



RECODE WORKING PAPER SERIES

Online Working Paper No. 05 (2012)

The Finnish Paradox: Language and Politics in Finland

Pasi Saukkonen

This paper can be downloaded without charge from:
<http://www.recode.fi/publications>

ISSN 2242-3559

RECODE – Responding to Complex Diversity in Europe and Canada

ONLINE WORKING PAPER SERIES

RECODE, a research networking programme financed through the European Science Foundation (ESF), is intended to explore to what extent the processes of transnationalisation, migration, religious mobilisation and cultural differentiation entail a new configuration of social conflict in post-industrial societies - a possible new constellation labelled *complex diversity*.

RECODE brings together scholars from across Europe and Canada in a series of scientific activities. More information about the programme and the working papers series is available via the RECODE websites:

www.recode.fi
www.esf.org/recode

Series Editor: Peter A. Kraus
Editorial Assistant: Daniel Moran

Section 1, Workshop 1:
Linguistic Diversity and the Changing Dynamics of Political Integration

Title: The Finnish Paradox: Language and Politics in Finland
Author: Pasi Saukkonen
Working Paper No. 05
Publication Date of this Version: April 2012
Webpage: <http://www.recode.fi/publications>

© RECODE, 2012
Helsinki, Finland
<http://www.recode.fi>

© 2012 by Pasi Saukkonen
*All rights reserved.
Short sections of text, not to exceed
two paragraphs, may be quoted without
explicit permission provided that full credit
is given to the source.*

*The views expressed in this paper do not
necessarily reflect those of the RECODE
Research Networking Programme or the
European Science Foundation.*

Pasi Saukkonen
Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism (CEREN), University of Helsinki
Pasi.Saukkonen@helsinki.fi

ISSN 2242-3559



Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)
Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)

The Finnish Paradox: Language and Politics in Finland

Pasi Saukkonen

Pasi Saukkonen is a political scientist currently working as a researcher at the Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism, CEREN, University of Helsinki. He has published widely on nationalism and national identity, integration policies and politics in a multicultural society. At present, he is writing a book on Finnish minority and integration policy alternatives in a European context. He has also worked upon the Finnish political system, upon politics and society in Belgium and in the Netherlands and upon Finnish local and national cultural policy.

Abstract

Nationalism and multiculturalism are strange bedfellows. In the Finnish case, however, they have formed a relatively well-functioning couple for almost a century. In my paper, I will discuss the institutional arrangements and symbolic constructions of this relationship, with special attention to the political organization of linguistic diversity in Finland. In the final section, I will bring out some contemporary pressures and challenges that the Finnish linguistic policy is now facing.

All societies are plural societies. That is, they are not entirely homogeneous units and their members are not completely equal. It is in practice unavoidable that a society includes at least some ethnic or cultural differences and that there exists some kind of political and/or economic inequality. The task of politics, in turn, is to deal with this diversity in a way that makes the preservation of the society and the accomplishment of its main tasks possible. Politics is essentially about organizing difference (cf. Saukkonen 2003; Koenis and Saukkonen 2005).

This politics of diversity takes place on different levels and dimensions. The concept of politics is usually connected with the institutions and activities of the political-administrative system, such as legislation, policy implementation and the distribution of public resources. However, especially when the position of ethnic and cultural minorities is being analyzed, also the symbolic dimension of political action deserves attention.

Symbolic politics here refers to the different ways of understanding the society as an entity with an own identity, specific characteristics and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The politics of identity draws demarcations between “us” and “them” and defines who can be considered as “true” or “genuine” representatives of the national community. It is possible, in practice almost inevitable, that the symbolic understanding of the nation deviates from the formal definition of the society and from its legal membership criteria.

This article focuses on the Finnish language policy from the above-mentioned perspective to politics. This means that I shall take a look at how the relationship between Finnish-speakers and Swedish-speakers in the country has been historically constituted. Attention is paid both to practical policy arrangements and to the development of the Finnish national identity – the latter with special regard to the role of linguistic communities in the symbolic construction of the Finnish nation.

The essay is divided into three analytical parts and conclusions. In the first section, I shall make an excursion to a debate in the mid-19th century where the roots of different notions of the Finnish nationality can be discovered. In the second, the main contours of the language policy arrangements in independent Finland will be described together with an analysis about what has simultaneously taken place in the symbolic understanding of the nation. In the third part, I will discuss the contemporary language policy situation in Finland from the perspective of change and continuity on both diversity policy dimensions.

Language policy and nation in the Grand Duchy of Finland

When Finland was separated from Sweden and annexed to the Russian Empire as a Grand Duchy in 1809, the Tsarist authorities were initially by no means hostile to Finnish cultural nationalism. They thought that a benign attitude towards linguistic and cultural claims would weaken the country's connection with the former host country and, as a corollary, increase loyalty to the present ruler. In the early decades of the 19th century, there were plenty of piecemeal reforms that improved the position of the Finnish language, even though political nationalism was, of course, not tolerated and even though there was a more restrictive period during the reign of Nikolai I (1825–1855) (on the political history of Finland, cf. Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi 1999; McRae 1999).

The domestic language reforms and the overall rise of nationalism in European thought also provoked discussions about nations and nationalism in Finland. In the summer of 1859, the philosopher, journalist and politician Johan Vilhelm Snellman wrote a letter to another prominent nation-builder, the poet, historian and journalist Zachris Topelius. The topic of the letter was an article that had appeared in one of the newspapers published in the capital of the Grand Duchy, *Helsingfors Tidningar*, in which Topelius was an editor. The author of this article was the pseudonym A. H. C. (A. H. Chydenius) and it was titled "Does the nationality polemic actually matter in Finland?"¹

The background of this article, in turn, was a debate between two other journals and their editors, *Papperslyktan* of August Schauman and *Litteraturbladet* of J. V. Snellman. In this debate, these intellectuals had changed opinions about the meaning of nationality, the possibility of multilingual nations and the future of the Swedish language in Finland, and other related issues.

According to Chydenius, both contributors agreed upon the necessity to improve the position of the Finnish language. However, their points of departure regarding the definition of the nation were strikingly different. This, in turn, would produce strongly divergent consequences to the understanding of the Finnish nationality, to the determination of its place in the wider world or civilization and to the ideas concerning proper patriotic behavior.

The definition of the nation in *Papperslyktan*, Chydenius writes, was based on the idea that when people develop their human character under the same external circumstances, go through the same historical experiences and undergo dense reciprocal interaction, there will emerge a similarity in their way of thinking, feeling and understanding the world. These shared characteristics will also make them a distinct people that can be separated from other nations.

Litteraturbladet, he argues, has a clearly different approach. Snellman – influenced by Hegelian philosophy – would rather define the nation on the basis of an original spirit or inherent genius which is transmitted among the members of the national community from

¹ This debate is digitally available at the Historical Newspaper Library of the National Library of Finland, <<http://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/sanomalehti/secure/main.html>>. The contributions of J. V. Snellman, including the letter to Topelius, have also been published in the collected works of Snellman in Swedish and in Finnish. The Finnish-language versions are also available on the internet: <http://www.snellman200.fi/kootut_teokset/fi.jsp>.

generation to generation. This national core manifests itself particularly in language, but also in the customs, habits and other forms of human action and behavior.

For Chydenius, this distinction was not merely a philosophical issue. Instead, he maintained that different approaches would have different practical consequences and that the supporters of these views would give different answers to many important questions of the day. Is there a human civilization common for all or does mankind only consist of the sum total of different individual nationalities? Should international influence be regarded as a possibility to reach higher levels of human development or should it be treated with suspicion, as something that endangers national originality? Should an individual member of the national community try to learn and internalize the best of human achievements irrespective of their origin? Or, would it be better to strive for a way of life that is as close as possible to the genuine national spirit?

In his letter to Topelius mentioned above, Snellman gives due credit to the analysis of A. H. C. However, he also clearly confirms to Topelius his own collectivist approach by writing that “Civilization, culture must manifest itself in action, in the customs. An individual hustles and potters around in different nooks. The nation, in turn, is active in the pantheon of world history. That is: civilization is the action of a nation in the world history.”² In this piece of private correspondence, he also expresses his opinion on the language question in a more blunt way than in his public contributions:

If we all were already Swedish by language, I would only rejoice. However, now that it is our eternal fate to live separated from the Swedes, something original could be developed among ourselves – some kind of own action in the world history – that is, civilization. (...) Because we are not all Swedes, and we cannot become Swedes either in the contemporary circumstances – and even less can we become Frenchmen – what remains? We have to become Finns. (...) Becoming Finns, that is, we have to get a national language, a small corner in the world history, a civilization (...).

This debate on the nationality issue took place at a moment when the Russian attitude had recently been more cautious than in the early years of the Grand Duchy. A censorship decree had banned the publication of books in Finnish with the exception of those of religious or economic topics during the years 1850–1854.³ Therefore, one had to take seriously the possibility that there would be periods of control and even attempts for Russification also in the future. The end of Snellman’s letter can be interpreted against this background, but it also reflects his view about the role of Swedish language in Finland in the future. “I have come to the conclusion that God only knows which one will win, the Russian language or the Finnish language. I dare not hope anything. But the Swedish language will sink – that is for sure.”

We don’t know if Topelius responded to Snellman with a letter. It is however inevitable that the gentlemen have met each other regularly and discussed issues related to nationality in general and to the Finnish nation in particular. The context of Finnish public debate however changed remarkably in 1863, when the Finnish Diet again started to convene regularly. This also triggered the domestic party formation process. The first party-political groupings of lasting nature were founded on the basis of the language question: the Finnish party striving for the improvement of the Finnish language and the Swedish party that aimed at restraining that process and to safeguard the interests of Swedish-speakers.⁴ In

² Translations by Pasi Saukkonen if not mentioned otherwise.

³ The censorship decree was officially abrogated in 1860, but it was already significantly attenuated six years earlier.

⁴ Initially, the main cleavage was between the Fennomans and the liberals who, however, soon split into different subgroups that then merged into other groupings (cf. Jussila, Hentilä, and Nevakivi 1999, 56–60).

1863, the Russian Tsar also issued an edict, after an individual political manoeuvre by Snellman, which declared that Finnish was to become equal with Swedish within twenty years.

What we know is that Topelius definitely had his own opinion in the nationality question and that he did not conceal it. During his long life, in addition to journalistic and academic activities he published a lot of popular books to raise the level of identification among his fellow countrymen to the Finnish nation. Perhaps the most influential book was the *Book of Our Country* (*Boken om vårt land*) that was published in Swedish in 1875 and translated into Finnish in 1876. This book was written especially for school use, but it was also intensively read by the large public many decades afterwards.

Book of Our Country provides the reader with information about the geography, people and history of Finland in an accessible form. In one of the beginning chapters, Topelius expresses his definition on the Finnish nation – and of nationality in general – in an eloquent way:

Now I understand. This is my fatherland. If I call it “Suomenmaa”, in Finnish, or “Finland”, in Swedish, it still is the same country. All its sons and daughters belong to the same nation, irrespective of the language they speak. God has kept them in this country for hundreds of years, under the same laws and administration. If something good has happened to the one, the other has experienced that as well. They have grown, lived and died side by side in the mountains of the same North, under the same sky, both working hard to earn their living. They have the same Christian faith, the same education, the same rights, the same duties, the same benefit, the same misery, the same freedom, the same love and the same hope. They are countrymen, brothers and sisters forever. They do not have two, but one fatherland. They are not two but one nation. May God give us all a conciliatory heart. What God has united, that should a man not tear apart.”(Topelius 1982: 13)

At the same time, there was also development on the Swedish-speaking side. Some Swedish-speakers shared the romantic notion of a nation together with Snellman but opposed strongly the visions where there was no room for the Swedish language in the future Finland. Another newspaper, *Vikingen*, saw the daylight in 1870, and it was strongly influenced by Axel Olof Freudenthal who was later to become the professor of Swedish language and literature at the University of Helsinki. Also for him, and his followers who called themselves Svecomen, the decisive factor in the constitution and manifestation of the nation was language. In addition to the Finnish nationality, there would hence exist also a Swedish nation, and it would be the duty of the Swedish-speakers to keep that nationality alive and to protect its legitimate interests (cf. Puntila 1944).

To recapitulate, at the end of the 19th century, there were in Finland two theoretical notions of the nation in action. The more liberal one emphasized common history and experiences and mutual social interaction among the inhabitants, and it found an influential supporter in Zachris Topelius. The more romantic alternative, in turn, shared the view of Johann Gottfried von Herder and located the root of the national community in the national spirit which was manifested in the common language, customs and character. This latter definition appeared in two forms, in the Fennomans version and in the Svecoman version. For the radical Fennomans, future Finland should be made a monolingual country where the cultural community and the political community would be one and the same. The self-proclaimed task of the Svecomans, of course, would be to oppose this development. If a return to the Swedish political realm was impossible, then at least the future existence of the Swedish nationality in Finland should be guaranteed.

Language policy and nation in the independent Finland

When Finland became independent in 1917, the language issue was one of the political questions that had to be resolved. There were claims from radical Fennomans that only Finnish would be made the official language. Some Swedish-speakers, in turn, argued for some kind of a system of regional autonomy for the linguistic minority. However, both demands were finally rejected and Finland was made an officially bilingual country in the 1919 Constitution and in the 1922 Language Act. The central features of the Finnish language legislation produce a combination of a territoriality principle and personality principle (cf. McRae 1999: 219–224).

- Finnish and Swedish are both recognized as national languages.
- Public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of both language groups on an equal basis.
- A citizen of Finland has the right to use his or her own language, Finnish or Swedish, before courts and administrative authorities everywhere in the country, with the exception of Åland which is declared unilingual (Swedish).
- Finnish municipalities (and administrative regions) are either officially unilingual or bilingual, depending of the size of minority language community. In a bilingual municipality, the speakers of the minority group have the right to use their own language and to get service in that language according to certain rules and regulation.⁵

These legal arrangements did not completely end linguistic disputes. In fact, the decades before the Second World War have even been called the years of linguistic strife (cf. Hämäläinen 1968). However, among the many tensions and controversies in the young republic, many people and also many politicians probably considered the language issue as somewhat irrelevant, a “question of the sixth order”, as a leading Social Democrat, Väinö Tanner, once put it. The language strife mainly centered upon the role of the Swedish language in Finnish universities.⁶ Despite of a lot of publicity, it was relatively marginal in daily political practice at the state level.

However, independence also meant that Finnish authorities and civil society organizations could now without external restrictions continue their efforts to consolidate the Finnish national identity and to disseminate the idea of the nation through social institutions such as school, the army and the media. Irrespective of differences in political opinion and orientation, the Finnish-speaking part of the population overwhelmingly accepted the Fennomans version of the Finnish nation.

Ironically enough, an important instrument in this activity was the *Book of Our Country* by Zachris Topelius. Even though the book contained the liberal definition of the nation cited above, it was also the locus of one of the most influential descriptions of Finnish nationality and national culture. The Finnish national characteristics and the stereotypical representatives of the nation were discovered by Topelius among the Finnish-

⁵ The criteria for official local and regional bilingualism have slightly changed during the decades. In the original legislation, a municipality was declared unilingual, if the proportion of of minority language speakers was under 10 per cent of the local population. The cities of Helsinki, Turku and Vaasa were declared bilingual even if the share of minority would be below that threshold. Later, an absolute number of minority language speakers was amended. After 1962, this criterion was five thousand; after 1975 three thousand inhabitants.

⁶ The language of education at the University of Helsinki was declared Finnish by a law in 1937. There were, however, simultaneous stipulations concerning the use of the Swedish language at the university and specific professorships where the Swedish language was required.

speaking inland peasantry. Hence, he strongly contributed to the spreading of a tenacious idea that it was exactly this part of the population that would form the backbone of the genuine Finnish nationality.

As a consequence, the core of the Finnish nation was anchored to the Finnish language, to historically evolved national customs and values and to the assumed ethnic origin in the region between the Volga and Kama rivers in eastern Eurasia. This development, together with the official recognition of Finland as a bilingual country, constituted the Finnish language policy paradox. In the legal framework regarding language rights, Swedish was not a minority but a parallel language together with Finnish. In the symbolic realm, however, Swedish-speakers had to be satisfied with a clearly secondary or marginal position in the Finnish national identity.

In the Finnish language policy, there weren't any major changes before the profound school reform in the 1960s (cf. Kielilakikomitea 2000; McRae 1999: 284–301). Until then, the education system had been based on two tracks. The majority of children passed only a limited number of years of general education before entering some kind of an occupational school. After four years of elementary school the minority of pupils followed a path that was to lead to higher education and professions. Only these pupils were to study both Finnish and Swedish whereas the majority of children would have only mother tongue instruction.

The new comprehensive school offered equal access to a nine year long basic school for all children. From now on, all pupils should study the mother tongue and two other languages, one of which would be the so-called other domestic language, Swedish for the Finnish-speakers and Finnish for the Swedish-speakers (cf. Geber 2010). Furthermore, in 1987, students in higher education institutions were obligated to pass an exam which showed that they have the skills required of a civil servant in the other national language.

Meanwhile, Finland had started to improve the position of national minorities such as the Sami and the Roma. In 1989, Finland also joined the Council of Europe, and the country has now ratified all the main agreements and signed the declarations related to cultural rights and minority issues.⁷ The general atmosphere in Finland had been getting more tolerant since the 1960s, but there was also national self-interest at play. The protection of minorities in Finland could be used as an argument in communication with Sweden where hundreds of thousands of Finnish-speakers were living either historically or as a result of massive emigration from Finland in the post-war decades.

In 1995, there was a profound basic rights reform which also included a new regulation concerning the rights of the members of Finnish society to one's native language and culture. The paragraph, which was later included in the new Constitution (2000), firstly states that the national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish and that it is the responsibility of public authorities to provide for the cultural and societal needs of both language groups on an equal basis. Furthermore, the section confirms that "the Sami, as an indigenous people, as well as the Roma and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture."

In 1999, an Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum-Seekers also came into force. In this Act, integration was explicitly defined as the personal development of immigrants, aimed at participation in working life and the functioning of society while preserving their language and culture (2§). With these reforms, Finland moved from bi-culturalism to a multicultural direction.⁸ Since the late 1980s, immigration to Finland had started to increase. In the last two decades, the number of those inhabitants speaking other languages than Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue has exceeded 200,000. In 2009, there were almost 52,000 registered Russian-speakers in the country.

⁷ However, Finland still has not ratified the ILO Convention 169 on the rights of indigenous peoples.

⁸ It is, however, good to know that the Finnish legislation does not officially recognize any specific national minorities.

At the same time, there were conscious efforts to redefine Finnish national identity. In the new circumstances, the traditional version emphasizing cultural originality, homogeneity and ancient historical roots was not considered valid anymore. In the 1990s, many intellectuals participated in the construction of a new sense of nationality which would acknowledge the diversity within Finnish society and Finland's belonging to a larger civilization. When Finland joined the European Union in 1995, it was celebrated by the supporters as a return to Europe.

The development in the last decades of the 20th century regarding the symbolic dimension of Finnish language policy therefore seems quite positive from the perspective of Swedish-speakers and other minorities. To put it into other words, the romantic version of nationality was being replaced by a more liberal one. At the same time, however, there was growing awareness that the legislative and political ideals were not achieved in the everyday reality. Even though many language policy issues had been resolved in the course of past decades, the overall development did not give too many reasons for excessive optimism. Kenneth D. McRae writes in his book on Finnish language policy (1999: 331), about contemporary problems as follows:

The absence of burning contemporary issues does not mean that this chapter is left as mere empty cells. It means instead that for Finland we must visualize the central problem of intergroup relations differently. A primary focus must stem from the changing linguistic proportion (...) which saw Swedish speakers decline from 14 to 6 per cent of the total population between 1880 and 1990 (...). In a word, the central issue here is not linguistic conflict but linguistic instability, and the key social process for our analysis is not intergroup conflict or hostility but quiet attrition.

This quiet attrition was one of the reasons for a legal language policy reform. The new Language Act that replaced the old Act of 1922 in 2004 did not, however, contain any major changes. Its primary objective was to ensure the realization of former linguistic rights in practice, not to entail any new rights. According to the new Act, the authorities shall on their own initiative see to the realization of the language rights of individuals. This means that it should not be necessary for the members of language communities to call attention to the rights. The Language Act determines a minimum level of rights whereas more detailed provisions are included in the special legislation concerning e.g. health care, social welfare and education.

Language policy and nation in contemporary Finland

The 2004 Language Act can be seen as an effort to solve the remaining problems in the Finnish language policy in a sustainable manner. However, with hindsight this reform can rather be seen as a turning point that revealed structural deficiencies in the system. During the last few years, dissatisfaction has grown on both sides of the linguistic border and differences in opinion have been more clearly manifested than for decades.

On the Swedish-speaking side, people started quite soon to realize that the reform did not produce any significant improvement in their state of affairs. On the contrary, there were signs of further deterioration of the situation. As a consequence of several administrative reforms with centralizing tendencies and public services cuts affecting Swedish-language institutions, many examples of a domain loss of the Swedish language could be observed (cf. Wiberg and Karlsson 2010). According to the Report of the Government on the application of language legislation (2009):

There is still room for improvement in the securing of the linguistic rights of the Swedish-speaking population. A central observation is that in public administration the starting point in the service of those speaking Swedish is in Finnish unless they specifically ask to communicate in Swedish. However, the regional differences are considerable. The linguistic rights of the Swedish-speaking population are best ensured in Ostrobothnia. In southern Finland, where the number of the Swedish-speaking population is high, there is most to be improved in the securing of the linguistic rights.

Some people started to speak of a hidden agenda or even of a conspiracy among Finnish-speaking parties and politicians that are willing to undermine the status of the Swedish language in Finland. The Swedish People's party, which had successfully mobilized a larger part of the Swedish-speaking electorate, was hence urged to defend the interest of the language community more vigorously. Lots of new initiatives were launched. A specific network (*svenska.nu*) was established to connect different actors in order to enhance the image of Swedish language among schoolchildren. A Swedish-speaking think-tank Magma was founded to promote new thinking and discussion about the future of the Swedish language in Finland. The Swedish Assembly of Finland (*Folktinget*) launched a process under the leadership of former president Martti Ahtisaari to prepare a new action programme for the maintenance of two vital national languages in Finland (cf. Saukkonen 2010).

On the Finnish-speaking side, the Association of Finnish Culture and Identity (*Suomalaisuuden liitto*) had already taken a more nationalist course in 1988 by publishing a new language policy program. In this program, the association demanded that the instruction of Swedish should be voluntary, that the so-called Swedish for civil servants (*virkamiesruotsi*) should be removed from the university degree and that after a period of transition, Finnish should become the only official language in Finland.

Language policy criticism started to organize more effectively after the ratification of the new Language Act. In 2007, another association called Free Language Choice (*Vapaa kielivalinta*) was founded to promote the achievement of similar objectives as the ones of the *Suomalaisuuden liitto*. At the same time, the Internet provided a new and almost unrestricted channel to publish political ideas and opinions and to gather like-minded people in virtual communities. The language issue, and especially the question of mandatory Swedish in schools, became one of the hot topics of this debate. An example of web sites specialized in language policy is the "*pakkoruotsi.net*", which strives for distributing more objective information about the significance of different languages in Finland that can be found in the mainstream media and to rouse public debate about the position of the Swedish language in Finland.

This language policy criticism initially remained on the margins of Finnish politics and of the mainstream public debate. In the years 2009–2010, however, the situation started to change remarkably. Many prominent politicians began discussing language policy and raising questions about the functioning of the current system. Suggestions to abolish or to revise the obligatory character of the "other domestic language" (read: Swedish) instruction have also come from actors such as the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK) and some municipalities of Eastern Finland. The issue seems to divide many parties even if most of them officially still support the linguistic status quo.

An analysis of the recent language policy debate shows that much of the debate is focused on practical arrangements and on the instrumental value of language skills (Saukkonen 2011). The decidedly most important issue raising dissatisfaction among Finnish-speakers has been the obligatory character of Swedish language in Finnish-language schools, the so-called "mandatory Swedish" (*pakkoruotsi*). On the Swedish-speaking side, the main concern has been the imperfect realization of their legal rights to receive public service in the mother tongue.

The opponents of mandatory Swedish have argued that the contemporary legislation hinders pupils from learning the languages they would really need in their future life. The protagonists of the current system have then maintained that if Swedish were made voluntary, it would be even more difficult to get personnel competent in Swedish to occupations where the law requires sufficient knowledge of both domestic languages. The latter also say that if Finnish-speaking children would not learn enough Swedish, they would be excluded in the future from the labour markets in Finland and beyond that require skills in Swedish or other Scandinavian languages.

It is not possible to analyze this discussion and the recent language policy development here in depth. However, as A. H. Chydenius pointed out 150 years ago, language policy debate is also inevitably related to larger and more principal issues regarding the definition of nationality and the relation of one nation to the surrounding world composed of other countries, languages and national cultures. This statement seems to be valid even today.

The linkage between language policy and the concept of nationality is most evident in a part of the Finnish-speaking critical discourse. Some of them even call themselves “Neo-Fennomans”, thus making a direct reference to their historical predecessors and to the nationalist heritage of Snellman and other Fennomans. For them, the genuine Finnish nationality is still defined by the common language and the historical memories and experiences connected with this linguistic group. Even genetic composition, that is supposed to unite the real Finns and to separate them from Swedish-speakers, is sometimes brought up again.

Some Finnish-speaking advocates of the Swedish cause, in turn, give strong support to the view that there is only one Finnish nationality even though the nation comprises two language communities. For them, bilingualism is an important part of Finnish identity and keeping Finland bilingual is the right way of showing respect to the historical legacy and to the important role that many Swedish-speakers have played in the formation of the nation and in the reaching of independence.

Needless to say, many Swedish-speakers, maybe even a large majority, share this view as well. During a demonstration organized by the *Suomalaisuuden liitto* against mandatory Swedish on March 31st, 2011, there was also a counter-demonstration where the main slogan was: “Two languages, the same nation!” (*Två språk, samma folk*). It was as if Snellman and Topelius had debated again at the stairs of the Finnish House of Parliament – albeit in a manner that both gentlemen would most likely have found very inappropriate.⁹

These two ways of understanding Finnish nationality and national identity are probably the most widely shared among the population. However, the picture would not be complete if no attention was paid to the still existing idea of a separate Swedish nationality – or at least of a separate cultural community – among some Swedish-speakers and their protagonists. During the last few years, as the language policy climate has hardened, more zealous voices from the Swedish side have also arisen that strongly oppose further concessions and that argue for the establishment of regional autonomy for Swedish-speakers. Half-jokingly, but also half-seriously, some of them are called the “Language Taliban” (*språktalibaner*) within the Swedish-speaking community.

Compared with the “Neo-Fennomans”, this language-based definition of nationality is among these Swedish-speakers usually rather more implicit than explicit. This is all the more true for those Finnish-speakers who are devoted supporters of Finnish bilingualism and of the legal rights of Swedish-speakers. Some of them have argued that the “neo-Fennoman” language policy criticism is still another manifestation of the fact that

⁹ Nevertheless, it is good to know that the main messages of the original, anti-mandatory demonstrators did not directly focus on the nationality issue, but rather on the language policy arrangements from a practical point of view, such as in the slogan “Swedish is good, compulsion is bad!” (*Ruotsi hyvä, pakko paha*).

Finnish-speakers are, compared with Scandinavians and Europeans, a less educated and more intolerant kind of people that still need guidance and control.

This stance among some Finnish-speakers may sound strange. In fact, what they do is that they criticize the language community if not the nation they belong to themselves. However, the ambivalent relation between Finnish intellectuals and the Finnish nation is a recurrent theme in the history of Finland. As Risto Alapuro (1997: 143) has mentioned, the relation between intellectuals and the nation was already charged in the early national movement. The 19th century Fennomania was an ideology that formed the nation at the same time as its supporters constructed the political state. In other words, people who were in power built an identity that was based on the way of life, political opinion and cultural characteristic of the subordinate part of the population.

No wonder that the intellectuals easily felt betrayed if people did not behave as they were supposed to. The greatest moment of consternation has unquestionably been the popular support for socialist ideas in the early years of the 20th century. One hundred years later, ordinary Finns turned out to be unfaithful to the national cause by failing to understand that Finland had become a culturally diverse society, member of the European family of nations and an active participant on the global scale. The Finnish people had missed the train of change, or stubbornly refused to accept that the new time requires a novel attitude and approach to oneself, to the nation and to the surrounding world.

Conclusion

The theoretical purpose of this paper has been to show that the political organization of difference takes place on two dimensions. In addition to legal, political and administrative regulations and arrangements, the construction of a symbolic national community also needs to be taken into account. It is possible but not at all self-evident that practical policy arrangements correspond with the notion of a nation and national identity. In fact, it is probably safe to assume that in all countries there is at least some discrepancy between the two sides of the coin of diversity policy.

Finnish language policy and Finnish minority policy in general, provide us with a good example of a case in which there is a relatively wide gap between the legal and symbolic constructions of a nation. Therefore, it is easy to misunderstand Finland if one looks exclusively at the legal framework or concentrates solely on the manifestations of national identity.

Finland is a state that combines tolerance and minority rights with a strong sense of a quite exclusivist form of nationality. Everybody living in Finland has the legal right to be treated equally before the law, foreigners can opt for applying for Finnish citizenship, the country has two national languages, two national churches and the rights of other minorities are constitutionally guaranteed. However, some people are still generally considered more genuine Finns than others. According to a not insignificant part of the population, these people constitute the true national community.

The conflict between official Finland and symbolic Finland has at times been mainly out of sight in the public debate whereas sometimes it has been clearly discernible. At the moment, it has no doubt surfaced again. Diversity policy in general and language policy in particular are being discussed more now than for decades. Immigration has definitely played a role here, as well as a general neo-nationalist trend in Europe. However, the domestic developments regarding the main language communities and their reciprocal relations are also relevant in this context.

The 2011 parliamentary election resulted in an overwhelming triumph for a populist party called the True Finns (in Finnish: *Perussuomalaiset*) that gained almost one fifth of the vote. Their election program echoes the Fennoman nationalist ideology in its understanding of the Finnish nation. In the program, the party also wants to abolish the

status of Swedish language as a mandatory school subject and to remove the test of Swedish language from the university degree. After lengthy government forming negotiations, the party decided to remain in the opposition.

There are many signs of continuity in the contemporary debate that reflect the 19th century definitions of the national community, ideas about the different roles of the nation in the world and perceptions of proper patriotic behavior. The liberal and romantic notions of a nation are still fighting for that place in the hearts and minds of the Finnish population. Language is not merely of instrumental value, it is also considered an important constituent for individual and collective identities.

However, one cannot help thinking that the current language policy debate is also slightly anachronistic and detached from the social reality. Most contributors in this discussion still seem to think that Finnish society is made of two language communities and that all people would be either Finnish-speaking or Swedish-speaking. However, contemporary Finland is genuinely multilingual, and several of the new linguistic communities are larger than many old minorities. Furthermore, an increasing number of Finns are rather bilingual if not multilingual, than unilingual. It cannot therefore be taken for granted anymore which language community people identify themselves with. Therefore, proficient solutions for today's language policy challenges probably require a profound revision of the traditional mindsets.

References

- Alapuro, Risto. 1997. *Suomen älymystö Venäjän varjossa*. Tammi 1997, Helsinki.
- Geber, Erik. 2010. *Den obligatoriska svenskan*. Helsinki: Magma.
- Hämäläinen, Pekka Kalevi 1968. *Kielitaistelu Suomessa 1917–1939*. Porvoo: W. Söderström.
- Jussila, Osmo, Hentilä, Seppo, and Nevakivi, Jukka. 1999. *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland since 1809*. London: C. Hurst & Co.
- Kielilakikomitea 2000. 2000. *Kansalliskielten historiallinen, kulttuurinen ja sosiologinen tausta: työryhmämuistio*. Helsinki: Oikeusministeriö.
[Http://www.om.fi/uploads/zye6d9qeom5.pdf](http://www.om.fi/uploads/zye6d9qeom5.pdf)
- Koenis, Sjaak and Saukkonen, Pasi. 2006. The Political Organisation of Cultural Difference. *Finnish Journal of Ethnicity and Migration* 1(1): 4–14.
- McRae, Kenneth D. 1999. *Conflict and Compromise in Multilingual Societies: Finland*. Helsinki and Waterloo (CA): The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters and Wilfried Laurier University Press.
- Puntila, L.A. 1944. *Suomen ruotsalaisuuden liikkeen synty: aatehistoriallinen tutkimus*. Helsinki: Otava.
- Topelius, Zacharias. 1982. *Maamme kirja*. Porvoo: WSOY.
- Saukkonen, Pasi. 1999. *Suomi, Alankomaat ja kansallisvaltion identiteettipolitiikka*. Helsinki: SKS.
- Saukkonen, Pasi. 2003. The Political Organisation of Difference. *Finnish Yearbook of Political Thought* 2003 7(1): 113–138.
- Saukkonen, Pasi. 2010. *Mikä suomenruotsalaisissa ärsyttää? – selvitys mediakeskustelusta Suomessa*. Helsinki: Magma.
- Wiberg, Matti and Karlsson, Fred. Ruotsin kielen käyttöala supistuu Suomessa. *Kanava* 2010, 38(5): 14–18.