

Challenges faced by the Finnish language community

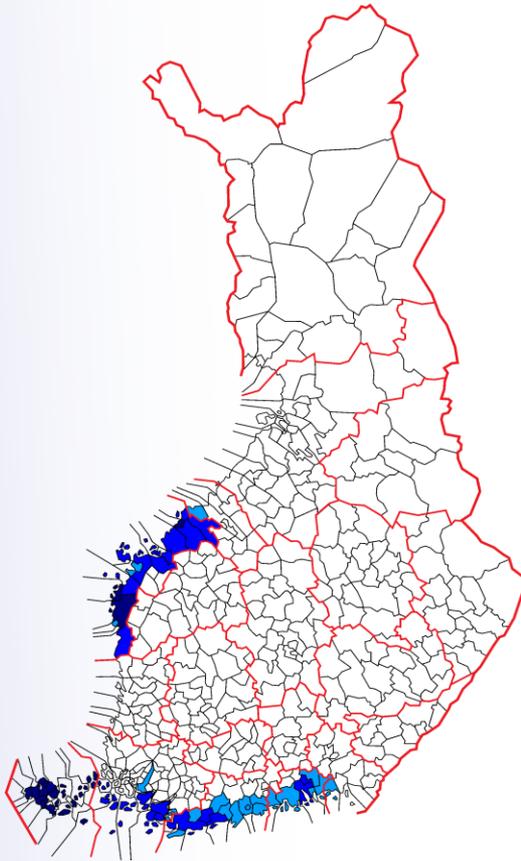
University of Barcelona
Barcelona October 9, 2009

Senior Lecturer
Sirku Latomaa
University of Tampere, Finland

Legal and political challenges

- Compared with the time of language conflicts (the 1920s and 1930s): a relatively stable situation ever since
- Hardly any concerns for the Finnish language as to legislation and its implementation!
- The Language Act 1922, renewed in 2004
- The Saami Language Act 2004
- The Government reports about the application of language legislation every three years to the Parliament: 2006, 2009
 - Finnish-speakers have it best

The official languages and municipalities



- Dark blue: unilingual Swedish municipalities
- Middle blue: bilingual municipalities with Swedish as a majority language
- Light blue: bilingual municipalities with Finnish as a majority language
- White: unilingual Finnish municipalities

Municipality types and languages

Municipalities	Number of inhabitants	L1: Finnish %	L1: Swedish %	L1: other language %
Monolingual Finnish (295)	3 657 336	97,6	0,4	2,0
Bilingual with Finnish majority (19)	1 480 497	83,2	9,2	7,6
Bilingual with Swedish majority (15)	144 650	28,8	69,1	2,1
Monolingual Swedish (19)	43 831	5,3	90,3	4,4
All (348)	5 326 314	90,9	5,4	3,6

- Finland ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities as well as the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1998
 - National minorities in Finland? (Sami, Roma, Jews, Tatars, "old" Russians, Swedish)
 - Regional or minority languages: Sami, Swedish, Romani
- The implementation of these agreements still remains unsatisfactory, especially on minority language education, minority language media, experiences of intolerance and discrimination

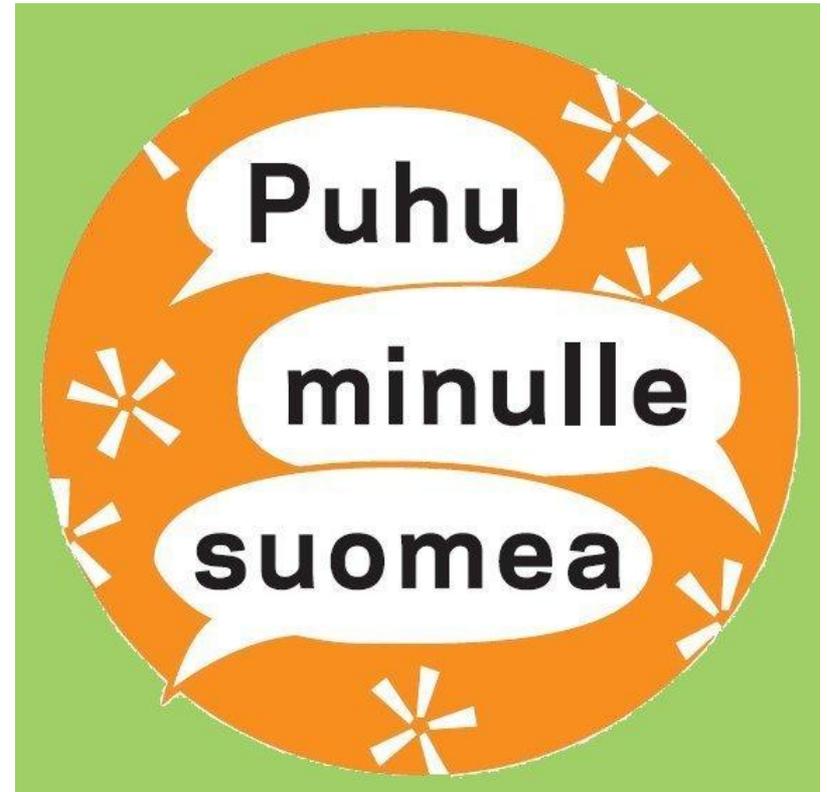
- In 1995, Finland joined the EU and the Finnish language became a language of international co-operation for the first time
- However, alongside with the enlargement of the EU, Finnish-speakers have had less and less access to EU's written material in their own language, and members of the EU Parliament have only a limited possibility to get interpretation into Finnish and from Finnish
- Officially, Finnish is recognized as a language of the EU, but in practice the status is far from that of English, French, German, Spanish...

Survival of the languages

- Concern about the young Finnish-speakers: spoken language (chatting, messenger, sms) "deteriorates" standard Finnish; the strong presence of English in young people's lives
 - Will they give up Finnish in the future?
- Concern about the large number of bilingual families in the Swedish-speaking community: mixing the languages "deteriorates" standard Finland-Swedish; the strong presence of Finnish in young people's lives
 - Will they give up Swedish in the future?
- Results of former policies: the current situation of the Sami and Roma
 - Will efforts to revive the languages (language nests, language showers) help?
- Current and future policies with immigrants:
 - Will they maintain or give up their languages?

Speak Finnish to me!

- An association established at the beginning of 2009
- Aims to activate immigrants and Finns to speak Finnish with each other
- Aims to promote the learning and use of Finnish



Languages in public domains

- The constitution and the language law ensure the status of Finnish in government and public institutions
- The possibility of using Swedish (or Sami) with municipal authorities depends on the municipality
- On the basis of the complaints to the ombudsman and a language barometer: Finnish-speakers have it better
- Recent efforts on increasing the clarity and comprehensibility of texts
- Material in Plain Finnish ~ democracy

- Foreign languages can also be used with public authorities (when it serves the purposes best)
- Recently more translations of materials into other languages, mostly English: it serves immigrants, international co-operation, visits etc.
- A growing demand on interpreters in immigrant languages (and education for the interpreters)
- More and more state and municipal webpages are translated into other languages
 - Of the municipal webpages (2007): in addition to Finnish, **46 % in English, 27 % in Swedish**, 16 % in German, 8% in Russian, 4 % in French (+ 6 % in other languages)
 - Information in immigrant languages and sign language



112 Numri i përgjithshëm i Urgjencës

Kur të keni nevojë për ndihmë urgjente, telefononi në numrin e përgjithshëm të urgjencës 112.

Kur të telefononi në numrin e urgjencës, nuk ka nevojë për prefiks, edhe kur të telefononi nga celulari. Mund të telefononi falas në numrin e përgjithshëm të urgjencës nga çdo telefon.



Número general de emergencias: 112

En el caso de que necesite ayuda urgente, llame al número general de emergencias 112.

Para llamar a este número general de emergencias no hace falta marcar un prefijo ni siquiera realizando la llamada desde un teléfono móvil. Las llamadas de emergencia se pueden realizar de una manera gratuita desde cualquier teléfono.

Language practices in public and private domains

- Language services in other languages are provided for clients
- People **working** e.g. in health care and cleaning industry are required to know Finnish
 - For health care, the required level for doctors from outside the EU/EEA is officially B1-B2
 - The level required for nurses varies in practice
 - Requirement to know both Finnish and Swedish in bilingual municipalities – officially and in practice?
 - Cleaning industry: the level required varies (from a job announcement: "satisfactory skills in Finnish are required")

Finnish in the educational institutions

- The status of Finnish is ensured from early childhood education to...university, or is it?
- A challenge in grades 1-6: the education of class teachers (5 credits for all; 25 credits if specialize in Finnish – half of that has to be literature)
- A challenge in grades 7-9: regional and gender differences
- A challenge in comprehensive school in general: the number of hours compared to other OECD countries (“a national shame”)
- Upper secondary education: Finnish (or “Mother tongue and literature”) is the only mandatory subject in the matriculation exam
- A challenge: the results of the matriculation exam are not the same as before – why?

Plurilingualism and mother tongue

- One explanation to the changes in skills: being international is more important than fully fledged skills in Finnish
- The results of Eurostat comparison: Finns have met the European goals (on paper)
- The popularity of CLIL in comprehensive schools (1996: 24 % of schools, 2005: 11 %); the growing number of English-medium instruction at universities
 - Are Finns giving up the status of Finnish in schools that they received only 150 years ago?
- Challenges in educational arrangements as for Finnish, but on the other hand: PISA (still looking good)

Languages of science and research

- Language strategies at several universities but not all
- Language of instruction according to the university law: Finnish and/or Swedish, other languages are not refused
- Increase of English-medium instruction for (European) exchange students
 - Courses in English and learning English in Finland instead of the national language
 - English becomes the language of the new international élité
 - What happened to the original idea of international mobility?
- Numerous Master's programs in English
 - the number of foreign students vs. potential students: who are these programs for?

- Master's theses:
 - a tendency to write all the more of them in English (especially in medicine, engeneering)
- Dissertations:
 - 80 % in English, 17 % in Finnish, 2 % in Swedish, 1 % other (2007)
- The quality of academic English?
- Popularising the results in Finnish?
- Development of terminology?

- Publications of a number of research centers:
 - 44,5 % of all publications in English, 64,1 % of scientific publications in English
- Centers with almost all publicational activity in English, while others orient to the Finnish-speaking audience
- The (implicit) language policy of the Academy of Finland: English is The Language of Science

Languages of mass media and new digital media

- Finns are active subscribers of newspapers (3rd in the world after Japan and Norway)
- Internet versions of newspapers popular: about 250
- 12 national TV channels
- National Broadcasting Company's channels (YLE): 58 % of programs of Finnish origin; MTV3: 48 %, Channel Four: 30 %
- Finnishness: one of the core values of NBC
- Subtitling (less expensive than dubbing)
- Almost 100 satellite channels: some of them ruled by regulations according to which programs need to be subtitled (or dubbed) into Finnish

- Public and commercial radio channels:
 - public channels: speech dominates
 - commercial channels: 80 % is something else (music, mostly in English)
- Speech has changed in radios: more informal (like the whole society), more local varieties
- "Radio Suomi" still the most popular channel
- The 10 most popular songs in radio channels: only 2 were made in Finland, one of them in Finnish (2006)
- Records produced in Finland 2003-2007: 13->45 % of them made in English

- Young Finns more involved with the Internet than printed media -> Internet resources should be offered in the future also in Finnish
- Blogging, chatting mostly in Finnish, but in some discussion groups also in English (and other languages)
- Creating subcultures in English: Fan fiction
- Finns still write a lot but the forms of writing have changed: English alongside with Finnish
- A challenge to school children (and their teachers): how to learn the right conventions for each genre in the current variation of language

Languages of cultural industry and entertainment

- Literature: the status of Finnish strong and Finns read a lot
 - Majority of children's literature is translated
 - Important: translator education, the quality of translations
- In theater: the status of Finnish is strong
- Movies: about 23 % of movies in the cinema and DVD rentals of Finnish origin, about the same of European origin and the rest is from the US
- Games: almost all of them in English; the status of Finnish is weak; no statistics on games' languages

Language planning

- The Research Institute for the Languages of Finland is responsible for language planning for Finnish, Swedish, Saami, Finnish sign language and Romany
- Language planning aims to describe and issue appropriate guidelines on standard language usage
- The Institute strives to issue guidelines that are as clear, simple and easy to apply as possible for all members of the linguistic community in any given context
- Linguistic democracy and equality ~ foreign influence (Finnish coinages instead of loan words (*plastic* -> *muovi*; loan words and their spelling, eg. *brand* -> *bränd*, *brändi*; *gourmet* -> *gurmee*))

The puristic language police among us

- In letters-to-the-editors: demands on measures that the language planners should take; "the Finnish language is in decline – why don't the language planners do anything?"
- Criticism especially on the language in the media:
 - spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes, choice of vocabulary, features of spoken language...
- Criticism also on the new guidelines that the language planners have given: older norms are felt to be better (even if no rational reason to stick to them)
 - Wish for clear rules, not "it depends on the genre" etc.

- Stylistic norms have changed: everyday vocabulary, informality, illusions of spoken language in interviews (intimacy, the image of eg. a politician)
- However, no clear answer to whether the spoken language is creeping into the written only now; what was their interplay like in the 19th century?
- A long tradition of avoiding the Swedish influence
- Current English influence mostly on the lexical level
 - direct translation into Finnish: "in the long run"
 - the meanings of English words overtake: *pateettinen*
 - but also constructions change: love **to do** instead of **-ing**
 - problems for the language user and the planner: *smoothie* (in partitive plural?)

Dialectal diversity: a valued resource

- A boom of interest in dialects in the 1990s: dictionaries (tampere – suomi etc.); comic books, parts of the Bible etc. translated into various dialects
- Use of local varieties in domains where they were not used before (eg. hostess of a TV show)
- Boom and general interest vs. self-perception of people moving away from certain dialect areas
- Dialects on TV pave way to linguistic tolerance towards the varieties of Finnish spoken by immigrants?
- The influence of multiethnolects on Finnish?

Linguistic diversity: a challenge and an opportunity

- On policy level: right to own language is ensured in the constitution (17§)
- Eg. education: implementations differ; equality is not reached; a hierarchy of languages is created (Sami, Roma, sign language; the rest)
- Immigration critical voices: the price of diversity!
- Labour market: the need for language skills!

Linguistic and technological equipment

- Compared to the resources mentioned in BLARK (Basic Language Resource Kit), Finland is behind its neighbours in developing linguistic technology
- A language bank with text and spoken language corpora exists (but limited compared to other countries), only few digital dictionaries, no thesauri
- Small language – small market; based largely on public support
- From translators' point of view: automatic translators? (Finnish -> English vs. English -> Finnish)
- From the common people's point of view: they do not know what they are missing