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## **Bilingual Bachelor's programmes: redesigning language attitudes at the Department of Chemistry**

**Chemistry** is one of the departments at the University of Helsinki that took up the challenge of introducing bilingual (Finnish – Swedish) Bachelor's programmes a few years back. The TvEx or KaTu (abbreviation of Bilingual Programme in Swedish and Finnish) is obviously important for the teachers and students who participate in the programme. However, my additional interest in these programmes stems from my background as a higher education policy and language policy researcher. In that context, TvEx / KaTu appear to have a role not only in increasing the number of bilingual experts in the working life and academic community, but in influencing language attitudes especially towards Swedish in Finland.

**I interviewed** several teachers, other staff members and students about the bilingual programmes at different departments of the University of Helsinki in November and December 2017. It seems that the programmes tackle the position of Swedish in new ways. The Finnish tradition of bilingualism has meant that degree programmes have been monolingual, while some universities have – as institutions – been bilingual. This tradition of *parallel monolingualism* (a term coined by Canadian sociolinguist Monica Heller) has kept Finnish and Swedish apart; a practice which has in previous research and policy been welcomed by some as the guarantee of the survival of a minority language, and criticized by others as an obstacle to the flexible use of different languages.

**What has changed** in Finland to make this kind of bilingual programme possible in the traditionally bilingual University of Helsinki? It appears that internationalisation of higher education has, somewhat paradoxically, made the national languages more visible in Finland in recent years. While Finland had at some point more English language Masters programmes than any other non-Anglophone country in Europe, it now seems that attention is turning back towards guaranteeing the position of Finnish and Swedish in higher education. It seems that particularly Swedish has landed in a tight spot when bilingual Finnish – Swedish universities have redesigned their language practices to include English as a third language.

**Particularly for the Swedish intake of students**, the bilingual programmes appear to have provided a lifeline. The students are expected to complete 60 ECTS in Finnish and Swedish each, and the language of the remaining 60 ECTS is optional. The threshold for entering the bilingual programme is low – if the student does not complete the required 60 ECTS in both languages, he or she can always return to the monolingual degree. Language support from the Language Centre helps.

The bilingual programmes are, however, not just about learning another language. Languages are fundamental in producing knowledge and construing identities. In that sense, the bilingual programmes are not important just because of the particular discipline specific language that the students learn in both Finnish and Swedish. They are important because they have an effect on the attitudes towards majority and minority languages.

**For the Finnish speaking students**, the programme integrates language with substance, thus easing the difficulty of fitting extra language courses in the tightly packed bachelor's degrees. Swedish becomes a language of a community and dialogue, not only an extra course in an already busy schedule.

**For the Swedish speaking students**, the programme shows that the minority language is important! Jenny Sylvén, a doctoral researcher from the University of Helsinki has shown that Swedish speakers are left to look after their language rights and tend to turn to the Swedish speaking personnel in

their matters. The bilingual programmes may lower the threshold of language use both for students and staff.

**Finnish university staff** has generally positive attitudes towards multilingualism, as Sabine Ylönen from the University of Jyväskylä has shown. Also students appear to be interested in languages, which is witnessed by the long queues to language courses in Language Centres. It seems that new kinds of ways of introducing multilingualism in the university curricula are needed. Bilingual programmes provide one way of achieving this.