

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Ennser-Kananen, Johanna; Saarinen, Taina

Title: Challenging Constitutional Bilingualism with 'What if...' : Counterfactual Histories and At-risk Minorities in Finland

Year: 2021

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

Copyright: © 2021 Multilingual Matters

Rights: In Copyright

Rights url: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en>

Please cite the original version:

Ennser-Kananen, J., & Saarinen, T. (2021). Challenging Constitutional Bilingualism with 'What if...' : Counterfactual Histories and At-risk Minorities in Finland. In C. Cunningham, & C. J. Hall (Eds.), *Vulnerabilities, Challenges and Risks in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 81-96). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788928243-007>

6 Challenging Constitutional Bilingualism with ‘What if ...’: Counterfactual Histories and At-risk Minorities in Finland

Johanna Ennser-Kananen and Taina Saarinen

Introduction: At-risk Minorities in Different Language Policy Scenarios

This chapter analyzes language ideologies in Finnish language policy through a lens of risk. More specifically, it presents a meta-analysis of Finnish language policy spanning a 100-year period since 1917, discusses this policy against the concept of risk (Beck, 1992) and examines the implications for language minoritized groups since the establishment of Finnish constitutional bilingualism in 1919, when Finnish and Swedish were designated equal status as national languages. In our discussion we utilize the analytical tool of counterfactual histories (see Villstrand & Karonen, 2017 for a discussion), a form of historiography that attempts to answer ‘what if’ questions known as counterfactuals (Rodwell, 2013; Bunzl, 2004). Through this, we attempt to illuminate the risks of language policy for different minoritized speaker groups by presenting an alternative to the mainstream analysis and thus opening historical developments and processes for critical scrutiny from a new perspective.

At the heart of our counterfactual alternative is an imaginary constitution declaring Swedish a (regional) minority language rather than a national language, a viable scenario in the geopolitical situation of the post-independence and post-civil-war Finland of 1919 (Saarinen & Ihalainen, 2018). By discussing this counterfactual, we aim at problematizing the often assumed and self-evident language policies, particularly from the point of view of vulnerable minoritized speaker groups.

We continue by first discussing the concept of risk and the ways in which it features in language policy research, particularly in ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ frames. While doing this, we acknowledge the problematic nature of these concepts: we do not wish to essentialize or normalize majorities and minorities (see Laihonon & Halonen, 2019) and recognize that minoritizing a particular population is never a politically innocent process. When we use these concepts and terms that are common in language policies and legislation and have very material consequences, we do so with the aim of unpacking the ideologies behind them. We conclude the theoretical part of our chapter by discussing the merits of counterfactual history for our topic.

Theoretical Framework

Risk as future-oriented, partly fictional and inequitable

Risk has maybe been most prominently theorized by Ulrich Beck (e.g. 1992, 2006), who describes its nature as an anticipation of the future with an awareness of the past (see also Giddens & Pierson, 1998). Therein lies, Beck explains, also the great irony of risk:

The irony of risk here is that rationality, that is, the experience of the past, encourages anticipation of the wrong kind of risk, the one we believe we can calculate and control, whereas the disaster arises from what we do not know and cannot calculate. (Beck, 2006: 330)

The future orientation of risk as an ‘attempt to anticipate what cannot be anticipated’ (p. 329) has two important implications for this chapter: First, it invites and encourages a counterfactual approach that foregrounds untrodden paths of history to uncover new aspects and elements of risk and vulnerability. Second, it acts as a social stratifier: the ability to anticipate and minimize risk is not equally distributed. In Beck’s words, risk is a ‘socially

constructed phenomenon, in which some people have a greater capacity to define risks than others' (p. 333). Thus, Beck concludes, '[r]isk definition, essentially, is a power game' (p. 333).

Although Beck points to power as an important aspect of risk management, his understanding of risk has also left room for criticism (e.g. Mythen, 2007). For instance, Beck's binary view of 'natural' vs 'manufactured' risks, his assumption of the universality of risk, and his failure to allow for heterogeneous risk perceptions have been brought up as weak points of the theory. In this paper, we concur with Mythen's point that risk perception and avoidance are 'informed by a range of social factors including class, gender, age, ethnicity and location' (p. 800). Thus, risk and how it is perceived and addressed can serve as an indication of social inequities and as a tool to identify and initiate steps to challenge such inequities.

As indicated above, Beck's (2006) concept of risk is deeply tied to a future-oriented society and a fundamental sense of not-knowing. Consequently, risk as understood by Beck always contains an element of fiction, which may compel people and institutions to react (sometimes hastily) to a perceived risk. He explains that 'it is irrelevant whether we live in a world which is in fact or in some sense "objectively" safer than all other worlds; if destruction and disasters are anticipated, then that produces a compulsion to act' (p. 332). Whether and how such partial fictitiousness of risk can potentially create new risks is one focus point of this chapter.

Owing to these characteristics of risk – its future orientation, its partial fictionality and its potential to highlight inequality – the concept lends itself to closer consideration in language policy and planning, particularly in our particular context of nation building and the role of official languages there (Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018). Throughout the text, we

will be using language policy as an overarching concept to refer to the various, multilevel and layered activities that may include explicit legislation and planning or *de facto* ideological practices, produced intentionally or unintentionally (Johnson, 2013: 24). While the early 20th century Finnish language regulation followed the optimistic ‘problem solving’ ethos of earlier language-planning approaches of a newly founded nation state, we also acknowledge the potential of these approaches to reproduce and generate language inequalities that ultimately imply social inequalities (Tollefson 1991), thus emphasizing the political and ideological aspects of language policy.

We will next examine the assumed risks behind the current language policy situation in Finland and continue then to analyze a counterfactual situation to explore possible

Language policy literature from the perspective of risk

Language policy efforts tend to have as their declared purpose the goal of improving or maintaining a sociolinguistic situation, be it, for instance, through the creation of national or regional unity, the protection of minoritized groups or the promotion of linguistic rights and statuses. In all, the management and minimization of risks such as language loss or linguistic and societal marginalization can be described as the goal of language policy. Less often, language policies are viewed as also inducing risk. We want to explore this aspect of language policy, particularly from the perspective of minoritized language populations.

Our approach draws on existing scholarship that has analyzed and illustrated the complicated role of language planning and policies between inducing and minimizing risks and rights. For instance, Hult (2004) examined the situation of Swedish and Sweden’s five recognized minority languages and showed how languages can simultaneously be at risk and induce risk for others. The status of languages varies in different situations and when in touch with different languages, thus also affecting the dynamic between them. For instance, in our

case, both Finnish and Swedish can be construed as being both vulnerable and hegemonic in the same historical situation.

In his book *Planning Language, Planning Inequality*, Tollefson (1991) explains how language policy efforts can perpetuate social inequalities in different national contexts, for instance through insisting on linguistic standards, reinforcing linguistic hierarchies, creating linguistic barriers and dismissing or ignoring a variety of linguistic resources. Takam and Fassé (2019) give a recent example of harmful language policy making in Cameroon, where unvetted bilingual (English and French) programmes are spreading and undermining public education and standards, and, one might add, run the risk of disregarding many other languages and perpetuating colonial language ideologies.

The vulnerability or stability of a speaker community is never something fixed or stable but can change when new risks are introduced through socio-political or ideological developments. In their article, De Silva and Heller (2009) analyze a shift in discourse about minoritized languages, specifically French in Canada, from protecting rights toward providing economic opportunities, which, as they point out, goes hand in hand with a shift from welfare to neoliberalism as main paradigms. The complex relationship between minoritized languages, language policy efforts and state policy that De Silva and Heller describe, reminds us that even nationally recognized and supported minoritized languages remain in a precarious and ever-shifting situation that is subject to global trends and discourses (see also Murillo's discussion of discursive constructions of social inequalities in Chapter 3). Given that risks and vulnerabilities can be introduced or increased even unintentionally and unexpectedly, an examination of risks, especially those that lie in rarely studied alternative histories, seems justified and valuable.

Counterfactual histories as frame for language policy analysis

Counterfactual histories offer alternatives to actual historical storylines and, in our chapter, help us understand what the situation for minoritized speaker groups could have been in a different historical scenario. Such studies offer a way of looking at history through the eyes of the contemporaries as a window of several possibilities rather than an inevitable historical development from a retrospective position. As such a framework presents an alternative to the mainstream analysis, it has the potential to open up historical interpretations for critical discussion and scrutiny, make us more receptive toward historical contingencies and act as a countermeasure against historical determinism (Rodwell, 2013). The intention of such an approach is not to ‘counter facts’, but to offer plausible alternate readings of historical events and help us tease out the often-unarticulated assumptions that our historical interpretations rest on (Lebow, 2007).

A counterfactual history approach allows us to foreground cases in which the dominant and minoritized language speaker groups are positioned differently. Lebow’s example from a different context is illustrative: while the ‘corporate boardrooms and corridors of power’ in Paris, London and Washington may have been happy with the outcome of World War I, from the point of view of Polish Jews, Germany winning World War I might have led to the scenario of no Hitler and no Holocaust (Lebow, 2007). Counterfactual analysis helps us overcome traditional paths of thought and ‘zoom out, refocus and contemplate a fresh perspective’ (Wenzlhuemer, 2009: 30), or create a *Spielraum* (Wenzlhuemer, 2009: 35) where the alternate possibilities can be examined in a less constrained way.

In the historical setting this chapter is concerned with, the existence of certain events is relatively unquestioned (e.g. Finland gaining independence in the beginning of December 1917). However, the interpretations and contextualizations of those events are more open to debate and discussion. As Lebow (2007) points out, historical events are not analytically

taken for granted but analyzed against several, often conflicting data, and there is rarely any factual evidence that leaves no room for alternative analyses (see also Wenzlhuemer, 2009).

Analytically, a study on counterfactual history first identifies a potential case for scrutiny (in our chapter, the constitution with two national languages and no provision for minority languages). The role of this case in a causal chain will then be manipulated as part of a counterfactual reality (Wenzlhuemer, 2009). As limitations of this approach, Lebow (2007) mentions the statistical improbability of multistep counterfactuals, the interconnectedness of effects and counterfactuals leading to second-order counterfactuals, all of which might interfere with the logic of counterfactual realities. While we acknowledge these limitations, we believe they are outweighed by the opportunities of looking at vulnerable language minorities through a counterfactual lens.

Questioning assumptions in our history is an exercise in juxtaposing causality and correlation. In our present-day analysis, we may assume a particular development as a causal consequence of an earlier development; taking an alternative view with counterfactuals, we may find the developments coincidental and not linked to the assumed events (Wenzlhuemer, 2009). The assumption of the bilingual constitution being at the root of Finnish minority language policy can be tested by taking a counterfactual event as a starting point. If the constitution of two national languages indeed causes a particular position for minority languages, a different constitution would either lead to a different status for minority languages and speakers, or alternatively help us see that the root of the vulnerability of minoritized language status is elsewhere (see also Severo & Makoni, Chapter 2, as well as Murillo, Chapter 3, on alternative epistemologies in discussing vulnerable groups).

Policies that have established or supported constitutional bilingualism have gone hand in hand with the discourse of protecting Finnish and Swedish. Counter to this master

narrative, we explore whether and how this effort has caused other languages, such as Sámi languages, Roma, Karelian or Sign Languages, to be at risk, or added to their at-risk status. What if Finland's language policy makers had anticipated different risks? What risks did they not see? (How) would Finland's language policy landscape differ from that of today if they had seen them? What other blind spots might that, in turn, have created?

We answer the questions by conducting a meta-analysis of existing literature and expanding on existing literature on historical language policy. Our data is thus primarily existing research literature on Finnish language policies from which we construct the counterfactual history of Swedish as a minority language.

The 1919 Constitution with Two National Languages and the Position of Minorities

Finland was part of the kingdom of Sweden from the late 13th century until 1809 and a Grand Duchy under the Russian Empire between 1809 and 1917. During the Swedish reign, developments in the Lutheran Church and the need to develop local administration led to gradual strengthening of the Finnish language alongside Swedish in the 17th and 18th centuries, amplified by Herderian, national romantic nation-building efforts in the 19th century. Finland's formal legislative bilingualism was slowly established during the late 19th century, first in municipal administration and then gradually in education and state administration. For a while, between 1902 and 1917, Finland was even administratively trilingual (Finnish–Swedish–Russian), for example, with compulsory Russian being taught at schools. However, the role of Russian language remained small, and the two-decade-long Russification of the society ended with independence (Engman, 2016; Ihalainen *et al.*, 2019).

After independence in late 1917 and following the Civil War of 1918, Finland became a republic with the first bilingual (Finnish–Swedish) constitution taking effect in 1919. In the first constitution and the consequent 1922 Language Act, the two languages were positioned

as equal national languages, with no mention of other linguistic or ethnic minorities. The first constitution, as well as the renewed one of 1999/2000 did, however, represent a monoglot ideology (Silverstein, 1996), stressing individual monolingualism (assuming first languages to be ‘either Finnish or Swedish’), combined with administrative practices allowing the registration of only one so-called mother tongue for individuals. In that sense, the Finnish constitution still today combines state bilingualism with individual monolingualism.

The solution of two equal national languages has often been described both as ‘model bilingualism’ and as problematic (for a discussion, see Salo, 2012), applauded and criticized for giving a minority of less than 10% a legislative status beyond the share of the population.

Constitutional debate 1919

The decision on a constitution with two national languages took place in the intersection of various political debates, highlighting the fact that ‘language’ emerged as proxy for different policies (Engman, 2016; Saarinen & Ihalainen, 2018). Discourses on language and ethnicity, economic and political class distinctions, and certain active politicians came together in the parliamentary debate (Saarinen & Ihalainen, 2018), which was further contextualized by the bloody and traumatic civil war that took place immediately after independence in the spring of 1918. Class conflict relating to population growth, industrialization and the rise of a labor movement also unearthed some of the social tensions between different language groups, which were then reflected in the polarized political discourses between the ‘elites’ and ‘common people’ (Saarinen & Ihalainen, 2018).

A larger backdrop to the constitutional debate was provided by international developments during and after World War I. After the civil war, the monarchist rump parliament (the Social Democrats as the losing party had been excluded) declared Finland a monarchy, selecting the German Prince Friedrich Karl of Hesse as its first king in October

1918. However, after Germany's defeat in World War I and Karl Friedrich stepping down, negotiations for a republican constitution resumed in 1919. In these debates, the mainly monarchist Swedish People's Party's support was sought by proposing a constitution with two national languages as well as other language regulations (Ihalainen, 2017).

From a language ideological viewpoint, the bilingual constitution was also in part an outcome of the 19th-century nationalistic discourses idealizing the connection between a language and a political unit (Hobsbawm 1992). This ideology manifested itself in the debates as the dominant discourse of 'two languages, one nation', and the alternative discourses of 'two languages, two nations' and 'one language, one nation'. For the Swedish MPs, the bilingual proposal was, while not completely satisfactory, still acceptable as a protection of minority rights, as witnessed by a turn in the debate by Swedish People Party's MP Georg von Wendt on 3 June 1919. Finnish MPs, in turn, saw the legislation that guaranteed equal rights to the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking communities as making sure the 'eternal complaining about the supposed oppression of the Swedish speakers would finally end', as Mikko Erich, MP for the conservative National Coalition Party, declared (3 June 1919). The proposal was first overturned in mid-June 1919 but accepted a week later, and without the Swedish votes in the end (Saarinen & Ihalainen, 2018).

From the perspective of anticipated risks, for proponents of Finnish, the risk was that to the unity and stability of a new state and potential international damage to the newly independent country's reputation. Swedish speakers were accused of separatism (Saarinen & Ihalainen, 2018) and of harming Finland's reputation internationally. For the proponents of Swedish, in turn, the expected risk was that of being in a minority position, without adequate protection for the rights of the Swedish language population (Engman, 2016).

The debates of two nations took place until World War II (Meinander, 2016: 30–31), but after that, with the comprehensive school reform in 1960s, the focus of the debate turned on the position of Swedish as a compulsory language in education. The national language status of Finnish and Swedish did not fundamentally change in the renewed current (1999) constitution, while political institutions were essentially unaware or ignorant of Indigenous and autochthonous minorities in the first decades of independence.

Minorities and the 1919 constitution

The constitutional debate of 1919 focused completely on Finnish and Swedish; no mention of other languages took place. Ideologically, both the representatives of Swedish and Finnish speakers referred to Swedish as a minority language, but with very different undertones. In other words, a minority legislative status for Swedish was not discussed in the constitutional debate, but the debate on the bilingual constitution revolved around the rights of the Swedish-speaking minority population. Thus, the constitution can be seen as a set of minority provisions intended to secure parliamentary and societal normalcy after a crisis (Saarinen & Ihalainen, 2018).

On occasion, Finnish was also construed as a regional minority language, interestingly mixing the question of hegemonic minorities and majorities and making visible the possibilities of differing dynamics in the situation. Both the debate on administrative regions and the final version of the regional administration paragraph included a direction that referred to both Finnish and Swedish in minority terms. The outcome also regulated that administrative regions should be, when possible, monolingually Finnish- or Swedish-speaking, and that minority populations in bilingual areas should be as small as possible. In other words, even if these minorities (Finnish and Swedish) were eagerly discussed, the aim was to promote as much administrative monolingualism as possible.

Minority languages, specifically Sámi, Romani, Sign Language and Karelian, began to receive formal recognition only in the 1990s. Sámi, Romani and Sign languages were added to the Constitution in an amendment in 1995 and kept in similar form in the renewed Constitution of 1999. Additionally, Karelian was named as a minority language in 2009 following the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of 1992, a status which has no legislative but rather a symbolic effect in Finland. All of the above are generally referred to as ‘minority languages’, although their status is based on different arguments, and Finnish legislation does not as such include minority provisions. The three Sámi languages spoken in Finland derive their rights from their Indigenous status. Romani is mentioned in the constitution among ‘other groups’ who are granted the right to maintain their language and culture, and Sign Language rights are derived from their users’ disability rights, rather than referring to individual Finnish or Swedish Sign Languages. The Sámi Language Act was accepted in 2003 and the Sign Language Act in 2015. However, the position of minority languages, particularly the Romani and Karelian language as well as some Sámi languages, remains vulnerable, with little support and low status within education. For further reading on Indigenous rights, see Murillo (Chapter 3), and on sign language rights see Conama (Chapter 4) and Snoddon and Wilkinson (Chapter 8).

The Counterfactual Constitution and At-risk Minorities

A potential counterfactual: Swedish as minority language

How then, would a counterfactual constitution have taken shape and what would it have looked like? As Lebow (2007: 156–157) points out, ‘every good counterfactual (...) rests on multiple “factuals”, just as every factual rests on counterfactual assumptions – and these assumptions too often go unexamined’. The outcome of the bilingual constitutional

debate was tied in many ways to the outcome of World War I. Had Germany emerged as winner, the German Prince Friedrich Karl of Hesse may have become king under the monarchist constitution. This would have rendered obsolete the recognition of Swedish as a national language, the trade-off for a republican constitution with the Swedish People's Party.

Already prior to independence and immediately after its declaration, strong opinions existed in the parliament and media both about making Finnish the only official language and about granting Swedish a minority status (Engman 2016; Saarinen & Ihalainen 2018). As the language of the political elites and education, an equal position was the political goal for Swedish until 1906, when the change in the electoral system and universal suffrage replaced the old estates system that had favored the Swedish population with education and capital (Engman, 2016: 365–367). From then on, the Swedish speakers went from requiring an equal position toward considering a minority position, or even a regional minority position (Ihalainen *et al.*, 2019; also Engman, 2016). Thus, a regional minority status for Sweden would have been a viable counterfactual.

A minority status for Swedish would also have been in line with developments in Central and Eastern Europe after World War I. According to Ruiz Vieitez (2001: 10–11), the first international treaties protecting minority languages were drafted after World War I, with the newly founded League of Nations monitoring the situations. The position of Swedish in Finland was brought to the attention of the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, much to the irritation of several Finnish language advocates (members of a nationalist movement named Fennomans, as opposed to the Swedish language activists or Swekomans) who found the development problematic.

Legislation that protects linguistic minorities is relatively new in Europe, starting with (often religious) minority provisions in the Congress of Westphalia in the early 17th century

and continuing with international treaties in early 19th century on the protection of ethnic minorities. While these treaties rarely mentioned languages except by implication, the early 20th century Paris Peace Treaty provisions explicitly considered linguistic minorities (Ruiz Vieyetz, 2001). International protection of Central and Eastern European minorities was set up to be monitored by the newly established League of Nations, and the position of Swedish might have followed these (often territorial) minority provisions. The Swedish Assembly of Finland Folktinget which had been founded in 1919 to represent Swedish speakers in Finland would have developed from a consultative into a regional legislature for the Swedish region.

Thus, the position of Swedish might have been organized much along the lines of developments in the other new states of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (Fink, 1995). Swedish speakers might have been supported by Sweden (which had already taken part in the real-life dispute over the status of Åland Islands between Finland and Sweden), much as Germany appeared as the protector of German speakers in other European countries (Mazower, 1997) or Russia of the present-day Russian diaspora (Lähteenmäki & Pöyhönen, 2015).

Minority languages in the counterfactual scenario

It seems, however, that less well organized autochthonous or Indigenous minorities did not get the same kind of attention after World War I as more established languages. Also in Finland, languages like Sámi and Karelian did not have nationally or internationally recognized institutions or status, but they nonetheless had different situations, as did Russian, our third example.

Lehtola (2012) describes the Sámi history around the turn of the 20th century extensively. The multilayeredness of Sámi society, dealing with questions of livelihood and landowning as well as the linguistic and cultural aspects, points to alternative historical

outcomes, had the Swedish counterfactual minority position opened a door for a different kind of Sámi policy.

The Finnish way of handling Sámi affairs seemed to be that of passive oppression, i.e. ignoring their needs while focusing on the whole population, as opposed to more actively oppressive measures in Sweden and Norway (Lehtola 2012: 16–17). This passivity gave some room for activities promoting Sámi rights. There were bilingual Finnish–Sámi practices in schools in the early 20th century as well as some political organization (Lehtola, 2012), and although from the end of the 19th century, Nordic administrations tightened their hold of the Sámi areas, there was increasing political activity in the first decades of the 20th century together with an increasing Sámi population. The first inter-Scandinavian Sámi conference was organized in February 1917, demanding several practical actions to improve the education of civil servants and clergy, as well as to enable Sámi representation in the parliaments (Lehtola, 2012: 193).

Thus, there is some potential for a Sámi national awakening that could have led to a more explicit status for the minority. With Sámi, anticipation of danger to national security and unity was smaller than with Russian or Karelian minorities, who lived closer to the potentially volatile Soviet Russian border (Lehtola, 2012). However, recognition as a regional minority language would have required strong intergovernmental cooperation between the Nordic states, and the Sámi issue was neither a priority for them at that point, nor did the Sámi push for regional autonomy (Lehtola, 2012).

It could be speculated that had Sámi been granted minority status, there might have been more push for a Sámi nation across the Cap of the North. Had this happened, it is possible that Sámi assimilation would not have taken place after World War II to the extent that it did. However, post-war foreign policy developments, combined with population

transfers between countries to ensure homogenous populations, might nevertheless have caused a push toward an assimilation policy of the Sámi after World War II regardless of a minority status, were the institutions not strong enough. It is thus debatable whether the counterfactual outcome by the 1990s would have been much different from the historical one.

Had the Civil War not broken out in 1918, there might have been less pressure on the national unity front, giving more space to more established minorities like the Sámi and perhaps Russian speakers. While some of the arguments used for supporting the position of Swedish in Finland would also apply to Russian (e.g. a long common history), Russian has traditionally been construed as a threat for several reasons (for a discussion, see Lähteenmäki & Vanhanen-Aniszewski, 2012 and Lähteenmäki & Pöyhönen, 2015). Part of this is due to a historical representation of Russia as a primordial enemy. Interestingly, in an analysis of name changes in the Helsinki Jewish community in the 1930s, Ekholm and Muir (2016) argue that Jewish names were changed not only because of antisemitism but also because of Russophobia and anti-Bolshevism. As the Fennified names in the Jewish community were generally associated with Russia and Russian language, name changing ultimately served as avoiding belonging to multiple minorities, i.e. Swedish-speaking Jews with Russian names. This example illustrates the fluidities and complexities of minority group belonging and the multiple sources of vulnerabilities behind it.

Another explanation concerns events closer to independence. The first and second periods of Russification between 1899–1905 and 1901–1917, i.e. Russian governmental policies of limiting the autonomous position of the Grand Duchy of Finland, were still fresh in the memory of Finnish people. In addition, the Soviet threat was deliberately propagated to create fear of communism before and during the Civil War (Lähteenmäki & Pöyhönen, 2015; Lähteenmäki & Vanhanen-Aniszewski, 2012). Thus, the prevailing image of a ‘Russian threat’ stood in the way of recognition of Russian and its speakers.

Karelian only received formal recognition as a minority language in 2009, when Finland added it to the languages protected by the European Charter. Before that, Karelians were mostly viewed as Finns by Finnish institutions and policies, making Karelian invisible in Finnish education, culture and political life. As opposed to Sámi, Karelian educational systems were already assimilated into Finnish and Russian ones at the beginning of the 20th century (Sarhimaa, 2017). An additional obstacle for the Karelian community was their diaspora situation, as the population was somewhat split in 1809 between Russia and the Grand Duchy of Finland, and more effectively in 1920 in the Tartu Treaty between Finland and Soviet Russia. Teaching in Karelian might have been possible in the mid-19th century on the basis of the 1866 education act, but lack of organization and Karelian activists prevented this from happening (Sarhimaa, 2017). In this, Karelians differ from the Sámi, who had at least some access to Sámi language education, albeit sporadic and dependent on local clerics and the availability of teachers (Lehtola, 2012). As for Karelian, the linguistic and societal activism of early 20th century led toward a Finnish nationalist rather than Karelian orientation, leading to a diminishing institutional position of Karelian (Sarhimaa, 2017: 104–110). Thus, the position of Karelian, compared with that of Sámi, was less secure both linguistically and institutionally and thus would have probably remained marginalized.

One tiny opportunity for minority languages to gain traction may have been the formulation in the Education Act of 1921, which talked about the pupils' language of tuition choice as being the language that the child 'either exclusively or best knows'. This is an exceptional conceptualization in Finnish language legislation as it indicates the possibility of individual bi- or multilingualism instead of the individual monolingualism of 'either Finnish or Swedish' implied elsewhere in legislation. Had this formulation transferred into the language policy, and had Sámi, Karelian or Russian been declared a minority language, minority populations would have had legal ground to claim their right to use their languages

at school more extensively and systematically. However, this is an unlikely scenario, as the wording was probably read (and intended) to refer to Finnish and Swedish as they were discussed in the constitutional debate.

Whose risks matter in minority language legislation?

The hegemonic narrative of 1919 was largely that of a new bilingual nation in need of constitutional legislation that protects the national languages, which were being depicted as vulnerable. Finnish and Swedish occupied the center stage until the 1990s. The discussion of risks and vulnerabilities until the end of the 20th century mostly focused on these two languages. In other words, the languages with the most solid societal status ended up being most protected, at the cost for languages that did not and still do not possess the societal status that Swedish had at the turn of the 20th century.

The counterfactual narrative would have been to constitutionally recognize other national minorities and languages, such as Sámi, Russian and Karelian. With several languages having minority status, Finland would have looked very different with regional autonomous areas in Western, Northern and Eastern Finland. However, even our counterfactual consideration of (a few) minoritized speaker groups in Finland does not even begin to address how migrant languages might and should factor into this equation. With the absence of historical (documented or recognized) presence, their status remains the most vulnerable.

One sobering interpretation of our analysis is that language policy efforts are rather likely to perpetuate privilege to some degree. Thus, in order to even be considered for language planning and support, linguistic groups need to have gained some visibility and agency and have become part of the discourse. Differently put, those whose language are most endangered are most likely not to have a seat at the table, which further increases their

marginalization. In our case, Swedish and for instance Karelian were in completely different situations in our counterfactual 1919 constitutional debates. This, of course, is related to questions of legitimacy in methodology and epistemology, but also of policy making: how do we know who is at risk? Who decides? Who is being heard and by whom?

Secondly, the position of minority languages is legally regulated from the language perspective, while it is the social, political, cultural and economic status of not the language itself but its speakers that ultimately has an effect on how the language has been positioned. Looking at our three sample minority languages of Sámi, Karelian and Russian, this is clear. Sámi, while having fewer speakers than Karelian, seems to have had at least a marginal economic status and political institutions at the turn of the 20th century, with active assimilation policies starting more pronouncedly only after World War II. The Karelian speakers, in turn, were actively assimilated either into the Russian or Finnish educational and societal institutions, with no formal political representation. Russian might have had the economic, educational and social status, but was politically considered a threat. The status and position of none of these minorities can be explained by the number of speakers alone. Consequently, the fact that looking beyond minorities as numbers is paramount is one lesson to learn from our analysis.

Thirdly, it seems that international legislation has worked to provide some attention and protection to linguistic minorities. Despite differences in practices in the post-World War I League of Nations policy and the approach promoted by the European Council, it needs to be recognized that these policies made many minority populations and languages (more) visible, first as collectives and later from an individual human rights perspective.

In order for such positive initiatives not to run into risks, language policy makers are called to engage in constant self-reflective processes. Attention to multiple contexts can

mitigate the risk of pushing populations to a legal or social offside, and self-reflection has to have as its aim to minimize our social, political, linguistic and cultural blind spots. Maybe it is time that language policy makers and influencers learn to routinely ask questions in Beck's (2006) sense, such as: what future are we not imagining? What risk are we not anticipating?

It is further crucial to recognize that hegemonies are not stable, monodirectional or fixed. In the hegemonic narrative, those at risk today can exert risk for others tomorrow or be presented in this way. Close and critical attention to discourses in the media and in academic and political contexts is needed to understand the intricacies of multidirectional and contextually shaped risk and to discern, for instance, populist overstatements of risks from situations that demand language policy intervention and support.

Conclusion

Seen through a counterfactual lens, one might come to the conclusion that minoritized languages of populations that may be white or non-white, European or non-European, and Indigenous, autochthonous or migration based, would have been disenfranchised in Finland regardless of the status of Swedish in Finland. Even a minority provision for Swedish in the 1919 constitution might not have made a significant difference to new minority languages in Finland.

However, a counterfactual perspective can compel us to look beyond language toward the speakers of the language and consider factors such as race, ethnicity, class, culture and others that impact our language policy foci and risk discourses consciously or subconsciously. Raising such issues requires the acknowledgment of the vulnerability of minoritized individuals and populations, which in turn forces scholars of a social majority (such as us, the authors of this chapter) to acknowledge our privileged positions and become aware of hegemonic processes that we are otherwise blind to, yet complicit in. The idealized

notion of Finland as a model of bilingualism is one of the normalized discourses that requires unpacking. Counterfactual histories may turn out to be a helpful tool for other contexts too, to understand multilingualism and language policy making in our societies more deeply and more honestly.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Tuomo Kondie, a Karelian activist, and Senior Researcher Heli Valtonen, for their insightful comments on the first draft of this paper.

References

- Beck, U. (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity in 1992*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U. (2006) Living in the world risk society: A Hobhouse Memorial Public Lecture given on Wednesday 15 February 2006 at the London School of Economics. *Economy and Society* 35 (3), 329–345.
- Bunzl, M. (2004) Counterfactual history: A user's guide. *American Historical Review* 109 (3), 845–858.
- De Silva, E. and Heller, M. (2009) From protector to producer: The role of the State in the discursive shift from minority rights to economic development. *Language Policy* 8, 95–111.
- Ekholm, L.K., & Muir, S. (2017) Name changes and visions of 'a new Jew' in the Helsinki Jewish community. *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 27, 173–188.
<https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.66574>

- Engman, M. (2016) *Språkfrågan. Finlandssvenskhetens uppkomst 1812–1922*. Finlands Svenska Historia 3. Helsingfors: Svenska Litteratursällskapet i Finland.
- Fink, G. (1995) The League of Nations and the minorities question. *World Affairs* 157 (4), 197–205.
- Giddens, A. and Pierson, C. (1998) *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity*. Stanford University Press.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. (1992) *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (2nd edn). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hult, F.M. (2004) Planning for multilingualism and minority language rights in Sweden. *Language Policy* 3, 181. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:LPOL.0000036182.40797.23>
- Ihalainen, P. (2017) *The Springs of Democracy: National and Transnational Debates on Constitutional Reform in the British, German, Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917–1919*. Studia Fennica Historica 24. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Ihalainen, P., Nuolijärvi, P. and Saarinen, T. (2019) Kamppailua tilasta ja vallasta: kieli- ja kielikoulutuspolitiikan historiallisesti kierrätetyt diskurssit. In T. Saarinen, P. Nuolijärvi, S. Pöyhönen and T. Kangasvieri (eds) *Kieli, Koulutus, Poliittikka: Monipaikkaisia Käytänteitä Ja Tulkintoja* (pp. 27–59). Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Johnson, D.C. (2013) *Language Policy*. London: Palgrave.
- Lähteenmäki, M. and Pöyhönen, S. (2015) Language rights of the Russian-speaking minority in Finland: Multi-sited historical arguments and language ideologies. In M. Halonen, P. Ihalainen and T. Saarinen (eds) *Language Policies in Finland and Sweden*.

Interdisciplinary and Multi-sited Comparisons (pp. 90–115). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Lähteenmäki, M. and Vanhala-Aniszewski, M. (2012) Hard currency or a stigma: The Russian–Finnish bilingualism among young Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland. In J. Blommaert, S. Leppänen, P. Pahta and T. Virkkula (eds) *Dangerous Multilingualism* (pp. 121–141). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Laihonen, P. and Halonen, M. (2019) Vähemmistöt ja enemmistöt kieli-ideologisina käsitteinä In T. Saarinen, P. Nuolijärvi, S. Pöyhönen and T. Kangasvieri (eds) *Kieli, Koulutus, Poliittikka : Monipaikkaisia Käytänteitä Ja Tulkintoja* (pp. 61–90). Tampere: Vastapaino.

Lebow, R.N. (2007) Counterfactual thought experiments: A necessary teaching tool. *The History Teacher* 40 (2), 153–176.

Lehtola, V.-P. (2012) *Saamelaiset Suomalaiset. Kohtaamisia 1896–1953*. Helsinki: SKS.

Mazower, M. (1997) Minorities and the League of Nations in interwar Europe. *Daedalus* 126 (2), 47–63.

Meinander, H. (2016) *Nationalstaten. Finlands svenskhet 1922–2015*. Finlands svenska historia 4. Helsingfors: Svenska Litteratursällskapet I Finland.

Mythen, G. (2007). Reappraising the risk society thesis: Telescopic sight or myopic vision? *Current Sociology* 55 (6), 793–813.

Rodwell, G. (2013) Counterfactual histories and the nature of history. In *Whose History?: Engaging History Students through Historical Fiction* (pp. 81–98). South Australia: University of Adelaide Press.

- Ruiz Vieyetez, E.J. (2001) The protection of linguistic minorities: A historical approach.
International Journal on Multicultural Societies 3 (1), 5 – 14.
- Saarinen, T. and Ihalainen, P. (2018) Multi-sited and historically layered language policy construction: parliamentary debate on the Finnish constitutional bilingualism in 1919.
Language Policy 17 (4), 545–565.
- Salo, O. (2012) Finland’s Official Bilingualism — a Bed of Roses or of Procrustes? In J. Blommaert, S. Leppänen, P. Pahta and T. Räisänen (eds) *Dangerous Multilingualism. Northern Perspectives on Order, Purity and Normality* (pp. 25-40). Palgrave.
- Sarhimaa, A. (2017) *Vaietut Ja Vaiennetut – Karjalankieliset Karjalaiset Suomessa*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Silverstein, M. (1996) Monoglot ‘standard’ in America: Standardization and metaphors of linguistic hegemony. In D. Brenneis and R. Macaulay (eds) *The Matrix of Language: Contemporary Linguistic Anthropology* (pp. 284–306). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Takam, A. and Fassé, I. (2019) English and French bilingual education and language policy in Cameroon: The bottom-up approach or the policy of no policy? *Language Policy*.
Online first: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10993-019-09510-7>
- Tollefson, J. (1991) *Planning Language, Planning Inequality*. London: Longman.
- Tollefson, J. and Pérez-Milans, M. (2018) *The Oxford Handbook of Language Policy and Planning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Villstrand, N.E. and Karonen, P. (2017) Tirkistysaukkohistoriaa vai avoimia tulevaisuuksia? [Peep hole history or open futures?] In N.E. Villstrand and P. Karonen (eds)

Kulkemattomat Polut. Mahdollinen Suomen Historia [Untrodden Paths. A Possible History of Finland] (pp. 7–21). Gaudeamus.

Wenzhuemer, R. (2009) Counterfactual thinking as a scientific method. *Historical Social Research* 34 (2), 27–54.