Finland Swedish as a non-dominant variety of Swedish – extending the scope to pragmatic and interactional aspects

Abstract

This chapter gives an overview of Finland Swedish as a non-dominant variety of Swedish. The first part outlines the status and position of Swedish in Finland and documents research on Finland Swedish. We present this body of work with reference to work on Finland-Swedish status- and corpus planning. While there is an impressive body of work on the phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic characteristics of Finland Swedish, much less attention has been paid to the pragmatic and interactional aspects of Finland Swedish vis-à-vis Sweden Swedish. With the exception of a few studies on politeness strategies, address and greeting practices, no systematic investigation of communicative patterns in the two Swedish varieties has been undertaken. The second part presents our methodological framework for such an investigation, and present preliminary results from a pilot study on openings in
institutional telephone conversations in the respective national variety. These results suggest that there are systematic differences which warrant further investigation.

1. Introduction – scope of the chapter

The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, we give an overview of the role of Swedish in Finland and document the main tenets of previous research on Finland-Swedish varieties. Second, we compare the two national varieties of Swedish with regard to some pragmatic and interactional features. The chapter opens with an overview of the historical background to the presence of Swedish in Finland, the geographical and demographical distribution of Finland Swedish, and its status and position in Finland today. Next, we give an account of the linguistic characteristics of Finland Swedish in relation to the dominant variety, Sweden Swedish. Finally we present some preliminary findings on pragmatic and interactional patterns in the two Swedish national varieties and our theoretical underpinnings and methodological framework for our project Pragmatics, interaction and communication in Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish.

2. Swedish-speaking Finns

Swedish is a language with an official status in two countries; it is the main language (Sw. huvudspråk) in Sweden and the other of the two national languages (alongside Finnish) in Finland. Sweden has a population of ca 8.9 million and all native Swedes have Swedish as their first or second language (Winsa 2005). In comparison, the variety of Swedish used in Finland is clearly a non-dominant one, spoken by ca 290,000 citizens as their first language, whereas the majority of the country’s population of ca 5.2 million speaks Finnish.1 Swedish-speaking Finns (Sw. finlandssvenskar) thus constitute a linguistic minority of 5.6%. However, it is a minority with a strong legal, economical and cultural position.

The linguistic rights concerning the national languages are guaranteed in the Constitution which originates from 1919. The Language Act specifies that a Finnish citizen is entitled to use either Finnish or Swedish in courts of law and in dealings with other national authorities. In practice, the equal status of the languages is largely dependent on the public sector and the Swedish-speaking

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1 Both Finland and Sweden recognise historical and regional minority languages by law, but for the purpose of this article this can be disregarded.
cultural and educational infrastructures that operate parallel to, but independently from, the corresponding Finnish infrastructures. In contrast to the situation in Switzerland, Belgium or Canada, the language policy of Finland is not grounded on strong territorially secured language environments but on cultural autonomy (see McRae 2007), except for the autonomous, unilingual Swedish-speaking Åland islands with 27,173 inhabitants. Legal requirements concerning language in mainland Finland are nonetheless based on local circumstances. Municipalities are defined as unilingual either in Finnish or Swedish or as bilingual with Finnish or Swedish as the majority language. In 2008, only three municipalities on the mainland were unilingual in Swedish and 43 were bilingual (of which 22 had Swedish as the majority language), whereas 353 were unilingual in Finnish. The bilingual municipalities are required to provide services both in Finnish and Swedish (Latomaa and Nuolijärvi 2005, RG 2009).

Swedish-speaking Finns live in provinces along the southern, southwestern and northwestern coast and, in addition, on a few Swedish language islands in coastal and inland cities with traditions in industry and overseas trade. The absolute number of Swedish-speaking Finns has been steady since the late 1800s but their share of the whole population of Finland has decreased gradually, from 13% in the beginning of the 1900s. Reasons for the decrease are manifold, including urbanization and emigration especially to Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s, but it also seems that the application of the Finnish state’s language policy has not been altogether successful from the minority’s perspective (McRae 2007, Tandefelt and Finnäs 2007).

Until the 1900s, Swedish had a strong position in public administration and higher education, which followed from the fact that Finnish provinces belonged to the Swedish kingdom for some 600 years until 1809. Between 1809 and 1917, Finland was an autonomous grand duchy of the Russian empire but preserved the legislative and social system of the Swedish era and also the dominant status of the Swedish language in the public sphere. The latter part of the 1800s was a period of Finnish national awakening, which by and by led to the strengthening of the position of Finnish as a written language and as the language of administration and education (see Saari, forthcoming). The same period also meant a mobilization of the Swedish-speaking population. Institutions and organizations were founded to preserve and promote the Swedish language and culture, inter alia the Swedish People’s Party (1906) in politics and the unilingual Åbo Akademi University (1918) in higher education.
Swedish-speaking Finns constitute a group whose core value in terms of ideology and identity is the Swedish language. In cultural terms there is not such a clear divide in relation to the speakers of Finnish, although Swedish-speaking Finns are generally more oriented to media and traditions associated with Sweden. Nonetheless, Swedish-speaking Finns have developed a distinct language identity against the dominant variety of Swedish, while the official language cultivation helps maintain linguistic unity with Sweden Swedish, especially in more formal usage.

3. The characteristics of Finland Swedish

The Swedish spoken in Finland covers both a large number of geographical dialects and the regional variety of the Swedish standard language generally referred to with the term Finland Swedish (Sw. finlandssvenska). More than half of the Swedish-speaking Finns are estimated to speak dialect as their mother tongue. Especially in southern Finland, there is, however, a tendency towards convergence between dialects and standard varieties (Ivars 1998). The standard language goes back at least to the early 18th century and was formed in a process where the language of the upper classes (in Turku) continually became more and more adapted to written language and urban Swedish, especially the Stockholm variety (Tandefelt and Finnäs 2007).

The main differences between Finland-Swedish and Sweden-Swedish varieties can be found on the level of pronunciation, vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. The degree of difference is greatest in informal spoken language and smallest in formal written language. Finnish has influenced both dialects and standard varieties to various degrees across individual speakers and regions (Reuter 1992). In the late 19th century scholars started to take an interest in the development and maintenance of standard Swedish in Finland (Ivars 2005, Tandefelt and Finnäs 2007). Since then, the goal of language authorities in Finland has been to keep the Swedish standard language, especially the written language, but also the formal spoken language, as close to standard Swedish in Sweden as possible. An important part of Finland-Swedish language cultivation has been the campaign against Finlandisms, i.e. words that are used regularly in Finland Swedish but not in Sweden Swedish (Reuter 1992, 2005).

The phonological, lexical and morphological characteristics of Finland-Swedish varieties are well documented. Moreover, syntactic features have been
documented in a number of studies (for an overview, see e.g. Reuter 1997, Wide and Lyngfelt 2009). Even though it is well-known that Finland Swedish differs from Sweden Swedish on the pragmatic and interactional levels (cf. Reuter 1992), no systematic comparative studies of communicative patterns in Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish have been carried out, with the exception of Saari (1995) on politeness, address and greeting practices, and Fremer (1997, 1998), Clyne, Norrby and Warren (2009), Clyne and Norrby (forthc.), and Norrby, Nilsson and Nyblom (2007) on address. There is thus a clear gap in the research on Swedish as a pluricentric language at this level of language. In the following section we will present some systematic differences between Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish which warrant further investigation in the area.

4. Pragmatic and interactional variation between Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish – some examples

Pragmatic routines, verbal actions (speech acts) and interactional patterns have – generally speaking – attracted considerable research interest both in Finland and Sweden during the past few decades. This is no doubt due to the strong position of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics in both countries. However, research which compares communicative aspects of the two Swedish varieties is scant. Exceptions include Saari (1995), whose preliminary observations regarding greeting formulas and address practices suggest that Finland Swedes are more inclined to negative politeness strategies (more indirectness and greater formality) than Swedes, who lean more towards positive politeness (more indirectness and informal speech patterns), to use Brown and Levinson’s terminology (1987).

Research on reported address practices and attitudes to address with 72 informants from Gothenburg, Sweden and Vaasa, Finland respectively show distinct differences in address preferences between the two speech communities (Clyne, Norrby and Warren 2009; Norrby 2006; Norrby, Nilsson and Nyblom 2007). Similar to many languages, Swedish distinguishes between an informal and a formal address pronoun in the singular, often referred to as T and V pronouns after Latin tu and vos (Brown and Gilman 1960). However, the Swedish T pronoun – du – is used in many more contexts than for example its German or French counterparts. Nevertheless, there are striking differences in the attitudes to the formal V pronoun – ni – across the research sites, as illustrated by the
following quotations where two young female informants recollect situations being addressed by the V pronoun *ni* and how they reacted:

(1) Reactions by woman, aged 27, Vaasa, Finland:
"Jag måste ju liksom säga att de gånger jag har blivit niad, särskilt av lite såna yngre människor, ska vi säga i min egen ålder ungefär, så har jag blivit glatt överraskad på något vis. Det känns som om man blir som bemött väldigt så där hövligt och liksom man får kanske lite mer värdighet på det sättet”
(From Norrby, Nilsson and Nyblom 2007:19)

English translation:
"I like sort of have to say that when I have been addressed with *ni*, especially by younger people, shall we say about my own age, I have been happily surprised. It feels like you are treated very kind of politely and like perhaps you get a bit more dignity in that way”

(2) Reactions by woman, aged 31, Gothenburg, Sweden:
"Ja, av äckliga unga manliga och kvinnliga expediter i tjusiga dyra affärer. Jag blir kränkt, jag känner mig som att jag är tusen år gammal eller som att dom tror att jag är dum i huvudet ... inte trevligt, känns oerhört fånigt och förlegat, det har ju varit en du-reform”
(Norrby, Nilsson and Nyblom 2007:20)

English translation:
“Yes, [being addressed with *ni*] by disgusting young male and female shop assistants in fancy expensive stores. I get offended, I feel like I’m a thousand years old or as if they think I’m an idiot... not nice, feels extremely silly and old-fashioned, there has been a du-reform“

These two young women display diametrically opposing views on being addressed with *ni*, and while they stand out for their strong attitudes, they are not exceptional, but confirm a general pattern in the data where the Sweden-Swedish participants display much more negative views on V and also report using it in fewer contexts than their Finland-Swedish counterparts (Clyne, Norrby and Warren 2009:132-139). In the questionnaire data there were no situations (out of 38) where more than half of the Sweden-Swedish informants
reported use of V whereas there were six such V-situations in the Finland-Swedish data. These results are summarised in Table 1. (Figures in brackets indicate total number who responded to the question.)

Table 1. Situations for V address in Finland Swedish (Vaasa) and Sweden Swedish (Gothenburg)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addressing:</th>
<th>Vaasa</th>
<th>Gothenburg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A much older stranger, opp. sex</td>
<td>71% (72)</td>
<td>46% (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A much older stranger, same sex</td>
<td>69% (72)</td>
<td>36% (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A stranger in an email</td>
<td>70% (66)</td>
<td>43% (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A client in an email</td>
<td>61% (64)</td>
<td>30% (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A much older police officer, same sex</td>
<td>60% (72)</td>
<td>17% (72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A much older police officer, opp. sex</td>
<td>58% (72)</td>
<td>15% (72)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is seen in the table, unfamiliarity with the addressee promotes use of V in both varieties, but the tendency is more pronounced among the Finland-Swedish informants. The results also suggest that the Finland Swedes are more likely to choose V address with somebody much older, in the written medium and, in particular, with a person of authority.

Greetings have also been found to differ between the Swedish varieties. For example, Saari (1995) reports that more formal greetings (god dag, lit. ‘good day’) were used in Finland-Swedish service encounters compared to Sweden-Swedish ones where informal hej (hi’) dominated. Similar differences in formality also exist in written communication: in our Finland-Swedish data the most frequently reported greeting in a letter to an unfamiliar recipient was Bästa (lit. ‘best’) + title + full name, whereas in the Sweden-Swedish data the most common was Hej + first name (Norrby 2006; Clyne, Norrby and Warren 2009:144).

In a pilot study of conversational openings in institutional service encounters, based on three existing corpora, we found clear structural differences between the two national varieties. In example (3) from the Finnish corpus, GF answers the phone at Luckan – a Finland-Swedish booking service for

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2 The pilot study was based on a corpus of service encounters in Finland (Dept. of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Languages, University of Helsinki, 1994), a Swedish corpus of private telephone conversations (A. Lindström 1994) and a Swedish corpus of telephone calls to Giftinformationscentralen (Poison Control Service) (Landqvist 2001).
cultural events and theatre performances in Swedish – and in the next turn the caller identifies herself, followed by a greeting (the turn in question appears in bold):

(3)
GF: Luckan Gun Finne
MB: de e Maria Blom här hej
GF: hej hej
MB: hur länge e Luckan öppen
GF: ti klockan aderton
(From: A corpus of service encounters, University of Helsinki (1994))

English translation:
GF: Luckan [The box office] Gun Finne
MB: it is Maria Blom here hi
GF: hi hi
MB: how long is Luckan open
GF: until six o’clock

In example (4), from a Swedish telephone conversation, the caller VV begins with a greeting followed by the identification (see bolded utterance):

BS: Be:rit Svåntesson¿
VV: Mm: hej Viveka Valander heter ja,
BS: Ja hej¿
VV: Du ja bor på Skattebo? pt=
BS: =Mm¿=
(From: A. Lindström 1994)

English translation:
BS: Be:rit Svåntesson¿
VV: Mm hi Viveka Valander I am called
BS: Yes hi
VV: Well I live at Skattebo
BS: mm

The Finland-Swedish caller in example (3) identifies herself before producing a greeting whereas the Sweden-Swedish caller in (4) does the opposite. In addition, a generic locative adverb is produced in the Finland-
Swedish presentation. Overall, the institutional openings we have analysed show the same structural differences between the varieties, illustrated schematically below in tables 2 and 3 (FN=first name, LN=Last name):

Table 2. Typical institutional openings in Finland Swedish:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particle</th>
<th>Greeting</th>
<th>Nexus</th>
<th>Name: FN+LN</th>
<th>Locative: här (here)</th>
<th>Greeting: hej (hi)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>här (here)</td>
<td>hej (hi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>De e (it is)</td>
<td></td>
<td>här (here)</td>
<td>hej (hi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jå (yes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>här (here)</td>
<td>hej (hi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nå (well)</td>
<td>de e (it is)</td>
<td></td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>här (here)</td>
<td>hej (hi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo (yes)</td>
<td></td>
<td>de här e (this is)</td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>hej (hi)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Typical institutional openings in Sweden Swedish:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particle</th>
<th>Greeting</th>
<th>Nexus</th>
<th>Name: FN+LN</th>
<th>Nexus: heter ja (I’m called)</th>
<th>Greeting: –</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm</td>
<td>hej (hi)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>heter ja (I’m called)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja ((yes)</td>
<td>hej (hi)</td>
<td>jag heter (I’m called)</td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja (yes)</td>
<td>hejsan (hi)</td>
<td>mitt namn e (my name is)</td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>FN+LN</td>
<td>heter ja (I’m called)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The structural differences can be summarised as follows:

a. In Finland-Swedish institutional telephone openings the greeting appears turn-finally, and a locative adverb (här, 'here') may follow after the name field. The same format for opening routines also exists in Finnish telephone conversations (c.f. Hakulinen 1993)

b. In Sweden-Swedish institutional telephone openings there is no locative field

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3 The pilot study is based on a limited number of examples: 21 in Finland Swedish and 12 in Sweden Swedish. In order to validate these tentative findings our next step is to collect a much larger sample of institutional opening structures.
and there is a strong tendency for the greeting to precede the name (all but one occurrences follow this pattern).

(c) If the introduction is in the form of a clause, Finland Swedish uses *de e* (‘it is’) or *de här e* (‘this is’), Sweden Swedish uses *ja heter/heter jag* (‘I’m called’) or *mitt namn e* (‘my name is’).

d. A particle may open the turn in both varieties, but there is variation in the types used. The particles *jå* (‘yes’) and *nå* (‘well’), typical of Finland-Swedish discourse (see e.g. Green-Vänttinen 2001, Lehti-Eklund 1992), prevail in our Finland-Swedish data while *ja* (‘yes’) is ubiquitous in the Sweden-Swedish data set.

e. It is also worth noting that *hej* (‘hi’) is by far the most frequent greeting in both data sets, and the more formal *goddag* (lit. ‘good day’) occurs very rarely, also in the Finland-Swedish telephone openings. This suggests that Finland-Swedish speech patterns have become less formal in the past decades, compared to previous observations (c.f. Saari 1995).

In summary, the studies reported on here indicate that there is pragmatic and interactional variation between the two national varieties, but some results also suggest that the gap might be closing. For example, while more formal V address is more common in Finland Swedish, some informants in the address study pointed out that Finland-Swedish address practices are becoming more informal, with more prevalent use of T, at the same time as some Sweden-Swedish informants mentioned increased use of V in Swedish service encounters (Clyne, Norrby and Warren 2009:110). In Saari’s comparative observations from the 1990s, Finland Swedish was found to employ more indirect strategies and overall more formal greetings such as *god dag* (‘good day’). However, her Finland-Swedish data included mostly middle-aged and older participants. In the other service encounter corpora discussed above we did not find such clear differences in formality; the informal *hej* dominates in both varieties, and there are overall very few instances of *god dag*. The most striking difference is found in institutional conversational openings: Finland Swedish follows the pattern *Identification (It is+Name)+Locative+Greeting* whereas Sweden Swedish typically has the greeting first: *Greeting+Identification*. There also seems to be less syntactic variation in Finland-Swedish institutional openings, compared to Sweden Swedish (see tables 2 and 3): the generic clausal opening *de e* dominates whereas

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4 The vowel in *jå* is pronounced [o:]
Sweden-Swedish speakers vary between *ja heter* ‘I am called’ and *mitt namn e* ‘my name is’. The typical Finland-Swedish presentational pattern thus displays features of language contact from Finnish and possibly a narrowing down of alternative idiomatic Swedish patterns. In our project on Swedish as a pluricentric language we aim to investigate these phenomena further. In section 5 we present the project’s framework for the analysis of pragmatic and interactional variation.

5. Conclusion – a framework for the analysis of pragmatic and interactional variation

Variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008a) is a recently established approach to the study of pragmatics, which incorporates insights from sociolinguistics, dialectology and ethnology. By drawing on results from cross-cultural studies, Schneider and Barron take stock of the variation at the pragmatic level of language (e.g. greetings, compliments, promises, thanking), and propose a research agenda based on the variation between cultures or subcultures. They put forward a number of parameters for future study, with regard to sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic variation (e.g. greeting patterns), strategies for expressing a certain action (e.g. a wish), variation in the types and/or frequency of mitigating strategies, and pragmatic change in one language/variety due to influence from another language/variety (Schneider and Barron 2008b: 14-15). Our own research agenda concerns many of these parameters, and variational pragmatics offers a promising theoretical framework for the study of national and regional variation of a language.

Muhr (2008) makes a distinction between macropragmatics and micropragmatics. The former concerns socio-historical developments within and between nations, languages and cultures – broadly speaking what constitutes the general cultural norms of a society or country (Muhr 2008:212) – whereas the latter concerns language use and interaction in concrete situations in a speech community. Our immediate research interest concerns the variation of micropragmatic features in Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish, as borne out in naturally occurring interactions, but in reality there is a dialectical relationship between macro and micro levels, which needs to be taken into account: the macropragmatic dimension will provide a basis for hypotheses about differing language use in Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish, while
knowledge of communicative patterns at the micro level may help explain sociopragmatic variation across cultures.

Our micropragmatic investigation will take into account three dimensions of language use: the formal level, the level of politeness and the interactional level. The formal level concerns linguistic forms that are linked to specific pragmatic tasks, such as response tokens, where variation between the two Swedish national varieties has been found (Green-Vänttinen 2001:327). The politeness level has to do with the management of interpersonal relationships, and what constitutes polite behaviour in a society: for example differences in address practices have been found between the two Swedish varieties (see section 4 above). Finally, the interactional level involves the organisation of the dialogical communication between interlocutors, for example patterns for introduction of self on the telephone, or for requesting something in a service encounter. Pragmatic variation at the interactional level has rendered the least interest to date, but our pilot study of telephone openings show clear differences between the national varieties of Swedish, and warrants further research at this level of language use.

Methodologically, our project will introduce new perspectives on the study of pragmatic variation. The majority of previous studies in pragmatics have been grounded in speech act theory, and empirical data have predominantly been collected through experimental methods, such as the DCT (discourse completion task), (see e.g. the CCSARP project, Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989). However, our focus is on naturally occurring situations and interactions, and the inductive research tradition of ethnography and conversation analysis will provide a suitable analytical framework for our purposes. By documenting a wide range of communicative situations and practices – through video recordings and transcriptions – we will be able to locate recurring patterns in each variety and thus build a comparative corpus of the pragmatic and interactional variation in Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish.

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