



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Helsingin yliopiston kieliperiaatteet

Språkprinciper för Helsingfors universitet

University of Helsinki Language Policy



1. Starting point for formulating a Language Policy

The University of Helsinki Strategic Plan 2007–2009 cites internationalisation as one of five key areas for development. Preparation of the Strategic Plan required a comprehensive view and thorough analysis of the usage of different languages within the University. The Strategic Plan states that *The University is currently preparing an action plan related to its language policy and will include this in the policy programmes.* For the first time, the University is assembling its views on the relationship between Finland's national languages (Finnish and Swedish), English, and other foreign languages, as well as their status within the University. The Language Policy specifies the development challenges stated in the Strategic Plan and in policy programmes.

In order to meet the requirements of the Strategy, four policy programmes have been established. These programmes replace the former sub-strategies of which at least two were partially concerned with language issues: the University of Helsinki Bilingual Programme 1997 (1999) and the University of Helsinki International Action Plan 2004–2006.

One of the goals of the *Programme for the Development of Teaching and Studies 2007–2009* is to develop internationalisation. This goal will be attained by developing an international learning environment.

The Programme for the Development of Administration and Support Services 2007–2009 recommends increased support for promoting the University's international standing, for providing English-language services and for international recruitment.

The Human Resources Policy 2007–2009 encourages the staff to become more international and calls for the promotion of international recruitment and for consideration of the University's bilingual responsibilities in staff recruitment.

Internationalisation is also central to the *University's Research Policy 2007–2009*.

This document will assist the University of Helsinki in ensuring consistency in its language policy during the preparation and implementation of the University's strategies and policy programmes.

In formulating this Language Policy, the regulations about language circumstances within the University have been taken into account, as have European declarations and policy clarifications, including the EU Commission's recommendations. The preparation of the University Language Policy is based on the following strategic precepts:

Languages are a resource within the academic community

- The University's bilingual and multilingual environment and internationalisation are sources of enrichment for all and are a necessity for the international comparability of its research performance.
- Language skills are a means to understanding foreign cultures and for making the Finnish culture known to others. The University promotes the language proficiency of its students and staff as well as supports their knowledge of different cultures. Multilingual and multicultural communities promote creative thinking.

The mission of the University includes a special responsibility for Finland's two national languages

- The University of Helsinki bears a special responsibility for preserving and supporting Finland's national culture as well as the status and position of its national languages (Finnish and Swedish) in all research and scholarship.

2. The objectives of the Language Policy

The duties of the University of Helsinki include research, teaching and interaction with society at large. Performing these duties requires that judgements be made between languages, and that language issues be considered from a range of perspectives. In establishing this Language Policy, the University of Helsinki aims to provide a comprehensive and consistent picture of the status of various languages within the University.

The University of Helsinki's tradition of teaching, research and international interaction goes back centuries. Throughout its history, the University has played a significant role as the builder of educational, social and cultural enrichment, identity, language and well-being in Finland. The history of the University of Helsinki as an acknowledged European university, together with its future perspectives, call for a constructive approach to language issues and the use of its multilingual capacities as a resource.

Through its language policy choices, the University of Helsinki can support the development of Finland's national languages as languages of scholarship and academic training and as a means of enhancing societal interaction. The University is responsible for ensuring that research benefits society and that new knowledge is integrated into the overall education and culture that inherently belong to everyone. Through its language policy, the University of Helsinki also supports the competitiveness of its bachelor, master and doctoral graduates in domestic and international labour markets.

The environment in which the University operates is becoming more international, and the English language, the academic *lingua franca*. The multicultural and multilingual academic environment are a source of enrichment for members of the University community; thus, the role of foreign languages should be acknowledged. The University of Helsinki has to be an attractive option for foreign students, teachers and researchers. The objective is to combine internationalisation with the University's responsibility for Finland's two national languages.

By determining a Language Policy, the University seeks to

- Ensure that the language used in research, teaching, administration, services and communication is rich and comprehensible.
- Increase language awareness, emphasise multilingual capacity as a strength and encourage the use of different languages.
- Meet the challenges brought about by increased internationalisation.
- Secure the status and the position of Finland's national languages as languages of research and scholarship.
- Support and strengthen the implementation of the University's bilingualism.
- Determine the status and development targets for teaching and research undertaken in other languages.
- Determine the languages to be used in a given situation at the University.
- Develop opportunities deriving from partial linguistic competence¹, parallel language usage² and multilingual working environments.

¹ Partial linguistic competence means that a person masters the various areas of language competence (speaking, writing, oral comprehension and reading) differently in different languages. At the University of Helsinki, partial linguistic competence refers to a person's ability to understand texts in his/her own discipline in more than one language, even if that person is unable to speak or write in all of those languages. Students and staff would benefit from developing their language skills, particularly in ways that would enhance their position within their own discipline and improve their future employability.

² Parallel language usage refers to the simultaneous use of different languages in one or more fields of activity. No language overrules or replaces another, but the languages are used in parallel across all areas of language usage.

3. The position of language at the University

3.1 The bilingual University

- The University of Helsinki maintains, encourages and supports an active bilingual environment. Because the University is the academic flagship of an officially bilingual society, bilingualism within the university community must be both omnipresent and functional. Teaching and learning should meet the requirements set by Finland's bilingual society and by legislation.

3.2 The international University and the position of the English language

- The internationalisation of teaching and research requires ongoing activity in foreign languages.
- Arranging teaching in English supports the educational targets set by the University without undermining the position of Finland's national languages.
- Developing and increasing the range of programmes taught in English is an integral part of creating an international learning environment. This will be enhanced by the presence of different values, worldviews and argumentative styles within teaching and learning. The cultural dimension and interaction between cultures will be incorporated into teaching, mentoring and the provision of services.
- At the international University of Helsinki, a foreigner can hold a position, when appropriate, without having a command of Finland's national languages. Having a good command of English, however, is usually required.
- The University recruits international students that meet the University's requirements in Finnish, Swedish or English, or in any other language essential to their studies.

3.3 The international University and the position of other foreign languages

- As a leading university in the Baltic region, the University of Helsinki enhances the knowledge of languages in Finland's proximity (e.g. Scandinavian languages, Estonian and Russian).
- The University observes the Nordic declaration on Language Policy made by the Nordic Council of Ministers.³ The gist of the Declaration is that the Scandinavian languages are used within Nordic cooperation, and everyone has the right to learn to use one Scandinavian language and to understand other Scandinavian languages.
- The growing impact of English as a foreign language may weaken users' skills in their first language and in languages other than English. Therefore, the University should be able to provide teaching and promote a range of activities in languages other than English.
- Global development and European integration mean that skills in other languages such as German, French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese, among others, are required within academia and in Finnish society at large.
- The language skills of students, researchers and other staff with immigrant backgrounds should be considered a resource when developing the University.

³ B245/kultur, Proposal of the Nordic Council of Ministers 23/2006

4. Languages in University teaching

4.1 The interrelationship of teaching in Finnish, Swedish and English

- University teaching is multilingual so that teaching can be offered in Finnish, Swedish and in foreign languages, particularly English. Teaching in foreign languages can be included in studies when it is meaningful from the point of view of arranging the teaching or in order to meet learning targets. In the course of students' academic guidance, attention will be paid to the benefits of multilingual skills and to the fact that the language of examinations and teaching can be a language other than the students' mother tongue.
- The University will develop flexible usage of languages in different situations and will seek to promote interaction between Finnish and Swedish in teaching. Multilingual teaching can foster vibrant interaction between languages. The starting point is that Finnish-speakers understand Swedish, and Swedish-speakers understand Finnish. Most will also understand English, even if they don't speak the other languages fluently. In many situations, people will be able to speak in their mother tongue and be understood by others.
- In order to improve and maintain language skills, the University will acquire literature for teaching and research in a range of languages. This should be encouraged to the extent that availability of the resources allow.
- When introducing teaching and learning objectives for students participating in courses given in English it is essential that students be aware of the terminology used in their field in both national languages, as required.
- Teachers teaching in English and students studying in English-language programmes will be offered language support which aims to improve their ability to interact in English in a multicultural academic environment.

4.2 Language teaching

- High-quality learning requires the improvement of communication skills in other languages essential to the field of study in parallel with improvements in one's mother tongue (Finnish or Swedish).
- Good language usage is the responsibility of every member of the university community. University teachers should promote high-quality language usage by setting an example. In this respect, all teachers are also language teachers. All students are responsible for improving their own communication skills in writing and speaking both in their mother tongue and in other languages.
- The University continues to maintain its requirements relating to the second national language, regardless of the fact that it is no longer a compulsory component of the final matriculation examination.
- The objective of the University is to train experts with multilingual skills who are able to move effortlessly from one language to another in different situations.
- The University will support foreign students and staff in learning the national languages.
- Degree-seeking foreign students will be offered appropriate training in the national languages, which will help them to find employment in Finland that corresponds to their field and level of study.

5. Languages in University research

- Language is a central tool in research, although its role varies according to discipline. Broad language skills are part of the qualifications of a researcher.
- Although the University acknowledges the dominant role of the English language in several disciplines, it also fosters the preservation of Finland's national languages, and aims to secure their future as vibrant and full-bodied languages in disciplines dominated by English.
- The University encourages publishing in Finland's national languages, especially in disciplines that promote Finland's educational, social and cultural enrichment.
- The University also believes in the importance of publishing scientific and other scholarly work in foreign languages other than English.

6. Languages and societal interaction

- The University is responsible for ensuring that research benefits society at large and that new knowledge is made available to all. Therefore, it is the University's duty to encourage researchers to publish and share expertise in Finland's national languages. Creating and maintaining domestic terminology within different disciplines is central to the University's duty to interact with society.
- Societal interaction compels the University to communicate in different languages as required, bearing in mind the target constituency and the prevailing circumstances.
- As part of its societal interaction, the University encourages the labour market to be more accepting of people from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- In global societal interaction, the language appropriate to the situation is the one to be used.

7. University services provided in different languages

- Continuing attention should be paid to the status and position of the Swedish language within the administration. Services provided to clients and staff in Swedish will be improved. Support services for Swedish-speaking students should be ensured.
- Services provided to foreign students, teachers and researchers should be raised to the same standard as those offered to Finnish students and staff. The starting point for these improvements is the needs of clients and the meaningfulness of the services provided.
- Information of a fundamental or permanent nature must be available in Finnish, Swedish and English for the benefit of all students and staff. Information which relates to protections afforded by law must also be available in these languages. Information in Swedish and English should be distributed sufficiently.

8. The day to day visibility of the University's multilingual nature

- **Publications.** The University's strategic plans, policy programmes and other main documents will be published in Finnish, Swedish and English.
- **Brochures.** Brochures central to the University's activities will be available in Finnish, Swedish and English. Exceptions to this practice can be made under special circumstances. Decisions to publish brochures in other languages will be made on a case by case basis.
- **Names.** Nomenclature for faculties, departments, independent institutes and other units will be in Finnish, Swedish and English. When founding new units, or when changing existing names, new names should usually be confirmed in at least these three languages, or in some other appropriate manner. Official titles and fields of study should also be confirmed in all three languages.
- **Guides and Signs** should be in Finnish, Swedish and English. Exceptions can be made only if it is impossible to follow this instruction in practice, or if there are other special reasons for such an exception.
- **Client Services.** Flexibility in the usage of languages should be developed as needed. Services provided in various languages will be based on clients' needs. External service providers operating within University facilities or units co-managed by the University will be advised of University language policies so that service can be provided in Finnish, Swedish and English.
- **Websites.** The University, its faculties, departments and independent institutes should have internal and external websites in Finnish, Swedish and English. The content and the coverage of the websites can vary between the languages, but all language versions should include at least up-to-date descriptions of and contact information for the units so that an external person can easily obtain the required information. Websites in Swedish should also include exhaustive descriptions of the teaching provided in Swedish and of other issues concerning teaching in Swedish. Similarly, English websites should also provide information about teaching in English and other foreign languages.

9. The standard of language used at the University

- The University should focus on the quality of the Finnish, Swedish and foreign languages used in written academic work and teaching.
- The University's position as a leading international institution of multidisciplinary higher education requires that the language used in all printed and marketing material and in digital information is of a high standard; the credibility of the University as a whole is enhanced by high quality material. Every unit within the University is responsible for carrying out this task.

10. Implementation and follow-up of the University's Language Policy

- The University's Language Policy should be observed in the performance of day to day activities and in the implementation of policy programmes as well as in preparing the next University strategic plan. Implementation of the Language Policy will also be monitored as part of operations management processes.
- The determination and allocation of the resources required for the execution of this Language Policy will be included in internal operations management processes.

Liite – Bilaga – Appendix

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