

CHAPTER 10

The English Language in Finland Tool of Modernity or Tool of Coloniality?

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Abstract

English is the dominant lingua franca of the modern world, used by an estimated 1.5 billion people (Peterson 2020; 2 billion people according to MacKenzie 2018). The ubiquity of English is in large part due to its colonial history, which resulted in extreme pluricentricity (Clyne 1992). English is also the world's most commonly taught foreign language, for example in places like Finland, where the majority population claims to be proficient in English (Leppänen, Nikula and Kääntä 2008). By some measures, the “best” non-native speakers of English are the Nordic populations, including Finland (European Commission 2012). Contemporary ideologies of the Nordic countries, Finland included, are at odds with the linguistic attitudes and discrimination that are a composite component of English. That is, Nordic countries value ideologies of equality (Keskinen, Skaptadóttir and Toivanen 2019), yet the English language is known to reflect social biases and to perpetuate social inequality based on

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race, economic status and gender (Lippi-Green 2012; Milroy and Milroy 1999). How then, does the use of English play out in a setting like Finland? Does English perpetuate Nordic values of equality, or colonial values of whiteness and elitism? The chapter explores these notions through the lens of the Extra and Intra-territorial Force Model (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017), a model designed to apply to non-postcolonial settings of English.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, language attitudes, language ideologies, English as a global language, coloniality

Introduction

A news article in the weekend supplement to *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's biggest daily newspaper, ran this headline and subheading for a story dated January 23, 2020:

Katri Kulmuni's delightful British English dropped jaws on social media—we asked linguists if she would be an upper- or lower-class Brit. Twitter delights once again over Katri Kulmuni's British English. Linguists say Kulmuni's language skills are on par with native speakers—and such a high level among Finns is only an advantage.¹

The article goes on to describe how the then-Finnish Minister of Finance, Katri Kulmuni, was not an embarrassment to Finland like other Finnish politicians had apparently been, due to their supposed lack of skills in speaking English. The story was published after a video interview circulated on Twitter featuring Kulmuni speaking English with the international press in Brussels, garnering praise for Kulmuni's English skills.

There is plenty to unpack in even this brief example. Not least is that a positive assessment of a Finnish politician's English skills merits space in the weekend supplement of the nation's most-read newspaper. The fact that this story was considered newsworthy can be attributed to a number of factors. Foremost, no doubt, is that a public figure representing Finland received positive assessment on the international stage. The fact that this assessment has to do with her use of English merits further attention. The same article goes on to mention the self-disparaging notion of “rally English,” a term coined at the expense of Finnish competitive rally drivers, who have traditionally been considered to speak “shameful” English—an adjective used in the article. Rally English is used in Finland to describe English spoken with a distinctive Finnish accent coming through. Parallel terms in other languages, also normally used in a disparaging manner, include *steenkolengels* “coal English” in Dutch, *inglese maccheronico* “macaroni English” in Italian and *Engrish* in Japanese. The observation about

rally English is raised in the news article to highlight that there is an overall improvement in the English skills among the Finnish population, and that this is a positive outcome. On the surface, the story is an innocuous, feel-good piece typical of a weekly supplement: attention is brought to the fact that a local politician has been praised for her ability in speaking English.

Below the surface, however, the overall tone and language use in the article point toward clear ideologies about language, and specifically about the use of English. To start, why is “British English” considered “delightful”? Would the same adjective be used to describe another variety of English — say, Indian English or US Southern English? Why, in particular, would a Finnish politician’s use of “British English” cause “jaws to drop”? Is the implication that speaking a highly regarded variety of English is something unexpected or out of reach for Finnish people? Furthermore, and more to the aims of this chapter, what is achieved by determining, based on expert insights from linguists, whether the “British English” in question is higher or lower class? What if, in fact, the resulting assessments had been “lower class,” rather than the “civilized and educated” assessment that came from language experts (later in the article)? Would this story still have been newsworthy if Kulmuni had been considered to speak a lower-class variety of British English? And, finally, why is it considered an “advantage” for Finnish people to sound like “native speakers” of English—and, based on the article, presumably higher-class British English speakers?

Newspapers are known to simultaneously reflect and feed into public discourse and ideologies through audience design (Bell 1984). With this in mind, it appears as a straightforward and uncomplicated issue that the concept of “British English” is something both desired and desirable for the newspaper and its readers. We can safely refer to this as an example of *standard language ideology*, which has been described as “... the promotion of the needs and interests of a dominant group or class at the expense of marginalized groups, by means of disinformation and misrepresentations of those non-dominant groups” (Lippi-Green 2012: 67). With regard to the English language, that is, the standard variety of the language is that which is associated and perpetuated by a socially dominant, elite part of the English-speaking population. As described later in this chapter, the historical roots of language ideology in English are part of its background as a language of colonization and coloniality. A key point that emerges in relation to the newspaper article detailed here is that language ideologies about a *foreign language*, English, are part of the story’s newsworthiness. This fact alone—that the language in question is English—is part of what makes it newsworthy. One can well assume that the same treatment would not have been evident if Kulmuni had appeared in media interviews speaking a standardized version of another language, such as *hochdeutsch* or *rikssvenska*. It is also unlikely that Kulmuni’s Finnish language would ever be directly evaluated in terms of social class in the same manner her English was. In fact,

evaluating a politician's Finnish as sounding "high class" rings as artificial or even ridiculous, a clear distinction from the treatment of English.

As a language-focused contribution to this volume, this chapter takes an exploratory stance to investigate the relationship between a foreign language, English, in the Finnish context and that language's roots in colonization, coloniality and elitism. As described in this chapter, these aspects of English are well established within its native settings and beyond. Within the context of Finland, a critical question is how these historical and social sides of English play out in the Finnish context, where people speak English as a foreign (not as a post-colonial) language. It is of interest to observe if the receiving community of English speakers accepts or rejects the ideological aspects inherent to the coloniality of English, and if it perpetuates these ideologies among its own speakers of English. It is also of interest to note if English takes on properties and functions in the receiving setting that relate to perceptions of Finnish, whiteness and prestige that are particular to the setting of Finland. These questions are explored mostly through the framework supplied by Sarah Buschfeld and Alexander Kautzsch (2017), which in turn is based on the foundational work of Edgar W. Schneider's Dynamic Model (2003; 2007). These models are used to assess the situation in Finland with regard to the use of English, as well as to explore the connection to coloniality through language.

Race, Colonialism, Coloniality and the English language

There are an estimated 1.5 billion speakers of English in the world today (Peterson 2020; cf. Pennycook 2017 and MacKenzie 2018). An accurate number of speakers is difficult to calculate with any certainty, given the different kinds of speakers and also by what standards we judge what it means to be a "speaker of English." Notwithstanding, this is an incredible number of speakers if we consider that a mere 500 years ago the estimated number of English speakers was around 5 million (Pennycook 2017). How does a language grow from having 5 million to 1.5 billion speakers in a 500-year period? The answer, of course, is colonialism, followed by coloniality and cultural imperialism.

The British were relative latecomers to colonialism compared to the Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish (Gramley 2018; see also Hickey 2019), and yet it is English that took hold and spread to the extent that is now the most-used language in the world, most notably as a foreign language. As stated succinctly by Mario Saraceni (2019: 642):

The imperial origin of the spread of English worldwide could be said to be twofold: The British Empire literally took the language to its colonies but, after its collapse, it was the economic, financial, cultural, and military might of the USA—the imperialism of capitalism—that kept and boosted the global status of English.

As discussed, for example, in the introduction to this volume, this set of circumstances is a component part of coloniality, or in other words reaping the benefits of colonial complicity, while simultaneously reaping the benefits of modernity and Westernization.

The ultimate outcome of these phenomena is that there are distinctly different types of English-speaking populations, and the relative value placed on the English used by these populations depends in part on how English came to them. In general terms, this distinction can be described based on terms rooted in colonialism: *native speakers*, *second-language speakers* and *foreign-language speakers* of English. Another way of viewing these distinctions is based on race and ethnicity: the standards of native speakers are associated with whiteness, while the English associated with second-language speakers and non-standard varieties is often associated with other ethnicities and brownness (Rosa 2018). A famous model of Englishes introduced in the 1980s by the linguist Braj Kachru is informed by colonialism. Kachru's (1982) Three Circles Model categorized World Englishes according to their position in three concentric circles, in which the so-called "inner circle" represents "native speakers" of English, the "outer circle" mostly represents (former) British colonies and the "expanding circle" refers to the worldwide users of English in locations where English has no official status; that is, where English has foreign language or lingua franca status. The model itself is thus based on a colonial understanding of English: inner-circle speakers are from the United Kingdom or then from settler colonies such as Ireland, the United States, Canada and Australia; outer-circle speakers tend to be from exploitation colonies such as India, Singapore and Nigeria; and expanding-circle speakers are associated with the post-colonial global expansion of English (Schneider 2011).

There are many criticisms of the Three Circles Model, one of them being that it does not capture the constant change and use of English language use in diverse populations. Schneider (2003; 2007) has introduced the Dynamic Model, which attempts to capture the process and possible outcomes of English use in a given population, pertaining especially to postcolonial settings. In the model, Schneider identifies five phases, summarized as: (1) foundation; (2) exonormative stabilization; (3) structural nativization; (4) endonormative stabilization; and (5) differentiation. One of the main contributions of the Dynamic Model is that it allows English use to be assessed as any stage along a continuum.

While the Dynamic Model was designed expressly for accounting for postcolonial Englishes, a point that remains unclear is whether and how it applies to non-postcolonial settings. As mentioned previously, the labels often assigned to English-speaking settings make specific note of any colonial history: a first-language setting generally has a settler history, a second-language setting a colonial history, or foreign-language settings are where English is primarily learned in schools. In terms of overall language outcome, however, many researchers, including in Finland, have observed that the line between foreign language,

second language and first language is becoming increasingly problematic (see e.g. Leppänen and Nikula 2008; see also Buschfeld 2019; Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2019).² As noted, for example, in Buschfeld and Kautzsch (2019) and by Schneider himself (2014), the Dynamic Model was not designed to account for non-postcolonial Englishes, and, in fact, there has been no model that could be applied to English-speaking settings that do not have a settler or colonial history.

Buschfeld and Kautzsch (2017) attempted to remedy this dilemma by introducing the Extra- and Intra-territorial Forces (EIF) Model, with the aim to salvage the parallels, but also account for differences (ibid.: 113). Briefly, the model consists of five partially overlapping subcategories that can be applied to the trajectory and use of English in postcolonial and non-postcolonial settings, or what the authors call extra-territorial forces versus intra-territorial forces. These are:

- (1) colonization OR attitudes toward colonizing power
- (2) language policies OR language attitudes
- (3) globalization OR “acceptance” of globalization [quotation marks in the original]
- (4) foreign policies
- (5) sociodemographic background

As mentioned by the authors (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017), an advantage of the EIF model is that it can account for the heterogeneous reality of many English-speaking contexts and allows for granularity between different speaker groups, taking into account aspects such as age, ethnicity, social status and gender (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017: 66). Their own analysis, in the publication in which the model was introduced, was of Namibia. In many ways, Namibia is not a prototypical non-postcolonial territory, as noted also by the authors. In this chapter, we apply the setting of Finland to the EIF model, a setting which in many ways can be considered prototypical of today’s non-postcolonial setting for English.

Language Attitudes and Ideologies in English

An often-quoted line among scholars of English is from the play *Pygmalion*, by George Bernard Shaw: “It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him.” The central social parameter in *Pygmalion*, of course, is social class, and both this quotation and the play itself center around the relationship of social class to attitudes and perceptions of varieties of English in Great Britain. In this chapter, language attitudes and ideologies are treated as related and overlapping concepts. *Attitudes* is the term used to describe more localized or in situ language use, which is in turn and can both stem from or contribute to ideologies about language.

Ideologies, in turn, refers to broader views of language at a societal level, related to social structures and access to power, for example. As noted in the EIF model, attitudes and ideologies about language are a crucial component in accounting for its overall use and presence in a given setting.

With regard to English in the United Kingdom, there are decades of research about attitudes toward the varieties of English spoken there. The major deciding factor in how varieties are regarded has been found to be social class and how it relates to language variation (Garrett 2012). Traditionally, the lowest regarded varieties of English in the United Kingdom have been regional dialects that are in turn associated with the working class, pointing toward an ideology of valuing higher-class language over working-class language. For example, for decades, Birmingham has been the most harshly judged of regional UK dialects (Garrett 2012; Sharma et al. 2019). As the United Kingdom has become home to more and more people of non-white British backgrounds, however, including (but not limited to) speakers of languages other than English (Fox and Torgersen 2018), there is a shift toward negative evaluations of English associated with race rather than—or, more accurately—in addition to social class. For example, a recent study (Sharma et al. 2019) testing five different varieties of UK English showed that the most harshly judged was Multicultural London English (Cheshire et al. 2011), a working-class variety in London characterized by a majority of foreign-born and non-white speakers of English. MLE was the only of the five varieties tested that was marked for race, ethnicity and region, rather than just region—a strong indicator of intersectionality (see other chapters in this volume).

Race has long been a deciding factor in the social evaluations of English in the United States (Lippi-Green 2012; Rosa 2018), while the corresponding factor in the United Kingdom has traditionally been social class. Increasingly, these previous distinctions come to overlap, as socioeconomic class divisions correspond more and more with racial, ethnic and immigrant background (Lippi-Green 2012; Peterson 2020). It would be remiss to assume that judgments about how English relates to class and ethnicity do not carry over into foreign-language environments. Indeed, as demonstrated later in this chapter, the very decision to persist with the teaching of standardized “white” English as a target model in foreign language environments is rife with colonialism and elitism (Ramjattan 2019).

English Language in Finland

A 2012 EU Barometer survey asked EU citizens the question: “What languages do you speak well enough to have a conversation?” (European Commission 2012). The outcome shows that citizens of the Nordic countries and the Netherlands claim to have much higher capability in English than other countries in the European Union. The population of the Netherlands claimed nearly

as high a level of proficiency as the United Kingdom: 90 percent compared to 95+ percent. In Denmark and Sweden, 86 percent of those polled said they could have a conversation in English. In Finland, 70 percent of respondents claimed they could have a conversation in English. As mentioned by Buschfeld (2019: 569), making such a claim on a survey tells something about current sociolinguistic realities in the European Union and the status and roles of English worldwide. What has happened in these countries to lead an overwhelming majority of the population to lay claim to English? And, importantly for this chapter, what ideologies or stances are being enacted or drawn upon to say “yes”?

The first explanation is a historical and demographic one: how have people in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands become so good at English? This question has been addressed many times, and is summarized, for example (specifically with regard to the Netherlands), in Alison Edwards and Philip Seargeant’s work (2019). In short, in these countries there has been a combination of formal schooling in English, starting in the early years of basic education (and with increasing bilingual education at even younger ages), higher education use of and instruction in English, and subtitling rather than dubbing of television and foreign films.

Other explanations that have been advanced include the relatively small populations of these countries, their geographical location and the fact that they tend to be countries in which Germanic languages, genetically close to English, are spoken. A puzzling aspect is that any and all of these explanations can be countered. For example, equally small populations in Europe do not exhibit such a level of proficiency in English. Finnish is not a Germanic language, and yet Finland boasts proficiency on a par with countries where the majority language is Germanic. Equally educated populations do not exhibit high proficiency in English—and so on.

In contemporary Finland, there are multiple ideologies about English and how it relates to the national languages, Finnish and Swedish. One example is the “success of English in Finland” story, which in popular discourse is often presented with Finland as an active agent in procuring high proficiency in English as a measured strategy to ensure its competitiveness and viability on the world stage (see e.g. Pahta 2008). From an external perspective, however, agency can be flipped or at least seen as a mutual endeavor, also on the part of the UK and US governments. That is, in conjunction with the end of the Second World War, there was a concerted effort from both the United States and the United Kingdom to spread English-language learning in different global settings.

The Spread of English in Foreign Language Environments

The post-Second World War period was a time of significant growth for the English language (Edwards and Seargeant 2019; see also Phillipson 1992).

English was the “language of the liberators, the money providers and progress” (Ridder 1995: 44; cited in Edwards and Seargeant 2019: 345). Finland was an active participant in this growth spurt for English-language learning. In the fieldwork for my PhD dissertation (Peterson 2004), conducted in Helsinki in 2000, a recently retired man told me in an emotional face-to-face interview (in English): “You don’t know what it was like in Europe after the war. America was the hope of the world, and the English language was part of that hope.” Up until the Second World War period, the major foreign language in Finland had been German, but naturally, after the war, the Finnish population was eager to distance itself from the language associated with Germany, Nazism and bitter losses suffered during the war. English was an obvious alternative. English was a means of Finland symbolically tying itself to countries that had a more “triumphant” history (see the definition of coloniality), especially after the Second World War. (In the case of Britain, in particular, the use of quotation marks around the word “triumphant” are used to highlight that a colonial history was part of that supposed triumph.)

Great Britain was quick to respond to the desire to learn English, not only in Finland, but throughout Europe. During this period, like in other places in Europe, English-language classes were introduced through the British Council. English came to Finland in the late 1940s (see e.g. the memoir of Diana Webster, who came to Finland as an English teacher in 1952; Webster 2013). As early as the 1930s, Great Britain considered English to be a tool for fighting fascism, as seen in this quote from the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII), cited in Alastair Pennycook (2017), from the 1935 inauguration of the British Council:

The basis of our work must be the English language ... [and] we are aiming at something more profound than just a smattering of our tongue. Our object is to assist the largest number possible to appreciate fully the glories of our literature, our contribution to the arts and sciences, and our pre-eminent contribution to political practice. This can be best achieved by promoting the study of our language abroad. (White 1965, cited in Pennycook 2017, ebook)

It is difficult to interpret this quotation as anything but nationalist—and indeed, this was the apparent, unapologetic intention. The “object” “to assist the largest number possible” can be seen as similar in intention to the language policy enacted, for example, through the famous Monroe Doctrine in colonized territories such as India.

Indeed, the success of the propagation of English-language learning by the British Council and other organizations, even today, is staggering. For places like Great Britain and the United States, the benefits are clear: there is no mystery as to why a country would want “its” language to serve the purpose of a global lingua franca. Such countries reap enormous benefits from the fact

that global business, politics, shared culture and knowledge are all in the language used by the majority of its own population (as outlined e.g. in Pennycook 2017). These factors bring “very real economic and political advantages to the promoters of [the spread of English]” (Pennycook 2017, ebook). Ingrid Piller writes: “Investing in global English means investing in teachers, teacher trainers, materials, and instructional technology originating primarily from Anglophone center countries, constituting in effect a financial flow from periphery to center” (Piller 2016, ebook). Piller cites studies showing that Ireland and the United Kingdom benefited from Continental Europe to the tune of €16–17 billion per year because of the dominance of English, and the US economy saves up to US \$19 billion per year by not needing to spend time and effort learning or using other languages.

In summary, the aims and ideologies driving the widespread adoption of English in Finland were a concerted effort for globalization and Westernization, along with an element of symbolic power through language (Bourdieu 1977), English being the language of the victors.

Coloniality and English

Against the backdrop presented in this chapter so far, the next step is to make use of the framework supplied by Buschfeld and Kautzsch (2017), which in turn is based on the foundational work of Schneider’s Dynamic Model (2003; 2007). These models are used to assess the situation in Finland with regard to the use of English, as well as offering a lens through which to observe the major themes of this volume: whiteness, Finnishness and coloniality.

Several of the five subcategories of the EIF model are, for the purposes of this chapter, relatively straightforward and do not merit in-depth scrutiny. For example, as described in the third section of this chapter, English was introduced to Finland through a combination of intra- and extraterritorial forces. Thus, phase 1 of the model, *colonization or attitudes toward colonizing power*, can be described in Finland as a concerted effort by the organizations such as the British Council, complemented by the strong desire in Finland’s public and private sectors to promote the English language. Although English had been taught and used as a foreign language prior to the Second World War, it was the end of the Second World War era that brought English into Finland as a strong foreign language, growing steadily until the 1970s and reaching its current climax in approximately the 1990s and 2000s (Leppänen, Nikula and Kääntä 2008). Thus, in line with the EIF model, the foundational introduction of English began in the 1940s, not through colonization, but through its widespread adoption as a foreign language.

Another subcategory of the model is *globalization or “acceptance” of globalization*. While this might seem a rather straightforward criterion, in many settings it is not. For example, as pointed out by Buschfeld and Kautzsch, there

are contexts where openness to forms of media and, in connection, English, is proscribed by the state, for example, North Korea, China and Turkey (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017: 214). In the case of Finland, the globalization phase, like the foundational phase, can be viewed as both an intra- and extra-influence. This is because Finland “finds expression in, for example, linguistic and also cultural influences coming from the Internet, US popular culture, and modern media as well as trading relations between countries,” while at the same time offering an openness to accepting and not limiting access to these influences (ibid.).

A further subcategory introduced but not taken up at length is *foreign policies*. In short, this subcategory accounts for allies, opponents and diplomatic relations, a negotiation between extra- and inter-territorial influences.

It is the EIF subcategories *language policies / language attitudes* and *sociodemographic background* that are most applicable to the questions laid out in this chapter, and these concepts are explored here in light of the chapter’s main aims of exploring the relationship between the English language and whiteness, Finnishness and coloniality.

Language Policies and Language Attitudes

The second phase or component of the EIF model concerns language policies and language attitudes. The EIF model builds on the foundation laid by Schneider’s Dynamic Model and considers at all stages the influences of both internal and external forces. With regard to the language policies and attitude phase of the EIF model, this means that policies and attitudes can be influenced by a number of sources stemming from extra- and intra-territorial influences.

From the foundational stage, English in Finland has been exonormative (according to criteria from Schneider’s Dynamic Model), meaning that norms of correctness and the overall target were prescribed according to the model of an external example, namely British English (more specifically, Standardized Southern British English). In Europe it is not unusual to adopt ideologies about English that are characteristic of native-speaking settings, namely those relating to class and elitism. That is, the social value placed on the use of English mirrors those found in native-speaking environments (Piller 2016).

The newspaper article used to begin this chapter is an example of an exonormative criterion for evaluating the use of English. The report stated that Kulmuni used “British English,” which presumably means Received Pronunciation, defined in the second section of this chapter as the variety of English most closely associated with overt, elite prestige in the United Kingdom. Further examples of exonormative criteria are to be found in other public settings. For example, I routinely query English majors at the university (as part of a course on language attitudes) about which variety of English they use,

compared to which variety they would like to speak. Most recently (in 2020), among 97 students who were asked in an anonymous survey “What variety of English do you speak?” the largest proportion, 37 of them, reported that they speak American English. However, out of the same students, a majority (43 students) reported that they would like to speak British English.³ The fact that the students responding to this survey were English majors is not particularly revealing; that is, it is not surprising that most of these English students have internalized the ideologies about the English language that surround them, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter.

This finding concerning the desirability of British English is in conflict with what Finnish students are taught in the current era. According to the latest English-language curriculum, Finnish students today are exposed to a range of different English accents in their English classes. However, it is still the case that the two main global target varieties, standardized Southern British and US English, are the most familiar and apparently the most admired. Additionally, there are differences in how these two varieties are perceived and situated. Research has shown that “American English,” while lacking the overall social prestige of “British English,” is more associated with leisure activities, bottom-up learning and personal use of English. For some Finnish people today, particularly younger people, “British English” seems to be associated with the formal setting of the classroom (see Peterson 2020).

Another example of an exonormative orientation, also from the university setting, concerns the language requirements for international MA and PhD students to Finnish universities. A forthcoming examination of language policy documents and language requirements (Peterson and Hall, forthcoming) from Nordic universities shows that the core exemptions for English medium programs across Nordic universities are citizens of Australia, English-speaking Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. Other language-related exemptions vary widely from country to country, but these six nations, in addition to Nordic citizens who have schooling in English and/or an appropriate level of English, are those who are admitted to degree programs without having to demonstrate proficiency in English through a standardized test such as the TOEFL.

These examples prompt interesting questions relating to coloniality. As explained by Edwards and Seargeant (2019: 347), overt attitudes about how English “should” be spoken are often “firmly exonormatively oriented,” meaning the ideologies are coming from places such as Britain and the United States, not developed internally within the recipient English-speaking community. With this observation in mind, it is not surprising that exonormative criteria would be applied in settings such as politics, professional media and universities, as they are highly visible and influential functions within a society. At the same time, however, it is noteworthy, perhaps even surprising, to observe the wholesale adoption of views about language, social class and access

to power that are apparently played along with as part of high-stakes participation in realms such as higher education. While in some ways adherence to accepted norms may seem logical or even unavoidable, the use of English in other locations around the world tells us this does not need to be the case. That is, it is possible to use English in various contexts without reinforcing aspects of coloniality.

Another possible outcome is *endonormativity*, a component of what Schneider (2007) refers to as stabilization. Endonormative stabilization is the fourth stage of his Dynamic Model, occurring when a post-colonial territory has established its own norms of use of English that no longer look outward to the colonizer to provide a model. Notwithstanding inner-territory variation, contemporary examples include places such as the United States, Australia and India. For non-postcolonial English settings, however, Buschfeld and Kautzsch (2017) note that it is rare and even unattested to undergo stabilization of English. This is due to a number of factors, such as the adoption of the ideologies present, for example, in language teaching materials, and also because access to English-language media and attitudes reinforce exonormative perspectives (ibid.: 118).

A plausible explanation for why English is not likely to develop endonormative status in Finland in the foreseeable future stems from the fact that English tends to be used within only specific domains for internal purposes (e.g. online gaming) or for external purposes with people who do not share a mother tongue. For example, Anna Mauranen (2012) points out that it would be odd in everyday circumstances for Finnish people to speak English with one another. In the absence of such internal usages, an endonormative variety does not have the right conditions to emerge. The closest parallel to something endonormative in Finland is what Mauranen calls a *similect*, or in other words a manner of speaking English in which traces of the speaker's first language are apparent. It is critical to note that in a foreign language context such as Finland, the boundary between features of language learning and nativization is blurred, and one of the central concerns becomes distinguishing English endonormativity from settings such as Nigeria or India, for example. The closest equivalent to endonormative English in Finland is a style often (disparagingly) characterized as *rallienglanti* "rally English," as discussed in the introduction to this chapter. While it is possible to find positive assessments of this style of English, the most common perception is likely in line with that revealed in the *Helsingin Sanomat* article: that "rally English" is something to be ashamed of. This observation earns backing from the survey administered to students of English at the University of Helsinki: in response to the question "What variety of English would you *like* to speak?" no one out of nearly 100 students chose "Finnish English."

The linguist Peter Trudgill has noted on several occasions that it is "perfectly normal" for people to speak English in a way that reflects where they come from, and this assessment naturally extends to non-native speakers as well. The

fact that it can be considered shameful to sound Finnish when one is, in fact, Finnish, raises numerous questions about language rights, access to language and language attitudes (Trudgill 2016; see also Peterson 2020). In a previous analysis of ideologies of English in Finland, Sirpa Leppänen and Päivi Pahta (2012: 163) reflect on the complexities of proficiency in English: on the one hand, it indexes “elite, expert status,” while on the other it indexes the “vulgarity and low social class of its speakers”.

In addition to exonormativity and endonormativity, a third possible outcome not explicitly mentioned in either the Dynamic Model (Schneider 2007) or in the EIF (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017) is that English is a neutral entity. In this type of outcome, English would be a commonplace communication tool that functions simply as such. This is an idealized—and probably an unattainable—outcome for any language, even one that serves as a lingua franca. Language never exists in a vacuum; it always reflects and simultaneously contributes to the social capital of those who use it (Bourdieu 1977).

For a language to be considered neutral implies an accessibility to everyone in a given population, as well as uniform distribution among all users. This is rarely, if ever, the case. Language is a complex communication tool that, among other things, reflects and contributes to social inclusion and exclusion. Even in a monolingual community, language reflects social divisions. A foreign language is no exception. In Finland, for example, English is available to some, but not all (Blommaert Leppänen, Pahta and Räisänen 2012). Exceptions to the common wisdom that “everyone speaks English” include older generations, people in lower socioeconomic categories and people from non-Finnish backgrounds. Even among younger generations, who at this point in time are the population most exposed to and proficient in English, there are exceptions based on issues such as region and social class (Finnish National Board of Education 2015; Leppänen 2008). These observations offer a transition into the final subcategory in the EIF Model, *sociodemographic background*.

Sociodemographic Background

The final subcategory of the EIF model relates to, in the words of the authors, the overall number of inhabitants of a territory, the overall number and ethnic distribution of immigrants, and age distribution (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017: 114–15), among other factors. The authors also note the well-recognized role of younger people in many settings as purveyors of English.

The properties of this subcategory are especially insightful in a setting like Finland. As mentioned previously in this chapter, a majority of the overall population in Finland reports having at least conversational skills in English. This fact alone raises questions for further introspection. For example, if “most people” speak English, what does this reality mean for those who do not? Paradoxically, if the common wisdom is that “everyone speaks English,” is someone

who does not speak English somehow less Finnish than those who do? All other factors being equal, does someone who speaks English, especially an exonormative model of English, have more access to social capital in Finland than someone who does not? Returning to the themes of Finnishness, whiteness and coloniality, these issues carry extra layers of meaning, at their core exposing either incidental or purposeful adherence to language norms rooted in white supremacy, social class distinctions and exploitation.

At a finer-grain level, demographic division in the use of English shows further disparities (e.g. across region and age groups). To date, the most comprehensive study on the English language in Finland is a written survey conducted in the first decade of this century (Leppänen, Nikula and Kääntä 2008). This large-scale survey, with responses from 1,495 people in Finland, showed that English tends to be more commonly used by younger people in relatively more urban areas. In fact, there was a distinct difference, with respondents living in cities claiming a much higher proficiency in English than respondents living in rural areas. The consequences of an urban/rural and age divide between those who speak English and those who do not is effectively captured in an ethnographic study of a married Finnish couple in their 90s who lived in southwest Finland (Pitkänen-Huhta and Hujo 2012). The couple, who the authors called Aino and Erkki, are shown to demonstrate evidence of a lack of self-respect and marginalization related to their (lack of) multilingualism.

In addition to highlighting region and age, there is also a relationship between socioeconomic status and proficiency in English. It is worth noting that in the most urbanized region of Finland, the greater Helsinki area, a report by the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* shows a relationship between high socioeconomic class neighborhoods and the number of residents who speak English as a mother tongue.⁴ As highlighted in other chapters in this volume, other regions in urban Helsinki are associated more with foreign languages such as Somali, Arabic and Russian.

In the history of the English language in Great Britain, a well-documented shift in the use of English regional dialects occurred in large part due to the Education Act in England and Wales in 1870 (Hughes, Trudgill and Watt 2012). Up until 1870, only the wealthier and more privileged families could afford to send their children to school. When education became available for everyone, a consequence was that richer families sent their children to private schools, where they contributed to the development of the now-famous upper-class accent, RP (see above), which is still in evidence today. That is, when education became available for everyone, the upper class sought out a way to further distinguish themselves symbolically through language (Bourdieu 1977).

It is interesting to note a somewhat comparable phenomenon in Finland with regard to proficiency English. After the Second World War era, it became socially prestigious in Finland to be proficient in English (see Pahta 2008). Being proficient in English was at the time reserved primarily for the highly

educated, globally oriented people who could afford and participate in such a lifestyle. As the number of proficient English speakers in Finland has risen, it appears that the stakes have become higher in symbolizing the same level of social capital as a few decades ago. For some, it is no longer enough to be just proficient in English; one has to prove “native-like” proficiency and “native-like” attitudes and language awareness—the same styles considered the most prestigious in native-speaking settings are likewise considered the most elite in Finland. It would be of great interest to conduct research on the ideologies surrounding English-language medium schools in Finland. It is telling, but also a consequence of Finland’s social welfare system, that private and tuition-based schools in Finland are also English-medium schools. In fact, the majority of private schools in Finland are English-medium schools, with a smaller number of private schools having foreign languages such as French, German and Russian as the medium of instruction. Connected to the ideologies about English-medium schools is the equally fascinating occurrence of Finnish-speaking parents choosing to use English as a family language with their own children. This phenomenon is attested in other countries (see Piller 2016), but appears to be under-investigated in the Finnish context.

As a final note, recent research in Finland (Koskela 2020) addresses the question of integration of skilled and unskilled workers in Finland, including with regard to language. Without question, language is a key factor in integration, as found also in other settings (see e.g. Baran 2017 regarding the United States; Sharma et al. 2019 regarding the United Kingdom). Through an ethnographic study amounting to hundreds of participants, Koskela found that while skilled migrants to Finland experience the same racialized attitudes and stereotypes as other migrants, the white skilled migrants in fact enjoy relative ease compared to other migrants who are non-Western, non-skilled and non-privileged. While the study did not have an explicit aim of studying language, an overall finding was that highly skilled workers who spoke English were afforded exemption from learning Finnish in a way that unskilled workers were not.

A consequence of the attitudes about the English and the demographic properties described in this chapter is that certain disadvantaged segments of the overall population are excluded from the benefits that come with proficiency in English. These populations, as described here, include older people, those in rural areas and certain immigrant groups, in some cases coinciding with a lower socioeconomic status. It is fascinating but also disheartening to chronicle the cycle of disadvantage, if not outright exploitation, related to the English language and carried over into a new setting. As a foreign language setting of English, Finland would presumably have choices regarding the use of English, choices that would not need to perpetuate and mirror the disadvantages inherent to English in native-speaking environments.

In an earlier work (Peterson 2020), I described the relative freedom of individual speakers of English from expanding circle settings, due to the overall lack of a sociolinguistic backdrop, or what I referred to as “linguistic baggage.”

I made an example of a first-language speaker of Danish who created a New York City guise of English for himself because he was willing and able to do so. The same linguistic freedom, I argued, would not necessarily be possible—or suitable—for a mother-tongue speaker of English. In light of the information presented in this chapter, I must retract or at least modify my earlier claims. That is, at the societal or overt level (see Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017), the advantages that go along with adherence to exonormative uses of English, along with all of its ideological trappings, appear to outweigh the advantages of moving toward less divisive ideals of English.

Yet, as demonstrated here and in other sources (see e.g. Peterson 2020), the use of English in foreign-language settings is characterized by wide variability across social groups and individuals, exhibiting a full range of proficiencies and attitudes that go along with those proficiencies. Finland is no exception to this variability. In Finland, there is evidence of an exonormative idealization of English, as highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. In terms of the main themes of this volume, an exonormative idealization, borne out of the introduction of English to Finland, is on the one hand a relatable measure (i.e. “there have to be standards”), but at the same time there is no denying the fact that these attitudes, mirroring norms of correctness chiefly from Great Britain, are rooted in centuries of colonialism, exploitation and elitism. Rather than diminishing in the Finnish context, there is evidence that exclusion through English lives its own life, constituting a driving force between those who have access to social privilege through language and those who do not. Adding to the complexity, at the same time, there is evidence that English in Finland is viewed as a necessary and possibly even neutral communication tool at least to some extent, indicated by the acceptance among some of Finnish-influenced English. Yet, in official contexts, such use of English is often viewed as a source of shame and embarrassment.

Conclusions

The model utilized to explore the phenomenon of English in the Finnish context, the EIF model (Buschfeld and Kautzsch 2017) offers a suitable framework for many reasons. Chief among these is that the model applies to English-speaking territories that do not have a British colonial past. As such, the model allows for consideration of the balance between internal and external forces. In Finland, English has grown as a highly valued component part of modern life, global inclusion and all that this entails. Finnish society and public policy ensure through their openness that exonormative norms of English, for example from the United Kingdom and the United States, persist through generations of new English speakers, complemented through formal learning in the classroom. The EIF model was of particular interest to the situation in Finland with regard to language attitudes and demographics. These subcategories

allowed for further introspection into connections with coloniality and, in turn, elements of exclusion and inclusion relating to the use of English in Finland. The dominant conclusions of the investigation are that processes of coloniality relating to English, such as adherence to white, upper-class norms, are highly regarded and perpetuated in the Finnish context, in some ways creating divisions between highly proficient speakers of English and those who do not have native-like skills. While Buschfeld and Kautzsch did not explicitly address issues of coloniality in the description of their model, the model is successfully flexible enough to incorporate such a perspective.

A notable outcome of these findings is that the social realities and attitudes relating to the English language in Finland appear to operate in their own realm, distinct from the use and attitudes of Finnish. Namely, with regard to English, there are overt attitudes in evidence about how English should be used, and these attitudes mirror the class- and racially/ethnically based distinctions found in native-speaking settings. A key ideology in the Nordic countries in general, including Finland, is social equality, and this ideology extends to languages (Mooney and Evans 2015; Keskinen 2019; see also this volume). Indeed, it is likely even a social taboo to openly discuss issues such as race, ethnicity and class distinctions in relation to Finnish language—although immigrant Finnish seems to be another story. The information in this chapter suggests that further investigations of the relationship between social divisions and the use of English are well warranted in the context of Finland.

As described in this chapter, a recognized outcome of English use in post-colonial settings is a movement toward endonormativity and differentiation (Schneider 2007). In Finland, English has now been the most taught and widely used foreign language for some 70 years. During these decades of use, overall proficiency has increased, with the result today that the majority of Finns claim they can have a conversation in English. In postcolonial settings, the likely expectation is that with proficiency and increased everyday use, English becomes localized. However, in Finland, a non-postcolonial setting, the outcome is different—and, as expected, it is highly variable across the overall population. In some ways, as overall proficiency in English has increased, so have expectations about how English should be spoken; if “everyone” speaks English, then it becomes necessary to distinguish one’s own English through ever-increasing native-like proficiency. By applauding and upholding these norms in the Finnish context, the Finnish population—perhaps innocently and unknowingly—perpetuates the injustices of a colonial past that they do not share. Such an outcome is at odds with a society that supposedly idealizes values of equality and lack of social distinctions among its population. Rather than English becoming a communication tool for practical purposes in Finland, it instead appears in some ways to be more accurately described as a tool for perpetuating inequality.

It is interesting to observe that the same kinds of survey results applying to proficiency in English are mirrored in world “happiness” ratings. That is,

the Nordic countries are routinely ranked the “happiest” in the world, with Finland being the top-ranked “happy” for a fourth year in a row (Helliwell et al. 2021). In recent years, there have been many accounts, both critical and positive, explaining this phenomenon (for an overview, see Levisen 2012). While there is no obvious link between being proficient in English and being “happy,” the common link between these two phenomena seems to be the social welfare system in the Nordic countries, and the related value placed on public education. So-called “Nordic exceptionalism,” as described in the World Happiness report, is linked closely with education, which is in turn linked to proficiency in English as a component part of public education.

A challenge arises with regard to English-language education and use in Finland. Is it possible for Finnish society to make use of the benefits of English without being complicit in the perpetuation of English as a tool of inequality and exclusion? As described in Keskinen (2019), Finland is not exempt from participation in colonialism. The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that, likewise, Finland is not innocent when it comes to linguistic inequity with relation to English.

Notes

- ¹ The original headline and subheadline in Finnish were: *Katri Kulmunin ihastuttava brittienglanti loksautti leuat somessa—kysyimme kielentutkijoilta, olisiko hän ylä- vai alaluokkainen britti. Twitterissä ihastellaan jälleen Katri Kulmunin brittienglantia. Kielitieteilijän mukaan Kulmunin kielitaito on lähes syntyperäisen tasolla—ja raoista pilkistävä suomalaisuuskin on vain eduksi.* Translation by the author.
- ² Already in 2008, Finnish researchers published an article titled “Englannin merkitys muutoksessa: englanti ei ole suomalaisille enää vieras kieli” [“The Changing Significance of English: English Is No Longer a Foreign Language to Finns”] (Leppänen and Nikula 2008).
- ³ A breakdown of the results of this poll are as follows: What English do you speak? British English 18/97; American English 37/97; Finnish English 17/97; Other/I don’t know 25/97. What English would you “like” to speak? British English 43/96; American English 36/96; Finnish English 0/96; Other/I don’t know: 17/96. Survey participants selected an option from four answers; there were no free-form responses.
- ⁴ *Helsingin Sanomat*. “Satatuhatta helsinkiläistä.” July 3, 2020, <https://dynamic.hs.fi/a/2020/helsinginkielet/>.

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