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Language, change and society: Perspectives from Finland

In this paper, we offer an overview of the various themes that emerged in the course of AFinLA 2021 50-year Anniversary Symposium *Language, change and society*. After a brief review of the dialogical nature of this hybrid event and the heightened sense of reflexivity this belongs to, we divide the 19 contributions to this yearbook into four thematic groups: (1) accommodating reform in language and in education policy, (2) evolving practices in language learning and teaching, (3) technologically mediated teaching environments, and (4) the digitization of work and everyday life. Taken together, the different contributions give a good indication of how changes in society are reflected in applied language studies in Finland.

Keywords: applied linguistics, applied language studies, change, society

Tämä artikkeli on katsaus AFinLAN vuoden 2021 50-vuotisjuhlasymposiumissa *Kieli, muutos ja yhteiskunta* esiintyneisiin teemoihin. Kuvaamme ensin lyhyesti hybridinä järjestettyä tapahtumaa sekä siihen liittyvää dialogisuutta ja reflektiivisyyttä. Sen jälkeen esittelemme vuosikirjan artikkelit jaettuna neljään temaattiseen ryhmään: 1) muutokseen mukautuminen kielikoulutuspolitiikassa, 2) kielenoppimisen ja -opetuksen kehittyvät käytännöt, 3) teknologiavälitteiset opetusympäristöt ja 4) työn ja arjen digitalisoituminen. Yhdessä nämä artikkelit kertovat siitä, miten yhteiskunnan muutokset heijastuvat soveltavaan kielentutkimukseen Suomessa.

Asiasanat: soveltava kielitiede, soveltava kielentutkimus, muutos, yhteiskunta



1 Introduction

Over the past decade, the world has been facing a number of mounting global challenges: accelerating climate change and a painful reckoning with the anthropocene, steeply rising numbers of refugees and displaced people, the alarming popularity of eurocentrist populism, conspiracy theories and post-truth politics, against the background of a neoliberal capitalism that continues to create precarity and insecurity for ever larger segments of the population (Pennycook 2021: 6-9). The turmoil and upheaval we witnessed in the last two years have may have had an even more direct impact on our immediate surroundings, from a global pandemic to full-scale war in Ukraine, recession, and the risk of nuclear escalation. To many, these circumstances may seem frightening, and, for language and society researchers, they also constitute a challenge, as many of us consider it their task to address both these global transformations and the localized ways in which people respond to them. At the same time, there is also a glimmer of hope in that global crises, such as the pandemic, force us to question and change ways of working and living that we previously accepted uncritically. In the past two years, our experiments with online teaching, collaborating, and exchanging information (webinars, virtual conferences, etc.) have fundamentally reordered academic working life in ways that are not only ecologically more sustainable but also more democratic and more inclusive, for example by increasing opportunities for participation for scholars from the Global South. The development of the social sciences has been described as an entwining of several “cultural turns” (Bachmann-Medick 2016, see also Pennycook 2021), all of which in one way or another involve a drastically heightened form of research reflexivity (see, e.g., Grasz et al. 2020). From this perspective, the events of the past two years may be considered an additional “turn,” one that took place not on paper but in practice and forced us to extend what used to be an “intellectual” reflexive exercise to our own daily working practices and routines, and to the societal outcomes these may unwittingly foster.

Situated against this uncomfortable background, AFinLA’s 50 Year Anniversary Symposium *Language, Change and Society* eventually became a landmark event in more than one way. Initially planned for 2020, but postponed by a year due to the pandemic, the organizers at the University of Jyväskylä went all out for a hybrid event, probably one of the first in the field of linguistics in Finland. In retrospect, the hybrid mode could not have been more suitable for an anniversary edition like this one, because it turned an essentially Finnish event into a global one, opening up the floor to voices from outside Finland. In addition to (approximately) 140 paper presentations and two keynotes, the program also included three panels comprising both live participants and remote ones scattered across locations and time zones, thus transforming the conference into a truly dialogical event – a multi-voiced celebration

of the intrinsically polyphonic nature of the scientific enterprise, and a vivid illustration of the heightened sense of reflexivity advocated above.

For three days, researchers from Finland and abroad came together to reflect on the many ways in which research is intertwined with its surroundings and to exchange ideas as to how researchers could (and should) react to and analyze the changes taking place around them, both locally and globally, in Finnish society and around the world. The contributions to this yearbook illustrate how applied linguists have a role to play in lending visibility (Brighenti 2007) to various social injustices that hitherto may have gone unnoticed (those associated with various multilingualisms being only one of them), and, eventually, in suggesting changes and new practices that could counteract these injustices. At the same time, it is important to also approach the notion of *change* itself critically. As Saarinen and Välimaa point out, “[t]he concept of change is rarely problematized” (2012: 45), and their discussion of policy reform in higher education shows that on the ground, change more than once amounts to decline.

The few pages available to us here cannot possibly do justice to the richness of the discussions during the plenaries and the panel debates. **Patricia Duff’s** opening plenary “Changing directions and themes in applied linguistics research from a North American perspective” sketched a range of parallel developments that radically opened up and transformed the field of applied language studies in North America. First, researchers are increasingly also turning to Asian, native American and sign languages, and the populations that are being investigated are becoming increasingly diverse as well. Second, understandings of the learning process itself have changed drastically. The centrality of what goes on outside the classroom is recognized more and more, including learners’ participation in vernacular and popular culture and the various multilingual and multimodal resources thereby opened up to them, as well as the points of view, trajectories, positionalities, etc. of the learners themselves. Third, interdisciplinary approaches have challenged applied linguists to test new theoretical frameworks and methodologies (see also Grasz et al. 2020). Essentialist binaries are now widely rejected and the core topics that have traditionally occupied applied linguists, the analysis of language teaching, learning and testing, are now increasingly approached from critical and intersectional perspectives, thus aligning applied linguistic research with a social justice and decolonization agenda.

With **Minna Suni’s** keynote *Morfeemeista monikielisyyteen: kielenoppimisen käännteitä ja suuntia* (“From morphemes to multilingualism: turns and directions in language learning”), the focus shifted from North America to Finland, where research on Finnish as a second language has traditionally occupied a prominent position in applied language studies. As Suni walked the audience through the history of Finnish as a second language research, she showed how the changes that Duff described in her plenary have filtered through to other regions. Thus, attention has expanded to the analysis of agency and affordances, multilingualism, multimodal communication and multiliteracy.

cies research. Methodologically and theoretically, scholars have adopted usage-based theories of language learning and teaching, including ecological perspectives (van Lier 2000) and Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (de Bot & Larsen-Freeman 2011; see also Lesonen in this volume). Like Duff, Suni problematized essentializing binaries such as that of “native” and “non-native speaker” (see also Ruuska & Suni 2022). Suni pointed out that the more we come to know about language acquisition, the more nuanced our view of the process becomes (about applying transdisciplinary views to second language acquisition, see e.g. The Douglas Fir group 2016).

As stated earlier, the commitment to elucidate the entwining of language and its societal embedding, and to identify opportunities for social change also extends to the scientific enterprise itself, forcing us to critically consider our own working practices. Hence, on the first day of the symposium, right after the opening plenary, five journal editors – Johanna Ennser-Kananen (*Apples*), François Grin (*Language problems and language planning*), Helen Kelly Holmes (*Language Policy*, 2015-2020), Li Wei (*International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *Applied Linguistics Review*) and Anna Mauranen (*Applied Linguistics*), with Taina Saarinen as moderator – sat down to discuss the formative role that applied linguistics journals (have) play(ed) in steering the development of the field. Topics included, among other things, the extent to which journals have a truly global reach and how (lack of) open access and also peer review practices might be a limiting factor in this respect. Asked for concrete advice as to how journals could contribute to leveling the playing field and facilitating the publication of research originating from the global south, panelists suggested that editorial board members could be engaged to provide support for scholars from underrepresented areas, for example by guaranteeing access to recently published research. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to develop alternative channels such as video journals, research blogs and social media platforms, which can fundamentally alter the way we communicate about our research. A blog like *Language on the Move* (<https://www.languageonthemove.com/>) is a good example of what such an alternative channel might look like.

RECLAS (Research Collegium for Language in Changing Society) and MultiLEAP (Multiliteracies for Social Participation and in Learning across the Life Span), two “profiling areas” hosted by the University of Jyväskylä, are examples of new ways of doing and organizing research that have arisen out of a reflexive concern about the position that applied language research should occupy in changing society. Profiling is a fairly new funding instrument created by the Academy of Finland aimed at strengthening the research profile of Finnish universities by allocating funds not to individual projects but to the development of whole research areas that they consider strategically important. RECLAS (2016-2020) brought together cross-unit and cross-faculty expertise in (1) language learning, teaching and assessment, (2) critical sociolinguistics and discourse studies, and (3) research on language and education policies. Its successor MultiLEAP (2019-2023) adopts a multidisciplinary approach

to multiliteracies across the lifespan that extends beyond applied language studies and also draws on educational studies, social sciences, cultural and media studies. On the morning of the second day of the symposium, the directors of these profiling initiatives (Tarja Nikula-Jäntti, Anne Pitkänen-Huhta and Mirja Tarnanen) discussed how profiling has contributed to securing the position of applied language studies in the university strategy, followed by a roundtable that also involved associate professors recruited in the context of RECLAS and MultiLEAP (Sigurd D'hondt and Sari Sulkunen) and visiting scholars Alastair Pennycook, Srikant Sarangi and Sue Wright. Profiling, as it was pointed out, not only entailed increasing the visibility of applied language studies but also expanding its scope, both in terms of research foci and in terms of ways of doing research. In a most basic sense, RECLAS was born out of a concern to do things differently, and in this sense, it definitely turned out a “reckless” enterprise.

The second symposium day concluded with an at times a humorous dialogue between former AFinLA chairs, including Hannele Dufva (who also acted as chair), Auli Hakulinen, Paula Kalaja, Maisa Martin and Anna Mauranen. Each of the five former chairs reflected on how Finnish society had changed during their term and on how rising demands for language teaching, both in schools and in the context of international collaboration, had led to the establishment and further development of applied language studies in Finland. A major highlight was the 1996 AILA World Congress hosted by the University of Jyväskylä, which introduced far-reaching theoretical and methodological innovations such as Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (Larsen-Freeman 1997) or Firth and Wagner's (e.g., 1997) proposal to adopt conversation analysis for studying second language acquisition. Panelists also reflected on epistemological changes, for example related to shifting conceptualizations of language and multilingualism, and they concluded by calling for intensifying dialogue, increasing multidisciplinary and also furthering understanding between people, both in everyday and academic contexts. As could be expected, the panel was a useful reminder of the long-standing tradition behind applied linguistics research in Finland.

The Finnish Network for Language Education Policies (Kieliverkosto), finally, staged a discussion event titled *Keskiössä kielivähemmistöt* (“Minorities in focus,” see Vaarala & Riuttanen 2021 for more details), in which representatives of Karelian, Sami, Romani and sign languages discussed the status their respective languages presently enjoy in Finland. At the event, a heritage language teacher working in an elementary school sketched the current situation of heritage language teaching in Finland (see also Ahlholm, Slotte & Wallinheimo in this volume). The joint discussion touched on topics such as language rights, minority language use, and learning opportunities (see also Kok et al. 2019; Paunonen 2020). Minority language users are inherently multilingual and they would eagerly take the opportunity to use their full linguistic repertoire in public life. Too often, however, this is curtailed by the invisibility of minority languages, both in the public sphere and in education and available teaching materials (see also Moshnikov in this volume). In our view, one important way for raising the profile of

minority languages is fostering language aware practices in the classroom. Teachers should pay conscious attention to the simultaneous learning of both content and language-related skills, by creating increased opportunities for translanguaging (at every level of schooling) and by positively valorizing all languages in their students' repertoire (see, for example, Alisaari et al. 2019; Lehtonen 2021). Engaging with various types of online environments or affinity groups, as Lam (2009) points out, can also be an effective means for developing both first and additional language literacies.

On the one hand, the different panels and discussions at the anniversary symposium can be regarded as an attempt to give a platform to those scholars who helped shape applied linguistics in Finland, as well as to advocates of minoritized languages. At the same time, they also illustrate how the field of applied linguistics has evolved, and in that sense the theme of "change" can be considered indicative of scholars' willingness to create room for other voices and stakeholders, as many and as diverse as possible. Most importantly, discussion makes it possible to examine what could be done differently and shake up taken-for granted practices. It may be a cliché, but science is not just a body of knowledge but, above all, a dialogue among researchers, research participants and other stakeholders.

In this yearbook, you will find 19 articles based on a presentation at the AFinLA 2021 anniversary symposium, arranged around four themes. Together, they demonstrate the variety of ways in which applied language studies in Finland deal with the theme of change in society. We hope you find them as engaging as we did, and we are confident that they exhibit some of the reflexivity that characterized the overall spirit of the event.

2 Accommodating reform in language and education policy

Finnish educational institutions are becoming increasingly multilingual and there is therefore a growing need to define institutional language policies. Most universities have already compiled their own language policy documents, some of which are available in multiple languages (see, e.g., University of Helsinki 2014; document available in Finnish, Swedish and English). Traditionally, language policy research has foregrounded regulatory top-down language planning (Ricento 2000). The focus, however, has now started to shift towards how people negotiate situational language practices in multilingual contexts and/or in relation to specific technologies (Hult 2010; Pienimäki 2021).

There has been a growing research interest in language policies in higher education, but the role of administrative staff in regulating language use and in shaping language practices on the ground has received little attention so far. **Anna Solin's** paper addresses precisely this issue, drawing on documents and interviews with ad-

ministrative staff collected in two universities, one in Finland and another in Sweden. Both universities have only one administrative language. In practice, however, running the university often requires multilingual communication, and reconciling situational demands regarding everyday language use and allocation of available resources repeatedly creates tensions in administrative work. Ethnographic research is required, Solin points out, to shed further light on everyday decision-making practices regarding language choices in various administrative genres.

In addition to the emergence of university language policy documents, there is also a growing concern with the role of language in basic education. The renewed National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education 2014/2016) introduces notions such as the language aware school, multiliteracy, and subject-specific languages; it emphasizes that every teacher also has a role to play as a language teacher and pays extensive attention to bilingual education, much more than used to be the case before (Skinnari & Nikula 2017). As Finland is officially a bilingual country, Swedish enjoys a special status as the second national language and as a compulsory subject in schools. **Kaisa Hahl** and **Toni Mäkipää** analyzed how the reform of the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education and the number of teaching hours allocated to studying Swedish have affected students' learning. After the core curriculum reform that took effect in 2016, the teaching of Swedish has started from grade 6 onwards, one year earlier than before. A language test gave some indications as to how the earlier start and the varying number of teaching hours affect students' learning outcomes in Swedish. The findings indicate that the number of hours itself is not the only relevant factor when comparing learning outcomes. In general, students' proficiency in Swedish appears to be decreasing. Finding ways to enhance students' motivation to learn Swedish is therefore of utmost importance.

Dmitri Leontjev is concerned with the uptake of the new National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Education (Finnish National Board of Education 2016), in particular the growing emphasis placed on formative assessment in relation to the digitalization of the Finnish Matriculation Examination (ME). Whereas the curriculum emphasizes formative assessment (or "assessment *for* learning", cf. Davison & Leung 2009) that is firmly rooted in the constructionist tradition, the ME continues to be anchored in positivist-oriented summative assessment ("assessment *of* learning"). The survey data and interviews with teachers indicate that overall, they are rather positive about the changes proposed in the new curriculum but have mixed feelings about how students would react to them. Moreover, teachers' own assessment practices in the classroom continue to be oriented to the requirements of the ME, and as a result "assessment *of* learning" continues to have a strong hold on Finnish upper secondary classrooms. Leontjev suggests that teachers could benefit from support in the development of formative assessment practices, and that collaboration between researchers and teachers would be fruitful here.

In addition to the teaching and learning of the two national languages, schools also need to adapt to the increasing number of students with diverse linguistic backgrounds. **Maria Ahlholm, Anna Slotte** and **Kirsi Wallinheimo** examine how linguistic support for migrant students, both in their first and in the school language, is described in basic education policy documents in three Nordic countries: Finland, Sweden and Norway. In general, the policies in the three countries are highly similar, but there are also outspoken differences. Some of these are based on legislation, such as the amount of time students can spend in instruction that prepares them for basic education. Others depend on the resources and expertise that are available in individual municipalities. In none of the documents, however, do we find a model where the entire linguistic repertoire of the student is taken into account in the learning path. Only those students whose linguistic resources are legitimized in school and who are not subject to racialization or other types of social injustices will effectively celebrate their multilingual identity (Hummelstedt et al. 2021). There is still a lot that needs to be done, especially in teacher education, to raise people's awareness of the need to foster positive attitudes towards diversity and of the different means that are available for supporting multilingual students (Aalto 2019; Hermansson et al. 2021).

With regard to upper secondary education, there is a growing concern that the number and variety of optional languages chosen by students is declining at an alarming rate (Pyykkö 2017; Tilastokeskus 2022). Previous studies exploring teachers' opinions have suggested high workload in upper secondary education as one of the potential reasons (Mäntylä et al. 2021; Veivo et al. 2021). **Pirjo Pollari, Outi Veivo, Jaana Toomar** and **Katja Mäntylä** approach the issue from the perspective of the students. As the teacher-based studies just mentioned already indicated, some students find it difficult to fit language studies into their program (which ties in with recent media commotion about the workload and wellbeing of high school students). Some participants also thought that acquiring good language skills required too much investment from them. Another factor regulating the choice of optional subjects in upper secondary school relates to the universities' changing entrance requirements, according to which language study only benefits those who later apply for language-related higher education programs (for any other field of study, mathematics yields more entrance points). Finally, the authors point out that the ideological dimension and the overall value that is given to language study in Finland should not be underestimated.

3 Evolving practices in language learning and teaching

Global challenges like the COVID pandemic are also reflected in research themes related to the actual learning and teaching of language. Although the use of technology had already increased over the last two decades (see also Tudor 2003; Jakonen et al. 2015), **Tiia Vahtola**, **Pekka Lintunen** and **Minna Majjala** demonstrate how the forced remote teaching period made digital learning materials and digital learning environments even more prominent in the early foreign language (FL) teaching in the first two grades of Finnish primary schools. Somewhat surprisingly, however, digital technology has not been used to connect with communities outside the school, which would add more authenticity to early language learning. Drawing on Manninen et al.'s (2007) model that considers learning environments from a physical, local, social, didactic, and technological perspective, learning environments are grouped into five categories. In each learning environment, teachers implemented functional language teaching methods in the form of physical and playful activities such as different kinds of games and songs. In addition, the teachers used concrete objects such as toy animals or food items during the activities. The classroom activities described in the study were mostly aimed at practicing oral skills and learning new vocabulary as well as reviewing content that had been covered earlier. The authors feel it would be important for teachers to involve students in the planning of classroom activities, since this proved to be an effective method to yield higher motivation towards language learning among the students.

Each academic discipline describes events, agents, relationships, and actions differently. The phenomenon of “disciplinary language” and the literacy practices associated with different academic subjects have recently attracted considerable attention among Finnish scholars (e.g., Joutsenlahti & Kulju 2010; Rantala & Veijola 2016; Sulkunen & Saario 2019; Paldanius 2020; Manninen 2020; Koivumäki 2021), and this is, in turn, closely connected to the insight that every subject teacher is also a language teacher (Satokangas & Tiermas 2021). **Anne Tiermas** uses nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon 2007) to investigate disciplinary literacy practices in lower secondary physics classes. Her findings powerfully demonstrate how in the physics classroom, students develop disciplinary literacy practices through participation in interactional events, for which they use a variety of linguistic resources drawn both from disciplinary language and concrete everyday language.

Annekatriin Kaivapalu and **Jasmin Rankinen** also deal with the language skills of Finnish-speaking lower secondary school students, in particular their capacity to produce passive verbs. Focusing specifically on how the students evaluate their own production skills, they show that some production aspects come across as easier than others: changing the active form to passive was considered relatively straightforward, but inflecting the passive verbs and changing colloquial forms to standard language turned out more difficult. In colloquial Finnish, the double passive occurs frequently

in the perfect and pluperfect tenses (e.g., *ollaan tehty* vs. *on tehty*), and the difficulties participants experienced in changing these colloquial forms to standard ones may be considered as the reflection of an ongoing change in the use of the passive in the Finnish language. Kaivapalu and Rankinen conclude that the entrenched forms of colloquial language have a strong effect on the students' language awareness, which, to our understanding, sits particularly well with the model of the dynamics of the linguistic system that Schmid (2020) recently proposed: language change at the level of community and at the level of the individual are constantly interacting with each other, and concrete usage events are at the center of this interaction.

Teaching pronunciation has received increasing attention in the field of language learning and teaching, which went hand in hand with a shift in emphasis from native-likeness to intelligibility (see e.g., Levis 2005). **Elina Tergujeff's** paper on Finnish EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching adds to this discussion by suggesting that teaching pronunciation should specifically focus on those sounds that are crucial in terms of intelligibility. A listening test involving teenage Finnish L1 speakers and teenage British English L1 listeners demonstrated the extent to which segmental deviations typical of L1 Finnish speakers affect intelligibility. The study offers valuable guidelines for focusing on specific sounds (such as /v/) in teaching L1 speakers of Finnish how to pronounce English segmentals.

Sustainable development themes are becoming increasingly important in educational contexts, and education for sustainable development is now considered an important aspect of teachers' professional skills (Solís-Espallargas et al. 2019). In their contribution, **Päivi Laine, Salla-Riikka Kuusalu** and **Maarit Mutta** examine how sustainability is addressed in language classes and how future language teachers perceive its importance in their teaching. They found that future language teachers do acknowledge the importance of sustainability themes but are also unsure whether they are qualified to teach them and have trouble finding sufficient time to integrate them in their teaching. The authors suggest that future language teachers would benefit from more training, especially in environmental and financial sustainability, so as to help students develop the knowledge and skills needed to build a more sustainable future.

In her keynote (cf. *supra*), Minna Suni presented Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) as an example of the much-needed holistic perspective that is required to better understand the complex process of language learning. **Sirkku Lesonen's** contribution takes up this challenge and presents an overview of dynamic usage-based approaches to language learning that are based on CDST (e.g. Larsen-Freeman 2007; Verspoor et al. 2008; de Bot & Larsen-Freeman 2011), as well as usage-based approaches more generally (e.g. Barlow & Kemmer 2000; Tomasello 2003; Langacker 2009), which make it possible to analyze the development of learner language from a socio-cognitive perspective. She also ponders how dynamic usage-based approaches could be further developed in the future. As Bulté and Housen (2020) have pointed out, CDST

researchers must come up with new methodological solutions so as to unleash its full potential. In Finland and elsewhere, new theories and methods are an important factor in the development of applied linguistics (see also Grasz et al. 2020).

A central tenet of CDST, and of sociocultural approaches to language learning in general, is that learners are considered as inseparable from the learning environment, which includes instruction, multimodal texts, as well as interaction with other language users (de Bot & Larsen-Freeman 2011; Lesonen 2020). According to Larsen-Freeman (2019), language learner agency is also a relational phenomenon and is inseparable from the affordances available in the environment. It represents “people’s ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and hereby pursue their goals as individuals” (Duff 2014: 417). In this yearbook, **Tanja Seppälä** examines the learner agency of migrants enrolled in Finnish integration training in Finland, which she considers both as an individual, social, and societal phenomenon at the same time (see also Duff 2014; Dufva & Aro 2015). The author’s qualitative content analysis of interview data shows that similar training practices can have a differential effect depending on the learner in question, either supporting or limiting agency. This finding corroborates CDST assumptions about the development of dynamic systems, in which patterns arise and changes take place in a non-linear fashion as the different system components interact with each other and with their environment in complex ways that cannot be anticipated solely on the basis of their individual properties (see also Lesonen in this volume).

4 Technologically mediated teaching environments

One of the major changes that took place in the past few decades is the increasing role of technology in daily life, which also extends to (language) learning and teaching (see, e.g., Luukka et al. 2008). It is crucial, therefore, to critically interrogate how these new technologies are implemented in the educational environment and how such change is accommodated.

An important part of language teachers’ work is assessment, which is invariably also related to questions of validity, reliability and ethics (Wei 2014). Because of its complicated nature, oral assessment is often considered somewhat exceptional, but here too, technology provides useful tools to support raters’ work. **Anna von Zansen, Heini Kallio, Milla Sneck, Mikko Kuronen, Ari Huhta** and **Raili Hildén** analyze how language assessment raters perceive the automated assessment of oral production, based on reflections they collected from raters who had participated in an experiment involving the digital assessment of oral samples of Finnish and Swedish. Raters evaluated automated assessment largely positive or neutral, and they considered it a useful tool alongside human assessment. In addition, the authors also examined which aspects of the oral sample the human raters found most important in assessing oral

production. The findings indicate that not all elements of oral proficiency can easily be assessed automatically. Automation can increase the reliability of assessment, but the authors point out that it is crucial to reflect critically on what exactly is meant by oral proficiency, as this plays a crucial role in determining the tasks and evaluation criteria that will be used.

Technological innovation also affects the way data are collected and analyzed (Grasz et al. 2020) and, as such, has greatly facilitated the turn to multimodality in conversation analysis (Mondada 2016), which, in turn, provides a powerful tool for addressing the embodied nature of (language) learning. The paper by **Minttu Vääntinen** analyzes the use of mobile devices during EFL classes in a Finnish comprehensive school. Although the task that the pupils had to solve required them to direct their gaze to their mobile devices in front of them, the analysis also demonstrates the pupils' ability to flexibly reorient gaze to their peers, as a resource for displaying and addressing troubles that emerge in executing that task. The fact that students are simultaneously interacting with their device and with their peers, Vääntinen argues, is something that should be taken into account in the design of such digital tasks.

Increasing digitization not only affects youngsters, and, therefore, it is important to understand how people acquire digital skills at later stages in life (Selwyn 2004). **Joonas Råman** and **Florence Oloff** draw on multimodal conversation analysis to examine how the acquisition of digital skills later in life proceeds *in situ*, and like Vääntinen, they focus on problem solving around mobile devices. In their article, they compare how older participants in a digital skills course in Finland and in Germany use complaints, either about their digital skills or about their device, for recruiting assistance from their teacher. Their analysis identifies two basic sequences in which such complaints routinely occur and highlights their cross-linguistic similarities (and differences) across the Finnish and the German data. One remarkable observation is that during these sequences, the participants seem more oriented towards the devices than to the teacher.

5 The digitization of work and everyday life

Digitization not only affects schools but the whole of working life. Varhelahti & Mikkilä-Erdmann (2016) point out that, in addition to having to acquire new digital skills, digitization also forces professionals to (be able to) use multiple languages at work and navigate cultural differences. **Maarit Leskelä's** paper uses nexus analysis to investigate German-Finnish business communication among IT professionals and sheds more light on the intricate connections between communication, social relationships, and cultural norms and practices at the workplace. When work communities undergo changes, for example through a fusion or a pandemic, internal communication patterns also become reorganized as new actors enter the field and new

practices need to be formed. The findings indicate that successful German-Finnish business communication presents employees with opportunities for participation and agency by allowing each employee to rely on their strengths. Also, in highly technologized environments miscommunication appears to occur more frequently when the development of new ideas is central to the interaction, as happens to be the case in the field of information technology.

As pointed out in the Introduction, digitization has had a profound impact on how our everyday and working lives unfold. To accommodate these changes, the traditional conceptualization of literacy as the skills of reading and writing needs to be expanded as well. Towards this end, the concept of multiliteracies, which are themselves often multilingual, has emerged (Anstey & Bull 2018). From this extended point of view, **Mari Honko, Heidi Vaarala, Sari Sulkunen** and **Sini Söyrinki** have surveyed adults who frequently engage in various writing activities, asking them which kinds of writing skills they consider important and how they see the development of writing in the future. For the respondents, writing is both a means for individual self-expression and for meaningful participation in community and society. Regarding the latter, however, the picture is also somehow ambiguous. On the one hand, digital technologies have a democratizing effect in that they make writing more accessible to larger segments of the population. On the other, they may also limit a person's opportunities for self-expression and present challenges in accessing information, if one lacks digital literacy skills. The authors point out that more context-situated research into writing practices is needed, also because writing practices and the skills required for them change continually due to rapid technological advances.

Societies have always been multilingual, but new technologies provide new opportunities for negotiating the visibility of minority languages and improving their position, which is essential from linguistic rights and linguistic wellbeing perspectives (Kok et al. 2019; Paunonen 2020). **Ilia Moshnikov's** paper provides an overview of websites that have a full interface in Karelian. Drawing on language ideology research and linguistic landscape theory, Moshnikov analyses how and to what extent different varieties of the Karelian language have managed to achieve visibility in the virtual linguistic landscape. While the actual number of websites with a full interface in Karelian might have dwindled a bit in recent years, the use of different varieties of Karelian in social media appears to be flourishing. The visibility is especially important for the minority communities whose speakers are geographically dispersed and whose languages are not represented in the physical linguistic landscape. Moshnikov also points out that the Karelian language still does not enjoy official status. As a result, it is, for example, still not used on official websites and there are few resources for revitalization initiatives.

One area where the social impact of new technologies is particularly significant is social media, and many have pointed to the damaging role the internet plays as a repository for hate speech and conspiracy theories – to the point that we have started

referring to our time as the “post-truth-era” (Pennycook 2021). Highlighting the role of social media as a “fifth estate” and the social responsibilities that come with this, **Sabine Ylönen** looks at the emergence of networks of counter-speech activities trying to counter the normalization of aggressive and hateful speech in an effort to keep the societal debate healthy. Comparing Finnish and German Facebook groups that resort under the network #iamhere international, Ylönen examines the strategies these activists use for lending maximal visibility to their counter-speech efforts. One of the interesting points raised by the analysis relates to the new rules and practices that seem to be emerging in these communities of internet activists around the digital affordances of the Facebook platform.

Technology provides resources to people and creates opportunities for language communities, but they may also engender new inequalities. There is a sharp divide between those who have access to technology and those who do not, and the digital bubbles in which we live may reduce opportunities for communication. The virtual environment is changing rapidly and communication practices and mechanisms for societal coping are changing accordingly. It is important for researchers to attend to these changes, keeping in mind both the new opportunities and the new inequalities opened up by these new technological environments.

6 Conclusion

In this introductory article, we looked at change from various perspectives. Based on the articles of this yearbook, we explored different subfields of applied language studies, including language policies and language choices, language learning and teaching, and the role of technology in education and a variety of other contexts. Our attempt to organize the yearbook contributions thematically may be the point of departure for a reflection on the vast scope of the changes covered in the articles. As has become apparent at this point, the field of applied language studies must accommodate various kinds of changes and must continue to deal with previously underexposed areas. Think of virtual landscapes, device-supported learning, or electronic assessment possibilities.

All articles in this yearbook are related to Finland, either because of their subject matter, data collection, or authors. In this sense, the yearbook is a good starting point to reflect on the current state of applied language research in Finland. In the anniversary year, Finnish researchers seemed particularly interested in broadening their research frameworks, mapping the practical and political aspects of language regulation, exposing the positive and negative effects of technology, and often - as Minna Suni pointed out in her keynote - in elucidating educational practices and language learning experiences and outcomes. However, the focus is not limited to Finland, as evidenced by the numerous comparisons between Finland and other

countries. This yearbook is bilingual and contains articles in both Finnish and English, as well as excerpts and snippets in other languages. We hope that future editors will be able to offer an even more multilingual collection of articles.

Many of the articles touch upon questions of social (in)justice. When considering whose points of view are represented or whose voices are heard, it is obvious that more diversity would be welcome. Even though we make room for the point of view of multilingual students, learners of different ages, teachers who adapt to new practices and people who are forced to adapt to new (technologically mediated) communication environments, many voices remain underrepresented. Even the researchers themselves, although they come from different disciplines and different universities, are still a quite homogenous group. Hence, we also need to critically consider who has access to universities and who has the opportunity to do linguistic research. The context in which we work also deserves attention. As researchers we enjoy a lot of freedom, but our work is also shaped and influenced by insecure work conditions, limited funding opportunities, and the constant pressure to generate output. We ourselves are also subject to change, and as Saarinen and Välimaa (2012: 51) point out, such changes are dictated by both local and global developments.

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