

## *What is the Customer Saying?*

### *Service-, person- and context-related characteristics of service communication*

#### **ABSTRACT**

**Purpose** – The interaction between the customer and the service provider is a key concept within the service marketing, but this interaction might be impeded by communication difficulties. Building on the service literature, this paper adapts two existing communication frameworks to present a model of how service-related, person-related and context-related aspects explain consumer language preferences in service encounters.

**Methodology/approach** – Building on the existing literature, the paper develops and tests four main effects and five moderating effects explaining language preferences in service encounters. These nine hypotheses are tested using a Bayesian multilevel model, addressing the methodological challenge of analyzing characteristics of service encounters on three different levels. The data was collected from speakers of different languages in different countries in Europe and North America.

**Findings** – The results confirm the nine hypotheses, underlining the importance of service-related, person-related and context-related aspects to better understand consumer language preferences in interactions with service providers. More specific, we found that perceived control, second language skills, political considerations and the type of country have direct influences on consumers' native language preference. Moreover, we found that the effect of perceived control was moderated by second language skills, political considerations and the country-specific effect. The effects of second language skills and political considerations were moderated by the country-specific effect.

**Research implications** – The results carry important implications for better understanding the role of communication in interactions between customers and service personnel and for understanding how service-related, person-related and context-related aspects interact with each other to shape consumer communication preferences. Within the context of services, our findings demonstrate that customers and service providers must have the required competences to interact with each other in order for the customer to perceive the service outcome to be successful.

**Practical implications** – By identifying the roles that different aspects of the service interaction play for consumers, the findings help managers to understand under what circumstances, for which persons and for which countries they need to focus on providing services in the consumers' native language. Our findings can guide managers in their decision on when to take initiatives to serve customers in their native language, such as e.g. hiring bilingual personnel or offering translation services.

**Originality/value** – The paper is the first to propose and test a model consisting of service-related, person-related and context-related characteristics to understand customer communication preferences within the setting of services.

**Key words** *service encounters, language use, perceived control, service-dominant logic, Bayesian modeling*

**Paper type** –Research paper

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since first developed, services have been characterized by an interaction involving the customer and service employees (Eiglier and Langeard 1976; Grönroos 1982, 1984; Bitner 1990). At the core of services, the service encounter is defined as “the dyadic interaction between a customer and a service provider” (Surprenant and Solomon 1987). Building on this view of a dyadic interaction, service research has long recognized that services are strongly influenced by interactions in which both the consumer and the service personnel play integral roles (Bitner 1990; Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman 1996). In recent years, the role of the customer as an active participant in service encounters has been further emphasized, particularly within the service-dominant logic, further underlining the importance of the interaction between the customer and the company (Bendapudi and Leone 2003; Grönroos 2008; Payne, Storbacka and Frow 2008; Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2008).

Despite this longstanding emphasis on interactions between consumers and companies, service research would appear to build on the premise that the consumer and the company personnel are perfectly *able* to interact and communicate effortlessly. Such communication requires a common language. One key component of the service dominant logic is that customers need to have the required skills to interact competently with the company (Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2008). But what if the consumer and the service provider do not share the same native language? This might be the case on multilingual markets and would mean that the consumer and the service provider cannot competently interact with each other.

To date, language has been emphasized in management research demonstrating the importance of language within organizations: among employees in business meetings (Rogerson-Revell, 2010) or in the context of international mergers (Piekkari, 2008; Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari & Sääntti, 2005; Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari & Sääntti, 2005) Language is also studied in advertising

research on how bilingual consumers process bilingual information in advertising or text-processing contexts (Puntoni, de Langhe and van Osselaer 2009; Schmitt, Pan and Tavassoli 1994; Tavassoli and Han 2001).

In this paper, we further elaborate on the marketing perspective by investigating language in services. Previous marketing research on language has only focused on situations where the interaction between a consumer and an organization is very low or even absent. In services, however, interaction between consumers and service providers are crucial in order to co-create value (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Payne et al, 2008). Despite this, the importance of language remains largely unexplored. This paper contributes to the literature by investigating consumers' perceived importance of native language use in service encounters. Building upon the conceptual framework of Zhang and Schmitt (2004) and using cross-national data, we demonstrate that native language use is more important in certain situations, for certain persons and in certain markets. While long recognizing that companies should adapt their strategy to cultural differences across and within countries (Agarwal, Malhotra and Bolton, 2010; Broderick et al, 2007), researchers have largely ignored the impact of language differences between and within countries.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The last decades have seen an increased interest in language use, both in management (Piekkari et al. 2005; Vaara et al. 2005) and advertising (Appiah 2001; Puntoni et al. 2009; Luna and Peracchio 2001). In service research, however, language remains absent, despite the importance of the interaction and communication between the customer and the service personnel (Bendapudi and Leone 2003; Grönroos 1984; 2008; Surprenant and Solomon 1987; Vargo and Lusch 2004). Although language has not yet been studied in contexts where there is an

interaction between customers and company personnel, research on language in advertising has proposed that consumer language use is based on stimulus-related and person-related factors, but could also include context-related factors (Zhang and Schmitt 2004). Based on that view, the conceptual framework of this paper proposes that consumers' perceived importance of native language use is dependent upon service-related characteristics (perceived control over the service), person-related characteristics (second language skills and political considerations) and context-related characteristics (country-specific effect). Building on Zhang and Schmitt (2004) finding interaction effects between stimulus- and person-related antecedents of native language, we also propose interaction effects between the four antecedents. An overview of the conceptual framework is given in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 about here, please**

## **Hypotheses development**

### *Perceived control*

Perceived control has been identified as one of the most powerful constructs for understanding behavior (See Skinner, 1996 for a review). Within service research, Hui and Bateson (1991) were the first to demonstrate the relevance of perceived control. The need to feel a sense of control is crucial to consumers (Bagozzi & Kimmel 1995; Hui & Bateson 1991) and perceived control influences their perceptions (Jewell & Kidwell 2005). Consumers respond positively to an increased feeling of being in control (Hui & Bateson 1991) as consumers interacting in service contexts require control to feel assured about the service process (Namasivayam 2004). Perceived control is of particular importance for consumers engaging in service encounters, as the

intangible nature of services makes it harder to predict the outcome of the interaction (Crosby, Evans and Cowles 1990; Laroche et al. 2005; Murray and Schlacter 1990).

Consumers in service processes are influenced by the level of control that they perceive to have over the service (Grewal et al. 2007). As interactions between consumers and company personnel could be rendered more difficult by consumers and the service personnel not sharing the same native language (cf. Marcella and Davies 2004), this could cause consumers to feel that language difficulties give them less control over the outcome of the service. In these circumstances, consumers may feel stronger about using their native language.

***H1:** High perceived control is negatively related to how important consumers perceive native language use to be.*

### *Second language skills*

Even though bilingualism among consumers may be widespread (cf. Luna and Peracchio 2001), not all bilingual consumer are fluent in their second language (Zhang and Schmitt, 2004). We propose that consumers' second language skills impact the perceived importance of native language use. Fluent bilinguals can easily activate both languages, whereas non-fluent bilinguals have to put more effort into activating their second language (Beauvillain and Grainger, 1987; Jared and Kroll, 2001). Looking at how bilingual consumers process advertising, Zhang and Schmitt (2004) proposed second language skills as a person-related antecedent. Adopting these findings to a service logic, we propose that consumers who are not fluent in their second language might find it more important to be served in their native language as these consumers have to put more effort into the service encounter.

***H2:** Stronger second language skills are negatively related to high perceived importance of native language use.*

### *Political considerations*

Language is not just a tool of communication; consumers often perceive an emotional connection with their native language (Puntoni et al. 2009). While earlier research on person-related factors in consumer language use has taken second language skills as the only person-related factor (Zhang and Schmitt 2004), research in the field of political and sociological sciences shows that language use might also be a political consideration (Fraser, 2006; Spolsky and Cooper 1991). Sociolinguistic research in bilingual countries states that consumers choice about which language to use becomes “a political act” (Heller 1982). Customers may base their feelings of identification with companies based on the language the company uses (cf. Spolsky and Cooper 1991), and language preferences can be displayed in ideological preferences and activities (McRae 1999). In a study focused on consumer language preferences, Holmqvist (2011) identified political considerations as an important part of consumer preferences for native language use. This echoes earlier research showing that language use plays a part in consumers’ ethnic affiliation (Appiah 2001; Forehand and Deshpandé 2001; Koslow, Shamdasani, Touchstone 1994). Apart from the issue of how capable consumers are to use a second language, there are situations in which consumers’ choice of language is not necessarily based on language skills or perceived control, but rather on political considerations (cf. Fraser 2006). As the choice of which language to use can be political (Heller 1982) and language use is connected to nationalist feelings (cf. Redondo-Bellón 1999), we propose that political considerations concerning language and identity will influence consumer language preferences.

***H3: Strong political considerations are positively related to how important consumers perceive native language use to be.***

### *Country-specific effect*

Language use and attitudes to language vary considerably between countries and cultures (Holmes 2001, Wardhaugh 2002). In many cultures, bilingualism is relatively common for consumers (Luna and Peracchio 1991), and consumers may use different languages depending on the situation (Oswald 1999). This phenomenon, known in sociolinguistics as diglossia, has been adapted to consumer research (Holmqvist 2009; Oswald 1999), while consumer preferences for which language to use in interactions have been linked to the sociolinguistic situation on the market (cf. Heller 1982). Culture, the degree of diglossia and the sociolinguistic situation all influence consumers, vary between countries and cultural groups and determine language use (cf. Oswald 1999; Wardhaugh 2002). We thus propose a country-specific effect, which influences consumer language preferences in service encounters.

***H4: Consumer perceptions about native language use are country-specific.***

### *Interactions among service- and person-related antecedents*

Switching to a second language can make the interaction between the customer and the company personnel more challenging, but strong second language skills can make the interaction less problematic (cf. Marcella and Davies 2004). As consumers who are more fluent in a second language are likely to be more able to interact in that language with confidence, we propose that fluent bilinguals feel more in control when they are served in their second language, compared to less fluent bilinguals.

Language is not only a functional tool for communication; in many markets, language plays a political role (Heller 1982) and is important for consumer identification (cf. Spolsky and Cooper 1991). Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, has described how language choice in encounters may reflect political preferences and how some express their

political views by means of language use at the possible expense of control (cf. Fraser 2006). We thus propose that political considerations have a moderating influence on how perceived control influences consumer perceptions of language use.

***H5:** Second language skills moderate the influence that perceived control has on consumer perceptions of native language use.*

***H6:** Consumers' political considerations moderate the influence that perceived control has on consumer perceptions of native language use.*

#### *Interactions among context-related and service- or person-related antecedents*

Crucially to understanding consumer language preferences in international and cross-cultural contexts, we suggest that there are country-specific sociolinguistic aspects, related to the role of the different languages in the society, which will influence all other aspects of native language use. For many cultural groups, changing between languages, known as code switching, is a matter of everyday life (Dorian 2002) while other cultural groups may resist language change (Holmes 2001). On markets where consumers are used to switching between languages on a daily bases, even if not fluent in both (Pollack 2000), this might lead to a less strong feeling of losing control when switching language, as compared to consumers who rarely switch. We thus propose a market-specific moderation of the influence of perceived control on consumer language preferences, as consumers on a market where language switching is more common will be more used to the situation of being served in their second language. As the habit of switching language is more dependent on the sociolinguistic situation in each culture than on second language skills (Pollack 2000), consumers in some countries switch even though they are not fluent in their second language while consumers in other countries may not switch even if fluent. We



hypothesize that there will be a country-specific moderation of the influence that second language skills have on language preferences.

Political considerations regarding language are closely connected to the position of different languages on the market. In a country where the language question is high on the political agenda, this is likely to have a stronger influence on how consumers are influenced by political considerations in their language use, compared to countries where language is less politicized (cf Fraser 2006). We thus propose that market-specific factors have a moderating effect on how political considerations influence consumer language preferences.

***H7a:** There is a country-specific influence on the role that perceived control has on consumer perceptions of native language use.*

***H7b:** There is a country-specific influence on the role that second language skills have on consumer perceptions of native language use.*

***H7c:** There is a country-specific influence on the role that political considerations have on consumer perceptions of native language use.*

## **METHOD**

A questionnaire was designed to test our hypotheses. Respondents were asked to rate the perceived importance of native language use and the perceived control for nine service encounters: negotiating a bank loan, a medical visit, negotiating insurance, electric installations, booking a holiday online, visiting a hairdresser, buying an etching, buying groceries and visiting a café. By evaluating different services, we increase the generalizability of our results and create variability in perceived control. Respondents evaluated each of the nine services and rated their second language skills on Likert-scales ranging from 1 to 9. Single-item scales were used to

reduce respondent burden. Because the evaluated concepts (perceived importance of native language use and perceived control) can be considered as concretely singular, the use of single-item measures should not be considered problematic according to research on this matter (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007). Consumers' political considerations were measured on a three-item nine-point Likert scale ( $\alpha=0.723$ , developed after a review of literature in the field of sociological science (cf. Fraser 2006; Kreander and Sundberg, 2007; McRae, 1999). Finally, respondents provided demographic information. An overview of the measures can be found in the appendix.

In order to test the hypotheses, two bilingual countries (Canada and Finland) were selected as suitable markets. Both are officially bilingual, and the two official languages in each country are different enough from each other to ensure that speakers of one language cannot understand the other without having studied it. By selecting two countries, we sampled for greater variability on the country-level and enhance the probability of consistent sample and population relationships (Frank and Richey, 2010). Both Canada and Finland contain regions where the national minority language, French and Swedish respectively, make up a large regional majority, thus enabling us to gather data from regions where the languages are in a regional majority position as well as areas where they are in a minority. Canada and Finland also present some important differences: in Canada, the language question has strong political connotations and French-Canadian consumers are often reluctant to switch language (Fraser 2006; Heller 1982) while language switching is much more common among Swedish-speaking Finns (Leinonen and Tandefelt 2007) thus allowing us to test for the market-specific differences of Hypotheses 2, 7a, 7b and 7c. To ensure that the measurement items measured the same things in both versions, back translation was used and the final French and Swedish versions were read by both a native Swedish speaker from Finland who lived in Quebec and speaks fluent French and a native French speaker from

Quebec who lived in Finland and speaks fluent Swedish. We could thus verify that the questionnaire measured the same items in both French and Swedish and that it was seen as relevant for both a Canadian and a Finnish context.

The questionnaire was distributed to 135 respondents with 97 returned and usable questionnaires yielding a response ratio of 71.9% in Canada (68% female,  $M_{age}=26.00$ ,  $SD_{age}=7.00$ ), and to 142 respondents with 117 returned and usable questionnaires for a response ratio of 82.4% in Finland (58.3% female,  $M_{age}=26.17$ ,  $SD_{age}=4.58$ ). These 214 respondents had French (in Canada) and Swedish (in Finland) as their native language. To ensure generalizability, respondents from different regions were recruited via a random-walk. The regions included bilingual areas where French/Swedish are minority languages, bilingual areas where they are in the majority, and monolingual areas where French/Swedish is spoken natively by more than 95% of the population.

## RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for the dependent and service-related variables are listed in Table 1. The perceived importance of native language use varies across the nine different services ranging from consumers strongly preferring using their native language during a bank-interaction ( $M_{Canada}=8.08$ ,  $M_{Finland}=7.02$ ), while finding it less important when visiting a café ( $M_{Canada}=3.66$ ,  $M_{Finland}=1.49$ ). As can be seen, the order of the services according to the perceived importance of native language use is identical in Canada and Finland, although Canadians consistently attach more importance to native language use than Finns. It is noteworthy that a similar but reversed pattern was found for perceived control. Consumer felt least in control in encounters with banks ( $M_{Canada}=2.80$ ,  $M_{Finland}=5.54$ ), while feeling most in control during café visits ( $M_{Canada}=8.51$ ,  $M_{Finland}=8.84$ ). The order of the services according to perceived control is also identical in both

Canada and Finland, although some differences in amount of perceived control exist between both countries. Average second language skills were 6.34 in Canada and 7.59 in Finland. The average political considerations were 5.81 in Canada and 4.64 in Finland.

**Table 1 about here, please**

The data were checked for multicollinearity before analysis. No high correlations between the independent variables were found (all  $r_{(x,y)} < 0.421$ ), hence all four variables were retained in the analysis.

Owing to the hierarchical structure of our data, we applied multilevel modeling to test the hypotheses. Before analysis, all variables were grand-mean centered. The model was fitted using Bayesian estimation procedures as implemented via Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods using the Metropolis-Hastings algorithm. A Bayesian estimation procedure was used as we compare two countries at the third level, making empirical generalizations with traditional frequentist models more difficult. In international business research, the countries themselves are given and cannot be part of repeated applications of data generation (“There is only one Canada”), as is required in the frequentist approach. Thus, Bayesian methods are more appropriate in international business research with limited countries to compare (Franke and Richey, 2010), because a Bayesian approach computes the conditional probability of hypotheses given the data at hand, without any explicit reference to what might happen over repeated applications of the data generation mechanism (Jackman, 2009).

The basic principle of the MCMC approach is to simulate values and to summarize these values to describe the posterior distributions of a set of parameters. The simulation contains two

stages. First, we used 500 simulations as ‘burn-in’ to find the equilibrium of the correct distribution. Once this convergence was achieved, these simulations were discarded as they contain biased estimates possibly far away from the correct distribution. In the second stage, we ran 100000 simulations. Summarizing these simulations yields a description of the parameter estimate and its distribution. We used flat priors, meaning that we did not favour a priori any particular values of the estimates. In Table 2, we report the mean of the simulated posterior distribution, the standard error is the standard deviation of this distribution. We also report the Bayesian 95% confidence intervals.

**Table 2 about here, please**

One important aspect of MCMC estimation is that the number of simulations should be large enough, as this determines the quality of the estimate. Longer runs increase precision, once convergence has been achieved. We assess the length of run through three indices (Jackman, 2009). The Raftery-Lewis diagnostic indicates the number of simulations necessary to reliably estimate the 2.5% and 97.5% quantiles of the posterior distribution. Values should be lower than 100000. The Brooks-Draper index is concerned with how many simulations are necessary to estimate the posterior mean. Values should also fall below 100000. The effective sample size gives an estimate of the equivalent number of independent simulations that the chain represents. The effective sample size should be large. The results in Table 2 indicate that 100000 simulations were largely sufficient to estimate the model<sup>i</sup>.

We assessed to what extent the data provide support for our hypotheses. If zero is included in the 95% confidence intervals, this would mean that a certain parameter is not significant. If zero

is not included, this would mean that our parameter is significant. As seen in Table 2, none of the confidence intervals contain zero.

The results of the tested main effects lend support for the first four hypotheses. We observe a negative effect of perceived control ( $\beta = -0.658$ ), suggesting that the more consumers feel that they will not get the outcome due to language difficulties, the more important they will find it to use their native language; Hypothesis 1 is thus supported. For Hypothesis 2, there is a negative effect of second language skills ( $\beta = -0.190$ ), supporting the hypothesis; the less proficient consumers are in their second language, the more important they will find it to use their native language. Supporting Hypothesis 3, there is a positive effect of political considerations ( $\beta = 0.315$ ), indicating that the higher importance consumers attach to language when voting, and the more they believe that their region should be independent or autonomous, the more important they will find it to use their native language. Finally, our results indicate that Finnish consumers find it less important to be served in their native language than Canadian consumers ( $\beta = -0.584$ ), confirming Hypothesis 4. The interaction effects are plotted in Figures 2 to 6.

#### **Figures 2 to 6 about here, please**

The impact of perceived control on perceived importance of native language use is moderated by both language skills and political considerations. Looking at Hypothesis 5, we find that the effect perceived control has on the perceived importance of native language use is moderated by consumers' second language skills ( $\beta = -0.025$ ). However, the effect of perceived control on the perceived importance of native language use is stronger for consumers who are highly fluent in the second language than for consumers who are not fluent in their second language. Consequently, we do not find support for Hypothesis 5.

The effect of perceived control on native language preferences is further moderated by consumers' political considerations: the effect of perceived control on the perceived importance

of native language use is stronger for consumers who have low political considerations than for consumers who have high political considerations ( $\beta = 0.045$ ), supporting Hypothesis 6.

Support is also found for country-specific differences, the interactions of which are plotted in Figures 4-6. Perceived control is moderated by country-specific effects ( $\beta = -0.246$ ), confirming Hypothesis 7a; the impact of perceived control on the perceived importance of native language use is stronger for Finnish consumers than for Canadian consumers. It appears that the market's sociolinguistic situation acts as a moderator of the relationship between perceived control and perceived importance of native language use. For Hypothesis 7b, the relationship between second language skills and the perceived importance of native language use is also moderated by country-specific effects ( $\beta = 0.280$ ). Results show that second language skills have a strong impact on the perceived importance of native language use for Canadian consumers, but not for Finnish consumers. Finally, country-specific effects moderate the relationship between consumers' political considerations and the perceived importance of native language use ( $\beta = -0.219$ ), lending support to Hypothesis 7c. The results show that Canadian consumers rely more on their political considerations when evaluating the importance of native language use in service encounters than Finnish consumers.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In this paper, we suggested that language is the forgotten factor of services; even though language is absent from current service research, we proposed that it might have an important role. The results of the study confirm the case for language as a factor in services, as consumers perceive it to be important to use their native language in many services. The conceptual part of the paper introduced four variables proposed to have both a direct and indirect influence on

consumer language preferences in service encounters. The data support the role of these variables.

Underlining previous research on the importance of perceived control for customers in service encounters (Van Raaij & Pruyn 1998), the results confirmed that perceived control has the single strongest influence on consumer language preferences. As perceived control influences how consumers experience services (Grewal et al. 2007; Namasivayam 2004), it seems logic that something as fundamental for the customers as the possible necessity of switching from their first to their second language influences their language preferences.

Finding that consumers who are less fluent in their second language are more reluctant to use that language may seem obvious, but it also underlines the importance of native language use in service encounters. More than half the consumers in the world are estimated to be bilingual (cf. Luna and Peracchio 2001), but these results show that bilingualism is not enough. All respondents in the study were bilingual with relatively strong second language skills, but still displayed a preference for native language use.

Echoing sociolinguistic research on the political role of language use (cf. Heller 1982; Spolsky & Cooper 1991; Fraser 2006), the results confirm the importance of taking political considerations into account when addressing consumer language preferences. Political opinions had both a direct impact on consumer languages preferences and a moderating effect on how perceived control influences language preferences. While both perceived control and second language skills mainly focus on how capable consumers are to interact with service providers in a second language, political considerations add another dimension to language use as they concern consumers' emotions and identity. Political considerations concern how willing consumers are to switch language for ideological reasons. The results indicate that consumers take political considerations into account when evaluating language issues, thus demonstrating that political



considerations should be added to the person-related antecedents of the conceptual model of Zhang and Schmitt (2004).

Taking an international perspective on native language use, the results confirm the need to understand how attitudes to language and language use change between markets. Attitudes to language use differed between the markets in the study, with Canadians attaching a significantly higher importance to native language use compared to Finns. To understand this situation, the moderating effects found in the study are crucial. The different outcomes for perceived control and political considerations offer important insights into country-specific differences. For Finnish consumers, perceived control has a stronger influence on language preferences. In Canada, the opposite is true as both second language skills and political considerations, related to the *willingness* to switch language, have a stronger influence on language preferences.

These findings underscore the importance of a proper understanding of the differences between markets on many levels. In Canada, a market where the language question is at the core of politics and where the largest federal party in Quebec favors independence from Canada, political considerations are closely connected to how consumers perceive language use. That political considerations appear to take precedence over control in Canada would thus seem logic; language use is not a functional matter but an emotional one. In Finland, a market with a history of political compromises concerning language (Andersson & Herberts 1996) and where the party with the largest support among the minority is a regular junior partner in government, political considerations have a less strong connection to language use. These country-specific differences could explain that the feeling of being control takes precedence over political considerations. There are also noteworthy country-specific differences regarding the influence of second language skills on consumers, as second language skills have a negative effect on language preferences in Canada but not in Finland. Language preferences in Finland thus appear to be

driven by the situation, the service context, while language preferences in Canada is driven by personal aspects which is consistent with the often emotional role of to language use in Canada (cf. Heller 1982).

From a theoretical perspective, our study adds to the research by Zhang and Schmitt (2004). We applied their research into a service context, but also provide support for their suggestion that consumers' context matters for evaluating language preferences. Given that their proposition was not empirically verified, this research forms an important complement to their research. Whereas Zhang and Schmitt (2004) only focused on second language skills as a person-related antecedent, our research demonstrates that political considerations should be added to their framework. The results indicate that consumers evaluate language not only based on whether they are fluent in that particular language, but also whether they are willing to talk their second language. From an international perspective, it is noteworthy that country-specific differences had both a significant direct influence on native language preferences and a moderating influence on all the other variables in the study.

For managers, the strong influence of perceived control is important. As the feeling of being in control has a strong effect on consumer language preferences, managers for companies operating on markets with more than one language need to focus on this aspect of the service. If it is not possible to offer the service in the customer's language, measures should be taken to reduce the feeling of losing control. The opposite findings from Finland and Canada regarding control versus language skills and political considerations carry important implications for managers in multinational companies. In some countries, language use is more emotional and political than in other countries, and this has an impact on how consumers feel about switching language in services. However, these market-specific differences should not dim the similarities. In both markets in this study, consumers on average displayed a preference for native language use.

In this study, we focused on two bilingual countries that we thought suitable for testing our hypotheses, based on previous sociolinguistic research. Future research could apply the same framework to different markets; in both Finland and Canada, the minority languages enjoy a relatively strong constitutional position. It would be interesting to test whether consumer language preferences would be different in countries where the minority languages do not have the same protection and civil support. Future research might also explore whether bilingual consumers within an officially unilingual country (e.g. Hispanics in the US) attach importance to being served in their native language, and which antecedents play a role in this situation.

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## Appendix: Measurement items

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### Measurement items

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#### *Perceived importance of native language use*

When taking part in the following service, how important is to you to conduct the service encounter in [your native language]? (Not important at all - Very important)

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#### *Perceived control*

If you have to talk another language than your native language in the following service, do you perceive a risk that it could influence the outcome of the service? (No risk at all - Very high risk)

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#### *Second language skills*

Please rate your ability to speak [the second official language of the market]. (I do not speak it at all - I speak it fluently)

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#### *Political considerations*

[My language] plays a part in how I vote in elections. (I disagree - I agree)

I am in favour of increased autonomy for [my region/province]. (I disagree - I agree)

I am in favour of independence for [my region/province]. (I disagree - I agree)

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**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

	<b>Perceived importance of native language use</b>		<b>Perceived control</b>	
	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Finland</b>
Bank	8.08	7.20	2.80	5.54
Medical visit	8.02	6.67	3.33	5.57
Insurance	7.23	6.41	3.59	5.86
Electric installations	6.67	5.64	4.36	6.72
Holiday online	5.31	5.03	4.97	7.77
Buying an etching	5.29	4.63	5.38	7.04
Hairdresser	4.91	3.24	6.76	7.51
Buying groceries	4.07	1.77	8.23	8.74
Café visit	3.66	1.49	8.51	8.84

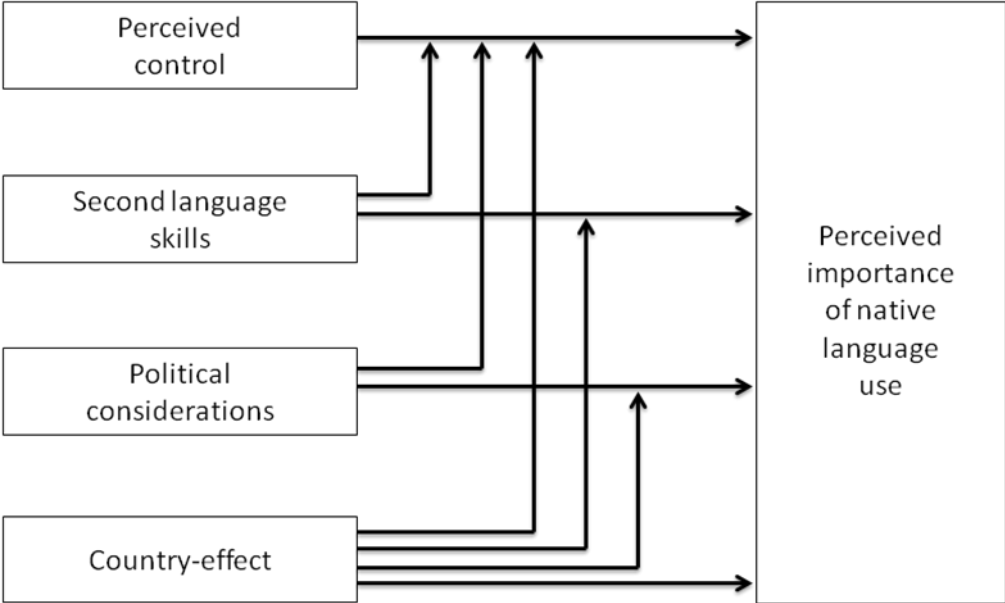
**Table 2 Results of Bayesian multilevel regression**

<b>Dependent variable: Perceived importance of native language use</b>							
<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Posterior mean</b>	<b>Posterior SE</b>	<b>Quantiles</b>		<b>Raftery-Lewis Index (2.5%, 97.5%)</b>	<b>Brooks-Draper index</b>	<b>Effective sample size</b>
			<b>2,50%</b>	<b>97,50%</b>			
<i>Level 1 (Service related antecedents)</i>							
Constant	5.093	0.145	4.809	5.378	(12664,12258)	268	13286
Perceived control	-0.658	0.026	-0.708	-0.608	(7742,7554)	165	58413
<i>Level 2 (Person-related antecedents)</i>							
Second language skills	-0.190	0.083	-0.353	-0.027	(12230,12215)	8033	13544
Political considerations	0.315	0.057	0.204	0.426	(12440,12255)	3902	13385
<i>Level 3 (Context-related antecedents)</i>							
Country	-0.584	0.193	-0.962	-0.204	(13188,12298)	47507	12877
<i>Level 1 - Level 2 interactions</i>							
Second language skills *Perceived control	-0.025	0.011	-0.047	-0.003	(7474,7582)	3651	50839
Political considerations*Perceived control	0.045	0.008	0.029	0.061	(7730,7588)	1690	59033
<i>Level1 - Level 3 interactions</i>							
Country*Perceived control	-0.246	0.037	-0.319	-0.172	(7698,7700)	343	62712
<i>Level2-Level3 interactions</i>							
Country*Second language skills	0.280	0.124	0.038	0.522	(12512,12484)	17456	12578
Country*political considerations	-0.219	0.093	-0.400	-0.036	(12436,12822)	10626	13400

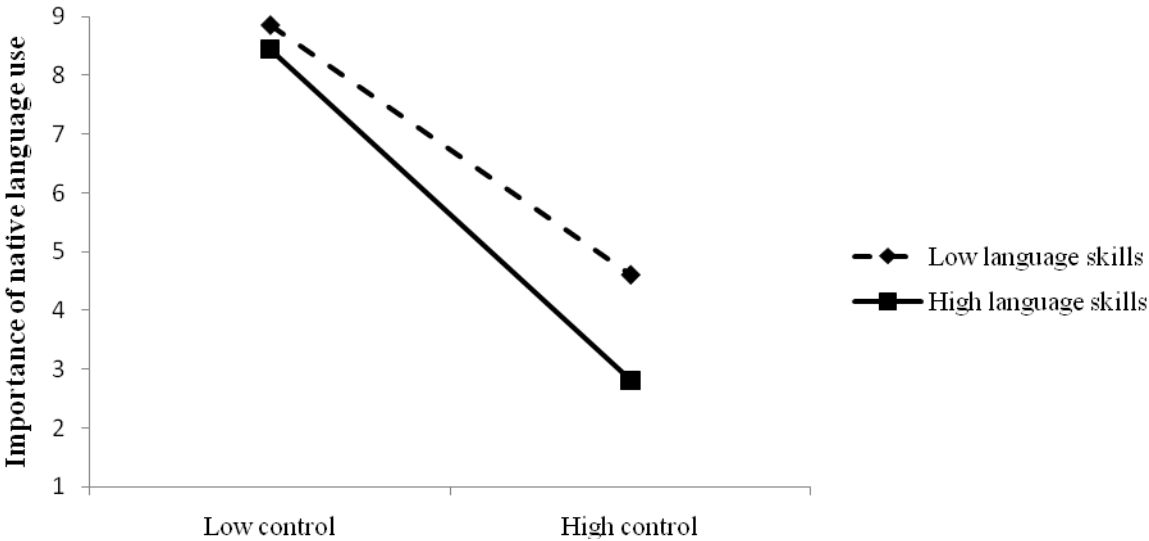
Notes:

- Results are based on Markov Chain Monte Carlo-estimates (100000 simulations)
- Canada acts as reference category for the country-variable

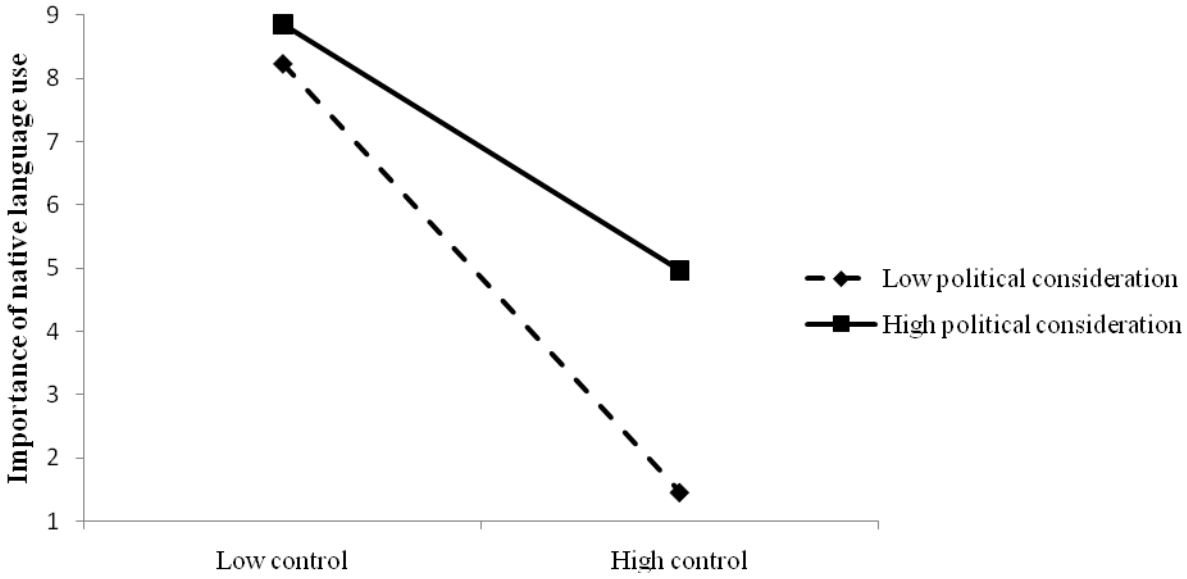
**Figure 1: Conceptual framework of main and interaction effects**



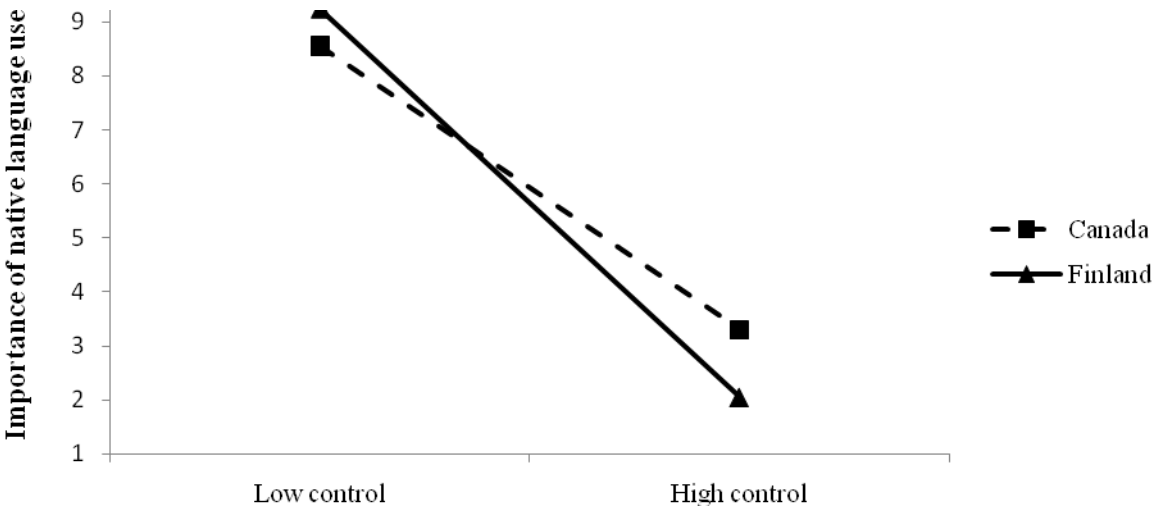
**Figure 2: Moderating influence of second language skills on the effect of perceived control on the perceived importance of native language use in services**



**Figure 3: Moderating influence of political considerations on the effect of perceived control on the perceived importance of native language use in services**

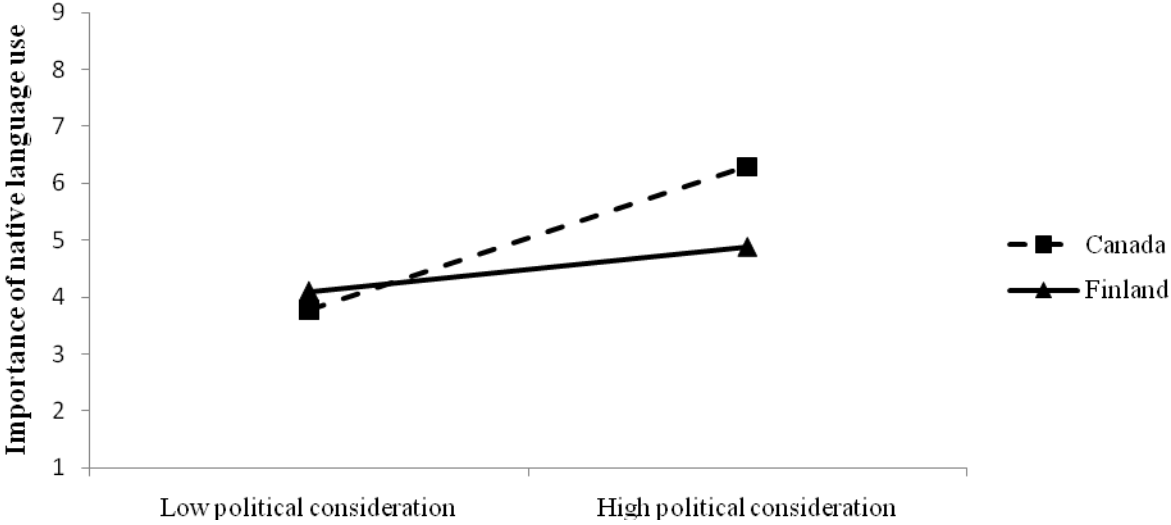


**Figure 4: Moderating influence of country-effects on the influence of perceived control on the perceived importance of native language use in services**

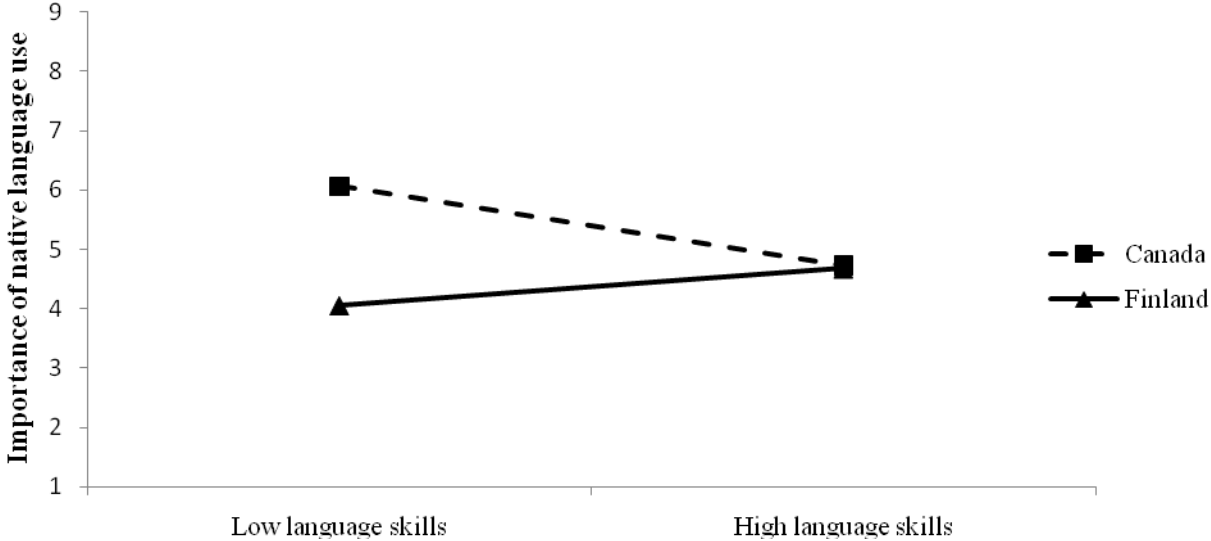




**Figure 5: Moderating influence of country-effects on the influence of political considerations on the perceived importance of native language use in services**



**Figure 6: Moderating influence of country-effects on the influence of second language skills on the perceived importance of native language use in services**



**Notes**

<sup>i</sup> We also did a visual inspection of the trace plots, running means plots, autocorrelation function plots, partial autocorrelation plots and Monte Carlo standard error plots indicated that 100000 simulations are largely sufficient.