

Language and demography: historical development

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Abstract

In this article a sociolinguistic as well as a demographic perspective is used in order to present the historical background of the Swedish language in Finland and of the users of this language. The first part describes the evolution of the Swedish language as it developed into a complete language, serving the needs of the Finnish society. This description primarily deals with issues at the macro level, whereas social and dialectal variations at the micro level only are touched upon en passant. In the latter part of the article, the development of Finnish society at the macro level is discussed by means of demographic and linguistic statistical data. Issues dealt with here concern the spread of bilingualism in the course of various periods and in different parts of the country via marriages between partners with different mother tongues.

1. Varieties of Swedish throughout history

The written and spoken Swedish language in Finland — also called “Finland-Swedish” — is one of the five regional varieties of Swedish. The other four are used in present-day Sweden proper. The historical reason that a fifth variant of Swedish is still in use in Finland is that the geographical area that today forms the republic of Finland was part of Sweden for almost 700 years, i.e., from the twelfth century until 1809.

The history of the Swedish language in Finland, and the Swedish language territory in general, begins before Sweden was consolidated as a state, where the establishment of a nation as such and the development of an organized society led up to the evolution of a standard language used in all linguistic domains in which such a language today is considered prevalent. During the centuries following the twelfth century, the history of the Swedish language should be regarded as uniform, though it is

possible to speak of a parallel evolution on both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia separating Sweden from Finland proper. After a war between Sweden and Russia (1808–1809), Finland became a Grand Duchy within the Russian empire, but the standing of the Swedish language in Finland was in fact initially only marginally affected. Later on, the course of events during the twentieth century (after Finland's declaration of independence in 1917) has exerted more influence on the evolution of the regional Finnish variety of Swedish.

1.1. *Written standard Swedish develops*

The prerequisite for the evolution of what in current terminology is called a standard language is the existence of a reasonably uniform written language. It is in the encounter with written language — primarily through the church, the school, various kinds of literature, and, in our times in addition to this, the mass media — that citizens in a country absorb a common linguistic model they also can use orally when communicating outside the local community. As long as no common written language is available, the standardizing process remains in its infancy. In order to develop into a full-scale standard language, the written language has to expand into several important domains (Teleman 2002, 2003).

The foundations of the standard variety of the spoken and written Swedish used in Finland today were of course laid in the core regions of the Swedish language in Sweden. One of the first written language domains developed in Swedish was the legal language. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the so-called Law Rolls of the Swedish Provinces were framed in Swedish. An additional important normative source of another kind was the religious texts written during the Catholic period in, i.e., the Brigittine monastery in Vadstena in Sweden proper, founded in 1369. In the eastern part of the realm, i.e., Finland, a monastery belonging to the same order was founded at Naantali (in Swe. *Nådendal*) in southwestern Finland in 1438, where a religious literature in Swedish was compiled, either as translations or paraphrased from the original Latin. After the Protestant Reformation, by the resolutions taken by the Diets of Västerås (1527) and Örebro (1529), respectively, the publication in Swedish of the New Testament in 1526 and the entire Bible in 1541 was exceedingly important for the dispersion of a written language model and thus also for the evolution of a standard language (Svensson 1988; Pettersson 1996; Moberg and Westman 1996; Teleman 2002; Larsson 2003).

During the seventeenth century, the first more important literary and scholarly works in Swedish were published, but the eighteenth century

was especially crucial for the development of Swedish as a scholarly language.¹ The status of Latin still remained high in the scholarly and scientific world, but it was still important that the Swedish language was admitted in such prestigious written language domains as the scholarly and scientific ones. During the same period, the first dramatic works in Swedish were written, and the first example of journalism in Swedish was printed. The evolution of a scholarly and scientific factual prose also resulted in ventures involving linguistic descriptions (grammars and dictionaries) as well as a conscious development of the standard language *per se* (Teleman 2002: 63–110).

What happened to the same language, i.e., did it enjoy the necessary prerequisites for development in the corresponding literary, scholarly, and journalistic fields in Finland, the eastern part of the Swedish territory? At the Royal Academy in Åbo (founded in 1640) the scientific sector was also cultivated, albeit mostly in Latin. During the eighteenth century, an increasing number of the Master disputations were at least written in Swedish, especially if the theme of the thesis was domestic (Tandefelt 2003a). Also incidental poems, broadsheets, and folk ballads were written in Swedish, and the first newspaper in Finland was published in Swedish in 1771. There was as yet no equivalent in Finnish. The development of a Finnish standard language for administration, science, education, factual prose, *belles lettres*, and media did not start until later in the nineteenth century (Ikola 1984). As a written language, Swedish was dominant due to its wide field of domains.

1.2. *Spoken standard Swedish develops*

The Swedish dialects used on the Finnish side of the Baltic had their roots on the Swedish side. The peaceful colonization by peasant farmers east of the sea during the early Middle Ages and the three so-called crusades (approximately 1155, 1238, and 1293) were followed by immigration to the eastern half of the realm by representatives of various professions, trades, and crafts. Clergymen, fief beneficiaries, bailiffs, farm foremen, mill operators, and artisans were needed in Finland *pari passu* with the consolidation of the Swedish state, and the eastern half of the realm became an integrated part of a common nation, with the right to take part in the election of kings (1363), and later with representation in the national diets.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the need for officers, teachers, civil servants, and representatives of the authority of the crown constantly grew and many persons moved from the western to the eastern part of the realm. They brought along their respective varieties of the

Swedish language, which at that time were more locally than socially stratified. With the written language as a basis, the spoken standard Swedish evolved and in this process Turku (in Swe. Åbo; see Figure 1 in Liebkind et al., this issue) in southwestern Finland played a decisive role.

During the entire period when Finland was part of the Swedish realm, Turku was an important centre for administration, the church, the judicial system, and education. In all these public sectors Swedish, not Finnish, was used. The majority of the population was Finnish-speaking, but the city had a large Swedish minority, which also represented several social classes, persons of rank as well as servants. In Turku many languages thus intermingled: Finnish and Swedish, as well as local dialects of both, in addition to the almost mainstream Swedish spoken language the individuals who had immigrated from the western part of the realm represented. Turku with its thousand-odd inhabitants was in other words a linguistic melting pot (Ahlbäck 1971).

It is possible to claim the existence of a socially stratified spoken language — an urban Swedish — no later than during the eighteenth century in Finland. The language of the upper classes had continually become adapted to the written language, but also to urban Swedish, especially the variant spoken in Stockholm. The Swedish spoken in Turku was not without distinctive Finnish features, but the language of the upper classes in Finland did not differ very much from the contemporary mainstream Swedish spoken in Sweden. Among the lower classes, on the other hand, the previously more spread dialectal traits lived on. One distinctive characteristic was also the influence from Finnish. More or less bilingual individuals spoke Swedish interspersed with Finnish features. The socially stratified Turku Swedish gradually spread to other localities in Finland through representatives of various professions and trades (Ahlbäck 1971).

Swedish was the language that dominated the entire Swedish realm, although only a minority in Finland had Swedish as their mother tongue (see Table 1). Statistically, Swedish-speaking Finns were always a minority, but socially and politically Swedish was a majority language and the requirement for social advancement was command of Swedish.

1.3. *Swedish in the Grand Duchy under the Russian czar*

The Swedish king lost the eastern part of his realm to the Russian czar in the war between Sweden and Russia, 1808–1809. Finland was not, however, directly incorporated into the Russian empire, but made a Grand Duchy directly subordinated to the czar, in which the Protestant religion of the population as well as its languages (Swedish and Finnish) were

respected, and the indigenous legislation remained in force. The laws of the Grand Duchy of Finland were framed in Swedish, the language of the officials was Swedish, the Royal Academy of Turku (in Swe. *Kungliga Akademin i Åbo*) functioned in Swedish, and the church used both Swedish and Finnish. The language of the educated classes was Swedish, but in addition to this some also had command of at least spoken Finnish, beside one or several of the continental languages such as German and/or French. Gradually, Russian became a language used, among others, by officials and trades people in their professions.

Swedish continued to function as a complete standard language serving the needs of the society. But in 1863, the czar issued a language manifest making Finnish the other language for administrative use in the Grand Duchy. The decree was to be put into effect over a period of twenty years, so the change did not take place overnight. If one could speak of a kind of diglossia up to the middle of the nineteenth century, in which Swedish had dominated the highest genres and the most prestigious domains, an evolution now took place that in the end resulted in a parallel use of both languages up to modern times (Ivars 2005a).

During the Swedish period, contacts with the Swedish language in Sweden had been close, continuous, and full of nuances, not least because of reciprocal mobility. Due to the fact that the need for collaboration concerning official matters more or less came to an end, these contacts became less and less frequent. Private dealings with relatives and friends in both countries, as well as cultural interchange, however, remained (and still remain). When the seat of the central government of the Grand Duchy, by decree of the czar, was transferred, in 1812, from Turku to Helsinki (in Swe. *Helsingfors*), the distance to Stockholm, the former capital of the realm, was lengthened. The Royal Academy in Turku was also moved to Helsinki (1827) and later became the University of Helsinki. After that, the political, intellectual, and cultural elites of Finland were found in the new capital.

With regards to language development, these changes meant that the contact with the linguistic evolution in Sweden was no longer guaranteed and became more one-sided. Finns traveled to Sweden and could stay there for, e.g., a study period, but Swedes in Sweden no longer had similar natural reasons for visiting Finland in order to pursue studies or take up a post in the administration, the educational sector, the judiciary, or the church. The genuine “Sweden-Swedish” contribution needed in order to arrest a separate linguistic development was thus weakened. From now on, Swedish became what is today called a pluricentric language, in which the evolution within the core region of the language in Sweden and in its periphery in Finland no longer could run on parallel courses (Reuter

1992). By and by, Finnish linguists became aware of this state of affairs, and the discussion started on the consequences of this for the Swedish language in Finland and for the Swedish-speaking population in the country.

1.4. *Swedish in Finland becomes the subject of linguistic studies*

Nevertheless, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that a scholarly interest in the Swedish language in Finland awoke and scholars started to take an interest in Finland-Swedish characteristics. At the beginning of the century, it was instead the Finnish language that attracted most interest on the part of scholars (Hiidenmaa and Nuolijärvi 2004). When the domestic interest in Swedish awoke, linguists noticed words and modes of expression that were not used in the central parts of the speech area, i.e., Sweden proper. They asked themselves if the separate evolution they thought they had observed was the consequence of the separation from Sweden, or if the differences were older than that. They did not merely discuss the matter, but actively collected examples of characteristics classified as, e.g., archaisms, loans from Finland-Swedish dialects, Russicisms, and Fennicisms. On all linguistic levels, influence, not least from Finnish, could be traced (Laurén 1985).

At the end of the nineteenth century, especially around the turn of the century 1900, the basis for Finnish research in the field of Swedish in Finland was laid, and, in a few simple words, followed two lines. On the one hand, scholars studied the Finland-Swedish dialects and naming customs, on the other hand, they systematically worked to compile and describe the differences between standard Swedish in Sweden and Finland, respectively. Dialectology, onomastics, and language history also served language-political purposes. By means of their studies, scholars could demonstrate the deep roots of the Swedish-speaking part of the population in the country, which was necessary at a time when the Fenno-nationalistic movement to a certain extent was explicitly anti-Swedish (Hämäläinen 1968).

The studies of the Finland-Swedish characteristics also served double purposes. Apart from the fact that the results were of linguistic interest, there was also a need for applicable knowledge. Here, the groundwork for the Finland-Swedish language cultivation was laid,² the main principles of which are still valid today. On the one hand, scholars were of the opinion that a separate evolution of the Swedish in Finland was inconsistent with the interests of the minority; on the other hand, they agreed that active language planning activities should involve the written, not the spoken language. The basis of the Finnish language planning was laid at

the same time. Standard Finnish evolved, domain was added to domain at the same time as measures were taken to counteract the Swedish interference and to replace loan words with Finnish words. Language planning could also serve language-political ends, irrespective of whether the steps taken concerned Swedish or Finnish. Within both language groups, there was a tendency toward purism, fired by ideological motives (Laurén 1985; Ivars 2005a; Reuter 2005).

1.5. *Swedish in Finland — a national language in minority*

Finland was urbanized comparatively late; the process started in the middle of the nineteenth century. As a consequence of the changing economic structure, a massive migration process toward the cities set in, chiefly in southern and southwestern Finland. In the second part of this article, this development will be presented in figures. The consequences of this development for the Swedish language will be described briefly here.

The intensive migration from the interior, Finnish-speaking Finland toward the Swedish-speaking and bilingual coastal areas turned cities and industrial communities into linguistic melting pots where the linguistic habits of the local population and the newcomers met and rubbed against each other. The dialects, which in rural areas had signified a speaker's local domicile, now became elements of an urban language in which the presence of dialectal characteristics — or the absence of such traits — instead revealed the social standing of the speaker (Gullmets-Wik 2004; Ivars 2005b).

Not only intermingling of indigenous speakers and newcomers in the rapidly growing urban environment affected the language. The schools, where all pupils encountered the standard language, also made efficient and target-orientated efforts. A consequence of this, among other factors, is that the dialects have been reduced to a more uniform level and many more today meet the standard language in speech and writing than was the case only a few generations ago. This development has taken place in both language groups, in about the same manner and at the same rate in the course of the period following World War II (Nuolijärvi 1986; Tandefelt 1988).

In theory and according to law, the Swedish language as a national language has kept its full domain repertory (see McRae, this issue). Swedish is used in the exercise of public authority, in legislation and education on all levels, in the churches, etc. The Swedish-speaking Finns enjoy a selection of mass media (see Moring and Husband, this issue), literature, and, to a certain extent, entertainment in Swedish. As customers in shops,

banks, and insurance companies, etc., they can enjoy service in Swedish with varying success in different parts of the country.

The condition for maintaining such a domain repertory is that there are individuals with a command of Swedish on the level of a native language who are capable of framing laws, writing books, working as journalists, preaching in the churches, and teaching in the Finland-Swedish schools. Persons who can translate original texts from Finnish to idiomatic Swedish are also required. Not all texts encountered by Swedish-speaking Finns in daily life are original ones; many of them have been translated from Finnish. Translated language is also normative for the users. It contributes to the divergence that a variety in a peripheral situation is constantly involved in (Tandefelt 2003b).

In the beginning of the twentieth century, linguists and language experts in a newly awakened manner started to discuss whether or not the Swedish language in Finland was involved in a process leading to a divergence from the Swedish used in Sweden. Around the turn of the century 2000, the discussion involves not only the separate evolution of the language, but also the weakening native language proficiency among Swedish-speaking Finns (Tandefelt 1996; see Leinonen and Tandefelt, this issue). Later articles in this issue will deal with these and other topical matters. In the following part of this article, demographic facts of the Swedish-speaking Finns will be presented and commented upon.

2. The demographic development of the Swedish-speaking population in Finland

In order to help interpretation of the articles presented in this issue, a brief description of the demographic conditions is called for. It is, however, important to realize that the composition of a population at a given point of time is the result of a long-term demographic development, and it is necessary to look not just at the present situation but also at the development back in time. The presentation in this section is from a purely demographic point of view.

Generally, for most societies, comprehensive statistical data on language or ethnic groups are not available, but for the Swedish-speaking population such data fortunately exist. As Finland was part of the Swedish kingdom until 1809, it has the longest comprehensive population registers in the world. Thus, official statistics, including both population size and vital statistics, are available annually since 1749. Initially, the mother tongue of the inhabitants was not registered; however, from 1880 onwards this information has also been available in Finland.

With such seemingly exact data it is important to realize that the criterion used for determining a person's language group may influence the classification. Initially, the statistics were based on the notations in the parish registers. All individuals were classified according to "mother tongue" and the vicars were instructed to perform the classification according to 'the language used in connection with confirmation' (in Swe. *kristendomsundervisningsspråk*) in uncertain cases. These data were collected every tenth year. In 1950, the first nationwide census was performed and it included a question about language group: "Language best spoken. In uncertain cases the language group you consider yourself belonging to." In the censuses of 1960 and 1970, the former sentence was replaced by "Main language." No further instructions were given.

From 1977 onwards, the population statistics are based on the central population registers, where the language group criterion is again "mother tongue." As will be seen below, this had a clear effect on the registered number of Swedish speakers. From this year onward, most information about population size and composition as well as demographic events is available annually, separately for the Swedish-speaking population.

In the 1950 census, a question about ability to speak Finnish and Swedish was included; but with this exception, no nationwide information about competence or language usage has been collected. Also note that all statistics are based on information about individuals. Thus in the statistics a "bilingual family" is a family where the spouses are classified as belonging to different language groups, but both languages are not necessarily used in practice. To conclude, there exists detailed demographic information separately for the Swedish-speaking population, but all the data have to be interpreted with some caution.

2.1. *General development*

The estimate of the number of Swedish speakers that goes farthest back in time is due to Wallén (1932). According to his calculations, the Swedish speakers amounted to about 70,000 persons in 1610. This was 17.5% of the total population. However, this estimate must be considered very uncertain due to the lack of appropriate data. A much more accurate figure was presented by Gylling (1911), who estimated the numbers of Swedish speakers to be some 87,200 persons (16.3%) in 1749.

Based on Gylling's figures, Fougstedt (1951) estimated that the population almost doubled until 1815 (160,000 persons) but the relative proportion decreased to 14.6%. The population growth continued rapidly during the nineteenth century, and the population had almost doubled between

Table 1. *The Swedish-speaking population 1610–2004*

| Year | Number | Percent of total population |
|------|---------|-----------------------------|
| 1610 | 70,000 | 17.5 |
| 1749 | 87,200 | 16.3 |
| 1815 | 160,000 | 14.6 |
| 1880 | 294,900 | 14.3 |
| 1890 | 322,600 | 13.6 |
| 1900 | 349,700 | 12.9 |
| 1910 | 339,000 | 11.6 |
| 1920 | 341,000 | 11.0 |
| 1930 | 342,900 | 10.1 |
| 1940 | 354,000 | 9.6 |
| 1950 | 348,300 | 8.6 |
| 1960 | 330,500 | 7.4 |
| 1970 | 303,400 | 6.6 |
| 1980 | 300,500 | 6.3 |
| 1990 | 296,700 | 5.9 |
| 2004 | 289,751 | 5.6 |

Sources: 1610: Wallén (1932); 1749: Gylling (1911); 1815: Fougstedt (1951); 1880–2004: Statistics Finland (1950, 2005).

1815 and 1880. The increase was about the same in both language groups until 1880, and the total number of 294,900 Swedish speakers thus amounted to 14.3%.

According to official figures, the number of Swedish speakers continued to increase rapidly, and it was almost 350,000 by the end of the nineteenth century. However, this figure includes a considerable number of nonpresent persons who had emigrated to America, and according to Fougstedt (1982), a more accurate estimate of the resident population would be about 332,000.

The growth leveled off, and the population reached its maximum of 354,000 in 1940. As the total population in Finland continued to increase, the relative size of the Swedish speakers had decreased to 9.6% that same year.

During the first post-war decades, emigration flows to Sweden were strong, reducing the number of Swedish speakers to 303,400 persons in 1970. Since migration was concentrated to young ages, the age structure became unfavorable with respect to population growth, resulting in an annual excess of deaths over births already in the late 1960s.

In the middle of 1970s, the situation looked very problematic for the Swedish-speaking population in many respects from a demographic point of view. There had been a steep decline in numbers and a considerable Fennicization of the settlement area due to the immigration of Finnish

speakers from other parts of the country. An increasing proportion of Swedish speakers married Finnish-speaking persons, and in these marriages only a minority of the children became Swedish speakers. The disappearance of the Swedish-speaking population seemed inevitable: it was a melting ice floe.

The development did not continue unchanged, however. The migration flows both within the country and abroad leveled off and the effect on population size as well as language structure diminished. Another explanation to the more positive trends is technical in the sense that the classification changed: the direct effect of the change from “main language” to “mother tongue” (1977) was a Swedish net gain of almost 6,000 persons, and the new concept is more stable as it is apparently more related than main language to ethnic identity (Finnäs 2000).

During the last decades, the net effect of international migration has been almost negligible, but due to the negative net effect of natural increase, the Swedish-speaking population has decreased to 289,000. An interesting observation is that in absolute numbers, the Swedish-speaking population is almost the same as 125 years ago, but its relative size has diminished considerably. In recent years, the annual number of deaths has exceeded the number of births by some 400 persons. According to population projections, this surplus of deaths will probably diminish somewhat during the next decade (Finnäs 2007).

In order to really understand the changes and the present conditions for the Swedish-speaking population, a description of the overall development is insufficient, since the Swedish-speaking population is concentrated in certain regions (see Figure 1 in Liebkind et al., this issue), and within some of these the changes in language structure have been considerably larger than at the national level. These changes have also had consequences for the language composition of marriages. At present, there are annually formed more marriages where the spouses belong to different language groups than unilingual Swedish ones. Until the 1970s, mixed marriages were considered to be an evident demographic threat for the Swedish-speaking population, but the development during the recent decades has turned them into a positive demographic opportunity. These aspects will be discussed in some detail below.

2.2. Changes in language structure

The Swedish-speaking population lives and has always been concentrated along the western and southern coastlines (see Figure 1 in Liebkind et al., this issue). A good century ago, the two language groups lived almost

Table 2. *The distribution of the Swedish-speaking population with respect to language structure in municipality of residence*

| Year | Unilingual Swedish | <i>Bilingual municipalities Swedish-speaking (%)</i> | | | | Unilingual Finnish | Total |
|------|--------------------|--|-------|-------|------|--------------------|-------|
| | | >67 | 50–66 | 34–49 | <33 | | |
| 1880 | 59.9 | 15.9 | 10.1 | 4.9 | 2.8 | 6.4 | 100 |
| 1910 | 36.9 | 30.2 | 5.9 | 16.0 | 6.0 | 5.0 | 100 |
| 1930 | 35.4 | 25.3 | 4.2 | 4.5 | 26.2 | 4.4 | 100 |
| 1950 | 26.7 | 24.7 | 9.5 | 8.0 | 26.9 | 4.2 | 100 |
| 1960 | 24.2 | 21.2 | 15.5 | 0.6 | 35.1 | 3.5 | 100 |
| 1970 | 18.9 | 18.9 | 16.5 | 6.5 | 36.4 | 3.0 | 100 |
| 1980 | 19.8 | 18.5 | 10.3 | 11.4 | 36.1 | 3.9 | 100 |
| 1990 | 15.8 | 22.3 | 12.2 | 11.2 | 34.3 | 4.2 | 100 |
| 2002 | 13.6 | 22.0 | 12.0 | 13.2 | 34.8 | 4.4 | 100 |

separate from each other. Some 60% of the Swedish speakers lived in unilingual Swedish municipalities, and another quarter lived in bilingual areas where they formed the local majority (Table 2).³ Thus, less than 15% of the Swedish speakers lived in Finnish-dominated areas. The concentration in the bilingual regions appears from the fact that only a good 6% lived in unilingual Finnish municipalities.

In 1880, Helsinki, the capital of Finland, was still a small city with 43,100 inhabitants, out of which almost 22,500, i.e., 52.1% were Swedish-speaking. The population in Helsinki doubled every twenty years through urbanization, and in spite of the fact that the Swedish-speaking population reached 80,000 in 1940, this amounted to only about one-quarter of the total population. The development was similar in several cities, and thus an increasing proportion of the Swedish-speaking population lived in municipalities with a Finnish majority. In 1930, only about one-third lived in unilingual Swedish municipalities and another third lived as a local majority in bilingual municipalities.

The changes in language structure were especially strong during the first post-war decades, which were characterized by a very rapid industrialization and great migration when the baby-boom generation born in 1945–1950 entered the labor force. In 1970, almost half of the Swedish speakers lived in Finnish-dominated municipalities. However, during the most recent decades the changes have been very modest.

As can be seen from the map in the introduction to this issue (Figure 1 in Liebkind et al., this issue), the Fennicization has been concentrated especially to the southern coastline around Helsinki. The northern region, Ostrobothnia, is still dominated by Swedish speakers except for three

cities, Vaasa (in Swe. Vasa), Kokkola (in Swe. Karleby), and Kaskinen (in Swe. Kaskö).

Since there have been numerous changes in borders as several municipalities have united, it is inappropriate to describe the development according to the number of bilingual and unilingual Swedish municipalities. To give an example, in spite of the fact that the number of bilingual or unilingual Swedish municipalities has decreased from 91% in 1950 to the present 63%, no bilingual municipality has become unilingually Finnish during this period. During the first half of the century, four bilingual municipalities became Finnish.

One evident feature of the development until about 1970 is that the number of Swedish speakers outside the main settlement area decreased considerably during the first half of the twentieth century. In 1970, only 3% lived in unilingual Finnish municipalities. No explicit studies have been performed about this development, but we may assume that it is due to both individual Fennicization and migration. The possibilities for young Swedish-speaking families to maintain Swedish are also poor since there are schools with Swedish as the medium of instruction in only a few unilingual cities, e.g., Tampere (in Swe. Tammerfors), Oulu (in Swe. Uleåborg), and Kotka.

2.3. *Bilingual marriages*

Since marriage markets are generally geographically restricted, partners have been found in the proximity of the place of residence. This was especially the case formerly when communication was more limited than today. Therefore, when the two language groups lived almost separate from each other, marriages between persons with different languages were rare. As a consequence of the changes in language structure within the Swedish settlement area, and improved transportation possibilities, the proportion of mixed marriages has increased considerably. According to Fougstedt (1951), the proportion with a Finnish partner in marriages contracted between 1936 and 1945 was 19% among Swedish-speaking females and 23% among males. These proportions almost doubled until 1980, but have remained rather stable since then. The proportion of mixed marriages correlates strongly with the language structure in the place of residence (Finnäs 2000). The development therefore corresponds very well with the changes in the language structure within the main settlement area (see Figure 1).

So far no one has managed to find any explanation to the fact that there are more marriages of the combination Swedish male and Finnish

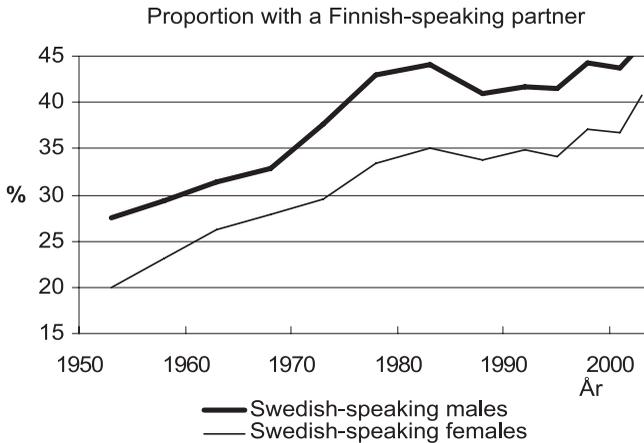


Figure 1. *The proportion with a Finnish-speaking partner among Swedish-speaking males and females in marriages contracted between 1951 and 2004*

female than the combination Finnish male and Swedish female. To some extent, it may be due to conditions in the marriage market, but evidently the real explanations must be found in attitudes that cannot be analyzed by ordinary “hard” statistics only (Finnäs 2002). It can also be mentioned that the proportion of mixed marriages decreases with an increasing level of education of the Swedish-speaking persons (O’Leary and Finnäs 2002).

A marriage between two persons belonging to different language groups does not necessarily result in a bilingual marriage where both languages are used in practice. Obviously, a considerable proportion of the “potentially” bilingual families have become unilingual in practice. Explicit comprehensive information about language use is not available, but data from a longitudinal register give clear indirect indications. In a follow-up study of two generations (until 1995) of persons who lived with their parents in 1970, it can be shown that Finnish-registered persons with a “potentially” bilingual background, i.e., the parents had different registered languages, acted almost identically with respect to partner selection as persons with a unilingual Finnish background. Swedish-registered persons with a potentially bilingual background have chosen Swedish-speaking partners to a clearly higher degree, but not as much as persons with a unilingual Swedish background. We are convinced that these findings reflect that a great proportion of the potentially bilingual families were in practice Finnish, especially as a majority of these families lived in Finnish-dominated surroundings (Tandefelt 1996).

For many Swedish-speaking persons, marriage to a Finnish-speaking spouse has certainly changed the main language use in daily life. However,

according to previous studies, with respect to the registered mother tongue, the net effect of explicit language shifts in the official statistics must have been very small (Finnäs 2000). Until the late 1970s, there was, however, a considerable negative effect of the mixed marriages for the Swedish-speaking population due to the outcome with respect to the language of the children. In 1970, about 60% of the children in formally bilingual families were registered as Finnish-speaking, and in a pure statistical sense the mixed marriages reduced the Swedish birth cohorts by about 7% (Finnäs 1986). However, this net loss was not the result of an overall Swedish weakness. In fact, the language registration was highly dependent on the language conditions in the place of residence and almost symmetric with respect to the languages. Thus, the negative net effect was due to the fact that the vast majority of the mixed marriages were situated in Finnish-dominated areas.

The changes within the mixed marriages have been dramatic since the late 1970s. Whereas there previously was uncertainty among parents whether children can learn two languages simultaneously and become practically bilingual, they are now encouraged to use both languages from the very beginning. In practice, this has in most cases meant an increased commitment to the Swedish language, and the families are no longer only potentially bilingual, but also in practice, at least with respect to the children. In the official statistics, this can be seen in the language registration of the children (Table 3). An increasing proportion is registered as Swedish-speaking, and at present this proportion is about 60% for the country as a whole and two-thirds within the bilingual regions. Parents are now much more aware of the need for linguistic strategies in order to make the children bilingual, and one effect of this is also that the importance of the language conditions at the place of residence has almost disappeared. More important factors are the language of the mother and level of education, especially of the Swedish-speaking parent (Finnäs and O'Leary 2003). The higher the education, the higher the proportion registered as Swedish-speaking.

The trend toward an increasing commitment to Swedish can also be seen in school statistics. In Finland, children generally start their schooling the year they become seven years old. By comparing the number of seven-year-old children with the number of pupils at first grade, it is very evident that the registered mother tongue in fact underestimates the real interest in Swedish. During the last decades, the number of new pupils in Swedish-language schools has exceeded the official number by some 10%. By the end of the millennium, when the number of seven-year-old Swedish-registered children was about 3,700, about 4,100 pupils went to Swedish-language schools. Lojander-Visapää (2001) reported that in the

Table 3. *The proportion of bilingual families and the proportion Swedish of the children (0–4 years) in these families in 1970 and 2002. The distribution by language structure of place of residence of Swedish children and the proportion with a bilingual family background of these*

| Percent Swedish of total population | Percent bilingual families of all Swedish and bilingual families* | Percent Swedish of children in bilingual families | Percent with a bilingual background of all Swedish children | Distribution by language structure of place of residence |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| 1970 | | | | |
| ≤19 | 52.1 | 34.2 | 27.1 | 26.6 |
| 20–39 | 37.2 | 44.3 | 20.8 | 8.5 |
| 40–59 | 29.6 | 48.4 | 16.9 | 23.8 |
| 60–79 | 21.2 | 55.9 | 13.1 | 11.4 |
| 80–89 | 13.6 | 67.7 | 9.6 | 9.9 |
| 90–100 | 9.7 | 83.6 | 8.2 | 19.9 |
| Total | 32.2 | 43.3 | 17.1 | 100 |
| 2002 | | | | |
| ≤19 | 71.6 | 66.5 | 62.6 | 31.7 |
| 20–39 | 55.0 | 63.7 | 43.8 | 17.5 |
| 40–59 | 44.7 | 64.2 | 34.2 | 14.1 |
| 60–79 | 28.2 | 66.7 | 20.8 | 11.1 |
| 80–89 | 21.5 | 76.8 | 17.4 | 10.7 |
| 90–100 | 11.2 | 79.7 | 9.2 | 14.9 |
| Total | 47.8 | 66.5 | 37.8 | 100 |

* Estimated from the number of children by language of the parents.

Source: Unpublished data from Statistics Finland.

metropolitan area the proportion of children from linguistically mixed marriages who go to schools with Swedish as the medium of instruction exceeded 80% in the late 1990s. Explicit comprehensive data do not exist, but according to this and the other findings it seems that at least 75% go to Swedish-language schools in the country as a whole.

In this connection it should be noted that in the calculations above immersion schools are not taken into account. There are no nationwide figures about the number of pupils in Swedish immersion schools, but a modest estimate seems to be that it somewhat exceeds 500 pupils per grade.⁴

3. Summary

The official number of Swedish-speaking persons is about the same as a good century ago. However, from a linguistic perspective, the changes

in living conditions have been considerable. Assuming that language group identity is formed at young ages, this implies that there are very big differences between the generations within the Swedish-speaking population. This seems to hold true also for language usage and proficiency (see Slotte-Lüttge, and Leinonen and Tandefelt, this issue).

The vast majority of the Swedish speakers above 50 grew up in Swedish-dominated surroundings, both at the municipality level and in the families. As mentioned above, a majority of the marriages between persons with different languages were unilingual Finnish in practice, and therefore a considerable number of persons were “potential” Swedish speakers at birth, but they have in practice grown up in a Finnish family and became (unilingual) Finnish (Tandefelt 1988). As a consequence, the proportion of the adult persons now classified as Swedish-speaking persons who have had a bilingual family background is very small.

The changes within the mixed marriages have been tremendous during the recent decades. Most of the potentially bilingual families are now bilingual in practice, and an increasing proportion of the children are registered as Swedish speakers and go to schools with Swedish as the medium of instruction. From a demographic point of view, the direct effect of this development is a higher number of Swedish-speaking children. Another effect is that in spite of the fact that the proportion of mixed marriages has been rather stable, the proportion of the Swedish-registered children with a bilingual background has increased considerably. At present, some 40% of the Swedish-registered children have parents with different languages.

The trend toward bilingualism is even more evident in the Swedish-language schools, which have received many more pupils than the registered number of Swedish-speaking children, and that could be foreseen a few decades ago. One consequence of this trend is also that if one classifies the language groups according to language of education, the number of Swedish-speaking persons has been increasing in recent years.

The differences between generations are great, but they are even bigger between regions with a differing language structure. On the one hand, about one-quarter of the Swedish-registered children live in regions where the Swedish proportion exceeds 80%, and of these clearly less than one-fifth has a bilingual family background. Geographically, these children mainly live in Swedish-dominated rural municipalities. On the other hand, about one-third of the children live in strongly Finnish-dominated surroundings, such as the Helsinki metropolitan and Turku regions, and out of these almost two-thirds have a bilingual family background.

Our final conclusion is that the demographic development is important for the prerequisites and status of the Swedish language in Finland, and

that there are great variations across ages and regions. However, at the same time we can say that the status of the language in mixed marriages has had a considerable positive effect on the recent demographic development. The development has been positive in a numerical sense, but it has resulted in a heterogeneous population with respect to linguistic family background. The consequences of this have been very apparent in Swedish-language schools during the last decade, and it will certainly cause considerable challenges for the future, from both a demographic and a linguistic point of view.

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Notes

1. Among others, the world-famous scientist Carl Linnaeus, later von Linné, published a number of scientific works in Swedish.
2. ‘Language cultivation’, in Swedish *språkvård*, a loan translation from German *Sprachpflege*. Literally *språkvård* means ‘language care’. A formal definition of *språkvård* is “any action designed to improve the language or to prevent its deterioration.” Such activities may relate to the use of the language or to the linguistic system as such.
3. Municipalities are classified as unilingual or bilingual for administrative purposes. In bilingual municipalities, authorities are obliged to offer services in both languages. At present, a municipality is bilingual if the minority exceeds 8% or 3,000 persons.
4. Based on personal information from the Centre for Immersion and Multilingualism at the University of Vaasa (<http://lipas.uwasa.fi/hut/svenska/centret/english.html>).

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