

Exploring politeness in pluricentric languages: communicative patterns in Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish

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Swedish is a pluricentric language with official status in two nations, Sweden and Finland. In Sweden, the vast majority of the population of 10 million has Swedish as their first language, and Swedish permeates all aspects of society and public life. The Swedish-speaking Finns constitute a minority of only 5.3 per cent of the Finnish population of about 5.5 million, but due to historical circumstances it is a minority with a strong legal, economic and cultural position. Finland was part of the Swedish kingdom for close to 600 years until 1809 when it became an autonomous part of the Russian empire. After this, Swedish remained the main language of public administration and bureaucracy until Finnish slowly replaced it in the decades before Finland gained independence in 1917. In the Finnish constitution from 1918 Finnish and Swedish were given equal rights as official languages. Nonetheless, due to the difference in numbers Finnish dominates in most public arenas in Finland today.

In relation to Sweden Swedish, Finland Swedish is clearly the non-dominant variety. The degree of difference between the two national varieties is greatest in informal spoken language and smallest in formal written language. The language contact situation in Finland naturally impacts on communicative patterns utilized in Finland Swedish – and in Finnish. For example, there is a stronger preference for respect strategies in Finland-Swedish settings than in Sweden-Swedish ones, where solidarity strategies play a crucial role (Saari 1995, Clyne et al. 2009). However, even though Finland Swedish is an exceptionally well documented non-dominant variety – through academic research and language planning – few systematic comparative studies of contextualised communicative patterns across the two national varieties had been carried out prior to the binational research program *Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages. Communicative Patterns in Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish* (IVIP, funded by Riksbankens jubileumsfond 2013–2020).

In the IVIP program (<http://www.su.se/svefler/ivip/in-english>), the focus is on institutional discourse from a variational pragmatics perspective. Comparable authentic conversations from three domains – service, higher education and health-care – have been video-recorded and transcribed (some 80 hours in total). Since differences in politeness strategies had been reported in earlier research, many of the first studies within the IVIP program focused on address, greetings and alike (e.g. Norrby et al. 2015a, b). In my presentation I will present results from these studies. I will also show how differences in politeness strategies surfaced in a number of other studies where the focus was not on politeness *per se*.

References

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