

Mantila, Harri & Saviniemi, Maija & Kunnas, Niina (eds.). 2019. *Oulu kieliyhteisönä* [Oulu as a language community]. (Tietolipas 261). Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura. Pp. 329.

Reviewed by Minna Palander-Collin

1 Introduction

Oulu as a language community is a collection of eight articles written by linguists based at the University of Oulu. The book provides an overview of the current sociolinguistic situation in the Oulu region, paying attention to the majority language Finnish and the minority languages Swedish, Sámi and Karelian.

The blurb of the book identifies various target audiences in addition to sociolinguists, including language minority communities and anyone interested in the relationship between language and society. Indeed, the book offers highly approachable and illuminating perspectives on the topics it covers: the history of Swedish and its current status in the region, educational possibilities for Sámi language speakers, the less well-known Karelian community, folk linguistic perceptions of the Oulu dialect of Finnish and attitudes towards immigrant Finnish.

The book certainly opens up new and possibly surprising perspectives even for most Finns. For example, Karelian is almost invisible to the majority of Finns, and Swedish in Oulu does not show on the streets either, even though there is a thriving Swedish-speaking community. The official national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish. The Sámi languages are the languages of the indigenous people, and Karelian is among the autochthonous languages with a long history in Finland (Institute for the Languages of Finland n. d.).

On the national level Swedish is the native language of 5.2% of the population and Sámi of 0.04% of the population (Statistics Finland n.d.). Oulu is an overwhelmingly Finnish-speaking city with only a small Swedish-speaking minority of 0.2% (468 persons). Sámi is the native language of 0.1% (142 persons), and various other languages are spoken as the first language by 4.2% (8,496 persons) (City of Oulu 2019).

Similar sociolinguistic surveys of other cities in Finland have been published on Helsinki (Juusela & Nikula 2006), Tampere (Lönnroth 2009) and Vaasa (Lönnroth & Laukkanen 2015). Of these, Vaasa has the most

Swedish-speakers amounting to 23.2% of the population. With 0.5% of Swedish-speaking inhabitants, Tampere is close to Oulu, whereas Helsinki with 5.6% is closer to the national average (Statistics Finland n.d.). Outside of the indigenous Sámi region, Oulu, Helsinki and Rovaniemi have the most Sámi speakers. Varieties of Karelian are spoken in Finland and Russia, and it is estimated that there are over 30,000 people in Finland of Karelian origin who speak or understand Karelian. A more recent linguistic phenomenon concerning the whole of Finland is the impact of immigration on increasing multilingualism, especially in bigger cities. In this book, this phenomenon is approached from the perspective of native-speaker attitudes towards immigrant Finnish.

2 Summary of the chapters

The individual chapters are organised into three main sections: the first one deals with the historical and current status of Swedish in Oulu, the second one with minority languages and the third one with Finnish as the majority language.

In the first section on Swedish, Paula Rossi's article provides a historical perspective on the status of Swedish in Oulu from the foundation of the city in 1605 by King Charles IX of Sweden to the beginning of the twentieth century. Finnish has historically been the majority language in Oulu and the surrounding regions, unlike for example in cities like Helsinki and Turku. Under the Swedish rule in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the role of Swedish was strengthened due to commercial activity and administrative practices. Even under the Russian rule in the nineteenth century, for many inhabitants of Oulu, Stockholm and Swedish provided a gateway to education and the rest of the world, but the numbers of Swedish-speakers, nevertheless, dropped to less than 2% by 1930. This development was strengthened by the establishment of a Finnish-language newspaper, the third of the kind in Finland, as early as 1829, as well as the availability of education in Finnish and Finnish as the language of administration during the latter half of the nineteenth century. A slightly more unusual data source used in this article are telephone directories, which contained both Finnish and Swedish and thus serve as a useful indicator of the status of the languages. At the end of the nineteenth century, Swedish was used by most telephone owners to list their profession and the names of public institutions were mostly in Swedish, but

the majority of advertisements were in Finnish.

Riitta Kosunen in the same section on Swedish explores individual multilingualism through code-switching practices in a personal diary of an elderly Swedish-speaker, who lived her entire life in Oulu. Her analysed diary entries (23,465 words) written in Swedish contain 321 switches into Finnish and English, of which 87% are nouns. In folk linguistic interpretation, switching often seems to be understood as a sign of not mastering either language properly. This is not the case, but it is not easy to give a simple explanation for the switches either. Only a few switches into Finnish fill a gap in the Swedish lexicon. In many cases, the Finnish switches vary with the Swedish equivalent without any apparent reason. For example, many societal institutions have both Finnish and Swedish equivalents that are used interchangeably. One clear explanation for switching seems to be the primary language of specific domains in the writer's life. Her accounts of family life contain switches into Finnish like *mökki* (Sw. (*sommar*)*stuga*, 'cottage') as in this domain she used Finnish in everyday interaction.

Elisa Risto's article on the small present-day Swedish-speaking community in Oulu reads as a continuation of the historical situation explored by Rossi. Oulu is an example of an old Swedish-speaking language island in Finland, existing outside of the traditional Swedish-speaking regions of the coastal areas and Southern Finland. Other such cities with Swedish-speaking language islands in Finland include Kotka, Pori and Tampere. In the light of the history of Oulu, the main question perhaps is: how is it possible that Swedish has survived in the city? The data, essays produced by 33 students of the Swedish-speaking upper secondary school in Oulu, show that there are many positive aspects to getting one's education in Swedish, including the possibility of attending Swedish-speaking schools situated close to each other all the way from kindergarten to upper secondary school. This seems to provide a safe community with opportunities for improving one's skills in both Swedish and Finnish. The popularity of the school has increased in recent years, and, importantly from the perspective of language survival, it now attracts students from entirely Finnish-speaking backgrounds who see the mastery of Swedish as a valuable asset for their future educational and career paths.

The second section focuses on two minority languages, Sámi and Karelian. Marjatta Jomppanen maps the situation of Sámi in Oulu, offering a thorough survey of laws and regulations defining the position of Sámi and its speakers, the history of education in Sámi, parents' perspectives on Sámi language education and the history and current situation of Sámi language in

university programmes. Sámi is in fact three different varieties, North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi, which are all endangered minority languages. As an indigenous people, the Sámi children are entitled to education in their own language in the Sámi region, but outside of the region they are entitled to two hours a week of Sámi language education like immigrant children in general. The situation is different in day care, as children whose first language is Sámi are entitled to day care in Sámi irrespective of where they live. Oulu is outside of the indigenous Sámi region, but the city has provided early childhood education in North Sámi since 2002, primary school education since 1997 and secondary school education since 2001. North Sámi lessons are offered in an upper secondary school for adults and they are open to anyone. The University of Oulu launched a study programme of North Sámi in 1970, and now all the three Sámi language varieties are taught at the University. The reasons for studying Sámi in university programmes vary, but they include factors like the student's intention to work with the Sámi language in the Sámi region or the wish to reintroduce the heritage language in the family. Jomppanen's account highlights the role of determined and enthusiastic individuals, be they parents, early childhood educators or academics, in working towards an improved status of Sámi in Oulu.

Niina Kunnas analyses the current situation of Karelian in Oulu. Karelian people have moved to the Oulu region in different times and there are different subgroups of Karelians, hence also different Karelian language varieties. After the First World War an influx of Karelian refugees came to Oulu from White Sea Karelia, and after the Second World War, Finnish Karelians had to move to other parts of Finland from the areas occupied by the Soviet Union. Due to this historical background, Karelians were often looked down on in their new Finnish communities as "Russians". Karelian, hence, became a language spoken only in the family and it was something to hide in the new environment; the new identity was best gained by speaking Finnish. Nevertheless, Karelian has been maintained in Oulu, and Kunnas refers to four explanations: (1) three generations of Karelians often lived in the same household, (2) healthy Karelian linguistic identity of (grand)mothers, (3) the village community of Karelians in Muhos, and (4) the belief held by some White Sea Karelians that they would eventually return to Karelia. Kunnas' analysis of her interview data shows that the Karelian community has mixed feelings about the revival of Karelian. Some feel that it is not a suitable language to be used in modern society and the written standard Karelian feels strange, others are interested in developing their language skills. Kunnas

concludes that the Karelian community does not have enough information about language revival, and in order to maintain Karelian as a living language the Karelian community should be made more aware of this information.

As part of the section on minority languages, Heidi Niemelä focuses on Finnish tertiary-level students' perceptions of immigrant Finnish. The evaluated speakers come from Russia, Somalia, Iran, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The study used the Verbal Guise technique in which recordings by different speakers were played to the student informants. The informants evaluated the speech samples in three groups: the first group just heard the audio samples; the second group heard the audio samples and saw fictional photos of speakers dressed up in high-status clothes such as a suit or a doctor's coat; the third group heard the audio and saw fictional photos of low-status characters. As immigration in any greater numbers is still a recent phenomenon in Finland, Finns are not that used to hearing Finnish spoken with a foreign accent. This makes the study and its results all the more important, even though it is a well-established finding in accent attitude studies that different accents are evaluated in different ways and the evaluations are extended to the speakers as well (see e. g. Garrett 2010). In the same vein, this study shows that immigrant speakers were not just evaluated on the basis of the Finnish they spoke, but cultural stereotypes and the assumed social status of the speaker affected the evaluation. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the immigrant Finnish was evaluated more positively if the informants believed that the speaker was close to them in appearance, cultural and geographical background. In other words, Finnish spoken by Western immigrants received the most positive evaluations, whereas Finnish spoken by Somali immigrants received the most negative evaluations, and the Finnish spoken by an Iranian man was considered difficult to understand only when the informants thought that he had a low educational background.

The third section on Finnish begins with Harri Mantila's study of a well-known feature of Oulu dialect, the second-person singular pronoun with its major variant forms *sä(ä)* and *nä(ä)*. It is this latter variant that is widely recognized as a typical Oulu dialect feature, and almost every Finn can cite stereotypical expressions where *nä(ä)* occurs in an interrogative clause. The article provides variationist sociolinguistic evidence of the second-person singular variation as well as folk linguistic data on how this feature is recognized. The variationist part is based on 68 dialogues between young people, previously analysed and reported in several MA theses. The folk linguistic data was collected as a survey of 115 students studying in a

polytechnic and a vocational institute in Oulu. The results of the variationist analysis show that *sä(ä)* is the more frequent variant overall, although *nä(ä)* has a stable presence. *Nä(ä)* is more frequently used in interrogative clauses than in declarative clauses, and there are gender differences as boys use *nä(ä)* more and girls use *sä(ä)* more. Folk linguistic analysis shows that *sä(ä)* and *nä(ä)* are recognized well as Oulu dialect features, but especially those who have come to Oulu from outside the dialect area, seem to recognize *nä(ä)* as a dialectal feature rather than *sä(ä)*, but surprisingly they also recognize *sie* and *siä* as Oulu dialect features although they are not. Mantila suggests that these informants recognize *nä(ä)* because it is a feature not found in the respondent's own dialect and therefore easier to notice than the more widely spread *sä(ä)*. *Sie* and *siä* variants were possibly reported because they have positive connotations in Finland in general and their use is spreading.

The last article by Maija Saviniemi, Niina Kunnas, Harri Mantila, Elina Rajala & Ulla Paukkunen analyses folk linguistic ways of talking about the Oulu dialect and dialect variation. The writers present a taxonomy of folk linguistic metalanguage ranging from intuitive metalanguage to the formation of a rule. The intuitive level of talking about language is characterized by evaluative statements, which are often in the form of adjectives about language. The Oulu dialect is, for example, described as “slow”. The next level is represented by concrete linguistic examples, such as phrases, personal pronouns, or dialectal words. The second-person singular pronoun *nä(ä)* would be a typical example of this level of metalanguage. The next group in the taxonomy is formed by a hint of a rule, which refers to self-formulated rules and comparisons to other varieties aiming at a generalization about language. The fourth group, closest to the analytic approach to language, is the formation of a rule using linguistic concepts. The writers point out that folk linguistic metalanguage, i.e. how non-linguists talk about language, is language dependent as dominant language ideologies in the community and resources of a particular language influence the way in which lay people talk and can talk about language.

3 Conclusion

The approaches and perspectives adopted in these studies on Oulu as a language community vary from diachronic to synchronic, from individual language practices to practices on a community level. Most articles study

speakers' attitudes towards and perceptions of language, or the language sociological situation of a language and its speakers, but there are also studies analyzing linguistic variation in a sociolinguistic frame.

The voices of informants are present in interesting ways in all studies. We hear stories of people living in Oulu, who speak Swedish, Sámi, Karelian, Oulu dialect or Finnish with an accent. These stories contain many lessons to be learnt about language maintenance and revival, language and identity, and the importance of native-language education. The authors do not specifically underline this didactic and normative potential of their work, but their findings can certainly be used by language policy makers for language planning purposes or by language educators to enhance minority language programmes.

The context here is Oulu, Finland, but the findings have more general value as paths and avenues of linguistic development tend to form patterns. At least for a scholarly audience, it would have been useful to include a summary of the main findings and a discussion of their significance in relation to sociolinguistic research more broadly.

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Contact information:

Minna Palander-Collin
Department of Languages
P.O. Box 24
00014 University of Helsinki
Finland
e-mail: minna(dot)palander-collin(at)helsinki(dot)fi