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Title: Language ideologies in Finnish higher education in the national and international context : a historical and contemporary outlook

Year: 2014

Version:

Please cite the original version:

Saarinen, T. (2014). Language ideologies in Finnish higher education in the national and international context : a historical and contemporary outlook. In A. K. Hultgren, F. Gregersen, & J. Thøgersen (Eds.), *English in Nordic Universities : Ideologies and practices* (pp. 127-146). John Benjamins Publishing Co.. *Studies in World Language Problems*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1075/wlp.5.06saa>

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Language ideologies in Finnish higher education in the national and international context¹: a historical and contemporary outlook

Taina Saarinen

Abstract

The article examines the language policy developments of Finnish higher education in historical and contemporary perspective. It is part of an Academy of Finland funded project (2011-2013) on the role of language in Finnish higher education internationalisation. The article first presents an historical overview of the language policy developments in Finnish universities and then goes on to discuss the latest developments in Finnish university and language legislation. Two cases illustrate the role of language in internationalisation strategies on one hand, and the ideologies made visible by hierarchisations of English as native and non-native on the other. The article concludes by discussing the implications of the complex role of English in the setting of the equally complex Finnish constitutional bilingualism.

Keywords: Finland, constitutional bilingualism, internationalization of higher education, language policy

1. Introduction

Universities as institutions have historically been characterized both as fundamentally international and essentially national. Both claims are clichés in that there is some truth to their origin, but they have become intellectually empty as a consequence of constant repetition (see Scott, 2011).

Universities are international in as much as their knowledge base is international: scientific disciplines and research have an international (in fact, universal) basis (see Clark, 1983, for a discussion on the fundamentals of disciplines). Organisationally, on the other hand, universities have been strongly national institutions with a role in nation building particularly in European societies as of the first half of the 19th century (Anderson, 1991; on Finland, see Välimaa, 2012), as the first periods of massification of higher education in the 1800s broke the academic independence of universities and tied them more closely to the nation states and their knowledge needs. To sum up, universities are as much results of their disciplinary internationalisation as their organisational nationalism.

Traditionally, language has had three functions in higher education. It has been seen as a medium of teaching; as a means of archiving knowledge in different text depositories like books and libraries; and as an object of theoretical study (Brumfit, 2004, p. 164). This article discusses a fourth

function, language as construing the functions of the university; in this case, the internationalisation trends of the recent decades.

With the increasing focus on policies of “internationalization”, “knowledge society” and “knowledge economy” within higher education (see for instance Välimaa & Hoffman, 2008; Williams 2010), it is, however, somewhat surprising that language does not feature in these policies, given that they would seem to require a certain amount of language use and communication (Saarinen, 2012a). Thus, while Finnish higher education policy and its internationalisation has been explicitly formulated on the policy level in recent years, the position of language in that policy has remained more implicit and invisible. The political invisibility of language and the conflation of “English” for “foreign” seems to reflect a paradox of internationalisation, as increasing international co-operation may, in fact, lead to increasing linguistic homogenisation. (Saarinen, 2012 a).

Interest in the study of internationalisation in higher education has increased in recent years with the increases in student volume in both long-term and short-term mobility (see for instance Garam, 2012, for the Finnish case). While a lot of the research focusses on cultural, economic and social aspects of mobility, attention has in recent years increasingly turned to linguistic aspects as well.

The discussion of language and higher education revolves both around English as the lingua franca of higher education (see for instance Björkman,

2010; Hynninen, 2013; Smit, 2010), and around the use of smaller national languages in an international setting (i.e. Mortensen & Haberland, 2012, for the case of Denmark; or Lindström, 2012, for Finland). English can be seen both as the hegemonic “global English” and as the empowering “international English” (Bull, 2012). Risager (2012) and Saarinen & Nikula (2013) have discussed the hierarchies of languages in the context of higher education.

Language in the context of higher education has, however, mostly been dealt with from the perspective of use of English or different learning perspectives (for Nordic examples see Airey, 2009; Hellekjær, 2010; Salö, 2010; for others, see Alexander, 2008; Coleman, 2006). In *Higher Education*, a leading international journal in the study of higher education, 25 articles have during 2000-2012 somehow dealt with language. What seems to be missing in a majority of these, however, is the policy dimension, or the ideological implications of language in internationalisation, as they deal predominantly with internationalisation as an English language learning situation, often in the classroom (see for instance Byun et al., 2011; Sherry, Thomas & Wing, 2010; Torres-Olave, 2012;).

Marginson’s (2006) analysis of higher education as a globally competitive and asymmetrically resourced market, dominated by dynamics of the English language, presents one of the rare exceptions in its discussion

of the role of language within the larger frame of globalisation (but see Bull's treatment of "global English": Bull, 2012). Phillipson addresses particularly questions of linguistic imperialism, and while he does this in a higher education context (see for example Phillipson, 2003), his work focusses on questions of language policy rather than higher education policy. Williams' (2010) work is one of the rare attempts at linking language, knowledge economy and culture.

With all this in mind, it seems that while current higher education policies seem to encourage "internationalisation", the position of language in higher education policy is both unclear and unproblematised. This article thus focusses on the ideological positions of higher education policy, internationalisation, and language, by addressing the tensions between the traditionally national Finnish higher education policies and the historical and contemporary demands for internationalization in that policy. I concur with Gal & Woolard's (1995) definition of language ideologies as being, in fact, ideologies of political realities and that ideologies of political realities seem to be linked with language practices. I will consequently be analysing language policies of Finnish higher education both as ideological reproductions and as the concrete practices of using different languages at different times and sites. My study will remain at the policy levels (either national or institutional) of higher education.

I will analyse the discursive construction of language policies in

Finnish higher education and, on a case level, the implications of those policies for internationalisation. The two cases presented in this article focus, firstly, on the construction of “national” and “international” in Finnish internationalisation policies for higher education, and secondly, on the construction of a particular kind of hierarchisation of English in Finnish international study programmes.

The main questions are: Does “language” have a role in the past and present internationalization policy of Finnish higher education, explicitly or implicitly? What kinds of ideologies do the representations of language in Finnish higher education reflect?

I will first present a brief overview of the historical phases of language use in Finnish higher education. I will then look into Finnish language legislation and, in particular, into the development of the legislation on languages in higher education. Third, I will present two case studies of the ideological implications of internationalization policies from the point of view of language, and the operationalization of “English” as the language of internationalization.

As data in this article, I will use (language) policy documentation such as legislation (The Constitution; Language Act; Universities Act) and government programmes since Independence in 1917. The case studies are based on policy documents, Internet sites of international programmes and the information available there, and interviews conducted with higher

education staff and students in Finland. The historical overview is based on existing research on universities and education in Finland.

2. Historical overview of the Finnish HE system from a language perspective

Finland, as a nation state, developed first as the Eastern part of the Swedish Realm (from the twelfth century until 1809), then as a Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire (1809–1917), and as of 1917, as an independent republic. As a result of the positioning between these eastern and western fronts, Finnish history is therefore characterized by social, legislative, cultural and (geo)political links and tensions with both its neighbours.

Historically, language policies of Finnish higher education can be divided into five periods (Saarinen, 2012b), as presented in Table 1.

	Language of instruction	Language of internationalisation
c. 1640-1850 (period of pre-national higher education)	Latin	Latin
c. 1850-1900 (period of national awakening)	=> Swedish =>Finnish	Latin => German
c. 1900-1930/40 (period of domestic language policy issues)	Finnish Swedish	German
c. 1950-1980 (period of regional policy and Anglo-American reorientation)	Finnish Swedish	English
c. 1990 - (period of new internationalisation)	Finnish Swedish => English	English

Table 1. Languages in different periods of Finnish higher education (see Saarinen, 2012b)

The period of *pre-national higher education* (c. 1640-1850) was marked by the use of Latin both as the language of education and the language of internationalisation. The first Finnish university (the Royal Academy of Turku) was established in 1640 in the wake of the expansion of the Swedish Realm and its need for highly educated civil servants. Before that time,

Finns had studied in European universities, first in the Sorbonne and then in German-language universities in Central Europe.

The Russian Empire took over Finland in 1809 as an autonomous Grand Duchy, but the Swedish Constitution, other legislation, and the Lutheran religion remained in force. Following a devastating fire in Turku, the Royal Academy of Turku – which was felt to be geographically and culturally too close to the political influence of Sweden anyway – was moved to Helsinki in 1828 and renamed the Imperial Alexander University. Latin remained the official language, and remained the only language of doctoral disputations until the language statutes of the University were changed, together with statutes on its governance and examinations, in 1852 (Hakulinen et al., 2009; Klinge, 1987, p. 382; Tommila, 2006). From 1852, Swedish was made an official language of doctoral disputations, followed by Finnish in 1858 and other languages in 1871.

The mid-19th century brought with it a *national awakening*, with an increased interest in the Finnish language both within the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking upper classes, aimed at strengthening the Finnish nation against the Russian influences. During the more liberal reign of Alexander II in the mid-19th century, the Russian authorities in practice encouraged the development of the Finnish language into a societally significant language as they felt that a strong Finnish identity would help form a buffer against Swedish political influences. Towards the end of the 19th century, however,

the policies of Russification also begun to influence the University.

In the early years of the 20th century, the international sphere of Finnish higher education did not reach beyond Northern Germany, Sweden and Denmark; even France and England remained distant (Klinge, 1989, p. 900). The number of German-language dissertations grew gradually (Klinge, 1989, p. 906-908), and Germany became the main international orientation of Finnish academics.

The first decades of Independence in 1917 brought with them *domestic language policy issues*, particularly within the University of Helsinki. After independence, the University of Helsinki was given an autonomous position in the new constitution of 1919. The first university act during independence was given legislative approval in 1923 after an intensive debate particularly on the language issue, reflecting language political ideologies of the new republic in general. In 1937, in a renewal of the 1923 act, the official language of the university was declared to be Finnish, but with dictates that in practice made the University of Helsinki bilingual both in instruction and administration, with a quota defined for Swedish-language professorships. (Klinge, 1990; see also Hakulinen et al., 2009; Tommila, 2006).

Language feuds were put aside both at the universities and in the society at large as the Second World War broke out. From the point of view of internationalisation, the end of the war meant a turn in orientation for the

Finnish universities from Central Europe, particularly Germany, towards Anglo-American (particularly Northern American) co-operation. Similar developments took place also for instance in countries like Japan or Denmark, as a part of the post-war *Pax Americana* (Haberland, 2009).

The turn from German to English was promoted by at least two factors. First, as a consequence of the mass emigration of German scientists after 1933, and the German loss of the Second World War, with the resulting total political, economic and cultural collapse, Germany lost the position it had held in Finland (and elsewhere in Europe) in the first half of the 20th century (Hietala, 2003, p. 135). Second, the active foreign policy of the United States of America after the Second World War also had an influence on the internationalisation of higher education, as the growth of English as the language of internationalisation was strongly promoted by U.S. cultural foreign policies. Finland joined the international Fulbright programme in 1952 (Fulbright Center, 2011).

The shift that took place in the language of internationalisation is also depicted by the changes in the proportion of PhD dissertations in German and English over the first half of the 20th century. German-language dissertations appear to have accounted for almost half of all dissertations in Finland in the period 1901-1930, whereas during 1931-60 English came close to reaching German (29.2 and 32.5 per cent respectively) (Ylönen, 2012; National Bibliography of Finland *Fennica*).

After the Second World War, new universities were founded, but rather on regional than language policy arguments. (Kivinen, Rinne & Ketonen, 1993), and language policy issues went underground for most of the post-war period, until the turn of the 1990s.

In the 1980s, a new era in Finnish higher education policies emerged, as the principles of management by results took over from the traditional, centralised policy steering of the system that had expanded radically since the Second World War (Kivinen et al., 1993). The new steering system was characterized by strong decentralisation, demands for accountability and quality assurance, changes in funding structures, and a more structured policy of internationalisation.

Since the early 1990s, internationalisation in Finnish higher education has been characterized by the setting up of international study programmes, both for the purpose of attracting international students and to support "internationalisation at home" for the local students. The polytechnic sector, in particular, was active in this development of *new internationalisation*. In the 1990s, some degree programmes in German and French existed alongside their English language counterparts, but gradually English became, in practice, the only language in international degree programmes in Finland.

The setting up of separate international (= English-medium) programmes since the 1990s was followed by a trend of offering more and

more Master's programmes both in the national languages and in English in the 2000s. Master's programmes are regulated by a Decree issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, following a proposal by the university. . (*Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön asetus yliopistojen maisteriohjelmista*, 2012). Judging by the names of the Master's programmes, it would seem that approximately two out of three Master's programmes are currently in English. Since one can study for a Master's degree outside the Master's programmes specified in the Decree, this is no indication of the percentage of Master's studies taken in English. However, it does imply that degree reform, induced by the Bologna process, has given impetus for English-language Master programmes particularly in business, biosciences and technology.

3. Current language legislation

3.1 Finnish language legislation: Constitutionalist bilingualism as societal bilingualism

Finnish language legislation and attitudes towards it seem to be based on strong constitutionalism to the extent that the Constitution is represented as something static and unchangeable in Finnish language policy debates

(Ihalainen & Saarinen, forthcoming). Finnish language legislation has its roots in the constitution and legislations inherited from the Swedish era, when Swedish was the language of administration. Swedish remained a language of administration even after the separation from Sweden (Hakulinen et al., 2009) but Finnish started to gain some ground in the 19th century first among the clerics in the parishes, then in the judicial system, and then in the University. During the time when Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire (1809-1917), Finnish began to have some position in the country, partly because the Russian authorities felt that Finnish would take some of the the pressure from Swedish and thus distance Finland from the former mother country Sweden. The 1863 Language Act strengthened the status of Finnish not just as a clerical but also as an administrative language. The first republican Constitution of 1919 and the Language Act of 1922 defined Finland as a bilingual country with the "national languages" of Finnish and Swedish.

The contemporary Finnish language policies are legislatively prescribed in the new Constitution of 1999 and in language legislation (the Language Act of 2003). According to Mantila (2005), language legislation prescribes language use in one of four categories..

The first is that of national language. Since Independence the strongest position has been enjoyed by the national languages Finnish and Swedish, whose position has remained relatively stable since the first

republican Constitution of 1919, renewed in 1999. Legally, Finnish and Swedish have equal status; discursively, they are framed as (the only) mother tongues in the Constitution and the Language Act, as the following statement on “everyone’s” linguistic rights implies:

The right of everyone to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts of law and other authorities, and to receive official documents in that language, shall be guaranteed by an Act. (Constitution, 17.1)

Secondly, the three Sámi languages (Northern Sámi, Skolt Sámi and Inari Sámi) spoken in Finland have been given a status as indigenous / original languages by a separate Sámi Language Act (2003), which guarantees the linguistic and cultural rights of the Sami population to use, maintain and develop their language and culture.

Thirdly, the Constitution specifically mentions Roma people and sign-language speakers as having particular rights (although, in fact, the rights of the sign language speakers for particular support are based on disability, not on linguistic identity). As Finland ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Carelian language has been given a minority status.

Fourthly, in addition to the abovementioned categories, the Constitution states that all other language groups have the right to develop their language and culture. With the increase in especially migrant languages, this right is interpreted in very different ways.

Currently, there are approximately 80 languages with more than 100 mother tongue speakers (Statistics Finland). In 2012, of the 5.4 million inhabitants, about 4,870,000 people (90 per cent of population) speak Finnish. The number of Swedish speakers is 291,000 (5.3% of population). The number of Russian speakers has increased in recent years to over 62,000. About 38,000 people reportedly speak Estonian. The linguistic minorities of Romani Chib speakers (approximately 14,000) and the three Sámi languages (approximately 1,900), Finnish sign language (5,000) and Finnish-Swedish sign language (200) complete the picture. Sign languages and Romani Chib are not, however, registered by Statistics Finland as mother tongues. A particular feature of the statistics provided by Statistics Finland is depictive of the constitutional societal (rather than individual; see Ihalainen & Saarinen forthcoming) bilingualism typical of Finland: the official statistics do not recognize individual bilingualism or multilingualism.

3.2 University legislation

In previous sections of this chapter, we have described the development of the current language situation in Finnish higher education. Since 2013, there are 14 universities, nine of which are by legislation Finnish-language, two Swedish-language, and three bilingual. The situation is analogous in the polytechnic sector, with the majority of the institutions using Finnish. Since the 1990s, and particularly after the renewed University Law of 2004, English has been increasingly used in the higher education sector.

In short, before 1997 university legislation was based on individual Acts for each university, and the language of instruction and examination was also defined by the individual Acts. In 1997, the old legislation was unified into one single university Act (645/1997), which maintained the linguistic *status quo* stated in the old individual Acts. Basically, the languages of instruction and examination were defined as either Finnish, Swedish, or both, but the university had the right to use other languages in instruction. The first "foreign language programmes" in the 1990s functioned based on this legislation, offering formally Finnish or Swedish language degrees but with instruction offered in English (or, during the first years, on some occasions, German or French).

In 2004, the University Act was amended so that a language other than Finnish or Swedish could be used for examination also, but a Government Decree was needed to implement this. The language of instruction continued to be decided by the universities themselves. The new

University law of 2009 gave universities, for the first time, the examination right (the right to offer degrees) also in other languages than their official languages of tuition.

As changes in legislation since the turn of the Millennium have increasingly led to the use of languages other than the national ones, some incidents involving student complaints or public media debate have already occurred.

In early 2009, a Finnish student filed a formal complaint with the Office of the Chancellor of Justice about English-language tuition at the Master's level, appealing to the constitutional right of a student to receive tuition in his or her mother tongue (i.e. Finnish or Swedish). The Chancellor's Office, while stating that the university had acted within its legal rights and thus ruling against the student (*Englannin käyttäminen yliopiston opetuskielenä*, 2010), stated that the university needed to indicate clearly that the students were informed of their right to the use of Finnish and Swedish also within English language programmes.

Another indication that English, rather than the historical schisms between Finnish and Swedish, is making language visible in Finnish higher education again, is the media attention during the first months of 2013 to the fact that Aalto University was offering only English-language Master's Programmes (YLE, 2013). Another complaint to the Chancellor of Justice's Office has been made on English-language tuition, and a formal written

question was presented (symbolically on Kalevala day, 28 February, 2013) by a parliament representative of Jussi Niinistö (True Finns) to the Minister of Education and Culture, Jukka Gustafsson (Social Democrats) on the Aalto case. The Minister based his answer largely on the same Chancellor of Justice's answer (*Englannin käyttäminen yliopiston opetuskielenä*, 2010; *Kirjallinen kysymys, 2013*)

It seems that while Finns have generally a very positive attitude towards English (Leppänen et al., 2009), the constitutional position of the national languages and the languages used at universities provides a setting where the status of English is problematized slightly more critically.

4. Data and methodology

The cases represented in the next chapter are examples from the ongoing research that this article is part of.

The *first case* looks into the presentation of the terms “national” and “international” in Finnish higher education internationalization policy. It is based mainly on the internationalization strategies of Finnish higher education.

There are three strategy statements for such internationalization (Opetusministeriö, 1987, 2001, 2009). The statements are the only national

(Ministry-level) documents on higher education internationalization in Finland. The first one (Opetusministeriö, 1987) was drafted as an unpublished memo, while the second (Opetusministeriö, 2001) and third (Opetusministeriö, 2009) were published in the publication series of the Ministry of Education. The most recent one was drafted after extensive public consultation with higher education institutions and interest groups (academic trade unions, employer organisations, representatives of industry, trade organisations etc.).

The *second case* is based on a previously published article (Saarinen & Nikula, 2013) on the specific case of English in Finnish higher education, particularly the ideological underpinnings of access to English-language programmes. The data for the second case is derived from the language requirements for the English-language programmes, as stated in the entry requirements published on the websites of the programmes from two universities and two polytechnics in Finland (N=44). The degree programme descriptions form the primary textual data, supported by the interviews described above.

A secondary set of data for both cases is a set of interviews gathered at two Finnish universities and one Finnish polytechnic in 2012 (N = 10). The interviews are a part of a larger comparison with Danish higher education. The interviewees represent academic administrators (within the field of internationalization), students, and academic staff.

In both cases, discourse analysis is used as an analytic tool to come to an understanding of how languages are (not) construed in the national and institutional higher education policy setting for internationalisation in Finland. In both the website data and the policy texts, the occasions where languages are made (explicitly or implicitly) relevant have been analysed. Equally important to note, however, was also the absence of references to languages, as that may also be indexical of ideologies (e.g. Blommaert, 2010; Saarinen & Nikula, 2013). In both cases, the interviews have been used mainly to illustrate the observations made from the policy documents and the language requirements.

5. Internationalisation and its implications for language in higher education policy: two cases

In recent years, demands for increased internationalization and political transparency have challenged the understanding of higher education as traditionally national. Also, in Finland, higher education reforms on issues like quality assurance and degree structures have been motivated by the “international attractiveness” of higher education. Globally, students are flowing towards high-fee-charging English-speaking countries, making internationalization a major global industry (Graddol, 2006). One of the major responses of non-English-speaking countries such as Finland to

demands for internationalization has been to offer English-language study programs, in order to deal with this “Anglophone asymmetry” (Hughes, 2008). It can be said that internationalisation and processes related to it challenge Finnish higher education not only from the point of view of demands for foreign language (mostly English) teaching at universities and polytechnics, but also from a more fundamental perspective of universities and polytechnics as national institutions, providing a public service (see Jalava, 2012; Saarinen, 2012a).

As we discuss the role of national and international languages in higher education, we inevitably enter the relationship of national and international. It has been assumed that as economic, cultural and social globalization advances, the role of nation states will diminish. While some of the formal and informal decision-making powers in higher education have been shifted to international actors (see Kallo, 2009, for the OECD and “soft law” influences on Finnish higher education), the nation state still plays a distinctive role in higher education policies (Saarinen, 2008). Especially after the 2008 economic crash, the nation state appears increasingly as protector of national interests (Block, Gray & Holborow, 2012, p. 18; Rodrik, 2011). In language policies, the same influence appears as forms of linguistic measuring and hierarchisation (Nikula, Saarinen, Pöyhönen & Kangasvieri, 2012), or “linguistic border control” (Blommaert, Leppänen & Spotti, 2012, p. 2).

As the development of Finnish higher education language legislation shows, increasing international cooperation further increases pressures on the language of tuition. English has increased its share as a language of tuition, previously dominated by the local Nordic languages. Next, I will present two case examples on the relationship of national and international, and the ideological position of English in Finnish higher education.

5.1. Case 1: National vs. international, and language in Finnish higher education

In the first internationalization strategy, of 1987, internationalization is coupled with economic and educational (*sivistyksellinen*) success, thereby labeling internationalization as a founding factor in these two, and echoing the traditional national *Bildung* function of Finnish higher education (Jalava, 2012). From the point of view of *language*, the 1987 strategy was very pragmatic, promoting in the first place the setting up and development of language education in universities and polytechnics.

The 2001 strategy, in turn, introduces the themes of “the competitive edge of national systems”, and calls for a strong national basis, needed in international competition. As this strategy coincided with the strengthening of the Bologna Process, it is probably not surprising that the strategy document pointed out (probably to ease the worried minds at universities)

that universities were protected by national legislation. The 2001 strategy thus contrasts national and international, and makes assurances about the protection of the national system, implying that the national aspect is in some kind of need for protection.

On the other hand, and somewhat contrary to the protectionist definition of the national, the document makes explicit reference to the "competitive edge" offered by English. "English language" programmes were referred to, but mostly reference was made to "foreign language" programmes, thus making "English" invisible.

The latest internationalization strategy from 2009 names higher education as a nationally significant export product, which is interesting as Finnish universities do not charge fees to either domestic or international students, except in very few experimental cases. The export nature of higher education is apparently not linked to direct revenues, but something more implicit, namely to Finnish higher education as an exemplary idea or a brand (see *Mission for Finland*, 2010, the final report of the Finnish Country Brand Delegation) to be offered to the world.

Also the 2009 document refers systematically to "foreign language" teaching, when, in fact, English is meant. "English" is, in other words, clearly conflated (or euphemized even, as Lehtikoinen, 2004, indirectly suggests) with "foreign":

The higher education institutions offer high-quality education focused on their fields of expertise, given in foreign languages.

(Opetusministeriö , 2009, p. 26)

The dual attitude towards *foreign* language on one hand and *English* on the other reflects the practical role of English as the current international *lingua franca* (see Björkman, 2010; Hynninen, 2013), but simultaneously recognises the Finnish goal of promoting other languages as well. However, linking *English* and *foreign* in this way blurs the relationship of language to internationalisation.

The invisibility of language and the self-evidence of English were apparent in the interviews as well. In many interviews, languages came up fairly late in the course of the discussion. In one example, explained in more detail in the second case, in a discussion that revolved around internationalization of higher education and such issues as cultural differences, the issue of *language* was brought up by the interviewer only in the 54th minute, and in that case, the interviewee replied from the point of view of English non-nativeness (of both students and staff) (Saarinen & Nikula, 2013).

The “protectionist” discourse that permeates discussion on the importance of internationalization for the economic commodification and success of higher education does not seem to extend to language. This may

suggest that the nature of the conceptualization of *language* has changed, as the link between language and nation seems to have weakened. In sum, the relationship of the national and the international in Finnish higher education internationalization policies has turned from the need to protect the national to promoting the international.

5.2. Case 2: English and internationalisation of Finnish higher education

Another example of internationalization and Finnish higher education is provided by the practices around the use of English in Finnish international study programmes.

In a large scale survey on English in Finland, Leppänen et al. (2009) show that Finns generally have a very positive attitude towards the use of English. Finland has been among the biggest providers of English language study programmes in Europe to the point that the somewhat euphemistic term ‘foreign language programme’ (*vieraskielinen ohjelma*) used in Finnish policy documents has begun to mean “English-language programme” (Saarinen, 2012a).

Finnish universities and polytechnics require that students somehow prove their English language skills before entering an international programme. This can be done by taking a test (such as the TOEFL or IELTS tests) or by showing a secondary or bachelor’s level certificate or diploma

taken in an English-language country. This seemingly unproblematic and commonsense requirement, however, includes some in-built ideological elements of gatekeeping and hierarchisation. In fact, exemption based on a secondary or university diploma from an English-speaking country is further explicated as studies taken in the UK, USA, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand and the English-speaking parts of Canada, leaving out the approximately 50 other countries in the world where English is an official language.

Favouring particular (traditional) varieties of English may produce different, probably unintended, categories of international students.

This kind of hierarchisation of different Englishes not only selects students based on their language skills, but in fact also based on their nationality, a particular set of Western hegemonic varieties of English, the status of the higher education system (as Anglo-American systems are preferred), or the status of the political system (as in some cases students within the European Union or European Economic Area are preferred) (Saarinen & Nikula, 2013). This practice represents a governing rationale (Rose, 1996) of creating hierarchies between different varieties of English, producing categories of identity and creating social orders based on different Englishes, probably in an unintended way (Nikula et al., 2012).

The unproblematized nature of English in Finnish higher education also becomes visible in the interviews conducted at Finnish universities and polytechnics. One of the ideologized features of the use of English in

Finnish higher education internationalization is an “us vs. them” discourse that emerges in the interviews in addition to the hierarchisation presented in the entry requirements, as shown above. This is exemplified by the next examples which are rooted in the topic of “nativeness” not only as ideal but also as problematic.

While the interviewees frequently noted that the local students were not “native English speakers”, they still felt that their own students’ English skills were better than those of the international students. The following two excerpts led to a discussion of the role of “nativeness” as a hierarchizing factor in internationalization.

The first excerpt shows a Finnish administrative staff member discussing the role of language in internationalization. It is illustrative of the invisible role of language in internationalization in higher education that while the next exchange takes place after over 50 minutes of discussion of internationalization of higher education, the role of language comes up only at the interviewer’s initiative (see the excerpt in previous section).

TS: one more question here, we have been talking about internationalisation and different questions of culture, but not about language (Interviewee: mmmm) How does... Do you think language is a factor here (Interviewee: nods slowly)... In what way?

Interviewee: Weeeel... It shows in that most of us ... teachers, me, students... none of us speak... or there are maybe one or two native English speakers (TS: mmmmh)... But that all of us speak English as... non-native. And... I don't know if it shows... well some teachers find it problematic that the students' English skills are not good enough... but I think that's just something we have to be prepared for. That it's a part of the package (Staff, faculty level) (In Finnish in the original. My translation).

The interviewee begins by turning the general question of “language” in internationalization into a question of native vs. non-native skills. Following this turn, the question of “everybody's” non-nativeness quickly turns into a problematization of “the students'” non-nativeness, implying that the international students' language skills are a bigger problem than the domestic staff's skills.

The second excerpt is with a German exchange student at a Finnish polytechnic. S/he discusses the reasons why s/he chose Finland as the place of study:

A: [...] that's why I wanted to discover Finland from the cultural side and also was good from the language side, because it is not mother

tongue English language like it would be in Great Britain but it's having a high quality of English [...]

S: So you came here, because you thought that lang-... the English language was of high quality here?

A: yeah...that's because I applied, because I knew that Finland was quite successful at PISA, that they have the television programmes in English, that they have early contact with English, and that's what I guessed that they would have a high quality of English... but it's still not their mother tongue, so it's OK to make mistakes as a student...

In the second excerpt, nativeness is presented as problematic, rather than ideal. It appears that while native language skills are frequently presented as the norm and something to aspire to, going to an English-speaking country might be something less lucrative, specifically because of that same native norm.

6. Conclusions

As the previous chapter shows, language(s) have, basically, been visible in

the history of Finnish higher education during two periods. Firstly, the period of national awakening in the mid 19th century finally broke the era of Latin and brought to the fore national (and living) languages, both within Finland (Finnish and Swedish) and in international contacts (German). The second period of visibility took place after the declaration of Finnish independence, with the founding of new universities based on language motivations, and the language policy debates and the relationship of Finnish and Swedish at the University of Helsinki.

Currently, it appears that language has become a political issue in higher education again. While the debate on the position of Swedish in Finland has become more heated since the last parliamentary elections in 2011, the discussions about language revolve around the position of English rather than the national languages. As an empirical concept, language appears as a form of high modern, national governance (Blommaert et al., 2012; Saarinen & Nikula, 2013) that forms hierarchies of domestic and international students and staff. Language thus seems to be becoming politically visible again, which will force us to rethink the relationships between “national” and “international” in higher education policy.

From the ideological point of view, the invisibility of English suggests its strong position in Finnish higher education. Interestingly, English has been made self-evident while at the same time presenting protectionist concerns about the strength and competitiveness of national higher

education systems. It seems, thus, that *language* may have been detached from *nation*, in contrast to the 19th and early 20th century understandings of language and nation as inseparable. However, other ideological positions, such as ones relating to the ownership of English, seem to have been strengthened.

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¹ The article is part of a study on the position of language in higher education policies in Finland, funded by the Academy of Finland project n. 138287.