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Author(s): Saarinen, Taina

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Internationalization and the invisible language?

Historical phases and current policies in Finnish higher education

Taina Saarinen

Introduction

Finnish higher education has since the 1800s been a nation state project (Välilä 2001). In recent years, however, the higher education developments and political demands for increased internationalization, and student and staff mobility (see Nokkala 2007; Hoffman 2007; Garam 2009; Ministry of Education 2009) have challenged this relatively stable and traditional understanding of higher education as, first and foremost, a national issue. Systematic internationalization processes since the late 1980s (Saarinen & Laiho 1997; Nokkala 2007) and the latest university reforms have now brought the issue to the forefront.

While internationalization has been in the focus, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the role of language(s) in this process. This is somewhat surprising, since many of the goals of internationalisation, such as increased international co-operation or ability to operate in increasingly international and multicultural environments, would seem to indicate a need to use languages other than the national ones. Some attention has been paid to the use of national languages in *research* (see Hakulinen et al. 2009), but the impacts of internationalisation on policies and practices of university *teaching* have been largely unarticulated both in policy debates as well as by researchers.

Finland (together with the Netherlands) hosts the largest amount of foreign language study programmes in Europe, in proportion to the size of our Higher Education system (Wächter & Maiworm 2008; Garam 2009). This proves Hughes' (2008) point of an "Anglophone asymmetry": in a need to "attract" (as the political metaphor goes) international students, Non-Anglophone countries (such as Finland and Netherlands in Wächter & Maiworm's 2008 study), resort to offering programs in English, trying to adjust to a scene the Anglophone countries have had a 20-year advantage in developing. This, as Hughes (2008) points out, is an issue of both intellectual and economic equality and equity (Hughes 2008), as the Anglophone countries dominate the markets by attracting largest numbers of foreign students and by being able to charge the highest fees.

"Language" has, in general, featured in education policies mainly from the point of view of politically supporting the bilingual status of Finland on one hand and on supporting the study of foreign languages with different kinds of programmes. In the latest development plan for education and research (Ministry of Education 2007), "language" appears on about

a hundred occasions, and these boil down to three general contexts:

- Securing the official bilingual status and the rights of the Swedish speaking minority
- Developing language education of immigrants (instances of teaching of Finnish or Swedish to immigrants clearly outweigh mentions of supporting the teaching of immigrants' own mother tongue)
- Internationalization and its needs

Individual languages are not mentioned, with the exception of those mentioned in the Constitution (Finnish, Swedish, Sami languages & sign languages).

During recent years, our higher education system has been adapted in many ways to meet the demands of the European Higher Education Area (Saarinen 2008). The new internationalization strategy for Finnish higher education was published in the beginning of 2009, calling for further measures towards internationalization. The new university law (2009) changed the legal status of universities from the beginning of 2010 into public law entities or private foundations and this new position is motivated largely from the point of view of internationalization and its attractiveness (Yliopistolaki 2009).

All these processes challenge Finnish higher education from the fundamental perspective of universities and polytechnics as national institutions (providing a public service) in a globalizing world.

This chapter analyses the tensions caused in the traditionally national Finnish higher education policies by demands for "internationalization", by taking *language* as the point of departure, and aiming at understanding the emerging trends towards multilingualism and the increasing use of languages other than Finnish or Swedish in higher education. The starting point is an observation made in an earlier article (Saarinen 2012): in current internationalisation trends of higher education policy, as observed from the micro level of foreign language programmes, language appears invisible. It seems that the role of language is taken for granted and that internationalisation takes place in situations where language is a self-evident tool. The fact that language (either as individual languages or as a generic notion) rarely gets mentioned in the context of internationalisation produces an understanding of language as something so self-evident that it needs not be stated or problematized in the goals of the international strategies of HEIs.

In this article, I will first make a historical overview on the situations where language has been visible. Then, I will look into recent policies of higher education and its internationalisation and their relation to languages. I will close the article with a brief,

hypothetical look into the future: Will language become visible again, and in what circumstances?

The questions I will be answering in the main body of this chapter are:

- *Does “language” have a role in the past and present internationalization policy of Finnish higher education, explicitly or implicitly?*
- *What challenges does the traditionally national language setting of Finnish higher education face, with the increasing demands for internationalization and the increasing English language degree programmes?*

Historical position of language in higher education

The languages of tuition in Finnish higher education have, since Independence in 1917, been Finnish and Swedish. However, in practice since the 1990s, English has been increasingly used in the higher education sector. The new University law of 2004 gave universities, for the first time, the right to give degrees also in other languages than in their official languages of tuition. Before this, universities had the right to give tuition (but not to grant degrees) also in other languages. This possibility was continued in the university law of 2009 (Yliopistolaki 2009). This development had in fact started already in the late 1990 especially in the polytechnics and later also in universities (Pyykkö 2005).

The present situation is, naturally, a result of a longer historical development. Latin was the language of the Royal Academy of Turku, founded in 1640, until the early 1800s, not only because of its international lingua franca status, but also as Latin was seen to “educate and discipline” the youth (Klinge et al. 1987). The domestic challenge to Latin at the Royal Academy of Turku first came from Swedish rather than Finnish, since at that time, Finnish had barely begun to gain formal status as a written language. In doctoral disputations, Latin remained the only language until 1852, when Swedish (and in 1858, along with the national romantic awakening, Finnish) was made an official language for doctoral disputations (Klinge et al. 1989; Tommila 2006; Hakulinen et al. 2009).

Latin was also the language of internationalisation for most of the early history of European higher education. Mauranen (2011) has suggested that Latin kept its status as lingua franca, because there were no mother tongue speakers, i.e. it was not a living threat to local languages. Latin may consequently have been viewed as a more neutral language than the many, already by the 16th and 17th century politicized languages such as French, German or English. It is, however, also possible that the position of Latin within the Catholic Church may have had an influence. During the Reformation, Latin lost some of its status as local languages increasingly started to be used. (Saarinen 2012).

National higher education and breakthrough of national languages

Latin remained the language of higher education until the 19th Century. As a language of tuition, it was first challenged by Swedish and then, gradually, Finnish. In doctoral disputations Latin remained the only possible language until mid 19th Century, until Swedish (1852) and Finnish (1858) were made possible. (Klinge et al. 1987; Tommila 2006; Hakulinen et al. 2009). By the late 19th century, Finnish was seriously challenging Swedish as the language of higher education. Latin, however, remained the language of internationalisation of Higher Education, until replaced by German by the end of 19th Century.

The first years of Independence

During the first years of Finnish Independence, two new (private) universities were founded, both based on language ideologies. The Swedish language Åbo Akademi (Åbo Akademi University) was founded in 1919, while the Finnish language Turun yliopisto (University of Turku) was founded in 1922. The reason behind this simultaneous promotion of both Finnish and Swedish language education was that University of Helsinki was “becoming Finnish” either too quickly or too slowly, depending on which side of the language divide the person stood. ((Klinge 1987; Tommila 2006.)

In 1924, the languages of the University of Helsinki were stated as Finnish and Swedish, but in practice, teaching took place largely in Swedish. This led into the language debates of the 1930s, which were solved in 1937, as a decree was drafted stating that the language of tuition at the University of Helsinki should be Finnish, but rights of the Swedish speaking students should be guaranteed: A fixed number of Swedish speaking professors should be appointed (Tommila 2006; Klinge et al. 1987). University of Helsinki remains a bilingual university to date, with a responsibility for certain Swedish language training such as training of lawyers, medical doctors, dentists and agricultural experts.

The language political feuds of higher education eased away gradually, in the 1930s as the bilingual principles and practices for the University of Helsinki were agreed on. Higher education policies focussed in the postwar decades on regional policy questions, as new universities were founded in the eastern and northern parts of the country based on regional policy arguments (Kivinen et al. 1993). Implicitly, language questions were still present in the postwar years, as the new universities were explicitly Finnish-speaking.

The period after the Second World War witnessed, however, another language policy development. In the late 1930's, according to Numminen (1987), only some five or six of

the then approximately 100 full professors spoke English, while the rest operated internationally in German. After the war, English gradually replaced German as the language of internationalisation of Finnish higher education. At least two factors promoted this development. Firstly, the foreign policy direction of Finland changed drastically as a consequence of the Second World War, as the orientation towards Germany weakened and Germany lost the cultural and political position it had held in Finland (and elsewhere in Europe) in the first half of the 20th century. (Hietala 2003, 135.) Secondly, the growth of English as the language of internationalisation was strongly promoted by the United States of America “cultural foreign policies” since the war. The U.S. first started to direct back the war loan funds paid by Finland towards the study of Finnish students in the United States, and in 1952 Finland joined the international Fulbright network (Fulbright Center 2011).

The period of internationalisation of higher education

The 1980s witnessed a new era in Finnish higher Education policies, as the new principles of Management by results started to take over from the more centralised post-war policy making (Kivinen et al. 1993). Features of this change were strong decentralisation, increasing demands for accountability and quality assurance, individualization of education, and changes in funding structures.

During this new period also policies of internationalisation started to take shape and systematize. Already in the 1980s exchange programmes (both for students and staff) started to grow, and universities were rewarded among other things for internationalisation (see Saarinen and Laiho 1997). The Centre for International Mobility CIMO was founded in 1991 to promote internationalisation of education at all levels.

In Finland, already in the early 1990s, there was strong political support for setting up international degree programs both to attract international students and to foster “internationalisation at home” for Finnish students. The polytechnic sector, in particular, was active in this. In the 1990s, 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. Some programmes do exist in Finnish (for student of Fenno-Ugric studies) or in Swedish.

Historical summary

Table 1 summarizes the historical periods of languages in Finnish higher education and its internationalization:

	Language of tuition	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 language policy)	Finnish, Swedish	German
c. 1950-1980 (period of regional policy)	Finnish, Swedish	English
c. 1990 - (period of internationalisation)	Finnish, Swedish (English)	English

Table 1. Languages in different periods of Finnish higher education

As the previous chapter shows, language(s) have, basically, been visible in 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 front 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 at the University of Helsinki.

Next, I will look into the current policies for internationalisation and the position of languages in this situation.

The current period of internationalisation and the position of language(s)

The internationalization period in Finnish higher education started in the late 1980s, and was at that time geared towards internationalisation of research (Nokkala 2007). The first focus was on student and staff exchange programmes. In the 1990s and especially 2000s, the weight turned on developing foreign language study programmes. As a consequence of

the first policy for internationalisation (Ministry of Education 1987), foreign language degree programmes were set up; initially in the polytechnic sector, and after that in universities

The number of international programmes in Finnish higher education grew fast. In 1996, there were approximately 75 English language programmes in universities and polytechnics; in 1999 this had almost doubled. In December 2010, there were 335 international degree programmes (Bachelor's and Master's level) at universities and polytechnics. These are overwhelmingly English; two were run in Swedish (the other national language in Finland), and five in "other" languages, which means Finnish and Fenno-Ugric degree programmes offered for foreigners. Measured by the share of English taught programmes against all programmes, Finland ranks second in Europe after the Netherlands. Measured by the proportion of institutions providing English language programmes, Finland ranks first in Europe. (Wächter and Maiworm 2008.)

The next internationalisation strategy of 2001 (Ministry of Education 2001) made specific reference to the "competitive edge" offered by English. "English language" programmes were also referred to, but mostly reference was made to "Foreign language" programmes.

The latest internationalisation strategy for higher education was accepted in 2009 (Ministry of Education 2009). Also this 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) into "foreign":

The higher education institutions offer high-quality education focused on their fields of expertise, given in foreign languages. (Ministry of Education 2009, 26)

Even when the strong position of English is acknowledged, reference is made to *foreign languages*:

Higher education institutions have increased education given in foreign languages leading to a qualification. In proportion to the size of our higher education sector, there is an exceptionally large amount of teaching available in English.. (Ministry of Education 2009, 14)

The dual attitude towards *foreign language* on one hand and *English* on the other reflects, on one hand, the practical relationship to English as the current international *lingua franca*, and, on the other, the Finnish goal of promoting other languages as well. However, linking

English and foreign in this way fades out language from internationalisation. I will move to this invisibility of language in internationalisation next.

This invisibility of language in the context of internationalisation and globalisation has been noticed recently elsewhere as well. The American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) organized in March 2011 a conference, where Pratt held a plenary titled "Why Don't Theories of Globalization Think About Language?" Pyykkö (2011, 26) has, along the same lines, written about the invisibility of language in Finnish Innovation policy, where language has been hidden behind words like co-operation, interaction and communication. Language is rendered invisible in internationalisation, but why?

For an article (Saarinen 2012) I looked into the short marketing blurbs of the foreign language degree programmes of four universities (University of Helsinki, University of Turku, University of Jyväskylä and Helsinki University of Technology) and four polytechnics (Metropolia Polytechnic, Laurea Polytechnic, Turku Polytechnic and Jyväskylä Polytechnic), found on their website front pages. There were 73 cases, and I specifically looked into mentions of language in these texts that were in average 100 words long. Four categories in relation to languages emerged (Saarinen 2012):

1. Knowledge of English is presented as a basic and necessary entry qualification. (N=5)
2. Implicit or explicit reference is made to participation in the study programme giving language skills or intercultural skills (N=21).
3. Languages and/or communication and/or intercultural skills are mentioned specifically as program contents. (N=7)
4. No particular reference is made to languages or culture (N=40).

Out of the 73 English language programmes in the data, 40 made no mention of languages in their web introductions whatsoever. This implies, first, that language in general is taken for granted, and second, that English is self-evidently the language of tuition in the so-called foreign language degree programmes in Finland. Mauranen (2011) has said that while English has come to stay in the globalised university world, it is not the same English that we learned at school. The key words of Global English are interactionality and clarity.

What does self-evidence of language mean?

Why, then, the conflated usage of "foreign" for "English"? This euphemism may imply willingness in principle to promote languages other than English – a steady policy goal since the 1990s (Tella et al. 1999). It might also be due to an unwillingness to specifically acknowledge the strong position of English in Finnish society (see Hakulinen et al. 2009 for

a criticism of English and Leppänen et al. 2008 for an analysis of English in Finland.) In any case, language is treated as something more or less self-evident in Finnish policies of higher education internationalisation.

This self-evidence can take place at least on two levels:

First, the analysis above clearly indicates that it is taken for granted that the language is English with no exceptions. Any exception would, by definition, be explicitly mentioned.

Second, it is possible that the language of tuition is not mentioned, because language is seen instrumentally, merely as a technical tool. As such, it is irrelevant what the language in question is. This may reflect a view of language where language is either reduced to disciplinary specialized vocabulary or even to “multicultural small talk”.

Discussion: is the invisibility of language breaking?

The invisibility of language and the euphemization of *English for foreign* seems to reflect a paradox of internationalisation. Increasing international co-operation may, in fact, lead into increasing linguistic homogenisation, as the increase in global mobility reduces the available common languages into English (in comparison with the earlier, more regional internationalisation). On the other hand, this might also be a macro political illusion, if we base our observations only on policies or on the current study programmes. For instance in Denmark, interesting research is being conducted into the position of local languages in internationalisation. It seems that, for international students, the local language may also be becoming a lingua franca (Haberland 2011). This leads us into a direction that is out of the scope of this short article: will we be witnessing a geographical or disciplinary localization and diversification of language practices in the world of higher education and research?

Officially, the aim of Finnish internationalization is both to attract foreign students and to internationalize Finns. However, we can ask, whether these are indeed compatible aims, and what kind of internationalisation is promoted by presenting English language degree programmes as self-evidently international. Current higher education policies seem to encourage “internationalisation”, but the position of language is both unclear and unproblematic.

Language has always surfaced in Finland in times of some kind of national turmoil. Past examples of this are the period of national awakening in mid 19th century, and the two first decades of independence. Since the Parliamentary elections of April 2011, it is obvious that

we have come to another such phase in Finnish history. Language has become a political issue again, and this is reflected in the political discussions about the position of Swedish in Finland. This is true also of internationalisation developments in Finland. In early 2009, a (Finnish) student filed a formal complaint to the Office of the Chancellor of Justice about English language tuition, appealing to his/her constitutional right to receive tuition in his or her mother tongue. The Office ruled against the student (OKV/1001/1/2009), but the issue alone indicates that language is becoming visible again.

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