

## SWEDISH-SPEAKING FINNS IN FINLAND: LINGUISTIC MINORITY WITH LEGAL POSITION

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## ШВЕДОМОВНІ ФІНИ У ФІНЛЯНДІЇ: ЛІНГВІСТИЧНА МЕНШИНА ІЗ ЗАКОННИМ СТАТУСОМ

Шведомовне населення Фінляндії складає абсолютну меншість: на приблизно 4,8 мільйона фіномовних припадає трохи менше 0,3 мільйона шведомовних. Не дивлячись на це, в Конституції Фінляндії фінська і шведська мови визначені як державні. Це має корені в історії і походить з тих часів, коли Фінляндія була частиною Швеції.

Становище шведської мови у Фінляндії час від часу викликає дискусії, наприклад, проблеми вивчення у школах шведської і фінської мов, витрати на забезпечення двомовності всіх державних установ і закладів громадського користування. З іншого боку, статус меншини згуртовує шведомовне населення. Воно має власні традиції і відчуває важливість збереження своєї мови.

In Finland there are two linguistic minorities, which have been specially taken account of legislation: Lappish-speaking and Swedish-speaking. Lappish has a special position only in the north<sup>1</sup>, but Swedish all over the country. In the year 2003, there were about 4,8 million Finnish-speaking people and little less than 0,3 million Swedish-speaking in Finland. The third biggest group was Russian-speakers (about 35 000 people)<sup>2</sup>. Only about 1500 people spoke Lappish as a mother tongue<sup>3</sup>. That was less than Estonian (almost 6000 people), Vietnamese, Arabic and Somali (each about 2000 people) in the year 1993<sup>4</sup>.

Actually, Swedish is not legally a minority at all: in the constitution of Finland both Finnish and Swedish have determined as official languages of the country<sup>5</sup>. According to the law of languages, a municipality will regard as bilingual, if at least eight per cent or 3000 people of the habitants speak a minority language (Swedish or Finnish) as their mother tongue. The situation will be controlled every tenth year. In a bilingual municipality, if the number of the minority is under 3 000 habitants and their proportion has declined under six per cent, the locality will define monolingual<sup>6</sup>. In Finland, 82 % of the municipalities are bilingual, only Swedish-speaking municipalities there are 13,6 % and only Finnish-speaking municipalities 4,4 %<sup>7</sup>. Most of Swedish-speaking people live in the coastal district of the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Bothnia<sup>8</sup>.

In Finland there is one part of the country, which is legally monolingual simply and purely. The province of Åland (in Finnish Ahvenanmaa) has self-government, and the official language in civil service department and all institutions is Swedish. All legal provisions of Finland don't relate to inhabitants of Åland, for example the liability to military service. People with all legal rights in Åland must have the specific *right of domicile* in the Åland Islands<sup>9</sup>.

## About history and origins of Swedish-speaking Finns

In Åland, there have been found Swedish-type archaeological findings from 500 AD. Christianity came to Åland perhaps as early as in 11th century, and with it came new inhabitants from Sweden. In 12th century Swedish-speaking settlement spread from Åland to the archipelago of Turku and from there to the mainland. In 13th and 14th century the emigrants were given tax concessions and other benefits. (They weren't really emigrants, because at that time Finland was part of Sweden, Sweden's backwoods.) A lot of Swedish-speaking immigrants came to the coastal areas of the Gulf of Bothnia and the Gulf of Finland. Some of them went on over the Gulf of Finland and settled in Estonia<sup>10</sup>.

Because Finland was a part of the kingdom of Sweden until the year 1809, the language of administration and education was Swedish. State officials, priests and all "better folk" were Swedish-speaking. Finnish was the language for the uncultured masses only. In the time of national awakening, the position of Finnish language became very important. From the half of 1800's, there was dispute over languages, which continued until Finland became independence, when both Swedish and Finnish were written into basic law as official languages.

The amount of Swedish-speaking people has enlarged until 1940's, then there were 354 000 Swedish-speaking. Nowadays, the amount of persons speaking Swedish as their mother tongue is the same as in 1880's and it is still decreasing<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, Swedish-speaking schools have usually some more pupils than official amount of Swedish-speaking children in the area<sup>12</sup>. In bilingual families (where mother and father has different mother tongue) the mother tongue of children can be Finnish or Swedish according to the advert of the parents. Parents can still choose the school of their children, if in the area there are various schools. So officially Finnish-speaking children can attend Swedish-speaking schools and vice versa. The identity of Finnish-Swedes and the belonging to this group can be chosen in some level and in some circumstances.

### Majority vs. minority

In Finland, there can be seen negative attitudes towards Swedish-speaking people. Every now and then in newspapers are letters to the editor with relation to this. Very often are discussed privileges of Swedish-speaking people and their exceedingly power and high positions in the political, cultural and economical life of Finland. Some writers compare the positions of Finland's Swedish-speaking and Sweden's Finnish-speaking: "why we are giving all possible benefits and rights to Swedish-speaking people, when in the same time in Sweden the position of Finnish-speaking people is so much worse"<sup>13</sup>. It is also quite expensive to use two languages in all municipal functioning. Quite often are mentioned expensive TV-programs made for small minority<sup>14</sup>.

The discussion about languages has also sometimes got quite humorous features. For example the use-by dates were in some Swedish-speaking parishes printed in Swedish side of the cartons of milk. Some Finnish-speaking people claimed in newspapers in their letters to the editor, that Swedish-speaking people are favoured again: for Finnish-speaking people old milk is good enough<sup>15</sup>.

Most of all has been discussed on the fact, that every child in Finland has to learn Swedish. Many of the speakers underlined that they don't have anything against Swedish, but it should be optional, not obligatory, and for many children it would be much more useful to learn other languages than Swedish<sup>16</sup>. Language is also an important symbol of nation. ("One nation, one language.") Finnish-speakers can be seen as real Finns, while Swedish-speaking people are something else, "Others". Official bilingualism is even seen a survival of the "colonisation" of Sweden<sup>17</sup>. In the attitudes of youngsters, speaking Swedish was sometimes connected with the lack of patriotism<sup>18</sup>.

### Social capital

In Åland, the people are very healthy and long-life. Implied life expectations for men are 74,9 years and for women even 82,5 years. These life expectations for women are among the longest of the world<sup>19</sup>. In East Bothnia, where live both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking people, the Swedish-speaking people live longer and stay more healthy than their Finnish-speaking neighbours<sup>20</sup>.

The natural environment of the islands of Åland is quite barren, and the life has not been very easy. In East Bothnia the social structure is quite the same in both Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking groups. Why can those people, inhabitants of Åland and Swedish-speaking in East Bothnia, live longer and stay healthier than other people in Finland? There has advanced a proposal, that the explanation of the healthy and long life of the people of Åland is based on social environment<sup>21</sup>. People of Åland feel to be very equal, and they have strong confidence in the backing of the society in every situations of life<sup>22</sup>. The Swedish-speaking people in East Bothnia identify themselves with language and home district much more than Finnish-speaking people of the same area or Swedish-speaking people in the metropolitan area<sup>23</sup>. Today the identity has been seen very positive, and lack of it is negative. It's important that one knows who is and feels to belong somewhere. Without that, one is rootless. Missing feeling of relations has been seen as an explanation for many kinds of drastic phenomena, like neo-nazism<sup>24</sup>.

### Swedish-speaking identity and ethnic symbols

Most Swedish-speaking Finns identify themselves both with Swedish language and the citizenship of Finland. An exception of this is the people living in Åland; they have quite strong connections to Sweden<sup>25</sup>. According to the opinion of Finnish-Swedes, Finnish-speaking people don't like to speak Swedish and don't want to learn it<sup>26</sup>, so Swedish-speaking people have to speak Finnish with them. Likewise Finnish-speaking pupils have to learn Swedish at school, Swedish-speaking have to learn Finnish. Knowing Swedish makes things easier also in Scandinavia, but Finnish is not very useful outside Finland.

There can be seen four dimensions of the identity of Swedish-speaking Finns. The oldest dimension can be called territorial-lingual dimension, which included clearly defined areas of Swedish language and Swedish-speaking people. The second is political-lingual dimension. A concrete manifestation of that dimension was the establishment of a political party of Swedish-speaking people. Third dimension is called social-cultural-lingual, which is emphasised by Swedish institutions as university<sup>27</sup>, Swedish theatres and newspapers, bishopric<sup>28</sup>, and Swedish-language branches in National Board of Education as well as in radio and television. In ethnic-lingual dimension Swedish-speaking identify themselves Finns, whose ancestors have come from Sweden. This group is quite heterogeneous; the only shared thing connecting people is the language<sup>29</sup>.

Swedish-speaking Finns have some ethnical symbols of their own. Perhaps the most important ones are rustic style wedding, Midsummer pole, national costume, and celebrating the day of Santa Lucia<sup>30</sup>.

The Midsummer pole is a 15 – 20 meter high pole often with two or tree crossbars. It is decorated with flowers, leaves, garlands and banners. It is usually made and erected in every village by each village community. The building of Midsummer pole is an old Swedish custom, which was known among the Swedish-speaking inhabitants of coastal area in the early 1800's and it was very common in the end of 1800's<sup>31</sup>. It become the symbol of Swedish in 1907, when an Åland-like Midsummer pole was erected in the outdoor museum of Seurasaari in Helsinki<sup>32</sup>.

The day of Santa Lucia is on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December. It's an old custom from Catholic time. Among Finnish-Swedes it has been celebrated at least in the middle of 1800's. It was at first celebrated in homes, where the daughter was Lucia and served other people buns early in the morning. In schools there was a Lucia-procession: a young white-dressed girl appears as Lucia with a candle-crown on her head, walking and singing with a group of other girls. Little by little this habit has become more and more official. At present, the greatest Swedish-language newspaper of Finland arranges a competition every year to find the most beautiful Lucia<sup>33</sup>.

The day of Santa Lucia is the most common feast day for the Finnish-Swedes. Other special feast days of Swedish-speaking Finns are the Swedish Day (6.11.), Day of Runeberg (5.2.) and the Independence Day (6.12.). (The Independence Day is one of those national feast days, when Swedish-speaking people are noticed officially.)<sup>34</sup>. Finnish-speaking people has acquired some of these habits from Swedish-speaking: the Midsummer pole is nowadays quite common also as a decoration of summer festivals of Finnish-speaking people, likewise the celebrating the day of Santa Lucia has spread in Finnish-language schools.

## For the end

Both Sweden and Russia have ruled Finland in history. Perhaps that is the reason why Finnish are suspicious and prejudiced against Sweden and Swedish almost as much as against Russia and Russian. In the history of Finland, state officials, priests and all “better folk” were Swedish-speaking for hundred of years.

Today there are little over 290 000 persons (5,5 % of the population) having Swedish as their mother tongue in Finland, but Swedish is the other of official languages in Finland along with Finnish. Most Swedish-speaking Finns identify themselves both with Swedish language and the citizenship of Finland. The attitudes between Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking Finns are ambiguous. Every now and then complainings about the position of Swedish language take place in Finnish newspapers. On the other hand Swedish is also seen as enrichment for the culture of Finland.

<sup>1</sup> Lappish has a special position only in four municipalities of Northern Finland: Enontekiö, Inari, Sodankylä and Utsjoki. (Law of Lappish language.)

<sup>2</sup> Statistic Finland. <http://www.tilastokeskus.fi/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *Kieli ja sen kieliopit*. 1994. Opetusministeriö, Helsinki. – P. 238.

<sup>5</sup> The constitution of Finland. *Suomen perustuslaki*. 2000. 17§.

<sup>6</sup> Law of language. Kielilaki 6.6.2003/423. <http://www.finlex.fi/lains/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Finnäs, Fjalar 2004: *Finlandsvenskarna 2002. En statistisk rapport*. Folktinget, Helsingfors. – P. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. – P. 7–8.

<sup>9</sup> Law of the self-government of Åland. Åhvenanmaan itsehallintolaki 16.8.1991/1144. <http://www.finlex.fi/lains/index.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Lönnqvist, Bo 1981: *Suomenruotsalaiset*. Gummerus, Jyväskylä. – P. 35–47.

<sup>11</sup> Finnäs, Fjalar 2004: *Finlandsvenskarna 2002. En statistisk rapport*. Folktinget, Helsingfors. – P. 7–8.

<sup>12</sup> Finnäs, Fjalar 1990: *Barnens språk i tvåspråkiga familjer och valet av skolspråk*. Institutet för finlandsvensk samhällsforskning, Åsa. – P. 17.

<sup>13</sup> There are lots of Finnish immigrants in Sweden.

<sup>14</sup> Herberts, Kjell 1988: *“Detta svenkatarlande bättre folk...” En dokumenterande innehållsanalys av språkdebatter i finsk huvudstadsperr under åren 1984 – 1988*. Institutet för finlandsvensk samhällsforskning, Åsa. – P. 15–18.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. – P. 28–29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. – P. 36–40.

<sup>17</sup> Anttonen, Pertti J. 2000: Cultural Homogeneity and the National Unification of a Political Community. In Pertti J. Anttonen (ed.) *Folklore, Heritage Politics and Ethnic Diversity*. Multicultural Centre, Botkyrka. – P. 263.

<sup>18</sup> The study of patriotism, tolerance and ethnic prejudices was made among ninth-formers in four Finnish comparative schools. Virrankoski 2001, 50–57.

<sup>19</sup> Hyyppä, Markku T. 2002: *Elinvoimaa yhteisöstä. Sosiaalinen pääoma ja terveys*. Ps-kustannus, Jyväskylä. – P. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. – P. 104–108.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. – P. 81–85.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. – P. 83.

<sup>23</sup> Hyyppä, Markku T. 2002: *Elinvoimaa yhteisöstä. Sosiaalinen pääoma ja terveys*. Ps-kustannus, Jyväskylä. – P. 117; Sundback, Susan 1995: Att vara tillsammans. Ideel finlandsvensk gemenskap I

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Esbo, Helsingfors, Korsholm och Vasa. In Krister Ståhlberg (ed.) *Finlandssvensk identitet och kultur*. Åbo Akademi, Åbo. – P. 115.

<sup>24</sup> Wolf-Knuts, Ulrika 1995: Den mångbottnade identiteten. In Krister Ståhlberg (ed.) *Finlandssvensk identitet och kultur*. Åbo Akademi, Åbo. – P. 2–3.

<sup>25</sup> Sandberg, Siv 1995: Språkbeteende, språkmiljö och identitet. In Krister Ståhlberg (ed.) *Finlandssvensk identitet och kultur*. Åbo Akademi, Åbo. – P. 77–78.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. – P. 96.

<sup>27</sup> The Swedish-language university Åbo Akademi (1918).

<sup>28</sup> The Swedish-language bishopric of Porvoo (1923).

<sup>29</sup> Lönnqvist, Bo 1981: *Suomenruotsalaiset*. Gummerus, Jyväskylä. – P. 142–143.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. – P. 146.

<sup>31</sup> Database of Åland. Ålands bibliotek. <http://www.mhbibl.aland.fi/alandica/>

<sup>32</sup> Lönnqvist, Bo 1981: *Suomenruotsalaiset*. Gummerus, Jyväskylä. – P. 147–148.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. – P. 148–149.

<sup>34</sup> Sundback, Susan 1995: Att vara tillsammans. Ideel finlandssvensk gemenskap i Esbo, Helsingfors, Korsholm och Vasa. In Krister Ståhlberg (ed.) *Finlandssvensk identitet och kultur*. Åbo Akademi, Åbo. – P. 122–124.