

# The *Others* as impediments to ‘integration’ into Finnish society: the case of exchange students in higher education

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Very few studies have tackled the case of exchange students in Finnish society, though their increasing presence is valued and urged by Finnish authorities. This article deals with the intricate concept of “integration” through a discourse analysis of what exchange students in Finland have to say about Otherness. Based on a critical approach to the concepts of integration and politics of differences, the study demonstrates how discourses on the *Same*, the foreign other and the local (Finns) point to certain patterns in the ways psychological integration is conceptualized by French exchange students in Finland. The study shows how these *Others* represent impediments to ‘integration’ into Finnish society. Finally, I ask if the predominance of differentialist discourses of integration in this context could be replaced by an alternative vision based on a *mélange* or mixing understanding of differences.

*Keywords:* student mobility, discourse analysis, integration, cultural integration, peg communities

## Introduction

Yearly, thousands of migrants and foreigners, of various types and from different parts of the world, enter Finland. As in most societies experiencing the contemporary *accelerated globalization* (Pieterse, 2004, 16) that the world is currently witnessing, some international mobile individuals have garnered a greater degree of attention than others (Abdallah-Preteille, 1999; Phillips, 2007). As such, intense debates regarding some of these populations, such as refugees, representatives of certain religions and certain parts of the world, regularly take place in various media – be they national and/or local newspapers, the cyberspace agora, casual conversations, etc. (Pietikäinen, 2000; Pitkänen & Kouki, 2002).<sup>1</sup> The same applies to research on Finnish society, as is attested by e.g. posts on the influential mailing list of *The Society for the Study of Ethnic Relations and International Migration* (ETMU)<sup>2</sup> in Finland, which mostly concern the aforementioned types of population.

Exchange students, who are at the centre of this study, are an example of short-term migrants who stay in host countries for anywhere from three months up to one year (and sometimes more). Unlike other kinds of migrants, the impact of these “new strangers” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003) or “liquid strangers” (Dervin, 2007a) has not been extensively

researched and does not obtain much media coverage. In Finland, where these students are regarded as increasingly valuable, studies on this population are limited to various ‘official’ quantitative facts about their daily lives and their so-called level of “integration” into Finnish society.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, only two qualitative studies have been devoted to this group within the fields of linguistics and education (Dervin, 2008; Taajamo, 2005). As an evolving field worldwide (Byram & Dervin, 2008; Dervin & Byram, 2008), it is felt that academic mobility should now be further considered by researchers as the case of e.g. mobile students can help us to grasp other wider societal phenomena (relationships in hypermodernity, the politics of identity, the impact of the growing presence of *temporary guests* in Finland, etc.) (Dervin, 2007a; Hoffman, 2008).

The following study is an attempt to combine reflections from the sociology and anthropology of postmodernity, migration studies, and intercultural studies, in order to examine the intricate theme of integration within academic mobility, which, in turn, is a burning issue for ‘general immigration’ (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Papatsiba, 2003; Taajamo, 2005). More precisely, my study looks at mobile students’ discourses on un/successful integration into the Finnish ‘host’ society and on the vital role played by three entities in the

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of revising this article (early 2009), many debates about refugees and new immigrant laws were taking place in Finnish society. The appearance of a page written by anti-immigrant individuals on Facebook triggered a lot of discussion (cf. for example the archives of the National newspaper Helsingin Sanomat in early February 2009 at [www.hs.fi](http://www.hs.fi))

<sup>2</sup> Cf. [http://www.etmu.fi/index\\_eng.html](http://www.etmu.fi/index_eng.html).

<sup>3</sup> CIMO, the Center for International Mobility based in Helsinki frequently proposes such figures. Cf. <http://www.cimo.fi/Resource.phx/cimo/jutilil.htm> - the Erasmus Student Network also publishes such statistical data.

formation of these discourses: the *Same* (people from their own country), the others (people of other nationalities) and the 'locals' (Finns). Two sources of data, namely interviews and a focus group with exchange students in Finland, will illustrate the conceptual and theoretical arguments put forward in the article. Linguistic discourse analysis (Dervin, 2008; Gee, 2005) provides the tools for analyzing the data.

### On working with discourse

Before entering into a discussion on the basic notions used in this paper, let us define the concept of *discourse* as it will be amply used in this article. The concept is polysemic, multifaceted and complex; it is often used and understood differently in the human and social sciences (Gee, 2005, 5, 33). In this article, the approach to discourse is based on a linguistic "language-in-use" understanding of this phenomenon (Yule, 1996). The French linguist Charles Bally was one of the first to insist on the importance of taking into account the heterogeneity, instability and variability of language in its personal and daily "concrete" use and performance (i.e. "discourse", Blanchet, 2000, 19; Gee, 2005, 1) when analyzing data. Discourse, which is « *a system of options from which language users make their « choices »* » (Chouliaraki, 1998, 6), helps speakers to construct "reality" and their perception of phenomena. However, in doing so, speakers are not "free from all constraints" in the sense that discourse involves at least two interlocutors who are led to co-construct what is being uttered, and who, in an unplanned fashion, influence each other in terms of the content and the manner in which it is evoked (Gee, 2005, 5). This is why no discourse can be considered to have a univocal/truth-conditional meaning (Neveu, 2004; Hall, 1997, 19) as "reality" needs to be interpreted and transformed into images before it is uttered (Charaudeau, 2002, 556). It is through the identification of 'voices' (those of others and sometimes that of the utterer) inserted by speakers that one can identify discourses. Linguistic mechanisms such as the use of passive voices (I was robbed), represented discourses (ex: **he told me** that...), modalities (he **might** have come) and the choice of specific words and metaphors, are concrete tools that can be used to examine discursive choices. Discourse is thus always a subject's representation or perspective that s/he (co-)constructs, negotiates, contests... while interacting, which goes "*far beyond 'giving and getting information'*" (Gee, 2005, 2). This also applies to discourses created through research and must be taken into account when collecting and analyzing data. In the case of exchange students in Finland, their discourses on un/successful integration into Finnish society may not necessarily correspond to some "truth" given that, as will be hypothesized in the next section, the concept of integration is a complex one which is conceptualized in many and varied ways, and thus necessitates recourse to discursive constructions of its understanding.

It is also important to bear in mind that discourse can be personal (based on one's own impressions), interpersonal (our own discourses are transformed by the presence of an Other or other discourses) but also imposed, reproduced, sus-

tained and transformed by society (Gee, 2005, 7), as is the case with dominant discourses. The latter are defined by Holliday et al. (2004, 42) as "ways of talking and thinking about something which have become naturalized to the extent that people conform to them without thinking". In the case of exchange students, for example, one cannot ignore that common beliefs or official and political discourses on what the outcomes of stays abroad should be in terms of "culture-learning", "intercultural relations" and "integration" are often engrained in the students' discourses. This is why we need to remember that the boundary between personal, interpersonal and societal discourses is not clear-cut and that they are "continuously and actively rebuilt in the here-and-now" (Gee, 2005, 10) – in our case during the interviews and the focus group.

The understanding of discourse as a collection of voices presented by the speaker to her/his interlocutors will be used when looking at how exchange students in Finland "represent" their views on integration through talking about *others*.

### Discourses on integration and politics of differences

#### *Integration as a socio-cultural and (inter-)subjective phenomenon*

The notion of integration is omnipresent in migration discourses (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1999) and it is often conceived of in terms of success or failure in "learning to read the culture's basic text and making it one's own" (Fay, 1996, 60). Within the Finnish context, successful integration is politically defined as ensuring: "that immigrants can contribute to Finnish society in the same way as other residents"<sup>4</sup>. According to the Ministry of Interior: "Learning Finnish or Swedish is one key factor in integration" but also "familiarity with Finnish society" and "information about society and working life" (ibid.). These are often achieved through courses offered by various educational institutions (Dervin & Wiberg, 2007).

This understanding of integration corresponds to the socio-cultural aspect of integration. Yet, integration is also a psychological concept which is heavily linked not only to ideology and political beliefs but also the *doxa* ("the common sense") conveyed, amongst others, by the media. Its meaning is often manifold and it is sometimes confused with the notion of assimilation, which entails adopting "cultural habits", language, dominant discourses, or simply becoming like the *others*, the "hosts" or the "locals" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1999). In a study on the "integration" of Indian scholars in the USA, Bhatia (2002) shows that feelings and expressions of psychological integration can be quite (inter-)subjective as they depend on who is judging whether somebody is considered as integrated or not: an observer, a member of the host/home society or the actor himself. As such, someone can feel fully integrated in a "country" while others (e.g. the "*Sames*" – people from their own country

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.intermin.fi/intermin/home.nsf/pages/EE5BC82EF6ED4ED5C22573B5002D2C9F?opendocument>

–, the “locals” or other foreigners) see her/him as not being integrated or vice versa. What can be considered signs of integration also varies. Usually, being professionally active, being engaged or married with “a local”, speaking the local languages, adopting “cultural” habits and being able to navigate between one’s own “culture” and the other “culture” embody such signs in many dominant discourses, be it in the media and/or educational and political contexts (Bhatia, 2002). This is why discourses on successful or unsuccessful ‘psychological integration’ should be examined with care as they cannot but be representations, and thus should not be seen as vericonditional truths.

Different pressures to “integrate” are applied to different categories of migrants. With regard to “Westerners”, I. Piller (2002, 19) asserts that “The ‘invisibility’ of Westerners in Western countries derives from the fact that they are regarded as ‘non-ethnic’ foreigners. Furthermore, as largely white and middle-class they are not problematic (. . .). Research on migrants and minorities is preferably negative and ‘miserabilistic’, both in Europe and the USA”. The population under scrutiny in this article is never represented as “problematic” in this sense, nor is its success at integrating (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Dervin & Dirba, 2008, 19). In this article, I am only interested in the psychological integration of exchange students in Finland as they are merely “passing” through Finnish society and are not required to “integrate” in the same way as other migrants by Finnish law. Moreover, these individuals do not usually have a job, nor a permanent resident permit.

### *Politics of differences*

The desire to integrate the host societies is presented as one of the recurrent discourses that emerge in student mobility (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003; Dervin, 2008; Taajamo, 2005, 19). The notion of politics of differences will be used to further problematise integration, as there is often an established relation between differences, how to deal with them and integration. Though what follows is mostly dedicated to “cultural aspects”, one needs to remember that the politics of differences can also apply to languages (e.g. in the native vs. non-native speaker dichotomy, cf. Block, 2007). Many different models of cultural differences proposed by scholars from different fields could be used to problematise these politics (Abdallah-Pretceille, Hall, Hannerz, Miles, Ogay, Young). In this article, I have chosen to concentrate on the anthropologist N.P. Pieterse’s three ideal-type perspectives on cultural differences (2004, 42) which are very useful in synthesizing the aforementioned scholars’ contributions and to lay down the foundations for an understanding of the ‘politics’ of integration. The model is composed of: 1. Cultural differentialism, 2. Cultural convergence and 3. Cultural *mélange* or mixing. These three major components can apply to daily, political, media, educational and scientific discourses on migration.

The first component, cultural differentialism, is based on the principle that people are different because of their “cultural belongings/baggage”. According to Pieterse, differen-

tialists establish that the world is “a mosaic of immutably different cultures and civilizations” (2004, 55). In this model, cultural differences are defined as “objective data” allowing individuals to understand the behaviours of others (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1999, 56). The canonic definition of integration presented in the previous section is directly related to the differentialist politics of differences presented supra. As such, if one can delineate cultures and clearly define what differentiates certain cultural elements from other such elements, then a “stranger”, i.e. somebody from outside the group, can “learn” these cultural facts and become “engulfed” in the culture, in other words become the *other*. Pieterse (2004, 47) criticizes the differentialist approach by claiming that the image of the mosaic is erroneous as it is composed of fixed discrete pieces, whereas human experience is fluid and open-ended. For A. Sen (2006, xvi), according to this sort of approach, people are “miniaturized” as they are reduced to one single identity, that of a “culture” which is, in turn, reduced to national and geographical boundaries<sup>5</sup>. This approach to differentiation has been shown to lead to stereotypical discourses and positive or negative representations on the Self and the Other (Boyer, 1999; cf. Boli & Elliott’s (2008) “façade diversity”). As seen supra, politically, Finland observes a “differentialist” or “multiculturalist approach” to immigration, proposing to migrants that they continue to “maintain/nourish” their own culture while learning – and “adopting” - Finnish “culture” at the same time (cf. Dervin & Wiberg, 2007; Sagne et al., 2005).

Pieterse’s second type of cultural politics is based on the cultural convergence paradigm, which has been theorised in the past through notions such as *Mac Donaldization* or *cocacolonization* (2004, 48). In other words, through “global” cultural artifacts that each and every one of us shares, uses or is made/said to use, culture is said to have become unified all over the world. According to Pieterse (ibid.), this approach ignores mixed social forms which are but the essence of societies and is based on the “liquid fear” (Bauman, 2006) of “globalization-as-homogenisation” (Pieterse, ibid.). While the previous politics of cultural differences have been translated into an official political line (multiculturalism), which has been adopted by many countries worldwide, the convergence paradigm is restricted to *dominant discourses* (and thus representations) of globalization.

The third and last type of politics is based on the notion of “*mélange*” or “mixing”. According to Pieterse (2004, 42), societies constantly live through open-ended, ongoing mixing, which leads to *diverse diversities* in terms of habits and artifacts, discourses and opinions within the same geographical boundaries (ibid., cf. also Abdallah-Pretceille, 1999). The anthropologist adds that, even though mixing is something that is quite evident in everyday forms of being, it is not something which is easily accepted as far as the politics of differences are concerned or is often reduced to *façade diversity* through differentialism. According to Boli et al. (2008, 540), “Purportedly celebrating and

<sup>5</sup> As we will see on many occasions, culture tends to be treated as « coterminous with countries » (Phillips, 2007, 44).

protecting group differences, these principles translate concretely into differences that operate as facades masking the underlying individualization of world society". While the multiculturalist/differentialist approach has followers worldwide, the *mélange* approach to differences does not have any clear political support. In research, it is increasingly present through paradigms such as *hermeneutical interculturality* (cf. the *Nordic circle of hermeneutical interculturality* represented amongst others by Dahl, Jensen, & Nynäs, 2006) or *proteophilia* (Dervin, 2007b), which consider interculturality, and the related concepts of culture and identity, to be intersubjective co-constructions and thus experiences as *mélanges*.

All in all, it seems that differentialism and *mélange* are the only paradigms that can be operationalised in terms of integration. Differentialism remains a "boundary fetishism" of cultures and makes it possible for individuals to believe that integration can be achieved through learning the other's culture. *Mélange*, on the other hand, sees integration as possible but emphasizes the constantly changing nature of culture and identity and thus the need to learn to co-construct who one is beyond façade differences and "boundary fetishism" in order to feel at ease with one another and feel integrated. As far as the convergence paradigm is concerned, integration would mean a general worldwide movement of absorption into the same "robotic" cultural habits, thoughts, attitudes, etc. - which is improbable, despite being mystified worldwide through media discourses and even scientific parlance (cf. e.g. Widdowson, 1994).

In what follows, and based on our discussion on integration and the three components of the politics of differences, we shall look at data which may help us to grasp the discourses of exchange students on integration into Finnish society. As such, I am interested in how the students conceive integration and differences, by identifying the 'voices' and subjective words in their discourses that allow them to do so and assessing their success, failure or both. The data is taken from two different sources: excerpts from interviews of six French students in Turku from 2005 (coded (TURKU1...6)), and excerpts from a focus group interview of three French students from 2008 (coded FOCUS). Both sets of data were collected in similar conditions (the students were all at the end of their stays in Finland, the meetings took place at the University of Turku, the researcher was present and asked questions...) and dealt with the general state of the students' sojourns in Finland. By comparing the discourses presented by the students, we will be able to highlight potential recurrences or differences of discourses on the *Same* and the *Other* and identify their perceptions (not "truths") regarding the theme of integration.

### Others as impediments to integration?

This section looks at how the students talk about otherness in the data and what impact this is said to have on their integration. In intercultural contexts, as explained supra, otherness contributes directly to the discursive assessment of the

speaker's perception of her/his integration as a success, failure or sometimes both (Bhatia, 2002). The following others will be examined in this section: the *Same*, the other foreign students and Finns.

### The Same

The *Same* is understood here as a person who comes from the same geographical area and who shares similar national, ethnic, regional and religious characteristics to the population under scrutiny. When the students talk about the *Same*, discourses of integration in both the international student communities in Turku and Finnish society at large are proposed. It is important here to look at official figures to appreciate the fact that Finland is, in a way, a victim of her increasing success, as many students from the same countries often choose Finland as their destination: in 2007, the largest groups of students came from Germany (1241), France (1020), Spain (815) and Poland (500). As we saw in II.1, language is an important factor in the way integration into host societies is conceived. For international students, the notion of foreign language use in Finland is not just a question of learning and using Finnish and/or Swedish - very few know these languages before their arrival and do not succeed in learning them during their stay. The students are often led to interact in their own language and in *English as a Lingua Franca* with the others and the "locals", as very few of them speak English as their first language - e.g. students from English-speaking countries accounted for a maximum of 7% of exchange students in Finland in 2007.<sup>6</sup>

In the corpora, many students complain about the fact that there are too many students from their own country in their Finnish environment, which sometimes prevents them from using English with the other foreign students or the locals and from learning the local languages (Finnish and/or Swedish) and/or "culture". In general, the students feel that they should not spend time with the *Same*. Some students even describe the practice of some Finnish institutions to accommodate them together with their *Sames* as "tough luck" and an "unnecessary burden", as it 'plays against' integration. According to the students, the segregation with the *Same* - caused by the institutions or by their own decision to "stick together" - has important consequences in terms of social learning and interaction with others.

In the focus group interview, the students co-construct the following discourse when asked how they felt about spending time with the *Same* in Finland. The three students in question shared an apartment together in Turku.

<sup>6</sup> This is just an estimate as the notion of English-speaking countries is questionable. Yet, according to official figures (www.cimo.fi), there were 9000 exchange and international students in Finland in 2007. Students from "official" English-speaking countries included 235 students from the UK, 36 from Ireland and 246 from the US. Of course, we should bear in mind that not all students from these countries are obligatorily native-speakers as foreigners can also be registered at these universities and be mobile through them.

S2: personally I would have liked to meet one or two French people but not as many as I did, we are. . .

S3: yes it is a real trap

S2: we came

S1: yeah

S2: we came here to learn a language [i.e. English] we have been surrounded by quite a lot of French people we are not open enough towards others yes it is so simple like this so easy it is security too

S1: yeah

S2: security

In this excerpt, S2 plays the role of the spokesperson (the common voice) for her fellow citizens who are also present in the focus group when she explains that, because of the presence of the *Same*, opportunities to practice English, thus allowing them to meet Others, are limited. She uses the pronoun “we” to this effect, “hiding” behind the group to explain their situation. The “trap” and “easiness” of remaining with the *Same* abroad, that she describes with her comrades, has consequences for all of them: “we are not open enough towards others”. What is implied here is that this practice directly works against integration into other social groups in their Finnish context. In the excerpt, her colleagues approve of what she says (*yeah*), reformulate through evaluating her utterances (“yes it’s a real trap”) or merely repeat her explanations (*security*), thus showing that they share this discourse on the *Same* and on integration.

In the interviews, a student, who was in a similar situation as she was accommodated with one of her fellow citizens, also presents a dual attitude to the *Same* by using two metaphors - that of a ship versus a safety buoy:

(TURKU1)

Communities unite people so it is like a safety buoy but in my case, I wanted a small safety buoy not a big ship.

This confirms how the students across the corpora seem to share discourses about the *Same*: on the one hand they are useful (*security* in the previous excerpt, *ship/safety buoy* here) but on the other hand, they are hindrances to the ultimate goals of student exchanges: meeting people from other countries and learning a new language, a new culture - in other words, integrating into local social contexts.

The topic of learning and practicing English is omnipresent in the data and the students often blame the *Same* for not ‘allowing’ them to learn/practice this and other foreign languages (Finnish/Swedish, for the rare ones who wish to learn the local languages). It is important to note that the students set learning or improving their English as a priority during their stay in Finland (and very rarely Finnish or Swedish). Being with the *Same* can thus prevent integration into both international student ‘tribes’ but also local circles.

In the following interview excerpt about the impact of the presence of the *Same* on her daily life, the student makes clear that English was her priority and uses the argument as an answer to her avoiding the *Same*:

(TURKU2)

Interviewer: Have you tried to avoid them at times [THE SAME]?

TURKU2: yes because I came here to practice my English it was my objective. . . to speak English and to do something completely different and then to be surrounded by all sorts of nationalities except Finns I think it is a shame.

Unlike the previous students, she seems to complain about the fact that she doesn’t get to interact with Finns, not just with other foreign students. Her assessment of the situation (“I think it’s a shame”) is in direct line with the discourses on integration abroad presented above. It is important to note here that various factors, such as EU political discourses and dominant discourses about the objectives and benefits of student mobility - which emphasize the importance of the encounters between the “locals” and the exchange students - may have an impact on the discourses outlined above - though these voices are not linguistically identifiable in the students’ discourses (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003).<sup>7</sup>

All in all, even though no clear politics of differences are expressed when the students talk about the *Same*, indirectly the differentialist approach is present in the reiterated need for interacting with “others” (be they other foreign students or locals) that is put forward by the students.

### *Other foreign students*

The second group of *Others* is that of other foreign students. Their presence is essential in the students’ daily lives as they are usually accommodated in the same building in student villages, with parties and trips organized just for them, etc. When students talk about other exchange students in the interviews and in the focus group, they first express the idea that they share a lot and that there is some sort of general natural symbiosis between them. For example, at the beginning of her interview, when she describes her daily life, TURKU3 tells us that:

We share a code, we speak a language we speak English but and. . . how shall I put it? We have things in common (. . .) we are like a big family.

The use of ‘we’ here again is indicative of the speaker hiding behind an entity to qualify their relation, which is very close to the ideal-type of “mélange” (cf. page 21) as no discourse of differences was identified when the students talked about their exchange communities. The English language is used here as a common identifier and tool for integrating in this “family” (“we share a code, we speak a language, we speak

<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm).

English”). Various metaphors are used in the corpora to describe the exchange students’ community: family, cocoon, ship, summer camp, etc. These metaphors present the idea of strong *togetherness* and integration into this community. This togetherness is generated by the context of mobility itself, as exchange students spend most of their time together in lecture halls, accommodation, hobbies, etc.

Yet, despite the apparent similarities and the shared contexts described by the students, discourses gradually yield what I call *unfaithfulness* and criticisms towards this group in the interviews. The introduction of the theme of integration into Finnish society by the interviewer constantly leads to this phenomenon. For example, when asked if the fact that she does not get to meet Finns disturbs her, TURKU4 declares:

Interviewer: Does it disturb you not to be able to meet Finns?

TURKU4: I would have liked to meet more Finns. But it has not happened. . .

Interviewer: Why?

TURKU4: I do not now, maybe we are together too much . . . between foreigners and we do not really try to go meet them and they do not try at all.

Once again, the discourses of togetherness (“maybe we are together too much”) and the wish for interaction with her Finnish surroundings (“I would have liked to meet more Finns”) are put forward. What is interesting here is that the student confirms the segregation and mutual “rejection” between the students and the locals (cf. her use of the us vs. them dichotomy) and shows, at the end of her turn, that Finns are as responsible for this as her comrades – maybe even more responsible: “they do not try [to meet us] at all”.

In a similar vein, TURKU4 clearly articulates the segregation that is experienced between exchange students and Finns through describing her accommodation context and the omnipresence of other foreign students:

For me Erasmus is. . . I do not know, I feel like I am left aside, because we are. . . maybe it is the fact that we live in the student village with other foreigners, maybe we are really left aside and we are not integrated into. . . into the rest of the population here in Finland.

This discourse is similar to the ones presented in the previous section about the Same. By using passive voices in “we are really left aside” and “we are not integrated”, the student gives the impression that there is some ‘force’ (the Finnish authorities represented by the university, the accommodation offices or the Erasmus ‘tribes’ themselves?) that prevents her from “integrating”. Also, through alternating the pronouns *I* and *we*, the student blends in with other foreign students through *we* to express ideas of segregation, while *I* is used for criticizing and commenting on the resulting *être-ensemble* between foreigners (“I feel I am left aside”).

Though this togetherness/symbiosis symbolizes mixing and *mélange par excellence* (the students are all from different countries), through wishing for more engagement with the locals (i.e. not being “left aside”), the student clearly reveals a need/wish for differentialist experiences through potential opportunities for integration with the locals.

Again, in the analysis of the impact of *Others*, i.e. foreign students, though none of the politics of differences are clearly mentioned by the students, differentialism, or the need for a “real” difference – that of the ‘locals’ – is hinted at. Relations and interactions with the *Same* and other foreigners definitely appear as creating boundaries to reaching the ‘real’ *Other*: Finns. In what follows, we shall look at how talking about these *Others* relates to the theme of integration.

### Present-absent others: Finns

The final category of others, and their impact on discourses of integration, is that of the “locals”, i.e. Finns. The students say that they meet Finns mostly in lecture halls or in non-places (Augé, 1992) such as shops, banks, train stations. . . These encounters are described as being short-lived and the places where encounters between the students and Finns may occur are thus very limited – the foreign students live in different parts of student villages and do not attend the same lectures as Finns. This is why the adjective “present-absent” seems to fit very well with the way students describe their relationships to Finns: they are omnipresent in their discourses but, according to what they say, mostly absent from their daily lives. This means that integration into Finnish society is either impossible or at best very limited. Varied stereotypes and (shared) representations of Finns are introduced by the students to explain the fact that they do not get to meet them: *they are shy* and *cold* – most students even assert that Finns describe themselves as such. These are differentialist explanations which serve the purpose of characterising impediments to integration. It is interesting to see that the same sort of discourse seems to be shared by students who have had exchange periods in other countries (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003, 89; Papatsiba, 2003, 137), where encounters with locals are more like “mism meetings”, “a meeting which is not quite a meeting, a meeting pretending not to be one” (Bauman, 2004, 153-7). I have also shown, for example, that Finnish students who studied in France for a year as exchange students, even if they were specialists of the French language, found it hard to meet French people and integrate (Dervin, 2003, 2006). French people were also described as “cold” and “not interested in Erasmus students”. So difficulties in integrating into Finnish society may not just be a characteristic of the Finnish context but related to the contexts of exchange programmes and “liquid [temporary] strangeness” (cf. Dervin & Dirba, 2008 for a full discussion of this hypothesis).

In the first excerpt about Finns, this student describes various ‘mism meetings’:

(TURKU5)

I can’t say that there are loads of well several

Finns that I see regularly and it is very superficial, I mean we bump into each other in corridors, everyday, and we may talk for five minutes but it does not go very far, when you talk for 5 minutes everyday, it is not like 3 hours in a row, it is very superficial.

The idea that integration requires time and long-term relationships is clearly expressed here. This is emphasized by the student's use of a generic *you* in "when you talk for 5 minutes everyday, it is not like 3 hours in a row, it is very superficial", which helps her to provide the interviewer with a "convincing" and generalising argument, which, in turn, is related to a general view on integration (cf. page 20). Also, the repetition of the adjective *superficial* in order to define the relations between the students and Finns and the use of the expressions *to bump into* and *not go very far* highlight the short duration and limits in encounters with the locals.

Let us now look at how students talk directly about the concept of integration. In what follows, a student's direct perception of what integration into Finnish society means is explained:

Interviewer: you have been using the word « to integrate » several times, can you explain what you mean by it?

TURKU8: to be accepted by Finns, i.e. to discuss with them, now it is not possible because as soon as we start to speak English, we are put systematically in a foreign category and we... well they do not see the point we do not speak the language we are foreigners... why be interested in us because in any case we are just passing. To integrate yes it is to be able to talk to people and to create links and the problem here is that it isn't possible for me

The student's visions on what integration means are constructed by making Finns talk and "act" by means of represented voices (Johansson, 2000), through the use of a passive voice (*we are put systematically*), indirect represented speech (*they do not see the point*) and free direct represented speech (*why be interested?*) (Marnette, 2005). This gives weight and authenticity to her words and justifies her assertion regarding not being "included", "integrated" or "accepted" by Finnish society. Many elements that resurface in the students' discourses are introduced in the student's definition of integration: 1. To be accepted by Finns, 2. To discuss with them and 3. To create links with them. All these goals are rather general and "fuzzy" but correspond to archetypical views on integration (cf. 20). The *language alibi* also appears in this excerpt as the student asserts that she does not share a common language with Finns, "forgetting" about English, which is widely used with foreigners in Finland ("well they do not see the point we do not speak the language", i.e. Finnish). The comment on the use of languages can be related to the differentialist paradigm since the student, through what she says, seems to imply that there is a "difference" boundary between her and Finns based on her not being able to speak

Finnish, even though she could speak English with them. The end of the student's turn clearly shows that she has lost all hope of encountering Finns – and while she has been using the pronoun *we* when specifying her integration ("we are put systematically in a foreign category"), she resorts to an *I-position* (*me*) to express this idea, thus rendering the statement more personal (*the problem here is that it isn't possible for me*).

While language was important for defining integration in the previous excerpt, in the focus groups, Student 1 clearly states what is often put forward by the students as a motivation for meeting Finns:

Interviewer: so it's important for you to be with the locals here?

S1: to be with Finns?

I: yes

S1: yes because this is the best way to get to know their culture... though one can't say that they show us the best places of their country but that... they don't seem to know the best places...

S3: sometimes it's us who show them these places

(...)

The co-constructed discourse between the students reflects differentialism as they assert that being with Finns would allow them to "get to know their culture" (S1). The definition of the notion of culture is not very clear in the dialogue, though, when S1 mentions "the best places of their country [Finns]", Culture with a capital C (art, literature, tourist places...) seems to be favored (not anthropological culture, i.e. "daily" culture). This *culturespeak* (or an automatic and uncritical way of talking about culture, Hannerz, 1999) is interesting here as the students seem to reveal that Finns themselves do not know much about this Culture with a capital C ("they don't seem to know the best places..."). So in a way, the students wish to know Finnish culture through meeting Finns, and thus express their desire for a differentialist politics of integration, while noticing that this is not always possible due to the Finns' lack of knowledge about this.

## Conclusions

This article has been based on an analysis of exchange students' discourses on Otherness, i.e. the *Same*, other foreigners and Finns, and how they are related to their integration in Finland. Analysing interviews and a focus group with French students in Finland, we have shown that dominant, common but also unstable discourses about these three entities were shared by the students. What emerged from the analysis is that the students' integration in Finland seems unsuccessful and impossible as they lack long-term contacts with Finns, places to meet them and, according to the students, a common language. On the other hand, integration into their local communities (those of the *Same* and the other foreign students) was described as mostly successful.

A search for differentialism, as well as a longing for this phenomenon – though it was not always clear what sort of differences the students tried to “reach” – were identified in the discourses. The students tend to refuse the presence of the *Same* – despite “sticking together” – as it limits their integration into the foreign students’ community. The students also find this factor a real impediment to their integration in the macro-community represented by Finnish society.

We have examined in this article discourses on psychological integration of short-term migrants. While their context differs greatly from that of other migrants, such as refugees or migrant workers, it seems that the students confuse the ways socio-cultural and psychological integrations function. Socio-cultural integration in host societies requires long-term stays, a socioprofessional status and language skills in order to find one’s way into a society – though this is not always true in countries like Finland. These aspects are neither feasible nor promoted during short-term stays such as in study abroad.

In all the analysed discourses, the identified voices were those of the students’ communities (the *Same* and the foreign students) and of Finns. We have hypothesized that, even though official (supra-/national discourses on socio-cultural integration of migrants) and societal discourses were not clearly identified in the corpora, they cannot but have an impact on how the students conceive exchange students’ integration into the host society. Unless official and societal discourses on integration in exchange programmes are altered, exchange students will continue to feel left aside, and sometimes even blame the ‘locals’ for their unsuccessful integration. Finally, in terms of the politics of differences, criticisms of the differentialist approach and a push towards *mélange*, which urges individuals to go beyond façade diversity, could also help exchange students to feel more at ease with their status of “passing strangers”...

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