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On the Experiences of Finnish Engineers as Language Users in a Professional Context

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE
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The process can be likened to a journey along a narrow footpath through a varying terrain in a similar vein as Maija Lehtovaara described the progress of a phenomenological research process. Sometimes the path has been obscured by foliage or stones and my progress has been arduous, while at other times it has seemed delusively effortless.

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Abstract

This research project looks beyond linguistics, endeavouring instead to elucidate human meaning-making processes, and more specifically how people account for their experiences of language use. The focus is on the experiences of language users in a professional context in the field of engineering. There was a conscious decision to refrain from inquiring into the experiences of using any specific languages the aim being to reach to the plurilingual language potential of the participants in this project.

The theoretical framework here is phenomenological. The report consists of four articles and a summary section. The data for the research were collected in two stages from the employees of a medium-sized Finnish engineering company with international operations: first 12 engineers were interviewed in 2006 and three years later in 2009 seven engineers were selected for a second interview. A phenomenological method of analysis was used to examine the manifestations of experiences provided through interviews. This method comprises two phases: the specific, or individual phase, and the general phase producing knowledge shared by all the participants. The results of the first phase are presented as individual accounts of engineers’ experiences as language users at work. In the second phase there is a shift from individual knowledge to knowledge shared by all the participants. The outcome of this phase is a common meaning network that covers all the experiences shared by the participants. The accounts of the female participants added another dimension to this common meaning network that was shared by all three female participants, but that was not found in the male accounts. Thus there were two variants of a commonly experienced language use portrayal produced.

The core themes to be found in these commonly experienced language use portrayals in the professional context of engineering included: learner autonomy, the significance of social interaction skills and face-to-face communication, the concept of intercultural understanding, and the problematics of misrecognition of the female gender in engineering. The participants manifested powerful learner autonomy as language users. They accounted for the salience of social interaction skills in the daily working life encounters in engineering. The significance of face-to-face communication was emphasised in situations of conflict. In professional encounters the participants actively resorted to intuition and social positioning. The participants had developed a reflective mode of thinking for intercultural encounters, where they flexibly analysed cultural traits through cultural juxtapositions and sought to adapt to different cultural concepts with an open mind, striving to see things from the perspective of the other with reference to the human universal in people. The participants depicted a conscious resistance to stereotypical thinking patterns and resorted to humour as an alleviating element in situations of intercultural conflict.

Keywords: autonomy in learning, face-to-face communication, gender equality, intercultural understanding, language education, phenomenological research
Tiivistelmä

Tässä työssä ei tarkastella kieltä lingvistisenä ilmiönä vaan pyritään kartoittamaan kielenkäyttäjien ihmillistä kokemusmaailmaa. Tutkimuskohteena ovat tekniikan alan ammatissa toimivien insinöörien kielenkäyttökokemukset, joita ei halutu rajata mihinkään tietyn kieleen, vaan tavoitteena oli kuvata osallistujien kielenkäyttökokemuksia heidän koko plurilingvaalisen kielivarantonsa kautta.


Avainsanat: fenomenologinen tutkimus, kasvokkainviestintä, kielikasvatus, kulttuuriinvälinen ymmärtäminen, oppijan autonomia, sukupuolten tasa-arvo
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This thesis is based on the following original articles, which are referred to in the text by Roman numerals I-IV:

**Original publications**


Face-to-face communication and social positioning in the experience world of Finnish technical professionals. (accepted). In *Journal of Education and Vocational Research.* (Article III)

‘You do not just translate your thought into another language - you translate the whole issue into that culture.’ Intercultural understanding in the experience world of Finnish technical professionals. (accepted). In *Journal of Intercultural Communication.* (Article IV)
Much of what is cannot be brought under the rule of humanity. Only a little becomes known. What is known remains approximate; what is mastered remains unstable. What-is is never something man-made or even only a representation, as it can all too easily appear.

Martin Heidegger (1971, 53)

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1982/1603, 817)
INTRODUCTION

As the King in Shakespeare’s Hamlet laments, empty words without sustaining ideas behind them cannot get air beneath them, but fall to the ground. Martin Heidegger (1971), on the other hand, reminds us about the miniscule scope of human understanding. What we grasp of the reality surrounding us is further obscured by the medium needed when we seek to transfer this understanding. The natural language in philosophical thinking is easily delusive, as Kauppi points out (1957/2010, 27). In this research project I was not concerned to examine and dissect language or communication as such, but sought to look beyond linguistics, endeavouring to elucidate human meaning-making processes, and more specifically the way people account for their experiences of language use. The challenge here was that these meaning-making processes are tied to people’s subjective views of the world, which can never be fully conveyed to others, but are in principle open only to the experiencing people themselves (J. Lehtovaara 1996).

Thus this book no more than glimpses the professional lives of the participants in the research as they have experienced them and as they have agreed to reveal them in their interviews. The project did not take place in a narrative framework as such, even though the participants agreed to narrate on tape events that had taken place in their lives. Hence I cannot describe the outcomes here as any one person’s story, but as a description of the essences that constituted the experiences of the interviewees as language users in an engineering context as described to me and recorded by me.

The focus here is on the experiences of language users in a professional context in the field of engineering. I made a conscious decision to refrain from inquiring into the experiences of using any specific languages, seeking rather to reach to the plurilingual language potential of the participants as defined by the Common European framework for languages (CEFR 2001).

The lives of education and work have been drifting ever further and it has been argued that teachers need to possess more field-specific and up-to-date knowledge of working life today (Collin, Paloniemi, Virtanen & Eteläpelto 2008; Hyvärinen 2011). Hence as a teacher of English in engineering programmes it seemed imperative to me to actualise the aspiration to inquire into the reality of language use in the world of technology by interviewing engineers in a Finnish engineering company in order to gain an understanding of the language use of technical professionals.
Terminology in the field is perplexing, with some researchers preferring to move away from the traditional terms Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) towards terms such as Professional Discourse and Professional Communication (Gunnarsson 2011, 29), English for Occupational Purposes (Dudley-Evans & St John 2007), or Language and Communication for Professional Purposes (Huhta 2010), though all these are often seen as stemming from ESP. Dudley-Evans and St. John (2007) classify English for Academic Purposes and English for Occupational Purposes as the two sub-categories of ESP. Huhta labels three orientations: the academic, professional and vocational as stemming from ESP and differing both as to the discipline covered and the level of studies, with the two first-mentioned being used in higher education and the last one: vocational, referring to ‘craftsmanship and mastery in occupational contexts’ (2010, 17). This kind of categorizations, however, seem unnecessary and somewhat artificial in their pursuit to label and neatly store into separate boxes the plurilingual, shifting language repertoire and needs of autonomous language users of today.

The term Language and Communication for Professional Purposes (LCPP) is mostly used when referring to the field-specific language education that takes place in higher education institutions such as universities of applied sciences. Even though LCPP is not restricted to the professional subject area of each respective, specific field, the term itself seems to suggest that the focus of language education in LCPP is limited to the language of working life context. Hence though tempted to renounce all categorisation of language education as creating constrained boundaries, shying away from terminology, and mostly referring to professionally oriented language education only, I eventually chose to employ here the term Vocationally Oriented Language Learning (VOLL) as introduced in the Council of Europe Modern Languages Project (Trim 1997), even if in the first two articles (Valtaranta 2010; 2012) I was still using the term LCPP. I came to understand VOLL, however, as a wider, more encompassing term, where language education is not limited to the needs of the working life context alone, but it is seen as integrating the learners’ professional and social lives outside of the working context, including intercultural understanding (Vogt & Kantelinen 2012).

In seeking to define my knowledge base as a language teacher I draw upon Jaatinen (2007, 55), who states that professionally oriented language teachers have to define their educational philosophy, language pedagogic, linguistic and cultural knowledge, but also need to have an understanding of their students’ future professions to be able to include this in their teaching. The language teacher tries to find answers to questions such as: What is a good professional in this field
like? What kind of being and learning environment will support the learning of a language and a profession in the students? What contents do I teach, and how? (Jaatinen 2007, 55-56.)

The constitutive ideology of language education can be seen to lie in what Martin Buber (1923/1970) defined as a thesis of dialogical existence. In dialogical existence mutuality and reciprocity are reflected in an I-Thou relationship to the Other, who is acknowledged as a subject, not as an object of the world that can be examined. Dialogical existence is not seen as a method in pedagogy, but as an ethical stance (Värri 2004, 17). There human beings are not reified into one-dimensional objects and deprived of their human qualities, but encountered as complete persons in open dialogue, where the other is being heard (J. Lehtovaara, 2001).

The goal in professionally oriented language education should not be an uncritical replication of existing professional contexts, however; but the students should be educated to become autonomous, critical and creative members of a society. Although the focus of phenomenological research is on individual experiences, there are commonalities that can be discovered and described on a conceptual level (Varto 1992b). Thus though findings cannot be generalised, the thematics in the meaning-making processes of professional language use manifested in the results of this study can be utilised in professionally oriented language education as background information when socialising students towards their professional identities.

Initially the objective was to include in this book autobiographical elements, and thereby incorporate a hermeneutic strand into the research. In the end, however, I abandoned this idea. The individually experienced meaning-making processes that the participants disclosed in the project seemed to me so delicate and intimate that deliberately merging them with my own autobiographical notions would have disrupted the wholeness of the descriptions. At the same time I am aware that there is no such thing as objective research, and my conceptions and thoughts will in any case have filtered through into the research to some degree. In the first article (Valtaranta 2010) the autobiographical strand is still there. The topic of female gender felt so close to me as a woman that I saw these personal notes as a necessary dimension supplementary to the experiences of the female engineers in the article.

The participatory observation notes during my stay with the company were to be incorporated into the data to be analysed. I later came to realise that my observations might have distracted and potentially damaged a truthful description of the phenomenon examined. One specific incident substantiated this to me. During a sales meeting at the company I had noticed that a representative

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1 The use of the term ‘data’ with qualitative research has been challenged (McLeod, 2001; Van Manen, 1990) for the term ‘accounts,’ by reason of the sensitivity of the interaction between participant and researcher. Here I am using both terms, but am simultaneously aware of the fact that in quantitative research the term ‘data’ has a different definition.
of the company, and a participant in the research project got up and followed a foreign visitor, who had left the meeting room a little earlier. My interpretation of this incident was that the company representative wanted to ensure that an outsider did not wander off where he would have had access to the company premises, thereby trying to prevent potential industrial espionage. When in an interview I adumbrated this to the person in question, he looked somewhat astonished and blandly stated that he had just wanted to make sure that the visitor could find his way to the bathroom.

This episode illustrates the propensity of the researcher to see the world that opens up around her in a more dramatic and picturesque light than it actually is. It also once again emphasised to me the necessity to bracket all the information that I as a researcher might inadvertently bring to the description of the phenomenon examined. Hence this research is based on the data acquired through two sets of thematic interviews conducted with seven participants, as well as shorter interview clips acquired with the same people.

Phenomenological thinking and philosophy aroused my interest when I became familiar, first with the thoughts of Lauri Rauhala, and then with the doctoral dissertation of Maija Lehtovaara (1992). The phenomenological framework seemed to provide a methodological setting that would revere the human being and his/her individual experience world to the fullest. Thus a phenomenological method of analysis was used to examine the experiences of language users in a professional context. This method comprises two phases: the specific, or individual phase, and the general phase producing knowledge shared by all the participants. The results of the first phase are presented as individual accounts of engineers’ experiences as language users at work.

These accounts are referred to here individually experienced language use portrayals in a professional context. In the second phase there is a shift from individual knowledge to knowledge shared by all the participants. The outcome of this phase is a common meaning network that covers all the experiences shared by the participants. This network is called here a commonly experienced language use portrayal in a professional context. The accounts of the female participants here added another dimension to this common meaning network shared by all three female participants, but absent from the male accounts. Thus two variants of a commonly experienced language use portrayal are presented here.

This research report consists in an introduction section, where the research task, earlier research, the researcher’s position and the social implications of the research are discussed. Chapter two lays down the theoretical framework and the methodology used. A review of the setting for the empirical research process and the data collection is provided in chapter three. Chapter four discusses qualitative research interviews and phenomenological interviews in particular. Chapter five
elaborates on phenomenological analysis, and chapters six to eight provide a detailed description of the data analysis with concrete, illustrative examples from each stage. The analysis is composed of two phases: the first one covers the process of analysis of the individual networks of meaning (chapter seven) and the second the process of analysis of the common networks of meaning (chapter eight). Chapter nine presents the findings of this research project in the form of two variants of a commonly experienced language use portrayal in a professional context. The findings are elaborated on in the subsequent discussion chapter ten, where also overviews are provided of the articles published (see Appendices 1-4). Chapter 11 summarises the project and discusses the implications and limitations of the research with some recommendations for future work. There is also an overview of the ethical considerations involved in the research project, and an assessment of its validity and trustworthiness.

1.1 Autobiographical development leading to the research

In the year 2006 I had already been working for HAMK University of Applied Sciences as an English teacher in undergraduate engineering and business programs for nine years, and altogether over 30 years as an English teacher. Language education at a university of applied sciences is working life-oriented, as it is regulated by the national decree on polytechnic (here: university of applied sciences) education:

“The student needs to --- demonstrate that he/she has achieved --- such written and oral language skills in one or two foreign languages as is necessary for the practice of a profession or for professional development.” (Decree on polytechnic education 15 May 2003/352)

With time I had increasingly begun to ponder whether “the practice of a profession or professional development” was actually met by the language education included in my English courses in engineering. I had never been employed by a company in technology, but had only resorted to the professional contexts provided by textbooks and other materials as well as my students’ experiences when planning the syllabi for language courses with a professional context. Especially valuable in this process proved to be the experiences of part-time students, who are actively involved in the working life of engineering during their studies.

Working life today, as well as the duties at a work place, are in a continuous process of change, so that it is not possible for students to learn all the competencies required in a certain profession during their professional education. There have been accelerating changes not only in the working
life in technology but also in our society in general. At the same time increasing numbers of students have decided to drop out from university education.

These issues are in the forefront in engineering education, as the government is drawing new national guidelines for polytechnic education within the year 2012. Vocationally oriented language education should set out from an examination of the profession from the perspective of professional and personal development (Luopajärvi 1993, 241) instead of emphasising different terminologies or simulated situations. This acted as a stimulus for me to start looking for closer information and new solutions to attain to a more authentic working life perspective in my language courses.

I heard about the *Askel työpaikkajaksoihin* project grants available from the EU/The State Provincial Office of Southern Finland, and felt that this might provide the answers I had been looking for. The grants were targeted towards teachers at HAMK University of Applied Sciences. The objective in the project was to ‘increase the connections between teachers and working life and thus bring the teachers’ substance competence up to date’ (*Askel työpaikkajaksoihin*, project description 2006).

When I had been allowed access to the target company in the *Askel* project I contacted Professor Emeritus Viljo Kohonen at the University of Tampere to discuss and more closely define the project with him. Professor Kohonen was kind enough to invite me to join his language education seminar group as an outsider. The discussions during the seminars greatly advanced the development of my thinking, and increased my interest and determination to undertake a research project to develop my own work.

**Artificial divide between substance and language teachers**

Unfortunately there was an initial rejection – the project description was interpreted to mean that the grants were targeted towards ‘substance teachers’ only, and that as a language teacher I was not eligible. This kind of artificial segregation of teachers into substance-qualified and ‘the others’ was familiar to me, having been working as a language teacher in professionally orientated education for several years. Teachers were often divided into those who dealt with the ‘real thing’, i.e. professional subjects such as nursing, engineering or the like, and teachers who provided some kind of supplementary material to the students, e.g. language teachers. It was astonishing to see that these ideas were still alive today, when it ought to be clear that language education does not take place in a vacuum, completely detached from the rest of the professional education.

Eventually I was told, however, that it would be all right to apply for this grant after all – language teacher or not. In the end I was awarded the stipend, which meant an opportunity to work
and simultaneously conduct research for two and a half months with a company, provided that I could find one myself.

1.2 Earlier research - looking at language or the language user

Traditional geographical and national borders have been transcended and flattened by global business in the world today (Friedman 2005). It has been argued that this flattening has partly been caused by the increasing dominance and acceptance of English as the language of global business and technology (Nickerson 2010). There has likewise been an abundance of research with a focus on the English language used in a professional context around the world. The perspective in these projects, however, has been mostly linguistic; either looking at the characteristics of corporate rhetoric e.g. in the form of strategic discourse practices (Gunnarsson 2011), examining the global role of English as a key resource to companies (e.g. Charles 2007; Forey 2010; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010), studying different genres e.g. in written communication (Kankaanranta 2005) or the discourse of technology (Miller 1998; Darling 2005). Also the affective perspective in business encounters has been surveyed by examining e.g. the use of humour at corporate meetings in the setting of Finnish-Swedish mergers (Kangasharju & Nikko 2009). Kangasharju and Nikko noted that humour and laughter are jointly constructed intentional forms of interaction used for specific purposes, acting e.g. as a remedy in conflicting situations. The abovementioned versatile approaches to organisational communication also justify a diversity of methodologies, as Stubbe et al. (2003) have testified by contrasting several different research methods in an analysis of one set of data on workplace interaction.

The relationship between discourse, organization and national culture with banks and engineering companies in Germany, the UK and Sweden was explored by Gunnarsson (2011), who discovered that in these fields both distinctive national cultural patterns and organisational communication practices could be distinguished.

Charles (2007) looked at the use of business English, outlining the concept of BELF (Business English Lingua Franca) as the language of multinational organisations, where the aim is not to emulate the discourse of native speakers of English, but to ‘get the job done’. Global business English is thus seen simply as a tool to be used in specific contexts for certain purposes (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010), and in BELF a successful interaction is defined by appropriate use of language for the needs of the context. Forey (2010) discovered that the global outsourcing of the ITES (i.e. work supported by the use of technology, e.g. telecommunications and
the internet) work to overseas destinations and the pervasive impact of English as a lingua franca have induced social, political and economic changes in the Asian countries affected, which are not merely positive. In this new emerging industry little is known of the broader impact of the globalisation of English entails on societies.

There have been research projects where diverse methodologies have been employed to examine interaction in a professional context: e.g. Stubbe et al. (2003) employed versatile methodologies to analyse one piece of data: a nine-minute audio recording of communication at a workplace consisting of a conversation between a male manager and a female employee. The different approaches used to analyse this piece of data included conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, politeness theory, critical discourse analysis and discursive psychology. Even though there were similarities in the findings of these different methodological frameworks, it is apparent that each approach had its own point of focus. These differing foci also generated their own, complementary insights to the data. This research project has raised concerns in the academic arena (Johnson 2003), however, on whether a wider social context with a more holistic view to the interaction is neglected with approaches that focus on linguistic or paralinguistic features alone. Such concerns validate research projects such as the present one, looking for deeper meanings as experienced by people through a more holistic perspective to language use.

Engineering education has been widely examined in that typical genres and situations there have been scrutinised with a link to the respective professional field (e.g. Darling 2005; Dannels & Housley Gaffney 2009). Miller (1998) has characterised technical discourse in general as incorporating four distinct features: an emphasis on artifacts, an absence of emphasis on the personal, technology as autonomous and technology as ubiquitous. Darling (2005, 23) attested these features in her study of the oral presentation genre with American mechanical engineering students, and ultimately defined the discourse of technology as anti-discourse.

The Finnish language education policy and especially the needs of stakeholders as to LCPP (Language and Communication for Professional Purposes) have been profoundly analysed by Huhta (2010). The experiences of a language teacher and students in vocationally oriented language education through an autobiographical reflexive approach have been insightfully explored by Jaatinen (2007). Language studies at universities of applied sciences in Finland have been widely examined both from the viewpoint of language learners and from that of language teachers (e.g. Löfström et al. 2002; Kantelinen & Mertanen 2007; Simon & Vuorela 2008; Kantelinen & Airola 2008).
A real threat for European language education today seems to be posed by the growing significance of economic factors necessitating that university programs generate profit. An examination of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at UK universities revealed a commercialisation trend in language education, where initially these courses were often delivered by lecturers without any remit for research, or the courses were outsourced to commercial providers of language education (Fulcher 2009).

This present research project focused on the world of human experience. Already Brentano (1874/1995) was interested in examining reflections of experience, but with the rise of behaviourism the focus of research in psychology shifted from experiences to observable behaviour. There are only few studies in the research literature exploring the experiences of language users outside the school setting. Most papers on the experience world of language users have focused on the experiences of learners in an educational context (e.g. Giorgi & Giorgi 2003). The experiences and especially the needs in English language use by engineers were examined by Väänänen (1992), who singled out oral skills, technical terminology and telephoning as the most challenging areas in the use of English among mechanical engineers. In a working life setting Kubota (2011) examined Japanese employees’ experiences and motivation towards studying English.

1.3 Research task, professional implications and relevance of the research

In this project my objective was not to inquire into the communication used at the engineering workplace by the engineers who were the participants in the project, but to look at the subjective meaning-making processes that are hidden beneath the surface of communication. Professionally oriented language educators have been warned against focusing on superficial elements such as memorising special terminology and simulated situations in working life instead of socialising students towards professional identities (Dannels 2000). Learning processes not only concern the subject learned; they affect the students’ cognitive and metacognitive skills, motivation, beliefs and self-esteem as well. Professionally oriented language learning at its best is about transformative learning, where learners are involved in a continuous process of engendering new knowledge by exploring, questioning and verifying their perceptions (Ruohotie & Honka 2003) and engaging the students in an open dialogue (J. Lehtovaara 2001).

There have been calls for research that would better cater for the language needs of the stakeholders in industry (Huhta 2010), but this perspective prompts reverberations of neoliberal thinking, where the needs of an employee and member of a society are not in the forefront, but
those of the industry and the society. I was concerned to avoid this kind of angle. My interest lay in language and communication from a language user perspective and I wanted to encounter the interviewees as persons, not as individuals under a microscope. Thus my focus was on language users as defined in the Common European Framework for Languages (2001), where they are seen as active social agents with a will of their own. I felt that this perspective as well as an approach involving thematic interviews for data collection would also ensure that the interviewees’ voices would be better heard both individually and in common.

It seems in retrospect that in fact I did not choose phenomenology as a framework for this research, but it chose me. It felt quite natural to use this approach, where the researcher was not looking for answers to the question: ’How do people use foreign languages at work?’, but: ’What is the experience of using a foreign language like?’

Data collection for the research was conducted through thematic interviews with seven engineers working for a medium-sized Finnish engineering company with international operations. There were two interview rounds so that after the first interviews I limited the number of the interviewees from the original 12 to seven engineers, three female and four male engineers. The first interview data were transcribed and the follow-up interviews were arranged in 2009, three years after the first round. Themes that seemed unclear in the first interviews were elucidated and deepened in the follow-up interviews. In addition to the wider interviews there were several brief interview clips conducted during my stay with the company. The research thus assumed a concrete form leading eventually to the decision to pursue doctoral studies.

Engineering education has a long history in Finland, the year 2012 marking the 100th anniversary of engineering education in Finland. In September 1912 the first technical college was established to give engineering education in Tampere. For many decades it was the only institution of its kind in the country; the next technical colleges were established in Helsinki and Turku only in 1943 (Mäki 2012).

During the last few years engineering education has come to a crossroads in that there is a need to reduce the intake in this field at universities of applied sciences on a national level. On the other hand the proportion of engineering students who interrupt their studies has grown alarmingly; the national dropout rate is high and has been increasing (Salminen & Ylä-Anttila 2010). Measures have lately been taken at a national level to limit the volume of engineering education (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012) and by individual universities of applied sciences to entice students to continue with engineering education until graduation.
While industrial society assigned education the significant objective of preparing people for predefined jobs, today people need to define the content and rules of their work on their own or in collaboration with others without strict guidelines. For education to meet these demands of working life, creative, divergent, critical thinking skills as well as social interaction skills need to be nurtured in students at universities of applied sciences (Oivallus 2011).

In order to meet the requirements of a new society the engineering education in Finland is to be updated along with all polytechnic education in the Polytechnic Reform 2011-2014, with a goal not only to limit intakes of engineering students and to lower dropout rates, but also to narrow down the divide between working life and education.

The goal of the government (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012) is to raise the level of expertise in Finland so that by the year 2020 the nation will be the most skillful and knowledgeable in the world. Furthermore, the Finnish government has declared a national objective for Finland to be located among the top OECD countries when it comes to basic comparisons of people’s knowledge and skills, the proportion of dropout students, and the proportions of young people and adults with a university-level education (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012).

In working life today expertise alone is not enough; employees need a capacity to understand themselves and one another, or possess emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills (Hughes 2005). It is estimated that working methods will become more international, varied, autonomous, more creative, bolder in risk-taking and more experimental within the next few years (Oivallus 2011).

In spite of these high demands on the quality of expertise both at a national and an individual level, the Finnish language teacher education system does not provide any specialised training for language teachers in vocational education in second degree or higher education institutions. According to a recent Finnish language policy review, vocationally oriented language teacher education will be examined in the future, but when this will take place and by whom remains open (Pöyhönen & Luukka 2007, 474).

With all the aforementioned aspects in mind it seemed opportune to examine the working life experiences of engineers as users of languages to obtain a picture of the components that made up these experiences. This in turn could provide a deeper understanding of what elements from the professional context could be drawn upon when planning for new curricula in language education. The new systems are seen as shifting away from a fragmented curriculum towards a more problem- and phenomenon-based approach and collaborative teaching methods (Oivallus 2011).
It is noteworthy that there is scant previous research in the field adopting the perspective of language users and focusing on their subjective experiences instead of the communication they produce. Although the results of qualitative research cannot be generalized, they can still be examined in order to recognise certain modes of experiencing as well as recurring themes when using foreign languages in a professional context. Thus this information can be observed and utilised when developing the language education of engineering students at universities of applied sciences in socialising them towards their professional identities.
2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical framework of the research

In its essence phenomenological research is about an explication of the real, imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt (van Manen 1990, 9). For Heidegger (1927/1962) being in the world was both the starting point and the most significant issue to be examined in the phenomenological approach. Thus it is the objective in phenomenologically characterised research to inquire into the nature of phenomena, not as such, but as human experiences, the primary mission of research being to uncover the internal meaning structures of our lived experiences.

In the phenomenological approach the researcher strives towards an objective reality by bracketing the Husserlian natural attitude, the attitude that exists without a person reflecting on it. Husserl’s (1900/1970, 252) leitmotiv was “to the things themselves” (Zu den Sachen selbst), or an aspiration to describe the phenomenon in as pure a state as possible. Objectivity is hence not an issue in phenomenological research in the conventional sense of the concept; in a phenomenological framework it implies fidelity to the phenomenon that is being examined (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 27).

This aspiration to a truthful description of the objective reality around us could be likened to painting a picture of a landscape according to the realistic movement in visual arts. You need to take in all the significant features and colours in the landscape that lies in front of you, and try to be as true to life as possible. All the flora and fauna that can be detected have to be included, some in a more central role in the painting, some as minor details. No matter how meticulously you try to copy the landscape in front of you, the resulting painting will probably bear small marks of the artist’s hand, at least to the trained eye. If you attempted to paint the same painting again tomorrow it would not be possible, because the landscape would have changed, at least in small details. In similar fashion, no matter how carefully you strive towards an objective description, it is not possible to bracket away all the details, and if a phenomenological research project is repeated with the same participants the findings will inevitably be different.

It is difficult to find a way to reach to the experience world of the interviewees. The view into the inner life of an individual is never transparent, but it is blurred by cultural elements such as gender, race, age, social status or the like (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 12). Hence the persons who manifest their experiences to the researcher do not give accounts of the original experiences, but
their own interpretations of these experiences at this specific point in time. The manifestations of the experiences were probably different yesterday, and they will be different again tomorrow.

It is the challenge of phenomenological research to acquire and describe the phenomenon as purely as possible as it is, to understand the meanings and essences as they exist in connection with this phenomenon through intuition and self-reflection (Moustakas 1994). Heidegger was opposed to the idea of a natural body onto which a mind and soul were added, considering this kind of concept of the human being as a creature ‘built in layers’ (Heidegger 1993, 233). The natural attitude can also be contested as not really being universal on the grounds that we are always born into a specific culture and formed by it (Dreyfus 1991). Hence all our meanings evolve through the experience of being born human. The world we are immersed in cannot be completely bracketed, but it is through authentic reflection that we can become aware of many of our presuppositions.

In order to reach to the core of phenomena the phenomenological researcher needs to close his/her mind to the natural attitude: any preconceptions and previous knowledge of the phenomenon have to be bracketed away so that they do not hinder access to the essence of this phenomenon. This notion is, however, ambivalent, in that with any research on human beings it is a human being who designs and conducts the research, and the ontological concepts the human being uses in making meaning of the world need to be written open through a philosophical analysis by a human being (M. Lehtovaara 1992, 43).

An awareness of this acts for the researcher as a starting-point to the bracketing process, which has been aptly characterised as the silence of beginning in phenomenology (Spiegelberg 1971, 672). Even if it is important to bracket away all prior knowledge, it is just as essential, if not more so, that the researcher possess a loving and committed approach towards the phenomenon (Perttula 2006). The challenge in the phenomenological approach is to explicate all the potential meanings in a phenomenon. This stance has been depicted as ‘an unusually obstinate attempt to look at the phenomena and to remain faithful to them before even thinking about them.’(Spiegelberg 1971, 700).

A variety of methodological orientations are encompassed in the theory of phenomenology depending on how they commit to the findings: whether they aim at descriptions or at interpretations of experiences. Husserl represented descriptive phenomenology at its purest, whereas Heidegger can be seen as a spokesperson for existential phenomenology (M. Lehtovaara 1992, 10). In the descriptive approach the researcher aims to provide a description of the phenomenon, not his or her own interpretation of it. The approach in this present research, striving towards a description of the phenomenon of experienced professional language use, is existential
phenomenology (e.g. Rauhala 1981, 69). This can be seen as located somewhere between descriptive and interpretative, or hermeneutic phenomenology, being closer to descriptive phenomenology; though as noted earlier there can be no such thing as pure description: all description is bound to be to some degree interpretative. In the first two articles (I-II) the theoretical framework supporting the research project is still referred to as being hermeneutic-phenomenological, but since I later rejected the autographic stance the methodological decision in this project was defined as phenomenological.

2.2 Phenomenological method

I understand the phenomenological method as a profound process involving thoughtful, disciplined movements performed by the researcher around his or her data. It is tempting to liken this process to the choreographic ritual of a Japanese tea ceremony. There all the subdued, refined gestures have a significance and a deeper meaning in the process. During the steps in the ceremony the outside world is blocked away from the mind of the host. At the same time all the senses are employed so that when the host slowly turns the teapot he or she can feel its texture and warmth as well as the delicate aroma of the tea. In a very similar manner the phenomenological researcher blocks away the world and treats all the qualities in the data with equal attention and respect, turning them around in his or her hands through intuiting and free imaginative variation in order to reach to the essences of the phenomenon.

The phenomenological method has been defined as a thread that binds together the different modifications of phenomenological thinking (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Spiegelberg 1971). Each research project should actually be compelled to create its own methods which the researcher revises and modifies as the work progresses (Varto 1992b, 99). This in turn contributes to the researcher orientating him/herself in an unknown territory without any given tools or concepts and propels him/her to trust his/her own intuition and the answers that it transfers to him/her about the world (Varto 1994).

The method can also be broken down into steps that the researcher takes in a precise order. Spiegelberg (1971, 659) incorporates interpretation as an essential component into his method in hermeneutic fashion. He sees the method as comprising seven stages: 1. investigating specific phenomena, 2. examining general essences, 3. apprehending essential relationships among these essences, 4. watching modes of appearing, 5. watching the constitution of phenomena in
consciousness, 6. suspending one’s belief in the existence of the phenomena, and 7. interpreting the meaning of the phenomena (Spiegelberg 1971, 659).

There are four features which can be defined as the most characteristic and which are shared by different variants of the phenomenological method: description, reduction, a search for essences and intentionality (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Description is understood as an attempt to avoid interpretative analysis of the data in phenomenological research. It is never possible to reach to the original experiences as they were at the time of experiencing. In the phase of data acquisition the researcher has to accept this and strive to register the experiences as closely according to the description that is provided by the person whose life situation these experiences arise from.

Phenomenological reduction literally implies being led to a person’s experience of the way things exist. It can be seen as a phenomenological method comprising bracketing, intuiting and free imaginative variation (Perttula 2006, 145). In free imaginative variation the frames of reference and the perspectives are varied in order to arrive at structural themes in the data. A salient element in phenomenological reduction is the conscious and intuitive striving to suspend the state of amazement that is awakened in the researcher in order to allow an understanding of the researched reality to take place. Husserl calls this suspension of judgment epochê. The concept of ‘suspension’ is apt in that it abates the researcher’s eagerness to hasten the formulation of the outcomes of the research. It entails the researcher only describing what he or she perceives through intensive, sensitive, and repeated rounds of scrutiny. Thus in phenomenologically characterised research the data, i.e. the transcribed interviews here, have to be read through numerous times before the actual writing process can commence, so as to restrain from ‘ rushing straight into the consciousness of these people, inside their heads’ (Perttula 2006, 137).

Heidegger refers to the moment of unveiling the truth as an incident, as alétheia [Gr. αληθεία] or ‘unhiddenness’, and adds another essence of truth as ‘correctness of vision’ (Heidegger 1931-32/1998). In phenomenological research I understand this to mean that when confronting a strange concept the researcher must pause so that the truth can be produced through an unveiling process, where through intuiting and free imaginative variation an understanding of the new concept is gained. I feel that with this research project I experienced a more encompassing process of slow awakening into phenomenological philosophy only after I had written down the fumbling ideas expressed in my draft thesis. The awakening into phenomenological thinking took place gradually and continued through the interviews and their analysis as an on-going process.
The search for essences is the third central concept in the phenomenological method. The researcher endeavours to find in the phenomenon the features that are the most significant in it. For example in the landscape painting metaphor one could argue that painting the grass alone and leaving out the trees, the sky and the flowers would offer a distorted view of the landscape and ignore things that make the landscape what it is. Thus all the details that make the painting a landscape of this particular location have to be included. All the features without which the phenomenon would not be what it is need to be accounted for, making the implicit in it visible.

The fourth component in the phenomenological method is intentionality, without which man would not be a mindful being. Franz Brentano (1874, 88-89) defined intentionality as a specific feature of the mental in man:

> Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not do so in the same way. In presentation, something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.

> This intentional inexistence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves.

In intentional acts man experiences the world around him as something. There are also unintentional experiences, which do not refer to anything, but which are valuable as such. These include such experiences as happiness or holiness and they will easily perish if one attempts to turn them into intentional. (Rauhala 1997.)

A number of methods have been employed for phenomenological research, e.g. the Van Kaam method, which has been criticised as being quantitative in nature and best applied to large sample sizes (Anderson 1998). The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method was compiled by Clark Moustakas (1994) from the works of three authors. It resembles Giorgi’s method, but emphasises the subjective role of the researcher in the process of analysis prior to data collection as well as in the analysis. Since I did not possess any experiences of using foreign languages in engineering I decided not to turn to this method, but employed the phenomenological method developed by Amedeo Giorgi (1985) and further modified by Juha Perttula (2000; 2006). 

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<th>Action</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<td>Essence of the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td>Creating individual meaning networks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phenomenological reduction: bracketing</td>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>Relived experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stalling the moment of <em>alētheia</em> or awakening</td>
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<td>Loving &amp; enforcing approach towards experienced reality</td>
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<td><em>Epochē</em> or bracketing</td>
<td>Conducting the interviews</td>
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<td>Choosing the interviewees</td>
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<td>Contacting company X</td>
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**Figure 1. Phenomenological research process as it was actualised in this research.**

Figure 1 seeks to illustrate the airy, reflective, diffuse process that took place during this phenomenological research project. For the first draft of this figure I sketched a precise layer of rectangles, but soon came to realise that a symmetrical, immaculate depiction would not authentically portray the process, where many of the stages were overlapping and where the course of time was significant for the phenomenological line of thought to mature. This illustration is true in this particular case, but each phenomenological research process is by definition unique, and it cannot thus be seen as a general portrayal of the phenomenological method.

An active involvement with the project through all its stages created a connection between the researcher and the phenomenon, facilitating the conscious aspiration towards a suspension of the
process of understanding during all stages. I could acutely sense this when listening to the interviews. The listening process had to be conducted in small portions and several times again so that all the information could be preliminarily mentally assimilated before commencing with the task of transcription. Similarly, in the analysis phase I felt that the progression of the process of analysis should not be precipitated, the moments of meaning-making had to be allowed to mature with time and repeated reading.

2.3 Ontological concepts

Ontology enquires into the nature of the world and the fundamental qualities of the human being in the world, whereas methodology focuses on the best ways of gaining information about the world for a particular research project (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 91). The researcher has to define the ontological concepts as they refer to the nature of existence and frame his or her research. In this project the emphasis is on human experience. Thus the two ontological concepts that are central here and have to be explicated with this research are the concept of experience and that of the human being.

The knowledge that is produced through phenomenologically characterized research is never objective or global but is human knowledge of the researcher tied to a specific time and place (Varto 1992a, 24).

2.3.1 Holistic concept of man

The holistic concept of man as defined by Lauri Rauhala (2005), and returning to the thoughts of Husserl and Heidegger, provides the ontological starting point for this research project. Rauhala’s holistic ontology of man (1983; 2005) includes three dimensions: the body, the mind and the situation.

The corporeal or organic dimension of man has been largely neglected in Western science, where bodyness has mostly been the focus only in connection with medical disorders, while the Cartesian body-mind dichotomy has traditionally been strong. In phenomenological research corporeality with all the sensations and feelings channeled to the human being through physical signals are seen as significant in conveying content that enhances understanding.

Consciousness enhances the understanding of phenomena both inside and outside of man, reflecting the different qualities of experiences, including knowledge, feeling, belief and intuition.
Situationality contains elements of physicality as far as the human individual situation stands in relation to them: it comprises, e.g., the culture and nature around us, other people, buildings, values and norms. Situationality reflects the different dimensions of man through the varying ways in which corporeality and consciousness are related to it. (Rauhala 2005.) Understanding the human being as a whole, as a holistic concept implies that his existence is seen as representing the three modes of existence intertwined together: corporeality, consciousness and situationality. Thus all three dimensions exist in a human being as an entity, not one of them can replace another; the human being needs all three modes of existence to operate. (M. Lehtovaara 1992, 113.)

What needs to be borne in mind here is that a human being cannot through objective measurements be classified as composed of some static characteristics. A human being is an open system that is engaged in a constant dialogue with his or her environment through meaning relations, and thus also in a constant state of flux (J. Lehtovaara 1996, 68).

### 2.3.2 Concept of human experience

Already Dilthey concluded that all experiences become transformed with time: ‘the same image can no more return than the same leaf can grow back on a tree the following spring’ (Dilthey 1985, 102). Dilthey also saw intentionality and mediation as central concepts underlying experience. According to Habermas (1971) any cognitively significant experience creates meaning labeling the experience as poetic, the term *poíësis* standing here for the creation of meaning, allowing the mind to objectify itself in this kind of productive process.

When denoting experience as such, as a purely theoretical idea, the term ‘*noema*’ is used to signify the sense of a phenomenon or object to a person, i.e., the more elementary phase when a meaning has entered a person’s consciousness. The intentional act, where consciousness is directed towards something, is called ‘*noësis*’ *Noësis* becomes mindful through mindful representations, *noemas*, which are also called acts of sensing, feeling, knowing etc. (Rauhala 2005, 29). In this present project the focus is on the *noemas* connected with the phenomenon of foreign language use in the professional context of engineering and experienced by the engineers interviewed.

Phenomenological thinking looks for the meanings of a phenomenon with the purpose of understanding human experience. Intentionality lies at the core of human experience, where consciousness is constantly activated. It does not function as a storage, but is always directed towards an object. Through conscious acts such as desiring, imagining, judging or perceiving,
consciousness chooses an object, and when experienced the object appears to the person as something.

All the qualities of understanding, both constructed qualities in the form of knowledge and beliefs, and topic-embedded qualities in the form of feelings, sensations and intuition, are given equal weight when analysing the essences of a phenomenon through the experiences of the interviewees. The only exceptions are acts such as hallucinations, where there is intentionality but no existing object. (Rauhala 1995, 49.) Experiences are not static in nature but in a constant state of change when they are in relation with each other.

2.4 Experiencing as a hermeneutic cycle

As a hermeneutic philosopher Dewey (1980) referred to experiencing through interpretive oscillation, the hermeneutic cycle, and likened an experience to the act of breathing as a continuous series of inhalations and exhalations. In his simile the silent moments in between inhalations were composed of reflection and preparation for the next act of inhalation, based on the information received from the earlier experience. Dilthey (1988) introduced the concept Erlebnis (lived\footnote{Here a "lived experience" stands for the authentic experience that a person has lived through. Elsewhere in this research the term "lived experience" is used to refer to an experience in connection with the analysis of the interview data, denoting an experience that has already been altered with time and reflection. The term used here for an authentic, original experience is "living experience" (see also Giorgi 1985; Perttula 2006).}, actual experience), which referred to experience as isolated and categorical, something a person possesses, whereas the other concept, Erfahrung (conceptualised or inner experience), indicated an ongoing, interactive, cumulative experience, and something a person will undergo. A person seeks to objectify his/her experiences to reach an understanding of them.

"The truth of experience always implies an orientation toward new experience. ...The dialectic of experience has its proper fulfilment not in definitive knowledge but in the openness to experience that is made possible by experience itself.” (Gadamer 1989, 350.) Figure 2 illustrates the hermeneutic cycle of experiencing where each new experience leads to a renewed, conceptualised experience and paves the way for new experiences.
Figure 2. The hermeneutic cycle of experiencing.

One vital notion is that all the recollections of experiences – the data that the researcher has collected – are actually only transformations of the original experiences (van Manen, 1990, 54). According to Heidegger only what we experience in the NOW-moment is real to us, what took place in the past is not real to us any longer (Heidegger 1927/2000). In phenomenological research the researcher aspires to reach as closely as possible to the original experience, even if living experiences do not remain in the state they were in when the actual experience took place. They are always transformed in the act of description or memorisation and turn into re-lived or described experiences in the process of an interview and its analysis.

Merleau-Ponty (1956, 62) describes perception, or the original awareness, and the human being as the experiencing subject as follows:

The world is not an object the law of whose constitution I possess. It is the natural milieu and the field of all my thoughts and of all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not “dwell” only in the “interior man” for there is no interior man. Man is before himself in the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself.

When I turn upon myself from the dogmatism of common sense or the dogmatism of science, I find, not the dwelling place of intrinsic truth, but a subject committed to the world.

The concept of experiencing is reflected as questioning the possibility of objective historical research (e.g. Droysen 1893), because the distance created by temporality, locality or conceptuality invariably defines research on history. Kuhn (2000, 110) sees this as the paradox in what is taken to be scientific knowledge today but which may in reality be the belief of the winners in the race of science. Derrida (2005) has employed the concept of ‘trace’ as a central notion in human sciences,
referring to the fact that we have only traces, and traces of traces to examine; the original cannot be authentically reached.

Hence a human being is the unique product of history and culture that offers a unique starting-point for studying both. The structure of experience is a relationship that connects the subject and the object into one entity where both the experiencing subject and the object experienced have to be observed. A life situation is the reality a person stands in relation to. It comprises several elements, and a person can only have one complete life situation at a time. There are two dimensions to experiences: the life situation becomes meaningful in the life-situational dimension of the experience, and conscious action implies forming the conscious dimension of the experience. Thus experience can be understood as an understanding relationship between a conscious person and his/her life situation. (Rauhala 1998.)
3 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PROCESS

3.1 Setting for the empirical research process

The target company was chosen for this research project based on its innovativeness: the company in question had just received an award for its technical innovations. This was a medium-sized, rapidly expanding Finnish enterprise in automation engineering with wide international contacts. Communication with the company was effective and effortless. It was also encouraging that the decision to allow me entry into the company was taken promptly.

I was invited to attend an orientation day that the company organised for its new recruits. When there was an in-company meeting for the whole personnel I was given a chance to introduce myself and my purpose in being there to the employees. My entry was thus smooth and effortless; I felt really welcome in the organisation. An additional opportunity to present myself to the employees was given to me when I had a chance to write a brief article for the company newsletter about myself and the purpose of my stay. With hindsight it might have been better had I started with a lower profile. Now my role as a language teacher was unduly emphasized, as was the fact that I had the blessing of the management to justify my being there. This may have been reflected in initial contacts with the employees, as I noticed in some of the first comments during some interviews.

During my stay with the company I was given some proofreading tasks and I started planning for an English language training day that was to be arranged towards the end of my stay with the company, but for the most part I could focus completely on carrying out my research project. I was allowed access to some meetings and could even attend a commissioning trip to the U.K. Thus my two and a half months with the company were spent making participatory observations and setting up, conducting and transcribing interviews, and in the end I organised an English language training day for the staff.

For the interviews it was possible to reserve a small meeting room provided there was one available. Being able to conduct the interviews in a closed, peaceful environment made for a relaxed atmosphere for the interview situations even if the interviewees were otherwise fairly busy during their working days.
3.2 Ethical considerations in connection with the target company

The concept ‘gatekeeper’ was introduced into ethnographic research implying that the researcher as an outsider is allowed access to the organisation where the data collection is to take place and where an organisation member with an insider status acting as a gatekeeper introduces him or her to the other members of the organisation (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995).

In this case I contacted the management of the company and received a permission to conduct interviews and observations on the company premises. The management placed no restrictions on my research project or my stay with the company. It is recommended (Creswell 2011) that the organisation be approached openly with all the relevant information available so that the researcher is prepared to answer all potential questions put forward by the gatekeeper. Here the representatives of the organisation were told that this project was to be conducted for a doctoral thesis and that I would let the interviewees read through all material prior to the publication of the thesis, so that they would be given a chance to amend anything that concerned them. This information was also accepted by the company representatives.

Reciprocity of gain is an important incentive that needs to be clarified to the organisation (Creswell 2011). In this project the gain for the company was my contribution to them as an English language teacher and expert in the English language during my two-and-a-half-month stay. I also agreed to arrange a one-day training session for the staff on issues in the English language that I had seen as challenging for the employees during my observations.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Selection of participants

The objective in phenomenological research is not to provide generalisable information, but an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon examined based on individual experiences. Thus the selection of participants is not carried out in the form of sampling according to statistical requirements and with an interest in the distribution of the given phenomenon in a population (Polkinghorne 2005). The selection criteria have to involve choosing interviewees based on their contribution to the phenomenon examined through their own experiences and their willingness to participate in the undertaking.
The number of participants in phenomenological research projects may range from only one person to hundreds. The focus of interest is often more limited and hence the number of interviewees may be higher in phenomenological than in purely hermeneutical research. The higher the number of interviewees the higher the variation, and thus the better the possibility to see the essence of the phenomenon (Giorgi 1985). A higher number of participants will also provide different perspectives on the experience examined. It is by contrasting these perspectives that the essence of the phenomenon, the components that appear in all accounts, can be separated. Polkinghorne (2005, 140) notes that the method of triangulation on the experience parallels the use of several participants in that here the core of the experience is approached through different accounts. It has been recommended that from 5–25 persons who have encountered the phenomenon to be examined be chosen as interviewees (Polkinghorne 1989). Dukes (1984) advises examining three to ten persons, and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 113) around 15+-10 people.

In this project I did not take a conscious decision to choose a certain number of interviewees, but wished to let the situation develop during my stay with the company where the interviews were to be conducted. Initially 12 persons working for the company were interviewed. Out of these twelve I chose seven and interviewed them again two years later. The selection of the interviewees as well as their number was based on my intuition and the quality of information acquired from them. In qualitative research the researcher may start by generating an extensive list of potential interviewees by asking the people on the list for new names to be listed in a ‘snowballing strategy’ to generate a pool of interviewees (Polkinghorne 2005, 141). I partly utilised this kind of strategy in my project to produce the initial list of 12 interviewees. The company gave me a free hand to go and ask the employees for permission to interview them, and I was also provided with some advice as to potential candidates based on how much they were using languages in their work. Some of these people also ended up in my final cohort.

I have pondered both at the time and since whether this enabled the gatekeeper, the organisation, in some ways to direct the research and in so doing also to affect the outcome of the project. My conclusion was, however, contrary to this: the organisation in no way sought to restrict my actions and I could independently choose not to include a person recommended to me as a participant. There were also some who were suggested to me but who were not interviewed because of schedule problems, or who only attended the first round of interviews, but were left out of the final research project. These were my choices based on the quality of the information acquired through the interviews or premised on the interaction during the interviews.
The interaction was sometimes strained and it felt as if the interviewee was not participating wholeheartedly in the discussion; was holding something back. It sometimes appeared that the interviewee could not get beyond my role of a language teacher and kept addressing his or her comments to me in that role. He or she associated me with my social identity as a teacher, and was using a membershipping strategy (Riley 2007, 113) selecting as my identity the situationally most salient dimension for the interaction. I tried to avoid being seen as a teacher in that in the interviews I deliberately avoided questions which would have included terms with connotations of school/language/education.

Time was not an issue in the project; there was ample time both to look for the interviewees during participatory observation but also to conduct the interviews during my stay with the company. Hence it was useful to leave some interviewees out of the research and to focus on those who were willing to share their experiences. Among the seven participants in the final research it was possible to conduct several brief interviews during working days and observation with two of them, Petri and Sampo. Although these short interviews were often sporadic, cut off by a phone call or an urgent task, they also provided important information on the spot. They were also conducted quite freely, sometimes rising out of a certain situation that had just taken place. In chapter 4.2.3. I have included the interview questions from the brief interviews with Petri.

3.3.2 Participants

The participants in the research project were all engineers, either with a B.Eng./B.Sc. (Eng.) degree from a university of applied sciences or an M.Eng./M.Sc.(Eng.) degree from a university of technology. There were seven interviewees altogether: four male and three female engineers. One of these had been in working life for over twenty years, and all possessed a work history of several years, so there were no novices among them.

The positions the interviewees held in the organisation covered a wide field of an engineer’s job description: there were people with positions in project management, service and maintenance, engineering design, human resource management and sales support. All the interviewees were working full-time for the company and had all been employed by the company for from a few years to over ten years. In this book I refer to the participants by first name aliases. I refer to myself by my first name as well, instead of ‘researcher’ or ‘interviewer’ in order to be on a more equal basis with the participants – not just during the interviews, but also on paper in this report.
4 INTERVIEWS

4.1 Thirteen aspects of qualitative research interviews

In phenomenologically characterised research the context of data acquisition should be reassuring and permissive to the participants so that they can feel free to express themselves. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 28) list 12 aspects that further characterise a phenomenological interview. In the following I elaborate on these aspects based on my experiences with the present series of interviews. There is also an additional, thirteenth aspect that I have included at the end of the list.

1. Life world

As a phenomenological concept 'lifeworld' is complex and it has been denoted several meanings. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 29) ascribe the phenomenological framework as research that has to apply to the life world of the interviewees as they live it through. Also here the human lifeworld is attributed to the lived world as experienced by people in their everyday situations. In this case the life world here was that of seven technical professionals, engineers, as users of languages in the working life settings they recounted for in the interviews.

2. Meaning

Although the interview atmosphere should be made as empathetic as possible, what is involved is not an everyday conversation, but should focus on registering meanings as manifested by the interviewee orally, through gestures, tone of voice or the like. The interviewer needs to be knowledgeable on the topic to hand and should be able to guide the interview towards meaning-making, not towards fact-finding replies from the subject (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 30).

It is somewhat difficult to remain focused in an interview when you have to create a pleasant atmosphere, control the progress of the situation, act as the interviewer, master the technical recording equipment, and primarily react simultaneously and flexibly to responses encountered. For this research I registered a few moments of success in this multitasking assignment. One of them took place when interviewing Jari – he talked about his school days, often in a fairly laconic manner, as it were leaving the thought in mid-air as in the following:

Jari:   --- Somehow I sensed that I got that grade just because I had done well in the exams. But I felt that I did not really know English. So it was all sort of school-like.
Niina: What was it like when it was school-like?
Jari: Well, the goal was to do well in those exams.

I can still remember the situation; there were many issues that I wished to cover in this second interview of Jari, and it was tempting to leave the ‘school-like’ adjective without a definition and to move on to the next topic. Luckily I managed to inquire after a closer description on this and a longer line of thought ensued.

3. Qualitative

Quantifiable information is not the goal of qualitative interviews; an inquiry is verified by precision in description and austerity in meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 30). All the stages of the research need to be written open in the research report, starting from presuppositions at the outset. Especially researchers who draw on hermeneutic phenomenology suggest that the researcher account for his/her experiences on the phenomenon examined (van Manen 1990). Creswell (2007) states that a researcher may start by elucidating his/her own experiences of the phenomenon studied and then bracketing this information before setting out to describe the experience world of the interviewee.

Since I have not acted as a language user in the role of a technical expert in a professional context, I cannot relate to this experience world from an autobiographical perspective. However, when looking at the common network of meanings that reflects the essence of this experience for the interviewees I have a strong sense of familiarity with many of them. I have encountered experiences like these either as a foreign language user at work or in my free time. In the course of the research these meanings have also evolved in my mind, so that at the moment I look at them with different eyes after having reflected on them anew.

4. Descriptive

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 30) note that the interviewer seeks to entice the interviewee towards submitting a detailed description of his/her experience. Rauhala (1998) emphasises the significance of topic-embedded forms of understanding (feeling, intuition) as opposed to constructive forms (belief, knowledge) in phenomenological research. Hence in phenomenological interviews the goal is not to encourage the interviewee to construct an understanding of his/her experiences through reflection and analysis, but to describe them to the interviewer as closely as possible, using all the senses in the process. It is better to inquire using the question words “how” and “what” rather than “why”, which would direct the interviewee towards an analysis of the experience instead of a
description. I feel that this point is closely related to point five below, and I make my comments there.

5. Specificity
In qualitative interviews the objective is to elicit explicit descriptions of events in order to arrive at meanings on a concrete level instead of manifesting general opinions (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 30). In this present case there were several instances where the interviewees would elaborate on their own opinions or reflections on a certain issue, but as the interviewer I felt that this had to be allowed. Had I rigorously steered the subject towards phenomenologically orthodox, unopinionated data, the atmosphere in the interview situations might have suffered, and hence the quality of the data might have been unsatisfactory. Now I registered the elements as meaning-containing units in the data, but if they contributed no new information to the descriptions of experiences they could be left aside.

6. Deliberate naïveté
The interviewer needs to be sensitive and curious about what the interviewee says, and at the same time critical of his/her own prior suppositions to ensure that the descriptions acquired be as free of the interviewer’s earlier knowledge as possible (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 31).

In my project this approach was realised in that I did not offer my own opinions to the interviewees, or only did so if they asked for them. This presented a slight challenge in the situation, as I sometimes felt that to maintain a relaxed atmosphere I should have reacted more emphatically to what was narrated to me. It is also natural to expect affirmative comments from the other party in an informal conversation strategy. The bracketing of previous knowledge was conducted successfully, and I cannot believe that it infiltrated into the descriptions elicited.

7. Focus
In a thematic in-depth interview the interviewer offers the direction, the theme, that he/she needs to pursue, but thereafter the interviewee can dictate where the discussion proceeds around this topic (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 31).

In this type of interview technique it is necessary to follow up any leads given by the interviewee. It is important to remain alert so that you can not only detect what is being stated, but also register what is said between the lines and to react to this. Accomplishing this and simultaneously checking all the potential sidelines and diversions on the way is quite arduous, and after each interview I felt physically and mentally exhausted. It was a good decision to conduct two
rounds of interviews with the same persons. In this way I could ascertain that all the important issues the interviewees brought up were also taken into discussion – if not during the first round, then after having read through the transcripts and reverting to them during the second round.

8. Ambiguity
If something that the interviewee states is contradictory to his/her earlier comments this need not be due to a failure in communication; it may be a sign of the interviewee’s contradictory life situation (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 31).

Whatever the reason for an inconsistency it needs to be written open and clarified as far as possible. In the interviews conducted for this project there was a situation where the interviewee had said something quite interesting in an earlier interview, but the statement had eluded my attention at the time. When I took this issue up during the follow-up interview three years later, the interviewee could not remember what he had meant with this specific statement even when I tried to refresh his mind by reading through the transcript in my notes. The reason for the oblivion was never discovered, so that the issue had to be dealt with as it was.

9. Change
In an in-depth interview that does not focus on filling in a set of ready formulated questions but is more free-flowing by nature the subjects may discover new dimensions of themselves (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 32). There were instances where the interviewees actually stated this in the course of the interview; they suddenly realised something they had not thought of before. There was such an incident in Arja’s interview:

Arja: ... now I got this eureka-moment again – that in this sense it [the morning meeting] is an excellent platform...Yes, that’s it. It gives you the confirmation that it is okay to feel like this, and that it is not your fault.

10. Sensitivity
A difference in the sensitivity of interviewers towards the topic under scrutiny will provide versatile interviews: an interviewer who does not know anything about the topic may overlook certain aspects that another would take up (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 32).

This aspect of a phenomenological interview seems contradictory to the prerequisite of bracketing whereby the researcher has to put aside all prior knowledge of the topic in hand in order to carry out the research. In subtle ways, however, all through the process, starting from defining the research question, the interests and experiences of the researcher will influence the execution of the project. During the interview it is the interaction between the interviewee and the interviewer
that will vary and produce different interviews. The atmosphere may also change if the interviewees sense that the interviewer does not understand the meanings that they give to their experiences.

I sometimes felt here that it was a slight hindrance not to have the technical know-how the interviewees possessed, or that the operations of the company were unfamiliar to me. On the other hand this may also at some points have been an advantage in that the interviewees had to be very specific about their descriptions. In the following Sampo seems a bit irritated by my naiveté when inquiring about traveling for work:

\[\text{Niina: } \text{So how do you spend your time there, then?} \]
\[\text{Sampo: } \text{Working.} \]
\[\text{Niina: } [\text{laughter}] \text{ – I mean other than working? Or is it just?} \]
\[\text{Sampo: } \text{Working. When you commission a project it is budgeted and calculated so that you will work some 50 hours per week on site, so that---} \]

11. Interpersonal connection

The interaction between interviewer and interviewees is crucial to the sensitive atmosphere of the situation, which will in turn affect the understanding produced during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 32).

The interviewer should proceed with caution and sensitivity and create a safe environment where the interviewee can go through the situation in a relaxed atmosphere. At the same time the interviewer should not urge the interviewees to go further in their descriptions than they would want to. I intuited that the interviews here were conducted in this manner. Both the interviewer and the interviewee often seemed to cautiously feel the ground during the first few minutes, but after the first tentative questions the atmosphere became quite relaxed and natural, without becoming too informal.

12. Positive experience

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 32) note that an in-depth thematic interview that is conducted well and where the interviewee can explore his/her experiences can have a very positive influence on a person’s life.

This was also the impression I had from the interviews, even though they were conducted during working hours when the people interviewed would have had other more vital matters to attend to. The interviews were a very positive experience to me, the interviewer, as well. The management of the company contributed to this and I have to acknowledge their kindness in allowing me first of all to enter the organisation as a participating observer, to conduct my interviews on the premises, and
to book quiet conference rooms for this purpose, as well as in allowing the interviewees to use their work time to attend the interviews. The interviewees did not normally make any comments on how the experience had been, but one person in the pilot research noted after the interview that it had been a strange but pleasant experience, almost as if after attending a therapy session. This remark signaled to me that the interview had provided some revelations to the interviewee, or at least had been meaningful to him or her at some level.

13. Social self-effacement
I would like to add another aspect to a qualitative interview: the endeavour of the interviewer to socially fade out of the interview situation. When the interviewees do not see the interviewer as the representative of an institution or a profession they can more independently choose the expressions that would best describe their experiences (Perttula 2006, 141).

My reception at the company was very positive and I was introduced to the employees during an in-company meeting as an English teacher conducting research for the University of Tampere. I remember having been asked how I would like to be introduced, but at the time I did not think too much about it. It was only afterwards that I came to realise the significance of the manner in which I was introduced to the interviewees, and saw that this may have played a role in the knowledge produced in my research. For a person to know that the interviewer sitting opposite to him/her is an English teacher and a representative of the University of Tampere can have a powerful impact on the outcome of the interview and on the experiences recounted in the course of it.

Hence I tried to tone down my social presence as a teacher and a researcher for the university as much as I could and to be present in the interviews as a friendly person with no institutional load. In my opinion this succeeded fairly well. There were a few remarks from the interviewees, however, which echoed my presence there as a teacher, for example Kari’s and Arja’s in the following. My question is not true to the phenomenological approach, either, and Arja aptly quips about my role in the interview situation:

| Niina: | What would you then say, what qualities are important if you are dealing with foreigners and use English, what should an engineer be like in order to cope today? |
| Arja: | I don’t know. You are the teacher here - Of course you should never say this to any language people but I feel that the first thing you should do is forget about grammar. |
| Kari: | You must have noticed when you teach and hear from the student on which level he is, and they are a species of their own, teachers. - Actually he isn’t necessarily the best person in that area, but it’s about knowing how to give the other person - It’s like with those presentations. You need not be - or know every little detail, but you have to know how to tell the others about it. |
4.2 Phenomenological interview

Because human experience has a vertical depth, methods of data collection have to be carefully devised. Methods which only gather surface information are inadequate to capture the richness and fullness of an experience, which requires first-person reports of the participants’ experiences. (Polkinghorne 2005.) Interviews are widely used in gathering primary data in qualitative research. This was also the primary method of data acquisition in the present case, and thus it deserves to be examined more closely. In essence the ultimate objective of phenomenological interviews is to make visible the meanings of experiences of persons in order to gain an understanding of their experience world. Kvale and Brinkmann define a qualitative research interview as:

an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee. An interview is literally an inter view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.[emphasis original]. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 2.)

In the phenomenological approach it is paramount to allow the interviewee to express his/her thoughts in the form of a freely flowing monologue of manifesting living experiences (Perttula 2006, 141), where the interviewer is there to gently guide the flow of speech towards the themes under consideration. A phenomenologically characterised interview can also be defined as an acquisition of descriptions from the interviewee’s lived world in a manner that resembles an everyday conversation, but is semi-structured and involves a specific, focused technique (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 27).

Creswell (2007, 135) recommends using a protocol, a predesigned form for registering information collected in an interview. He states that a protocol will enable taking notes about the interviewee’s responses and will simultaneously allow the researcher to arrange his/her thoughts about the interview. I refrained from having a predesigned form at my disposal during the interviews, since I wanted to be free to take notes according to the development of each individual interview. I feared that had I utilised a predesigned form this would have restricted and directed my intuition and understanding of each unique interview situation.

One of the most important characteristics of a good interviewer is the ability to listen attentively to what the other has to say – not barging in with comments and thereby interrupting the speaker’s flow of thought. The goal is for the interviewer to employ ‘active and methodical listening’ (Bourdieu et al. 1999, 609).

Conducting the interviews was the first moment of revelation for me. It was astonishing how intensive this kind of a situation could be: as mentioned, after each interview I felt completely
exhausted both mentally and physically. The intensity of the interviews may have been a mutual sensation for both the interviewee and the interviewer, since one of the interviewees even likened it to having conducted a session with a therapist.

**4.2.1 Conducting the interviews in this research**

There were 12 people working full-time for the company who were interviewed for the first round. Some of the participants were recommended to me by my contact person in the company, who was also a representative of the company’s management. Most people were chosen by me after coming into contact with them when making observations in the company or during work duties. The participants were all willing to describe their experiences vocally. They could also be defined in somewhat objectifying terms as ‘fertile exemplars’ (Polkinghorne 2005), or ‘information-rich cases’ (Patton 1990). The participants were also exposed to the experiences of language use in their daily work routines, and could thus provide information on the phenomenon that was the focus of this research project. Sometimes a person was deliberately chosen from a certain department in order to cover the experience world from that aspect of an engineer’s job description.

The transcribed interview data covered in total 316 pages. In the individual interviews there were 646 lines and 20 pages in the shortest, and 2376 lines, 71 pages in the longest. With some participants there were in addition to the long interviews also brief interview clips arranged on the spot at a desk or in the corridor with or without a tape recorder during the observation period. It felt quite natural to pose the questions as the occasion arose, initiating them around phone calls or email message, though an ideal setting for an interview would be a peaceful location, free from distractions and which is physically suitable for audiotaping (Creswell 2007).

Most of the interviews were conducted in a conference room that could be reserved for the purpose on the company premises. There was one interview, however, which was conducted in the company canteen after lunch hours. The location seemed peaceful enough at the time, but afterwards when listening to the recording and transcribing it I was disturbed by the amount of outside noise which at times caused severe distortion to the sound quality. There were in fact some points when the noise made it virtually impossible to decipher what was being said amid the clatter of metallic utensils being handled in the kitchen. Luckily this applied to individual words alone, and the overall message was not affected.

All the interviewees signed a consent form that I had drafted for the project (Appendix 1). I clarified the purpose of the study by briefly stating that it was about a doctoral dissertation where I was examining the experiences of engineers as language users. I did not go deeper into the topic
since I wanted to avoid directing the attention of the interviewees in any way prior to the interviews. The amount of time needed for completing the interview was defined as one hour for the first round, but the sessions varied from 44 minutes to 1 hour and 58 minutes. All the interviewees had reserved at least one hour for the occasion, and the conference room was available for a longer period as well. The interviewees were told that they would receive copies of the articles when they were finished.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) advise the interviewer to proceed in an organised manner, and ideally also enquire of the interviewee whether he/she has anything to add or wants to ask something. I tried to complete the interviews within the time specified, though I tended to forget time completely when focusing on the flow of talk. Thus unfortunately with some of the interviewees they had to signal the end of the interview either by looking at the clock or by stating that they had another appointment.

I sought to put forward only a few questions and a minimum amount of advice to the interviewees. I endeavoured to elicit descriptive answers and avoided asking the interviewees to reflect on or analyse the reasons for the experiences that they were recounting. This seemed to me to be one of the most salient features in a phenomenological interview in order to refrain from collecting constructive understanding and to focus on topic-embedded forms of understanding.

4.2.2 The researcher as an interviewer

Creswell (2007) points out that a good interviewer is a good listener rather than a frequent speaker. With research interviews the definition of a good listener implies an active listener, who is not thinking about what to ask next, but pays close attention to what the interviewee is saying by becoming immersed in the interview situation and by being sensitive and attentive to situational cues (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 138-139).

It was not difficult to bear in mind the definitions of a good interviewer and listen attentively to what the interviewees were saying, since it was often quite interesting and I became absorbed in the narrative. This also made it easier to master the art of second questions, of continuing with what the interviewee took up, rather than taking the next question on my list and ignoring the chance of pursuing a dimension that had emerged. After having analysed the data as regards my questioning technique, I think that with the follow-up-questions technique I managed to let the conversation flow on fairly freely. This, however, also meant that there was a great deal of material where a more determined interviewer could have condensed the time used by omitting the digressions in the flow of conversation that I had allowed for.
Another issue where I may have failed was registering the extra-linguistic features of communication that the interviewees manifested. No video recordings were made, nor did I take any notes on this aspect. I decided to refrain from videoing the interviews, since I felt that this might have generated an unnatural atmosphere; where the subjects may not have felt as free to express themselves as with an audio recording, where they could remain more anonymous.

Paying close attention to what the people were saying and trying to follow up with the dimensions opened up in their accounts was taxing, it took a lot of energy and concentration from me as an interviewer. For this reason I decided not to divide my concentration by taking notes on how the accounts were given: the gestures, eye contact or tone of voice. Hence unfortunately here only characteristics that could be detected from an audiotape, such as pausing, laughter and use of stress could be registered.

4.2.3 Interview questions

The aim in a phenomenological interview is to acquire a concrete, detailed description of the interviewee’s experience and actions; thus the questions presented need to be wide and open-ended to give the interviewee the possibility to express his/her opinions as extensively as possible (Moustakas 1994; Giorgi 1997). To secure detailed descriptions several questions had to be presented and long interview sessions were required. There were different questions presented to the interviewees depending on the flow of each individual conversation. The questions presented to all participants are listed below. Though these are the main items they may have been presented in a different order or using slightly different words, but the core questions are the following:

- What are your memories of language studies like?
- Have you been working here for long?
- What kinds of memories do you have of traveling for work?
- Can you remember some difficult/problematic situations at work?
- What kind of people do you experience as difficult at work?
- Can you remember some pleasant encounters or situations?
- What kind of people are nice to work with?

In the following I present as an example the questions that were posed to Petri during the brief interviews to illustrate how the questions are generated and formulated as the interview progresses in a brief conversation. I will not elucidate the questions from the long interviews here, since there
were often fewer questions and the interview progressed more through monologues. Here there were no introductory questions, since I was observing Petri’s working day and could conduct several short interviews in his office when the occasion arose after a phone call or an email message. On top of these there were also the two more extensive interviews conducted in a meeting room as with the other interviewees.

Some of the questions seemed to unintentionally lead the respondent in a certain direction, even if at the time I tried to avoid employing them. In qualitative research literature, however, (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 172) point out that instead of reducing the reliability of the interviews, leading questions may in fact enhance it, and deliberate leading questions should be employed more often. In the following there are the accounts of the brief interviews with Petri with just the interviewer questions made visible. In square brackets I have added the clarifications that were previously mentioned in the interviewee’s lines. My comments on the questions are given in italics:

Table 1. Researcher questions in brief interviews 1-2 with Petri

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRIEF INTERVIEW 1 with Petri</th>
<th>Questions asked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher questions (») &amp; comments in italics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here a follow-up question to continue further with what the interviewee just stated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» What are intercultural experiences like?</td>
<td>How do you notice the hierarchy? [in British culture]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» What issues are experienced as problematic?</td>
<td>Are schedules the biggest cause of problems for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» How do you behave in a problematic situation? How do you experience and behave with a difficult person?</td>
<td>So how do you otherwise deal with problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you behave, if the other loses his temper?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What about when things do not really go well with someone, is there something like that?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRIEF INTERVIEW 2 with Petri</th>
<th>Questions asked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher questions (») &amp; comments in italics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here a follow-up question to continue further with what the interviewee just stated.</td>
<td>But you know the fiddle-faddle anyway?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» What is seen as polite empty language?</td>
<td>What is that fiddle-faddle then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» What kind of situations are experienced?</td>
<td>What about that phone call, what was the end result there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHORT INTERVIEW 3 with Petri</td>
<td>Questions asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Researcher questions (») & comments in italics | What are those messages [email messages] normally like then?  
So when he has divided them [topics in an email message] into 11 headlines?  
So it’‑s‑ [interrupted by Petri]  
You just said that the British always call you back after an email message anyway. Why is that?  
Aah. Why is that?  
Could it [calling the recipient by phone after an email message has been sent] be uncertainty, whether the message has reached you?  
Right, so the deadline issue was like this‑ [interrupted by Petri]  
So the British and the Germans, how do you cope with them, do you have a different strategy for them?  
Well how can you tell, then, if he really means it [Petri has mentioned strong reactions from someone for no apparent reason]?  
What about when you said that you can sense it [whether the other is serious or not], what kind of language do they use then?  
What about the British, then?  
So it was not a mechanical failure, but – [interrupted by Petri]  
So he was not a technical guy then?  
Was it after the commissioning phase?  
So they started already beforehand [to complain about a problem]?  
Well how, did you notice anything in the way they behaved?  
So have you met some people who really get heated? How do you then?  
Have you met him [the person who tends to get heated]?  
Has his behaviour been different then [in a face‑to‑face encounter]?

» How are email messages construed?  

» How is specific cultural behaviour construed?  

Here a leading question – giving Petri the potential reason for the counterparty having acted in a certain manner.  

»How is specific cultural behaviour construed and how does this affect one’s behaviour?  

This question was clearly a leading question, although Petri had frequently been talking about different manners of dealing with issues, mentioning the British and the German separately.  

» How is people’s behaviour interpreted?  

Here I should have continued with the sensing issue – to find out what kind of intuition, or what senses were used. I jumped into the language too soon.  

Somewhat leading again.  

Here leading Petri in a certain direction again – maybe he would not have had any comments here, but he wanted to please me by fabricating some. Actually his comments were confirmed by other interviewees, so my question was not harmful here.  

Here the interviewer wanted to manifest her knowledge of the context that the interviewee was operating in.  

» Elaborating on a description of a problematic situation. What were the settings, and did the situation develop somehow?  

» Have you encountered difficult people? What is your reaction there?  

Too many questions presented here; ideally the interviewer should just put forward one question at a time.  

» Elaborating on the concept of a difficult person in a working life context. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the situation different when met face-to-face?</td>
<td>The question here is somewhat complicated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>A follow-up question clarifying what was stated before. What are the power struggles like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you cope in a difficult situation?</td>
<td>Here the follow-up question is good, but the interviewer should not have given any alternatives on how it is manifested that one is being passive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a certain strategy for a difficult situation?</td>
<td>» What is a strategy of passivity like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A follow-up question clarifying what was stated before.</td>
<td>» How do you use your intuition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>» How do you judge what people are like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A follow-up question clarifying the role of intuition, but a little tentative, not very clear.</td>
<td>» What pleasant experiences have you had? What were they like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>The interviewer could not point out any specific situations, but he stated that 'when I have started to promote something and I have managed to cope with a difficult situation.'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you cope in a difficult situation?</td>
<td>» Are you sure there is nothing that you can mention here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a certain strategy for a difficult situation?</td>
<td>» Are difficult situations experienced through linguistic deficiency?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A follow-up question clarifying what was stated before.</td>
<td>The interviewer is leading the interviewee by giving a clear suggestion for an answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>Here the interviewee states that his language is always clear. But that his vocabulary is not that wide. He continues by saying that he has never enjoyed studying languages, nor has he been good at them during his studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you cope in a difficult situation?</td>
<td>The interviewer rightly interrupted me in this question, because I had not been listening attentively enough to what he had said: ‘I do like to speak, it’s not that, but I do not like to study at all!’ [stated with emphasis].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a certain strategy for a difficult situation?</td>
<td>The interview was interrupted here, but I came back to this question during the formal interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>How about it, when you think about situations, have there been any really nasty situations, or situations that you have experienced as unpleasant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>What kind of a strategy have you adopted, when you have entered it [an unpleasant situation], when you have realised that it may turn out to be difficult?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you cope in a difficult situation?</td>
<td>Right. So do you feel that you are always the underdogs when - ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a certain strategy for a difficult situation?</td>
<td>What about when you said that you are passive, does it mean that you do not say- you do not take the initiative there, or what?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A follow-up question clarifying what was stated before.</td>
<td>How is it then, can you easily sense it in people-, when you said that he was a pretty soft guy, - like sense how to approach different people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>What about pleasant situations-, when you think about nice situations, what kind of memories do you have there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you cope in a difficult situation?</td>
<td>You cannot think of any specific situations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a certain strategy for a difficult situation?</td>
<td>How about, do you think that it has been just the language that has been the problem in a certain situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A follow-up question clarifying what was stated before.</td>
<td>Right, so do you feel that your personality is not fully realised there [in a situation where the counterpart has inadequate language skills]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are difficult situations like?</td>
<td>Do you somehow tend to teach them [people with linguistic deficiencies], so that you use somehow very clear language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you cope in a difficult situation?</td>
<td>So you do not like speaking, or -?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a certain strategy for a difficult situation?</td>
<td>What is it then that bothers you about studying?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

5.1 Thematic analysis?

The written data provided in qualitative research can be examined as narratives, conversations or discourses, but research in the phenomenological framework interprets data as a description of life as experienced by the participant (Perttula, 2000, 440). What has been problematic with qualitative research in general is that the researcher has to explicate the analysis in a controlled manner to avoid presenting an unexplained, miraculous emergence of themes. Such emerging themes may be misinterpreted as themes dwelling in the data, when in fact they reside in the researcher’s head and are linked to the data at hand according to his/her own understanding. (Ely et al. 1997).

Thematic analysis is even seen as a foundational method applied within a particular theoretical framework in qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006, 78). In essence Amedeo Giorgi’s method of phenomenological analysis that applied in this present work, comes close to thematic analysis in that there the researcher starts by looking for individual meaning relations in individual interviews, forming an individual meaning network for each interviewee through theme proposals in the data. In the second phase these individual meaning networks are expanded into a common meaning network (Giorgi 1985).

A theme’s significance cannot be determined by quantifiable measures in the data: a salient theme may receive fairly little attention in the interview data with most interviewees, but this does not necessarily mean that the theme does not carry much meaning. Thus the ‘keyness’ of a theme cannot be judged by quantifiable means alone, but by its significance to the research question, because often a significant theme may be given considerable space in some interviews and little or none in others (Braun & Clarke 2006).

This was also the case here when the theme of gender did not distinctly emerge in interviews with male subjects, even if the issue was markedly prominent in the interview data from all the female interviewees. Thus it was the researcher’s task to judge whether this issue could be labeled as a theme. The prevalence of themes that are strongly linked to the data is always a major factor in analysis. (Braun & Clarke 2006, 82). It is quite possible that at the end of the analysis in phenomenological research there are as many common networks of meaning as there were participants in the project, or at least only a few different common networks of meaning. In these cases the phenomenon examined manifests itself in extremely individual forms (Perttula 2000, 440).
These are called different variants of the common network of meaning. Hence female gender in engineering as experienced by the female interviewees was included in the results as a variant of the common meaning network. It has to be emphasised here, however, that this variant was not categorised as a lower hierarchy network; there were two variants of the common meaning network formed, both positioned at the same level.

5.2 Phenomenological analysis

In phenomenological research the data acquired are approached either hermeneutically, seeking to interpret the meaning within it by uncovering the meaning relations, structures of meaning, or themes in the data (van Manen 1990), or through a descriptive approach accentuating a detailed, precise and comprehensive description, not a reflective analysis of a phenomenon (Merleau-Ponty 1962), by going 'back to the things themselves', this denoting knowledge based in meanings, not an analysis of the objects themselves (Husserl 1900/1970, 252). The ideal for Husserl was pure description, and he insisted that interpretation must be avoided (Husserl 1911/1965,). Being, however, is always interpretative understanding – thus a description is always by definition an interpretation (Heidegger 1927/1962, pp 33-34; Rauhala 1990, 109).

The role of method in phenomenology is crucial, it is seen as knitting together the different variations in the phenomenological mode of thinking (Perttula 2000, 429; Merleau-Ponty 1962, viii). In this inquiry the phenomenological method developed by Amedeo Giorgi (1985; 1997) and further modified by Juha Perttula (1998; 2000) was applied. The rigid phenomenological step-by-step method has sometimes been criticised as resembling logical positivism and reflecting a reductionist form (Munhall 2011, 119). Munhall further urges researchers to liberate themselves from the designated steps of the phenomenological method and trusting their own intuition wander off into the unknown terrain where being reveals itself.

Analysis grounded in transcribed interview data has also been questioned as involving the assumption that it contains an inherent truth waiting to be discovered by the analyst who will in the end decide what is relevant there and what is not (Pablé, Haas, & Christe 2010). Using a disciplined and firmly formalised phenomenological method eliminates these doubts. It provides a more reliable tool of analysis, because it reduces the possibility of ignoring some constituents in the phenomenon, or of adding there elements from the researcher’s own imagination. A disciplined method will also facilitate opening up the complete process of the analysis to make it visible to the reader, and hence it will add validity to the research.
According to Giorgi (1997) the criteria required for qualitative research to qualify as phenomenological include three elements: employing description, adopting an attitude of phenomenological reduction, or the Husserlian ‘natural attitude,’ and looking for the most constant meanings of a phenomenon. Bracketing, or phenomenological reduction is understood here as a conscious attempt by the researcher to block out all prior understanding or knowledge of the subject examined, and an aspiration to suspend the moment of revelation until he/she can through imaginative variation discern individual meaning relations in the data. When going through the imaginative variation stage the researcher has to trust his/her intuition and by varying the perspectives and the frames of reference arrive at the essences in the phenomenon examined (Giorgi 1985; Perttula 2000).

Research in the phenomenological framework presupposes that researchers formulate the method for each specific undertaking in order to reach to the essential qualities of the phenomenon examined. The phenomenon sets the goal for the research, and the method does the work (Perttula 2000, 429). Some minor alterations were made to the method upon employing it for the present analysis.

Perttula (2000) recommends thematising the data at the very outset in the process of analysis, but with this case it seemed more natural and true to the nature of phenomenological research to conduct the thematising process only after having identified the meaning-containing units. If the researcher identifies the themes after reading through the data, but prior to the process of analysis, there is the danger that he or she will permanently fixate certain themes as reflecting the essence of the phenomenon studied and simultaneously ignore other elements condemning them as not possessing this essence quality. Munhall (2011, 120-121) points out that defining a certain concept, e.g. ‘loneliness’, as a core theme, and then exploring this in the data, will lead the researcher to categorise human experience in a manner resembling reductionism in quantitative research, when the researcher should actually look at the unique manner in which ‘loneliness’ is experienced by this particular person.

In practice with this present work the divide between the different stages in the method was somewhat diffuse. The borders between the stages were blurred as I have sought to illustrate in Figure 1, as the various stages shifted and blended into one another. It was repeatedly necessary to return to an earlier stage to go through the data again in order to arrive at a more crystallised mode of analysis. Hence during the analysis the data were in a constant flow both in the mind of the researcher and on paper, until the material settled into its final form.
6 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

6.1 The phases of analysis

The phenomenological method of analysis was used here to analyse the experiences of language users in a professional context in engineering. This method comprises two phases: the specific, or individual phase, which produces knowledge of the experiences of the subjects, and the general phase producing common knowledge shared by all participants. The results of the first phase are presented as individual accounts of engineers’ experiences as language users at work. These accounts are called here *individually experienced language use portrayals in a professional context*. In the second phase there is a shift from individual knowledge to knowledge shared by all the participants. The result of this phase is a common meaning network that covers all the experiences shared by the participants. This network is called here *commonly experienced language use portrayal in a professional context*.

Table 3. The individual phase of the phenomenological method of analysis as it was conducted in this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the method/ Phase 1</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading through the data with a phenomenological attitude: bracketing, reduction.</td>
<td>Researcher arrives at a general sense of the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identifying meaning relations in the data and separating them.</td>
<td>Separate meaning relations and a more focused sense of the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Transforming the meaning relations into the language of the discipline through reflection and imaginative variation.</td>
<td>Transformed meaning relations that contain the necessary and sufficient essence of each meaning relation revealing the phenomenon more directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Classifying each transformed meaning relation under a theme.</td>
<td>Theme-specific individual meaning relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organising the transformed meaning relations into theme-specific individual meaning networks.</td>
<td>Seven theme-specific individual meaning networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Synthesising the individual situated structures of the phenomenon, or individual meaning networks.</td>
<td>Seven descriptions of the individual situated structure of the phenomenon - <em>individually experienced language use portrayals in a professional context</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. The general phase of the phenomenological method of analysis as it was conducted in this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the method/Phase 2</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Transforming the individual meaning networks into proposals of general meaning relations.</td>
<td>Proposals of meaning relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Forming organising themes in all individual meaning networks that structure the proposals of meaning relations.</td>
<td>Organising themes reflecting proposals of meaning relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Positioning each proposal of meaning relation under an organising theme.</td>
<td>All proposals of meaning relations address an organising theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Forming theme proposals out of each proposal of meaning relations.</td>
<td>Theme proposals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Constructing seven proposals for a common network of meanings.</td>
<td>Seven proposals for a common network of meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Constructing the seven proposals for a common network of meanings into one common network of meanings – or here into two variants of a common network of meanings.</td>
<td>Two variants for a common network of meanings. Two commonly experienced language use portrayals in a professional context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Tables 3 and 4 I have illustrated the process of the phenomenological method drawing upon Giorgi (1985) and Perttula (2000). The common meaning network is created from the individual meaning networks so that it covers all the constituents shared by all the individual networks of meaning.

In the interview transcripts in English included in this chapter I have used the personal pronoun he as a translation for the Finnish term hän, which does not reveal whether the speaker is referring to a male or female person if the gender is not apparent from the context. The reason for this decision was that in most cases the reference would have been to a male person.

The first step in a phenomenological analysis is reading and rereading through all the data gathered in order to arrive at a general sense of the whole (Giorgi 1985).
7 INDIVIDUAL PHASE OF ANALYSIS

7.1 Reading through the data with a phenomenological attitude

Amedeo Giorgi gives only a relatively vague description of this stage, stating that in order to arrive at a general sense of the phenomenon the entire description needs to be read through to obtain a firm grasp of the whole (Giorgi 1992, 10). In this present case, however, the reading phase was conducted in small portions along with the transcription process. It felt more natural to let the phenomenon reveal itself gradually without rushing through all the materials at once. Perttula includes bracketing in this stage as an essential component in it, noting how salient it is for the researcher to meet the data just as it manifests itself without any presuppositions about the phenomenon examined (Perttula 1995, 69).

7.2 Identifying meaning relations in the data and separating them.

Perttula (1995) states that with an extensive amount of data it is appropriate to define large meaning-containing units rather than separate them into smaller sections. He (1995, 124) further points out that meanings are intertwined into people’s experience world and thereby justifies his choice of separating more extensive meaning-containing units.

In this present context, however, it seemed that listing even the smallest meaning-containing units into separate entities contributed to all the meanings being registered, thus preventing subtler shades of meaning from being lost by oversight. Insensitivity to the finer tones of a phenomenon is also an issue a phenomenological researcher is cautioned about (Spiegelberg 1971, 660). Hence the units containing meaning are fairly brief in my data in comparison to those of Perttula (1995); a new unit was identified whenever I detected a transition of meaning in the text. The identification of meanings is carried out through a sensitive research attitude and a sensitivity to the phenomenon examined, as recommended by Giorgi (1997). This also speaks for registering shorter as opposed to longer units.
The units that contained different meanings were separated for each interview, and marked within a pair of virgules in the data. Thus when meaning changed in the narrative of the interviewee the meaning relation was clearly marked as well as numbered consecutively. In the following I illustrate the process of separating the meaning relations in an interview extract from the first interview with Kari. I chose not to attach the complete interview here, as the transcribed record alone covered 56 pages and 1702 lines.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kari’s interview</th>
<th>Individual units containing meaning – meaning relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| N: What is it then that’s nice about them [customer contacts]?  
K: /Well, let’s say that all in all being in contact with people is nice./ and /I don’t see the language issue there. If we can sort things out it doesn’t matter in what language we do it./  
N: Do you have some kind of a strategy in doing things?  
K: Well, I don’t really, I have to say that I don’t./But with business matters – when I’m planning what things need to be clarified to people and how./ / But I do not linguistically or presentation-wise prepare those issues./  
N: Or how you’ll open it up, or something like that?  
K: I do have something like – /I play it pretty much along with what those people are like, when I think about how I’ll start it. I do not really have one general way there./  
N: When you say you play along with those people, how do you divide them into groups then?  
K: What would I say… It also depends on the situation, whether I’m presenting something. //Pretty much I’ll give the presentation according to whether the people there are technical staff or if it’s more general. //Like what kind of information those people need, that may be one situation. // And another one could be how this info – a bit the style as well – like if it’s formal or contains humour. It pretty much depends on what the people are like there. /  
N: You must have lots of presentations to give?  
K: /Yes, pretty often, something like telling people about our products, what they are like. And earlier I have been more – like to you [during the orientation day] when I presented the ABC product. I have been pretty much involved with it earlier. And like – with the customers, who are our business partners – I have had negotiations with them. /  
N: When you have experience from a long time already about these presentations, has it changed at all, the way you give the presentation?  
K: /Well, yes. That’s where there may be a difference./ /That at the beginning I would prepare them a lot, and think about how to- but now it’s more about the routine of how to run these matters./  
N: So does that mean that you don’t prepare your presentations?  
K: /Well it still depends on whether the matters there are familiar to me, I do not prepare them then. If it’s something more special then I do prepare the | 1. Kari thinks being in contact with people is nice  
2. Language is not an issue in contacts with people.  
3. With business matters Kari has a strategy of planning what and how to clarify things to people.  
4. Kari does not have a linguistic or presentation strategy.  
5. Kari uses the term ‘play [a game]’ here for conducting business. He starts a presentation according to what the people in the audience are like.  
6. Kari does not have one general strategy for presentation openings.  
7. Kari divides people into technical experts and general audiences.  
8. Kari judges the presentation situation by what are the needs of the audience.  
9. Another factor is the style of the presentation. It may be formal or contain humour.  
10. Kari gives lots of presentations and is also involved in negotiations with customers.  
11. The manner in which he gives presentations has changed with time.  
12. Kari planned the presentations much more in detail earlier, but now there is more routine with them.  
13. It depends on the familiarity of the topic whether Kari prepares for the presentations. If the topic is more special he prepares for the presentation. |
Kari thought about presentations and practised for them going through sentences and their use in English in high school and at university. 

Nowadays Kari does not do so, but just sketches the issues that he needs to cover in a presentation.

Kari changes his presentation on the way depending on how the audience reacts to it.

As an example of a situation where Kari has changed a presentation, or actually here a job interview situation, he tells that when the candidate who was interviewed was not good for the position that he was intended for, Kari started to fit him for another position.

Kari thinks that in an effective presentation the language is simple, the sentences are short and the structures simple. There is enough repetition.

If there is a customer visit you always give a presentation of the company. You either prepare it yourself or you can use ready-made material.

The presentation is prepared according to the time slot that has been given for it.

Kari thinks that it is extremely important to stick to the time frame given for the presentation.
K: I think it’s really important to stick to the time-frame! I hate people who can stretch a five-minute presentation into 45 minutes! Whatever a seminar you have you need to stay, so that- //And I think that many people are terribly bad or good as presenters. I think that those who are good can get their message through. And there the language issue is something that good presenters can get their message through even with poorer language skills. / N: So that it’s not about language skills? K: It’s not about language skills. It is in a sense that those people who are interested in learning languages are normally also more social than … //There’s something like they enjoy the situation where languages are used. //Either the performance or the contact with a smaller group of people, but they are interested in it anyway. //Actually regrettably few people we have here in engineering, however, who would understand technology and who can also explain it to other people. There is a massive difference there. / N: Yes, probably, if you’re really deep in theory and technology- K: /You must have noticed yourself, when you’re teaching and you know and see from someone his level, the level that he’s at. /And that’s a special breed, I think, teachers, in that you have to motivate the others and encourage them. [end of tape] / /It’s not necessarily that you are the best in the subject, but that you can explain it to the other. It’s a bit like with the presentations. You don’t have to know yourself every little detail, but that you can clarify it to the others. / N: So is it about people skills, being with people? K: /Absolutely. But then again it’s not that alone here in our field. Here it’s self-evident that you master the technology, and then there are these human contact – interaction – presentation skills. Language skills. //Although with us it’s so that English skills are – we do not recruit anyone unless his English skills are at a sufficient level. So that it’s like the basic starting-point nowadays. / N: If you meet a difficult person at work how do you deal with him? K: /That’s a very good question, because there are those people, too … some… /Well, it tends to be like this that /you need to talk with them even more, and in a beautifully- to nicely get your issues through and then…. / /Whether you have enough patience and you manage to go through it, that’s another matter that…. / N: What is it normally that makes it difficult? K: /Well, for example those people, like a person who is himself terribly straightforward and also

22. Good presenters can get their message through even if their language skills are poor.

23. Presentation skills do not depend on language skills. People who are interested in learning languages are normally also more social.

24. People who are more social enjoy a situation where languages are used.

25. These people are interested in situations where languages are used either because they enjoy the communication or they enjoy the social contact with other people.

26. There are not many people in engineering who are social and interested in learning languages.

27. Kari refers to me as a teacher. He thinks that as a teacher I must have noticed that people are on different levels.

28. Teachers are special in that they must motivate and encourage other people.

29. Also in teaching, as with presentations, you do not have to be the best in a certain subject to be able to explain it to others.

30. You need to have social skills, engineering skills and language skills in the field of engineering.

31. English skills are necessary in engineering. The company does not recruit any people if their English is not at a sufficient level.

32. It is a valid question to think about difficult people in a working life context.

33. If Kari meets a difficult person he needs to talk with him even more than with other people, and in a nice manner to get the issues through.

34. You may not succeed with this with difficult people and may lose your patience.

35. A person who comes straight to the point is difficult according to Kari. A difficult person may assume that other people are prepared to make sudden moves just as he is.

36. A difficult person will simplify things when
assumes that other people make sudden moves with him. / And he himself will simplify things when it suits him, but then again requires of others that… / It’s not fair, that game… the other one requires something from you without seeing the big picture, and then again when we ask him for something he will not accept that at all. / N: So he has different modes of operation?

K: Different modes of operation, different principles, and on top of that if you feel that he’s not really coping with his own job even… / Of course there are people who are different by character, terribly different. But then again there are different cultures. / With the Americans it’s quite different to cope than with the Germans. / N: Now you’ll have to tell me how?

K: / The Germans they are so thorough, so precise. / I myself I’m more broadminded, I’m not that particular. / And in / the German language the way - , it’s actually a military language. There’s nothing but commanding forms, and only ‘bitte’ to soften it up a bit. / Their way of expressing something in a polite manner is that they write you an email message that’s this long or speak for an hour in order to get their message softened a bit. / They may then go on and on about miniscule things. / It’s not- you have no time for that. In an extremely precise manner all those details. / N: That’s funny, I’ve seen it elsewhere, too. But when you said that you’re more broadminded, doesn’t that help you, so that it in a way forces you to be really precise

K: Yes, they really go through things in so much detail. / And let’s say that there’s a technical device and they think there are some defects in it. What they’ll do is list down 50 items in detail, / and then it’s just the same with our customers and our service and sales people alike, it’s the same with them all. / Somehow it’s German. / N: So it’s time-consuming?

K: / Very. If you read through something like a fault list where there are 50 items on something, and then they require that you answer them all and then you go through and negotiate them all. N: So it does not really take things forward?

K: Very often it doesn’t take things forward. / So that they in a way lose it themselves – that the one important issue gets lost among all these other issues, which are not that relevant. / N: Answering must take time?

K: This here is a bit different… in this company it’s starting to get the same as… / The German culture is quite hierarchical in that there’s someone who takes it suits him, but assumes of others something else.

37. Kari uses the term ‘game’ here again. Kari thinks that the game is not fair. The other person may require something from you without seeing the big picture, but will not himself accept any special requests, is not flexible there.

38. Difficult people have different principles for themselves and other people.

39. Sometimes a difficult person does not cope with his job.

40. People are different by character, but so are cultures.

41. It’s different to cope with the Americans compared to the Germans.

42. The Germans are quite precise, thorough.

43. Kari is not precise, but more broadminded.

44. The German language sounds to Kari like a military language, a commanding language, where there are lots of commanding forms, and few words to soften this.

45. When Germans want to say something in a polite manner they write very long email messages or speak for a long time to soften the message down.

46. There may be lots of small details.

47. Kari feels that he does not have time to go through these messages.

48. If there is a defect with a technical device the Germans will list down several items to report this.

49. It’s the same with customers, sales and service people who are German.

50. Kari thinks that this is specifically a German characteristic.

51. This feature of the Germans takes up a lot of Kari’s time.

52. Kari feels that the Germans themselves lose something by listing all the details. If there is one issue that is really important it will get lost among other details which are not that relevant.

53. The German company culture is quite hierarchical.
The Finnish company culture is more conversational, whereas in Sweden it is over-conversational.

The Swedes come for a company visit in a group of ten people. A business meeting with the Swedes is like a very long conversation.

In the Swedish company culture negotiations take time when people need to discuss things and ponder about them back and forth.

In the German company culture the supervisor has considerable power in listing the tasks for the subordinate, who does not dare leave any issue out of the list.

On the other hand the German company culture is quite clear from the top down.

The German office experiences it as problematic to do business with the company’s people in Finland when they do not have one clear decision-maker there.

The Germans would like to be in direct contact with the manager and ask him directly for decisions.

In this Finnish company, however, it is not always clear who will take the decision in a certain matter or have the final word there.

Kari thinks that the decision making process is a bit like the Swedish in that if someone denies you something you can still turn to another person for permission.

Kari thinks that in the American business culture they focus on the most important issues.

The culture is apparently friendly, but you do not find out the real problems there.

The Americans are more energetic and this is seen as a virtue by them, too. They do not like to waste their time talking like the Germans.
K: It may well be so. At least with American people I have this small impression that they do openly tell you about their personal things and... It’s all well and then again at the next moment they’ll already tell someone else that there was this fool who keeps sharing all his own issues- that something like this….
N: Really, that’s pretty funny – So this is your own experience?
K: This one, too. And then for example one where I didn’t at all like the idea in the States when they had these ‘good-day-wishers’ in front of stores. Who’d been hired in front of the store to shout the hellos and how-are-you’s and... I don’t really... On the other hand I... again this American positive and relaxed attitude is – they are really over-relaxed and the Germans are quite over-stiff.
N: Well if you are having dinner with the Germans how do you behave then?
K: You cannot be as informal as with the Americans but... I do try to be... on the other hand it’s always when in Rome do as the Romans do, but....
N: What about if you host a dinner in Germany what would you advise?
K: I don’t think I have any advice... if you are calling people by their first names... then it’s like...
N: What about the States?
K: Well they don’t care about stiffness, or Finnish reticence. It’s like if... well, their parties and visits are spoiled if people stay silent. They’ll feel that they have failed there if.../
N: - if the guest is taciturn...
K: Yes.
N: So do you have some, for example what would you talk about, some topics, or-?
K: No, I don’t like, it’s the same as here. Anything, just anything, so much that I don’t usually. Usually it’s pretty easy to talk with people if you tell something about yourself, all in all.... If you open up a bit and then again if you can make the other tell something about himself then it’s easy to carry on from there. Normally people have some topic of interest that they like to talk about if there’s someone to actively listen to them. /Actually when we’re talking about the English language for example, these are difficult things at first. You do know some phrases and know how to ask questions or answer them, but you didn’t necessarily understand it if the other person pronounces words a bit differently. Or if he was using words that were so difficult that you didn’t understand them, and you had to ask what he’d said time and time again./ That’s – like there was something like fear... or tension to ask the other

66. Kari thinks that the Americans openly tell you about their own personal issues.
67. Then again he feels that this may lure the other person to revealing things about his own person that the Americans will consider a bit excessive.
68. Kari has experienced this trap of opening up with the Americans.
69. Kari does not like the way in the United States they hire people to greet you and wish you a good day in front of stores.
70. Kari feels that the Americans are over-relaxed compared to the over-stiff Germans.
71. Kari thinks that if you are having a dinner with the Germans you cannot be as informal as with the Americans. He also thinks that one should behave in Rome as the Romans do, adapt to each culture.
72. Kari feels that with the Americans you should not be too stiff or silent, or you will spoil the atmosphere of a party or a visit.
73. Kari thinks that anything makes a topic for a conversation with foreigners, just as with the Finns.
74. Kari thinks that it is easy to talk to people if you open up a little and tell something about yourself. It is easy to continue from there if you can make the other person tell something about himself.
75. Normally people have something that interests them and that they like to talk about if someone listens to them.
76. Kari thinks that sometimes a foreign language such as English is problematic. You may know the phrases and you know how to ask questions or answer them, but you may not understand the other person if his pronunciation is different, or if the words he is using are difficult. You have to ask for
person and then listen to the answer, you didn’t understand a thing. And then you repeated it and… the other one went on again, and still you didn’t understand and… /That kinds of situations are nasty./
N: Yes. When the discussion gets broken-
K: Right. And then when you’re still not quite sure about what the other person meant, so
N: But can people then repeat what they said more slowly?
K: /No, that’s quite clear. We have here an Englishman and if you’re speaking Finnish and you see that he’s not reacting or does not understand, then you try to say it in an easier way. But I have not seen this phenomenon, somehow I’ve got a feeling that Finnish people know how to do it/ but for example Germans and Americans, they don’t like, at all-. They just keep trying to talk more if the other person does not understand it. At the same speed, and with more and more words. So that they can’t in a way …// But Finnish people, when they know how to ask, they know how to pronounce, and it’s correct, like the structure, and everything is okay. Well they don’t think that they should address this person as if he were a preschool pupil./ So in a way the level, the level of listening comprehension is not what the communication implies. //And I think that’s something that there is not enough of at school./
N: And probably the accent is different-?
K: Yes, and probably, well /also in Finland people have different dialects and manners of speech, and I have noticed that with some people the vocabulary is also…. //Although in England it’s so that your education and profession are revealed in your vocabulary. It’s quite visible. //The most difficult ones, by the way, are our own sales people in the UK. Their way of speaking, pronouncing and such things are really partly still so difficult. /
N: I was just listening to S. I was there for a few days.
K: Yes, right, I was giving them this presentation. /Just came to think about it, their service person, M., is the worst one. He speaks so fast and he often gets panicky when somewhere on site. //Then he cannot even explain the problem at hand clearly enough. /And if the telephone connection happens to be poor-these are nasty situations. /It’s always all right if you’re there face to face with someone. You can always see in the other person’s eyes if the message has reached him. //Some people are just ‘yes’, they’ll nod and yes-yes, even if they don’t understand. I mean what the other person is saying./

a clarification over and over again.
77. There is fear or tension when you keep asking, and try to listen to the answer, but do not understand.
78. Kari thinks that situations like this are unpleasant.
79. Kari thinks that it is a Finnish phenomenon that people can slow down or use simpler language if the other person does not understand what you are saying.
80. Kari thinks that the Germans or the American do not know how to do it. They just try to talk more and use more words but at the same speed.
81. Kari thinks that with the Finns it may be difficult for foreigners to slow down or use simpler language, because they seem to know the language quite well. These people do not figure that the Finns need to be addressed like a preschool pupil if they do not understand something.
82. Kari thinks that in these cases the listening comprehension is not at the same level as the communication otherwise implies.
83. Kari thinks that there is not enough listening comprehension at school in Finland.
84. Kari thinks that also in Finland people may have different dialects and use difficult vocabulary.
85. Kari thinks that in the UK the vocabulary also reveals people’s education and profession quite visibly.
86. Kari thinks that the most difficult people to understand are the company’s own sales people in the UK because of their pronunciation.
87. Kari thinks that the most difficult person in this respect is the service person in the UK, who will easily panic if there is a problem on site.
88. In a situation like that this person cannot explain what the problem is clearly enough.
89. It is always easier to understand people if you are there face-to-face. You can see it in people’s eyes if they have understood you.
90. Some people will just nod and say ‘yes’ even if they have not understood you.
7.3 Transforming the meaning relations into the language of the discipline through reflection and imaginative variation.

The process of transformation is conducted through reflection and free imaginative variation (Giorgi 1985), which Husserl (1939/1973) refers to as free variation in fantasy, to determine which meaning relations are essential to the phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty (1962) describes free imaginative variation as an intensive search for the essence through a concrete experience: the researcher varies the experience in his/her mind, trying to imagine it as modified; what remains invariant is the essence of the event described. The researcher thus inquires what the minimal conditions are for something to be represented, and what alterations in the imagined can cause a change in the issue imagined.

The units that contained meaning were here translated into the language of the discipline, i.e. education in this research, and at the same time condensed. This process was originally conducted in Finnish, but for this book I translated first the interviews, and then the units containing meaning as well all the other material of the analysis into English. It seems to me that in this process of translation the original interviews were somehow altered. The translated language is not quite that of the interviewees any longer. The participants came with their distinct dialects or informal quips and phrases in Finnish, but in English the language of the interviews has become more neutral and closer to the language of the discipline. Thus the extracts illustrating the process of translation into the language of the discipline may seem somewhat artificial.

I illustrated this stage by inscribing the translations in bold after each meaning-containing unit. In the following the meaning relations from the same interview extract as in the stage illustrated earlier have been translated into neutral language:

1. Kari thinks being in contact with people is nice.
   Kari enjoys contacts with people.
2. Language is not an issue in contacts with people.
   Kari does not think that language is an issue in contacts with people.
3. With business matters Kari has a strategy of planning what and how to clarify things to people.
   Kari has a strategy on how to clarify things to people and what to tell them.
4. Kari does not have a linguistic or presentation strategy.
   Kari does not have a linguistic or presentational strategy.
5. Kari uses the term ‘play [a game]’ for conducting business. He starts a presentation according to what the people in the audience are like.
   Conducting business involves playing games for Kari. He adapts presentations according to the audience.
6. Kari does not have one general strategy for presentation openings.
   Kari does not have one general strategy for presentation openings.
7. Kari divides people into technical experts and general audiences.
   Kari divides audiences according to their level of expertise in engineering.
8. Kari judges the presentation situation by what are the needs of the audience.
   Kari plans his presentations according to the needs of the audience.
9. Another factor is the style of the presentation. It may be formal or contain humour.
   The presentation styles may differ from formal to humorous.
10. Kari gives lots of presentations and is also involved in negotiations with customers.
   Kari’s work involves giving innumerable presentations and negotiating with customers.
11. The manner in which he gives presentations has changed with time.
   Kari has changed the presentations he gives with time.
12. Kari planned the presentations much more in detail earlier, but now there is more routine with them.
   Earlier Kari’s presentations involved much planning, but today they are more routine like.
13. It depends on the familiarity of the topic whether Kari prepares for the presentations. If the topic is
    more special he prepares for the presentation.
   Kari prepares the presentation if the topic is unfamiliar to him.
14. Kari thought about presentations and practised for them, going through sentences and their use in
    English in high school and at university.
   At school and university Kari practised going through presentations.
15. Nowadays Kari does not do so, but just sketches the issues that he needs to cover in a presentation.
   Today Kari just sketches the presentation issues that need to be covered beforehand.
16. Kari changes his presentation on the way depending on how the audience meets it.
   Kari changes the presentation according to the signals the audience gives him.
17. As an example of a situation where Kari has changed a presentation, or actually here a job
    interview situation, he tells that when the candidate who was interviewed was not good for the
    position that he was intended for, Kari started to fit him for another position.
   During a recent job interview Kari changed the position he was interviewing the candidate for.
18. Kari thinks that in an effective presentation the language is simple, the sentences are short and
    the structures simple. There is enough repetition.
   Kari thinks that in an effective presentation the language is simple, the sentences short and
    there is enough repetition.
19. If there is a customer visit you always give a presentation of the company. You either prepare it
    yourself or you can use ready-made material.
   During customer visits there are always presentations given, using either ready-made material
    or material prepared by Kari.
20. The presentation is prepared according to the time slot that has been given for it.
   The presentation is prepared according to the time slot defined for it.
21. Kari thinks that it is extremely important to stick to the time frame given for the presentation.
   Kari thinks that the time frame given for the presentation is very important.
22. Good presenters can get their message through even if their language skills are poor.
   Good presenters get their message through even with poorer language skills.
23. Presentation skills do not depend on language skills. People who are interested in learning
    languages are normally also more social.
   Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent. People who are interested in learning
    languages are also more social.
24. People who are more social enjoy a situation where languages are used.
   More social people also enjoy situations where languages are used.
25. These people are interested in situations where languages are used either because they enjoy the
    communication or they enjoy the social contact with other people.
   People who are interested in languages enjoy either the communication process or being in
    social contact with other people.
26. There are not many people in engineering who are social and interested in learning languages.
   In the world of engineering there are not many people who are both social and interested in
    learning languages.
27. Kari refers to me as a teacher. He thinks that as a teacher I must have noticed that people are on
    different levels with their language skills.
   Kari sees the interviewer in her role as a teacher. He thinks that as a teacher I can see that
    people are on different levels as to their language skills.
28. Teachers are special in that they must motivate and encourage other people.
   Kari thinks that teachers are special because they must motivate and encourage people.
29. Also in teaching, as with presentations, you do not have to be the best in a certain subject to be able
    to explain it to the others.
   Kari thinks that in teaching and other issues in life expertise in some field is not a prerequisite
    to being able to teach this skill to the others.
30. You need to have social skills, engineering skills and language skills in the field of engineering.
   Social, engineering and language skills are necessary qualities in the field of engineering.
31. English skills are necessary in engineering. The company does not recruit any people if their English is not at a sufficient level.

   English skills are necessary in engineering and the company does not recruit people without sufficient English skills.

32. It is a valid question to think about difficult people in a working life context.

   It is a valid question to ask about difficult people in a working life context.

33. If Kari meets a difficult person he needs to talk with him even more than with other people, and in a nice manner to get the issues through.

   With a difficult person you need to use your communication skills even more than with other people. You also have to make sure that your tone is polite.

34. You may not succeed with this with difficult people and may lose your patience.

   You may lose your patience trying to communicate with difficult people.

35. A person who is very straightforward is difficult according to Kari. A difficult person may assume that other people are prepared to make sudden moves just as he is.

   Kari thinks that a person who is very straightforward is difficult. He may require that other people be prepared to behave in the same manner as he is.

36. A difficult person will simplify things when it suits him, but assumes of others something else.

   A difficult person will simplify things when it suits him but assume that others operate in a different manner.

37. Kari uses the term ‘game’ here again. Kari thinks that the game is not fair. The other person may require something from you without seeing the big picture, but will not himself accept any special requests, is not flexible there.

   Kari thinks that business involves playing games, which are not always fair. The other person may require of people something that he himself is not prepared to do.

38. Difficult people have different principles for themselves and other people.

   Difficult people have different standards for themselves and for other people.

39. Sometimes a difficult person does not cope with his job.

   It may be that a difficult person has problems in coping with his work.

40. People are different by character, but so are cultures.

   People are different, but so are cultures.

41. It’s different to cope with the Americans compared to the Germans.

   Doing business with the Americans is different from doing business with the Germans.

42. The Germans are quite precise and thorough.

   The Germans are quite precise and thorough in Kari’s opinion.

43. Kari is not precise, but more broadminded.

   Kari thinks that he is not precise but more broadminded.

44. The German language sounds to Kari like a military language, a commanding language, where there are lots of commanding forms, and few words to soften this.

   Kari thinks that the German language sounds like a military language, a commanding language with many commanding forms and few words to soften the message.

45. When Germans want to say something in a polite manner they write very long email messages or speak for a long time to soften the message down.

   Kari thinks that when the Germans strive towards politeness in communication they have to write very long email messages or speak extensively.

46. There may be lots of small details.

   German communication may include many details.

47. Kari feels that he does not have time for going through these messages.

   Kari feels that he does not have time to deal with long messages.

48. If there is a defect with a technical device the Germans will list numerous items to report this.

   If there is a technical failure in a device the Germans will list numerous items to report this.

49. It’s the same with customers, sales and service people who are German.

   Kari feels that this feature is shared with German customers, sales and service people.

50. Kari thinks that this is specifically a German characteristic.

   Kari thinks that this is specifically a German characteristic.

51. This feature of the Germans takes up a lot of Kari’s time.

   This feature in the Germans takes up a great deal of Kari’s time.

52. Kari feels that the Germans themselves lose something by listing all the details. If there is one issue that is really important it will get lost among other details which are not that relevant.

   Kari feels that this feature may be problematic for the Germans themselves, too, when in a long list of details a relevant issue may easily get lost under insignificant issues.

53. The German company culture is quite hierarchical.

   Kari thinks that the German company culture is quite hierarchical.
The Finnish company culture is more conversational, whereas in Sweden it is over-conversational. Swedish negotiations are long, because there is a need to discuss things back and forth.

The Swedes come for a company visit in a group of ten people. A business meeting with the Swedes is like a very long conversation.

In the Swedish company culture negotiations take time when people need to discuss things and ponder about them back and forth.

In the German company culture the supervisor has a lot of power in listing the tasks for the subordinate, who does not dare leave any issue off the list.

Kari thinks that in the German company culture the superior has a great deal of power over the subordinates, who has to go through all the duties that the superior has listed into his task list.

The German office experiences it as problematic to do business with the company people in Finland when they do not have one clear decision-maker there.

Kari thinks that the Germans may experience the Finnish company culture as problematic because there is no one clear decision-maker here.

On the other hand the German company culture is quite clear from top down.

This makes the German company culture also very clear from top down.

The Germans would like to be in direct contact with the manager and ask him directly for decisions.

The culture is apparently friendly, but you do not find out the real problems there.

The culture is apparently friendly, but the real problems may be difficult to detect because of this.

The Americans are more energetic and this is seen as a virtue by them, too. They do not like to waste their time talking like the Germans.

Kari thinks that the Americans are energetic and hold this as a virtue in business life, where they do not want to waste their time talking.

Then again he feels that this may lure the other person to reveal things about his own person that the Americans will consider a bit excessive.

Kari feels that by doing this the other person may be lured into revealing personal issues, which the Americans consider excessive.

Kari has experienced this trap of opening up with the Americans.

Kari has personally experienced this trap of opening up with Americans.

Kari does not like the way in the United States they hire people to greet you and wish you a good day in front of stores.

Kari dislikes the way people are hired by stores to artificially communicate with people.

Kari feels that the Americans are over-relaxed compared to the over-stiff Germans.

The Americans are too relaxed in their manner whereas the Germans are too stiff.

Kari feels that if you are having a dinner with the Germans you cannot be as informal as with the Americans. He also thinks that one should behave in Rome as the Romans do, With the Germans you cannot be as informal over a dinner as with the Americans, but that one needs to try and adapt you into the culture one is in.

Kari feels that with the Americans should not be too stiff or silent, or you will spoil the atmosphere of a party or a visit.

Kari feels that the atmosphere in a meeting or at a party is spoilt if you are too stiff or silent.

Kari thinks that anything makes a topic for a conversation with foreigners, just as with the Finns.
Kari thinks that just as with the Finns anything serves as a topic for conversation with the Americans.

74. Kari thinks that it is easy to talk to people if you open up a little and tell something about yourself. It is easy to continue from there if you can make the other person tell something about himself.
Kari thinks that a social situation is easier if one opens up and tells about oneself and thereby also makes the other person tell something about himself.

75. Normally people have something that interests them and that they like to talk about if someone listens to them.
Kari thinks that people are always interested in something and like to talk about this.

76. Kari thinks that sometimes a foreign language such as English is problematic. You may know the phrases and you know how to ask questions or answer them, but you may not understand the other person if his pronunciation is different, or if the words he is using are difficult. You have to ask for a clarification over and over again.
Kari thinks that language skills may be problematic when you have to repeatedly ask for clarifications from the person speaking.

77. There is fear or tension when you keep asking, and try to listen to the answer, but do not understand.
Kari connects these situations when you do not understand with sensations of fear or tension.

78. Kari thinks that situations like this are unpleasant.
Such situations are unpleasant.

79. Kari thinks that it is a Finnish phenomenon that people can slow down or use simpler language if the other person does not understand what you are saying.
Kari thinks that Finnish people know how to speak slower or use simpler language if there are problems of understanding on the other side.

80. Kari thinks that the Germans or the American do not know how to do this. They just try to talk more and use more words but at the same speed.
The Germans or Americans do not know how to do this, they just talk more at the same speed.

81. Kari thinks that with the Finns it may be difficult for foreigners to slow down or use simpler language, because they seem to know the language quite well. These people do not figure that the Finns need to be addressed like a preschool pupil if they do not understand something.
Kari thinks that with Finns the language problem may be due to the fact that the other party evaluates that the linguistic level of the Finn is higher than it actually is.

82. Kari thinks that in these cases the listening comprehension is not at the same level as the communication otherwise implies.
This problem may be caused by insufficient listening comprehension skills, which are hidden under otherwise good communication skills.

83. Kari thinks that there is not enough listening comprehension at school in Finland.
Kari thinks that the listening comprehension skills are not practised enough at school in Finland.

84. Kari thinks that also in Finland people may have different dialects and use difficult vocabulary.
In Finland one side of the problem may be that there are different dialects and people use different vocabulary.

85. Kari thinks that in the UK the vocabulary also reveals people’s education and profession quite visibly.
In the UK people’s social class and profession are visible and audible in the way they speak.

86. Kari thinks that the most difficult people to understand are the company’s own sales people in the UK because of their pronunciation.
Kari thinks that the spoken language of the sales people in the UK is especially difficult to understand.

87. Kari thinks that the most difficult person in this respect is the service person in the UK, who will easily panic if there is a problem on site.
There is a person employed by the company in the UK, whose language is the most difficult to understand because he also easily panics when facing a problem.

88. In a situation like this person cannot explain what the problem is clearly enough.
When in panic this person cannot clarify the problem.

89. It is always easier to understand people if you are there face-to-face. You can see it in people’s eyes if they have understood you.
In a face-to-face situation it is always easier to understand people. It can be seen in people’s eyes if they understand you.

90. Some people will just nod and say ‘yes’ even if they have not understood you.
There are people who will just nod and pretend that they have understood you even if they have failed to understand something.
7.4 Classifying each transformed meaning relation under a theme

When the meaning relations have been itemised they are classified under themes. Perttula recommends forming classifying themes already at the start of the process of analysis, but in the present case it seemed more natural to conduct the thematising process after having registered the meaning-containing units. The themes were formed separately for each interviewee, but I tried to keep them as broad as possible to avoid leaving any meanings out by mistake or to avoid premature definitions of meanings (Perttula 2000). The following themes emerged from Kari’s narratives:

**Learning languages: at school/ outside of school**

- In the world of engineering there are not many people who are both social and interested in learning languages.
- Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent. People who are interested in learning languages are also more social.
- Kari’s experiences from school were bad. The first years were much fun.
- Kari’s experiences with school changed suddenly in secondary school so that he felt that he was no longer with it in what the others were doing.
- Kari feels that there were two camps where some pupils were keeping up with what went on at school and the others had fallen away as had he. Kari’s grades fell and he was not interested in studying languages.
- Kari feels that at school the wrong issues were emphasised: pronunciation and grammar.
- Delivering the message was not emphasised at all. Kari feels that there was no sense in it.
- Kari feels that his efforts to use the language were disparaged at school.
- At school they focused on linguistic errors. Assessment was based on faults.
- In practice at work the errors you make when using a foreign language are not that significant.
- Kari’s trip to the United States gave him confidence as a language learner.
- When he had to cope with English it became natural for him to start to learn and practise the pronunciation of words.
- Kari collected strange words that he had heard during the day and wrote them in his notebook.
- Every evening he would go through the words in his notebook and find out what they meant. He either checked the words in a dictionary or asked his friends.
- After this Kari would learn by heart the words on his own.
- Kari feels that he had real motivation for studying then.
- During the first few weeks Kari did not speak English at all. The situation was especially difficult if there were other Finns present.
- Today Kari can see this sensation from another perspective: when there is someone at work whose language skills are not very good this person will remain silent, and Kari now knows why.
- Kari thinks that the reason for not daring to speak is not what the foreign person might say, but because of a lack of confidence.
- Kari thinks that Finnish people should be able to use English in everyday situations because they have studied it for many years.
- Kari sees the interviewer in her role as a teacher. He thinks that as a teacher I can see that people are on different levels as to their language skills.
- Kari thinks that teachers are special because they must motivate and encourage people.
- Kari thinks that in teaching and other issues in life expertise in the field is not a prerequisite to being able to teach this skill to others.
- This problem may be caused by insufficient listening comprehension skills which are hidden under otherwise good communication skills.
- Kari thinks that the listening comprehension skills are not practised enough at school in Finland.
In Finland one side of the problem may be that there are different dialects and people use different vocabulary. People who are interested in learning languages are also more social.

Using languages - Painful experiences with foreign languages – problems with languages
Kari feels that by doing this the other person may be lured into revealing personal issues, which the Americans consider excessive. Kari has personally experienced this trap of opening up with the Americans. Kari thinks that language skills may be problematic when you have to repeatedly ask for clarifications from the person speaking. Kari connects these situations when you do not understand with sensations of fear or tension. Such situations are unpleasant. Kari thinks that Finnish people know how to speak slower or use simpler language if there are problems of understanding on the other side. The Germans or Americans do not know how to do this, they just talk more at the same speed. Kari thinks that with Finns the language problem may be due to the fact that the other party evaluates that the linguistic level of the Finn is higher than it actually is. Kari thinks that the spoken language of the sales people in the UK is especially difficult to understand.

There is a person employed by the company in the UK, whose language is the most difficult to understand because he also easily panics when facing a problem. When in panic this person cannot clarify the problem. Kari does not think that language is an issue in contacts with people. Good presenters get their message through even with poorer language skills. Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent. People who are interested in learning languages are also more social. More social people also enjoy situations where languages are used. People who are interested in languages enjoy either the communication process or being in social contact with other people. In Finland one side of the problem may be that there are different dialects and people use different vocabulary. Kari feels that his efforts to use the language were disparaged at school. At school they focused on linguistic errors. Assessment was based on faults. During the first few weeks Kari did not speak English at all. The situation was especially difficult if there were other Finns present. Today Kari can see this sensation from another perspective: when there is someone at work whose language skills are not very good this person will remain silent, and Kari now knows why. Kari thinks that the reason for not daring to speak is not what the foreign person might say, but because of a lack of confidence.

Face-to-face communication /Social skills / Language skills / Strategy
Kari enjoys contacts with people. In a face-to-face situation it is always easier to understand people. It can be seen in people’s eyes if they understand you. There are people who will just nod and pretend that they have understood you even if they have failed to understand something. Kari does not think that language is an issue in contacts with people. Good presenters get their message through even with poorer language skills. Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent. People who are interested in learning languages are also more social. More social people also enjoy situations where languages are used. People who are interested in languages enjoy either the communication process or being in social contact with other people. In the world of engineering there are not many people who are both social and interested in learning languages. Social, engineering and language skills are necessary qualities in the field of engineering. English skills are necessary in engineering and the company will not employ people without sufficient English skills. Kari thinks that a social situation is easier if one opens up and tells about oneself and thereby makes also the other person tell something about himself. Kari thinks that people are always interested in something and they like to talk about this. Kari has a strategy for how to clarify things to people and what to tell them. Conducting business involves playing games for Kari. He adapts presentations according to the audience.
Kari thinks that business involves playing games, which are not always fair. The other person may require something that he himself is not prepared to do. Kari plans his presentations according to the needs of the audience. Kari changes the presentation according to the signals the audience gives him. Good presenters get their message through even with poorer language skills. Kari thinks that in teaching and other issues in life expertise in the field is not a prerequisite to being able to teach this skill to others. Kari thinks that a social situation is easier if one opens up and tells about oneself and thereby makes the other person tell something about himself. Kari thinks that people are always interested in something and they like to talk about this.

**Tasks at work - giving presentations – negotiations- meetings**

- Kari does not have a linguistic or presentational strategy.
- Kari does not have one general strategy for presentation openings.
- Kari plans his presentations according to the needs of the audience.
- The presentation styles may differ from formal to humorous.
- Kari’s work involves giving numerous presentations and negotiating with customers.
- Kari has changed the presentations that he gives with time.
- Earlier Kari’s presentations involved much planning, but today they are more routine like.
- Kari prepares the presentation if the topic is unfamiliar to him.
- At school and university Kari practised going through presentations.
- Today Kari just sketches the presentation issues that need to be covered beforehand.
- Kari changes the presentation according to the signals the audience gives him.
- Kari thinks that in an effective presentation the language is simple, the sentences short and there is enough repetition.
- During customer visits there are always presentations given, using either ready-made material or material prepared by Kari.
- The presentation is prepared according to the time slot defined for it.
- Kari thinks that the time frame given for the presentation is very important.
- Good presenters get their message through even with poorer language skills.
- Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent. People who are interested in learning languages are also more social.
- Kari divides audiences according to their level of expertise in engineering.
- During a recent job interview Kari changed the position he was interviewing the candidate for.

**Encounters with difficult people**

It is a valid question to ask about difficult people in a working life context. With a difficult person you need to use your communication skills even more than with other people. You also have to make sure that your tone is polite. You may lose your patience when you try to communicate with difficult people. Kari thinks that a person who is very straightforward is difficult. He may require that other people are prepared to behave in the same manner as he is. A difficult person will simplify things when it suits him but assume that others operate in a different manner. Difficult people have different standards for themselves and for other people. It may be that a difficult person has problems in coping with his work.

**Different people, different cultures – intercultural skills**

People are different, but so are cultures. In the UK people’s social class and profession are visible and audible in the way they speak. Doing business with the Americans is different from doing business with the Germans. The Germans are quite precise and thorough in Kari’s opinion. Kari thinks that he is not precise but more broadminded. Kari thinks that the German language sounds like a military language, a commanding language with many commanding forms and few words to soften the message. Kari thinks that when the Germans strive towards politeness in communication they have to write very long email messages or speak extensively. German communication may include abundant details. Kari feels that he does not have time for dealing with long messages. If there is a technical failure in a device the Germans will list numerous items to report this. Kari feels that this feature is shared with German customers, sales and service people. Kari thinks that this is specifically a German characteristic.
This feature in the Germans takes up a great deal of Kari’s time. Kari feels that this feature may be problematic for the Germans themselves, too, when in a long list of details a relevant issue may easily get lost under insignificant issues. Kari thinks that the German company culture is quite hierarchical. The Finnish company culture is more conversational, whereas in Sweden it is over-conversational. Kari thinks that Swedes conduct business visits in large groups of ten people. A business meeting with Swedes is like an extensive conversation. Swedish negotiations are long, because there is a need to discuss things back and forth. Kari thinks that in the German company culture the superior has a great deal of power over the subordinate, who has to go through all the duties that the superior has listed in his tasks. This makes the German company culture also very clear from top down. Kari thinks that the Germans may experience the Finnish company culture as problematic because there is no one clear decision-maker here. The Germans would like to be in direct contact with the manager and ask him directly for decisions. In a Finnish company there is not always one clear decision-maker. Kari thinks that the Finnish and Swedish decision-making processes are similar in that there are several people who may take the decision in a certain matter. Kari thinks that in the American business culture people focus on the most important issues. The culture is apparently friendly, but the real problems may be difficult to detect because of this. Kari thinks that the Americans are energetic and hold this as a virtue in business life, where they do not want to waste their time talking. The Americans are more open about personal issues. Kari dislikes the way people are hired by stores to artificially communicate with people. The Americans are too relaxed in their manner whereas the Germans are too stiff. With the Germans you cannot be as informal over a dinner as with the Americans, but one needs to try and adapt into the culture one is in. Kari feels that the atmosphere in a meeting or at a party is spoilt if you are too stiff or silent. Kari thinks that just as with the Finns anything serves as a topic for conversation with the Americans.

7.5 Organising the transformed meaning relations into a theme-specific individual meaning network

At this stage individual meanings are related to one another to manifest their inherently intertwined character (Perttula 1998). The essential content of each theme is illustrated as theme-specific networks in a more condensed form. In the following the theme-specific individual networks evinced by Kari are illustrated:

Learning at school and at work

Kari’s experiences from school are bad, although the first years were great fun. He felt that he was not with it any longer in what the others were doing. Kari thinks that there were two camps where some pupils kept up with what went on at school and the others had fallen away, just like himself. His grades fell and he was not interested in studying languages. Kari feels that at school the wrong issues were emphasised: pronunciation and grammar. Delivering the message was not emphasised at all. He feels that there was no sense in it when thinking about real life. Kari feels that his efforts to use the language were disparaged at school, where the focus was on linguistic errors and assessment was based on faults. In practice the errors you make when using a foreign language are not that significant.
Kari’s trip to the United States gave him confidence as a language learner. When he had to cope with English on his own it became natural for him to start to learn and practise. Kari created a system for himself for learning English. He feels that he had real motivation for studying then.

Kari thinks that a teacher can classify people into different levels as to their language skills. He thinks that teachers have to motivate and encourage people. Kari thinks that in teaching and other issues in life expertise in the field is not a prerequisite to being able to teach this skill to the others. Kari feels that Finnish people should be able to use English in everyday situations because they have studied it for many years.

**Communication at work**

Kari feels that language is not a problem in social contacts, but in the world of engineering there are not many people who are both social and interested in learning languages. People who are interested in languages enjoy either the communication process or being in social contact with other people. Earlier speaking English was especially difficult for him if there were other Finns present. Today Kari can see this from another perspective: when there is someone at work whose language skills are not very good this person will remain silent, and Kari now thinks it is not because of the foreigner, but because of a lack of confidence.

Problems may be caused because of different dialects or differences in terminology even within the company. According to Kari’s experience the biggest problems in communication are caused by insufficient listening comprehension skills, which are hidden under otherwise good communication skills. He feels that there are problems when you have to repeatedly ask for clarifications from the person speaking, and this kind of experience will result in tension or fear. Kari thinks that the listening comprehension skills are not practised enough at school in Finland.

Kari feels that Finnish people know how to speak more slowly or use simpler language if there are problems of understanding on the other side, when native speakers do not know how to adapt to the level of the other party. Kari thinks that the spoken language of some British people is especially difficult to understand. If the speaker becomes nervous it will make communication even more problematic, which is why you have to try to calm him/her down to get the message delivered. Kari feels that today social, engineering and language skills are necessary qualities in the field of engineering.

**Managing duties at work**

His work involves giving numerous presentations and negotiating with customers. Earlier Kari’s presentations involved a great deal of planning and practising, but today they are more routine-like, he only prepares them if the topic is unfamiliar to him, and just writes down the issues that need to be covered beforehand. He plans the presentations according to the needs of the audience and changes them according to the signals the audience gives him. Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent: good presenters get their message through even with poorer language skills. Kari thinks that in an effective presentation the language is simple, the sentences short and there is enough repetition. During customer visits there are always presentations given, using either ready-made material or material prepared by Kari. The presentation is prepared according to the time slot defined for it. Keeping to the time frame given for the presentation is very important.

**Face-to-face communication**

Kari enjoys contacts with people. In a face-to-face situation it is always easier to understand people. It can be seen in a person’s eyes if he understands you or not. Some people will pretend that they have understood you, but in a face-to-face contact you can detect this fallacy. Kari thinks that a social situation is easier if one opens up and tells about oneself and thereby makes the other person tell something about himself. On the other hand he feels that by doing this one may be lured into revealing one’s own personal issues. Kari tries to find what the other person is interested in and breaks the ice by talking a little about this.

**Playing games in business**

Conducting business involves playing games, which are not always fair. A person may require of other people something that he himself is not prepared to do. Kari does not have a linguistic or
presentational strategy, but he has a strategy for how to clarify things to people and what to tell them. Difficult people are an issue in a working life context. They have different standards for themselves and for other people. They may have problems in coping with their work. With them you need to use your communication skills even more than with other people. You also have to make sure that your tone is polite. Kari thinks that a person who is very straightforward is difficult. A difficult person will simplify things when it suits him but require that either others operate in a different manner, or that they are prepared to behave in the same manner as he is.

**Intercultural competence**

Kari thinks that just as people are different, so are cultures. Kari thinks that he is not precise but more broadminded, whereas the Germans are quite precise and thorough. This feature makes doing business with the Germans quite time consuming. Both written and oral communication involves long lists of details that need to be attended to. This feature in the German culture is sometimes problematic, when in a long list of insignificant details the one important issue may get lost. Kari thinks that these long messages may also reflect an aspiration towards politeness. The German language sounds like a military language to him. The company culture is more hierarchical in Germany. This can be seen in the way a superior has a great measure of power over the subordinate. This makes the German company culture also very clear from the top down. Kari thinks that the Germans may experience the Finnish company culture as problematic because there is no one clear decision-maker here. They would like to be in direct contact with the manager and ask him directly for decisions.

Kari feels that the Finnish company culture is more conversational, whereas in Sweden it is over-conversational. The Swedes conduct business visits in large groups of people, and a business meeting with them is like an extensive conversation. Swedish negotiations are long, because there is a need to discuss things back and forth. In a Finnish company there is not always one clear decision-maker to be found, but Kari thinks that the Finnish and Swedish decision-making processes are similar in that there are several people who may take the decision in a certain matter.

Kari thinks that in the American business culture people focus on the most important issues. They are energetic and hold this as a virtue in business life, where they do not want to waste their time talking. The culture is apparently friendly, but the real problems may be difficult to detect because of this. The Americans are more open about personal issues and too relaxed in their manner where the Germans are too stiff. With the Germans you cannot be as informal over a dinner as with the Americans, but one needs to try and adapt into the culture one is in. Kari feels that the atmosphere in a meeting or at a party is spoilt if you are too stiff or silent. Kari dislikes the artificial openness in the American culture. He thinks that just as with the Finns anything serves as a topic for conversation with the Americans.

7.6 Forming individual networks of meaning arriving at individually experienced language use portrayals in a professional context

The aim in this stage is for the researcher to synthesise and integrate the insights of the meaning units into a consistent individual description of the structure of the event (Giorgi 1985, 19). An individual network of meanings is created where all the transformed meaning units are included at least implicitly. In the following Kari’s individual network of meanings is given as an example:

Bad experiences from school, no interest in languages. At school the focus on artificial assessment based on errors. No connection to language use in practice in the real world. Teachers have to motivate and encourage people. They also classify people according to their language skills.
Expertise in the field is not a prerequisite for being able to teach this skill to others. Finnish people have studied English for several years and should be able to use it.

Autonomous thinking and high motivation towards studying English developed after school. Analysis of autonomous learning methods with systematic, independent studies. Utilising these and gaining confidence as a language user.

Using a foreign language has been especially difficult in the presence of another Finn because of a lack of confidence. Tension causes problems in use of language. Relaxation makes it easier to gain access to language skills.

Language use and social contacts are positive elements at work. In engineering there are only few people who are both social and interested in learning languages. The most problematic issue is understanding spoken language. In oral communication pronunciation may cause problems. Failure to understand the message may result in tension and fear. Terminology is sometimes problematic in internal and external contacts.

The daily work involves giving presentations, which earlier involved a great deal of planning and practising, whereas today just the main issues are written down as preparation. With presentations the most significant elements are keeping to the time frame given and adjusting the presentation according to the needs and level of expertise of the audience. A presentation may also be changed in mid-course according to the signals received from the audience. Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent: good presenters can get their message across even with more limited language skills. In a good presentation the language is simple and there is abundant repetition.

Face-to-face communication with people is enjoyable, making understanding the other much easier. In direct contact with people it is possible to detect from the body language whether the recipient has understood the message, even if some people try to hide this. The message may be simplified and clarifying questions used to make sure that the message gets across. In social situations both parties open up a little about some personal issues of interest to break the ice.

Doing business involves playing games, which are not always fair. Negotiations involve thorough preparations: setting the goals and defining the arguments to be presented, as well as a general strategy. The written word carries considerable weight and it can be used as a piece of evidence, so all written messages have to be carefully drafted.

With a more hectic working life time management has become a salient issue. People want to choose which meetings to attend and prefer to pay attention only to those parts of a meeting that are of use to them. At other times during meetings people are occupied with email or texting. People want to be available on their mobiles at all times.

People are experienced as difficult when they have different standards of behaviour for themselves and for other people. They may be incompetent in their work. Politeness and choosing the right tone are significant in communicating with difficult people.

There are differences in national cultures as to how detailed or polite communication is. It is important to adapt to the culture that one encounters at the time. The German culture feels too stiff and formal. Important messages may get lost among linguistic details. Business cultures differ in the degree of hierarchy, which is quite high in Germany, but low in Finland and Sweden. This may
cause problems in decision-making, when in a culture with a higher degree of hierarchy people expect that there is only one decision-maker with different issues.

The Swedish business culture is experienced as too conversational involving long discussions and large teams for negotiations. A special feature in the Finnish business culture is inconsiderate use of the mobile phone.

The American business culture seems to emphasise efficiency and energy. The culture is apparently open, relaxed and friendly, but real problems may be difficult to detect because of this. Remaining too silent during a meeting or a party is not acceptable in the American business culture.
8 GENERAL PHASE OF ANALYSIS

8.1 Transforming the individual meaning networks into proposals for general meaning relations

In the next stage the level of the analysis is raised from an individual to a general level. In this synthesising process the individual meaning networks are considered as proposals for potential general meanings reflecting knowledge of the commonly experienced language use in a professional context towards which is the researcher proceeds in phase two.

The researcher should strive towards a single common meaning network, but often there are more than one formed, when the data cannot be condensed into one structure (Giorgi 1985). It is quite possible that at the end of the analysis in phenomenological research there are as many common networks of meaning as there were participants in the inquiry, or at least a few different common networks of meaning. In these cases the phenomenon being examined manifests itself in extremely individual forms (Perttula 2000, 440). These are called different variants of the common network of meaning.

Here the theme of female gender in engineering was the only deviant component in the description of the commonly experienced language use in a professional context. It was shared by all the female interviewees, but absent from the accounts of the male interviewees. Hence female gender in engineering as experienced by the female interviewees was categorised as a variant to the common meaning network in this research. It has to be emphasised here, however, that this variant was not categorised as a lower hierarchy network; there were two variants of the common meaning network formed, both positioned at the same level.

In a similar manner as in stage two of the individual phase of analysis, meaning relations are separated in all the individual networks. The research data are now in a more crystallised form and hence it is also easier to isolate the meaning relations contained in it. As a final outcome of this stage the meaning relations are transformed into a more general language, fading away the individual in these experiences. (Perttula 2000, 434.) In the following Kari’s individual network of meanings is used as an example of this stage. The meaning relations that have been isolated are numbered consecutively. The transformed proposals for general meaning relations are given in brackets in italics.
1. Bad experiences from school, no interest in languages. At school the focus on artificial assessment based on errors. No connection to language use in practice in the real world. (Education experienced as negative, with no interest towards languages. Assessment conducted at school experienced as artificial. No connection seen between the life of school and the life at work.)

2. Teachers have to motivate and encourage people. They also classify people according to their language skills. Expertise in the field is not a prerequisite for being able to teach this skill to others. (The role of a teacher seen as a motivator, but also as an evaluator of competences. Expertise in the field is not required if you are to teach a skill)

3. Finnish people have studied English for some years and should be able to use it. (A number of years of language education should provide a person with the language skills needed in life.)

4. Autonomous thinking and high motivation towards studying English developed after school. Analysis of autonomous learning methods with systematic, independent studies. Utilising these and gaining confidence as a language user. (Systematic independent language studies outside of school using and analysing autonomous learning methods. Gaining confidence as a language user.)

5. Using a foreign language has been especially difficult in the presence of another Finn because of a lack of confidence. Failure to understand a message may result in tension and fear. Tension causes problems in use of language. Relaxation makes it easier to gain access to the language skills. (Language use has been experienced as especially difficult in the presence of another Finn. A lack of confidence and feelings of tension or fear make it difficult to use a language, whereas relaxation makes it easier to gain access to the existing skills.)

6. Language use and social contacts are positive elements at work. In engineering there are only few people who are both social and interested in learning languages. The most problematic issue is understanding spoken language. In oral communication pronunciation may cause problems. Terminology is sometimes problematic in internal and external contacts. (Language use and social contacts are positive elements at work, although it is difficult to understand spoken language at times because of differences in pronunciation. Terminology used at work is not systematic and causes problems in internal and external contacts.)

7. Daily work involves giving presentations, which earlier involved much planning and practising, but where today just the main issues are written down as preparation. With presentations the most significant elements are keeping to the time frame given and adjusting the presentation according to the needs and level of expertise of the audience. A presentation may also be changed in mid-course according to the signals received from the audience. Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent: good presenters can get their message across even with more limited language skills. In a good presentation the language is simple and there is abundant repetition. (Presentations are an integral part of the work. No planning or practice needed any longer for these. The most significant elements in a presentation are keeping to the time frame given and adjusting it to the needs and level of expertise of the audience. Signals received from the audience may lead to
changes in the presentation in mid-course. A good presenter need not possess good language skills. A good presenter uses simple language and ample repetition.)

8. Face-to-face communication with people is enjoyable, making understanding the other much easier. In direct contact with people it is possible to detect from the body language whether the recipient has understood the message, even if some people try to hide this. The message may be simplified and clarifying questions used to make sure that the message gets across. In social situations both parties open up a little about some personal issues of interest to break the ice. (Face-to-face communication is enjoyable and it makes understanding the other easier. Body language reveals whether the other has understood one’s message, even if people sometimes try to hide this. Simplified language and clarifying questions are used to ensure that the message is understood. In social situations both parties open up about some personal issues of interest to break the ice.)

9. Doing business involves playing games, which are not always fair. Negotiations involve thorough preparations: setting the goals and defining the arguments to be presented, as well as a general strategy. The written word carries considerable weight and it can be used as evidence, so all written messages have to be carefully drafted. (Business life involves playing games, which may be unfair. Negotiations involve setting the goals and defining arguments and a general strategy. Written word has to be carefully drafted and carries great weight, since it can be used as evidence.)

10. With a more hectic working life time management has become a salient issue. People want to choose which meetings to attend and prefer to pay attention only to those parts of a meeting that are of use to them. At other times during meetings people are occupied with email or texting. People want to be available on their mobiles at all times. (Time management is a salient issue at work. People choose the meetings they attend and also choose the parts in the meetings that are useful to them and pay attention to only them. At other times during meetings people are occupied with their mobile phones for emailing and texting. People want to be available on their mobiles at all times.)

11. People are experienced as difficult when they have different standards of behaviour for themselves and for other people. They may be incompetent in their work. Politeness and choosing the right tone are significant in communicating with difficult people. (People are experienced as difficult if they have different standards of behaviour for themselves and other people. Difficult people may be incompetent in their work. Politeness and choice of right tone are significant in communicating with difficult people.)

12. There are differences in national cultures as to how detailed or polite communication is. It is important to adapt to the culture one encounters at the time. The German culture feels too stiff and formal. Important messages may get lost in linguistic details. Business cultures differ in the degree of hierarchy, which is quite high in Germany, but low in Finland and Sweden. This may cause problems in decision-making, when in a culture of a higher degree of hierarchy people expect that there is only one decision maker with different issues. (There are differences in national cultures as to how detailed or polite the communication is. It is important to adapt to the culture one encounters at the time. In a very formal culture important messages may get lost in linguistic details. Cultures with a higher level of hierarchy may cause problems in decision-making, when people from such a culture expect that there is only one decision-maker with different issues.)
13. The Swedish business culture is experienced as too conversational, involving long discussions and large teams for negotiations. A special feature in the Finnish business culture is impolite manners in the use of the mobile phone. The American business culture seems to emphasise efficiency and energy. The culture is apparently open, relaxed and friendly, but real problems may be difficult to detect because of this. Remaining too silent during a meeting or a party is not acceptable in the American business culture. *(Cultural features include the quantity of discussion and people needed for negotiations. A special feature in the Finnish business culture is impolite manners with the mobile code of conduct. In a culture that is very open and relaxed it may be more difficult to detect problems. Silence is not approved of in some cultures.)*

8.2 Forming organising themes in all individual meaning networks structuring the proposals for meaning relations.

The analysis now proceeds to the formation of organising themes out of the proposals for meaning. This phase is carried out separately for each individual network of meanings. The purpose here is to perceive the themes in each proposal, hence the organising themes are not integrated (Perttula 2000, 436). The organising themes in Kari’s individual meaning network were as follows: *school, learning, communication at work, duties at work, face-to-face communication, playing games in business, time management, encountering difficult people, and intercultural communication.*

8.3 Positioning each proposal for meaning relation under an organising theme

At this stage all the meaning proposals are located under one organising theme. In the following this stage has been realised with the same example as earlier:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organising theme</th>
<th>Proposal for meaning relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>1. Education experienced as negative, with no interest towards languages. Assessment conducted at school experienced as artificial. No connection seen between the life of school and the life at work. 2. The role of a teacher seen as a motivator, but also as an evaluator of competences. Expertise in the field is not required if you are to teach a skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>3. Several years of language education should provide a person with the language skills needed in life. 4. Systematic independent language studies outside of school using and analysing autonomous learning methods. Gaining confidence as a language user.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication at work</td>
<td>5. Language use has been experienced as especially difficult in the presence of another Finn. A lack of confidence and feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of tension or fear make it difficult to use a language, whereas relaxation makes it easier to gain access to the existing skills. 6. Language use and social contacts are positive elements at work, although it is at times difficult to understand spoken language because of differences in pronunciation. Terminology used at work is not uniform and causes problems in internal and external contacts.

Duties at work
7. Presentations are an integral part of the work. No planning or practice needed any longer for these. The most significant elements in a presentation are keeping to the time frame given and adjusting it to the needs and level of expertise of the audience. Signals received from the audience may lead to changes in the presentation in mid-course. A good presenter need not possess good language skills. A good presenter uses simple language and ample repetition.

Face-to-face communication
8. Face-to-face communication is enjoyable and it makes understanding the other easier. The body language of a person reveals whether the other has understood one’s message, even if people sometimes try to hide this. Simplified language and clarifying questions are used to ensure that the message is understood. In social situations both parties open up about some personal issues of interest to break the ice.

Playing games in business
9. Business life involves playing games, which may be unfair. Negotiations involve setting the goals and defining arguments and a general strategy. Written word has to be carefully drafted and carries great weight, since it can be used as evidence.

Time management
10. Time management is a salient issue at work. People choose the meetings they attend and also choose the parts in the meetings that are useful to them and pay attention only to them. At other times during meetings people are occupied with their mobile phones for emailing and texting. People want to be available on their mobiles at all times.

Encountering difficult people
11. People are experienced as difficult if they have different standards of behaviour for themselves and other people. Difficult people may be incompetent in their work. Politeness and choosing the right tone are significant in communicating with difficult people.

Intercultural communication
12. There are differences in national cultures as to how detailed or polite the communication is. It is important to adapt to the culture one encounters at the time. In a very formal culture important messages may get lost in linguistic details. Cultures with a higher degree of hierarchy may cause problems in decision-making, when people from such a culture expect that there is only one decision-maker with different issues. 13. Cultural features include the quantity of discussion and people needed for negotiations. A special feature in the Finnish business culture is lack of consideration with the mobile code of conduct. In a culture that is very open and relaxed it may be more difficult to detect problems. Silence is not approved of in some cultures.
8.4 Forming theme proposals out of each proposal for meaning relation.

Theme proposals are formed at this stage in the analysis by addressing one organising theme at a time. The core contents of each theme are described in detail.

**Theme proposal**

**School**

Education is experienced as negative, with no interest towards languages. Assessment conducted at school is experienced as artificial. No connection is seen between the life of school and the life at work. Teachers are seen as motivators, but also as evaluators of competence.

**Learning**

Systematic independent language studies outside of school using and analysing autonomous learning methods. Gaining confidence as a language user and thinking that several years of language education should provide a person with the language skills needed in life. Expertise in the field is not seen as necessary for teaching a skill.

**Communication at work**

Language use was earlier experienced as especially difficult in the presence of another Finn. A lack of confidence and feelings of tension or fear make it difficult to use a language, whereas relaxation makes it easier to gain access to existing skills. Language use and social contacts are seen as positive elements at work, although at times it is difficult to understand spoken language because of differences in pronunciation. Terminology used at work is not uniform and causes problems in internal and external contacts.

**Presentations**

Presentations are an integral part of the work. No planning or practice is needed any longer for these. The most significant elements in a presentations are keeping to the time frame given and adjusting them to the needs and levels of expertise of the audience. Signals received from the audience may lead to changes in the presentation in mid-course. A good presenter need not possess good language skills, but he/she uses a simple language and a lot of repetition.

**Face-to-face communication**

Face-to-face communication is enjoyable and makes understanding the other easier. The body language of a person it reflects whether the other has understood the message, even if people sometimes try to hide this. Simplified language and clarifying questions are used to ensure that the message is understood. In social situations both parties open up about some personal issues of interest to break the ice.

**Playing games in business**

Business life involves playing games, which may be unfair. Negotiations involve setting the goals and defining arguments and a general strategy. Written word has to be carefully drafted and it carries great weight, since it can be used as evidence.
Time management

Time management is a salient issue at work. People choose the meetings they attend and also choose the parts in the meetings that are useful to them paying attention to them alone. At other times during meetings people are occupied with their mobile phones for emailing and texting. It is seen as negative that people want to be available on their mobiles at all times.

Encountering difficult people

People are experienced as difficult if they have different standards of behaviour for themselves and other people. Difficult people may be incompetent in their work. Being polite and choosing the right tone are significant in communicating with difficult people.

Intercultural communication

It is important to adapt to the culture one encounters. There are differences in national cultures as to how detailed or polite the communication is. In a very formal culture important messages may get lost in linguistic details. Cultures with a higher degree of hierarchy may cause problems in decision-making, when people from such a culture expect that there is only one decision-maker. Cultural features include the quantity of discussion and people needed for negotiations. A special feature in the Finnish business culture is an inconsiderate mobile phone code of conduct. In a culture that is very open and relaxed it may be more difficult to detect problems. Silence is not approved of in some cultures.

8.5 Constructing seven proposals for a common network of meanings.

The analysis proceeds in this stage to form tentative common meaning networks, or proposals for them. A proposal is constructed for each individually experienced language use portrayal in a professional context. The proposal needs to be refined until it takes shape as one entity. The end result of this stage consists of seven proposals for a common network of meanings. In the following, one of them is taken as an example for an individually experienced language use portrayal in a professional context:

A proposal for a common network of meanings /Kari

Education is experienced as negative, with no interest towards languages. Assessment conducted at school is experienced as artificial. No connection is seen between the life of school and the life at work. Teachers are seen as motivators, but also as evaluators of competences. Expertise in the field is not seen as necessary for teaching a skill. Systematic independent language studies outside of school using and analysing autonomous learning methods. Gaining confidence as a language user and thinking that several years of language education should provide a person with the language skills needed in life.

Language use was earlier experienced as especially difficult in the presence of another Finn. A lack of confidence and feelings of tension or fear make it difficult to use a language, whereas relaxation makes it easier to gain access to existing skills. Language use and social contacts are seen as positive elements at
work, although at times it is difficult to understand spoken language because of differences in pronunciation. Terminology used at work is not uniform and causes problems in internal and external contacts.

Presentations are an integral part of the work. No planning or practice is needed any longer for these. The most significant elements in a presentations are keeping to the time frame given and adjusting them to the needs and levels of expertise of the audience. Signals received from the audience may lead to changes in the presentation in mid-course. A good presenter need not possess good language skills, but he/she uses a simple language and ample repetition.

Face-to-face communication is enjoyable and makes understanding the other easier. In the body language of a person one can detect whether the other has understood the message, even if people sometimes try to hide this. Simplified language and clarifying questions are used to ensure that the message is understood. In social situations both parties open up about some personal issues of interest to break the ice.

Business life involves playing games, which may be unfair. Negotiations involve setting the goals and defining arguments and a general strategy. Written word has to be carefully drafted and carries considerable weight, since it can be used as evidence. Time management is a salient issue at work. People choose the meetings they attend and also choose the parts in the meetings that are useful to them, paying attention to them alone. At other times during meetings people are occupied with their mobile phones for emailing and texting. It is seen as negative that people want to be available on their mobiles at all times.

People are experienced as difficult if they have different standards of behaviour for themselves and others. Difficult people may be incompetent in their work. Being polite and choosing the right tone are significant in communicating with difficult people.

It is important to adapt to the culture one encounters. There are differences in national cultures as to how detailed or polite the communication is. Important messages may get lost in linguistic details. Cultures with a higher degree of hierarchy may cause problems in decision-making. Cultural features regulate the extent of discussion and the number of people needed for negotiations. A special feature in the Finnish business culture is an inconsiderate mobile phone code of conduct. In a culture that is very open and relaxed it may be more difficult to detect problems. Silence is not approved of in some cultures.

8.6 Constructing from proposals for a common network of meanings one common network – or here two variants of a common network of meanings.

The seven proposals for a common network of meanings are formed into one common network of meanings describing the phenomenon that has been examined. This common network of meanings is no longer a proposal, but stands alone as the end-point of an empirical process of analysis covering all the meanings shared by all the interviewees regarding the phenomenon examined. If the proposals for a common network of meanings deviate substantially from one another it is necessary to form several common networks of meaning, or variants of a common network (Perttula 2000, 339–440).

In this project the accounts of the female interviewees added a dimension to the common meaning network that was shared by all four female participants, but absent from the male accounts. This dimension reflected the encounters of women in engineering as experienced by the
interviewees. It was somewhat frustrating to separate the proposals for a network of meaning of the female interviewees into a variant of the common network, since the only deviation could be seen in how the female gender was experienced, the core contents of the examined phenomenon being shared by all the participants. In the end I decided to separate the female accounts as a variant to the common network of meaning. It has to be emphasised here, however, that this variant was not categorised as a lower-hierarchy network; two variants of the common network were formed, both positioned at the same level.

Amedeo Giorgi (1985, 20) points out that this final stage in the analysis may be somewhat intricate with phenomenological research, since the manner in which the findings are expressed depends on whether the audience the research is targeted to consists of phenomenologists or psychologists, for example. This statement is not further elaborated, but I interpret it to mean that in the essentially similar findings different aspects can be emphasised or opened up for different audiences. Here the common networks of meanings, or general descriptions of the situated structure of the phenomenon are expressed so that they have been divided into paragraphs according to different context areas to ease reading. My background as a language teacher has probably also affected the presentation of the findings.
9 FINDINGS

9.1 Commonly experienced language use portrayal in a professional context – variant Y

The language of foreign language education is seen as unauthentic in that there is little connection between the language use at school and the language use in practice in the real world. At school as well as with in-company training courses the focus is often seen to lie on artificial assessment based on errors. Good grades earned at school do not necessarily portend success in language use in real life. The transition from school to work is thus experienced as dramatic. A more profound integration of cultural issues into foreign language education is called for, since the Finnish method of learning languages is sometimes recognised as limited to learning the technique of the language without internalising the role of culture as an integral part of any language.

Language courses are perceived as efficient if they are intensive, well-structured and progress in an organised manner; they should not be too lax. A good teacher is seen as someone who is goal-oriented, motivated and encouraging, who listens to his/her students, emits good energy, and creates a pleasant atmosphere. Expertise in the field is not seen as a prerequisite for someone who teaches skills to others.

Autonomous thinking and high motivation towards studying languages is frequently developed after school, especially since language skills are often considered as personal equity. The plurilingual nature of language skills is demonstrated by incorporating vocabulary from different languages into business communication to ensure that the message is apprehended. Language users evaluate that they are competent in recognising their own level of language skills and the needs for development there. Autonomous strategies in learning may be manifested by setting criteria for language skills or determining goals for a language learning process. Often the criteria for the spoken language are set much higher than for the written language. A stance of analysing autonomous learning methods is frequently adopted in connection with systematic, independent language studies to gain confidence as language learners. Often language users also analyse the structures of languages, looking for similarities and differences there.

Autonomous language learners often employ critical reflection to assess their own personalities, and development targets can be set e.g. as regards impatient behaviour, adoption of a softer tone in
communication, or they may try to refrain from belittling themselves. Recognising one’s own weaknesses is seen as a facilitating factor in reaching one’s goals in business life. It is sometimes experienced as difficult to hide professional expertise under a humble attitude, which may cause misunderstandings in business encounters, whereas attending psychological training courses is seen as potentially beneficial for learning a correct attitude.

An active use of foreign languages and social contacts in general are regarded as positive elements at work. Courage to enter a situation is seen as a positive element in communication, when one can take hold of a language even with poorer language skills. Experiences of discouragement when trying to use a language in a face-to-face situation may dishearten the speaker from using the language again. Mastering a language can provide one with an upper hand in negotiations, where the language used is chosen according to the nature of the transaction. Terminology is sometimes problematic both in internal and external contacts, but understanding spoken language is recognised as the most problematic issue in communication in a foreign language, where a failure to understand the message delivered may result in tension and fear.

In most cases the counterparts will relate to a person in a positive manner if they perceive a genuine urge to deliver a message. Thus personalities are seen to contribute to understanding between people much more so than perfect language skills. Creating an understanding atmosphere is experienced as significant, while the most vital issue in business is considered to entail both parties establishing a common goal in order to get a specific issue covered. In a business encounter it is not seen as relevant whether the communication is conducted linguistically inadequately or not.

Early in the career language skills may be presented as more elementary than they in reality are, this to hide insufficient technical expertise. Using a foreign language may be particularly difficult in the presence of another Finn. Tension may make it difficult for a person to gain access to his/her full language repertoire. Small talk is utilised to facilitate common understanding or to break the ice.

The preferred mode of communication may still be emailing as against telephoning. Sometimes it is useful to ignore a phone call if the person is not prepared for it, and only call the person back after having prepared for it. Teleconferencing is only perceived as useful if well organised. Brief and sometimes impolite email messages are seen as a specifically Finnish feature. The written word carries considerable weight, so all written messages have to be carefully drafted. An email message leaves a trace and may thus be used as a verifying tool in business.

It is significant that all business transactions involve some degree of interaction with people. Technical issues can be learnt, but interaction skills are experienced as more difficult to adopt.
Face-to-face communication is experienced as enjoyable. It facilitates understanding the other party, and delivering technical information. Regular face-to-face encounters are seen as beneficial for establishing a good rapport between people or for settling a conflict situation. With linguistic problems people often resort to visual means to illustrate the issue at hand nonverbally with gestures and visual aids. The message is frequently simplified and clarifying questions used to make sure that the message gets across.

Intuition is often used as a tool in interpreting the reactions of the counterparty. Interpreting the body language of the counterpart also makes it easier to detect whether he/she has understood a spoken message or not, especially with cultures where people may intentionally try to hide this. It is acknowledged that even if cultures differ, basically people’s reactions and the signs behind them are the same all over the world. Sensitivity to nonverbal communication enables registering people’s reactions and adapting behaviour according to the counterparty. Especially with new contacts it is seen as imperative to remain sensitive and to weigh one’s words carefully. A sense of situational awareness is seen as salient in business life: an ability to read people’s faces and between the lines. It is often found beneficial to try to identify oneself with the counterparty in a problematic situation instead of expressing open frustration. It is important to sense who is the decision-maker in the opposite camp, because the person who is highest in the hierarchy also needs to get most of the attention.

Humour is seen as bound to the context and varying from one culture to another. Sometimes people resort to humour when taking the lead to prevent people from losing face. Humour can also be used to alleviate offended feelings. Caution should be taken when resorting to humour, however. Sometimes communicating with native speakers is experienced as difficult when one cannot tell for sure whether a person is joking or serious. The situation may be somewhat awkward when people do not really understand one another and this may create a chain of embarrassment.

Daily work involves giving presentations, which may earlier in the career have involved much planning and practising, but where today just the main issues are written down as preparation. With presentations the most significant elements are considered to be keeping to the time frame given and adjusting the presentation according to the needs and level of expertise of the audience. A presentation is also frequently changed in mid-course according to signals received from the audience. Presentation and language skills are not inter-dependent: good presenters can get their message across even with more limited language skills. In a good presentation the language is simple with abundant repetition. Prior preparations are frequently made to acquire background
Doing business entails playing games, which are not always fair, but it is seen as paramount to remain calm, since losing one’s nerve will also mean losing the game. It is found extremely significant in business not to cause the opposite number to lose face. Negotiations involve thorough preparations: setting the goals and a general strategy as well as defining the arguments to be presented. A strategy needs to be planned for each encounter especially as regards which issues to take up and which to leave out. A person may also be given a certain position in the company for strategic reasons. Social positioning is resorted to in potentially difficult encounters where interpreting the counterparty is problematic. It is often seen as useful to position oneself as inferior in business contacts. The manner in which issues are presented is crucial for success in business encounters, but it is also quite difficult to be simultaneously humble and assertive. Remaining calm, neutral and passive is advisable in business encounters. It is seen as beneficial to approach the other party and ask for their opinions.

Cultural features may contribute to intentionally providing misleading information. It is considered to be good manners on both sides to make clear who has the final word. One has to be outspoken and direct in business, not too soft, to gain respect. Often stronger language is used with complaints, exaggerating and overreacting a little to get one’s demands through, even if in reality the issue may be marginal.

People are experienced as difficult if they have different standards of behaviour for themselves and for other people. They may have learnt a mode of operation in getting what they want through anger. This kind of behaviour may be very frustrating to the other party, but remaining calm is necessary to cope with them. In any such conflict the person who starts shouting will lose the game. People can also play a game involving minor details, when they actually have problems in setting their priorities. Politeness and choosing the right tone are significant in communicating with people who are indecisive because of lack of competence.

With an ever more hectic working life time management has become a salient issue. People want to choose which meetings to attend and prefer to pay attention only to those parts of a meeting that are of use to them. At other times during meetings people may be occupied with email or texting. Particularly Finnish people want to be available on their mobiles at all times, and an impolite mobile phone code of conduct is seen as a specifically Finnish feature.

Integrating cultural elements into language studies is perceived as salient. Incorporating cultural consultancy is seen as a good investment for a company before embarking into other cultures.
Cultural experts could draft contracts and they might be able to prevent conflicts when intervening in potential conflicts as neutral outsiders.

Intercultural understanding is seen as universal empathy between people and genuineness is emphasised as a salient personality trait in business. Often people reflect critically upon their own behaviour in intercultural encounters. There are differences in national cultures as to how detailed or polite the communication is. Effusively polite behaviour is interpreted as softness in Finland, where it is better to exhibit edge and determination to manage in business. When for a Finn it is perceived as important that an issue gets solved, in some other cultures it is much more important to establish a good relationship between people for the issue to progress.

Often preconceptions of people from some cultures as arrogant have changed after face-to-face contact. It is important to adapt to the culture one encounters, though cultural features can also be quite problematic. If communication in a culture is too stiff and formal, important messages may get lost in linguistic details. Organisational cultures with high power distance are more centralised and more importance is placed on status. This may cause problems in decision-making, when in a culture with a rigid hierarchy people expect there to be only one decision-maker with different issues. From another viewpoint intercultural friction created through differences in power distance is illustrated with an example between the different organisational cultures of the target company in Finland and the United States of America. In Finland anyone can go to see the managing director, who does not feel that it encroaches on his authority if people come to see him to express their dissatisfaction about something. The president of the American office, however, would not tolerate this kind of behaviour. This example was seen as a manifestation of it being no use for a person to know the language if he/she has no idea of the way people think in the country in question, or have not developed an intercultural understanding.

The American business culture is seen to emphasise efficiency and energy. The apparent openness and friendliness there may, however, make it difficult to detect underlying problems. In business transactions it is often experienced that in some cultures people do not want to take on responsibility, whereas Finns are seen as possessing the courage to do this and to hold on to decisions. It is seen as negative if the counterparty is completely passive, giving all the leads to the other party. An active dialogue is perceived as the best option for all parties involved in order to gain results. It may on the surface seem useful if a person can dictate everything in a business transaction, but this will almost always bounce back when the other party notices that they have been tricked. In the end a project is experienced as a partnership: the buyer needs to understand that there is commitment and a certain responsibility there.

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9.2 Commonly experienced language use portrayal in a professional context – variant Z: Female gender in engineering

The commonly experienced language use portrayal of female engineers includes the portrayal presented earlier (variant Y). Thus a commonly experienced language use portrayal in a professional context for the female engineers is a combination of these two variants (Y+Z).

Women do not wish to be treated in a different manner or to get any extra favours from men; they find it much easier and more equal to set out from the same line as men. Female engineers frequently feel that their ideas are valued, and they may be encouraged to express their opinions particularly by the management level. Expectations in the case of women in technology are perceived to be much higher than for men: they need to possess more knowledge and stand up for themselves more emphatically. In some situations women have been denied the possibility to express their opinions freely in public or their speech has been interrupted at meetings.

Unequal treatment or demeaning behaviour may be experienced especially upon taking up a managerial position. A degrading mode of thinking has long prevailed in the field, so that for example trade fairs employ lightly dressed presenter girls with the purpose of luring people to the stands. Sometimes women are improperly approached after a business dinner. The strategy of the female engineer in such situations may be to politely turn offers down and try to control the situation by limiting her own use of alcohol at dinners to the minimum.

There may be internal games played within the company, where e.g. prior to a meeting two fronts are formed to discuss a difficult issue at hand. Women may be excluded from these fronts: they are not approached by either, which makes them feel as outsiders.

Male chauvinism may be encountered in intercultural contacts, but such experiences may frequently be alleviated by interpreting them as stemming from cultural issues. In some cultures a woman’s word does not seem to have the same weight as a man’s, and women may have to verify decisions with a male colleague’s name. Sometimes improper language is contained in email messages. Studying the local language and being able to use it in business contacts is foreseen as a potential means of minimising misrecognition of women engineers in intercultural encounters.

The survival strategy in face of degrading behaviour may appear as an effort to stay above it all, trying to ignore it, avoiding thinking about this as a gender issue, or confronting it either on the spot or afterwards. Prior awareness of potential demeaning attitudes makes it easier to relate to them. The reason for avoiding a confrontation may stem from an analysis where the offender is seen as a person who will not change his mode of operation even upon confrontation. Defensive action may
be resorted to if the humiliation has been public. Any resulting confrontation is often conducted in private and the subsequent feedback has mostly been positive. Sometimes disparaging jokes on women are returned to the sender by resorting to telling some on men.

The strategy may include avoiding attention to gender altogether, so as not to lose credibility. It is accepted as natural that in some cultures a woman will receive a certain amount of special attention; doors are opened etc., but this is not made into a spectacle. According to this approach, for a woman to be seen as an expert she needs to be seen in as neutral a light as possible, not standing out of the mass of men at all. It is often considered important to carefully assess how to dress, preferably being overdressed rather than underdressed, and as a result a conservative dress code is often adopted.

It is seen as imperative for a female expert to be assertive. She needs to be able to speak her mind when needed. A person cannot remain silent, man or woman, or he/she will be rated incompetent, and this is not seen as a gender issue. According to one approach it is acknowledged that there are some advantages to being a woman, which need to be accepted, since ignoring the special attention would be regarded as tactless. It is seen as an advantage of the female gender that men seldom lose their temper completely with a woman or start shouting at them.

Humour is often considered useful, but it is acknowledged that caution should be maintained in resorting to it. Female gender is seen as advantageous and powerful: when a woman uses humour she is allowed more space than a man in some situations, and men will take it as a joke when they have to obey women both at work and at home. They will not be offended, because they can see that the intervention was necessary, but they could not have accepted it from another male person without losing face. If a woman has faced misrecognition it is difficult for her to resort to humour even if that would normally have been customary for her.

In an engineering company some positions may be internally tacitly labeled as women’s positions, often those involving secretarial duties. In a situation like this a woman may be able to change the job description herself and have the secretarial duties removed – enabling men to occupy this kind of a position as well in the future.

The female gender may be used as an asset by women themselves to further a cause, to attain to more power in some situations, or to ask for a favour e.g. by adopting a special tone of voice to solve a situation in a positive spirit. It may be resorted to to hide the fact that the execution of managerial decisions may be difficult for the woman in question.
Men are experienced as having their own culture at work to which a woman has no access. They may share friendships e.g. through hobbies outside of work. Sometimes there have been efforts to create togetherness and team spirit among women at work, but with little success.
10 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

10.1 Shift from the multiple voices of the individually experienced language use portrayals to commonly experienced language use portrayals in a professional context

The individually experienced language use networks of meaning reflect the versatility, individuality and uniqueness of the participants, as well as their multiple voices (Rauhala 1995; 2005; Perttula 2000). The participants here were of different ages, possessed varied work experience in the field of technology, and included both male and female engineers. What is seen as more fundamental in phenomenologically characterised research entails, however, that all the meaning relations be embedded into the experience world of an individual, and experiences are always formed in the life situation of an individual (Rauhala 1998).

When the phenomenological analysis proceeds from an individual to the general level the basic nature of the knowledge formed thereby is to some degree construed more by the researcher (Perttula 2000, 430). This general knowledge, however, must be comprehensive, it must always be returned to all the individual knowledge, and nothing that is contradictory to the individual knowledge can be included there (Alasuutari 1993).

10.2 Clusters of themes in the commonly experienced language use portrayals (variants Y + Z) in a professional context

In the common network of meanings shared by all the interviewees the following central themes could be detected:

- **learning**: learner autonomy, school knowledge vs. working life knowledge, self-reflection, language & culture education
- **female gender**: misrecognition, versatile approaches to this, encouragement, appreciation
- **face-to-face communication**: social interaction skills, intuition, playing games, social positioning, concept of face
- **humour**: used as a device to control a situation, in power transition, to manage intercultural encounters to alleviate friction, to create a pleasant rapport
duties at work: presentations adapted according to the audience, keeping to the time frame, simple language, repetition; time management: selective allocation of attention, being available 24/7

intercultural understanding: reflection, human universal coherence, adaptation, resisting stereotypes, cultural juxtapositions, humour, appropriateness, positive attitude, effectivity

10.3 Overview of articles

In the following I elaborate on the central concepts in the common networks of meanings, giving an overview of the articles that form an integral part of this research report. The significance of these themes for professionally oriented language education is also discussed. The concepts of autonomy in learning, face-to-face communication, female gender and intercultural understanding are dealt with in detail in the respective attached articles (I–IV).

The theme of female gender was in the first article more prominently examined from an educational perspective, because the article was based on a presentation given at a national didactics conference. Hence the theme of female gender in engineering as experienced by language users in a professional context is dealt with in greater detail than the other themes in articles II–IV.

10.3.1 Article I - Female gender in engineering

Women account for 13 per cent of the membership in the Finnish trade union of engineers, but the proportion of women there is increasing; out of the engineers who graduated in 2009 already 18 per cent were female. Most female engineering students do not study towards the more traditional degrees in engineering, but in novel programs such as bio and food engineering, where over 60% of students are female (Union of Professional Engineers in Finland 2010). In most EU countries vertical segregation is less marked than horizontal segregation. Significant factors contributing to segregation include e.g. choice of study field, stereotypical thinking, as well as covert biases or forms of impediment in organisational practices. (Bettio & Verashchagina 2009, 9.)

It has been pointed out that when seeking to define gender identity we are actually already creating a norm (Butler 1994). Postmodern feminism denies the option that all women would have a unified voice or that employment in technology would affect all women in a uniform manner (Rosser 2006, 33). The competitive nature of engineering is seen as a major factor preventing
women from entering the field (Cockburn 1983; Wajcman 1991; Rosser 2006), while the social shaping of technology has frequently been conceptualised in terms of men, to the exclusion of women at all levels (e.g. Wajcman 1991; Webster 1995). Gender division is often acknowledged as natural in engineering, with men as the standard, since engineering as a field is connected in images and systems of belief precisely with men (Acker 1999, 182).

In today’s society gender as a social relation is individualised so that any misrecognition as to gender is easily labeled as an individual problem, thus creating silenced and cemented power relations (Mäkinen 2012). In this project the female interviewees mostly referred to their experiences as women in engineering in an individualised overtone. They indicated that the recognition or misrecognition of female gender in engineering was an aspect that in profound ways affected their being in working life. The participants here had been given encouragement especially by the management to openly express their opinions, but there were also experiences of misrecognition, culminating in cases of demeaning behaviour towards female engineers. Misrecognition of a person or a group of people does not merely reflect a lack of respect, it can harm people. It is a form of oppression imprisoning people in a reduced mode of being (Taylor 1994, 25). While the level of social interaction is closely connected to professional participation and performance, Fox (2006) indicates that women have limited access to social networks and interaction in engineering. In Figure 3 the negative experiences of female engineers and the approaches they resorted to upon encountering these are illustrated as they were manifested in the common network of meanings of the female interviewees.
Misrecognition of female engineers

Demeaning behaviour included interrupting and speaking over an address by a female engineer at a meeting, improper language in business email messages and degrading behaviour at business dinners. There was a feeling that misrecognition escalated after a female had entered a management position. Powell et al. (2006) remind us that women are even today often type-cast as females with a care duty in engineering still today, and if women engineers progress to operate as ‘masculine’ men, they are socially sanctioned for this.

In recruitment there were experiences of positions having been tacitly earmarked for women or for men, even if the vacancy had been advertised for both genders. In general it was felt that male engineers shared a male culture of their own, where they would also spend their free time outside of working hours partly together. Sometimes there had been efforts to form similar networks between female employees, but to little avail. Wolf (1994, 75) points out that misrecognition of a group of people or a culture may cause a lack a sense of community and basis for self-esteem. This may lead to a paralysis-like state of emptiness where no dialogical connection between people is realised, and this may have been at least partly the reason behind the failed connection in this case as well.

Approaches adopted

- ignoring the experiences
- fading out gender -being 'neutral'
- self control
- dress code
- humour
- grasping voice
- confrontation
- utilising gender

Figure 3. Misrecognition experienced by female engineers and the approaches adopted upon encountering misrecognition.
Female engineers resorted to a variety of approaches towards degrading behaviour. They would try to ignore the experiences and sometimes explain to themselves that this could have happened to a male engineer as well. Lagerspetz (1990, 91) notes that women who were employed in the field of technology would position female gender outside of their self-image, and chose to present themselves as neutral technical experts. Such an approach was also found in the present cohort, characterised by an endeavour to fade out gender completely and become as neutral as to avoid standing out from the mass of male engineers at all, but would blend in completely. Often this stance included a careful consideration of the dress code, as well as a certain degree of self-control at business dinners, e.g. as to the use of alcohol. Wood (2000) points out that the approach where female engineers need to blend in with male engineers and thereby efface their gender resonates in the muted group theory and the role socialisation of women whereby a childhood pattern of restraint is replicated in public arenas predominantly occupied by men.

Perpetrators of demeaning behaviour were mostly subsequently confronted, and in private, even if the humiliation in question had been public. In most cases the feedback after the confrontation was positive.

Humour was seen as a valuable asset in business encounters and it was experienced as a strategy that empowered women over men in power struggles. Mäkinen (2012) claims that gender as a social relation has become individualised, contributing to gender becoming an asset that can be used towards a person’s own self realisation in society today. Some female participants would also refer to female gender as an asset that could be utilised when there was a need to request a favour, although they saw the fallacy there and confessed to having mixed feelings about resorting to it. It was experienced that a plea coming from a female was not turned down so easily, nor were women exposed to yelling out of anger.

The negative experiences of female engineers resonate as reflections of misrecognition. Due recognition is a basic human need, which Charles Taylor (1994) sees from two perspectives: recognition can be intensified by an emphasis on individuality, where each person’s voice is unique, where one needs to get into contact with one’s inner self. This mode of thinking can be extended from individual people to cultures, leading to modern nationalism, in both a positive and a negative sense. Instead of inwardly generating one’s being, through recognition of difference, the human condition is inherently dialogical: we need relationships with other people to fulfil ourselves (Taylor 1994). Fraser (2009) connects with the politics of recognition the concept of parity of participation as a two-dimensional norm combining both the politics of redistribution and the
politics of recognition, whereby justice is served when social arrangements permit interaction for all the (adult) members of a society with one another as peers.

It has to be remembered, however, that women have been recognised as women, and nothing else, for centuries, and one needs to ask whether these female engineers really want to be recognised as women at all at work, or whether it is the professional status of expertise that they would prefer as their voice. The politics of recognition demands, however, that all people are seen as equals, and if this is not true with female professionals, then measures need to be taken to change the professional culture in this respect. Powell et al. (2006) claim that this will be induced by having a critical mass of women enter engineering, thereby making the field more easily accessible to other females only if the women within the profession choose to challenge the patriarchal norms instead of solely ‘fitting in’.

In a recent study it was concluded that female adolescents experienced more anxiety in social situations than their male counterparts. They also felt more comfortable communicating through socially interactive technologies than being in face-to-face contact with people (Pierce 2009). The findings of another study indicated that female students participated more actively in a dialogue in an online environment regardless of age or national origin. In online forums the voices of all the participants were heard, because of the absence of nonverbal manifestations of status. Female students also reported experiencing deeper learning in online courses compared to face-to-face courses. (Anderson & Haddad 2005.)

These results may indicate that even though the significance of face-to-face communication was emphasised in this present work, it is possible that groups or individuals who are experiencing misrecognition and social inequality may not enjoy entering a public arena and face-to-face contact. With them the principle of equal respect may be difficult to implement in direct social interaction with people, whereas in online communication the interlocutor remains anonymous, and it is more likely for a person to be treated in a difference-blind fashion. Even though the female interviewees here did not indicate that face-to-face communication per se would have been uncomfortable or problematic for them, they reported experiences of demeaning behaviour in professional interaction.

Educational level needs to be addressed when contesting the misrecognition of women in engineering. It is there that both male and female students are socialised towards their professional identities. The well-established impression of equality in the Finnish school system may obscure the processes there that actually create or reproduce gender inequality. A report on gender and education in the EU (Commission of the European Communities 2009) points out that equality does not emerge by accident; hence it should be fostered through concrete action instead of merely
proclaiming equality at school to be a rhetorical priority. The report further recommends that gender education be included in professional education programmes in both further and higher education with monitored equality policies adopted at each institution.

10.3.2 Article II - Learner autonomy

The interviews were opened with an inquiry into the participant’s earliest memories of language studies at school. This was designed to serve as an ice-breaker in creating an accommodating atmosphere for the interviews. In the end recollecting about school times turned out to be a very valuable item that brought to the surface emotional memories of the participants and profound reflection on these.

The interviewees manifested identities as life-long learners who were motivated towards using different languages and who had embraced their own learning as an attitude to life. When one looks at one’s experiences and oneself, adopting an attitude of critical reflection, one examines oneself as an object, in a way ‘attends to oneself’ through the Greek concept of *epimeleia heautou* introduced by Foucault (1994, 93). Foucault extends this concept to pedagogy by noting that already in Plato’s Alchibiades it was seen as necessary for people to take charge of their own learning throughout their entire life span to cover up the inadequacies of education (Foucault 1994, 96).

It was somewhat in this vein that the interviewees referred to their autonomous stance in learning when they accounted for autonomy from the point of view of individual learning to learn outside or in spite of institutional settings; ‘taking over languages’ as they would sometimes refer to their autonomous stance of appropriating learning. This kind of a stance engages the person holistically: as a sensing, feeling, critically thinking member of a community. Since the roles of teachers and students are complementary they need to be agreed upon by all the participants (Kohonen 2006, 41; La Ganza 2008). In the experiences of the interviewees there were also vivid portrayals of teachers who had entered the pedagogical negotiation of language education as autonomous participants together with their students.

On the other hand autonomy in education stands for social action and educational change. Learners may easily conform to the hidden curriculum of the educational institution, turning into conscientious students instead of growing into independent professionals as they should in vocational higher education. An autonomy-in-life idea defines autonomy as a socially formed concept, where learners and teachers alike are engaged in critical, social thinking processes.
Reverberations of the Freirian (1970) banking model of education could be heard in the accounts of the interviewees. They felt that they were often seen as passive recipients of knowledge and objects of exercise of authority. The interviewees manifested an awareness of this, but on the surface accepted the roles of silent learners delegated to them. The nature of school knowledge was seen as unauthentic and alienated from real life. Even if most interviewees expressed their frustration at some aspects of life at school, there was no active resistance portrayed, although some interviewees had resorted to rebelling by interrupting studies and changing schools, or by leaving school completely.

In real life most participants were actively involved in language studies, either on their own or as arranged by the employer. Institutional constraints of school were experienced as physically suppressive, and e.g. a teacher expressing his autonomy by taking students out into the schoolyard for a class was seen as a liberator.

Many interviewees challenged the contents of foreign language education, where they saw an unauthentic emphasis on the structures of the language and felt that the education they received did not equip them for real life outside of school. Some interviewees also lamented having lacked the courage or the skills to speak a foreign language after school (cf. also Kaikkonen 2004).

Evaluation conducted at school was often labelled as unauthentic with no elements of self-assessment or peer assessment having been incorporated there. Authentic assessment was identified as feedback given in real life connected with real situations. Assessment conducted at school, e.g. in the matriculation examination, was recognised as artificial, but the participants might have assimilated into the system, memorising by heart some general sentences that they could utilise in the exam. They realised at the same time, though, that their real language skills were not reflected in the grades that they received at school, as Kari here testifies:

Kari: It’s really quite funny that I normally always got some 60 points [of max. 100/99 points] for my essays. For the matriculation examination I learnt by heart two essays and wrote one of them. There were no mistakes there and the grammatical structures were terribly simple, and I got 85 points for it!

Niina: Oh!

Kari: Just learnt by heart two of these – that you could adapt anywhere by just changing one sentence. It was so crazy!

Motivation is linked to autonomy and identity as an upper-level concept, and often the interviewees manifested a loss of motivation towards studying after having been denied autonomy in their learning. This in turn seemed to lead in the most dramatic cases to leaving school. Some
participants recounted having renegotiated their own status as autonomous learners outside of the institutional constraints. This entailed an analysis of a learning strategy and methods and assessing their own learning analytically and critically. Some interviewees even emphatically referred to learning a language on their own as ‘taking over the language,’ and they would then proceed to the next language according to the goals that they set for themselves.

Table 5. Negative learning experiences at school in comparison to learning in real life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life at school</th>
<th>Life outside school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>school knowledge</td>
<td>real life knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unauthentic</td>
<td>authentic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessment unauthentic</td>
<td>authentic assessment, self assessment, conducted by colleagues, customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of goal</td>
<td>setting goals for oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of motivation</td>
<td>desire to ‘take over a language’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no control over one’s learning</td>
<td>taking control over one’s own learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assimilation into the role of a learner</td>
<td>learner autonomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.3.3 Article III – Face-to-face communication

Figure 4. Components of face-to-face communication as experienced in this study.
The communication in working life in engineering today is carried out in an intensely oral culture that is characterised by personal encounters (Darling & Dannels 2003). Also the interviewees in this project emphasised the significance of meeting with the counterparty face-to-face in a professional context, especially in situations where there was a potential conflict to be forestalled or solved. In Figure 4 illustrates the components that formed the core experiences of face-to-face communication here.

The interviewees reported that it was important for them to be able to resort to intuition in professional encounters. They would seek to interpret and predict both the behaviour and positions of the participants in social interaction aspiring to arrive at a favourable outcome in the encounter. The participants manifested having adopted a holistic stance that did not follow any given sets of rules, but was based mostly on intuition when trying to read people’s faces, and to analyse the counterparty’s statements also between the lines.

With the ever increasing virtual modes of communication, the significance of a real-time, physical dialogue seems to have been emphasised today (Turkle 2012). Face-to-face communication is a complex, shared process of sense-making, where the participants are physically connected to and conscious of one another (Hougaard & Hougaard 2009). In addition to literal meanings oral communication also conveys social, non-verbal cues such as tone of voice, eye contact and facial expressions that the parties in the communication process analyse and react to. Thus face-to-face communication is a process of shared sense-making, interaction, where the participants are physically, via their senses connected to and conscious of one another.

Social positioning

Social positioning is a key concept in communication, whereby stances adopted are created jointly by the interlocutors. Symbolic exchanges, or conversations are the most basic substance of the social realm in a persons/acts reference grid, where discursive practice comprises conversations, institutional practices and the use of societal rhetorics. Social acts and societal icons are produced in conversations through two discursive processes: positioning and rhetoric redescription. (van Langenhove & Harré 1999.)

The concept of position is a more flexible and dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role (Goffman 1974; van Langenhove & Harré 1999; Hausendorf & Bora 2006; Weizman 2008). In conversation people can position themselves or be positioned by the others, e.g. as dominant or submissive, as possessing authority or lacking it, etc. During the course of a jointly created
conversation it is possible for the participants to be fluidly repositioned, or claim new positions for themselves.

In this study the participants manifested positioning as significant especially in the dimension pertaining to status and power relations in face-to-face encounters. There social positioning emerged in both its reflexive and interactive forms so that sometimes persons would be positioned as possessing less status and in some situations they would with ulterior motives deliberately position themselves as inferior.

The participants considered organisational positioning as a justifiable tactic, and they would utilise the backing provided by the organisation when confronted with a difficult request in professional encounters. The façade of the organisation might have been used as a shield to hide behind, e.g. when trying to gain more time in business transactions, or when turning down an irrational request.

In social positioning the corporate unit provided by the title of a person was normally activated, but occasionally the categoric unit of gender, age or the like would override this. This was especially true with the female engineers, who sometimes experienced misrecognition which they interpreted as the result of female gender. There were also some situations where participants would actively utilise a categoric unit tactically to further their own purposes. This was the case where an interviewee would knowingly define her position not as embedded in the corporate unit, but as converted according to a categoric unit, and further her cause through her gender.

Humour

The use of humour in social interaction is a universal phenomenon, but the norms that control how, when, where and with whom it is used differ from one culture to another. Humour is complex both linguistically and culturally, and thus poses a challenge to the user of a foreign language in intercultural encounters (Bell 2007).

An earlier study indicated that non-native speakers of English sometimes had problems in understanding joking talk when attending negotiations with native speakers of English. The non-native speakers were, however, not at a disadvantage due to humour that was not understood. (Adelswärd & Öberg 1998.) It has also been shown (Davies 2003) that non-native users of a language can successfully utilise their limited resources for constructing humour, and sympathetic native speakers can provide support for them so that the speakers can together contribute towards creating conditions for successful communication and use of humour.
The interviewees here sometimes confessed to having difficulties in telling whether a certain narrative was intended to be received as humorous. Quite often in social interaction people utilise contextualisation cues either verbally or non-verbally to facilitate the recipients in coding the narrative correctly. Contextualisation cues may be presented non-verbally, e.g. in the form of a smile or laughter or verbally in the form of phrases such as “Something funny happened…” It was obvious that in the situations manifested by the participants these cues were not delivered or they were so subtle that they were missed by the recipients, as can be deduced in the following:

Marja: What created an embarrassing situation was when I did not know for sure. I thought I had grasped that it was a joke, but since I’m not sure I cannot start laughing [laughter]­ And then the other party becomes annoyed, when I did not get his joke! It creates this chain of embarrassment! [laughter]

The participants reported utilising humour as an alleviating factor in intercultural encounters when there was some friction experienced because of differing cultural practices. It was considered valuable in creating a pleasant rapport among the participants in an intercultural business encounter.

In earlier research it has been discovered that in business negotiations humour is often power-related (Vuorela 2005). The participants here also mentioned that occasionally in professional encounters they saw a need to take the lead through using humour if there surfaced a power vacuum in the encounter. Humour was considered a safe method to be utilised in the process of a power transition, because it would ensure all parties saving face under the protective mask that the comic relief provided. Humour was sometimes employed in power transition together with social positioning, where a female participant could step forward claiming authority in a situation of a power vacuum. This resulted in a positive closure to a deadlock situation so that no participant in the interaction lost face.

Intuition

Intuition and tacit knowledge are seen as salient elements in professional expertise. Expert intuition has been examined e.g. through the reflections of chess masters (Neisser 1976) and through learning processes developing into tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1969). Intuiting seems to be a subconscious process, which may guide the manner in which a person acts, but is often difficult to share with others (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). Most definitions of intuition involve pattern recognition of some kind (Behling & Eckel 1991). Intuition can be defined as the preconscious recognition of the inherent pattern or possibilities that exist in a personal stream of experiences (Weick 1995, 25).

Already Kant (1995) acknowledged the primacy of intuition as a tool for processing concepts through experience. In phenomenological research intuition is seen as a form of topic-embedded
understanding that creates meanings in the present. What differentiates intuition from feeling is the capacity for self-awareness. The mental in the human being can be developed through intuition and its individualising quality by examining, directing and controlling the meanings that one has experienced, whereas as a generalising function intuition strengthens interpersonal understanding more than the other qualities of experience. (Rauhala 1992).

The interviewees here referred to intuition when reading and interpreting signs in the counterparty in order to determine the kind of action to resort to in a business context. They manifested having adopted a holistic stance that did not follow any given sets of rules for different situations; they intuitively employed the tacit understanding that they had developed about these situations. The participants also indicated that they could through the intuitive thinking processes they had adopted verbalise the deep, tacit understanding into practice. The interviewees did not mention the term “intuition”, but resorted to phrases such as “sensing, smelling, being on one’s toes” when they referred to intuitive processes. The verbalisation chosen suggests that the participants employed a holistic analysis in their meaning-making process when resorting to intuition.

Playing games

The interviewees would repeatedly refer to the concept of game when describing business encounters. Games include by definition an element of deception, and they are associated with ulterior, concealed motives involving a psychological gain or payoff to the instigator after a set of maneuvers (Berne 1964, 48-49).

When the interviewees referred to games they themselves played, these seemed to be positive in nature, lacking the dishonest element associated with games according to Berne’s definition. These accounts were reminiscent of accounts of social positioning. Often what was referred to as a game was actually about making rigorous observations about the counterparty and predicting his/her potential actions. The participants thus indicated a continuous assessment of encounters and the parties involved to decide what kind of strategy to adopt in any given situation with any given counterparty. Such conduct can also be seen as contributing to a strengthening of both the social identities of the participants and the practices thus created in an on-going reactivation of organisational communication (Carbaugh 1996).

For a game to be activated a tacit set of rules needs to be adopted, a breach of which is experienced as negative. The interviewees indicated that some of their business encounters had involved unfair games and dishonest behaviour from their opposite number, leading to an
obstructed game and a deteriorated business relationship. This in turn resulted in confusion when the participants could not anticipate the behaviour of the counterparty judging by the tacit rules of professional encounters in engineering.

10.3.4 Article IV - Intercultural understanding

Culture has been defined in various ways: in the sociocultural theory and the Vygotskian tradition it is seen as an objective force infusing social relationships and the historically developed uses of artefacts – including language – in concrete activity (Lantolf & Thorne 2006, 1). Human communication that mediates a shared intentionality is at the heart of social organisation according to Tomasello and Herrmann (2010) also contributing to the creation of human culture. Culture can thus be seen as an outcome of a learning process that is realised through communication and social interaction (Kaikkonen 1994, 68).

As human beings we are bound to seek contact with one another: ‘It is otherness which makes interaction both possible and necessary... A human community is a community of recognition: it can only exist to the extent that the individuals concerned recognize the existence of one another.’ (Riley 2007, 176.)

In this research I draw from the process models of intercultural learning (Deardorff 2011; Bennet 2004; Talib 2005) when illustrating the development process of intercultural understanding as based on the accounts of the interviewees. The term ‘competence’ was avoided here because of its connotations of technical achievement of skills, the term ‘understanding’ being used instead as a more encompassing, wider concept. In the globally connected working life of today it is fundamental to possess an understanding of intercultural aspects in doing business. Numerous diagnostic instruments have been developed to evaluate intercultural competence, but it has repeatedly been acknowledged (e.g. Fantini 2009; Graf & Mertesacker 2010) that these are often incapable or at best limited in assessing the multifaceted nature of intercultural competence.

The four components that Deardorff (2011) lists as essential for intercultural learning to take place emerged from the interviewee’s manifestations as well. These components included: reflection and assessment, critical thinking skills and curiosity, attitudinal elements such as respect, openness and curiosity, and finally looking at life from the perspective of the other.

There were two primary components in the development process of intercultural understanding in this research: intercultural encounters as realised in the daily working life of the interviewees, and the element of critical reflection, which emerged conspicuously in the meaning-making of the
participants. The elements that manifested intercultural understanding in the experience world of the interviewees included in addition the following: a certain, sometimes inward-turned element of humour, effectivity, or dealing with diverse culturally coloured encounters in working life in the most efficient manner, cultural juxtapositions, resisting stereotypical thinking, and a sense of human universal coherence, of seeing what all human beings share together.

Humour often emerged as a facilitating factor in intercultural encounters where occasionally different customs and modes of operation clashed. The value of humour was recognised by the interviewees as a tool for creating a pleasant rapport for intercultural encounters, although at the same time they confessed that there were often difficulties involved; especially with native speakers.
11 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research project set out to determine what the experience of language use in a professional context encompassed for the participants. This phenomenon was initially described in the individually experienced language use portrayals. From the individual accounts the level of analysis was raised to a general level, and as a result two variants of commonly experienced language use portrayals were constructed. There were manifestations of experiences pertaining to female gender in engineering that were shared by all the female participants. Descriptions of these formed the commonly experienced language use portrayal, variant Z, that applied to the female participants, but in addition to this the female participants also subscribed to the commonly experienced language use portrayal, variant Y, shared by all the participants.

The core themes to be found in these commonly experienced language use portrayals in the professional context of engineering included: learner autonomy, the significance of social interaction skills and face-to-face communication, the concept of intercultural understanding, and misrecognition of female gender in engineering. The participants manifested marked learner autonomy as language users. They depicted school experiences where autonomous thinking had not been fostered, but they had adopted a stance of autonomous learning when reflecting upon and developing their own language repertoires in real life outside of school, thus realising life-long learning in practice. The interviewees accounted for the salience of social interaction skills in their daily working life encounters in engineering. The significance of face-to-face communication was emphasised in situations of conflict. In professional encounters the participants actively resorted to intuition and social positioning.

The participants had developed a reflective mode of thinking for intercultural encounters, where they flexibly analysed cultural traits through cultural juxtapositions and sought to adapt to different cultural concepts with an open mind, striving to see things from the perspective of the other with reference to the human universal in people. The participants depicted a conscious resistance to stereotypical thinking patterns and resorted to humour as an alleviating element in situations of intercultural conflict.
11.1 Limitations of the research

Data on human experiences as compared to human behavior is more limited in its very nature, not being reducible to observations. A prerequisite for experience-based inquiry is that the participants be able to reflectively reach to aspects of their experience and to convey these to the researcher through language (Polkinghorne 2005, 138). People are immersed in culture and this contributes to another limitation to the researcher in penetrating to their experience world. The world of experiences is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 12).

In the phenomenological approach the life-world (Lebenswelt) or the everyday life of people is much more vivid and plentiful than the reflection that research creates when it aspires to depict it. Research is thus always by definition limited as a method of illustrating the life-world of people. (Perttula 1995, 105.) Nor is it ever possible to capture the original experience as it was at the moment of experiencing, since it started transforming from there on. Experiences transform with time through self-reflection and interaction with other people into experiences that are communicated to the researcher. Hence the results discussed here are only true as to the phenomenon described with these people and at the time they described their experience worlds in this research project. Even if parallels can be drawn from the findings here, they have to be taken as signals requiring a closer examination for other contexts, not as general experiences.

11.2 Validity and trustworthiness

The criteria for scientific research in the phenomenological framework can be defined as a systematic and disciplined use of methods, an explicit nature of the research in the explication of meaning structures embedded in lived experience, a critical nature in a continuous assessment of its aims and methods, and finally its intersubjective nature whereby the researcher needs the Other to create a dialogue with the phenomenon, to validate the phenomenon (van Manen 1990, 11). Thus in order to meet the criteria set for content validity it is essential that the reader can retrace all the solutions the researcher has made in the project. Here both the methodological choices and the process of data analysis are made visible to the reader, who is led through all the stages of analysis by an ample provision of examples illustrating the progression of the analysis.

In qualitative research validity assessment pertains to the complete research process, the data, the analysis of the data and a valid presentation of the findings (Eskola & Suoranta 1998). The
researcher is at the core of the validity criteria in phenomenologically characterised research. It is beneficial for the reliability of the research if the researcher designs the interviews, conducts them and goes through the transcription process him/herself. This was the case in this present work as well. Being personally involved with the project through all its stages, also contributed to the researcher being able to justify the choices made, as well as promptly change the course of action or modify some features in the project if this was called for. This active engagement in the project through all its stages also created a connection between myself as a researcher and the phenomenon studied facilitating the conscious aspiration to suspending the process of understanding during all stages.

Thematic interviews can be assessed as an appropriate method for data acquisition in a phenomenological research project. The fact that the findings presented here can be returned to the original data of individual interviews contributes towards validity.

The analysis of the transcribed data was conducted in Finnish. Only the excerpts of the data included in this book and the four articles published were translated into English. It felt that some of the nuances conveyed in the data were diluted in the process of translation. I can agree with Polkinghorne (2005, 139) that just as some qualities of meanings may be lost in translations, also the transcription process from the oral into the written language needs to be conducted with care so as not to lose salient information, and some finer shades may in any case be inevitably lost anyway.

Participants for the research are not chosen as random representatives of a population but because they can contribute to the undertaking by giving insights into the phenomenon examined (Polkinghorne 2005). Here the interviewees were selected on the spot during the period that was spent with the target company. I did not take a conscious decision to choose a certain number of interviewees, but wished rather to let the situation develop during my stay with the company where the interviews were to be conducted. The selection of the interviewees as well as their number was based on my intuition and the quality of the information acquired from them.

Although it is often seen as imperative for the researcher to strive towards empowering his or her interviewees, this process is bound to take place even in the most asymmetrical interview contexts through a collaborative construction of the participants so that ‘power is everywhere in the interview’s exploration and explication of experience’ (Gubrium & Holstein 2003, 46). The joint construction of knowledge has also led to a blurring of the roles and boundaries of the interviewer and the interviewee (Fontana 2003, 52). In the participatory research paradigm this approach is taken to the extreme in that all the participants are engaged in a democratic dialogue as co-researchers constructing new knowledge (Heron & Reason 2001).
Brooks and Watkins (1994, 12) see it as a salient dimension in a collaborative action inquiry strategy that the research generates improvement in organisational practice. I did not consider it possible to apply a pure participatory research paradigm in this project, however, since the research was conducted within a company. There the positions of the interviewees in the organisation might have been jeopardised were they actively engaged in creating change in professional practices, or otherwise the results gained might have been distorted. The use of a second researcher was not considered, since the role of a critical friend was nominally taken by my fellow students at the doctoral seminars where the progress in the research project was regularly presented for open discussion. Thus a traditional interview approach, where the author was acting as the sole interviewer-researcher, was deliberately chosen for this project.

11.3 Ethical considerations

The fundamental nature of ethical issues has to be observed during all stages of a research project; starting from the topic chosen to publishing the results and using the information gained through these results. All the data acquired through the interviews have to be used, reported and stored so as to ensure that nobody except the people who were interviewed can discover their personalities there. In this case there were only seven interviewees from one company, and if someone from within the company reads through the research report it may be possible to recognise some personalities. The names of the interviewees were changed for anonymity and the name of the company in question was not revealed in order to protect the participants. In some parts in the data anonymity could have been put at risk through the information provided by the interviewee. In such cases the excerpts were not included in this book.

The general ethical principles of beneficence, i.e. doing good and benefiting the persons involved, and non-maleficence, i.e. not harming these persons, need to be adhered to in all research. The ethics of science imply that researchers become engaged with studies that activate collective operations that result in a radical policy of love, care and equality, and at the same time abstain from ‘inquirer-oriented power’ where the researcher operates as a saviour or someone who empowers other people by giving them voice. (Cannella & Lincoln 2011, 82). Christians (2011, 61) holds that qualitative research should take place in an ethical and political framework that is ‘multicultural, gender-inclusive, pluralistic and international in scope.’ With this present research this prerequisite was realised as to the issue of gender, while otherwise the scope was restricted by the research task.
The ethical issues that had to be taken into consideration in this project included ensuring that participation took place on a voluntary basis, honouring the autonomy of the participants, maintaining their anonymity, informing the participants that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time and ensuring that they were informed regarding the procedures involved in the research so that they could give their consent to participate.

Punch (1994) notes that a researchers’ integrity may suffer in the eyes of participants in the case that they are seen as an extension of their political sponsors. Here this aspect was not directly questioned by the interviewees. The research grant awarded just covered my normal salary, hence I cannot say that financial issues in the form of sponsorship would have affected my stance or behaviour, nor did I have any links to the organisation examined.

During an in-company meeting at the outset of the research project I introduced myself as a doctoral student conducting research as a representative of the University of Tampere. Denzin (1997, 272) notes that researchers ‘carry the mantle’ of an authority that is based in a university. With this research, however, I got an impression that the influence of institutional authority had no particular impact here, albeit at the outset of the interviews the participants would sometimes comment on my status as a language teacher or direct their words to a language teacher. This stance quickly disappeared, however, when the interviews got on the way and the interviewees would normally not vocalise my language teacher background.

The ultimate ethical issue that needs to be accounted for in the process of acquiring research data through interviews is the asymmetry in the power relations between the interviewer and the interviewee which Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) would pinpoint as the ultimate ethical dilemma in connection with qualitative interviews. The interviews in this project were conducted as a dialogue, where the objective was to allow the interviewee to lead the discussion, while the interviewer was there to feed it with follow-up questions and clarifications as to what was being said as well as to introduce themes that were included in the frame of questions designed beforehand.

11.4 Implications of the findings and recommendations for future research

In qualitative research the results are not generalisable, but some parallels can be drawn from descriptions of the phenomenon to professionally oriented language education as signals of more widespread tendencies. The results of phenomenological research may thus be utilised for policy development or change in practice. In the findings of this present study several features call for a closer examination or reform at a societal level in vocationally oriented language education.
The role of learner autonomy has been acknowledged in earlier research as an integral element in education and adult education in particular. It was, however, apparent in the manifestations of the participants on learning at school and in real life that learner autonomy needs to be highlighted at schools and universities even more emphatically than is the case today. The participants mostly advocated autonomous learning only after having left school, where they turned into active proponents of learner autonomy and testified to this in their own objectives and independent, goal-directed development as language learners. They also indicated having recognised the fallacy and unauthentic nature of knowledge and assessment at school, but had, nevertheless, conformed to this. Hence the hidden curriculum of the school had been adopted and they had replicated a model of becoming students instead of learning to become active, critical professionals or members of a society during their time at school.

We as teachers in professionally oriented language education need to foster the development of learner autonomy in our students during their studies, aiming at socialising them towards their professional identities. Teachers should also be urged to critically evaluate an integration between professional and academic contexts when striving towards authenticity in language education.

In order to bring the lives of school and work closer together the structures of traditional engineering degree programmes may need to be transformed away from a conventional array of separate courses, where each subject teacher stands responsible for his or her course alone, and does not need to converse on the course content with anyone besides his or her students when planning the syllabus. In working life people often operate in teams, and their days are not divided into clearly distinguishable topic segments that follow one another, but comprise versatile entities overlapping one another. Thus a reform in the traditional course-based thinking in engineering education towards a more professionally oriented approach may be called for, with a transition from separate courses towards compilations of project-like modules encompassing several subject areas.

The interviewees in this project emphasised the role of face-to-face communication and interaction skills in the working life context. Social interaction needs to be highlighted during language classes, but this should be conducted with care in order to avoid merely simulating professional settings and reproducing the existing practices in working life or school. In vocationally oriented language education the course contents include a high degree of interaction. Different company and product presentations, meetings, negotiations as well as informal and formal discussions form the core of field-specific language education in engineering. Special attention needs to be paid to avoid covering them as shallow performances one following the other and ensure that in connection with all these communicative encounters reflective and interaction skills
are nurtured in the students. Thus a focus on the context at the expense of the interaction is seen as a danger in vocationally oriented language education in the form of a superficial, situation-focused approach instead of a concern for deeper thinking and the interaction skills required in different situations.

With all the different contexts that are covered in professionally oriented language education constantly decreasing contact hours may present a challenge to developing the interaction skills of the students. With simultaneously growing group sizes it is no longer possible to include e.g. individual presentations in the syllabi, and the salient element of reflective assessment discussions after these may at the same time be lost. Diminishing resources have heightened the significance of virtual modes of learning. It is somewhat confusing, though, that the information technology utilised online is called the 'social' media, when what the interviewees in this project highlighted the salient nature of actual social contacts in professional contexts. Precaution thus needs to be taken in order not to discard traditional face-to-face learning environments in favour of virtual learning platforms.

Here in Finland we are easily lulled into erroneously believing that gender equality is an issue that no longer needs to be addressed here. The most alarming findings in this research, however, were the experiences of misrecognition that the female engineers recounted. This should be seriously explored, starting from engineering education and the experiences of the minor share of female students there. Both the trade unions and the students’ unions in engineering need to be alerted to confront this problem and to turn potential misrecognition of female students and engineers into equal recognition of all participants in both educational and working life contexts.

It is worth exploring whether an online discussion forum where female engineers/engineering students could share their experiences would provide a beneficial educational context for them. At universities of applied sciences online courses with a discussion element might be the medium of choice for reducing social anxiety and for also empowering other misrecognised groups in education.

It remains to be seen how the global economic crisis we are facing at the moment will affect working life and education. It is equally worrying in the world of higher education today that students are frequently seen as clients, and the stakeholders in the economy as the direct commissioners of education. There is a threat that this commercialised mode of thinking may turn the personal, intellectual growth that students should gain in professional higher education towards a vocational orientation dictated by the market economy, especially when the research in the field is to a high degree aimed at examining the needs of the stakeholders. To a certain extent it seems that
profit motive thinking, which allows little room for the interests of the employees unless they align with the interests of profit motive, has already pervaded the world of university education.

There was an interesting letter sent to Times Higher Education journal by a disillusioned lecturer at Harvard University (Summers 2008). In his letter Summers draws a simile from the stock market bubble to the inflation of degrees and grades upon demand in university education, where teachers are seen as: “…annexed to the management of student careers, drawn into tacit agreement between corporation and client in which failure is not an option. I had to grade the students, and I had to grade them well.” Summers ends on a foreboding note: “…when intellectuals act as clerks and students act as clients, how do college teachers differ from corporate accountants?”
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

SUOSTUMUS TUTKIMUKESSA KERÄTTÄVIEN TIETOJEN KÄSITTELYYN

Tutkimuksen työnimi Perspectives to LCPP (Language and Communication for Professional Purposes) – experiences of language use in a professional domain

Suoritettava tutkinto Filosofian tohtori/Tampereen yliopisto

Tutkimuksen toteuttaja Niina Valtaranta Tampereen yliopiston kasvatustieteellisen tiedekunnan jatko-opiskelijana

Tutkimukseen osallistujan nimi ____________________________________________

Annan suostumukseni antamieni yllä mainittuun tutkimukseen liittyvien haastattelut- ja havainnointitietojen käyttämiseen yksinomaan tästä mainittua tutkimusta varten. Suostumus on annettu vapaaehtoisesti. Tutkimukseen osallistuvan henkilötiedot muutetaan anonymiteetin takaamiseksi.

_____________________________  ________________________________________

Paikka ja aika Suostumuksen antajan allekirjoitus
(nimen selvennys)

_____________________________  ________________________________________

Paikka ja aika Suostumuksen vastaanottajan allekirjoitus
Niina Valtaranta
Didaktiikan lehtori
Tampereen yliopisto

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Appendix 2

Interview questions

1 Introductory questions – to break the ice and create a good rapport
   • You have a long experience of working in engineering?
   • Shall we start with you telling about your language studies? The very first memories?

2 Follow-up questions
   • How have you gained access to this game, have you somehow apprehended this tactic – or has it somehow-?
   • And – has it helped then?
   • So it was not like that? 3 Probing questions – pursuing the answers
   • Tell me a bit more about this ‘game’ then.
   • So then it leads to results?
   • What makes you feel- when you said that they seemed arrogant to you, and that they may feel the same about you. What is it that makes you feel a person is arrogant? What is the behaviour or way of speech like then?
   • What are your recollections of those negotiations?
   • Did you prepare for them especially well, or how did it go?

4 Specifying questions – to elicit more precise descriptions
   • How do you feel then – as a host – and on the phone when the other person does not say anything?
   • Is your personality somehow missing [in a conversation with deficient language skills from the other party] there?
   • Right, so you said that they cry afterwards, or-?
   • Right, so humour is something that helps there-?
   • So it’s about reacting in a pretty subtle manner?

5 Direct questions – introducing a theme
   • What about phone calls then? When you think about those phone calls, when you have made phone calls at work, have there been any difficult calls?
   • Yes, and you probably pretty much have to think about what the people are like on the other side and how-?
   • When my next question was about difficult people – what kind of people are difficult at work, and-?
Appendix 3

Interview Questions

- What kind of memories of language studies do you have?
- Have you been working here for long?
- What kind of memories do you have from traveling for work?
- Can you remember some difficult/problematic situations at work?
- What kind of people do you experience as difficult at work?
- Can you remember some pleasant encounters or situations?
- What kind of people do you enjoy working with?

There were many other questions presented during the interviews depending on the flow of the conversation, but the above were those presented to all interviewees.
Perspectives to Language and Communication for Professional Purposes: Curriculum theory, gender, autobiography, and experiences of language use in a professional context

English Language and Communication for Professional Purposes (LCPP) has been studied quite extensively, but most research projects have focused on language as a purely linguistic phenomenon. This article shares the view expressed in the CEF where language users are seen as active social agents, members of society conducting tasks that are not solely linguistic. In the research the objective was to examine through a holistic view the experience world of professionals in the domain of technology. The concept of gender emerged strongly out of the interviews of the female engineers, and thus also became one of the main findings in the research.

In this article two professional and educational themes are addressed as being intertwined together: how gender is experienced when working in the domain of technology and how curriculum as a gendered text is made visible.

Keywords: language and communication for professional purposes (LCPP), Common European Framework (CEF), language user, gender, curriculum
Introduction

The objective of my research is to gain an extensive insight into the experiences of people working in technology as users of English. My approach is hermeneutic-phenomenological and the theoretical framework here is a combination of critical pedagogy, feminist and narrative theories. I will be drawing on the definition of the Council of Europe (2001) whereby language users/learners are primarily seen as social actors and members of a society in certain situations, contexts and domains performing tasks that are not solely linguistic. Here the domain is that of technology. For the research I conducted participatory observation working with a medium-sized international company in engineering for two and a half months, as well as carried out thematic interviews with six engineers. The concept of gender emerged strongly out of the interviews of the female engineers, and thus also became one of the main findings in the study.

In this paper I strive to gain to an understanding on how gender is experienced when working in the domain of technology. In education today the focus is on understanding the relationships between the curriculum and the world outside school; hence the fundamental educational question that needs to be voiced is not a technical “how”, but a more profound “why”, which connects school with the world (Pinar 1995, 8). Getting an insight into the
authentic, often traumatic experiences of female engineers provides valuable information on this “why”-question for teachers of English as regards the curricula of English in LCPP (Language and Communication for Professional Purposes). Female students are a minority in engineering education. Encouraging them to challenge gendered educational theories and practices, offering them a possibility to find their own voice, will empower the students during their studies. Empowered, autonomous students in charge of their learning process will also see themselves shaping their own future careers as change agents, not as obedient individuals.

In this paper curriculum is explored as a gendered text. Female experiences are examined both at school, where male dominance is more secretive, hidden behind a façade of neutrality, as well as in working life where it is more openly exposed. Having been working in teacher education for the last two years I have included here my observations during classes as well as interviews with student teachers. There is also a thread of reflective autobiographical diary notes in this paper based on my years of teaching experience and life experience that runs through this essay and intertwines the themes together.

Gender Equality in Finland?

There is a long tradition of male dominance in technology in Finland. In labour statistics out of young people (25–34 yrs) employed by technology 87% were male and 13% female in 2003, even if out of students taking the matriculation examination 60% were female and only 40% male (Statistics Finland 2006). It is evident that Finnish cultural and social practices favour education of women, but these practices also maintain a tradition that technology is a field for men. This in turn is also reflected in the salary structures of male and female dominated professional areas, as well as in a higher appreciation of male dominated fields. Women experience their gender at work as much more of a disadvantage than men do. This is most often related to pay, recognition of professional skill and career advancement. An interesting fact is that in the latest barometer published in 2008 approx. 40% of women with high education estimated that gender is a pay impediment, whereas five years ago only 20% were of this opinion (Nieminen 2008).

The issue of objectivity is a central concept in education – it is amazing how deeply rooted the illusion of objectivity in education is in Finland, and in many other parts of the world for that matter. Curricula are regarded as neutral documents giving guidelines for the teachers; not as the products of
western educational policies that change with the views of the current politicians in power. Schools, teachers and students are seen as and referred to as neutrally as possible even if it has been shown that as teachers we look at our students through gendered lenses (Tarmo 1991; Palmu 2003) without any implications on how easily we can use the power in our hands to adjust students, endorse competitiveness, or undermine students’ reliance on their abilities.

In Finland we often like to see our country as a model country in gender equality because of historical reasons: having been among the first nations to grant women the right to vote. This kind of gender equality discourse may also stem from our strongly agrarian background where men and women were working side by side on the farm (Lempiäinen 2002). The focus in the national policies of Finland and the Nordic countries has traditionally been on gender equality, not on gender-based non-discrimination (Kantola & Nousiainen 2008). Both the legislation and the gender equality policy in Finland reflect this position. Since the promotion of gender equality has been in the forefront, this has led to a disregard of gender-based discrimination, and there persists a strong illusion that gender equality exists in our country. In a recent EU study on people’s conceptions of discrimination only 24 per cent of Finns, representing the lowest figure in the EU, were of the opinion that discrimination of women on a wide scale existed in Finland (European Commission 2007). There is something that makes us turn our eyes away from the problem and it seems to be difficult to admit the problem exists just as was stated in a recent OECD report:

The review team found that neither national policymakers nor representatives of higher education institutions in Finland expressed a sense of unease or concern about participation among underrepresented groups in tertiary education. Equity concerns were not spontaneously mentioned in meetings, and when questions were raised respondents expressed confidence that current policies were sufficient, and the system’s performance was broadly acceptable. (Davies, Weko, Kim & Thulstrup 2006.)

This awkward refusal of the policymakers to discuss gender equality, expressed as aporetic perplexity, may also be reminiscent of a national characteristic – a general difficulty to openly speak about controversial, painful issues. As with many other painful issues there is a tendency to deny their existence here and to look elsewhere, at other countries for the problem.
Gender Equality at the Workplace

The fairly advanced Finnish social security policy has made it much easier for Finnish women to work outside the home when compared to women in other countries, although gender-based non-discrimination legislation was only initiated in the country because of international pressure (Nousiainen 2008). This does not indicate, however, that gender equality of opportunity would prevail here. Segregation according to sex is a problem that may limit the choices for individual people. Segregation is exceptionally strong in the Finnish labour market when compared to those of other European countries. Finnish women in the private sector have most often experienced discrimination at work whereas men in the public sector have most rarely had discriminative experiences. With female workers the discriminative experiences were most often connected with salary, division of work load, receiving information on new tasks and on division of tasks. Women most often felt that the reason for discrimination was their gender or position in the company, whereas men felt that it was their position or opinions that were the reasons for discriminative experiences. (Huhta et al. 2007, 69.)

Tuuli, one of the interviewees in my research was contemplating between the very strongly female field of linguistic studies and the male-dominated field of technology when entering higher education. In the end it was for financial reasons that she made up her mind for the male-dominated field – it being higher valued financially:

T: Yes, it was really very close that I would have started to study German philology.
N: – – What got you interested in technology then? Did you apply to both [faculties]?
T: Yes I did. I have always been interested in technology – and then again I knew that as an interpreter I would not necessarily make as much money as I would as an engineer.

Another interviewee, Arja, reminisced how she had experienced segregation already at the recruitment stage in her career. During her application process she had not been considered for the position that she had applied for, but had been advised to accept another position where all the predecessors had been women:

A: – – This whole story started when I applied for… – – they were looking for a Z designer when I was still studying. I applied for the position – – they told me that they would not be interviewing me for Z design, which is
much more technical than X design, but for X design, that the Z designers had always been men.

A: – – But it felt bad afterwards – when I realized that it was really because I was a woman that I would not have been accepted as a Z designer. That was the impression I got.

The negative first impression that the interviewee got at the very onset of her career must have had a deep impact on her thought structures on gender equality at work. It turned out that the same person had constantly been experiencing a pattern of discriminative behaviour at the workplace, but had never really fully internalized this, as she states in her interview:

A: – – I have talked about big boys playing in the sandbox – already for the ten years that I have worked here. That they act behind your back. That they agree on things, there is some- for example a development target that you need to have a meeting on, there is a meeting coming up so and so, and then there are these people who are for it, and these who are against, and then there are those people who are somewhere in between. This is probably quite normal everywhere. So that those who are for [the issue at hand] will set up a group plus will have a word with these-these “I-do-not-know-where-to-go”, do I want to go either way. They go to agitate these people. – – Again I am exaggerating, but at the end of the day I do feel that this is how it goes. Then this against-group will do a round and strengthen their front. And, well, when you do not belong – when no one comes to see you, this situation.

N: Yes.

A: Well now we are getting somewhere – I just realized it myself – that very rarely anyone comes [to see me]. This is exactly where I feel different from the rest of the group – always! I just do not belong into that group of buddies, they do not share things with me. – – We will go to the meeting and everybody else knows a lot more about this thing even if they have received exactly the same e-mail message as I have, an invitation to this meeting.

Here during the interview Arja reflected on how she had experienced exclusion at work. Apparently these segregatory procedures had become somewhat a standard practice so that also she had taken them at face value. It was only through a process of reflection on what really constituted this experience that she realized how openly and visibly segregation had been put into practice excluding her from the circle of active operators at company meetings. The segregative policy affected in subtle ways Arja’s professional identity, making
her sense her status as not belonging.

Silence of Women – a Narrative of Resistance

The national silence on equality issues is echoed in another notion of silence; that of girls and women everywhere. It was a notion of silence that I registered with 5th grade girls when observing a class given by one of my student teachers. The boys in the group were mildly boisterous creating all kind of noise in order to get the attention of their teacher: they would tap their hand or a ruler on the table, intentionally drop their books or just speak in a loud voice. The girls in the group, on the other hand, were mostly silent, they did not move much, but sat quietly with the exception of one girl. She was protesting for not having been picked by the teacher to participate in the discussion, but even these protests were uttered in such a low voice, that the teacher did not hear her at all. Maybe the comments were only meant for the other girls. (Diary 25 November 2008.)

The teacher would also constantly turn to face the boys after having invited the students to participate in whatever she had put forward, so mostly she did not even look at the girls. When asked afterwards if she had realized this, she said that she had not been aware of ignoring the girls, but that she had only wanted to soothe the boys, also that “they seemed to be so active in all that they did”, and that this was why she would turn to the boys for dialogue and participation in class. She had not really seen that the girls needed be addressed, since they seemed to be content anyway, whereas the boys always demanded attention. (Diary 25 November 2008.) This could also be read through the objectifying look theory of Grumet, as a female teacher using talk, turning to male students to ward off the silence and gaze (Grumet 1988). In every-day work teachers constantly need to make quick value-based decisions in a stressful atmosphere where contact hours are getting fewer and student groups are getting bigger. It seems that this was what prevented the teacher student from registering what was going on – she resorted to focusing on the boys as the easiest way out for her.

When looking at the situation at work in the interviews, female engineers described a spectrum of experiences as well as different ways to resist subordination. The silence of women gets reflected in the narrative and astute analysis of her own pattern of behaviour by Arja. She has been working for the company for nine years, but still struggles with self-esteem and appreciation as a technical expert:
A: – – men think that she is just a silly girl, what would she know... and I tend to adopt the same pattern of thought. I am very good at belittling myself [laughter]. So that I really have a self-development project here...

A: That you need to give yourself more credit and believe in what you know and can do. And of course this pattern that you sit in the same room with ten men. So it is really difficult in the first place to... in a certain way think of yourself as being at the same level with them. The fact that you are a woman makes it even more difficult.

Another kind of resistance strategy was adopted by Tuuli, in trying to somehow ignore the existence of the incident and solve the problem through strictly professional conduct. She maintained a professional pattern of thought, wanted to retain good business relations, and ascertain that nobody, not even the person who had harassed her, would in any way suffer:

T: For example that situation where he made me a direct suggestion [to follow him to his hotel room] – – I told my Finnish colleague to come together with us. – – Made sure that there will no uncomfortable situations either way. – – so that I just left then – – I will not cling on to those situations, they come and go.

It was an interesting to hear that Marja felt she was able to take a stronger and more active position in a communicative setting at work under the disguise of humour. She sensed that a woman could safely take the lead – and that this was actually expected of her by her male counterparts – after she had intuitively analyzed whether the situation permitted a manifestation of power by a female. Here Marja tells how she channels humour through a traditionally female domain, the home. In a sense she has taken authority over her male colleagues, who because of rigid male power structures cannot act.

M: Humour is a pretty good thing, because that way nobody loses face. And normally then maybe gender is–is an advantage... that you accept something from a female that a man could never say – everyone – everyone can say then “oh, this is just like at home”. So they are saying that they will obey you, but as if in a joke state that they need to obey women everywhere, anyway. So that – I will not get offended by it, I have noticed that it is actually a real strength that you can say things that men could not. When actually everyone sees that what you say is necessary, but they could not take it from a man.
Female Gender as Subaltern

The association of female gender as subaltern can be traced back to Aristotle, who in his Generation of Animals wanted to see males and females as much separated from one another as possible, because to him the male was better and more divine than the female (Retrieved Nov 26, 2008, from: http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/generation/index.html.)

The male gender became the norm or model in science in the 17th century with the objective of having man become the master of the nature, to subjugate nature which was seen as feminine in character under the dominion of man (Fox Keller 1988). An image of the female gender as deviant, as opposed to the norm: the male, was thus rooted into the Western society and this view has later been carried with e.g. the approach of Freud up to the modern times.

When looking into the image textbooks in school today give on equality between men and women it often appears stereotypical complementing the male-female dichotomies further and often presenting the female gender as subaltern. The dialogue in English LCPP textbooks is also often created for male characters with little identification space for female engineering students. Teachers need to recognize any gendered materials used in their classes and take up the issue of segregation in our society into the open for a discussion with the students in order to strive towards a change in the society. The significance of a gender equality discourse in school is further emphasized because it is in education that segregating practices start when girls and boys choose their school subjects, which in turn determine their future fields and professions.

On the web home page of the engineering company my interviewees work for, there were only five pictures: under “Company Information” there is a nice, casual picture of five people at a table having coffee, three men and two women. Under “Facts and Figures” there are the hands of a woman with a pencil going through a spreadsheet, but under “Values” there is the face of a man talking, pictured from slightly below – illustrating a superior position. Under “Service” there is a close-up of a silent, seated woman’s face viewed from above, and thus illustrating a subordinate position. In a subtle way the subaltern position of the female gender in the world of engineering is reinforced here.

Subordination in School

Through working hard and being diligent girls can achieve the targets that
the curriculum sets for them and do well at school – whereas for boys to be sloppy and carefree is seen as normal behaviour – since they inherently have brilliance in them. For me this was illustrated in a painful experience at the age of 11: We had to gather a herbarium for the biology class during the summer vacation: 80 plants were to be neatly pressed and glued on A4s with the Latin and Finnish names attached on the labels. It was quite an ordeal for me – being the oldest child in the family I did not have older siblings whose plant collections I could have utilized, but had to figure out on my own how to go about the task. Upon returning the herbaria back to us the next autumn our teacher told the class that she had been fairly pleased with them – with the exception of one herbarium – which was a girl’s, but according to her was even worse than some of the boys’ herbaria. Having earlier realized that my homework and handwriting were somewhat sloppy when compared to those of the other girls, I sensed that she must be referring to my collection of dead plants and there and then experienced a painful reminder on how a girl needs to perform according to the norms of the school: that girls were expected to be tidy, studious and conscientious.

This experience of subordination is vividly impregnated into my memory with feelings of shame and inferiority. Experiences of subjugation in school are often related to obedience training causing in students feelings of fear, shame, guilt and dissatisfaction with oneself and resulting in a need to control one’s behaviour (Vuorikoski & Törmä 2004). Intense feelings, outbursts, and defiance are not tolerated at school, since they manifest the hidden world of emotions, instincts and the physical that should be controlled in a school setting.

Holistic Conception of Man

In education the ontological concept of an individual should be for us, the educators, a holistic, whole-person view on students as human beings (Rauhala 1998). Still with the academic achievement pressures on teachers and schools of today students are easily seen as one-dimensional with sense and intellect only – more as computers capable of storing and processing material in their memory, with school exams as regular check-ups where the memory capacity can be tested. We do not need to register such dimensions as bodiness or intuition with computers, these do not exist. But mind, body and spirit are inherent dimensions with us humans, just as the interviewees in my research described their experiences of communicative encounters having often been channeled through intuitive notions or through having had pure physical sen-
Perspectives to LCPP

Corporeality may be problematic for women in a working life setting just as it is at school. In an interview Marja, who had been working for the company for several years, expressed very firmly how she believed that as a technical expert she needed to hide her femininity and virtually merge with men. A neutral, or masculine model of expertise, that is also regarded the ideal of a teacher’s profession (Dillabough 2000) is reflected in her opinions. She felt that for a female engineer to achieve and maintain the status of an expert it was necessary to become invisible as a woman:

N: – – So you need to keep a low profile…
M: Yes, and especially, like, the younger women. Women of my age do not have it any longer, but naturally something like giggling or another risk like this there may be, but really, the more beautiful you are, the more you’ll need to pay attention at not being paid attention to. Men are men [laughter] and then they will start looking at something else, not at your overheads or the like.
N: So a neutral…
M: As neutral as possible, so that you do not stand out of that mass of men at all. Then you are acceptable as an expert.

An extreme approach to the female body can be seen e.g. in the world of motor sports today where women are objectified as decorations and decoys. Here Tuuli describes how she had encountered this silent, stereotype image of a female at trade fairs in engineering:

T: In this field – – there are usually lots of women at trade fairs, these scantily clad presenter girls – – acting as lures for the stands.
N: That does not bother you?
T: No, it doesn’t – because I know the reason behind it.

Here the world is experienced through power structures that categorize the female gender, as Martin Buber (1937) defined it, through an objectified I-It relationship, not through an I-Thou relationship, which would entail an authentic encounter with another human being in a dialogue between subjects.

The presence of bodies in the classroom can be problematic both for students and teachers. When I asked my student teachers to draw a picture of a teacher, they mostly depicted very bare, neutral figures with not much flesh around their bones. Gender features could not readily be seen in the drawings, but outer signs of authority were often present: a pointer or book in the hand, a teacher’s desk, a clock on the wall (Diary 26, September 2008). Educational
researchers, e.g. Mitchell and Weber (1999) have analysed teachers’ and students’ drawings of a teacher and used them to unmask stereotype images of a teacher. They describe how evasively the issue of bodiness is dealt with in connection with an asexual image of a stereotype teacher.

The disconcerting nature of corporeality in a teacher’s role became real for me some twenty years ago. I remember how uneasy it felt to continue teaching in late pregnancy, especially since I was a substitute teacher for a few months only. I felt relieved when the girls in the class came to me to ask about the baby after class: when it was due, whether I wanted to have a boy or a girl etc. Even after I had had the baby these girls called me and asked if they could come and see the baby. Maybe the girls were so socialized into their future roles as caring mothers, that they expressed it so strongly here, or adopted the social skills to break the ice, to support the other. For me this experience helped to realize the significance of corporeality in my own identity as a teacher, of coming to terms with it, not trying to hide and deny it in the classroom.

Girls-against-boys Discourse

In the public discourse on education in Finland there seems to be a trend today to express worries over boys not enjoying themselves at school or their poor academic records when compared to girls. The National Board of Education (2008) conducted a national assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue (Finnish) and literature, grade 7, in 2007. A startling finding in the research was that the marks in the school year reports had been given on different grounds to girls and boys, so that a lower performance had been required of boys to achieve the same mark as girls.

There was also a controversial educational project conducted at Olkahinen Primary School in Tampere recently on how boys and girls in primary school will perform if they are segregated into their own classes and taught 70% of the time separately. This project was initiated by the principal, Pasi Rangell, who felt that boys needed to be addressed separately in order to thrive at school. He referred to an earlier evaluation (OPH – Finnish National Board of Education 2005) of the skills of grade-3-children, which showed that 3rd grade boys acquired 50% of the maximum score in writing skills compared to the 68% of the maximum score that girls of the same grade reached. In setting the objectives of the project Mr Rangell stated:

Girls often prefer a quiet learning environment and they may suffer from the boys’ “need for action” whereas boys often need action in classroom
work and have problems with a normal 45 min-lesson. (Retrieved on November 21, 2008 from: http://www.tampere.fi/koulutus_v/opettajille/materialit/yhdessajaerikseen.pdf.)

It is difficult to understand how it can be claimed that girls of nine do not need any action to break a 45-minute lesson. It should be self-evident that students of this age as a routine need to be given a chance to activate all their senses, and especially a set of kinesthetic activities at regular intervals. In the end when drawing conclusions from the study the research group had to note that it had actually mostly been the girls, not the boys (who had e.g. become even more competitively-minded when segregated), who had gained more benefits from having been taught in their own groups.

In order to resolve this problematic girls-against-boys discourse a national teacher education research and development project “Equality and Gender Awareness in Teacher Education (TASUKO) was launched by the Finnish Ministry of Education in 2008. This two-year project will hopefully help pave the way for equality in education through teacher education by providing more theoretical and practical knowledge on how teachers can promote gender equality. The objectives of the project are to develop teacher education, to set up a research programme and to include the results achieved in women’s studies research projects into teacher education. (Ministry of Education 2008.)

Discussion

The first efforts to understand curriculum as gender text first appeared during the 1970s, and this effort has been central in educational discourse for some time already (Pinar 1995). There would not be a need for equality discourse in school or work if people were not objectified, if human dignity were an axiom in the educational or labour discourse. Often a discriminative approach is hidden in the official structures and policies of a company, but this approach is infiltrated already into the practices and policies in education, and it is there that the abolition of gender-based segregation has to start. Equality should become a part of everyday life in school. It should not be regarded as a topic to be dealt with in one lesson and then ticked off done. Through discussions between teachers and students they can together arrive at an understanding on what gender equality stands for in the class and then regularly monitor how this understanding is realized in the day-to-day life at school. Even if the world outside the school walls is built on patriarchal power structures students will get awakened to an awareness on how otherness is manifested and
created in the society through a continuous reflective approach on what they see, hear and experience around them. This awareness will also provide the tools to abolishing gendered structures.

Intuition, feeling and corporeality are largely missing from the language of the curriculum. It is not easy to bring to life learning as a social process that recognizes students holistically as composed of mind, body and emotions in a school setting, where students have to sit in rows facing each others necks. Defining themselves as individuals working in co-operation with their classmates, negotiating meanings together, using their whole capacity as human beings, with intuition, emotions and bodiness included, will teach students the immensely important social skills or life skills they will also need in working life. The collaboration and conversation with teachers and students, and at the same time with their histories, is significant in the process of finding their own voices (Pagano 1990).

Gendered power structures in school need to be taken apart, but this cannot be achieved through gender juxtaposition. Since men and women work side by side in a professional setting it is through socio-cultural learning strategies that students will acquire the social skills needed for team projects both in an educational and professional setting. Through becoming autonomous, responsible members in cooperative learning teams also female students will be empowered with a strong sense of self-esteem and a belief in their abilities. When stepping out into vocational or higher education – and the working life after that – it will be easier for them to recognize gender-based discriminative practices and actively work towards changing them. When students are working together in small heterogeneous groups they will also more easily avoid falling into gender traps that lurk in a school setting where girls are assumed to behave in a certain way and boys have a much broader scope of accepted behaviour. Language education is today seen as emancipatory, through the perspective of critical autonomy, helping students find their own voice, and with student autonomy as the espoused goal (Kohonen 2009).

In LCPP it is important to empower female engineering students during their studies. This will serve to alleviate the harsh reality that the students will face upon graduation when stepping into the working life in technology, an area which, just as the field of engineering studies, is dominated by men. They need to develop a strong sense of identity and autonomy as well as a critical awareness of the power structures in the society to be better equipped to deal with the harsh realities of the working life. Empowered students can see themselves shaping their own future careers as change agents, not as obedient individuals.
On the cover page of this paper there is a painting depicting a reflection in sea water in Korppoo, the archipelago in the Baltic Sea. In the picture the structures of a pier are reflected as shadows in the multicoloured water. This image represents to me a metaphor to the curriculum as gendered text: the many themes that are discussed in this paper can be seen as if reflected in the water, some surfacing, others disappearing with the ever changing waves. The colours of the sky above blend into the different shades in the water beautifully. As a contrast to these colours there are the darker, shadowed structures of the pier, which reveal the green algae that grows in the Baltic Sea in a multitude – and represent the suppressing gendered structures of the society that are hidden beneath the surface, do not emerge clearly in the sunlight, but can only be seen in the shadows, just as here – and will slowly suffocate all other forms of life in case no measures are taken to fight them.

References


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Face-to-face Communication and Social Positioning in the Experience World of Finnish Technical Professionals

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Face-to-face Communication and Social Positioning in the Experience World of Finnish Technical Professionals

Abstract

The objective of the research was to examine the experience world of professionals in the field of technology as users of foreign languages to illustrate the general meaning structure in the agency of a foreign language user. The theoretical framework of this research was phenomenological. The fieldwork was carried out through thematic interviews with seven interviewees in a medium-sized Finnish engineering company with international operations. Through a phenomenological method of analysis the individual meaning units were identified. Out of these individual meaning units a common meaning structure that reflected the experiences of all the interviewees was uncovered. Face-to-face communication and social positioning manifested as common meaning units, significant elements forming this structure in the accounts of the interviewees. Thus the findings of this research project suggest that in foreign language education special attention should be paid on establishing oral communication and thereby nurturing interactive communication skills in the students, instead of focusing on providing web-based language education.

Keywords: engineering education, face-to-face communication, interaction, language education, social positioning
Vocationally oriented language learning (VOLL) has been studied quite extensively, but most research projects have focused on language as a purely linguistic phenomenon. This study shares the view expressed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001) where language users are seen as active social agents, members of society conducting tasks that are not solely linguistic in nature.

This paper is part of a research project where the goal was to illustrate the general meaning structure in the agency of a foreign language user. The objective of this paper is to examine the experience world of Finnish technical professionals as users of foreign languages in a professional setting of intercultural encounters. The fieldwork for the research was carried out in a medium-sized Finnish engineering company with international operations through participatory observation and interviews of engineers working for the company. Interview data was collected in two phases: open, thematic interviews were arranged with twelve engineers for a pilot study during my stay with the company. In the second phase, two years later, seven engineers - three females and four males, were chosen for the final research, and in-depth thematic interviews were conducted with them.

Today’s globalising world is more and more becoming a world of virtual encounters, but the engineers in this research accounted for the significance of social encounters in a professional context. The salient nature of face-to-face communication came strongly out in the narratives of the interviewees as a common meaning unit. This was especially clearly articulated in connection with conflict situations, which called for systematic face-to-face contacts in order for the conflicts to be resolved. Social positioning was manifested as a salient element in the professional competence and face-to-face interaction of the interviewees. Virtual modes of education are
FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING
promoted with the decision-makers of language education today, contrary to these findings
(Ministry of Education, 2011), and teachers are urged to devote at least a part of their courses
to virtual learning. The findings in this research indicate, however, that a face-to-face contact
still seems to be the primary mode of communication in a professional setting. Hence more
emphasis should be paid on social interaction skills and this aspect of linguistic competence
should be nurtured in schools at all levels.

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical approach here is phenomenological. In this framework it is paramount
that the researcher’s own knowledge concerning the subject matter is bracketed throughout
the preparatory and interview stages of the research. It is also important to stall the moment of
awakening or revelation allowing the meanings to become visible or emerge only when the
researcher is ready for them, so that they are not precipitated in any way. Using free
imaginative variation the frameworks of reference are examined until the essences of the
phenomenon is uncovered.

The process of analysis employed here was further developed by Perttula (2000) from
Giorgi’s original phenomenological method (1997). In Table 1 I have described stage by
stage the regimen of the two-phase method as it was realised in this research with the data of
each individual interviewee. Table 2 illustrates the respective method raising the level of
analysis from an individual level to a general one describing the phenomenon as it reflected
all the interviewees’ experiences. Thus the method of analysis was comprised of two phases:
the individual and the general. In the first phase the objective was through the identification of
individual meaning units to uncover the experience as pure as possible, as lived through by
the person. Hence phase one resulted in seven individual meaning networks formed through
an analysis of the data. Out of these individual meaning networks the analysis proceeded
through phase two towards a common meaning structure that reflected the experiences that were common, shared by all the interviewees.

Table 1 Phase one of the phenomenological method of analysis as it was conducted in this project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the method/ Phase 1</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading through the data with a phenomenological attitude: bracketing, reduction.</td>
<td>Researcher arrives at a general sense of the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identifying meaning relations in the data and separating them.</td>
<td>Separate meaning relations and a more focused sense of the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Transforming the meaning relations into the language of the discipline through reflection and imaginative variation.</td>
<td>Transformed meaning relations that contain the necessary and sufficient essence of each meaning relation revealing the phenomenon more directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Classifying each transformed meaning relation under a theme.</td>
<td>Thematised individual meaning relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organising the transformed meaning relations into thematised individual meaning networks.</td>
<td>Seven thematised individual meaning networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Synthesising the individual situated structures of the phenomenon, or individual meaning networks.</td>
<td>Seven descriptions of the individual situated structure of the phenomenon. <em>Individually experienced language use in a professional context</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Phase two of the phenomenological method of analysis as it was conducted in this project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the method/ Phase 2</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Transforming the individual meaning networks into proposals of general meaning relation.</td>
<td>Proposals of meaning relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Forming content areas in all individual meaning networks that structure the proposals of meaning relations.</td>
<td>Content areas reflecting proposals of meaning relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Connecting each proposal of meaning relation with a content area.</td>
<td>All proposals of meaning relation address a content area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Forming proposals of content area out of each proposal of meaning relation.</td>
<td>Proposals of content area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Forming seven proposals for a common network of meanings.</td>
<td>Seven proposals for a common network of meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Structuring the seven proposals for a common network of meanings into one common network of meanings.</td>
<td>Creation of a common meaning network. A general description of the situated structure of the phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of these individual meaning units a common meaning structure that reflected the experiences of all the interviewees was uncovered. The experiences of the language users in a professional context in the study formed a common network of meanings woven around the following key concepts: autonomy of language users, female gender in engineering, intercultural understanding, as well as face-to-face interaction and social positioning. This paper examines the two latter mentioned concepts as manifested in the accounts of the interviewees. This article will be included into a series of articles for my dissertation that
inquire into the experience world of language users as uncovered in the study; each article focusing on one of the common meaning units.

**FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION**

In the increasingly multicultural world of today communication between people is becoming even more significant than before, and at the same time it is defined as a wider concept than a mere exchange of information. Communication is seen as less focused on persuasion, and more focused on the connection between the participants, less on the self than the process of social interaction. A fixed identity of a person, an organisation or a nation-state is hence giving way to a more dynamic one that constantly keeps adjusting to tumultuous surroundings. (Eisenberg, 2001, p.539.)

With the ever increasing electronic modes of communication: email, voicemail and instant messaging in the internet, face-to-face interaction and a real-time physical dialogue may seem to be diminishing in value. Nevertheless, an authentic contact instead of a virtual one, is somehow primary to us humans (Turner, 2002, p.13). We tend to seek a visual contact with one another in order to establish meaningful interaction between any two or more parties. Face-to-face communication is a complex process of shared sense-making, interaction where people are physically, via their senses connected through coordination, orientation, posture, touch, vision, sound, smell and artefacts, while at the same time the participants are inescapably conscious of one another. (Hougaard & Hougaard, 2009, pp.49-50).

Researchers have designed several major models of communication over the years, but what these models all share in common is interconnectivity: there is a tendency to increase the degree of overlap between individuals and communities, and social interaction between
different cultures increases the need to reflect on the Other, people are becoming Other-aware, not just self-aware (Hill, Rivers, & Watson, 2008, p.41).

When looking at communication in the business life of today, even though email is the method to be chosen for making appointments and the telephone the medium of swift conversations, a scheduled in-person meeting is still the most convenient method for creating an authentic dialogue between two parties. Also the daily routine in engineering is carried out in an intensely oral culture characterised with a high degree of interpersonal encounters (Darling & Dannels 2003). In this research the salience of face-to-face communication in professional encounters was emphasised, especially in conflict management either proactively or as a remedy in an inflamed situation. The interviewees spoke for face-to-face contacts in professional encounters in the following extracts. Sampo felt that the participants in a face-to-face interaction were more considerate and more in control of themselves than otherwise. Kari testified that there were some restrictions that had to be accounted for in face-to-face situations: an oral agreement was not seen as sufficient or binding, but a confirmation in writing was needed. Kari and Marja also accounted for having all their senses open when they explored the signals emitted by their counterparties:

*Sampo: Well, normally there are no problems there on site when you are face-to-face. There is something like – some kind of courtesy, anyway, here in these European cultures, so that...*

*Kari: It is enormous the emailing-. Quite rarely nowadays I settle anything on the phone with the customers. So that if I have settled something over the phone I will afterwards send the person an email stating ’as we agreed on the phone’. --- - because nowadays more and more-it’s all the same what was said, or what was the spirit of the conversation, what’s on paper is what counts. --- It’s rare that they’d straightforward try to turn the matter from black to white, but in a way they change it a little.*
FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

Kari: It is always a good situation if you can meet a person face-to-face. You can see it in his eyes already if he has got your message. Some people are just – they will just nod and say yes-yes, even if they have not understood you.

Marja: What is needed [in this work] is some kind of sensitivity to the situation, something like an ability to read between the lines, and reading people’s faces, so that even if cultures differ, basically the reactions of people are the same all over anyway. In the same way you can see it, if somebody gets annoyed about something, or becomes nervous or happy, the signs are the same almost everywhere.

Jari: It is an old truth that if you have to negotiate something like interface issues, it truly is so that seeing someone face-to-face will help you there. So that – then of course when you have met with this person a few times it is much easier to speak with him on the phone after that.

Intuition - Reading the Signs in the Counterparty

Intuition seems to play a vital role in professional competence, and the interviewees in this research would also often refer to resorting to their intuition when trying to make sense of a situation of face-to-face communication. The role of intuition has been emphasised in research on professional expertise in the stage model of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986), where intuition and tacit knowledge are seen as salient elements in professional expertise. Intuitive knowing can be illustrated through an example on the process of perception (Polanyi 1969): when one raises one’s hand and moves it across one’s face the colour and shape of the hand are in a constant state of change in the changing lighting and temperature. The hand is, however, through a holistic, intuitive process perceived as one solid object, not as a series of slightly changing clues to be interpreted. A parallel can be drawn from the skill of employing integrative perception to intuitive, tacit knowing, where it is difficult to break the analysis of
the whole down into the components that form it. Also in this research the participants manifested having adopted a holistic stance that did not follow any given sets of rules to different situations in a professional context; they intuitively employed the tacit understanding that they had developed through an integrating process about these situations.

Intuition was utilised by the participants in reading the signs in the counterparty to determine what kind of action to resort to in their business encounters. This was manifested e.g. in connection with presentations, where the interviewees attentively observed the audience for potential adjustments in the presentation, not just prior to delivering the presentation, but also during the presentation. This confirms what has been discovered in earlier research (Dannels & Housley Gaffney 2009) – that in the field of engineering it is expected that the presenter puts forth convincing arguments, is motivational, focuses the presentation according to the audience, as well as creates a natural, close connection with the audience.

Lately the role of intuition has been contested, and there have been both proponents for and adversaries against the reliability of intuitive decision-making. Some researchers have challenged intuition e.g. as purely the result of an inability to verbalise the chain between practice and deep understanding.

There have been endeavours, however, to reveal the tacit, intuitive dimension of expertise knowledge in a structured representation of expertise through concept mapping, where it can be illustrated as a bridge between knowledge structures (Kinchin & Cabot, 2010). It has been admitted that in order to assess the quality of intuitive judgment one needs to assess the predictability of the environment where the judgment was made, as well as a person’s possibilities of learning the regularities of that environment (Kahneman & Klein, 2009, p. 515).
The interviewees in this research referred to intuition in connection with reading the signs in the counterparty in order to determine what kind of action to take. They also indicated that they could through these intuitive thinking processes that they had adopted verbalise the deep, tacit understanding to the practice as Arja and Marja manifest in the following extracts:

Arja: I do change my attitude. And I try to learn – I mean – I may try to read people a bit too much even. I am terribly sensitive to nonverbal communication, how people react to different things and-. --- If you think about a meeting situation, I do change my own mode of operation according to who the attendees are.

Arja: I go along the situation, I don’t plan it that much. That I have this – have always had this strong intuition, which of course may often be wrong, too.

Marja: I guess you could call it some kind of intuition --- you can pretty soon see who it is who makes the right questions. --- --- You should be articulate and smooth, and you should be able to read people’s faces and reactions there.

Marja: The morning was spent pretty much with me using my feeble Swedish so that I could see it myself on the customers’ faces that they were feeling pretty uncomfortable there. And maybe then, when I could get hold of the atmosphere somehow - it was not so slow any longer that they would have felt so uneasy about it any longer.

Marja: Usually something like genuineness is what is always sensed and conveyed, so that if you genuinely try to settle things, that you genuinely want to get along with these people, then that is conveyed, everyone can sense (‘smell’) - sense that. Some customers may have a role on, it may be difficult to reach them, but normally the easiest way of doing so is...

Niina: By being genuine?

Marja: - being genuine, you have to be genuine and sincere and also – when talking about products and delivery – to tell about the so-called drawbacks – with care of course, but something, in any case. Because that will convey an impression to the other party that – that
I’m not just bragging here, presenting you something that does not exist. But I have to somehow be convinced of the fact that what I am doing here is something that is really great and we can do this so well.

**Playing games.**

The interviewees would often refer to social interaction in a professional setting as a game, where they and their counterparties encountered in various professional contexts were acting as players each with their own sets of tactics. According to Goffman whenever one takes part in a social encounter, “… a distinction will be drawn between what is called the person, individual, or player, namely, he who participates, and the particular role, capacity, or function he realizes during that participation.” (Goffman, 1974, p. 269).

In social interaction a game can be defined as “an on-going series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome” (Berne, 1964, p. 48). These transactions are repetitive and they differ from rituals, which Berne associates with intuition in that games are dishonest by definition, they are associated with ulterior, concealed motives and involve a psychological gain or payoff to the instigator after a set of maneuvers (Berne, 1964, pp. 48-49). The references of the interviewees to games played by themselves, however, were mostly positive in nature, seemingly lacking the dishonest element associated with games according to Berne’s definition. In the following narrative Kari describes how he sees meeting new people at work as a game, in which he makes observations about his counterparty predicting their potential actions.

*Kari: I have this - I pretty much play the game along- what the people are like, how they start things. I don’t have any one set procedure there.*
FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

Marja: But if you are too nice in these matters – if the machine supplier knows that there are some shortcomings in their delivery that will affect our delivery – if you are too nice there, they will not respect or value that then.

Marja: It is just like in normal interaction with people, it is a continuous game, where you constantly assess what he now thought about what I said here, and what will I say next [laughter] and whether this was a good move or not.

Petri: ... it is what I present, and in which order, and-. Because it is always like a game, really. It is always like a game.

Niina: Tell me more about this game?

Petri: Well, when there is a goal, some goal that you want to reach, or you want to have something accepted by the other party, you do need to have some kind of tactics there. Like what are the things that you say out loud, and what are the things you do not talk about. What you offer someone so that you can again gain something yourself....

According to the interviewees they would continuously assess the situations and the participants there as to what kind of strategy to adopt in any given situation with any given counterparty. This way organisational or institutional communication is constantly being reactivated in the interaction between people, which strengthens both the social identities of the participants and the practices that are thus created (Carbaugh, 1996).

A constituent element of a game is a tacit set of rules that has to be followed in order for the game to be realised. A breach of these rules or a code of conduct was experienced as detrimental. Hence some of the encounters in a professional context were assessed by the interviewees as having involved dishonest, unfair behaviour from the counterparty, which had led to an obstructed game, and a deteriorated relationship. In the extract below Kari refers to some games as not being “fair”, which has resulted in perplexity and confusion among the players, when they cannot anticipate the behaviour of the counterparty to follow the rules of
Kari implies here that there are certain tacit rules that have been defined for professional interaction and that the participants expect to be followed in order for the game to be fair.

Kari: For example there is the person who is a terribly fast mover himself, and requires quite sudden actions from the other party, as well. And he himself will simplify things whenever it suits him, but then again demands something else from the others... it is not fair that game... he requires something from us without seeing the big picture. And then again when we ask him for something, he will not budge at all.

Controlling the encounter.

The interviewees would often describe situations where they would endeavour towards taking control over a situation – of “taking things into their own hands” in professional encounters. In the following extract Marja feels that it is in the interest of the company that she works for, that she takes the lead and steers the professional encounter towards a successful conclusion. Therefore she takes caution in her pursue towards getting the initiative in the situation. At the same time she is, nevertheless, aware of the danger of inadvertently offending the counterparty in the process, and sees humour as an appropriate means for avoiding this:

Marja: When you are there as a supplier, and they are there as customers, it is difficult to mangle the decisions. Of course you can try and-and, either through the use of humour or some other ways try to steer things.--- But of course there are situations when you just have to go along with them, for the most part, because they are the customers after all, and you cannot – at least not in an impolite manner – run them over.

Niina: Right. So that it is humour then that will help there-?

Marja: Humour is pretty good, because using it everybody will save his face.
FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

--- ---But somehow you have to take it into your own hands. So that if we want something, if we need to get something out of this situation, then we do need to keep the initiative in our hands.

SOCIAL POSITIONING

In this research social positioning emerged in many forms, but especially intensively pertaining to status. The interviewees accounted for having been positioned as inferior in some encounters, and mentioned other occasions where they had deliberately positioned themselves as inferior with ulterior motives for specific purposes. This is where social positioning came quite close to the definition of a game: the participants had covert motives, had activated certain tactics, and their payoff would be a successful business encounter both for them and the company.

According to Bakhtin (1986) and the sociocultural theory, it is through interaction in sociocultural discourses that the participants, the recipient and the producer of these discourses, are simultaneously positioned. Social positioning can thus be described as a key concept in communication. It is understood as an interactive process, where the images of both the self and other people are constructed and communicated intentionally in situations on interaction. Through social positioning the producer of the discourse can consciously indicate to the recipient what stance he/she is taking in a situation by signalling to one another what kind of a social position they are going to adopt in each particular encounter (Hausendorf & Bora 2006, 35).

Erving Goffman, who was a pioneer sociologist in the research of face-to-face interaction, developed a dramaturgical approach to human interaction distinguishing a person or individual from the particular role or function that he/she adopts during an activity or episode (Goffman 1974, 269). There is a difference between self-positioning and self-presenting,
where in the latter a person strives to convey an image of him/herself to the outside world, whereas in self-positioning the relationship with the outside world is more dialogical in nature. When people position themselves (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka 2010) they not only portray external positions of themselves but are also prepared to take on to themselves positions that are designated to them where the two: the external and the internal position may be completely discrepant.

Social positioning has been defined as a concept that is more flexible and dynamic than the more static, ritualistic notion of a role (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). This distinction can also be illustrated through the spatial dimension suggested by the term “position”. When one positions oneself, one immediately also positions others in relation to oneself. Harré and van Langenhove (1999) emphasise the relational nature of the concept of positioning, where participants are always positioned vis-à-vis each other. This process takes place as interactive positioning, where one positions another person as e.g. powerful, and as reflexive positioning where one necessarily at the same time positions oneself as powerless.

Social positioning involves assigning and negotiating the reciprocal relationships of all the parties in the process of interaction. As such, positioning can be seen, not as excluding the concept of role, but as presupposing it and situating “role” with notions such as ”identity”, ”self”, ”status”, and ”category membership”. Both the concepts of ”role” and ”identity” are associated with the perceptions of others considering the person, whose identity is in question, and as such are essential to understanding the relational nature of positioning. (Weizman 2008, 16.) Since the construction of a social position is dynamic by definition, a person’s social position is fluid and may be changed during the communication process. Positioning theory is often regarded as a theory of conversation analysis (e.g. Davies and Harré 1990), but
FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

I am here referring to social positioning as taking place in the narratives of the interviewees where they account for their experiences in professional interaction.

**Occupying a Status Position**

Positioning is dynamic by nature as it portrays a person’s most prominent stances in social interaction and at the same time conveys a salient element of identity work for the participant. Sometimes the position that the counterparty occupies can be seen as a status position. The concept of status can be characterised by its clarity vis-à-vis other status positions, by the embeddedness of these positions into corporate and categoric units, the connectedness or networking qualities of status positions to one another, and by the degree of authority attached to status. (Turner 2002, 192.)

In the following Arja manifests how it had been useful for her to get some distance to her work and her embedded corporate position, when she had been away on maternity leave for a year. She had gained a new perspective to matters and did not accept at face value how her corporate position was aggressively challenged through the hostile behaviour of her counterparty in a professional encounter. She could simultaneously objectively assess the reasons for this kind of behaviour, and at the same time calmly defend her position as a technical expert:

*Auja: I always remained quiet and apologised [when confronted with an aggressive sales person]--- But then I had been at home for a year and had gotten some perspective and learned to put things into proportion in this life, like-. --- then this sales person called me and started yelling at me --- I just kept repeating to him that it is the Sales Manager he needs to talk to, while he was raging there.--- He just had this urge to emphasise his own position.*
FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

Next Jari describes how he has learnt to emphasise his status as a technical expert by abiding by the cultural standards as expected in different professional settings. Had he not verified his position as a technical expert by indicating that he “had a plan” when working in the United States, the interaction might have become strained. Vice versa if the participants in the social interaction had not been able to determine their respective status positions in relation to Jari they would have been confused and the interpersonal flow in the interaction would have been strained or obstructed.

Jari: Well, they [the Americans] talk a lot, and you have to have, when talking about technical, and also other issues, but at least with technical issues, you always need to have a “plan”. So that you can immediately say what you are going to do next. Even if you do not know if that is of any use, but everybody is happy that way, and will go: ‘aha, tomorrow we’ll do it like this then’.

Reflexive and interactive positioning.

The relational nature of social positioning is emphasised in the division into “reflexive” and “interactive” positioning (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) – these dual forms of positioning are also labelled as “reciprocal positioning” and thus take place simultaneously and are dependent on one another: when one reflexively positions oneself as superior one automatically interactively positions the others as inferior.

In this research both reflexive and interactive positioning emerged especially intensively pertaining to status. The interviewees accounted for having been positioned as inferior in a certain situation, and mentioned other occasions where they had deliberately positioned themselves as inferior in social interaction.
**Reflexively positioning oneself as inferior.**

Participants in social interaction may reflexively position themselves on an epistemic scale, presenting themselves e.g. as ignorant or knowledgeable (Du Bois, 2007, p. 143). In the following Petri accounts how he positions himself on an epistemic scale as somewhat ignorant when faced with challenging customers in a problematic situation. He seems to disguise his real personality under the generic personal attribute of inferiority here. Doing so he avoids being confronted or pressured by the people he knows have earlier troubled his colleagues. In order to be able to placate the counterparty and to enhance settling the situation Petri chooses to present himself as “*reppana*” (poor wretch), which in Finnish is a positively coloured expression of a personality trait. On the affective scale this social position can be characterised as predominantly denoting a slightly foolish, benevolent, but unfortunate soul:

*Petri: Yes, they [the customers] were really- towards our sales people and our British service person they were really- they would put on pressure, and bully them, but for some reason they would then be quite ok towards me, and constructive. I will present myself as a poor wretch, they will then handle me more carefully. [laughter]*

Another similar strategy of positioning oneself as inferior, was presented by Arja when she described her behaviour during the early days working as an engineer. Arja accounted how she would disguise her lack of professional knowledge as inadequate language skills. It was easier for her to admit that her linguistic performance in the English language was deficient than to admit that she did not possess the professional knowledge required. Later in her career Arja came to realise that her language skills were not that inadequate after all, and that she could or should not adopt the social position of a person whose professional image is characterised by deficient linguistic performance.
Arja: - so that it was somehow so easy to hide behind my poor English skills. --- These systems are pretty complicated and I came here straight from college and had not even heard about them when I started here. --- My orienteering process was somewhat inadequate, and because of that it was so easy for me to say-, I resorted to saying that my English was bad.

Arja: The teacher asked me after the course [English language] why I was there, since I knew those things already.... After that course I had to start thinking that maybe I’m not so terribly bad [at languages] after all. That I could not hide behind that screen any longer.

**Interactively positioning a person as inferior.**

In a company with a strongly hierarchical division of labour it is more likely that the status of the members is clear, and the influence of categoric units (e.g. education, age, gender) becomes diminished in encounters between members. In a setting where there is no clear hierarchy or division of labour to define status, the members will rely on diffuse status characteristics especially if they are differently valued. (Turner, 2002, p. 195.)

In the research the interviewees had not experienced the division of the labour in the company as highly hierarchical, on the contrary: they testified that compared to other organisational cultures the hierarchy with their company was fairly low, and it was quite effortless to approach the representatives of the management level. There had, however, been negative experiences where the interviewees had personally experienced the influence of a categoric status. They manifested having been defined and confronted according to a categoric unit instead of a corporate unit and professional status.

In the following Arja describes an encounter that was not embedded into corporate units, but the positions of the interactants may have been defined by their categoric (here: male-female) units. From the gender perspective this can be seen as a manifestation of power, where a male expert does not treat his counterparty based on the corporate unit of a technical
expert and a colleague, but defines her through a categoric unit as a female, and thus inferior in his eyes, so that he can manifest his authority over her.

Arja: - through his behaviour he shows you that he does not, like, appreciate you at all.
Niina: What kind of behaviour is it?
Arja: Well, for example by cutting in on you at any meeting you might be attending with this person. If someone asks for my opinion on an issue there– and I am trying to answer the question, then this person will cut in, will come and offer his opinion, even if he does not know the first thing about the issue at hand!

It is noteworthy here that Arja may at first have tried to distance herself through the use of the passive voice in her narrative, but she changes her perspective to a subjective stance in the continuation. This can naturally also be interpreted as an expression of a missing dialogical relationship in communication. In the extract Arja recounted how she was treated by her colleague as an object, not as a co-worker, an expert, but as an object whose opinions need not be paid attention to at a meeting. The person that Arja was referring to here may have acted in this manner regardless of the gender of the counterparty. He may just have adopted an attitude that expressed a restricted engagement to the world, one where he saw himself as the subject and would treat any person around him in an objectifying manner.

Using Gender as a Social Position

In a social positioning process people account for themselves and others in various ways in terms of being, sometimes communicating conflicting images of themselves and others (Hausendorf & Bora 2006). One may, for example, be positioned as inferior according to the categoric unit of gender, age or the like, as was also the case in the earlier
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examples, but it is also possible to actively utilise a categoric unit tactically to further one’s own purposes.

A person may knowingly define his/her position not as embedded into the corporate unit, but as converted according to a categoric unit, just as Arja describes herself sometimes resorting to using her gender in the following. Arja seems to be critical towards herself because of this, however, and asks herself whether it is morally questionable to utilise gender this way, after all:

_Arja:_ When you say it –like ‘hey, now I’d need your help, you’re so good at this’, so that you can do it in a positive spirit. Maybe this is something where I use my gender, because I cannot imagine a man going to another to ask ‘could you, would you be so kind?’ [expressed with a sweet voice lengthening the vowels]--- But then again I raise the question to myself, whether I did wrong to behave in that manner.

Marja, on the other hand, wants to disguise female gender under the corporate unit of a technical expert in the professional context. In a way she wants the female engineer to be the initiator in the process, neutralising and wiping out the impact of gender as a categoric unit as completely as she can in order to primarily communicate her identity as a technical professional.

_Marja:_ Actually the more beautiful a young woman is the more she needs to pay attention to not being paid attention to. --- As neutral as possible, so that you [a female engineer] do not stand out from that mass of males at all, then you are good as an expert.

Marja wants to highlight the fact that in order to strengthen a person’s identity as a technical expert also a male engineer needs to have a fact-centred approach to expressing himself. Any accentuation of one’s exterior appearance might hence give a wrong signal to...
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the counterparty and destroy one’s endeavour towards a social position embedded into the corporate unit of a technical expert:

Marja: And his [an expert] task is not to be so, to give people the impression that this guy probably uses all his time working and developing himself, not by looking himself in the mirror.

---

M: Yes, well, and-and if you strongly smell of after shaves and things like that. Because this really is a world that is pretty close to production, so that neither the people in the counterparty are like that. So that they will experience you as a smooth sales person, not as an expert, then.

Organisational Social Positioning

Institutions in a society are seen to be continuously reactivated in the daily interactions, and through institutional communication it is possible to solidify the social identities of people into justifiable practices (Carbaugh, 1996). An approach of this nature was indicated by the interviewees as reflected in the way they would professionally utilise the backing provided by the organisation to forward their own standpoint after having been confronted by the counterparty.

Sometimes an interviewee would manifest these justifiable practices in the form of taking cover behind the façade of the organisation. In this kind of a situation it may just have been a question of buying some more time in order to solve a specific, problematic issue. A person may also have aspired to seek for an affirmation to one’s professional opinion from the reinforcement that the organisation could provide him/her with. Hence it had become a form
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of personal tactics and a justifiable practice to use the organisation as a shield and "to hide behind it," when confronted with a difficult request in a situation of face-to-face communication, just as Jari describes in the following.

Jari: I will say "I'll need ask about that from Finland.", especially if I already know beforehand that this suggestion is of no use, then I'll call someone or send an email, and I'll get an answer, and then I can tell them the next day that this is a bit [laughter] I don't know, this is my tactic. I have noticed that if I told them straight away that I don't feel like going through with this – that is not good.

Jari: It's been seen so many times before that when you sort of hide a bit behind your organisation, then that will help you there.

CONCLUSION

With all the virtual modes of communication available for us today there are also new hazards looming in the horizon: sensory and cognitive overload combined with new concepts of time and space are the contemporary perils that have emerged with the new forms of communication. Face-to-face interaction can, however, still be considered as the primal and primary means of communication for us humans.

The interviewees in the research acknowledged the significance of face-to-face communication through their experiences of language use in a professional context. They manifested a deep rooted aspiration to abandon virtual modes of interaction in order to come into an authentic contact with the counterparty, especially in situations of potential conflict, where there was a problem to be solved or some kind of friction to be detected. In encounters
such as these the participants would feel more at ease when they could holistically interpret the signals emitted by their counterparties and thus resort to all their senses in the process of interaction instead of just depending on a visual or aural interpretation of the situation.

Intuition emerged from the data as a vital part of professional face-to-face communication. The interviewees manifested that an intuitive analysis of situations and the participants in these situations formed a salient element in their professional expertise. Thus the interviewees were able to form and verbalise a bridge between tacit knowledge structures and the practice, where they would employ intuitive thought processes into action.

In this research social interaction in a professional setting was often referred to as a game, where the participants acted as players making observations and analysing the situations and the other participants there, and endeavoured to take control over the situation. In social psychology a game is defined as a series of ulterior, repetitive transactions progressing towards a predictable outcome involving both concealed motives and a psychological gain or payoff to the initiator after a set of manoeuvres. The payoff for the interviewees was a successful professional encounter, where they managed to get what they had aspired for. The success of the encounter was assessed from the point of view of the organisation the interviewees worked for, but they would gain personal gratification out of a fruitful outcome as well.

There seemed to be tacit rules and codes of conduct to these games, a breach of which was experienced as detrimental. Some of the encounters in a professional context were assessed by the interviewees as having involved dishonest, unfair behaviour from the counterparty, which had led to an obstructed game, and a deteriorated relationship.

Social positioning is understood as an interactive process, where the images of both the self and other people are jointly constructed and intentionally communicated in situations of interaction. In this research social positioning was manifested powerfully in the narratives of
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the interviewees where they accounted for their experiences in professional interaction. The participants accounted for fluid and dynamic processes of positioning themselves and others in various situations of interaction in terms of being. They sometimes communicated conflicting images of positioning either according to the categorical unit of gender, age or the like, or according to a corporate unit. In this research both the reflexive and interactive forms of social positioning emerged especially intensively pertaining to status. The interviewees accounted for having been positioned as inferior in some encounters, and described other occasions where they had deliberately with ulterior motives positioned themselves as inferior in social interaction for specific purposes. Thus for some elements social positioning could also be characterised as coming close to the definition of a game.

Occasionally the interviewees would resort to organisational positioning by taking cover behind the façade of the organisation e.g. when they sought to stall the proceedings and buy some more time in business transactions. Organisational positioning may have been employed as a justifiable practice, to use the organisation as a shield and "to hide behind it,” when confronted with a difficult request in a situation of face-to-face communication.

Face-to-face communication, social positioning and intuition were manifested as salient elements in the professional competence of the interviewees. With view to this it is deplorable that these findings are not reflected in language education today. Virtual modes of education are strongly promoted by the decision-makers of language education and teachers are urged to modify their courses for virtual learning. The findings of this research indicate, however, that a face-to-face contact still seems to be the primary mode of communication in a professional setting. Hence also in language education more emphasis should be paid on social interaction skills and this aspect of linguistic competence should be nurtured in schools at all levels.
References


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‘You do not just translate your thought into another language - you translate the whole issue into that culture.’

Intercultural understanding in the experience world of Finnish technical professionals
Abstract

The objective of the research was to examine the experience world of professionals in the field of technology as users of foreign languages to illustrate the general meaning structure in the agency of a foreign language user. The theoretical approach here is phenomenological. The fieldwork was carried out through thematic interviews with seven interviewees in a medium-sized Finnish engineering company with international operations. Through a phenomenological method of analysis the individual meaning units were identified. Out of these individual meaning units a common meaning structure that reflected the experiences of all the interviewees was uncovered. Intercultural understanding came out strongly as a significant component in the experience world of the interviewees.

**Keywords** intercultural understanding; foreign language; intercultural education; foreign language education
1 Introduction

Vocationally oriented language learning (VOLL) has been examined quite extensively, but most research projects have focused on language as a purely linguistic phenomenon. This study shares the view expressed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001) where language users are seen as active social agents, members of society conducting tasks that are not solely linguistic in nature.

The objective of this paper was to examine the experience world of Finnish technical professionals as users of foreign languages in the setting of intercultural encounters. This paper is part of a research project where the goal is to illustrate the general meaning structure in the agency of a foreign language user.

In this paper the often employed term *intercultural competence* is replaced by a more multifaceted term *intercultural understanding*, which lacks the mechanical, perfunctory connotations of the earlier term. The findings showed that the interviewees manifested intercultural understanding when seeking to adapt to varying situations through both their cognitive knowledge and operational skills, but also with open and positive attitudes towards different cultures. They manifested resistance against stereotypical descriptions of national cultures, but often juxtaposed their own national culture against other cultures examining these critically. Expressions of intercultural understanding came out especially clearly in the data in connection with challenging intercultural encounters. The interviewees would resort to humour as a softening instrument when accounting for some of the most problematic encounters. They would construct their intercultural understanding through a critical reflection on their experiences of intercultural encounters: actions, thoughts and attitudes. Critical reflection seems to form a basis for the development of intercultural understanding.
2 Methodology

The theoretical approach in this research project was phenomenological with a focus on language and communication from a wider perspective instead of the more restraint perspective provided by linguistics. The objective was not to describe the language used to communicate different purposes, but to focus on the experiences of language users. Hence the phenomenological approach, where the experience world of a person is the focus of interest, was a natural choice for this research, where the researcher was not striving to answer the question: 'How do people use foreign languages at work?' but: 'What is the experience of using a foreign language like?'

The phenomenological researcher strives towards an objective reality through bracketing the Husserlian natural attitude, the attitude that exists without any reflection on it. Husserl introduced as a leitmotiv “to the things themselves” (Zu den Sachen selbst), an aspiration to describe the phenomenon in as pure a state as possible: as it was at the moment of experiencing. Thus objectivity in phenomenologically characterised research implies fidelity to the phenomenon that is being examined. Here this phenomenon is the experience world of language users in a professional context.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out in a medium-sized Finnish engineering company with international operations. The author was awarded a grant which enabled a period of two and a half months spent working for the company. During the stay it was possible to choose the interviewees for a pilot study. There were twelve engineers who were chosen based on the fact that they had had experiences of using languages for work and their consent to participate in the project.
In the second phase, two years later, seven engineers - three females and four males, were chosen out of the initial twelve interviewees for the final research, and a second round of in-depth thematic interviews was conducted with them.

The process of analysis employed here was further developed by Perttula (2000) from Giorgi’s original phenomenological method (1997). In Table 1 the regimen of the two-phase method is described stage by stage as it was realised in this research with the data of each individual interviewee. Table 2 illustrates the respective method raising the level of analysis from an individual level to a general one describing the phenomenon as it reflected all the interviewees’ experiences. Thus the method of analysis was comprised of two phases: the individual and the general. In the first phase the objective was through the identification of individual meaning units to uncover the experience as pure as possible, as lived through by the person. Hence phase one resulted in seven individual meaning networks formed through an analysis of the data. Out of these individual meaning networks the analysis proceeded through phase two towards a common meaning structure that reflected the experiences that were common, shared by all the interviewees.
Table 1 Phase one of the phenomenological method of analysis as it was conducted in this project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the method/Phase 1</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reading through the data with a phenomenological attitude: bracketing, reduction.</td>
<td>Researcher arrives at a general sense of the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identifying meaning relations in the data and separating them.</td>
<td>Separate meaning relations and a more focused sense of the phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Transforming the meaning relations into the language of the discipline through reflection and imaginative variation.</td>
<td>Transformed meaning relations that contain the necessary and sufficient essence of each meaning relation revealing the phenomenon more directly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Classifying each transformed meaning relation under a theme.</td>
<td>Thematised individual meaning relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organising the transformed meaning relations into thematised individual meaning networks.</td>
<td>Seven thematised individual meaning networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Synthesising the individual situated structures of the phenomenon, or individual meaning networks.</td>
<td>Seven descriptions of the individual situated structure of the phenomenon. <em>Individually experienced language use in a professional context</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Phase two of the phenomenological method of analysis as it was conducted in this project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of the method/ Phase 2</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Transforming the individual meaning networks into proposals of general meaning relation.</td>
<td>Proposals of meaning relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Forming content areas in all individual meaning networks that structure the proposals of meaning relations.</td>
<td>Content areas reflecting proposals of meaning relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Connecting each proposal of meaning relation with a content area.</td>
<td>All proposals of meaning relation address a content area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Forming proposals of content area out of each proposal of meaning relation.</td>
<td>Proposals of content area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Forming seven proposals for a common network of meanings.</td>
<td>Seven proposals for a common network of meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Structuring the seven proposals for a common network of meanings into one common network of meanings.</td>
<td>Creation of a common meaning network. <em>A general description of the situated structure of the phenomenon.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The experiences of the language users in the study formed a common network of meanings woven around the following key concepts: autonomy of language users, face-to-face interaction, social positioning, female gender in engineering and intercultural understanding. This article examines one of these components to the experiences of language users: intercultural understanding as manifested through the experiences of the interviewees. The article will be part of a doctoral dissertation forming a series of articles that inquire into the experience world of language users as
uncovered in the study; each article focusing on one component in the common meaning network.

2.1 Defining terminology: Culture – intercultural competence

The concept of culture can refer to a wide range of activities, behaviour, events and structures in people’s lives. It also entails varying meanings for different cultures (Matsumoto & Juang 2013:7). Baumeister (2005) identifies culture simply as an information-based system of social coordination, of people living together in order to satisfy their needs. The sociocultural theory and the Vygotskian tradition defines culture as an objective force that infuses social relationships and the historically developed uses of artefacts – including language – in concrete activity (Lantolf & Thorne 2006:1). It is language as well as nonverbal communication that allow human beings to communicate a shared intentionality, which may be at the heart of a social organisation and contribute to the creation of the human culture (Tomasello & Herrmann 2010). In everyday conversations, however, culture as a concept may be seen as a grandiose term that people tend to avoid using. During the interviews the interviewer knowingly avoided mentioning the term. When the participants in the research related to culture it was on their own initiative and often with some reserve, as Jari a little evasively states: ‘I guess that’s all about that culture-thing if you want to use fancy words; I don’t know.’

Intercultural competence or ‘global competence’ (Hunter, White, & Godbey 2006), ‘cultural intelligence’ (Peterson 2004), ‘intercultural mindset and skillset’ (Bennett & Bennett 2004), as it has been labelled as well, is an elusive term that has been defined over and over again during the last few decades through different researchers and a variety of theoretical models. Parekh creates a setting for intercultural competence in that he (2006:337–338) speaks of a multicultural
perspective as an interplay of three complementary insights: the fact that all people are culturally embedded, that all cultural diversity is inescapable and desirable, that an intercultural dialogue is beneficial to all cultures, and finally that all cultures are internally plural and fluid. When a person possesses a multicultural perspective he/she may open up a dialogue between different cultures. In this process an in-between space is created from which one can foster a less culture-bound image of human life and a critical perspective on one’s own society at the same time (Parekh 2006:339).

The models that try to illustrate intercultural competence include contextualising the components of intercultural competence (e.g. Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998), or they portray the development of intercultural competence as a process (e.g. Deardorff, 2009; Bennett & Bennett 2004; Talib 2005; Talib et al. 2009). Deardorff’s Process Model of Intercultural Competence (2009:33) features intercultural competence as a cyclical process, where a person’s knowledge, skills and attitudes in intercultural contacts are reflected in his/her desired internal and external outcomes. Deardorff (2011) lists four key components for intercultural competence to be realised: firstly reflection and assessment are crucial to the development of the competence, secondly critical thinking skills need to be adopted, thirdly attitudinal elements such as respect, openness and curiosity serve as a basis for the process of development of the competence, and fourthly there needs to be an ability to see life from the perspective of the other. Talib has examined teachers and the development of intercultural competence with them. Her discoveries were on the same lines with those of Deardorff. She noticed that with teachers intercultural competence gradually evolved from a deeper self-understanding to the adoption of a critical stance towards one’s work, incorporating a feeling of social and global responsibility (2005:43). The intercultural sensitivity model by Bennett and Bennett (2004) perceives the
development of intercultural competence through experiencing cultural differences and refers to a person’s awareness and knowledge, attitudes and values, skills and behaviour when operating in intercultural contexts. Bennett’s theory separates the ethnocentric and ethnorelative stages in the development process of intercultural sensitivity.

In this article the process model approach to intercultural learning is used as a springboard when accounting for the manifestations of intercultural understanding that came out in the interviews of the Finnish engineers in this research. The term ‘intercultural understanding’ is used in this paper instead of ‘intercultural competence’, to avoid connotations involved with the latter term that echo of a mechanical mastery of skills. The development of intercultural competence in a person, after all, is a reflective, cyclical and gradual process, where one comes through one stage and enters the next one encompassing and editing the information acquired during the earlier stages; it is not a competence that can be mastered and assessed mechanically.

3 Results and Discussion – The components of intercultural understanding

Downey et al. (2006) have defined intercultural competence in engineering in terms of a) positive attitudes toward ideas and people outside of one’s own culture, including an openness to and a willingness to tolerate ambiguity; b) showing an interest toward another culture including the language of this culture; c) interacting with people of another culture at a professional level; d) coping with people who define problems differently and use different engineering and managerial approaches for solving those problems. Grandin and Hedderich (2009) emphasise a globally
competent engineer’s ability to work in an interdisciplinary mode. Behavioural and interaction skills such as the skills of sharing and transferring information are the skills that are highlighted in today’s business life – also in intercultural encounters (Holden 2002; Sercu 2004). Interaction skills was emphasised with the interviewees as Petri testifies in the following:

Petri: You can learn technical issues, but interaction with people, that’s difficult. It’s all about interaction in the end, anyway, selling, purchasing and negotiating.

The interviewees in the research depicted features from all four aspects of intercultural competence, or understanding, as described by Downey et al (2006). The key elements of intercultural competence as defined by Deardorff (2011) reflection, critical thinking skills, attitudinal elements such as esteem, acceptance and curiosity as well as an ability to see life from the other person’s perspective were externalised in the data in this research.

On top of reflection and critical thinking, attitudinal elements and the ability to see things from the perspective of the other, the following components to intercultural understanding were manifested in the accounts of the interviewees: a certain, sometimes inward turned element of humour, effectivity, or dealing with versatile culturally coloured situations in business in the most efficient mode, cultural juxtapositions, resisting stereotypical thinking, or being reflective and analytical about one’s attitudes and actions, and a sense of human universal coherence, of seeing what all human beings share together.

The development of intercultural understanding can be illustrated in the form of a DNA-like structure (Figure 1). In this figure the entwined nature of all the coefficients contributing to this cyclical development process of intercultural understanding is depicted as it was manifested in the interviewees’ experiences. The development
process is seen here as an on-going cycle composed of two salient, permanent components: intercultural encounters of different degrees, and critical reflection. The features that characterized the accounts of the interviewees on their intercultural experiences form the strands in the DNA-like structure of the cycle; These strands may have been expressed more powerfully or in subtler tones with different individuals and at different times, but they were manifested to some degree in the data of all the participants.

Figure 1    Cyclical development process of intercultural understanding.
3.1  

Humour

In intercultural communication meanings are constantly being negotiated and created in a social process. The existence of humour in this process is universal, but how it is used, where and when, as well as the conditions under which humour can be utilized differ according to cultural, and even individual variables (Raskin 1985; Bell 2007).

Sometimes the interviewees resorted to humour to alleviate negative feelings that they had experienced in connection with culturally offensive behaviour. It facilitated proceeding with the agenda at hand and prevented dwelling on negative issues. Humour thus often emerged as a facilitating factor in intercultural encounters where occasionally different customs and modes of operation clashed.

Petri: I would say that in all other countries they’ll give you some-some-some wrong-wrong information to varying degrees there [on delivery times] and- because they would like the delivery to be dispatched [laughter].

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Jari: So that there is the same logic as with the British anyway. They do not seem to have any common sense in anything!

Niina: Tell me a bit more, I’m not following you there.

Jari: Well, they keep driving the wrong side of the road and water pipes run on the outer walls of houses, where they get frozen, and shops close at five and… [laughter]

In the following Marja manifests an open, friendly and positive, maybe a bit amused at times, general attitude towards different cultures. She describes how she has experienced situations where she has been forced to tolerate ambiguity caused by culturally deviant business practices, but has been able to operate with people successfully despite this. The humour here may be a token for coping with these sometimes problematic situations. Marja reflects in a neutral manner and at length her experiences of British business practices as compared to the Finnish and the German
ones. She admits that the British method of solving problems in negotiations is quite time consuming and heavy for her, but at the same time she identifies this as reflecting the British culture in general:

Marja: And in England I have been, too, and there it is quite strange and heavy the way they carry on discussions. At least with the ones that I have been to, there may have been a large group of participants, but they had not made any preparations at all. …And they somehow – it feels that it is much more difficult to find a decision maker there. A person who would in the end say how to do things. They just want to call in more and more experts for this. A bit like in Sweden, but it is not as relaxed and smooth as in Sweden.

---

In a way they immediately hand over the keys to the situation to us. So that we take the lead. And it is as if they feel that it’s not in their interest to close things, to settle things--- That they [the British] just philosophize and circle around things. When with the Germans it is in a way easy.

--- But the British are not systematic at all. And you can see this in everything. In their factories and everywhere – so that it is not so clean and tidy there. Somehow there is still this hierarchy, so that they still have foremen there, and people like that. They have many more layers of hierarchy.

Niina: Is it confusing then?

Marja: Yes, somehow confusing. They make things so difficult. Like their own language, which would be so easy in principle, but they make it so complicated themselves [laughter].

Using humour in intercultural interaction is often complex and requires sophisticated linguistic skills. Davies (2003:1381) suggests that successful use of humour primarily involves grasping the joke and prompt reactions when playing within the joking frame. The interviewees recognized the value of humour in creating a pleasant rapport for intercultural encounters, but at the same time confessed that there were often difficulties involved; especially with native speakers.

A significant function of humour lies in its potential to mark in- and out-group identities, and thus it can provide indication as to the status of the speaker (Bell 2007).
In the following extract, however, Marja testifies how she has felt humour threatening her status, and how she has experienced problems in grasping the humour in intercultural encounters with native speakers of English. This has resulted in socially awkward and embarrassing situations with both interlocutors:

Marja: What created an embarrassing situation was when I did not know for sure. I thought I had grasped that it was a joke, but since I’m not sure I cannot start laughing [laughter]- And then the other party becomes annoyed, when I did not get his joke! It creates this chain of embarrassment! [laughter]

3.1 Appropriateness - clashes in intercultural encounters

Intergroup contacts take place during social episodes such as making a joke during a meeting, or bargaining with a salesperson - intercultural problems may arise if these episodes are constructed differently. In such situations the consequent behaviour exchanges are likely to be perplexing, and difficult for both parties. (Gudykunst & Bond 1997:136). Some researchers have expressed their astonishment over the emphasis on cultural misunderstandings and clashes in the field of intercultural research (e.g. Stier 2010). Others, however, do not interpret intercultural conflicts as inexorably negative, but as neutral, necessary in the process of learning to manage them (Kim 2002).

The findings in this research support this latter interpretation of the role of intercultural conflicts, in that the interviewees did not indicate that the clashes they had experienced would have been especially trying for them. They would rather pursue to adopt an analytical mode of operation towards conflicts trying to find a solution that would alleviate or prevent similar situations in the future. The engineers that were interviewed had daily contacts with people from different cultural settings,
and strong reactions to each problematic encounter from their side would probably have been quite arduous.

The interviewees manifested that cultural features characterised decision making in their work significantly, and they had to be taken into account when doing business. The participants often demonstrated analyses of other-perception data in an endeavour towards a neutral assessment of potential conflicting situations when accounting for cultural adaptation. In their accounts the interviewees also depicted situations, where they had been puzzled by having been stranded into an encounter, where they had been looking for the correct tools to be able to solve problems caused by cultural clashes in communication.

In the following Marja reflects upon cultural differences in meeting practices. She also looks for a solution to the friction that these differences sometimes create:

Marja: When a Finn would much rather do so that all these items on the agenda are dealt with first, and only then we can start talking about something else --- But if the conversation keeps digressing so that not even the first decision has been taken and people start talking about football and something… Then you feel that this is not the place for that kind of conversation. But I don’t know if we need to get some training – so that we would learn to talk about football a little and then artfully lead the conversation back to the issue at hand.

Appropriateness, effectiveness and adaptation are categorised as interculturally competent conflict management criteria; appropriateness implying that one assess a conflict both through self-perception and other-perception data, or by aspiring to see life from the perspective of the other (Ting-Toomey 2009:115). Hence through successful implementation of other-perception data one would avoid a situation where one would think that one has acted appropriately while the other party thinks the opposite. In the conflicts that the participants described different parties had occasionally differing opinions as to what was considered as appropriate behaviour.
In the following extract Petri reminisces about a complex encounter, where he thought he had adapted to the situation interculturally appropriately. He had acquired other-perception data regarding one of the parties, but unfortunately neglected it for the other party. As a result intercultural problems were externalised from three different perspectives – although unfortunately we can only hear one interpretation of these here. The situation also depicts the problematic nature of information transfer in an intercultural encounter. Here the reserve of the Japanese, the directness and result-orientation of the Finnish and the discreetness of the German culture were expressed in an interplay of misunderstandings:

Petri: I was in Germany with a German colleague. On the other side of the table there were Japanese people – and I do know that much about their culture that they do not say anything, even if they do not understand what you are saying. And – and when for the fifth time I was going through the same thing, the sequence, this German colleague of mine lost it and dragged me out of the room. How could I be so rude that I over and over again started going over the same point. And I said ‘don’t you notice that he always says Uh-huh! at a different point. So he has not understood it even now.’

Niina: Yes.

Petri: And-and then we finished the meeting. After six months we had the delivery and they were all wrong, the parts they had to deliver, so he [the Japanese person] had not understood it at all, even then!

In the following Marja critically reflects on a case where intercultural contacts had caused problems within the company. She recalled a serious cultural clash with one of the employees originating from his transfer to the United States. Marja quite acutely acknowledges the significance of cultural aspects in language studies. She tries to find a solution to these intercultural problems and recommends resorting to external cultural expertise in order to prevent these kinds of clashes in the future:

Marja: -it is just one more example on how it does not help you at all if you know the language inside out, but have no clue of how people think about these matters in that country.
Niina: Yes.
Marja: Like there the American President [of the company] did not understand how Finns think about these matters and Tero did not understand how the Americans think. And both just stubbornly stuck to their own.

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Marja: --- I think it is a purely Finnish reaction, that:’ ok, let’s do assembly work then, if that’s what you want. I will do it till the end of the world –’ That it becomes, like, that only the Finnish can fall for something like that. That they in a way dig themselves into a hole.

Niina: Right, yes, like going through it like with your teeth clenched. Hmm.
Marja: Yes. And this is- had we used there a exp- like a cultural expert, or someone like that. A company that is regularly involved in projects like this one-

Niina: Uh-huh.
Marja: - when people are sent to the United States. Maybe they would already have drafted the contract in another way. Maybe we would have kept them on for the first six months.

3.2 Adaptability and effectivity

In the working life today it has become increasingly important to know how to operate in an intercultural setting. According to Pini Kemppainen (2009:110) operational skills surpass attitudinal and cognitive skills as aspects of intercultural competence in today’s business life. Deardorff (2011) defines effectiveness and appropriateness as the external manifestations of intercultural competence. Effectiveness in the accounts of the interviewees was often manifested as desired outcomes in business transactions. The participants also demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity in their strive towards appropriateness when in interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds. The interviewees confessed that even if hierarchy as a cultural feature was not always visible, it had to be sensed somehow in order to further their business contacts in an appropriate manner.
Petri: I noticed that I did not know it after all. Immediately everyone was on first name basis. That gives you the illusion that it is not hierarchical [the culture]. So I need to stay on my toes.

Intercultural understanding or competence can be defined as a social evaluation of behaviour that is comprised of the two primary criteria of appropriateness: i.e. contextually legitimate and fitting, and effectiveness: i.e. a communicator’s ability to reach the desired outcome in a given situation. (Spitzberg 2000:375). This implies that the communicators can identify their objectives, and assess what is needed in order to reach these objectives, that they can predict the other communicators’ responses, choose their communication strategies and evaluate the results of the communication (Wiseman 2002:209). These criteria of appropriateness and effectivity often blended together in the interviewees’ accounts: if the behaviour was contextually fitting and provided the desired outcome in a certain situation it was also adopted, even if sometimes with reserve.

In the following extract Jari manifests cognitive aspects of his intercultural competence. Jari presents the for him seemingly purposeless peculiarities in the American business culture with an air of amusement. He is willing to accept a contextually legitimate mode of behaviour as a ‘culture-thing’, where he abides by this code, thus making business contacts easier and smoother for himself:

Jari: --- there [in the United States] they talk a lot, and you always have to have – at least when it comes to technical matters, you need to have ‘a plan’. That you immediately need to say what you are to do next. Even if you do not actually know if it is of any use, it just keeps everyone happy ‘okay, so tomorrow we will do that.’

Niina: So you need to show that you do have some kind of a plan there?

Jari: Yes, maybe it is also otherwise so that everything needs to at least look good. I have also bumped into situations where the client’s computer has broken down and you need to go there just because it looks good to the client; like you are doing something. Even if you know that you
cannot do anything; that you need to call in service people from a computer company.

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Niina: So it is important just to show yourself?
Jari: Yes, showing yourself in the right place – I guess that is all about that culture-thing if you want to use fancy words, I don’t know.

Jari has clearly been reflecting on his encounters with the Americans quite a lot. He has formulated certain modes of behaviour for himself according to the American corporate culture the way he has experienced it. He sees the fallacy there, but abides by these rules in order to make the encounters smoother. Actually he seems to have interpreted this so that everything ‘needs to at least look good’ even though it may not feel good to him.

In the following Jari accounts for his experiences of communicating with the representatives of two national cultures. Through the descriptions of these encounters it is apparent that these experiences have been significant for him not only at a cognitive level, but at an affective level as well. Having been faced with the stubborn reluctance of an interlocutor to use a common language he must have felt awkward, as can be seen in his choice of words here ‘and if you cannot cope with that, so what!’.

Jari: --- But what I have tried to say here is that in France I noticed that in a way people just make the decision that they do not speak any English and period! And if you cannot cope with that, so what!

3.3 Resisting stereotypes

When people are trying to come to terms with a foreign culture it is inescapable that they resort to developing generalisations and stereotypes (Neuner 2003:46). During the interviews I carefully avoided any mentions to national cultural features. Often, however, the interviewees depicted notions where they had recognised
prevailing stereotypic judgements of e.g. national characteristics and took a stance against it. In the following extract Marja wants to oppose the trend that sees anything Swedish as negative. This trend may in part be due to historical reasons and an ongoing discussion in the mass media on whether to retain Swedish language studies as obligatory in the national curriculum. Marja, nonetheless, aptly and characterises the Swedish in a positive light, based on her own experiences having conducted work-related projects there on several occasions:

Marja: But the Swedish are terribly jovial and understanding, and somehow easy people – so that they quickly learned to slow down their speech for me. And I think that Sweden is a terribly easy country. I do not understand this hostility towards Sweden that is so common, because the Swedish are actually terribly nice.

Marja: --- Somehow we just imagine that they are big-headed and arrogant and such, but they are not like that at all. They are more like soft and gentle in nature.

Sometimes the interviewees took a stance against stereotypes that could be seen as a reverse manifestation of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat may affect any group of people, e.g. a grandmother fearing any faltering of memory as exposing her as a stereotype aged person (Steele 2004:687). Here the interviewees aspired to avoid being cast as prejudiced. In the following Sampo relates to a situation where he had involuntarily manifested a stereotypical racial stance. He recalls how this incident had deeply affected him in that he had felt a ‘sting in his heart’, but this incident had also demonstrated to him how easy it is to fall in to stereotypical thought patterns.

Sampo There was this- I remember this bloober from my visits to South Africa. I’m no racist by nature, but it just happened that we went to this electric station. And then there came a dark guy and a light guy, and they were both wearing overalls -

Niina: Yes.

Sampo - electricians. And they like jumped out of a maintenance car. And I was waiting there at the electric station, and naturally I- well the white guy somehow came closer to me and of course I automatically
assumed that he was the boss there and started talking to him. And then found out that it was just the other way around. It does not- well, but I did feel this sting in my heart, though it did not create an awkward situation.

3.4 Cultural juxtapositions

For as long as people have lived in national states there has existed a concept of national identity that in one way or another is transformed into an element of individual identity (Kaikkonen 2004:76). In all the cases where national characteristics were discussed the interviewees based their interpretations on personal experiences. In most cases there were comparisons with the Finnish national culture which was used as a standard against which the other cultures were reflected. The knowledge that the interviewees had gained could be described not only bearing expressions of declarative knowledge, but often the manifestations of intercultural awareness came in the form of procedural knowledge (Byram 1997:36). The narratives manifested critical cultural awareness (Byram 2001:7), when the interviewees critically reflected the information acquired about other cultures to their own national culture and professional behaviour. An example of this can be seen in the following extract where Marja perceptively ponders about the business practices in different national cultures:

Niina: Is it different in different cultures?

Marja: Yes, at least where I have been to, it has been. Of course I have mostly visited German speaking countries.---But it is so good for a Finn that Germans operate pretty much with the same logic as Finns, in that they also want to get things settled. But then I have been somewhere like Switzerland where I think it is already clearly different. It is not at all systematic the way they operate. So that there we have to guide things more. But the German, they have their points ready, ‘die Punkte’, that we have to go through.

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Marja: In Finland you can still operate in a different manner. Here we have regular customers and there you can still in a way trust a man’s word [laughter].

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Marja: We get still pretty often blamed for how awfully blunt our emails are. Niina: Uh-huh.
Marja: It must be that with a Finn that friendly face is not conveyed. [laughter] In that a Finn will say things a bit curtly and brusquely, but if you can see his friendly face it makes this feel less offensive.

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Marja: - so that it does not come across like an order from us, but like, ok, I’m waiting here, would you be so kind and give me an answer and a comment to this— and – something like that is needed there in the end.

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Marja: I don’t – I do believe that it is just our problem [reluctance to use the telephone]--- we would not like to let people get too close to us. And then when there is the language there as well, then something-. I do not so much- cannot analyse it as such, I have just accepted it, that it is part of being a Finn, that it just is more difficult for us-

3.5  Human universal coherence

The concept of ‘stranger’ is used in interpersonal and intergroup communication as a linking concept representing both nearness and remoteness by being physically present in the situation but also outside as a member of a different group (Gudykunst 1995:9-10). Experiencing the foreign in the form of a language or a culture always also implies a reconsideration of the familiar (Kramsch 2009:5).

In the research the interviewees often conveyed an objective, or transcultural approach to cultural differences. They would endeavour to efface the strange in their intercultural encounters striving to find something that they shared with the others. They would refer to some common denominators between human beings that rose above any existing differences. This would not, however, come out as minimisation (Bennett & Bennett 2004), where one effaces cultural differences in favour of similarities, and simultaneously trivialises or minimises different cultures.
Marja: Yes, something like a sense of situational awareness is what is needed and something like the skill to read between the lines and the ability to read people’s faces. So that even if cultures differ, I believe basically people’s reactions are the same everywhere, anyway. In the same way you can see if someone feels offended about something – or nervous or delighted. The signs are almost the same all over.

Petri: --- And pretty-pretty-well a foreigner is accepted when he just tries to use the language. And it’s not- it is so that people always try and understand you more than not understand.

The success of an intercultural encounter can be judged either in terms of the effectiveness of exchange of information or in terms of creating or maintaining human relationships (Bruner 1997:32-33). With the interviewees both of these aspects came out: the exchange of information being naturally of more significance because the common external goal and outcome in these circumstances was a successful work-related project.

3.6 Intercultural reflection

In Kolb’s cycle of experiential learning (1984) experiences, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and sounding these in novel circumstances follow one another as a continuing spiral. Jerome Bruner highlights the significance of reflection, or ‘thinking about thinking’ as the principal ingredient in any empowering practice of education. (1996:19). Reflective practice is also seen as a key component in the process of developing one’s intercultural competence (e.g. Parekh 2006; Byram, 1997; Latomaa 1996). In Latomaa’s theory the development of intercultural competence through a reflective process transpires as a spiral model starting from the level of a naïve approach towards intercultural encounters and progressing to a culturally specific, objective and finally a critical–dialogical level.

The interviewees in the research were often occupied in a critical and dialogical reflective process, constructing their understanding of their encounters from both the
perspective of the other and that of their own, so that they could come up with an interpretation of the encounter and a potential solution to it for future encounters. In the following Arja talks about her growth into an interculturally aware person. She has thought about the human condition in general, the ‘European’ culture that she refers to as excluding the Finnish culture, and about how she constantly remains attentive and sensitive in her contacts with other people:

Arja: ---I have knowingly tried to learn this European culture, like ‘hey, how are you? How is the weather?’ So that I have noticed that it makes understanding things smoother – during the phone call, when it is like a start there that here it is raining or shining or something.

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Arja: I do change my own attitude. And I try to learn – this really is – I think I try to read people a bit too much even. I am terribly sensitive to the kind of nonverbal communication – how people react to things and- I do notice it quite clearly even if I try – I do try to act so that it is equal towards everyone. Even those who treat me like I was air or someone evil, I try and stay above it all.

The interviewees had encountered otherness on a regular basis as part of their everyday working life. In order to make sense of the otherness they had often adopted a deeply reflective practice as Marja testifies in the following extract, where she ponders about foreign language education in an extremely astute manner outlining the linguistic paradigm of today:

Marja: But all in all- somehow maybe there should be something like teaching people how to understand culture and things like that with the language. Like more powerfully. When a Finn will by nature stick to learning the technique of the language. He will try and learn the words and the grammar-

Niina: Uh-huh.

Marja: - and he may not realise – or internalise the fact that- that – that culture is part of the language.

Niina: Uh-huh.
Marja: That it is not possible to speak it so that the other party feels feels that it is fluent, before you really know it- all those features that need to be taken into account- that you do not just translate your thought into another language, but- but you translate the whole issue into that culture.

Though the cultural dimension has been part of modern language education for some time now, at least in thinking, if not as part of everyday language education practice the curricula may refer to the significance of intercultural education, but there is still a lack of good practice even today (Byram, et al. 2001:1).

4 Summary and conclusion

Intercultural learning takes place as a continuous process, where reflection, the ‘thinking about thinking’, together with experienced intercultural encounters form the basis for the intercultural and professional development. This research indicates that intercultural understanding as manifested by the interviewed engineers was composed of critical reflection on intercultural experiences not only as to the other, but also as to the attitudes and actions of the engineers themselves. The participants interpreted the encounters critically in order to develop their intercultural understanding for future encounters. Hence both the intercultural encounters and the reflective process that accompanies these experiences together promote the development of intercultural understanding. This was manifested with the interviewees in a variety of modes varying from a positive attitude towards otherness, to expected internal and external outcomes from intercultural experiences.

Operational and interaction skills were highlighted as salient elements of intercultural understanding by the participants. The interviewees manifested that
intercultural understanding significantly characterised their decision making, and that cultural features had to be taken into account when doing business. They also expressed how they adapted their behaviour in business encounters according to different cultural codes. The participants often demonstrated acute analysing of other-perception data in an endeavour to neutrally assess potential conflict situations. They would critically reflect upon the conflict situations trying to look for the correct tools for solving the problems caused by cultural clashes in communication.

The interviewees in this research were interested in other cultures and languages manifesting positive attitudes towards ideas outside of their own culture, including a willingness to tolerate ambiguity. Through intercultural experiences they learned to interact with people from other cultures at a professional level. The interviewees manifested a resistance towards stereotypical thinking, and saw human universal coherence as an underlying denominator in intercultural encounters. The participants would often resort to cultural juxtapositions as a tool in their thinking process. The significance of humour and a general positive attitude in the process of intercultural understanding came out strongly in the interviews. The interviewees appreciated the significance of cultural aspects in language studies and tried to find solutions to potential intercultural problems such as external cultural expertise in order to be able to prevent potential intercultural clashes.

The implications of this research show that intercultural understanding is a salient component in professional expertise that engineering graduates will have to face upon entering the job market today. When planning courses in vocationally oriented language education the significance of intercultural understanding in the present day working life needs to be accounted for. Thus developing the students’ intercultural understanding should already be a natural element in language education.
today, but it should be emphasised even more according to the findings in this
research. In the words of Marja: ‘You do not just translate your thought into another
language - you translate the whole issue into that culture.’

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