

# Ideologies of standardisation: Finland Swedish and Swedish-language Finland

Jan-Ola Östman and Leila Mattfolk

*University of Helsinki and Research Institute for the Languages of Finland, Finland*

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

What is today Finland was an integral part of Sweden until 1809. At the time, in what was to become the Finnish part of Sweden-Finland, three major indigenous languages were used: Finnish, Swedish and Northern Sámi. In addition, there were a number of numerically smaller ethnic groups with their own languages in the area, among them the Skolt Sámi, the Inari Sámi, the Roma; and in the east, Russians and Karelians. In the mid-19th century, and especially after the general advent and spread of signed languages, the Deaf gradually also became accepted as a group.

In 1917 Finland declared its independence, and throughout its history of independence Finland has officially had two national languages, Finnish and Swedish; this is stated in the Finnish constitution. In 1995 three other groups and their languages were given constitutional status in Finland: the Sámi, the Roma, and the Deaf.

This overview is restricted to the history, present state and future of Swedish in Finland.<sup>1</sup>

Swedish speakers in Finland are today in a clear minority, and this has been so throughout the history of the nation. Depending on how one counts, less than 300,000 speakers, i.e. less than 6% of the population, has Swedish as their mother tongue.<sup>2</sup> The indigenous geographical areas populated by Swedish speakers in Finland are the coastal areas in the west (in Ostrobothnia, with Vaasa as the main town), in the south-west (the Åland Islands, and on the mainland to the south of the town of Turku), and in the south (to the west and east of Helsinki). In addition, there are other major towns in Finland that have enough of a Swedish-speaking population to offer educational opportunities for Swedish speakers, in particular the towns of Kotka, Tampere, Oulu, and Pori; these are commonly referred to as ‘Swedish language islands’ (*svenska språköar*). Communities in Finland are administratively defined as monolingual Finnish, monolingual Swedish, or bilingual Finnish and Swedish.<sup>3</sup> A community is a bilingual Swedish-Finnish community if the population of either speech community reaches at least 8% (or does not decrease below 6%), or makes up at least 3,000 speakers, or if the community itself decides to be administratively bilingual. In addition to the number of Swedish speakers living in monolingually Swedish or bilingual communities, there are today some 12,000 speakers of Swedish in administratively monolingual Finnish communities.

In addition to speaking Swedish, the Finland Swedes also have a somewhat different culture and somewhat different traditions and practices from Finnish-language Finland. ‘Indigenous’ Finland Swedes have grown up in a Swedish-language home in Finland and live in (and variably practise) some form of a Finland-Swedish culture, however defined.

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<sup>1</sup> The study complements the general overview of Finland and of the standardisation of Finnish by Nuolijärvi and Vaattovaara in this volume; the early stages of the standardisation of Swedish in Finland is a joint history with what happened in Sweden and is dealt with by Thelander in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> The statistics from 2006–2007 gives figures that indicate that Finland has a population of around 5.3 million; 290,000 with Swedish as their mother-tongue, i.e. about 5.5%. In percentages, the number of Swedish speakers has diminished from having been around 13% in 1900, but Swedish speakers in Finland have not decreased much in numbers during the last 30 or so years.

<sup>3</sup> There are also bilingual Finnish-Sámi communities in the north of Finland.

The group-defining term used by indigenous Swedish speakers of themselves is ‘Finland Swedes’ (Swe. *finlandssvensk*). The common term used for the Swedish spoken in Finland is ‘Finland Swedish’ (*finlandssvenska*).<sup>4</sup> The discontinuous geographic area where (indigenous) Finland Swedes live is called ‘Swedish-language Finland’ (sometimes ‘Swedish-speaking Finland’) – i.e. *Svenskfinland*.

Today families are often bilingual, with family members using both Finnish and Swedish, or with one spouse or partner using one language and the other using the other language (to their children). It is thus today rather a matter of self-identification and self-categorisation whether one wants to be included in the Finland-Swedish community. Members of the Finland-Swedish Deaf community, with their own sign language, FinSSL (which is different both from FinSL and from SSL)<sup>5</sup>, would typically see themselves as Finland Swedes, although the Deaf community, as a sign-language community, also stresses its own ethnicity.

Swedish-language Finland is said to host over 80 countryside dialects. Traditionally, these are divided into four major areas: Österbotten (Ostrobothnia) on the west coast; Åland – covering the Åland islands in the south-west between Sweden and Finland, which is an autonomous territory of Finland; Åboland – the mainland south-west; and Nyland on the south coast. A fifth area, Satakunta, has hardly any Swedish-speakers anymore; sometimes the Swedish language islands are seen as making up a dialect ‘area’ of their own. Nowadays, township dialects – spoken in the towns of the four major dialect areas – are seen as additional dialects, or varieties.

There are sometimes very vivid debates about when Germanic tribes (presumed to be ancestors of present-day Swedish speakers) came to Finland. What seems certain today is that the Åland islands were inhabited by Germanic tribes in the 6th century; and Swedes have settled in Österbotten, Åboland and Nyland at least from the 12th century onwards. This settlement might have occurred earlier.

Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia from 1809 until 1917. This was at the time when national romanticism grew to prosper in Europe at large. Towards the end of the period, when more severe attempts at Russification set in within the Grand Duchy, Finland concentrated its cultural, linguistic and political efforts on establishing itself as a sovereign state. This is a turbulent period which had the effect that many Swedish speakers switched language, learnt and started speaking Finnish to their children, and many also changed their names into Finnish names – in order to support the ideal of the time of ‘one nation–one language–one state’; this ideological activity is known as Fennicisation.

Towards the end of the Russian period, some Swedish speakers became more active and pro-Swedish and felt that the Fennicisation of Finland was going too far. Without going into details about these conflicts (and the fanatics on both sides), it is safe to say that concerned Swedish speakers actively started working towards keeping the Swedish language in Finland in tune with the development of Swedish in Sweden. The leading principle in Finland from these days onwards has been that Swedish in Sweden is to be the norm for the Swedish spoken in Finland; if Swedish in Finland diverges too much from the language used in Sweden – so the argument goes – Swedish in Finland has no future. This line of argumentation is still very much part of the everyday and codified way of thinking about standards and standardisation in Swedish-language Finland. (For an overview, see Mattfolk *et al.* 2004.)

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<sup>4</sup> Other terms occur, and it is sometimes pointed out that ‘Finland Swede’ and ‘Finland Swedish’ are not ‘correct’ English; be that as it may, these are the terms the indigenous speakers feel comfortable with and use themselves.

<sup>5</sup> FinSSL = Finland-Swedish Sign Language; FinSL = Finnish Sign Language; SSL = Swedish Sign language.

## THE STANDARD AND PROCESSES OF STANDARDISATION

The official standpoint in Swedish-language Finland is thus that Finland Swedish follows the same norm as ‘Sweden Swedish’ (*sverigesvenska, rikssvenska*). This has also been, and continues to be, the guiding principle for the standardisation and language planning of Swedish in Finland. That is, there is no, nor is there to be, a separate standard Finland Swedish.<sup>6</sup>

Even though there is officially no separate standard for Finland Swedish, the term ‘standard Finland Swedish’ does occur, and everyone can by him/herself assess the differences between the ‘standardly’ used variety of Swedish in Sweden and that used in Finland. The differences are particularly noticeable in the lexicon (with Finland Swedish containing Finnish loan words and loan translations from Finnish, e.g. of official, administrative terms) and in the phonology (with some consonants and vowels having different realisations in the two varieties) and prosody (both in intonation and in lexical word stress, with standard Finland Swedish lacking the acute–grave word accent distinction), but detailed analyses of in particular the pragmatics and the grammar of the two varieties also reveal differences.

According to Auer (2005), at least three criteria need to be considered when attempting to ascertain whether a language has a standard or not. One criterion is that of codification; thus, we can ask, is Finland Swedish codified? The answer is ‘yes, but only indirectly’, in the form of word-lists of, and guides for, what words and expressions to avoid. Bergroth’s *Finlandssvenska* (first ed. 1917) and af Hällström-Reijonen and Reuter’s *Finlandssvensk ordbok* (fourth ed. 2008) are the best known of these and function as normative guides for speakers of Finland Swedish of what Finlandisms (words and expressions used only in Finland but not in Sweden), Fennicisms and old-fashioned words to avoid in order to be understood by Swedish speakers in Sweden.

A second criterion is that a standard should be a common variety – used e.g. for writing and in business. This criterion is also fulfilled: Swedish-language Finland has a plethora of newspapers that are read by ‘all’ Finland Swedes, and publishing (novels, popular science, journals) in Swedish vastly overrides the expectancy one might have in relation to the population size of Swedish-language Finland. (For an overview and figures, see e.g. Moring and Husband 2007.)

Auer’s third criterion is that the variety should have a certain prestige. This is also fulfilled, albeit not in a simple manner. Standard Finland Swedish can be characterised as a reading-of-the-writing variety (*Sprechen nach der Schrift*; Auer 2005). It is not localisable, and it is every Finland Swede’s property – as long as it is kept in tune with Sweden Swedish. Indeed, the major towns in the four dialect areas have town-regional standards: the Helsinki standard in Nyland; the Turku standard in Åboland; the Mariehamn standard in Åland; and the Vaasa standard in Österbotten.<sup>7</sup> Speakers of these town-regional standards are, if not always directly confrontational in relation to each other, at least indifferent to the way Swedish is spoken in the other major towns. To be sure, pejorative statements occur about ‘the other’ standards, and there are statements to the effect that Åbo Swedish (as the ‘oldest’ town variety; Åbo used to be the capital of Finland) is the most beautiful, or that Tammerfors (Tam-

<sup>6</sup> In 1942 Swedish speakers in Finland – as the first in Norden – established a language-planning committee (*Svenska språkvårdsnämnden i Finland* – at the time functioning under the auspices of *Finlands svenska folkting*; in 1976 it became *Svenska språknämnden i Finland*, under the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland), with the expressed goal of dealing with (mostly corpus planning) questions related to Swedish language usage and Swedish-language place-names in Finland.

<sup>7</sup> When writing in English, one is recommended to use the Finnish or Swedish name of a town in Finland according to the majority language spoken in that town or community. However, due to the topic of this study, in what follows we will use the Swedish names for communities. Thus, e.g., Turku is Åbo, Helsinki is Helsingfors, and Vaasa is Vasa in Swedish. We will give the Finnish name of a community within parentheses the first time the community is mentioned.

pere) Swedish is the most neutral (i.e., has no dialectal colouring) and is thus the most beautiful. But such statements do not stand uncontested.

It is noteworthy that the variety of Swedish spoken in the capital, Helsingfors Swedish, is not in any simple fashion the ‘national’ standard. Many Ostrobothnians or eastern Nylanders would rather make fun of the Helsingfors-Swedish standard than see it as a model to follow. Further, a speaker of the Åbo standard might refuse to listen to a radio station (Radio X3M) that often broadcasts from Vasa, because he “can’t stand the variety”.<sup>8</sup> It is unclear, though, what this means, since we also note that Finland Swedes typically do not either see the spoken Swedish used by speakers of Sweden Swedish as a model, but are swift to make fun of it, too. It is mostly phonology that is made fun of, though, and phonology is not covered by the Finland-Swedish standpoint to follow Sweden Swedish as the norm.

Auer’s three criteria clearly indicate that the concept ‘standard Finland Swedish’ has a valid existence. The guiding principles (*läroplan*) for education in Finland do not explicitly mention what language variety mother-tongue teachers should use, although it is stated that children from the age of around 10 years old should know the norms of the standard. What standard is not specified, but it is presupposed that a teacher should use a good standard; and there are few if any mother-tongue teachers at primary schools that have a Sweden-Swedish pronunciation.

The overview with respect to the three criteria above depicts the general post-WW2 situation in Finland Sweden. In many respects the view on what is to be the standard language has started showing signs of change in late modernity, from 1970 onwards (cf. Östman 2008, forthcoming). Speakers of local dialects tend less and less to look up to or aspire to the spoken varieties in their regional town centres. Dialect speakers nowadays come together in large school complexes that pull youngsters in from the surrounding area; in this process, regional dialect standards are emerging that are the *de facto* (regional) standards for dialect speakers. That is, speakers of the Närpes or Solv dialects (in Ostrobothnia) will not see the town-regional standard of Vasa as a model to follow.

This state of affairs may, however, be changing in some areas. For instance, we have some, mostly anecdotal, evidence that eastern Nyland teenage girls are orienting towards Helsingfors Swedish in some of their phonological features. If this proves to be a generalisable phenomenon of accommodation, and if the tendency escalates, we might *de facto* here see the first stages of what Mattheier (1997) talked about as ‘demotisation’, the way this is said to take place in Denmark. In this scenario, the Finland-Swedish reading-of-the-writing standard would be comparable to what Kristiansen (2009a) calls High Copenhagen speech for Danish, and Helsingfors Swedish – at least for younger Finland Swedes – would be taking the first steps towards becoming comparable to what Kristiansen calls the new Low Copenhagen variety. This is clearly a phenomenon worth closer investigation in the whole of Swedish-language Finland. At present, the general rule is that if you are educated, you should speak as you read.<sup>9</sup>

It may be that the geography of Swedish-language Finland and the – relatively speaking – wide geographical dispersion of its speakers, work against the idea of having one spoken-language standard and one centre that sets the norm for the spoken variety. The written language is more containable, and at the same time it has more general applicability – without geographical boundaries.

<sup>8</sup> This was a particular opinion expressed in one of Mattfolk’s (forthcoming) interviews for the MIN Project (cf. [www.moderne-importord.info](http://www.moderne-importord.info)).

<sup>9</sup> Still, there are certain elements of the spoken language that have become part and parcel of the standard way of speaking(-as-writing); for instance, certain apocopated forms: *int* (rather than *inte*), *sku* (*skulle*).

## THE ROLE OF THE SPOKEN MEDIA

The media play an active role in shaping what is to be regarded as a language model in Swedish-language Finland. This is particularly the case with respect to the written media; there are at present nine regularly occurring newspapers for the 300,000 Swedish-language users. Many families subscribe to more than one of these papers. The language used in these newspapers is closely watched over by its readers; language usage (both spoken and written) and questions of both status and corpus planning are constantly recurring topics in letters to the editors of Swedish-language newspapers.

Published letters to newspaper editors deplore the bad language used on the radio, with the object of ridicule or horror varying between being the dialects, 'slang', and expressions in Finnish. Radio and TV journalists are recommended to use standard language in their reports; interviewees can use dialect, but interviewees feel very strongly that they should not do so, and in practice attempt to use a variety with (what they presume to be) more standard features.

During the last ten years, radio journalists have become bolder in their use of regional features, especially so in programs for younger and adolescent listeners. Swedish-language Finland has two nation-wide radio channels, Radio X3M (aimed primarily at younger listeners) and Radio Vega. Radio X3M in particular has become relatively more liberal in allowing non-standard varieties (also by journalists), but still today one very seldom hears dialect in what are classified as 'more serious' programs. This change in attitude towards varieties of media language is only now beginning to be systematically analyzed.

The general opinion in Swedish-language Finland is that it is more typical, more usual, and more acceptable to use non-standard varieties in the (Swedish) media in Sweden – maybe because Finland Swedes tend to see Scanian (*skånska*) and Northern Swedish (*norrländska*) as non-standard dialects, which might not be so conceived in Sweden. We do not know whether a more relaxed attitude towards variability is the case in actual practice, but (1) the view is corroborated by the fact that, in Sweden, immigrants (or people crossing over to immigrant varieties of Swedish) are often heard in the role of news reporters; and even somebody who does not speak 'correct' Swedish, but has clear Norwegian elements in their Swedish, can be the weather (wo)man. It is inconceivable at present to imagine a near future when the Swedish-language TV-channel FST5 in Finland would use a Finnish speaker with a less than 'perfect' command of Swedish.<sup>10</sup>

But we also predict that (2), if it is the case that variation is more acceptable in Sweden and Finland Swedes more and more often watch Sweden Swedish programs, then the implicitly transmitted view that variation is acceptable in public usage will also reach Swedish-language Finland one day.

In the interviews Mattfolk (forthcoming) carried out within the MIN Project, the interviewees were in considerable agreement with the view that Helsingfors Swedish is not to be seen as the standard for Finland Swedish. According to Mattfolk's interviewees, one should use standard (Finland) Swedish in serious programs on the radio, because – so the argument goes – we need to give our children good language models. Dialect on the radio is for entertainment. In programs sent from local TV-stations (e.g. När-TV), most of the speakers may be dialect speakers, but when they are placed in front of a camera, they do their utmost to speak some kind of (town-regional) standard. Even the most outspoken pro-dialect people in the local communities tend to attempt a standard when interviewed by the local TV; TV is public, and dialect is not for public and official purposes, seems to be the underlying view.

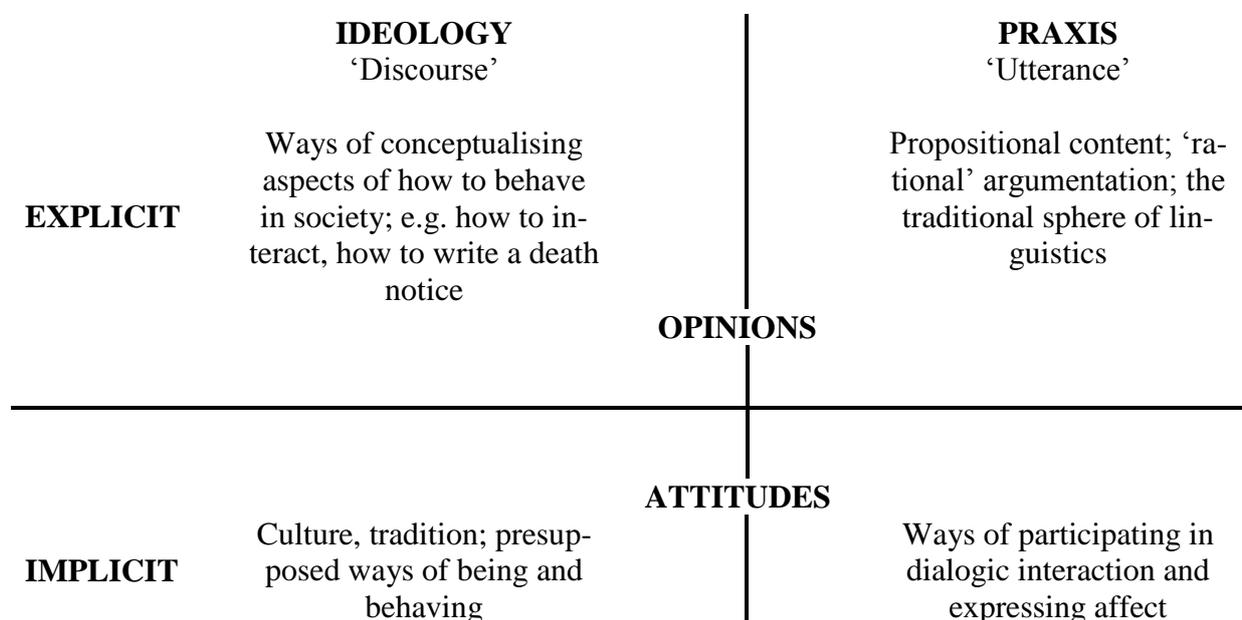
With the advent of digital satellite-TV, which has given Finland Swedes the possibility to see (at least some) Sweden Swedish programs all over Finland, it will not be surprising if the trend we already now see in Ostrobothnia (where some Sweden-Swedish TV-channels have been available for decades) will grow stronger: young Ostrobothnian children play in Sweden

<sup>10</sup> But journalists with Sweden-Swedish pronunciation are welcomed and are increasing in number.

Swedish, and this play-language is starting to appear in their everyday Swedish. We call this Bolibompa Swedish – on the basis of the most well-known children’s program. If this way of speaking is not dropped as the kids get older, it may have a considerable impact on the Swedish of Finland a couple of decades from now.

### FINLAND-SWEDISH IDEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

Within the MIN-project, Mattfolk has looked quite extensively into the opinions and attitudes of Finland Swedes as regards language (cf. Mattfolk 2005, 2006, forthcoming; Mattfolk and Kristiansen 2006.) The grid we have developed for investigating attitudes and opinions is given in Figure 1 (cf. Mattfolk and Östman 2004: 76). Opinions are here marked as explicit (overt, conscious) expressions, and attitudes as implicit (covert, subconscious) expressions of views on language. For analytic purposes, both are further separated into ideology and praxis (discourse and utterance, respectively).



**Figure 1:** The difference between explicit opinions and implicit attitudes.

One of the most interesting findings in Mattfolk and Kristiansen (2006) is that, despite what the informants in Mattfolk (2006 and forthcoming) express as their opinions, e.g. that they do not like English words to creep into Swedish, in a matched-guise test (accounting for their subconscious attitudes), they show in several respects that they evaluate a speaker who uses English words more positively (more ‘efficient’ and more ‘interesting’) than when the same speaker refrains from using English words in a Swedish-language news broadcast.

There is a general sentiment among Finland Swedes that Finland Swedish is ‘good’ Swedish (mostly because it retains some older linguistic features), and this feeling has been strengthened recently by the frequent and openly expressed view by Sweden Swedes that Finland Swedish is beautiful. As a general view this is fairly recent, and has clearly come about through the media (mostly TV) and a number of radiant personalities speaking Finland Swedish (Mark Lewengood, Andrea Reuter, André Wikström and the cartoon figure Moomin, to name a few). Again, this is in line with the recent, general pro-a-multitude-of-varieties view in the Sweden-Swedish media. But Finland Swedes are no doubt proud to hear that

somebody – especially somebody from Sweden – thinks highly of the Finland-Swedish variety. This view of Finland Swedish as a good, old, fine kind of Swedish was also explicitly expressed by informants in Mattfolk's (forthcoming) interview study. This is, then, the explicit opinion that Finland Swedes have of themselves and of their language – albeit that it is couched in the form that 'others' are of this opinion.

On the basis of the interviews in Mattfolk (forthcoming), we also find that Finland Swedes see Sweden Swedes as being more positive towards variation and as being more positive towards the use of English in Swedish than the Finland Swedes themselves are.<sup>11</sup> We saw earlier that Finland Swedes do not openly express their appreciation of spoken Sweden Swedish, but the general ideology is still that Finland Swedish has to follow, and be in tune with, the changes in Sweden Swedish. This seeming incompatibility might in fact be due not only to a difference in speech and writing, but to a failure to keep explicit opinions and implicit attitudes separate in constructing one's linguistic identity and ideology. Thus, Finland Swedes may have an indifferent, if not negative view (i.e. as an explicit opinion) of (spoken) Sweden Swedish as a common standard (especially in relation to their own variety of Swedish), but the effect of the Finland-Swedish language planning agency has successfully shaped the implicit attitude the Finland Swedes have towards Sweden Swedish – or some (written) version of it – into being more positive. This is a hypothesis that needs further investigation in order to get a deeper understanding of the Finland Swedes' ideology of 'the standard language'.

## CONCLUSION

The term 'standard Finland Swedish' has a somewhat unclear referent; ideologically it is (supposed to be) equivalent to whatever 'standard Swedish' refers to, but formally it includes loanwords from Finnish, and it has gone through diverging developments with respect to many of its lexical, prosodic and grammatical features. Functionally, 'standard Finland Swedish' is at the intersection of (Sweden) Swedish and the Swedish dialects of Finland, with a small 'path of Finnish' joining in. Standard Finland Swedish has four town-regional varieties, which are oriented towards in more official situations, but which are not equivalent to the regional standards that have emerged from within the dialect communities on the basis of the widening of the school districts.

On the continuum suggested by Kristiansen (2009b; cf. the introduction to this volume) of languages with strong single standards at one end and languages with multiple or ambivalent ('Norway-type') standards at the other end, Swedish might indeed – as suggested by Kristiansen – fall somewhere in the middle, but Finland Swedish seems to be fossilised in time with respect to standardisation, and thus would belong closer to the 'strong standard' end of the continuum – with Denmark, Iceland and France.<sup>12</sup>

It is extremely pertinent to do research on standardisation and the ideology of a standard language in communities that are not nations, not only in order to see how such a community construes its standard in real time, but also in order to pinpoint the ideological undercurrents of the very notion of standardisation. Here dialects and their varying statuses will have to be taken as important actors from the very start.<sup>13</sup> There is a strong in-group feeling among na-

<sup>11</sup> Although it has to be mentioned, for the sake of completeness, that there were also informants who were of the opposite opinion.

<sup>12</sup> One additional, functional reason for the prominent status of spoken standard Finland Swedish might lie in the practicalities of the minority situation as such: in order to be sure that one is understood by a majority speaker (of Finnish), one has become accustomed to use a clear, written-like spoken Swedish in contacts with others than those in one's immediate surroundings.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, in Swedish-language Finland dialect writing has a long tradition, and the question of how to write dialect is not just a question that interests scholars. Here (dialect) standardisation emerges from below – albeit very slowly, but with few demands 'from above'. What sells, and what is read, works.

tive periphery-speakers in Swedish-language Finland that the dialects are languages proper; it is only when these speakers are in contact with ‘core group’, majority members of the society at large that their views waver as regards the status of their own language/dialect.

As Östman (2008) has shown, there is a considerable ideological difference between dialect levelling as a manifestation of ‘globalisation’ on the one hand, and regionalisation as a manifestation of ‘glocalisation’ and dialectal appropriation of community space on the other. This is a distinction that needs to be maintained for the proper understanding of processes of standardisation, too.

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