the moderator and for the group. For example, the group can include people who want to dominate the interview situation, or by
comparison, serve as an impediment for individuals to express their opposing or negative views since they will fear the group’s undesirable reactions (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 211). Despite these limitations, group interview was seen to be the most appropriate method for examining attitudes in the current study. Group interview is also a method which is suitable for the framework of the qualitative attitude approach developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007).

The qualitative attitude approach is a methodological framework consisting of both theoretical postulates as well as practical methods (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 11). The method presented by Vesala and Rantanen (2007) is not, as they describe, a complete method but an approach and a tool, which can be applied when creating a research frame (p. 7). The method bases on the presentation of a certain stimuli, which can be a sentence including a claim, a photograph or a description of a certain dilemma. The purpose of the stimuli is to provoke a commentary from the interviewee, and this argumentation can be further analysed in terms of attitudes. This method for collecting material is a semi-structured interview since the claims are presented to each research participant in the exact same form and order, and the participants are given an opportunity to comment with their own words. The role of the moderator is to present the claims and direct the discussion by stating further questions, commenting, pausing the discussion or directing the discussion back to the presented claims. However, it is useful if the claims are visually present, for example, on a piece of paper or on a PowerPoint presentation (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 33–35, 40). The stimuli used in the current study were different claims, which were derived from the earlier collected questionnaire responses, discussed more in detail in section 5.1.3. The following sub-section presents the detailed procedure of the questionnaire study and the group interview.

4.2.3 Conduct of the questionnaire and the group interview

The questionnaire study was the initial method for gathering data in the current study. Ten immigrants taking part in a Finnish language course completed the questionnaire in the autumn 2015. I had contacted the teacher of the course, and on the agreed date, I went to the class and handed out the questionnaires in the beginning of the class, by first introducing the topic and the purpose of the study. It took approximately 20–30 minutes for the respondents to complete the questionnaire. However, a few students came late to the class and completed the questionnaire simultaneously as the teaching was in progress. This could have affected the depth of their responses. The questions were both in Finnish and in English, and the respondents had the option to answer in either one of the languages
or to use both languages. An attempt was made to formulate the questions as simple as possible since there was prior information of the respondents’ level of English or Finnish. This was seen to maximise the respondents’ ability to understand the questions and feel confident in expressing their thoughts and experiences.

The questionnaire consists of 18 questions in total, of which five are close-ended questions and 13 are open-ended. Question 1 and questions 6–9 were close-ended questions and intended to chart the respondents’ background information: gender, reason for coming to Finland and to Oulu, time spent living in Oulu, time spent studying Finnish and respondents’ spoken English language skills were multiple-choice questions. Nonetheless, questions 2–5 were open-ended questions and focused on the age, home country, mother tongue, profession and education of the respondents. Furthermore, questions 10–18 were open-ended questions and focused on attitudes. These questions can be divided into the following three categories: questions 10–11 were concerned with the respondents’ spoken English skills and their use of English in Oulu. Furthermore, questions 12–16 aimed at finding out the quality of the customer service and customer service both in Finnish and in English. Finally, questions 17–18 focused on the immigrants’ views on Finns’ English language skills. The questionnaire can be found first on the list of appendices.

Group interview was organised in order to serve as the second, primary method for gathering data. The participants of the group interview were students at an adult education centre in Oulu. Prior to the interview, the teacher of the course informed me of the participants’ nationalities, background and approximate level of English. As all of the immigrants were work-related, I further inquired if there was a student with a refugee or an asylum-seeker background, and subsequently, one more student was found. However, I did not have any background information of him because the information of his participation came at a later stage. On the agreed date, one of the participants was absent, but another student with a similar ethnic background was found from another group. Similarly, I had no background information of him or his English skills. Hence, the two participants who were asked to join in did not know the other participants, who were studying in the same group. This could have affected the group dynamics and the communication in the group.

The group interview was held in one of the classrooms at the school. Prior to the interview, the participants were orally informed of the purpose of the study, after which they signed two copies of consent forms. The participants also filled out a background information form. Both the consent form and the background information form can be found in the appendices. Eight different claims, which are presented and discussed more in detail in section 5.1.3, were presented on a PowerPoint presentation. The participants were asked to freely discuss and comment on the claims and each
other’s thoughts, and they were approached as immigrants. The group interview lasted approximately 42 minutes and it was recorded.

Both the questionnaire study and the group interview aim at following the principles of research ethics. First, as Kuula (2013) highlights, the research participants must be informed about the research: the purpose of the research, who is conducting it and why, the use of the research material, and confidentiality (pp. 99, 102). In the current study, the respondents of the questionnaire were informed about these aspects orally and the information was written in the questionnaire. Similarly, the participants of the group interview were informed both orally and in writing. They also signed two copies of consent forms. Second, Kuula (2013) mentions the importance of preserving anonymity. Hence, confidentiality and privacy protection were essential. Confidentiality is defined to be the agreement to use individuals’ personal information. Furthermore, privacy protection alludes to the protection of identity (p. 64). This means that in the process of the analysis I was the only one who went through the material and after the analysis the questionnaires and the recording of the group interview were disposed of. The concept of protecting one’s privacy also means that the research participants are made unidentifiable by anonymisation. This should be done case-specifically, taking into consideration, for example, the topic of the research (Kuula, 2013, p. 200). As the topic of this research could be considered sensitive and including personal information, anonymisation was an important factor to take into account. This means that any names or specific details are not published, and for example, proper nouns and details of work places have been deleted.

4.2.4 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) was chosen to be the method for analysing both sets of material. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002) describe content analysis to be an attempt to systematically and objectively describe the contents of different documents. The aim of the method is to create a concise, general and a descriptive summary of the researched phenomenon (p. 105). Similarly, Patton (2002) defines content analysis to be “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). Although definitions often include the words ‘text’ or ‘document,’ content analysis can be applied to a wide range of material. Such material can be transcripts of interviews, newspaper articles, textbooks, diaries, and so forth. Furthermore, Schreier (2012) emphasises that QCA is applicable to all material which requires interpretation. The research material does not have an inherent meaning,
but the researcher constructs the meaning, and the process is affected by the researcher’s individual background (Schreier, 2012, pp. 2–3).

What separates content analysis from other qualitative analysis methods is its focused aspect: the researcher concentrates on certain selected aspects of the material. Also in the stage of analysis the selected research questions specify the viewpoint from which the researcher approaches the material. Thus, QCA reduces material in two ways: first, only the aspects which are relevant to the research questions are taken into account in the material. Second, the categories in the coding process represent specific information turn into higher-order categories. In other words, the researcher loses the specifics in the coding process. Nevertheless, the balance between forming sufficiently abstract but at the same time concrete categories should be preserved. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2002) underline that with the help of content analysis material can be organised in such form that deductions can be made. However, they emphasise that a detailed analysis of the phenomenon and the presentation of it in an organised form is not adequate, but the researcher should be able to conduct meaningful deductions from the material (p. 105).

According to Schreier (2012), content analysis is systematic since it always includes the same set of steps. Schreier (2012) further presents eight different steps: first, the researcher decides the research question or questions and selects the material. Subsequently, the researcher builds a coding frame, divides the material into units of coding, tries out the coding frame, evaluates and modifies the coding frame. Finally, the researcher conducts the final analysis and interprets and presents the findings (p. 6). Also Laine provides a general framework for the conduction of content analysis. First, the researcher decides what is interesting in the material and then goes through the material, taking into consideration the research questions. Interesting material is separated from the rest and the separated material is organised into themes or categories. Finally, the researcher writes a summary of the discoveries (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002, p. 94). The core steps in the content analysis procedure, and the first step of the analysis, is to develop classifications or a coding scheme. As Patton (2002) states, “content analysis, then, involves identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying and labelling the primary patterns in the data” (p. 463). The analysis consists of the fundamental contents of, for example, an interview, and these core meanings found in the material are referred to as patterns or themes (Patton, 2002, p. 453). Moreover, categories can be brought to the material, assessed against it and modified, if necessary (Flick, 2009, p. 323).

In addition to general guidelines of QCA, the method of analysis also bases on the methodological framework of the qualitative attitude approach developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007). The core idea in their analysis is to analyse the interview participants’ commenting on controversial claims.
The commenting is seen to comprise of both stances and justifications. Differences and similarities can be recognised in both of them, and based on the similarities and differences, the findings can be grouped together and categorised. Hence, the conduct of analysis is on two levels: classification and interpretation. Classification means that different findings are acknowledged and grouped together. This stage of classification includes interpretation but interpretation can also be seen as a separate stage, in which abstractions are formed and the material is perceived from a certain theoretical viewpoint (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 11–12). This resembles the core idea in QCA, where the categories in the coding process represent specific information turn into higher-order categories. Thus, the method of analysis has features from both QCA and the methodological framework of the qualitative attitude approach. Nonetheless, content analysis was chosen because the study encompasses rich verbal and textual data, which require interpretation. Furthermore, the focus of the study is on discovering what kind of attitudes immigrants have, rather than on the expression of the answers, and that is why a method, which enables the categorisation and the interpretation of contents of the material, was chosen.

In terms of the questionnaire study, the questionnaire responses were categorised according to their similarities and differences. Subsequently, it was observed which themes were prominent and occurred multiple times in the responses. Such theme was, for example, the effect of Finns’ shyness on customer service. However, as the issue of racism only came up in the responses of two respondents, it was seen as an important theme needing to be further elaborated. Based on these similarities and differences in the responses and the re-occurring themes, four different categories were formulated, according to their thematic content. Each category includes two different claims focusing on the same theme, resulting in eight claims in total. These claims serve as a basis for the group interview. The formulation of the claims is presented in section 5.1.3.

In terms of the group interview, the recording of the group interview was transcribed word for word, by transcribing the language in its exact form as it appears on the recording. The transcription was then divided according to the four categories, keeping in mind the research questions. In other words, it was observed which comments belong to which category. Subsequently, the nature of the value judgement was observed and the comments were organised according to the positivity or negativity or their directness or indirectness. After this, it was observed how the participants justified their stances. The justifications were further divided into different sub-categories. In addition to this, the argumentation of the justification, the subject position and the context were taken into consideration when classifying the justifications. The analysis of the group interview and the questionnaire study are presented in the next section.
In this section, the findings and the analysis of the questionnaire study and the group interview are presented. The first section 5.1, where the focus is on the questionnaire study, has three sub-sections. First, the respondents of the questionnaire study are presented, after which the main findings are discussed. Finally, the claims derived from the questionnaire responses are presented. Furthermore, section 5.2 focuses on presenting the findings of the group interview. First, the participants of the group interview are presented, after which the analysis is divided into four different categories, each category including two controversial claims. In the final section 5.3, the findings of both the questionnaire study and the group interview are discussed.

5.1 Attitudes towards customer service in English: questionnaire responses

In this section, a short overview of the questionnaire study is provided. First, the respondents of the questionnaire study are presented in section 5.1.1. Second, the main aspects that emerged in the analysis of the questionnaire responses are discussed in section 5.1.2. On the basis of the different themes arisen in the questionnaire responses, eight different claims were formulated, following the theoretical and methodological framework developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007). According to Vesala and Rantanen (2007), the participants of the interview construct and express their attitudes in argumentation, which means commenting on controversial claims. These claims, derived from questionnaire responses and used in the group interview, are presented in the sub-section of 5.1.3.

5.1.1 The respondents

The respondents of the questionnaire study were immigrants taking part in a Finnish course, in the autumn 2015. The course was aimed at students who already had completed Finnish language courses, or who had studied Finnish for more than a year. The respondents were chosen based on description of the course. A more advanced level of Finnish course would mean that the respondents would already have lived in Finland for some time and would have proficiency in Finnish. Additionally, a more advanced level in Finnish would mean that the respondents are able to use
As demonstrated in the table above, out of the ten respondents, six are female and four are male. The age distribution of the respondents is from 26 to 70. However, the majority of the respondents are in their 20s or 30s. The respondents represent nine different nationalities: five are from Asia, four from Europe and one from North America. Furthermore, three out of ten have been living in Oulu for over four years, whereas five of the respondents have been living in Oulu for either 1–2 years or 3–4 years. The remaining two respondents have been living in Oulu from only six months to one year. As a result, the majority of the respondents are familiar with living in Finland and in Oulu. The respondents were also asked to describe their educational background and profession, and nine out of ten write that they have a university degree of some level. Hence, most of the respondents are work-related
immigrants since five out of ten have come to Finland and to Oulu to study or work. However, information of their education or profession is not presented in the table since it could give allusions to their identity and because the detailed information of their education does not have major relevance to the purpose of this study.

In addition to the respondents’ background information, they were also asked to evaluate their spoken English skills. Language competence is an important factor when considering the attitudes immigrants have towards customer service in English. Immigrants who have low proficiency in English are most likely to resort to Finnish. By comparison, immigrants who have high proficiency in English are likely to use it in customer service situations before they learn Finnish or feel confident enough using it. As can be seen from Table 1 above, most respondents evaluate their spoken English skills to be at the advanced level. Furthermore, three out of ten report that they are at the level of very advanced or mother tongue. Since almost all the respondents have a high level of education, it could be concluded that they have high proficiency in English, and they feel confident speaking it. Still, it is noteworthy to mention that based on the written questionnaire responses in English, the respondents’ self-evaluation of their own spoken English skills does not always coincide with their written English skills. Therefore, respondents who evaluate their spoken English to be at the level of very advanced show signs of lower level English in their written responses. This could have affected, for instance, the way these respondents evaluate Finns’ competence in English in customer service situations.

English is an important part of the daily lives of the majority of the respondents. Six out of ten write that they use English in almost all situations on a daily basis. For example, one of the respondents says that she uses English everywhere and in every communicative situation because it is easy, and she is not able to talk in Finnish. Another respondent writes that he uses English at work and everywhere in day-to-day life because he is not confident enough with his Finnish skills and cannot express himself fully in Finnish. Moreover, two out of ten answer that they try to use Finnish because they want to practice their Finnish skills but in order to avoid misunderstandings with different officials they use English. By comparison, the remaining two write that they use English in personal communication, for example, with friends or family because the conversation goes more in depth, and they can express themselves more easily in English. However, when using different services in Oulu, they use Finnish because they want to practice their Finnish skills. Hence, for over half of the respondents English is present in all kind of day-to-day communication, including customer service situations, while to others, Finnish has a different significance. It can be concluded that in order to get good customer service the respondents use mainly English. Those respondents who use Finnish
in customer service situations still resort to English when feeling insecure or having a chance of misunderstanding. Furthermore, the respondents feel more confident when using English and feel that by using English they get exactly the service they need. Nonetheless, they see that using English is not beneficial for their Finnish skills. Overall, this supports the idea of Leppänen et al. (2011), as well as Taavitsainen and Pahta (2003, 2008) who argue that English is strongly present in Finland and that it has almost reached the position of a second language, having become more visible due to immigration and multiculturalism.

5.1.2 Attitudes: main findings of the questionnaire study

This section seeks to present the main findings of the questionnaire study. The starting point of this section is to present the respondents’ overall attitudes towards customer service in English and to describe the quality of customer service, and the several factors that affect it from the respondents’ point of view. The questionnaire responses are presented in four different categories, according to their thematic content. These are the main themes that were brought up in the questionnaire responses. The categories are as following: “Official agencies and service providers in Oulu,” “Finns providing customer service in English,” “Racism in customer service,” and “Customer’s language choice and language competence.” The questionnaire can be found first on the list of appendices.

The responses in the first category focus on the customer service in English in different official agencies, as well as on the customer service provided by different service providers in Oulu. In terms of official agencies, such as Kela, the tax office and the Police, the majority of the respondents write that they have not encountered problems and that the customer service is sufficient in official agencies. For example, respondent C concisely states that she always gets what she needs. Respondent E writes that nowadays Kela offers customer service in English. Her answer indicates that things have improved in Oulu over the years. However, three respondents consider that Kela does not provide customer service in English and that the personnel there either does not speak English at all or speaks very little of it. For example, respondent H describes that the customer service at Kela is friendly, but the employees are not good at English. Respondents F and D write that the employees do not speak English at the Kela office or at the tax office, but that the customer service in English is sufficient at the police station.
In terms of other service providers in Oulu, the majority of the respondents express positive attitudes. They view that different service providers in Oulu, such as the hospital, hairdressers and grocery stores, provide sufficient customer service in English. However, some respondents view that there are differences in the availability and the quality of the customer service in English, depending on the service provider. For example, respondent G names that he can get his car fixed only in Finnish. Respondents H, K and B mention that bus drivers have inadequate English skills, and as customers they have to resort to Finnish. Respondent H adds that bus drivers are not willing to help even in Finnish. Respondent H also states that there are differences in English customer service between different shops in Oulu:

Example 1

“- -but at big shops eg. Stockmann is easier than Prisma or smaller shops.” (Respondent H)

Example 2

“I was able to find someone to help in English, however not always sometimes, I had to wait a lot or forget my question.” (Respondent H)

As demonstrated above, she views the customer service in different shops in the centre of Oulu to be better than in smaller shops. Furthermore, in the second example, she adds that she is not always able to find a person who speaks English, and thus, she has to ‘forget’ her question. In her other responses, she mentions that not all the employees speak English at the bank that she is a customer of. It can be observed from her responses that the customer service in English and Finns’ English competence are dependent on the service provider.

The responses in the second category, “Finns providing customer service in English,” focus on Finns’ English skills and Finns’ performance in customer service in English. Three aspects were connected to Finns’ English skills: different social factors, delivery of customer service, and shyness as a Finnish mentality. To begin with, the majority of the respondents express an overall positive attitude towards Finns’ English skills, as seven out of ten write that Finns have very good skills in English. However, some aspects were perceived to be of prominence when assessing Finns’ English skills, and the respondents connected different social factors to Finns’ English competence. These social factors can be divided into three groups: age, gender, profession and education. First, the connection between age and English skills was seen evident. The majority of the respondents stated that young people have very good English skills and speak the best English in Oulu and in Finland in general. For example, respondents F and I write the following:
Example 3
“There are different experiences based on where I go. Generally youngsters speak better English than the older generation.”
(Respondent F)

Example 4
“Ihmiset ovat yli 40 vuotias, joka eivät puhu hyvin englantia.”
(Respondent I)

Both respondents see a connection between the age of the person providing the customer service and their English skills, as they both suggest that young people are generally good at English. Respondent I specifies that people under 40 speak the best English in Oulu. Still, exceptions are acknowledged, as can be observed from the response of respondent B:

Example 5
“I work mostly with middle-aged people and their skills of English are the best so far. But definitely all younger people I talked to also speak very fluently with vast vocabulary.” (Respondent B)

In comparison to respondents F and I, respondent B considers that middle-aged people have the best English skills in Oulu. Later on, he states that he is surprised that also older people speak English quite well in Oulu and in Finland and better than in his home country, Poland.

The second social factor highlighted in the responses was gender. It was generally considered that women speak better English than men. For example, respondents G and D both write that women have high level of English. Respondent G further elaborates that, due to their language skills, women are remarkably more visible in official administrative roles than men are:

Example 6
“This is a very important question. Official administration in Finland has entirely been taken over by professional englishspeaking women. Reason: boys are dropping out of school.”
(Respondent G)

It can be concluded from his answer that women speak better English than men because they are more successful at school and educate themselves more, and consequently, are able to occupy administrative positions. The social factor of profession and education is also observable in his response, as he implies that people with higher level of education speak the best English in Oulu. This is also what respondent H emphasises in her response:
Example 7

“It’s different for example student at business or management are better in English, house wife and low educated are not good. - - (Respondent H)

As demonstrated above, respondent H states that a person’s English competence depends on the profession or education of the person. She writes that students are better at English than, for instance, housewives or those having a lower level of education.

The second aspect brought up in this category is the delivery of customer service. The respondents also connect this social factor to Finns’ English skills. To begin with, it is visible in the responses of all of the respondents that they have positive experiences of customer service in English in Oulu, and that they perceive that the customer service is mostly provided in a friendly and a polite manner. For example, respondent K writes that people in customer service are friendly, kind and understanding and want to help the customers to get what they need. Respondent E writes that although the customer service delivery is warm, it is not always very clear. Nonetheless, in her experience, the person will get someone else who speaks better English, and despite problems related to Finns’ English competence, the customer service is provided in a friendly manner. By comparison, other respondents suggest that Finns’ English skills can have an effect on the friendliness and politeness of the customer service. Respondent F writes that Finns speak good English and are responsive, rarely ceasing to respond or to ignore him by saying they do not speak English. Nonetheless, he names a situation where this happened, indicating that a lower proficiency in English may result in unfriendly service, where the customer is being ignored.

The third aspect highlighted in this category is shyness as a Finnish mentality, which was brought up by three respondents. Shyness was seen to be a Finnish personality trait connected to Finns’ English skills. Respondents D, F and H write that that Finns have good English skills, but they consider themselves weaker and are shy to speak English. Respondent D writes the following way:

Example 8

“They have very good skills of English language in my opinion. But since they normally don’t need to use/practice in everyday life, they are very shy to use it once they need to speak it.” (Respondent D)

Example 9

“It happened in the shop when I tried to describe the thing I need to buy. They are friendly, but you can feel little bit in tense/nervous maybe.” (Respondent D)
Respondent D sees that the reason why Finns are shy when using English is because they do not use English very much on a daily basis. In example 9, respondent D emphasises that the customer service is friendly but that she can sense nervousness. The respondents also view that shyness has different effects on customer service. For example, respondent D writes that in some cases, when she asks something in English, she is replied back in Finnish. She can also see that the person understands what she is asking, but they are shy to reply in English. From the viewpoint of the customer, this could be considered impolite since the person providing the customer service switches the language and speaks a language that the customer does not understand. However, it could also be perceived to be polite since the person providing the service is being responsive and trying to help.

The responses in the third category focus on the social factor of racism, and consequently, the category is “Racism in customer service.” Respondents B and C brought up the issue of racism. First, respondent C writes in the following way:

Example 10
“I have only positive experiments but I am europian, white female. Everybody are [handwriting cannot be read] and tolerant with me.”
(Respondent C)

It can be interpreted from her responses that she has good experiences from customer service in English in Oulu. Although she has received good customer service, she believes that it is connected to social factors, such as gender, skin colour and nationality. Second, respondent B writes the following:

Example 11
“Positive. I didn’t notice any “hostile” feelings. Basically everytime service was provided nicely.”
(Respondent B)

Similarly to respondent C, respondent B has positive experiences of customer service. However, his answer indicates that, although in his case the customer service has been provided “nicely,” there is a possibility of encountering “hostile feelings” in customer service. These responses of respondents B and C could be seen as allusions to racism and prejudice, which foreigners may encounter in customer service situations. Therefore, immigrants’ ethnicity or nationality may result in bad customer service and negative experiences, but the respondents of this questionnaire study have not experienced such. This can be because the respondents of this questionnaire study do not represent a wide range of different ethnicities.
The fourth category focuses on the customer service situation from a language point of view. The category “Customer’s language choice,” includes responses of the effect of the customer’s language choice on the customer service. The majority of the respondents write that the customer’s language choice between English and Finnish has no effect on the customer service. Still, some respondents, such as respondent H, are convinced that they would get better service in Finnish:

Example 12

"Of course, I’d get better & easier services with Finnish."
(Respondent H)

Respondents F and H write that they would naturally receive better service in Finnish, and as can be observed from the example above, respondent H believes that this is because the customer service would be better and easier, perhaps referring to information content in Finnish.

In conclusion, some of the aforementioned attitudes, which arose from the questionnaire responses, are equivalent to the results of the nationwide survey by Leppänen et al (2011). The survey indicated that languages are studied more by the young, women, city residents and by highly educated (Leppänen et al., 2011, pp. abstract, 62). Furthermore, the results demonstrated that Finns’ English proficiency is acknowledged generally high, and Finns assess their English skills to be relatively good, but that they also experience feelings of inadequacy when using English. The results also suggested that Finns rarely use English actively in their daily lives (Leppänen et al., 2011, p. 161). Thus, it is interesting to detect a link between the present research and the abovementioned nationwide survey, and to observe that immigrants have similar attitudes about Finns’ English language skills as Finns have about their own English language skills.

5.1.3 Summary: claims derived from the questionnaire

In this section, the eight claims derived from the questionnaire responses are presented. The claims were formulated based on the topics that arose in the questionnaire responses. As presented in the previous section, four different thematic categories are separated. Hence, each of the four categories includes two controversial claims focusing on the same thematic issue. Out of the two claims in each category, the other one was presented conversely to the group interview participants. This was an attempt to increase the controversial aspect of the claims and to evoke discussion, following the
methodological and theoretical framework developed by Vesala and Rantanen (2007). The categories and the claims are presented in the following paragraphs.

The first category “Official agencies and service providers in Oulu,” was formulated based on the respondents’ perceptions that the quality of customer service can be dependent on the official agency or the service provider. The claims in this category are the following:

a. Different official agencies, such as Kela, the Police and the immigrant services of City of Oulu provide good customer service in English in Oulu.

b. There are substantial differences in customer service in Oulu depending on the service provider.

The first claim is based on the respondents’ opposite views regarding customer service provided by different official agencies, such as Kela. As some of the respondents write that they have not had trouble with customer service in English at Kela, others write that Kela provides very little or hardly any English customer service. The claim was formulated from the latter viewpoint. Furthermore, as the respondents express that there are differences in customer service depending on the service provider, the second claim was formulated based on these responses and was kept in its original form.

As different views were also presented on Finns’ English skills, the second category, “Finns providing customer service in English,” centres on this aspect. The claims in this category are the following:

c. Finns are shy when using English. Because of this, customer service can be impolite and unresponsive.

d. Older people speak the best English in Oulu. You also get the best customer service from them.

As some of the respondents write that although Finns have good skills in English, they are shy to speak English. In addition, as some of the respondents view that shyness affects customer service, the first claim was formulated based on these responses but with the oversimplified idea that shyness can result in impolite customer service. Hence, the claim seeks to find out whether the group interview participants deem shyness to have a negative impact on customer service. Moreover, as the majority of the respondents write that young people and women speak the best English, the second claim is based on these responses and was formulated reversely.

The third category “Racism in customer service” centres on the aspect of customer’s ethnicity or nationality affecting the customer service. Consequently, the following claims were formulated:
e. The customer’s ethnicity or nationality does not affect the customer service at any point:

i. Not when the customer enters, for example, a shop and is clearly of different ethnicity.

ii. Not when the customer’s ethnicity or nationality comes up during the customer service.

f. Refugees and asylum-seekers have completely different experiences of customer service than, for example, work-related immigrants.

As the majority of the respondents do not highlight racism in their answers, it was still an aspect that is highlighted by two respondents. They write that they do not have any experience of negative customer service, but this might be connected to skin colour, gender or nationality. Consequently, the first claim was decided to formulate in the way that it negates the effect of ethnicity or nationality on the customer service situation at any point. Thus, in order to take into consideration the customer service situation as a whole, the claim was divided into two parts: the first part focuses on the appearance of the customer, and the second part centres on information, such as nationality, which might not be deduced solely from one’s appearance. Finally, the second claim was derived from the overall idea that work-related immigrants might have different experiences of customer service in English than refugees and asylum-seekers, who represent different ethnic backgrounds.

Finally, the last category continues to focus on the customers’ side, as it centres on the customer’s language choice and its effect on the customer service. The following claims were formulated:

g. You get equally good customer service in English and in Finnish. The language choice does not affect the quality of the customer service.

h. A native and a fluent speaker of English receives different service than someone who does not speak English very well.

As the majority of the respondents write that the customer’s language choice has no effect on the quality of the customer service, some participants state that they would get better and easier service in Finnish. The first claim presents this observation in a reverse manner. The second claim is not highlighted in the questionnaire responses but was seen as an important factor to include, and hence, it focuses on the customer’s language competence and its effect on the customer service.
Overall, the formulation of the claims is largely based on the expression and the format of the questionnaire responses. For example, as the questionnaire responses highlighted young people’s English skills, formulating the claim to state that older people speak the best English in Oulu made the claim more controversial. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) discuss, different criteria can be applied to the formulation of the claims, but they should be understandable from the interviewees’ perspective, and they should be related to the research questions of the study. The claims can be either evaluative or descriptive since, when the participants are asked whether they agree with the claim or not, the claim becomes an object of making a value judgement (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 33–34). The questionnaire study serves as a foundation for the group interview and presents an opportunity to further discuss some of the topics emerged in the questionnaire responses. The group interview includes new informants and provides new data, which are presented and analysed in the following section.

5.2 Analysis of the group interview

In this section, the findings of the group interview are presented. First, section 5.2.1 illustrates the group interview participants’ background information. The following sub-sections present the analysis of the group interview. The analysis is structured according to the four categories, and each sub-section focuses on one category and on the comments on the two claims belonging to that category. However, in this section, the order of the categories follows the order of their presentation in the group interview. As the category “Racism in customer service” was the most sensitive category, it was discussed last, and hence, it is presented as the final category here. The comments were approached by first categorising them according to their value judgement (positive–negative, direct–indirect). In other words, whether the participants agreed or disagreed with the controversial claim, or how directly they expressed their stance. Subsequently, it was observed how the participants justified their stances. When observing the justifications, the following aspects were taken into consideration: the type of justification, the manner of justification (argumentation), the subject position and the context in general.
5.2.1 Participants’ background information

The participants of the group interview were immigrants studying at an adult education centre in Oulu. The table below demonstrates the background information of the participants. The background information was collected before the group interview with a background information form, which can be found second on the list of appendices. In the analysis, the participants are referred to with the help of numbering, following the information presented in the table. The numbering follows the order in which the participants appeared on the audio recording. In the examples presented later in this section, the participants are referred to as, for instance, “P1,” and the interviewer as “I.”

Table 2. Background information of the group interview participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>HOME COUNTRY</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>REASON FOR COMING TO FINLAND</th>
<th>TIME SPENT LIVING IN OULU</th>
<th>SPOKEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS (SELF-EVALUATION)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1–2 years</td>
<td>Mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Work, studies, family</td>
<td>1–2 years</td>
<td>Mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Other, not specified</td>
<td>0,5–1 years</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>2–3 years</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Studies, Family</td>
<td>0,5–1 years</td>
<td>Beginner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated in the table above, out of the five participants, three are male and two are female. The youngest participant is in his 20s, while the rest are in their 30s. The participants represent five different nationalities: two come from Europe (the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), two come from the Middle East (Syria and Iran) and one comes from Africa (Congo). Four participants have come to Finland because of family reasons, work or studies, whereas one of the participants has chosen the option “other” in the background information form and has not specified his reason for coming to Oulu and to Finland. This could be because he considers the reason too personal or sensitive to be specified, and it could be that not all immigrants want to specify their immigration status. Moreover, participants 1 and 2 have been living in Oulu for 1–2 years and participants 3 and 5 for
0,5–1 years. However, it came up during the interview that participant 3 has been living in Oulu only for three months. In retrospect, as the background information form only offered options from six months to over four years, it could have been useful to provide more options for the participants to choose from. The remaining participant, participant 4, has been living in Oulu for the longest time, for 2–3 years. As a result, the participants could be considered to have experience of different services in Oulu. The participants were also asked about their profession and education, but this information is not presented in the table due to its possible allusions to identity.

In addition to the participants’ background information, the participants were also asked to evaluate their spoken English skills. Two participants, 3 and 4, evaluate their spoken English skills to be at the advanced level, and this was more or less accurate during the group interview. Participants 1 and 2 further evaluate their English skills to be at the level of mother tongue. With participant 2 this was accurate since he was originally from the United Kingdom. As participant 1 also spoke extremely fluent English, it was difficult to evaluate the exact level of her English. Participant 5 evaluates his spoken English skills to be at the beginner’s level. The respondent in question did not present many comments during the group interview, and the reason could be that he felt insecure about his English skills. He was also the youngest participant and had not been living in Oulu or studying Finnish for very long time, which could have contributed to his participation rate. He was also the participant that was taken from another group in order to replace the person who had originally agreed to take part in the study.

The participants were also asked whether they use Finnish or English when using different services in Oulu and why they choose to use that specific language. Participants 3, 4 and 5 write that they use mostly English because they have a good proficiency in English, and they cannot speak Finnish very well yet. Participant 3 has studied Finnish only for 1–3 months, while participant 5 for 3–6 months, which makes their choice of language evident. Subsequently, participant 4 has studied Finnish for more than 2 years but considers her Finnish skills to be insufficient, when using different services in Oulu. Moreover, participant 1, who has studied Finnish for 3–6 months, writes that she uses both languages but mostly Finnish. Nevertheless, she resorts to English when there is a possibility of confusion or misunderstanding. Finally, participant 2, who has studied Finnish for 0,5–1 years, writes that he uses Finnish because he is trying to learn the language and his language skills are also sufficient enough to perform basic, day-to-day, tasks.
5.2.2 Category 1: Official agencies and service providers in Oulu

The two claims in this category are “Different official agencies, such as Kela, the Police and the immigrant service of Oulu provide good customer service in English” and “There are substantial differences in customer service in Oulu depending on the service provider.”

The first claim was approached both from the perspective of the personnel’s English skills in different official agencies and from the perspective of customer service delivery. This is because the claim enables both approaches to be taken. The participants expressed multiple different attitudes depending on the official agency and the aspect under discussion. Positive stances were justified with customer service delivery, while negative stances were justified in three ways: personnel’s overall inadequate English skills, incorrect information content in English, and documentation in Finnish.

First, comments including positives stances are presented below:

Example 13
P1: Yeah. The Maistraatti, I’ve been there and there they speak perfectly fine English.

Example 14
P4: Esimerkiksi… Oulu 10. Yeah, it’s really helpful.

Example 15
P5: Yeah. They speak good English there [Villa Victor].

Example 16
P4: Yeah. I should go to renew my… like card every year. I don’t have any problem there [The Police].

Example 17
P2: They have good English [The Police].

When talking about the customer service provided by the city of Oulu, participants 1, 4 and 5 state that the personnel at Maistraatti, Oulu 10 and Villa Victor speaks good English. Similarly, participants 2 and 4 take a positive stance towards the employees’ English skills at the police station and state that they do not face any problems there. Consequently, the unambiguously expressed positive stances focus on the employees’ English skills and value the customer service to be good in certain official
agencies when the customer does not encounter any problems, which could be interpreted to mean
that the customer gets the services she or he needs. Subsequently, no further justifications were used.

Positive stances were also expressed towards the customer service provided by Kela. Participants, 1,
2, 3 and 4 expressed these positive stances and connected them to the customer service delivery,
rather than to the employees’ English skills. This is demonstrated in the examples below:

Example 18
P1: And for the other customer service, like Kela and the Police, I
think they are all very friendly and helpful.
P3: Yeah.

Example 19
P2: My girlfriend is Finnish, hates Kela and I like them.
[Everybody laughs]
P4: Interesting.
P3: Well, I like them as well because they are smiling...
P4: They are so nice, yeah.
P3: ... all the time, speaking in English.

In examples 18 and 19, participants 1, 3 and 4 comment that Kela and the Police provide customer
service in English in a friendly and a helpful manner. Therefore, they refer to factors such as empathy
and responsiveness. In example 19, participant 2 states that he likes Kela, whereas his Finnish
girlfriend does not. He made his comment while discussing the eighth claim and the cultural
differences that immigrants may encounter in Finland. Another participant suggested that certain
stereotypical Finnish characteristics may come up in day-to-day life, and it was at this point that
participant 2 made his humoristic notion about Kela. His comment implies that Finns may have a
preconceived idea about Kela, which affects their attitude towards the customer service provided by
Kela. Hence, the object of the participants’ value judgement is the customer service provided by Kela,
and the participants justify their stances with reference to customer service delivery, which they
perceive to be friendly and helpful.

However, negative stances were also expressed towards the customer service provided by Kela and
the Police. These stances focused on language-related issues and were mainly expressed by
participants 1 and 4 but received support from participants 2 and 3. First, the negative stances
expressed by participant 1 are demonstrated below:
In example 20, participant 1 states that not all employees can speak English at the Kela office. As she does not further elaborate how this affects the customer service, it is interpreted here that insufficient English skills have a negative effect on customer service and suggest a negative stance. She also brings up another language-related aspect, stating that some official agencies, for example the Police, sometimes provide incorrect information in English. Thus, she uses two types of justifications: personnel’s overall inadequate English skills and incorrect information content in English. First justification builds upon the notion that not all employees speak English at Kela, while the second justification builds upon the notion that the Police provides inaccurate information in English. Consequently, she expresses two attitudes, depending on the object of her value judgement. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) state, even in commenting on one controversial claim, it is possible to recognise multiple different objects for taking stances and to use different ways of making value judgements (p. 39). Consequently, with Kela and the Police she expresses a positive attitude towards the customer service delivery, but expresses a negative attitude towards the employees’ English skills or the information provided in English. Hence, she has two different objects and two different stances with different justifications.

Also participant 4 emphasises the information aspect in customer service in English:

Example 22

P4: - - Mutta, umm... in Kela, or for example, TE-office, when I go to ask something, they speak, umm... English. But for example the papers and everything that comes to our home, it’s not in English, it’s Finnish and it’s really hard to translate.
In comparison to participant 1, participant 4 views that the personnel at Kela can speak English, but the customers are not taken into consideration in a concrete way since all the documents are in Finnish. Consequently, she uses the third justification type of documents being in Finnish in official agencies. She shifts the focus from face-to-face communication to documents and suggests that good customer service encompasses also other forms of communication than face-to-face communication. The second claim is “There are substantial differences in customer service in Oulu depending on the service provider.” Only positive stances were expressed and, due to the nature of the claim, differences in customer service were justified with personal experiences. Within personal experiences, two types of justifications can be separated: customer service delivery and the personnel’s inadequate English skills. First, the comments made by participant 1 are presented below:

Example 23

P1: Yes. For example, I went to the bank, and they were really rude to me when I tried to open a bank account, so haven’t say there is differences in customer service. And then... yeah, it was quite unpleasant and I thought ‘Wow.’
I: Was it... their rudeness... was it, umm, do you felt it was language-related? That they didn’t speak good English or?
P1: No, I think I was because they thought I was not going to make the bank really rich or something. [Laughs] No, they were very disconsending and... so I thought... I was really surprised.

Participant 1 shares her negative experience at the bank, where she experienced the customer service to be impolite. She views that the impoliteness was connected to the behaviour of the person providing the customer service, rather than to the person’s language skills. In her previous comments, as can be observed in examples 20 and 21, she focused both on the language perspective and on customer service delivery, as she stated that although not all the employees speak English at Kela, they are friendly and helpful. Consequently, she emphasised factors such as assurance and empathy, as she also does when commenting on this claim. Thus, she uses the first justification type of customer service delivery, and her justification bases on her personal experience of how she was treated as a customer. It could be stated that she approaches the claim from the subject position of an immigrant or as a representative of her profession, as she feels that that the customer service was impolite because of the behaviour of the person providing the customer service. She feels that the customer service was impolite because “they thought I was not going to make the bank really rich or something,” which could be interpreted to allude to her profession, for instance.
Participant 4 also takes a positive stance to the claim but approaches it from a language point of view:

**Example 24**

P4: I think in Stockmann and Valkea, for example, in my experience they can speak, umm, English, but for example [name of a Finnish bakery], or for example, what is -- the place -- umm the grocery store --

P?: [unclear]
P4: No. Another one, the big... I: Prisma?
P4: No, no.
P5: Gigantti?
P3: Sale? Tokmanni?
P4: Tokmanni! [Laughs]

**Example 25**

P4: It’s like vähän. Sometimes they can [at Tokmanni], sometimes...

In example 24, participant 4 names two big department stores in Oulu and views that the employees can speak English there. However, in the subsequent example she parallels the two big stores with a smaller bakery and a grocery store, stating that the employees there do not always speak English. As she does not elaborate on the matter, it could be interpreted that she views that in the big department stores located in the centre of Oulu, the probability to get customer service in English is higher than in smaller shops, like bakeries or grocery stores, which may not have as many people in customer service. Furthermore, participant 4 discusses the customer service in English at the hospital:

**Example 26**

P4: Good point. Hospital. [Laughs]
P3: They speak very well English those people.
P5: Uhum.
P4: Yeah, but my experience was like- - the nurse she can’t... she couldn’t speak. -- But you know in, in the hospital two times I have experienced that it wasn’t as good as, for example, office, uhm, police office or Kela.

**Example 27**

P3: -- but they speaking very well in the hospital, more than Kela or Police or...
P4: Yeah. My experience is different.
Participant 4 tells that she has experienced two occasions at the hospital, where the nurses could not speak English. Moreover, she sees that the personnel at the police office and at the Kela office speaks better English, making parallels with the different service providers and this way indirectly expressing a positive stance to the claim. This is also what participant 3 does, and consequently, it is interesting to observe that both participants compare the personnel’s English skills at the hospital to the personnel’s English skills at Kela and at the police station, as they seem to be the two most important points of reference, when comparing English customer service in Oulu. As in the opinion of participant 4, nurses do not speak good English at the hospital, she agrees with participant 3 that doctors speak good English there. This could be connected to the social factor of education, discussed more in in section 5.2.3, where the focus is on Finns’ English skills.

Finally, participant 3 gives another reason for the differences in customer service between different service providers:

Example 28

P3: I think, as I’ve told you, it depends on the age of the person.

He steers the topic from the differences between different service providers in Oulu to the age of the person providing the customer service. This is discussed in the second category, in section 5.2.3.

Participants 3 and 4 rest their justifications on the personnel’s inadequate English skills. This justification type can be further sub-divided into two groups: differences within and between service providers and the age of the person providing customer service. First, both participants suggest that customer service in English, and employees’ English skills, may differ not only within one service provider, as at the hospital between nurses and doctors, but also between different public and private institutions in Oulu. Moreover, participant 3 sees that there are differences between service providers depending on the age of the person providing the customer service.
5.2.3 Category 2: Finns providing customer service in English

The two claims in this category are “Finns are shy when using English. Because of this, customer service can be impolite and unresponsive” and “Older people speak the best English in Oulu. You also get the best customer service from them.”

The stances to the first claim were dependable on which part of the claim the participants commented on. The first part of the claim “Finns are shy when using English,” received positive stances from all the participants commenting on the claim, but the latter part (“Because of this customer service can be impolite and unresponsive”) divided the participants. To begin with, almost all the participants expressed the attitude that Finns are shy when speaking English, as can be seen from the examples below:

Example 29

P1: Some people are very shy...
P3: ...hard to speak in English.
P1: Shyness.
P3: Yeah, shy to speak or afraid, both.

Example 30

P3: If you go to Turku, they don’t speak English, they are very shy or...
P1: Yeah, my mother lives there.
P3: ...afraid and they don’t speak. Maybe 20 or 30 percent people there can speak in English but let’s talk about Oulu now.
P1: No, but they can but maybe they won’t.
P3: Yeah.
P1: Their lack of confidence.

Participants 1 and 3 seem to acknowledge that Finns are shy when speaking English. As example 30 demonstrates, shyness is seen as a general characteristic amongst Finns. Participants 1, 3 and 5 expressed an immediate positive stance to the claim, unambiguously stating that the claim is true. However, participant 1 hesitated a little when expressing her positive stance, and consequently, changed her view onto only partly supporting the claim:
Participant 1 further elaborates that she only agrees with the first part of the claim since she does not view that shyness results in impoliteness and draws a clear distinction between the two phenomena. Similarly, participant 4 does not see shyness resulting in impolite or unresponsive customer service. She states that she has not experienced impolite customer service, but the issues in customer service have mostly been related to shyness or lack of knowledge. Consequently, participant 3 seems to moderate his unambiguous positive stance onto only partly agreeing since he states that shyness is normal in customer service but it does not result in impolite service delivery. Hence, the argumentation of participant 1 seems to change the stance of participant 3, which could be seen as an example of a situation, where attitudes are constructed in the communicative situation and can even be formulated in the course of the argumentation (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 48). As Billig (1991) elaborates, the meaning of an individual stance changes due to alterations in the argumentative context (p. 143). In other words, the comments made by participant 1 could be considered such alterations in the communicative situation of the group interview, and these affected the stance taken by participant 3.

The participants were further asked whether shyness affects the quality of the customer service or the customer’s emotions in the situation, for example, makes the customer irritated or frustrated. These additional questions were asked in order to discover the participants’ attitudes towards the second part of the claim, the impact of shyness on customer service. Participants 1, 3 and 2 did not view shyness to have a negative impact on customer service:

Example 32
P1: But maybe you are also shy when you speak Finnish, I can relate to that...
P3: Yeah, it’s the same situation.
P1: Yeah, I think I feel also awkward so I’m... I try to make them feel comfortable [simultaneous speech] you should do with my Finnish.
P3: I’m satisfied actually. Yeah, I am very, very satisfied. Sometimes they need time to remember the words maybe, you know, and it happens to me. Sometimes I want to remember that word in English, it’s not my mother language. ‘So, what was it?’ Yeah.

In example 32, participant 1 states that she understands if Finns feel uncomfortable or shy when speaking English, and hence, she tries to make them feel more at ease. Similarly, participant 3 understands if Finns encounter difficulties while serving customers in English since it is a foreign language for them. He does not view shyness and its presence in customer service negatively, as he emphasises in example 33, he is very satisfied with the customer service.

Thus, participants 1, 3 and 4 and support the first part of the claim (“Finns are shy when using English”) but do not support the other half of the claim (“Because of this, customer service can be impolite and unresponsive”). Therefore, the participants express a positive stance to the first part of the claim and a negative stance to the second part of the claim. Three types of justifications are used with the negative stances: shyness not resulting in impoliteness, shyness being a norm in customer service, and understanding shyness. First, participants 1 and 4 give the justification that Finns are shy, but shyness is not the same as impoliteness or result in that. Second, participant 3 uses the second justification type, as he comments that the customer service is not impolite but “normal.” Thus, it could be interpreted that he considers shyness to be a norm in customer service and a somewhat permanent characteristic of Finnish culture and mindset. Finally, participants 1 and 3 justify their stances with understanding how Finns might feel when providing customer service in a foreign language since they also feel insecure when speaking Finnish. Thus, they clearly approach the issue from the subject roles of Finnish language students.

As participants 4 and 5 expressed a positive stance towards the first part of the claim and acknowledged that Finns are shy, they also viewed that shyness does have a negative impact on the customer service:

Example 34
P5: Yeah, because if you are shy then you found out that you know the language, but you are shy. It mean that you are not a good customer... good service. Yeah.
Example 35

P5: -- but it’s not good if you are shy for speaking.

Example 36

P4: Yeah, yeah, sometimes I feel, okay, I think, umm, maybe I’m bothering them because they cannot... they are shy and it’s hard to speak.

As demonstrated in examples 34 and 35, participant 5 views that if the person providing the customer service is shy, he cannot be described to be providing good customer service. Similarly, participant 4 comments that Finns’ shyness makes her feel that she is a disturbance as a customer. Hence, two types of justifications can be separated: shyness not being a good characteristic in customer service and shyness resulting in the feeling of disturbance. Participant 5 uses the first type of justification. The object of his negative value judgement is shyness, and he justifies it with suggesting that he does not understand that if the person knows the language, that he or she will not use it. As he comes from Congo, Africa, where the culture could be considered more open, it could be interpreted that the participant expresses an attitude that stems from his own cultural background. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) state, expressing attitudes can strengthen one’s own social identity (p. 50). In this case, it could be interpreted that the comment made by participant 5 reinforces his identity as someone who values openness in customer service delivery. Although participant 4 earlier commented that shyness is not impoliteness, her later comment implies that shyness does have a negative effect on customer service. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) elucidate, participants commenting on controversial claims can separate different objects within the same claim and express multiple attitudes (p. 39). Hence, it could be interpreted that as she expresses a negative stance to the claim (shyness results in impoliteness), she expresses a positive stance to the negative effects that shyness has. In other words, although she views that shyness does not result in impoliteness, she perceives that it has other negative effects.

The second claim “Older people speak the best English in Oulu. You also get the best customer service from them” received both negative stances and stances that highlighted exceptions and which could not be separated as either positive or negative. Negative stances used two types of justifications: young people use English more than old people and old people are shyer to use English. In comparison, the stances that focused on exceptions used two types of justifications: exceptions confirmed by personal experiences and individual exposure to English.
Participants 1, 3 and 5 immediately disagreed with the claim and added that young people speak the best English in Oulu. Participant 3 also elaborated why young people speak the best English:

Example 37
P3: Yeah, there are more than one told me that they want or they like the young people, they like to speak in English because they need to practice, umm, language --

Example 38
P3: Very old persons here I think they don’t speak in English at... at all. They don’t know because they don’t use it.

Example 39
P3: -- old people sometimes are afraid or shy to speak in English. Yeah, but they try to speak it and I understand totally.

In example 37, participant 3 elaborates that young people speak the best English and are also eager to practice it and would be the most willing to communicate in English. In the subsequent examples, he explains that very old people do not speak English at all because they do not use it or are shy to use it. Furthermore, he constantly highlights the connection between Finns’ English skills and age, as in example 28, when discussing the differences between service providers. He approaches the issue from the perspective of who uses English the most, and uses two types of justifications: young people use English more than old people, and old people are shyer to use English. Hence, the object of his value judgement is older men’s English skills, as he clearly expresses the attitude that older people do not speak English very well, and consequently, do not provide the best customer service.

Some participants do not see the issue as straightforward and emphasise the possibility of exceptions. Participant 1 and 3 change their view to this direction in the course of the discussion. This happens after participant 4 tells about her personal experience:

Example 40
P4: No, it depends. For example, there’s a café in Hai, Hai... [Searches the word] Hailuoto Island and it was really far from the city and it was really... no? And it... there was an old man, he could speak English very well.
P3: Yeah, there is some old people speak very well in English...
P4: Yeah, but most... mostly.
P3: ... but it depends... I don’t know why.
Participant 4 tells that even in a more faraway place, in an island, there was an old man who could speak English very well. Therefore, participant 4 seems to emphasise the exceptionality of the case. Also Vesala and Rantanen (2007) see that validating a stance with a personal experience is very persuasive, especially when there is a detailed description or an empirical experience (p. 53). Participant 3 is affected by the emergence of this new information in the discussion. As he previously justified his stance with young people’s good English skills, he also joins in to acknowledge exceptions. Interestingly, participant 4 then seems to start agreeing with participant 3, while participant 3 moves back to support the view of participant 4. Consequently, they moderate their stances in the course of the discussion, which Vesala and Rantanen (2007) see to validate the social nature of attitudes. Attitudes are constructed in social interaction together with other people, and hence, a person can express multiple attitudes if they contemplate on the issue from another perspective (pp. 39, 43). In addition, the intersubjective nature of stance taking is present here. As Du Bois (2007) writes, people align with other people, and thus, the stances that people express are affected by other stances, for example the previously uttered stances. This shapes intersubjectivity (pp. 170, 172). It is interesting to note that participant 3 did this also earlier, in example 31, where his attitude changed because of the argumentation of other participants. Also participant 1 changes her stance and expresses a new attitude:

Example 41

P1: Of course there are exceptions.

Example 42

P1: In the past it was also not mandatory to learn English, so it probably has changed -- I think makes a huge difference how much you are exposed to the English.

In example 41, she changes her previous unambiguous stance into recognising exceptions. In the following example, she elaborates that Finns’ English skills are linked to individual exposure to English. She states that as English was not a mandatory subject at school before, older people may not speak English very well, but there might be individuals who speak English more fluently because of their exposure to English. Consequently, the stances emphasising exceptions can be divided into two groups: exceptions confirmed by personal experiences and individual exposure to English. Participant 4 justifies her stance with her story of Hailuoto, whereas participant 1 uses the justification of individual exposure, highlighting that some older people might be more in contact with English, and due to this, one cannot draw straightforward conclusions about the connection between age and English skills.
When the participants were further asked whether they think about the person’s ability to provide customer service in English if they see, for example, an old man providing the customer service, participants 3 and 4 commented the following:

Example 43
P4: No.
P3: Yeah, I try to speak in Finnish if I see old men. But you know… but what you want from that man behind the cash, just want to pay, so you don’t need to speak to him all the time. - -

This question was asked to discover the participants’ attitudes towards older men’s English skills more in detail. This is because participant 3 had changed his attitude in the course of the discussion. As can be observed from the example above, participant 4 states that she does not think about the person’s English skills, and this is in accordance with her previous attitude. Although participant 3 started to moderate his stance in example 40, here he expresses again his initial attitude towards older men’s English skills since he states that he adjusts his language choice and communication style when the customer service is provided by an older man. As Vesala & Rantanen (2007) write, expressing attitudes can have a directive aspect, which also tells other people how the person will behave in the future in certain situations (p. 50). In this case, it could be interpreted that after the comments made by participant 3, the other participants expect him to behave in a certain way in a situation, where an older man is providing customer service.

In addition to age, participant 4 brought up the social factor of education:

Example 44
P4: What about educated?
P5: Not all.

Example 45
P4: - - the nurse she can’t… she couldn’t speak. It was really, umm, interesting because for example, here I talk to fishermen and he could [Laughs] speak very well.

In the first example, participant 4 asks the others if they think educated speak good English. In the following example, she tells about her negative experiences at the hospital, where the nurses did not speak English, as presented earlier in example 26. She was surprised of this since in her experience, even people with lower education, such as fishermen, can speak English very well. However, when participant 3 tells that doctors speak better English than nurses because they are well-educated,
participant 4 supports this, although she just stated that even less-educated can speak good English. Again, the thoughts of Du Bois (2007) could be applied here, according to whom stances are built in collaboration with other people and are intersubjective (p. 171). Furthermore, participant 4 approaches Finns’ English skills from the perspective of education. This could be because she is a student and has come to Finland in order to study. Therefore, she approaches the topic from the subject role of a student. Her comments imply that she has the attitude that well-educated are expected to have good English skills, as she expected nurses to have good English skills. Yet, she does not see that the link between education and English skills is always evident, again emphasising exceptions.

Although the participants expressed different attitudes to the connection between social factors and Finns’ English skills, they expressed an overall positive attitude to Finns’ English skills and to the customer service in English. They also viewed English very helpful in Oulu, as the following examples elucidate:

Example 46

P4: You know, don’t forget that Finnish... umm, Finland is not a English language country.
P5: Yeah.
P4: For example, I was in Spain and you cannot communicate with people like with one word -- I really appreciate here, Finland because of this behaviour.
P3: Yeah.
P4: Almost everybody can speak English.
P3: At least here in Oulu, I am very very satisfied and I’m very happy because of that.
P5: Yeah.

Participant 4 wants to emphasise that English is not an official language in Finland. It seems that she wants to indicate that one cannot expect a high, unified level of English in customer service. She also compares Finns’ English skills to the ones of Spanish and sees that Finns’ English skills are at a much higher level. Also participant 3 expresses a strongly positive attitude and satisfaction towards Finns’ English skills. What is more, participant 4 does not only emphasise Finns’ English skills compared to other countries but also compares Finns’ English skills in Oulu to the ones in Jyväskylä:

Example 47

P4: I lived one year, one year in Jyväskylä and you know, they can’t... you know, then when I compare Jyväskylä with Oulu, in Oulu...
Participant 4 sees that people speak better English in Oulu than in Jyväskylä because Oulu is a seaside city, with international contacts to other countries. The object of the value judgement here is Finns’ English skills in Oulu, and three types of justifications are used: official languages in Finland, comparing Finland to other countries, and comparing Oulu to other cities. Participant 4 uses all of these justifications types to justify her positive stance towards Finns’ English skills. It can be interpreted that she is pleased with the customer service in English in Oulu in the light of her experiences living in other countries and in other cities, where people’s English skills were not as high.

5.2.3 Category 3: Customer’s language choice and language competence

The third category includes the following claims “You get equally good customer service in English and in Finnish. The language choice does not affect the quality of the customer service” and “A native and a fluent speaker of English receives different service than someone who does not speak English very well.”

While commenting on the first claim, negative stances were justified with the effect of language choice on information and with the customer’s evaluation of the service provider, while the positive stances were justified with overall adequate English skills, helpful customer service delivery, and connection with the person providing customer service. First, the negative stance by participant 4 is presented:

Example 49
P4: Hmm. Actually, it affects sometimes. For example, one night it was late. We went to -- coffee shop in the middle of the city. And, umm, were were... I was with my Finnish friend. I asked about it -- ‘Is there any place to go for cup of coffee, in for example 10 o’clock’ and she said ‘No, we don’t have, maybe here or there,’ but when my
Finnish [Laughs] umm, friend asked because it was their mother tongue, you know, umm, she, umm, respond very well. -- When you speak Finnish, you find more opportunity.
I: Uhmm. Yeah. So she gave your Finnish friend more an extensive answer...
P4: Yeah...
I: ... or like a deeper one?
P4: ... that’s because... you know, maybe the lack of English knowledge or something like that.

Participant 4 tells a personal experience of when she was at a café in the city centre with her Finnish friend and asked some information from the person working there. The person only stated that she does not know, giving vague information of other places. Nevertheless, when her Finnish friend asked in Finnish, she got a much more of an extensive answer. She justifies her negative stance with the limited information content in English, which is caused by a language barrier. Participant 4 clearly formulates an attitude that one receives more opportunities and better information in Finnish.

Moreover, participants 1 and 4 tell that they typically use English, especially when going to an official agency or dealing with something important:

Example 50
I: Yeah, so do you try to when you go to Kela, for example, do you try to, umm, use a little bit of Finnish or...
P4: Kela no because sometimes it’s really important to say what you mean.

Example 51
P1: Sometimes I just ask if it’s something important, you need to discuss or ask, then I’ll first ask... if I can ask it in English, if they understand it.

Participants 1 and 4 could be seen to express an attitude that it is safer to use English when going to an official agency, Kela for instance. This is accordance with the attitude of participant 1, according to whom the language choice may affect the information content, as demonstrated in example 21.

For participant 2, the language choice is of paramount significance in customer service situations:
Participant 2 tells that he usually speaks Finnish, and people are also starting to reply in Finnish but if they reply in English, it diminishes his desire to buy something from their shop. It can be interpreted that for him the language choice affects the customer service in a way that his experience of the situation and his decision to use the services are affected. As the other participants commented that the customer’s language choice may affect the information content, participant 2 justifies his stance with the change in the customer’s evaluation of the customer service or the service provider. He could be seen to comment from the subject position of a Finnish language student since he values communication in Finnish in customer service situations. Furthermore, it is interesting to compare this example to examples 29, 30, 31 and 32 in category 2, where Finns are acknowledged to be shy when speaking in English. Here it is indicated that Finns would still choose to use English, even when they could speak Finnish. This could be explained by various reasons. One of them could be that the person providing the customer service feels that, for example, an official matter is best explained in English to ensure that the customer understands.

By comparison, participant 3 expressed a positive stance to the claim, suggesting that the language choice does not affect the service. He expressed his stance when the participants were asked whether they get good customer service and sufficient information in English when buying a technological device. The question was formulated this way because, for example, buying a computer may require asking and receiving information about specific details, and the question clarifies if the participants see that they would get this kind of information better in Finnish. Participant 3 replied that he gets sufficient information in English and participant 5 suggests that Finns are helpful, also when the customer choose to use English:

Example 53

P3: [Clears throat]. They can explain to me what specifications in English. They can, yes. What TV and... everything. Yeah.
Example 54

P3: ...yeah, and they speak English... everyone, they were speaking English, in Anttila, umm... everywhere, actually. Sometimes good English, sometimes 50 percent English, sometimes... yeah.
P5: But they are also good because sometime you found you ask some service and found they don't speak English and say 'Oh, let me'...
P3: They [unclear] another one who speaks English. [Simultaneous speech with participant 5] to serve you.

In the comment of participant 3, it is observable that he views that he can get sufficient information in English when buying a technological device. However, it is interesting to observe that participant 3 states that people speak English everywhere, even though he implies that their English skills are at differing levels. He justifies his stance with the overall English skills in Oulu. He sees that people in customer service can speak English, if not very well, sufficiently enough to perform the customer service. In addition, participant 5 states that even when the person providing the customer service does not speak English, they are helpful and will get someone else to serve the customer. Hence, he justifies his stance with helpful customer service delivery.

Similarly to participant 3, participant 1 also expresses a positive stance and states that the language choice does not affect the customer service. Nonetheless, she sees that the language choice has a different kind of effect:

Example 55

P1: I think you make a nice connection with people when you try with Finnish, I don’t think the service changes more, that much. It’s a nicer, nicer experience.

Example 56

P1: ... [unclear] talking immediately to the person is that you have a language barrier.
P4: Exactly.
P1: They make much more of a connection.

In example 55, she expresses her positive stance towards the claim, stating that she does not think that the customer service changes more, but that the connection between the people is stronger when you use Finnish. Similarly, in example 56, she highlights that when you use English, you have a language barrier with the person providing the customer service, whereas when you use Finnish you make more of a connection. Although she states that the quality of customer service does not change,
she comments that the customer service situation is a “nicer, nicer experience,” which implies that a stronger connection between the two people could also make the customer service situation more positive. However, in example 51, participant 1 told that she uses English in customer service situations when it is an important matter. Thus, it could be interpreted that she sees that it is safer to use English information-wise, but better to use Finnish connection-wise. In other words, she expresses different stances to different objects within the same claim. Similarly, participant 4 emphasises connection:

Example 57

P4: But when you speak Finnish, you know, the distance between you and the people is really...
P3: Yeah.
P4: ... short.
P3: Yeah, that’s right.
P4: Yeah. I can feel it when you speak... at least when I try to speak, I know it’s so funny [Laughs] for them but you know they really respect.

Participant 4 also views that when she uses Finnish she gets closer to the person and earns more respect. Thus, as participant 4 sees that in Finnish you get better information but also closer to the person, she only views that the information aspect has an effect on the quality of the customer service, as presented in the claim.

The second claim in this category is “A native and a fluent speaker of English receives different service than someone who does not speak English very well.” The claim received both positive and negative stances. Positive stances were justified with inadequate explanation in English, while the negative stances were justified with Finns trying to serve the customer in a best possible way, despite the customer’s language skills. The positive stances came from participants 2 and 3, who agreed with the claim and approached the claim from the perspective of a customer, who is at a lower level of English. First, the comment made by participant 2:

Example 58

P2: I would agree with that. I’ve witnessed... I don’t know, in a bike shop and someone doesn’t speak very good English goes in there, they don’t speak Finnish and then, umm, they just tell them the price and what they need to buy. They don’t really explain a lot about... or they don’t try and explain why they have to buy this thing. Say, well, you
need to get this and it’s not worth is it ’cause the bike’s very old.
And then that’s it. Which isn’t very good customer service.
P3: Yeah, I agree. Yeah because that’s true. That’s happened to me.

Participant 2 reports about a situation he witnessed at a bike shop, where the customer was not told all the necessary information because he did not speak either English or Finnish. Participant 2 sees that this was not beneficial from the customer’s side, and thus, good customer service was not provided. Additionally, participant 3 agrees with the claim but does not elaborate further.

While participant 3 does not justify his stance, participant 2 justifies his stance with inadequate explanation in English. He states that when the customer did not know English very well and could not speak Finnish, the person providing the customer service left important information out because of the language barrier, and this was not beneficial from the customer’s side. The object of his negative value judgement is when the person providing the customer service ‘blames’ the language barrier and does not make an effort to serve the customer. It can be interpreted that participant 2 sees the customer’s language skills to have an effect on the quality of the service the customer receives, and sees that this can go unnoticed from the customer.

The negative stance was expressed by participant 4. She shares her personal experience of a situation, where despite the customer’s weak English language skills, the customer was served very well:

Example 59
P4: I have experienced, one, two years ago, I was in Maistraatti and there was, umm, a real old man, from, like Africa, and he... they, they were trying to speak with him, like vähän Finnish, vähän English, and they, they even used, like body language [Laughs]. You know, it was really... you know, it impressed me, it was really good. Because they tried hard to... and usually they have like translator or somebody but... that time I didn’t saw anything, anybody.

Her reply suggests that in official agencies, if no translators or interpreters are at hand, the people providing the customer service try to make an effort to make the customer understand, which in this case meant that they used both Finnish and English and other means to exchange information. In addition, participant 5 has a negative stance to the claim:

Example 60
P5: But they try to make him to understand. They try to act their best...
P4: Yeah, I see.
He states that ultimately the person providing the customer service tries to convey the correct information, even if the customer would not speak English very well. It is interesting to observe from example 60, that participant 3 agrees that Finns try to do their best in customer service situations, although he earlier stated that he has experienced negative customer service related to the customer’s language competence. This could be due to the argumentation of participants 4 and 5, and new, persuasive information, which founds upon personal and empirical experiences. These could be considered as the changes in the argumentative context, which urge the participants to moderate their stance (Billig, 1991, p. 143; Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 53). Hence, participant 3 sees the personal experiences of participants 4 and 5 more persuasive and moderates his stance. Nevertheless, both negative stances are based on one type of justification, which is that ultimately Finns try to serve the customer in a best possible way, despite the customer’s language skills. Hence, participants 4 and 5 express a positive attitude to customer service provided by Finns in Oulu, and see that especially the customer’s low level of English does not affect the quality of the customer service. It could be interpreted that especially participant 5, who has evaluated his English skills to be at the beginner’s level, has personal experience of the matter and expresses his attitude from the role of a low-level English speaker.

Since participants approached the claim only from the perspective of a customer, who is a low-level English speaker, an additional question introduced a more advanced speaker of English. The question was especially directed towards participant 2, since he is a native speaker of English.

Example 61

I: Okay. Have you as a native speaker... when you start speaking in English and the Finnish person realises that ‘Oh, this person speaks English fluently.’ Do they get intimidated or?
P2: Umm, sometimes they feel a bit embarrassed and they go and get someone else.

Participant 2 agrees with the question and implies that the customer’s language competence can affect the customer service situation. Nevertheless, it cannot be deduced from his answer whether it affects the quality of the customer service.
5.2.4 Category 4: Racism in customer service

The two claims in this category are “The customer’s ethnicity or nationality does not affect the customer service at any point: Not when the customer enters, for example, a shop and is clearly of different ethnicity and not when the customer’s ethnicity or nationality comes up during the customer service” and “Refugees and asylum-seekers have completely different experiences of customer service than, for example, work-related immigrants.”

The stances to the first claim cannot be separated straightforwardly into positive or negative, but the focus is rather on the direct or indirect expression of them, as stances can be conveyed in an indirect or an oblique way. This is also how people usually express their stances (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, pp. 35, 39). Indirectly expressed negative stances were justified with the possibility of racism, with reference to appearance, and with cultural factors. Positive stances were justified with overall experience, the mood of the person providing the customer service, and with false first-impressions. First, participants 3 and 4 comment the following:

Example 62
P4: I didn’t...
I: You haven’t experienced...
P4: ...knock the wood. [Knocks the table] [Laughs]
P3: I haven’t experienced but maybe there is a different way of looking, if you mean.
I: What kind of... can you?
P3: Is like...
I: Is it...
P3: Yeah.
I: Rude?
P3: Yeah. Sometimes. But not in the store. Maybe in the streets, some young people or... sometimes, not, not all the time.

Participant 4 states that she has not experienced racism in customer service. However, when she knocks the table, which has the meaning of preventing something negative from happening, she indirectly expresses a negative stance to the claim, acknowledging that the customer’s ethnicity or nationality might have an effect. By knocking the table, she also takes a more humoristic approach to the topic. Vesala and Rantanen (2007) write that an individual is defined through the lens of the social category they represent, but they can try to affect this definition (p. 55). As the participants have been asked to join the group interview as representatives of a certain social category, in this case,
immigrants, the implicitly expressed attitudes and humoristic means used by participant 4 may be interpreted as endeavours to affect the definition of her being an immigrant who might experience racism.

Similarly, participant 3 states that he has not encountered such situations, but still admits that he has faced prejudice perhaps in a more indirect manner, as can be seen from example 62. Still, he seems reluctant to tell what kind of negative behaviour he has encountered. When he does elaborate on the matter, he states that it has not happened in customer service situations but on the streets. It can further be observed from his argumentation that he uses a lot of adverbs expressing probability, seemingly wanting to moderate his stance. This can be due to the communicative context of the group interview, in which the participants may not feel comfortable talking about their personal experiences, especially when they encompass racism and prejudice. Furthermore, participant 3 was also brought in from another group, which meant that he did not know the other participants, which for one, might have affected the degree of his comments and the discussion in general.

In consequence, it is important to take into consideration the communicative context of the group interview, which might determine what kinds of attitudes are expressed (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 30). In addition, as the context is a cross-cultural interview, the participants might have differing norms and values, which govern the topics they want to talk about (Patton, 2002, p. 393). Nevertheless, the first justification type, possibility of racism, is used by participants 3 and 4 and can be further sub-divided into two parts: acknowledging the possibility of racism and referring to negative behaviour in other contexts. Participant 4 uses the first one by knocking the table, while participant 3 uses the second sub-type, by telling that has not experienced such in customer service but elsewhere.

Nevertheless, the personal experience of participant 3 is followed by the one of participant 1, who states that she also has a negative experience of customer service:

Example 63

P1: I have one bad story, but yeah, I don’t look that different from Finnish but only in the bank it was very unpleasant.
P4: Yeah, but that’s bank.
P1: ...furious. I was just standing there -- if that’s... maybe something to do that I was not a Finn but yeah... that’s just the only time.

Participant 1 tells that she has had only one negative experience. She links this to the first part of the claim (ethnicity does not affect the customer service), stating that this might be because she is not
visibly of different ethnicity, when comparing her appearance to the one of a Finn. She also further justifies that her negative experience might be connected to her being a different nationality, referring to the other part of the claim (nationality does not affect the customer service). Consequently, participant 1 indirectly expresses a negative stance to the claim. She justifies her stance with the second justification type, reference to appearance. She approaches the topic from a role of a white European woman, who because of her appearance has not experienced racism. She connects her negative customer service experience to her nationality. In both cases she implicitly expresses an attitude that both ethnicity and nationality can have an effect in different stages of the customer service. The reason for her indirect argumentation might stem from people not wanting to openly talk about racism or express an idea that social factors, such as ethnicity and nationality, might affect customer service. In the communicative situation of a group interview, other participants give social feedback and make assumptions of each other. Hence, people may use indirect ways in order to avoid certain assumptions to be made of themselves (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 36).

Participant 3 also expresses an indirect negative stance, by referring to cultural differences, which arise in customer service situations:

Example 64

P3: It happens to me in the bus actually sometimes. I said huomenta, terve!
[Laughter]
P1: Interesting.
P5: Yeah, they don’t… Yeah.
P3: Kiitos! Okay, sorry… So I am different. Yeah. Thank you! Kiitos hei!

Example 65

P1: There’s even a cartoon about Finnish are like ‘Oh no, somebody noticed me on the street, oh no, somebody’s speaking to me.’ It’s quite funny.

Participant 3 tells that he sometimes receives negative feedback of his communication style on the bus, when he greets and thanks the bus driver in Finnish in a cheerful manner. He justifies his indirect negative stance with the third justification type, reference to cultural factors. He implies that not only can ethnicity and nationality affect the customer service but also the cultural factors that are connected to that specific ethnicity or nationality. It is interesting to observe how he feels that his communication style does not fit the framework of the Finnish one, and consequently, he feels that he is different, as
he states in example 64. Furthermore, example 65 demonstrates how participant 1 joins the discussion and states that there is even a cartoon that makes fun of Finns’ reserved nature. Her comment suggests that the Finnish communication style is more or less well-known, and participants 1 and 3 seem to have a humoristic attitude to situations in customer service, which, in their view, embody the Finnish mindset.

When directly asked whether the customer service is changes when the customer is not a Finn, participants 3 and 4 disagree, and participant 3 states the following:

Example 66
P3: 90 percent is nice, more than 90 percent, yeah, I think so.

Although participant 3 has previously referred to his own negative experiences and the effect of cultural factors generating different customer service, here he expresses a positive stance to the overall claim. He states that the majority of people are nice, justifying his stance with his overall experience of customer service. As participant 4 expressed her acknowledgement towards racism in customer service, she now wishes to shift the emphasis away from factors connected to the customer and approach the topic from the perspective of the person providing the customer service. This is demonstrated in the examples below:

Example 67
P4: I think it’s also depends on your mood, you know... what is your problem that day. [Laughs] you know, it depend on many things.

Example 68
P4: It depends on the person, for example, by myself I am really bitter from the appearance, I know that. When people see me for the first time... I’m not... I cannot smile, I cannot be like that much, but I like communicating [Laughs] It depends on the person too.

Participant 4 uses two types of justifications for her stance: the mood of the person providing the customer service and false first-impressions. The first one bases on the idea that the person providing the customer service should be seen as an individual, whose personal and emotional issues may transfer to the customer service situation, and these issues are not linked to the customer. The second type of justification bases on the notion that solely based on facial expressions and body language, the person providing the customer service may seem serious or unfriendly. This may convey unintended, impolite messages. Participant 4 reinforces her justification by combining it with her own
personality, stating that as an open and a social person she does not always give that impression from the outside.

The last claim is “Refugees and asylum-seekers have completely different experiences of customer service than, for example, work-related immigrants.” When commenting on this claim, the stances were again expressed very indirectly. Justifications used together with the first object, which was not the claim, were as following: resemblances in appearance between different nationalities, people making individual judgements and people making misjudgments. Positive stances to the claim were justified with appearance, while negative stances were justified with the position of the person providing the customer service. However, in the beginning of the discussion the object of the value judgement was not the claim, as participants 3 and 4 start contemplating on how one can tell the difference between different types of immigrants:

Example 69

P4: So at first how they can recognise that are you like, like
P3: A refugee or not.
P4: ... an immigrant or pakolainen or... you know.
P3: Maahanmuuttaja.
P4: Yeah, because most of the time, umm, people... at first people judge you by your appearance, you know.
P3: Yeah.
P4: For example, my family, most of my family are living in Spain. -- but we are really the same and the appearance, you know, and for example, in Oulu, when I go with my Spanish friend, they cannot recognise which of us are Spanish, which of... you know?
I: Yeah.
P4: From Portugese. It depends in... on your judgement, I think. If they... like black hair is like... because at the first time they don’t know. If you are...

As can be observed from the example above, participant 4 approaches the topic from the subject position of an immigrant and as a representative of her own culture, stating that she could be confused with, for example, Spanish people. She sees that people from these two cultures can resemble each other in physical appearance because of similar features, such as dark hair. She further continues:

Example 70

P4: -- but you know when you are from the Europe or USA, it’s really hard to figure out if I am from the Arabic country or...
P3: That’s right.
P4: ... or Spanish or Portugal because they don’t have like that much experience, but you see this kind of differs a lot.
P3: But, but it depends which part of Europe you are coming from. From Italy, as for example, it’s very close to Arabic people...
P4: Yeah, the, the...
P3: Yeah, because here in Oulu they say, ‘You are Italian, Italian.’ I don’t know why. I’m Arabic, I’m not Italian.
P4: Yeah.
P3: But... as she said... how they can know that refugee or normal?

In the opinion of participant 4, telling the difference between representatives of certain cultures can be especially difficult for people who are not in a close proximity with those cultures, and hence, are not perhaps familiar with them. Moreover, participant 3 suggests that only some nationalities in Europe can be mixed with people from the Middle East, as he elaborates that people in Oulu often wrongly assume that he is from Italy. He sees that perhaps in the eyes of Finns, Italians and Syrians resemble each other in physical appearance, and this is probably why he has encountered such misconceptions.

Participant 5, who comes from Congo, and thus, can be considered the participant that clearly represents a different ethnicity, has not taken part in the discussion of the last claim. Therefore, he is subtly approached and asked whether he would like to add something in the on-going discussion. He answers the following:

Example 71
P5: No, there’s no... but just to say that sometime found that, like for example, like Finnish people, sometime found that Finnish people they have hair... white hair, and when you see like that you say ‘Oh, this is Finnish from Finland,’ you know, and sometimes you found they’re from Arabic, they have black hair and all Arabic have bear.
P3: Not all.
P5: Sometime, many people...
P3: Yeah.
P5: ... many people from Arab... so you say, ‘Ah, looks like Arab.’ That’s why you found that it’s different. Skin or culture and you found that the culture not actual, as for adults. Yeah.

Participant 5 states that sometimes people make deductions of somebody’s nationality based on their appearance. For example, it can be easy to say that a person, who has fair hair, comes from Finland.
Similarly, when a person has black hair and a beard, people can think that the person comes from the Middle East. However, he states that the case is different, depending on the nationality. He seems to suggest that one cannot always make reliable deductions of one’s nationality based on the appearance since he states, “Skin or culture and you found that the culture not actual, as for adults.” It could be interpreted that the judgement of one’s culture based on the appearance is not reliable because especially adults can modify their looks. Yet, he approaches the topic in a very vague manner. It should also be remembered that he had evaluated his English skills to be at the beginner’s level, which makes it harder to make solid interpretations of his answer.

Furthermore, since the topic ultimately concerns racism and prejudice in customer service, he might feel that that the topic is too personal or sensitive to discuss in the context of this group interview. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) state, participants come to the interview with different kind of preparedness, which determines what kind of attitudes will be expressed (p. 52). In this case, it could be the personal and cultural background of the participant, determining that he does not want to share personal experiences of racism in customer service. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) state, it is important to take into consideration the context in which the attitudes are formulated and shared, since it can have a profound effect on what kind of attitudes are expressed. Expressing attitudes is connected with interaction and with the other participants in that situation. Thus, people adjust their attitudes according to the situation (pp. 30–31, 56). Moreover, it is also interesting to observe the interaction between participants 3 and 5. When participant 5 says that Arabic people usually have a beard, participant 3 immediately corrects this generalisation, although generalisations have also been a part of his commentary, as can be observed, for instance, from examples 38 and 39, where he discusses older men’s English skills. It could be interpreted that as people make assumptions of each other’s attitudes based on their argumentation, participant 3 wants to correct, what he interprets to be an attitude towards Arabic people and approaches the topic as a representative of his own culture (Vesala & Rantanen, 2011, p. 36).

Here the object of the participants’ value judgement is no longer the claim itself, but whether one can separate a refugee or a work-related immigrant from each other based on their appearance. Vesala and Rantanen (2007) encourage to recognise the object of the commentary and to see that the object is not evidently the claim (p. 41). Three types of justifications are used here: resemblances in appearance between different nationalities, people making individual judgements and people making misjudgments. The first type is used by both participants 3 and 4, who share their personal experiences of getting confused with other nationalities. The other type of justification is used by participant 4, who suggests that people make judgements of other people based on their appearance, but this
judgement can be effected, for example, by the cultural background of that individual. Finally, participant 5 uses the last type, as he states that since people modify their looks, one cannot always tell which nationality they are, and hence, people make misjudgements.

In the discussion of how one can make deductions based on one’s appearance, participant 2 indirectly expresses a positive stance to the claim. He suggests that there might be some indications in one’s appearance, which may lead people to make judgements:

Example 72

P2: I, I would guess... and I would probably be called racist for this, but someone who’s... woman who’s wearing a hair...  
P4: Hijab.  
P2: Hair... [Searches the word]  
P3: Hijab, yeah.  
P2: ...we are assuming they would be un... someone coming from a country with war or something like that.  
P4: Maybe.

As can be seen from the example above, participant 2 gives an example of what kinds of things in the customer’s appearance could generate judgements of the type of immigrant the person is. He gives an example of a hijab, a veil worn by Muslim women. Participants 2 and 3, as representatives of the Middle East, seem to know the terminology and help participant 2 to find the correct word. Participant 2 then suggests that some people could link hijabs to certain countries affected by war, implying that there can be certain factors in a person’s appearance that allude to different cultures and countries. Consequently, these could be countries that a majority of refugees or asylum-seekers are perceived to come from. It is interesting to observe in his argumentation that he seems to acknowledge the sensitivity of the topic and protects his comment in the context of the group interview, by stating that “and I would probably be called racist for this,” before presenting his comment. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) state, in a social situation people want to avoid certain assumptions to be made of themselves, and in order to do this, use indirect expressions or try to avoid taking stances that seem too strict (p. 36). This phenomenon can be recognised to have occurred multiple times during the interview, as previously demonstrated in examples 63 and 71.

Participant 2 continues to validate his stance by telling about a situation he witnessed. This is demonstrated in the example below:
Participant 2 first suggests that since the topic under discussion encompasses parallelism between work-related immigrants and refugees, work-related immigrants would have to dress smartly for work. He continues to suggest that the combination of somebody being visibly of a different ethnicity and wearing worn-out clothes could suggest that the person is a refugee or an asylum-seeker. This could have an effect on what kind of customer service the person receives, as participant 2 tells about occurrence he witnessed at the bike shop, where the customer was a foreigner and was not treated nicely. He approaches the topic in a very sensitive manner and does not clearly state that the customer is of different ethnicity but rather, “if the customer looks like they’re from somewhere else.” Again, people have preparedness to adjust the expression of their attitudes according to the situation because they recognise the demands of the social situation (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007, p. 56). In this case, participant 2 recognises that the topic under discussion could be considered very sensitive in the communicative situation of a group interview, which includes people from different countries. Yet again, he could be concerned about the kind of assumptions that the other participants could make of him and tries to affect this with his argumentation style.

Participant 1 also joins in to support participant 2 by suggesting that some ethnicities are more clearly recognisable in Oulu as a Finnish city:

Consequently, participants 1 and 2 indirectly agree with the issue of recognising different types of immigrants, and this way further insinuate that different types of immigrants could have different
experiences of customer service. Both participants justify their stance with appearance, and this justification can be further sub-divided into three groups: cultural or religious markers in appearance, clothing, and ethnicity. First, participant 2 highlights cultural or religious markers by giving an example of a Hijab and telling about the associations it may create. Second, he refers to the different associations that smarter clothing in parallel to worn-out clothing may give, and indicates that this is especially the case when the person is noticeably of different ethnicity. Thus, he also uses the third justification type here. Participant 1 also uses the last justification type by stating that some people are clearly of different ethnicity, and it could be interpreted that she refers to skin colour.

As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) state, directing the discussion back to the claim is one of the interview strategies (p. 40). Therefore, the participants are asked whether the person providing the customer service could be affected by the information that the customer is a refugee or an asylum-seeker. Participants 3 and 5 take a negative stance, as can be seen from the following example:

Example 75

P5: No, they don’t affect.
P3: I don’t think so because if I complain anyone there, he will get fired, I think. Right?
I: Yeah, they should.
P3: Yeah, they should serve very well people, whatever I was.
I: Right.
P3: He’s working and he’s getting money, so should be good with the customers. This is my opinion.

Participant 3 suggests that people providing customer service do not treat customers differently. Therefore, it could be interpreted that he also disagrees with the overall claim of refugees and asylum-seekers having different experiences of customer service compared to work-related immigrants. He justifies his stance with the position of the person providing the customer service. Because the person in customer service is representing the company and receiving payment for his work, he has the obligation to serve all customers equally.
5.3 Discussion of findings

This section provides a brief overview of the questionnaire study and the group interview and compares the attitudes expressed by both sets of participants. Since the claims presented in the group interview were derived from the questionnaire responses, it is interesting to see what kind of similarities and differences the two studies have. The findings are grouped together following the four categories (Official agencies and service providers in Oulu, Finns providing customer service in English, Customer’s language skills and language competence and Racism in customer service), and within each category, attitudes expressed by both questionnaire respondents and group interview participants are compared with each other and linked together.

Regarding the customer service provided by different official agencies and service providers in Oulu, both the respondents of the questionnaire study and the participants of the group interview expressed positive attitudes to English customer service in Oulu. The customer service in English in official agencies was evaluated both from the viewpoint of language competence and from the customer service delivery. First, both sets of participants viewed the delivery of the customer service to be friendly and helpful in official agencies, for instance, at Kela. As the questionnaire respondents highlighted the personnel’s inadequate English skills at Kela, the group interview participants also brought up incorrect information in English and documentation being in Finnish in official agencies.

Similarly, both sets of participants viewed that there are differences in customer service depending on the service provider. As with official agencies, the customer service provided by different service providers was evaluated both from the viewpoint of language competence and from the customer service delivery. The group interview participants viewed that there are differences in customer service since one can receive impolite customer service, emphasising the behaviour of the person providing the customer service. In addition, the questionnaire respondents viewed that differences in customer service are related to different levels of English. In the questionnaire responses it was seen that big shops in the centre of Oulu provide better customer service in English than smaller shops, from a language point of view. Similarly, the group interview participants viewed that there are differences in customer service in English between different shops in Oulu. For example, the group interview participants expressed differing attitudes towards Finns’ English skills at the hospital.

Both the questionnaire respondents and the group interview participants expressed positive attitudes towards Finns’ English skills and English was seen as very helpful in Oulu in general. Finns were seen to have overall good English skills, but this was connected to different social factors, such as
age, gender, profession and education. In terms of age, it was generally considered that young people speak the best English in Oulu and in Finland. The questionnaire respondents also emphasised gender, as some of them stated that women speak better English than men. Education relating to language skills was highlighted more by the questionnaire respondents, some of which brought up that people with higher education speak better English, and that women speak better English because they educate themselves more.

These attitudes are also equivalent to the results of the nationwide survey by Leppänen et al (2011), which indicated that languages are studied more by the young, by women, city residents and highly educated. In addition, the results show that Finn’s English proficiency is acknowledged generally high (pp. 62, 161). Nonetheless, both sets of participants acknowledged exceptions. Acknowledging exceptions and moderating one’s stance after taking a strict stance can be considered to be connected to the communicative situation of a group interview, where people may want to avoid certain assumptions to be made of themselves. Hence, in order to avoid this, they use indirect expressions or try to avoid taking stances that seem too strict. People can also change their attitudes in light of new information or due to a change in the subject role (Billig, 1991, pp. 145–146; Vesala & Rantanen, 2011, pp. 36, 39).

Moreover, one of the main issues highlighted by both sets of participants was shyness as a Finnish mentality affecting customer service. Many of the questionnaire respondents and group interview participants suggested that Finns’ shyness when speaking English is more or less a permanent feature of customer service situations. In both studies, there were participants who expressed more negative attitudes towards Finns’ shyness, as it was considered to make the customer service more difficult. Especially the questionnaire respondents connected impolite customer service to Finns’ insecurity to speak English. Yet, the majority of the group interview participants did not view shyness as resulting in impoliteness, and some participants stated that they could relate to the feeling themselves. These attitudes are also equivalent to the results of the nationwide survey by Leppänen et al (2011), which indicated that Finns assess their English skills to be relatively good but experience feelings of inadequacy when using English (p. 161).

Another social factor brought up in the questionnaire responses was racism. The possibility of racism in customer service was highlighted by the questionnaire respondents, as two of them stated that they have positive experiences of customer service, but this might be due to their skin colour and nationality. Similarly, the group interview participants acknowledged the possibility of racism in customer service. Interestingly, participants 3, 4 and 5, who were not from Europe viewed that one cannot always deduce the nationality or ethnicity based on one’s appearance, and thus, negative
customer service is not necessarily linked to the aspect that the customer is a foreigner. These participants also viewed that, for example, the mood of the person providing the customer service is a factor that should be taken into account. By comparison, participants 1 and 2, who were from Europe, approached the topic in a more direct manner, highlighting that there are some ethnicities and nationalities that are more easily recognisable. What is more, certain cultural and religious markers in one’s appearance and people with worn-out clothes, together with clearly being of different ethnicity, could be subjected to racism.

Thus, the participants that were expected to have insights into the topic due to their nationality or ethnicity, for example participant 5 from Congo, approached the topic in a more indirect manner. By comparison, the participants who were expected to have fewer insights into the topic of racism, approached the topic more directly and brought up some of the aspects that the other participants left unnamed. However, even these participants made endeavours to be sensitive and appear tolerant, and this is probably due to the context of the group interview, which includes immigrants from different cultural backgrounds. As Vesala and Rantanen (2007) state, it is important to take into consideration the context in which the attitudes are formulated and shared since it can have a profound effect on what kind of attitudes are expressed. Expressing attitudes is connected with interaction and with the other participants in that situation. Thus, people adjust their attitudes according to the situation (pp. 30–31, 56). Therefore, it could be stated that in the communicative situation of this group interview racism was too sensitive a topic to be discussed extensively.

Finally, both sets of participants expressed similar attitudes to customer’s language choice and its effect on the quality of the customer service. The majority of the questionnaire respondents did not see that the customer’s language choice between English and Finnish has an effect, but some respondents stated that they would get better service and information in Finnish. The information aspect was also brought up in the group interview, but again, generally it was viewed that the language choice does not have any profound effect. Nevertheless, it was considered that a deeper connection is formed with the person when using Finnish. It could be postulated that the immigrants feel that without the language barrier, the customer service is warmer and more personal and gives recognition to different nuances in communication. Among group interview participants, the issue of customer’s language competence was considered to have an effect if the customer does not know English very well. By comparison, it was seen that a native speaker of English might encounter shyness from the Finns’ side, whereas the customer may get irritated if the Finn will not let the customer practice their Finnish.
6 CONCLUSION

The objective of this Master’s Thesis was to examine what kind of attitudes immigrants have towards customer service in English in Oulu. The interest was in exploring how immigrants perceive customer service situations in Oulu when the mutual language is English. More specifically, the current study focused on finding out whether the quality of the customer service in English is dependent on different social factors of the person providing the customer service. The aim was also to examine how immigrants perceive the customer service in different official agencies and between different service providers in Oulu. Another aim was to find out if immigrants conceive the customer service to be connected to the customer’s language choice (Finnish or English) or the customer’s ethnicity or nationality.

As the sample size of the current study was rather small, it only gives a limited insight into the attitudes that immigrants have towards customer service in English in Oulu. However, certain conclusions may be drawn from this Master’s Thesis. The results indicate that these immigrants living in Oulu expressed overall positive attitudes to the customer service in English in Oulu. Regarding official agencies, such as Kela and the Police, immigrants expressed positive attitudes towards the delivery of the customer service, but overall it could be stated that both sets of participants expressed less positive attitudes towards the competence of English in official agencies. Both sets of participants also viewed that there are differences in customer service in Oulu between different service providers, both in terms of language competence and customer service delivery.

Moreover, immigrants expressed positive attitudes to Finns’ English skills and English was seen very helpful as a language in general. Nonetheless, different social factors, such as age, gender, education and profession were connected to Finns’ English skills, as it was largely considered that young people, women and people with higher education speak the best English. Additionally, shyness as a Finnish mentality was highlighted as a factor in customer service since it was generally viewed by the immigrants that Finns are shy English speakers. Yet, both sets of participants expressed different attitudes to shyness and its effect on customer service, as some of them viewed that it has a negative effect on customer service, while others did not.

In terms of other social factors, racism was acknowledged as a possibility. Nevertheless, in-depth personal experiences or views were not shared, as many of the research participants solely stated that people who are clearly of a different ethnicity may experience racism, and this might affect the quality of the customer service. Thus, it could be stated that in the communicative situation of this group
interview certain topics, such as racism, were deemed sensitive by the participants and sharing such information was not seen as natural. Finally, in terms of language choice, the majority of the research participants expressed the attitude that customer’s choice of language does not have an effect on the customer service. However, when it was seen to affect, such aspects as information content and connection with Finns were highlighted. In conclusion, as the participants were eager to moderate and change their attitudes in the course of the interview, it should be noted that as attitudes varied in this small group, they may vary all over. This could be seen to validate the social nature of attitudes.

In hindsight, possible drawbacks can be observed. To begin with, the questionnaire study, the questionnaire consisted of questions which were formulated in a relatively simple manner because there was no preliminary information of the respondents’ proficiency in Finnish or English. It could be criticised that questions formulated this way may not be able to measure attitudes as successfully as more elaborated questions. Moreover, the respondents of the questionnaire study were all highly educated and had moved to Finland and to Oulu mainly because of studies or work. In consequence, their English proficiency was relatively high and this could have affected their positive and tolerant attitudes towards customer service in English. Finally, the questionnaire respondents represented a rather limited group of immigrants, as they had all come to Finland voluntarily and did not represent a vast majority of different nationalities or ethnicities.

The research attempted to take these into consideration in the group interview, as participants were all from different countries and of different backgrounds. Still, the group interview situation presented challenges in moderating the discussion and ensuring that all the participants could express their views. The group included two participants, who did not comment as much as the others. These two participants did not comment on every claim, although it would have been desirable that all the participants had participated equally. Furthermore, an artificial group, the members of which do not know each other, may not be the most natural setting for discussing sensitive topics, such as racism. Thus, the group could have been a natural group, and the setting could have been a more informal one, other than a classroom. It was also unfortunate that some of the initial participants could not join the group, and others were brought in, which meant that there was no preliminary information of, for example, their language skills. When observing both studies simultaneously, it could be stated that as Finnish and English were foreign languages to most of the participants, this could have affected the depth of their expressions. Both sets of participants were also studying Finnish, which could mean that they are motivated to learn languages and have more positive attitudes towards languages and customer service in English, than people who do not attend languages courses.
As Finland continues to grow to be more multicultural, and as the recent influx of asylum-seekers has increased the number of foreigners in Finland and in Oulu, the prospects to develop the current study are vast. The study could be expanded in many ways, shifting the focus on either the type of immigrant, type of service, service provider or on the region. Firstly, the study could be developed to focus solely on, for instance, refugees’ or asylum-seekers’ attitudes to customer service in Oulu. This would be of paramount significance, as the number of asylum-seekers is growing, and they represent a specific group in Oulu. Secondly, the focus could be on a specific official agency, Kela, for instance. Similarly, this would be of extreme importance, as Kela and other official agencies represent the services that almost all immigrants need to use when arriving in Oulu and in Finland, and the matters discussed there could be considered of high importance to the recipient of the service, as they can affect their opportunities. Lastly, the study could be expanded to cover nearby regions, for example, Rovaniemi, Vaasa, Kokkola and Kajaani. This way the sampling would be more encompassing and it would provide an opportunity to compare the attitudes to customer service in English between different cities in Finland. To conclude, as language attitude research from the viewpoint of immigrants and research on intercultural customer service have been minimal in Finland, the need for further research is evident. This presents new prospects to study the ever more multicultural Finland and the growing position of English. In the future, the results of this study could be utilised by different service providers in their planning of English customer service, as well as in the planning of how to help to improve the integration and life quality of immigrants living in Oulu.
REFERENCES


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Appendix 1: The questionnaire

Master’s Seminar Questionnaire


Kiitos ajastasi!

My name is Natalia Ruotsala and I study English as a major at the University of Oulu. I am a fifth year student and this year I am taking a course called Master’s Seminar, for which I will conduct a study. My topic for the study is “Immigrants’ attitudes towards service provision in English in Oulu.” I want to find out what kind of attitudes immigrants, who live in Oulu, have towards service provision in English and what kind of experiences they have had while using English in different service provision situations with Finnish people.

With this questionnaire I collect data for my research. It takes approximately 15 minutes to answer. You can answer anonymously. I will go through the material confidentially and I will be the only one going through the material. I will not publish names or any information which will allude to identity.

Thank you for your time!

Yhteystiedot/Contact information: cruotsal@student.oulu.fi

Kirjoita vastauksesasi viivoille tai rastita oikea vaihtoehto.

Write your answer on the lines or cross the right option.

1. Sukupuoli/Gender: 1. mies/male □
                            2. nainen/female □

2. Ikä/Age: ____ vuotta/years

3. Kotimaa/Home country: ______________________________________

4. Äidinkieli/Mother tongue: ______________________________________

5. Ammatti tai koulutus/Profession or education ___________________________
6. a) Miksi tulit Suomeen?/Your reason for coming to Finland?

Työ/Work □
Opiskelu/Studies □
Perhe/Family □
Muu, mikä? Other? ________________________

b) Miksi tulit Ouluun?/Your reason for coming to Oulu?

Työ/Work □
Opiskelu/Studies □
Perhe/Family □
Muu, mikä? Other? ________________________

7. Kuinka kauan olet asunut Oulussa?/How long have you lived in Oulu?

0,5–1 vuotta/years □
1–2 vuotta/years □
2–3 vuotta/years □
3–4 vuotta/years □
yli 4 vuotta/years □

8. Kuinka kauan olet opiskellut suomea?/How long have you studied Finnish?

1–3 kk/months □
3–6 kk/months □
0,5–1 vuotta/years □
enemmän kuin 1 vuoden/more than 1 year □
enemmän kuin 2 vuotta/more than 2 years □

9. Mikä seuraavista kuvaa parhaiten suullista englannin kielen taitoasi?/In your opinion, which one of the following best describes your spoken English language skills?
a) Alkeet/Beginner’s level □
En puhu englantia tai puhun hyvin vähän englantia.
I don’t speak English or I speak very little English.

b) Keskitaso/Intermediate □
Puhun ja ymmärrän englantia hyvin, mutta minulla on vaikeuksia monimutkaisemman kielinopin ja sanaston kanssa.
I speak and understand English well, but I have problems with more complex grammar and vocabulary.

c) Ylin taso/ Advanced □
Puhun ja ymmärrän englantia hyvin, mutta minulla on välillä ongelmia vieraissa tilanteissa.
I speak and understand English well, but sometimes I have difficulties in unfamiliar situations. □

d) Äidinkielen taso/Very advanced – Mother tongue □
Puhun ja ymmärrän englantia täysin sujuvasti.
I speak and understand English completely fluently.

10. Millaisissa tilanteissa ja miksi käytät englannin kieltä asuessasi Oulussa?
In what kind of situations and why do you use English language in Oulu?
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

While going to different places or while using different services in Oulu, do you use Finnish or English? Why do you use this particular language?
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

12. Jos käytät englantia asioidessasi eri paikoissa Oulussa, millaista asiakaspalvelua saat?
If you use English in different places or with different services in Oulu, what kind of customer service do you get?

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

13. Vaikuttaako mielestäsi käyttämäsi kieli (englanti tai suomi) siihen, millaista palvelua saat, kun käyt esimerkiksi kaupassa tai pankissa?
Do you think that the language you use (Finnish or English) affects the service you get from Finnish people for example, when you go to the shop or to the bank?

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

14. Muistatko tilanteen, jossa käytit englantia suomalaisen kanssa (esimerkiksi kaupan myyjän kanssa) ja se herätti sinussa jonkinlaisia tunteita. Millaisia tunteita ne olivat?
Do you remember a situation where you used English with a Finnish person (for example, with a shop keeper) and it provoked feelings? What kind of feelings were they?

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

15. Koetko, että englanninkielen palvelu eri arkipäivän tilanteissa (esimerkiksi ruokakaupassa tai postissa) on ollut positiivista vai negatiivista? Miksi?
Do you think that service in English in different everyday situations (for example, at the grocery store or at the post office) has been positive or negative? Why?

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

16. Millaisia kokemuksia sinulla on englanninkieli­lisestä asiakaspalvelusta…
What kind of experiences do you have on customer service in English…

a) Keskustan kaupoissa/At the shops in the centre

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

b) Asioidessasi eri virastoissa, kuten esimerkiksi, KELA, pankki, verotoimisto tai poliisi/
With different officials, for example, KELA, bank, tax office or police

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

c) Muissa paikoissa, kuten esimerkiksi, kampaajalla, sairaalassa, ruokakaupassa tai postissa/
In other places, for example at the hairdresser’s, at the hospital, at the grocery store or at the post office

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

17. Kuka mielestäsi puhuu parhaiten englantia Oulussa? (Esimerkiksi mies vai nainen, ikä, ammatti?)
Minkälaisen ihmisen kanssa käytät englantia kaikkein mieluiten eri arkipäivän tilanteissa (esimerkiksi lääkärissä tai kaupassa)?

In your opinion, who speaks the best English in Oulu? (For example, is it a male or female, age, profession?)
With what kind of persons do you prefer using English in different everyday situations (for example, at the doctor’s office or at the shop)?

_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

18. Mitä mieltä olet suomalaisten englannin kielen taidoista yleisellä tasolla?

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What do you think about Finnish people’s English language skills in general?


Kiitos vastauksistasi! 😊 / Thank you for your answers! 😊
Appendix 2: The background information form

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

Write your answer on the lines or tick the right option.

1. Gender
   1. Male □
   2. Female □

2. Age ____

3. Home country ______________________________________

4. Mother tongue ______________________________________

5. Profession ______________________________________

6. A) Your reason for coming to Finland?
   Work □
   Studies □
   Family □
   Other? __________________________

   B) Your reason for coming to Oulu?
   Work □
   Studies □
   Family □
   Other? __________________________

7. How long have you lived in Oulu?
   0.5–1 years □
   1–2 years □
   2–3 years □
   3–4 years □
   over 4 years □
8. How long have you used or studied Finnish?

- 1–3 months
- 3–6 months
- 0.5–1 years
- more than 1 year
- more than 2 years

9. In your opinion, which one of the following best describes your **spoken** English language skills?

a) Beginner’s level  □  I don’t speak English, or I speak very little English.

b) Intermediate  □  I speak and understand English well, but I have problems with more complex grammar and vocabulary.

c) Advanced  □  I speak and understand English very well, but sometimes I have difficulties in unfamiliar situations.

d) Mother tongue  □  I speak and understand English fluently.

10. While using different services in Oulu, do you use Finnish or English? Why do you use this particular language?
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your answers! 😊
Appendix 3: The consent form to participate in a research study

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Research project: You are asked to take part in a group interview. The group interview is a method for gathering data for Natalia Ruotsala’s Master’s Thesis, the topic of which is immigrants’ attitudes towards customer service in English in Oulu. The purpose of this study is to examine what kind of attitudes immigrants, who use English when using different services in Oulu, have towards the customer service in English in Oulu.

The research process: If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: fill in the consent and background information forms. Take part in the group interview, where the researcher will present six different claims. You are asked to freely discuss and comment on the claims. The group interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

This study is anonymous.
Names or any information alluding to identity will not be published.
The recording of the group interview will be kept confidential, and the researcher (Natalia Ruotsala) will be the only one going through the material. The recording of the group interview will be disposed of after the analysis.

Researcher: Natalia Ruotsala, University of Oulu

Contact persons of the study. You can contact these persons if you have any additional questions or want to request further information of the study.

Natalia Ruotsala, student: cruotsal@student.oulu.fi, 040-154 8297
Maarit Siromaa, Master’s Thesis Supervisor, lecturer: maarit.siromaa@oulu.fi, 044-5959365

The research participant’s full name _____________________________________________

The research participant’s date of birth _____________________________________________

I freely give my consent to participate in the aforementioned research study and in the process of gathering data, needed in this research. I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and / or written form by the researcher. I have been explained about the processing of personal information and data. I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time by informing the researcher and without having to give an explanation.

Place and date                      Signature of the research participant
                                      (Clarification of signature)

We assure you that we will use the material in accordance with the best practices of research ethics and the Personal Data Act. A copy of the consent form signed by the researcher is delivered to the reseach participant.

Place and date                      Signature of the person in charge of the research