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Riitta Jaatinen
University of Tampere

Toni Saarivirta
University of Tampere

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The Evolution of English Language Teaching during Societal Transition in Finland – A mutual relationship or a distinctive process?

Riitta Jaatinen,
Toni Saarivirta*

School of Education, University of Tampere, Finland

Abstract: This study describes the evolution of English language teaching in Finland and looks into the connections of the societal and educational changes in the country as explanatory factors in the process. The results of the study show that the language teaching methodology and the status of foreign languages in Finland are clearly connected to the changes in society and its education system. Since the first decade of the 20th century, Finnish society has developed from an inward-looking agrarian country into an economically and technologically advanced and industrialized society joining in various ways to the rest of Europe and global community. In that process, learning English has become inevitable for every Finn, although it is commonly agreed that other foreign languages are needed, as well. As a consequence, the plurilingual and pluricultural competence and democratic citizenship education have become goals in language teaching.

Keywords

English language teaching, Finnish education policy, societal and economic transformation

1. Introduction

English is the dominant foreign language in Finland nowadays. Every Finnish child studies English at school and almost everyone in Finland can speak English. Trade, sciences, cultural life and media all use English. It has become a necessity in our society. But this has not always been the case. English began to gain ground as the number-one language after the Second World War. Little by little, it has won the battle over other languages, and some people even say (Leppänen et. al, 2011), it is threatening the status of the mother tongue in Finland. In our study, we have endeavoured to find out how this has happened. Our purpose has been to investigate how the education system has developed in the societal transition of Finnish society during the 1900s and at the beginning of the millennium and whether the societal and educational changes have connections to the evolution of English language teaching in Finnish society. We wanted to find out whether the development of language teaching and that of the society and its educational system have been a mutual or distinctive processes and how such processes have emerged in the history of Finnish society.

This paper depicts a brief history of the development of the Finnish education system in the context of Finland's societal change. Both the early history of Finnish schooling and the rise of the Finnish comprehensive school are discussed, and the

* Corresponding author

characteristics of the modern Finnish school and the modern Finnish educational policy from a centrally planned system to a distributed system are also described. Next we concentrate on the evolution of the foreign languages in Finland and present our major arguments by explaining how English gained its dominant position as a leading foreign language in Finland. We start with the situation in the early days of independence and go on to describe the situation after the Second World War, when English began to take over. We also present the development of language teaching methodology in Finland from the early 1900s until today. We conclude with summarizing discussion on the societal and educational changes and their connections with English language teaching in Finland.

2. A Brief History of the Education System in Finnish Societal Change

Early History of Finnish Schooling

A cornerstone of the Finnish education system is 1921 legislation that made schooling compulsory for all children between the ages of 7 and 13 years. In 2014, compulsory education ends when a person reaches 17 years of age. Compulsory education in Finland was established later than in other Nordic countries: Denmark in 1814, Sweden in 1842 and Norway in 1848. Before 1921, the Finnish education system (under Russian rule, but with a high level of national autonomy) was governed in accordance with the Elementary School Act (1866). Under this Act, municipalities were able to establish schools to educate children. Government support was also available for schools. The 1866 Act ended the church's educational monopoly. The church was responsible for schooling before the nation became aware of the importance of education, but in 1869 the church and the school system were separated. Under the 1866 Act, the national schooling system established non-compulsory elementary schooling for a period of four years, which was extended to six years in 1921. Unfortunately, under this system there were huge disparities in the provision of schooling between regions: rural areas had much poorer options for schooling than the cities (Lehtisalo & Raivola, 1986; Nurmi, 1989; Sarjala, 2005).

Before the 1970s, education in Finland was based on a dual system. Elementary school lasted for six years (later from seven to eight years), but after the fourth grade, a small number of students were selected to attend a grammar school that lasted for five (lower secondary school) to eight years (lower secondary and upper secondary school). Grammar schools were private, municipally-run or state-run institutions that focused on academic studies, in a similar way to upper secondary schools and universities. Elementary schools were run by the municipality and focused on vocational and everyday skills.

Rise of the Finnish Comprehensive School

During the 1970s, a systemic reform was carried out in Finnish schooling. In 1968, the Finnish parliament passed a law to establish a comprehensive schooling system. The reform was implemented in 1972. The political parties at the time shared the view that the country needed to provide education for all. It took time for the comprehensive system to be effectively implemented across Finland. The streaming of classes based on students' levels of ability was used in grades 7–9 of the comprehensive school until 1985. At the time, the resistance to the comprehensive school reform was remarkable: privately run grammar schools were strongly opposed to the reform and thought it would be a waste of resources. They believed that the unification of the previous academic and vocational streams would

lead to the downfall of education in Finland and not everybody would be able to finish comprehensive schooling (Aho, 2000; Halinen & Pietilä, 2007; Pehkonen & Seppälä, 2007). History has proved otherwise as PISA shows (Sahlberg, 2011). Comprehensive schooling has been a great success story in Finland.

The motivations behind such an intense reform can be explained, first of all, by Finns' strong belief in education and its power to reduce poverty and inequality in society. The first ideas about comprehensive schooling can be traced back as far as the 1930s (Sarjala, 2005), when the chairman of the progressive party (liberals) suggested joint schooling for all in the name of justice and equality. The notion of comprehensive schooling was also quite prominent within the political parties on the left in the 1940s and 1950s (Nurmi, 1989). These notions failed to result in any practical actions and were neglected by politicians until the 1960s.

In the 1950 Finnish census, the level of education among the population was studied for the first time. The census revealed that nearly 30 per cent of the population over 20 years of age did not have any education at all. In rural areas, the proportion of people who did not have any education was even higher, 35 per cent. These numbers can be explained as a result of older generations not attending school under the 1921 Elementary School Act (Sarjala, 2005).

Another important factor behind the educational reform was an increased need for skilled labour after the Second World War. After the war, Finland had to pay war reparations to the Soviet Union of around (USD) \$300 million (gold value). Finland's war debts were a factor in the accelerated development of Finland from an agrarian to an industrialised country (Nousiainen, 1989). The increased industrialisation resulted in a need for a more educated labour force and the shift from an agrarian society towards a society with more educated workers became inevitable (Hjerpe & Vartia, 1997; Saarivirta, 2004).

The third factor behind the educational transformation was the post-war baby boom. The increased birth rates just after the Second World War were the greatest in Finnish history. The economic growth and the need for a more skilled labour force gave parents cause for wanting their children to be educated. These parents believed that being well educated guaranteed greater possibilities in the labour market and would result in better living conditions for their children. Education was highly appreciated and seen as a right for all Finnish citizens (Kärenlampi, 1999; Saarivirta, 2004; Saarivirta & Consoli, 2007).

"Education for all" has been a slogan in the Finnish education policy for a long period of time. It represents, in part, the Nordic welfare states' ideology, which is characterised by a large taxpayer-funded public sector. People in the Nordic countries believe that the public sector is the primary payer in health care, education and social services. These services are provided at limited or no cost for all citizens. There has been a joint belief among different actors for decades that the population should be educated with no costs to actual pupils. The ideology of the Nordic welfare states refers to great equality: all pupils should be at the same position no matter of their socio-economic backgrounds. However, maintaining a large public sector is extremely expensive. In 2014, there is a great deal of pressure to reform the health care system, for example, and Finland is debating on whether universities should charge fees.

Characteristics of the Modern Finnish School

Finland has succeeded well in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and as a result, several Finnish scholars have tried to explain the success. Välijärvi (2003), Kupari & Välijärvi (2005) and Välijärvi & Linnakylä (2002), recognise the following

six factors as important in Finland's good PISA performance.

Equality: Finland's schooling system is egalitarian. All students have the same status regardless of their socio-economic background. All students are provided with free education, including all of the materials they need (for example, books and pencils). The students study in heterogeneous classes of relatively small sizes (an average of 20-23 students) with no streaming of separate groups based on differing abilities. However, the social and socio-economic backgrounds of students still have some correlation with their results. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds do not perform as well as students from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the differences are minor and rank as the third lowest within the OECD countries, after Korea and Iceland.

Comprehensive schooling: The comprehensive school system is related to the equality between students. In the 1970s, the dual system of elementary and grammar schooling in Finland was abandoned and comprehensive schooling was established. The new system was built around the idea that all children should attend a comprehensive school between the ages of 7 and 15 years.

Early intervention for learning difficulties: Students facing learning difficulties are provided help as early as possible. If the school recognises that a particular student may face learning difficulties, special assistance and extra teaching hours are provided. According to the case studies (e.g. Eskelä-Haapanen, 2012), the number of students in need of assistance has increased significantly over the years. However, it may be argued that the recognition of learning difficulties has increased with time and that this increased understanding has led to a growth in the total number of students receiving assistance.

Teachers' profession and education: Teachers in Finland have a strong knowledge base and are required to hold a master's degree. Entry into teacher education courses is highly competitive, with less than ten per cent of applicants gaining admission to the university courses of primary school teacher education. Therefore, teachers in Finland are highly motivated in their profession.

Self-evaluation of schools: Finnish schools are not externally inspected or evaluated. This system is significantly different from many other countries. Schools are surveyed by the Finnish National Board of Education and are required to provide statistics to the municipalities, which are in charge of providing basic education for residents. School assessment and improvement is based on the self-evaluation of the schools. Teachers are viewed as highly trained professionals and they are greatly trusted by parents and society. Therefore, schools are permitted to draw their own conclusions as to best practice.

Tradition in reading: Reading and writing have been recognised as basic human needs for the last 100 years and there is a cultural tradition of reading (Linnakylä and Malin, 2006). Finns like to read and literacy is a skill that is often learned before entering the school system. Finland has one of the most substantial library networks in the world. Finns borrow more books from libraries per capita than any other nationality in the world (Sahlberg, 2007).

Educational Policy in Finland - from a Centrally Planned System to a Distributed System

Based on Finland's PISA performance, it seems evident that Finland's educational policy has been effective. According to Sahlberg (2007), the basic (compulsory) education policy in Finland has not seen any dramatic changes since the 1970s. A steady educational policy based on long-term agreements has ensured an encouraging atmosphere for schools. Schools trust that this policy will continue in the future. Sahlberg also notes that Finnish schools do not compete against each other. External evaluation and rankings between schools would change this situation. The level of school performance is supposed to be similar across

the country. However, it has been reported (for example, Jakku-Sihvonen and Komulainen, 2004) that students' results are lower in the northern part of Finland than in the south. Moreover, the performance of girls in basic education across the country is better than the performance of boys (Välijärvi, 2003).

Until the 1990s, the Finnish school system was highly centralised. The Finnish National Board of Education and the County Administrative Board kept a careful eye on schools. In the 1990s, the culture of education began to shift toward providing schools with more trust, guidance and freedom. The 1994 curriculum rendered a significant amount of freedom to schools. The number of voluntary subjects and courses increased tremendously. However, the 2004 curriculum reduced some of these freedoms and allowed fewer voluntary subjects and courses, putting more focus on compulsory subjects (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004; Sahlberg, 2007).

It is also worth mentioning that school directors and principals in today's system have adopted the role of professional leaders more than ever before. Although the municipalities are responsible for providing education for their residents, school principals are required to manage schools at a grass-roots level. Every school must have a principal, who is responsible for managing the schools' budget, supervision and teaching (Helakorpi, 2001; Nikki, 2001).

3. Which Foreign Language Matters?

In the following section, we will concentrate on the evolution of the foreign languages in Finland and present our major arguments in explaining how English reached and gained its dominant position as a leading foreign language in the country.

The situation in the early days of independence

Finland became independent from the Soviet Union in 1917 during World War I. Finland had been under Russian power for more than 100 years, but was given autonomy (own currency, own parliament etc.) in its territory. Before the Russian period of power in Finland, the country had been part of Sweden for centuries. (Jussila et. al, 1995) The spoken languages in those times were Finnish and Swedish. Also, Russian was spoken by the small Russian population in Finland.

Before gaining independence, Finland looked to Germany for help against Russia. Germany started secretly training voluntary Finnish secondary school graduates during World War I with the intentions of receiving help from the Finns in the on-going war between Germany and Russia. However, the military actions in Finland, as planned, were not needed. The revolution in Russia and the downfall of The Tsar ended the war and led to independence for Finland. In the events of revolution the Bolshevik governance recognised Finland's independence. Soon after gaining independence, Finland experienced a civil war. (Jussila et. al, 1995.)

When considering the language policy during the decades before and after independence, we argue that three dominant languages can be recognized, i.e. Finnish, Swedish and German. Although the language of the common people in the country was Finnish, the elite spoke Swedish, including civil servants and the people in power. During the Russian period of autonomy in Finland, Swedish maintained its position as the main official (civil servant) language. The role of Swedish in Finland and its status in the language policy of the country has always been strong. Even today, Swedish is one of the two official

languages in Finland spoken by 5 % of the population who speak Swedish as their mother tongue. (Saari 2012.)

After independence, there was more room for the Finnish language in the country. In the growing spirit of nationalism, Finnish began to replace Swedish as the most important official language. (Piri, 2001) Although Finnish was spoken and it was the language of instruction at the University of Helsinki (the only university in Finland at that time), it was not until 1920 when the first university, the University of Turku, was established where Finnish was the only language of instruction. The Russian language, however, was never popular in Finland. Step by step, Finnish began to climb its way to the primary language in Finland.

Together with the Finnish and Swedish languages in Finland, the third important language after Finnish independence was German. Contacts to Germany became closer. The language of science, for example, had already relied more and more on German (Harjula, 2007; Ignatius, 2000.) After the Second World War, German began to lose its significance in Finnish science and culture. The global language, English, was beginning to replace German for many reasons.

In the first decades of the 20th century, very few children in Finland actually studied languages, although it was suggested as early as the 1860s that a foreign language should be included in the elementary school curriculum. Foreign languages were taught only in grammar schools and they were in most cases Latin and later, especially in the 1930s, German also. Beginning in the 1940s few elementary schools provided an opportunity to study Finnish/Swedish or a foreign language as a voluntary subject. The common attitude was that foreign languages were something that only academically talented children could benefit from and foreign language skills were not necessary for all. (Piippo, 2009; Takala, 1982; Takala, 1986).

The situation after the Second World War - English begins to take over

After the Second World War, the dominance of German as the first language choice in grammar schools began to slowly lose ground, and instead, English, “the language of the war winners”, started to gain ground. This was the case in every area of Finnish life. This change was especially accelerated by the rise of the popular culture in the 1960s. English-speaking films, music and fashion inspired young people to choose English instead of German. In 1963–1964 13 % of all elementary school pupils studied modern languages (of these children Swedish was studied by 63 % and English by 37 %), while in 1967–1968 the percentage was 42 (Swedish was studied by 26 % and English by 74 %) (Takala, 1982; Takala, 1986). However, it was not until in the 1970s when studying a foreign language became a privilege for all children in Finnish schools.

Finland had taken major steps in internationalisation in the 1950–1960s. A radical turn from an agrarian society to a heavily industrialised society happened rapidly. English was clearly the language to communicate with others outside Finland’s borders. Finland joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as an associate member in 1961, which was a remarkable international agreement for Finland at the time and had an immensely positive impact on international trade. (Jussila et. al, 1995; Hjerpe & Pihkala, 1989.)

In the 1970s a few significant events took place regarding internationalisation. Finland signed the European Economic Community (EEC) agreement that boosted its international trade, although in the 1970s, as regards a global perspective, Finland experienced a period of low growth due to the global oil crises. Another internationally significant event for Finland was the conference of the Commission on Security and

Cooperation in Europe, which was held in Helsinki. During the time of the Cold War, Finland received international respect for its ability to gather the Eastern and Western worlds around one table. (Koski, 2005; Paunio, 1989.)

The abolition of the dual system of education in the 1970s was in many ways reformatory, bringing every Finnish child within the reach of foreign language teaching. The streaming of pupils based on the level of their language skills was used at the beginning of the comprehensive school. In the year 1985 the streaming was abolished from the national curriculum and since then all children have been taught languages in mixed-ability groups.

The decade of 1980s in Finland can be seen as a period of rapid economic development and expanding and increasing international contacts. During this decade, Finland began to invest heavily in technology. A large funding body, the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (TEKES), was founded in 1982. The organisation's main duty was to guarantee the operational preconditions for research aiming to improve technology and technical science. Several high-tech companies, such as Nokia, began to orientate toward new technologies, including mobile phones and other information and communication businesses, in the 1980s. (Lemola, 2002; Sabel & Saxenian, 2008.)

Although the period of the early 1990s in Finland was hit by a deep recession, not least because of the monetary policy decisions taken by the Government and the collapse of Finland's most significant trading partner at that time, the Soviet Union, Finland had become a permanent player in the international field. Finland joined the EU in 1995 and opened its doors more widely to Europe. As a consequence, there was a slight shift in favour of German and French as optional languages during 1996-1999 (see the Tables 2, 3 and 4 in appendices). But it turned out to be temporary. It has been a self-evident truth ever since entering the international community, that English is the language of interacting with the other nations. In the new millennium, nearly every Finn is familiar with English and it is taken for granted that English is either the first or second foreign language studied at school. (Sabel & Saxenian, 2008.)

Currently, a child in comprehensive school has both the right and obligation to study three languages: the mother tongue (Finnish or Swedish), another official language of Finland (Swedish or Finnish) and a foreign language. (Piippo, 2009.) From the beginning of the comprehensive school, local authorities (municipalities) have afforded an opportunity to study English in their schools and English has always been the most popular choice for the first foreign language to study. Although several projects and measures have been taken in Finland to encourage families/pupils to "choose otherwise", the dominant position of English as the first foreign language is definite; more than 90 % of Finnish children start their language studies with English (Tuokko et al., 2012).

In the national survey on the English language in Finland (see Leppänen et al. 2011) the researchers wanted to find out the views Finns hold on the status of English in Finland in the future. The respondents were asked to give opinions on the status of English in Finland in 2027. The results of the survey reveal that Finns believe that the status and importance of English will continue to increase in Finland and English will be used more than Finnish in some areas of life.

4. Development of language teaching methodology in Finland

The developmental changes of language teaching methodology have not been separate from the changes in the educational system and society in Finland. The research and development of language pedagogy and language teaching seem to have a direct connection to both society, i.e. cultural goals and conditions, and also to the research of "neighbouring"

sciences, such as philosophy, psychology, education, linguistics, anthropology and social sciences (Piippo, 2009). In the first half of the 20th century, there were researchers and scholars in Finland who were interested in language learning and teaching, but it was not until the late 1960s and 1970s that the research and development of language pedagogy increased to a greater degree. The reason was as follows: the comprehensive school in the 1970s provided all children with the access to language studies. That was an immense challenge to teachers, teacher educators, researchers and administrators. The decade witnessed an enormous amount of development, research and teacher training courses. At the same time, new ideas and influences were brought from abroad.

Up until the 1970s the Grammar Translation Method was almost the only teaching method used to teach languages in schools. It was originally developed to teach Latin and Greek and was thus focused mainly on the written language. In Finnish schools at this time, language lessons involved reading, translating and learning the rules of grammar. Both grammar and vocabulary were learned through translating from the native language into the target language. Very little in teaching was done in the target language. Instead, the teacher used the native language (Finnish or Swedish) to explain, discuss or analyse the use of grammatical rules and difficult sentence structures. (Laurén, 1991). The authority in the classroom was the teacher. All teaching was frontal: the teacher saying what to do, the students sitting in rows following orders, translating, giving answers or doing exercises on their own and their errors being corrected by the teacher.

During the first years of the comprehensive school in the 1970s, the Audio-lingual Method based on behaviourism was a prevailing (but was not the only) practice in language teaching (Piippo, 2009). In this approach language learning was seen as habit formation. External environment (teacher, a piece of text, audio in language lab) served as a stimulus and the student had to respond to it. Then the response was observed, maybe corrected, reinforced and practiced to the level of automatic routines. The teacher was still the authority in the classroom. The language learner was an object that was taught and controlled by external feedback, e.g. orders, denials, thanks (Kohonen, 2006.) However, compared to the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-lingual Method emphasised oral practice, often in the form of drills. Students had to produce language orally, not just know the grammar and words of the language and translate.

The late 1970s and 1980s the rise of the Communicative Approach to foreign language teaching became evident in Finland. The purpose was not to teach facts about a language or drill but to develop a student's communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). The teacher's role was recognised as less dominant than before. Two types of activities were applied: Through pre-communicative activities, students learned isolated, specific elements of language and practiced them separately to achieve fluent control over linguistic forms. Through communicative activities, students activated and integrated pre-communicative knowledge and skills to produce meaning. The class could be divided into groups or pairs which interacted with each other or with the teacher, the main purpose being to learn to communicate real meanings. Errors were seen as a normal phenomenon on the way to better communication and were not so extensively corrected. (Littlewood 1981). The Communicative Approach was adopted into Finnish schools at the same time as the new comprehensive school was being developed. As a consequence, new books and materials were needed and produced, and in-service courses were arranged for teachers. (Piippo, 2006.) For foreign language teachers, this was a time for a paradigm shift: finally, students were supposed to talk and learn communication in language classes.

The Communicative Approach meant extensive advancement for language teaching in Finland and it has left its mark on language teaching even today. But as a cognitive approach of learning, it was more interested in language learning processes than the

individuality of the learner (Kohonen, 2006). In the 1990s there was a new shift of paradigm to come. In the second language acquisition research there was a movement from cognitive to socio-culturally oriented research (Miller, 2003). The socio-cultural view was that language and discourse could not be dealt with in isolation from cultural and social contexts, and, therefore, the linguistically oriented communicative competence was not enough as the main goal of language teaching. Kohonen's (2006) notion is that communicative competence relates primarily to the individual's knowledge and skills in communicative situations, whereas intercultural competence also focuses on the language user's personal and social identities and abilities.

According to Kaikkonen (2001) foreign language education has to help students to grow out of the shell of their mother tongue and their own culture. Students have to be sensitized to the diversity in languages and cultures in order for them to grow up to be intercultural actors. Therefore, in language classes it is important to give the students opportunities for personal experiences with authentic foreign language use, because that ensures an emotional involvement in the learning process. This deep involvement helps students to become sensitive to phenomena taken for granted in their own culture and language. At the turn of the century, the term 'language teaching' had become too narrow to describe what was supposed to happen in language classes. Instead, a new term was introduced: 'language education' (Kohonen et.al, 2001). In language education, learning a foreign language is seen as holistic personal growth toward knowing and valuing one's own language and culture and learning to relate to otherness and foreignness in human encounters through a foreign language. The role of the teacher was to facilitate that growth in a dialogue with the students. (Lehtovaara, 2001; Jaatinen, 2007.)

English as a global language and its dominant position as the first foreign language in Finland also resulted in differences in how it is taught and learned (compared with other foreign languages). More and more often in language teaching, English is seen as a lingua franca, i.e. not as a foreign language, but as a common medium of communication among non-native speakers. English is also used increasingly as a language of instruction in content-based learning environments and CLIL (content and language integrated learning) classes. Furthermore, English is learned not just in language classes, but informally in everyday life and through media in particular. It is sometimes used instead of Finnish, side by side with Finnish or even mixed with Finnish. (Leppänen et.al, 2011.) All these new aspects of usage provide English teachers with both opportunities and challenges to further develop specific and modernized teaching methodologies targeted for English language education.

The Finnish development of language education (Kohonen et.al, 2001) is well in line with the European development presented in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) published in 2001. The work to develop common guidelines for language learners, teachers, curriculum developers and administrators in the European Union had begun in the 1990s and Finland was part of that endeavour by way of various research and development projects. CEFR was the document of that long-lasting co-operation. It emphasises a broad, learner-centred orientation in foreign language education, which aims at plurilingualism, pluriculturalism and student autonomy. Kohonen (2006, p. 53) argues,

“The notion of plurilingual and pluricultural competence (in CEFR) involves a complex, multiple language competence on which the language user may draw upon in intercultural communication. Building intercultural communication competence has a clear socio-political dimension in foreign language education: fostering student autonomy and democratic citizenship education.”

How these huge challenges are faced and translated into action in language classes have - at least partly - yet to be worked out.

5. Conclusions

Our purpose in this study was to investigate the connections that the societal and educational changes may have to the evolution of English language teaching in Finnish society. The research task was to find out if the development of language teaching and that of the society and its educational system are mutual or distinctive processes and how such processes appear in the history of Finnish society. Table 1 below summarises the main themes of the transitions in Finnish society from the 1900s until today, sums up a few important changes in the educational system, the position of languages and the development of language teaching methodology in Finnish context.

TIMELINE and DECADES	FINNISH SOCIETY IN TRANSITION	CHANGES IN THE FINNISH EDUCATION SYSTEM	POSITION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM	LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY
The 1 st decades of the 20 th century	Under the Russian rule, but with autonomy Independence in 1917 The growing spirit of nationalism	Elementary School Act 1866 established non-compulsory elementary schooling. The Act in 1921 established compulsory education.	Finnish is the language of the “common” people. Swedish is the language of the elite and civil servants. Russian is spoken, only by a small Russian population. After 1917 Finnish becomes	Grammar Translation Method Priority of written language in learning a language Teacher authority Frontal teaching
1930 till the end of the 2 nd World War and the 1950s	Close relationship with German during the war The split of the relationship with German at the end of the war	The dual system: (1)Elementary school (vocational and everyday skills) (2)Grammar school (academic skills)	number-one language in Finland. Foreign languages are yet not seen necessary for all. Only	Grammar Translation Method Priority of written language in learning a language

		30 % of the population (older people) without an education	academically more talented children are seen to benefit from foreign languages.	Teacher authority Frontal teaching
The 1950s and 1960s	From agrarian country to an industrial country, need for skilled labour Finland joins to EFTA and the economic growth starts. Rise of the Anglo-American youth and popular culture	The dual system prevails but there are already signs of change toward a comprehensive school in Finnish society.	Few children learn foreign languages. Latin is taught in grammar schools. German is a popular language in grammar schools from the 1930s until the 1950s. In the 1960s English begins to gain ground.	Grammar Translation Method Audio-lingual Method Oral practice is seen important in learning a language Teacher authority begins to crumble.
The 1970s	Finland signs the EEC agreement that boosts its international trade. The conference of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe is held in Helsinki, which gives Finland international respect.	The political parties share the view that Finland should provide education for all. The school reform: the egalitarian comprehensive schooling system is implemented in Finland.	Every child becomes within the reach of foreign language teaching. Finnish, Swedish and one foreign language (usually English) become compulsory subjects in the national curriculum.	Research and development of language pedagogy begins in Finland.
The 1980s	The period of rapid economic and technological development The decade of new technologies, mobiles, etc.	The streaming system in mathematics and languages is abolished. Students are taught in mixed-ability groups.	English becomes more and more popular.	Priority of the development of communicative competence in learning a language Communication in groups and

				pairs
The 1990s	Finland joins the EU and opens its doors more widely to Europe and the international community in general.	The national core curriculum provides teachers and schools with more freedom to make decisions locally.	A slight and temporary shift in favour of German and French, but it is not a threat to English as the most popular choice.	Priority of the development of intercultural competence in learning a language Possibilities for authentic contacts with children and student groups in other cultures
The millennium	Finland has become international, well-known and recognised in many areas of life. The number of immigrants has increased. People travel all over the world and communicate through Internet and social media.	Finland succeeds in PISA and the Finnish school is widely recognised as an outstanding system. Equality, comprehensive schooling, early intervention for learning difficulties, self-evaluation of schools and tradition in reading are seen as valuable characteristics of the Finnish school.	The Finnish child has the right and obligation to study three languages: Finnish, Swedish and one foreign language, which is more than 90 % of the cases is English. English is seen more important and necessary than ever before. In addition to English, children are encouraged to study other foreign languages as well.	Priority of plurilingual and pluricultural competence and democratic citizenship education in learning a language Student autonomy Common European Framework for References (CEFR) English as a lingua franca

Table 1: The evolution of English language teaching in the transition of Finnish society

The resulting facts presented in Table 1 indicate that a clear connection exists: Finnish society develops from an inward-looking, agrarian country into an economically and technologically advanced and industrialised society that connects to the rest of Europe and the global community in various ways. In this new societal situation, the political parties share the same view on the development of the educational system, i.e. the school is being developed towards an egalitarian school environment. Education is considered important and all children have the right and obligation to it. The growing economy and international relationships and agreements call for language skills. Everyone, not just the academically more talented or people in higher positions in society, need foreign language skills, the

communicative skills of English in particular. Internationalisation and cultural contacts become more and more important in many areas of life and, as a consequence, the need to teach intercultural skills becomes essential. In the millennium, immigration, emigration, migration, and travelling have increased and Finland is becoming more multicultural. These changes lead to a realization that there is a need to change language teaching. The priority of plurilingual and pluricultural competence and democratic citizenship education are considered essential in language teaching. Learning English is inevitable for everyone in Finland.

But what is the future of English in Finland? It is agreed that English is useful in an era of globalization. Could it even be a threat? Some people fear that it has replaced the mother tongue, for example in trade and science. (Hiidenmaa, 2003.) But although the status of English as a global language is generally accepted, as identified by Leppänen et al (2011) the future of English cannot be considered self-evident in a rapidly changing world, since (as argued in this article) changes in society have an influence on the status of languages needed. Finns believe that the status and importance of English will continue to increase in Finland and English will be used more than Finnish in some areas of life. A number of people think that English skills may be even necessary for full participation in Finnish society. Consequently, it seems very unlikely that there will be any dramatic changes in the status of English in Finland in the future.

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Appendices

Year	English	Swedish	Finnish	French	German	Russian	Lappish	Latin	Other	Total
1994	0,5	0,3	0	11,9	27,4	1,5	0	0,7	0,4	42,7
1997	0,4	0,1	0	9,9	22	1,4	0	0,6	0,2	34,5
2005	0,2	0,2	0	5,4	6,6	0,6	0	0,5	0,6	14,1

Table 2: Students studying optional languages in the fifth grade (primary school), % of age cohort. Source: Finnish National Board of Education (2007).

Year	English	Swedish	Finnish	French	German	Russian	Lappish	Latin	Other	Total
1996	0,5	0,3	0	11,9	27,4	1,5	0	0,7	0,4	42,7
1997	0,4	0,1	0	9,9	22	1,4	0	0,6	0,2	34,5
2005	0,2	0,2	0	5,4	6,6	0,6	0	0,5	0,6	14,1

Table 3: Students studying optional languages in the eighth and ninth grade (lower secondary school), % of age cohort. Source: Finnish National Board of Education (2007).

Year	English	Swedish	Finnish	French	Germany	Russian	Lappish	Other	Total
1994	86,9	3,1	4,6	1,1	4	0,2	0	0	99,8
1996	86,6	2,4	4,6	1,7	4	0,3	0	0	99,5
1998	87,7	2	4,8	1,6	2,9	0,2	0	0,1	99,3
2000	89,1	1,5	5,2	1,1	2,2	0,2	0	0	99,3
2002	89,7	1,5	5,3	1	2	0,1	0	0	99,7
2005	90,1	1,1	5,5	0,8	1,4	0,2	0	0	99,2
2007	90,9	1,1	5,1	0,8	1,2	0,2	0	0	99,3
2009	90,2	0,9	5,4	0,8	1,3	0,2	0	0,1	99

Table 4: First foreign language (mandatory) of pupils in the third grade (primary school), % of age cohort. Source: Kangasvieri et. al (2011).