

**LANGUAGES AND CULTURES UNDER THE PRESSURE OF GLOBALIZATION:
ENGLISH IN FINLAND AND ELSEWHERE**

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Helsingin yliopisto, Porthania PI and the University Main Building

Abstracts for the plenary talks:

Multilingualism in Finland

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The purpose of the presentation is to describe the language situation and the language policy in Finland and to discuss both the linguist's role and the institutional framework in language planning in a modern multilingual society.

The linguistic environment has changed during the past few decades in Finland as well as elsewhere in the world. This change has led us into a situation where we should take more responsibility of our mother tongues and of all the mother tongues spoken in various countries.

We can approach the variety of mother tongues spoken in Finland through the numbers of speakers of each language, thereby profiling the development of the past thirty years. Traditionally, the languages spoken in Finland have been Finnish, Swedish, three Sámi languages, Romani and the Finnish sign language. Especially since the 19th century there have also been speakers of Russian and Tatar, as well as of other languages, such as Estonian and German. During the past two decades in particular, members of language groups not previously represented in Finland, especially African and Asian, have moved to Finland. These groups are, however, very small when compared, for example, with those of the other Nordic countries.

The linguistic map of Finland has thus undergone interesting changes during the past few decades. Slowly but steadily, the number of speakers of different languages has continuously increased. According to the statistics, as many as about 150 languages are spoken in Finland.

When we speak of the language legislation in Finland we are, in fact, dealing with developments which have taken place during a period of approximately 150 years and which have, at a later stage, led into the establishing of the actual Language Act. When I refer to the Finnish problems and the issues that need to be corrected, I speak of the situation of a deeply bilingual country and indeed of questions that have been considered since the 19th century. I will briefly discuss the Finnish language legislation mainly in the light of three Acts: the Constitution, the Language Act and the Sámi Language Act. I will also make a brief reference to other legislation on language and discuss the status of various languages in our society.

English is used as a working language in certain professional, educational, and other contexts also in Finland. While the practical value of this is acknowledged, it is considered of the utmost importance to maintain, strengthen, and further develop

national languages in all their functional domains. The discussion of the balance between English vs. Finnish or Swedish is thus of interest in Finland.

English and other international languages under the impact of globalization

Ulrich Ammon

University of Duisburg-Essen

This contribution will focus mainly on international languages of the second tier, as it were, in the rank order of the languages in today's world. Globalization has had the effect of squeezing the majority of these languages out of international communication, let alone global communication, since English more and more functions as the exclusive, or at least supremely prominent, language in typical international domains like science, diplomacy, the media, or major areas of business. This development has the side effect of reducing these languages' attraction as subjects of foreign language studies, of which, among other data, the decline of foreign language studies in the major Anglo-Saxon countries is an indicator.

This contribution will discuss the following questions and present data relevant to them:

- Which languages except English still have a function in international communication, which function and to what extent?
 - What is the future outlook for these international languages, especially with regard to their international function?
 - What are, or would be, the consequences of recent changes or, in particular, of future perspectives for these language communities, for their native speakers, and for their speakers and learners as a foreign language?
 - What language policy measures could or should be considered to ameliorate existing or potential hardships deriving from changes in the international function of these languages?
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Global communication vs. local language: is conflict inevitable?

Susan Bassnett

University of Warwick

The growth of English as a world language means that millions of people are increasingly becoming bi- or multilingual. At the same time, native English speakers are discouraged from learning other languages and so are becoming more monolingual, with the added risk of becoming monocultural. This unbalanced situation can lead to serious failures in international communications.

This paper will explore some of the sources of tension between local and global communication, and will focus on the role that can be played by translation, particularly the translation of global news.

Learning to Read a New Culture

James McGonigal
University of Glasgow

This presentation reports on the findings of a year-long project that explored the attitudes of immigrant and asylum-seeking children to the Scottish language and culture in which they now find themselves. The project, funded by the Scottish Executive (the devolved government of Scotland within the UK context), also considered issues of home and school literacy, the maintenance of community languages, and the extent to which these children used inter-textual and previous literacy awareness from their previous cultures.

The researchers used children's texts in various genres (folk tales, science fiction, comics, short stories and poetry) but all of these were written in the Scots language, a variety of northern English that diverged from ancient Anglian (influenced by Norse and Scots Gaelic) and developed its own significant literature from the Middle Ages onwards, while Scotland was a separate kingdom. It is still widely spoken, particularly by working class people among whom asylum-seeking families are often housed, and by children as a semi-subversive playground code. Thus migrant children encounter it as an aspect of social survival among their peers, although it is rarely used in classroom contexts where Standard English (or a Scottish version of it) is taught and preferred.

The chosen texts were used both with whole-class mixed groups of immigrant and native Scottish children, and with smaller groups of migrant children, and the children's responses to and engagement with the texts were recorded. Two key findings were the positive reaction of Scottish children, particularly 'reluctant' boys, to these texts written in versions of their own local language, and also the way in which the stories and poems offered asylum-seeking children a 'safe space' or 'imagined happiness' in which to bring together their ongoing experience of fragmented cultures.