

TNP3 / SUBPROJECT 2: Languages for enhanced opportunities on the European labour market

NATIONAL REPORT ON FINLAND

2nd draft

Anne Räsänen

University of Jyväskylä

e-mail: rasanen@ulc.jyu.fi

1. Introduction

Some facts and figures about Finland:

Total area: seventh largest country in Europe, 338,145 square kilometres; second most northern country in the world

Land frontiers: 586 km with Sweden, 727 km with Norway, 1,269 km with Russia

Coastline: 1,100 km

Population: 5.2 million

Population density: some 17 inhabitants per square kilometre

Urban population: about 62%

(Source: <http://finland.cimo.fi>)

1.1. A brief overview of the Finnish economy and labour market

(Sources: Bank of Finland Bulletin, ETLA reports, Ministry of Labour web pages)

The Finnish labour market has been undergoing a longstanding structural change over the past twenty years. In the industry sector, this change started in the mid-1980s with textile industry, followed by other industrial sectors, as well as the business and public sectors in the 1990s. While economic development was mainly measured by the market shares and stock exchange rates of the forest industry in the past, present economic outlooks are more often evaluated in terms of information and communications technology, and Nokia in particular.

In many traditional sectors productivity development has been quite weak, although this fact has been partly obscured by rapid improvements in productivity and competitiveness in some other sectors, most notably ICT. For this reason in particular, Finland has emerged well from the extended international recession, and is among the small elite group in this respect.

Technology policy in Finland has been goal-directed, and over the past decade substantial investments have been made in research and product development to enable versatile development of technology and its utilisation. Their proportion of GDP is already close to 4 %. The competitiveness of business life, and the welfare of society, is seen to depend on how successfully new technology can be developed and how the potential provided by technologies can be utilised. Economic growth based on know-how is closely linked to innovative applications in this field. The improvement of the international competitiveness of Finnish business life shows that the inputs in the development of technology and innovations have created excellent preconditions for sustainable economic growth. Companies have understood in full the importance of know-how and technology.

There are three major export sectors in today's Finland: electronics and electrotechnical goods accounted in 2003 for 27.5 %, metal and engineering products for 27.1 %, and forest industry products for 26.5 % of all exports. Some 55 % of these exports were distributed to the EU market, while the Asian market was the fastest growing other market. Export markets are forecasted to grow by 7 % in the next couple of years, which will also permit a reasonably healthy growth in Finland's exports of goods and services, although there will also be a loss of market share and stagnation of export prices. Private consumption and domestic demand, on

the other hand, is predicted to increase by 2.5 % in the near future, due to rising real incomes of households.

The main recent – and future - economic challenge has to do with public services production, which is crucial in retaining the welfare society status. The labour market system, and in particular the volume and cost of the workforce, is an area which is predicted to go through a substantial structural change in the near future. Declining employment and the weakening trend in the output of paper and wood products and metal and engineering industries are also among the worries of Finnish economists.

Labour force distribution (2003) (Sources: www.tt.fi)

Public sector services	26%
Industry & construction	26%
Private sector services	42%
Other	6%

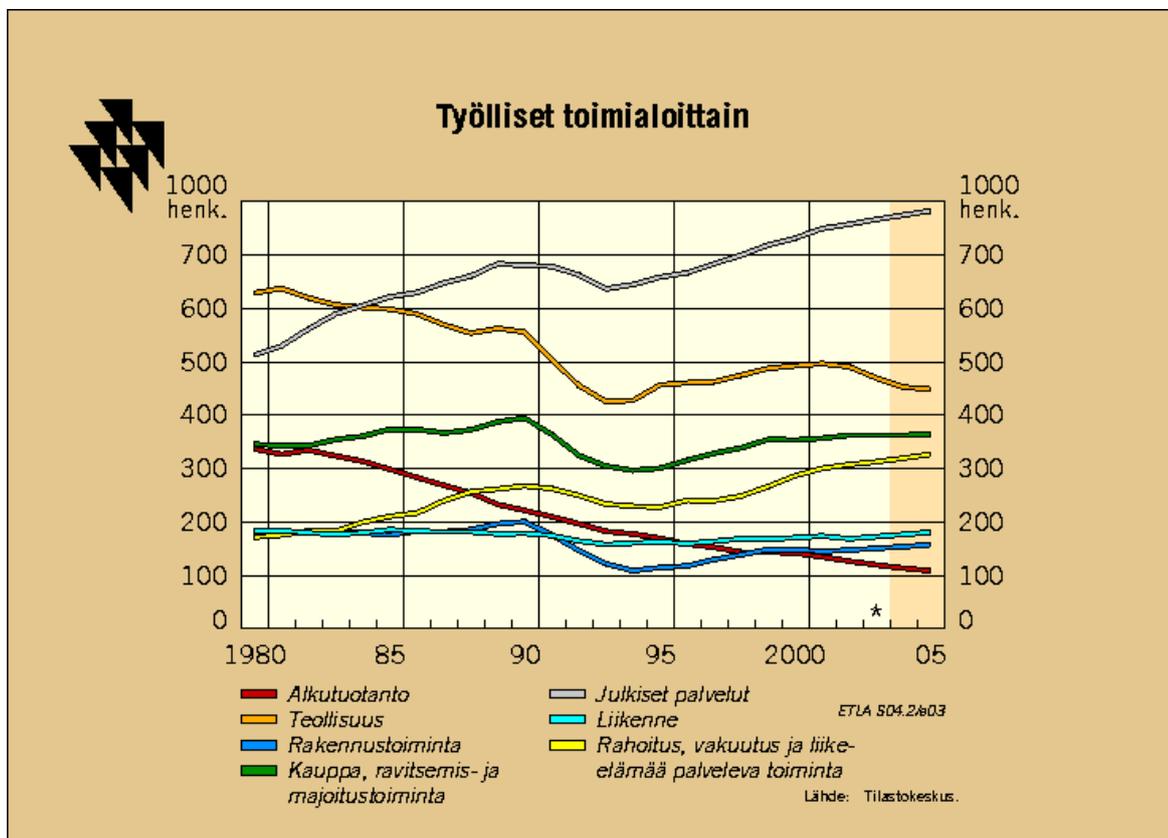


Figure 1: Development of employment by labour sectors 1980-2005

(Explanation of colours/order from left column to right: Red-primary production; Orange-industrial sector; Blue-construction; Green- trade, tourism, catering; Grey-public services sector; Turquoise-transport; Yellow-finance, insurance and business services)

(Source: <http://www.etla.fi/suhdanne/Png/c03.png>)

1.2. Effects of integration

Membership of the European Union and of EMU, its economic and monetary union, has meant substantial political, economic and social changes for Finland. Although foreign trade with EU

countries had been largely free before EU membership, many new factors have come to affect economic policy via accession. These have transformed Finland's economic environment.

In the early years of EU membership, the Finnish economy grew more rapidly than the economies of the EU countries on average. This was in part the result of the rapid upturn following the recession and the devaluations. Access to the EU's internal market and EMU membership also contributed to this growth. Introduction of EU legislation at the same time has been integrating the operations of Finland and the other EU countries, and this has made it easier to do business on the internal market.

Of all the economic sectors, Finland's traditionally well-protected agriculture was most affected by EU membership. Finnish agriculture was included in the EU's common agricultural policy in 1995, whereupon producer prices fell by 36 per cent in two years. In fact, the prices of production inputs also fell by around 20 per cent. In 2002, only 4.4 % of the employed population in Finland earned a living from agriculture. Their numbers declined by a total of 45 per cent between 1989 and 2002. Production, however, has become more efficient as the number of farms has decreased and their size has grown rapidly. On average, productivity has increased in agriculture as rapidly as in the economy as a whole. Nevertheless, because of Finland's severe natural conditions, agriculture receives a relatively large amount of economic support.

Yet another result from integration is that the importance of foreign trade has increased. Economic integration reduces barriers to trade and thus promotes international commerce. Imports and exports of goods accounted for 39 per cent of Finland's GDP in 1960 and 62 per cent in 2001. The 15 EU countries accounted for 50 to 65 per cent of this trade.

(Source: www.virtualfinland)

1.3. Future challenges

The Research Institute of the Finnish Economy (ETLA) presented its economic forecast for the near future in June 2004. According to its estimates, the overall economic expansion in the world will be strongest in the US and in Asia, but the Euro area economy is also clearly recovering. The Eastern and Central European economies are expanding more rapidly than EU countries on average, and over the next five years their growth will be very rapid. However, there will also be great structural changes in these countries, as well as higher inflation than in the other EU countries. Political and economic instability in the Middle East and high oil prices are the main overall risks to economic growth. On the other hand, high oil prices continue to support e.g. Russian economic growth. The forecasted growth for the Finnish economy is 3 %.

According to ETLA, Finnish economic policy should focus on ensuring growth opportunities for the economy by providing an environment which is favourable to business activity e.g. in terms of reasonable taxation and cost-effective administrative structure, and which offers incentives to work and pursue personal wealth. The advantage that Finland has enjoyed has been built on well-educated and highly skilled workforce, the availability of which should be guaranteed by providing quality education and solid basic research for knowledge and competence building.

(Source: <http://www.etla.fi>)

2. New linguistic demands resulting from European integration and globalisation: languages and skills / competences

In the present report, "linguistic demands" is interpreted as a broad concept including both the knowledge of the system of language and the know-how on the use of that system in various

contexts and for various purposes. The concept refers to both the mother tongue and to second/foreign languages, and covers skills and competences which are more often identified as cognitive or psychological than language-dependent.

2.1. Conceptual clarification – language and communication competence

Language and communication skills and competences refer here to the definitions and categorizations drawn by a Task Force specifically for the TNP3 project to illustrate a more extensive view of the concepts than the traditional “knowledge of language”.

Language is seen differently by different people: as **an academic discipline (object of research)** by a linguist or philologist; as **a subject to be taught** by a language teacher **and learnt** by a student, and as **a communication tool** by everyone who uses it; i.e. a tool for knowledge construction, information management and sharing, networking, and socialisation (whether in general or within some specific community of professionals and experts), etc. To become an expert and a professional means learning the language and communication skills that are an integral element of the respective academic field and profession, and being able to demonstrate that competence in a confident and credible way in various contexts of language use and to various audiences. Language and communication competence is, thus, closely related to both generic and subject-specific competence.

The categorization developed for TNP3 distinguishes between some different types of learning outcomes for language(s) and communication studies with reference to the distinctions made above about the concept of language. Our idea has been to outline at this point the main general categories of **competencies and core skills which form - in various combinations - a part of the professional profiles of the academic workforce**. The term “competence” is used here as a general construct, and not as a pure psychological construct, to accommodate a variety of other descriptors in each category, e.g. knowledge, awareness, application, ability, skills, know-how, etc., and to establish some ground for mutual understanding.

The main headings of categories are as follows:

1. **Generic competences for interpersonal and strategic communication** - *language user perspective*
2. **Generic language learning (independent/life-long learning) competence** - *language learner perspective*
3. **Language-specific communicative competences** - *learner/ teacher perspective*
4. **Profession-specific communicative competences for non-language professionals** - *professional language user perspective*
5. **Profession-specific communicative competences for language professionals** - *user perspective for language specialists*
6. **Language-specific cognitive competences** - *linguistic/ philological perspective*

The categories outlined above go from general language user/communicator/learner perspective to a specific user/learner perspective. Different professional profiles manifest different combinations of these competences. References to these categories are made below in connection with the needs and requirements of Finnish working life.

2.2. Internationalisation of Finnish working life

According to recent national statistics there were some quarter of a million companies in Finland in 2002 and slightly over 10 % of these were in foreign ownership. Most mergers have occurred in the industrial sector – forest and paper industries and manufacturing – but also in sectors such as power production, banking, and insurance.

Almost all of the 500 biggest companies in Finland are operating internationally and they also have multilingual web pages including recruitment information. In many cases the recruitment pages only exist in English, which reflects the overall opinion of the labour market about English skills being taken for granted for practically all work positions. Also, the most

internationalised companies (eg. Nokia telecommunications, biggest forest/paper companies) with half or more of their workforce outside Finland use English as one of the corporate languages. Depending on the location of their branch offices, then, other language requirements naturally come to play a role.

As regards working in both the private and the public sector within Finland, increasing internationalisation has been a factor for the past decade in particular. The main findings of some more extensive needs surveys regarding language-related skills and competences are presented below in section 3.1.

A survey was done at the University of Jyväskylä Language Centre in June 2004 of some 2,500 job advertisements available on the Internet on company recruiting pages, Labour Ministry and employment office pages, and academic recruiting office pages, and in the main national newspaper Helsingin Sanomat to check what language skills and competences are presently specified as qualifications for employing academic graduates. As can be expected, in a sample of some 200 typical job advertisements 80 % mentioned English (good, fluent, excellent, confident, strong, etc.) as a requirement, some 25 % mentioned Finnish/mother tongue as a requirement (together with some foreign language), 20 % Swedish and a few other languages (e.g. French, German, Russian, Chinese) (i.e. language-specific/profession-specific competences – categories 3 & 4 above) However, 40 % listed some general communication skills as a requirement (e.g. negotiation skills, team working or group working skills, presentation skills, or just communication skills in general without specifying the language) (i.e. generic competences – category 1 above) Furthermore, many jobs seemed to include international networking and management of international relations, or PR and team leading skills, although the language competence required was mentioned rather vaguely if at all. Nokia was clearly different from the others, emphasizing the requirements of an international and multicultural operational environment and workforce of the company, as well as specifying the level of English required as “mastery of both written and oral communication in English” (i.e. categories 1-4 above). All Nokia’s job advertisements were in English.

All in all, the language skills and competences were generally expressed rather ambiguously, almost as if letting the applicants decide for themselves whether they are qualified or not. The key terms that seem to be emerging from the descriptions on academic recruiting are creativity, self-directiveness, knowledge sharing, networking, and collaboration.

Survey findings on the development of Finnish working life are presented below in the next section.

3. In regard to non-language graduates, what formal or informal linguistic and intercultural qualifications – languages / skills and competences – are sought after on the national labour market?

3.1. Outcomes of needs surveys (national, profession-specific, public/private sector,)

Various kinds of needs surveys have been conducted for some twenty years in Finland, both for specific sectors of the labour market and for professional groups. Some have been national surveys with representative samples and some continue to be done annually. The main findings of three more recent surveys are presented here, namely the 1999 survey of language and communication skills in industry and business (whole report available at www.oph.fi/English/publications) covering some 270 employees in the technical and commercial sector in both bigger companies and SMEs and their employers, the 1997 Sinkkonen survey (n=1270) of civil servant language skills and needs, and the 2000-2001 survey (n=1 376 and 1397, respectively) of the skills and competences needed by business graduates at work, conducted annually by the Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics

and Business Administration (www.sefe.fi). In addition to these larger surveys, a considerable number of small-scale surveys presented eg. in academic theses have also been conducted, but the trends are rather similar in all of them.

3.1.1. Corporate sector

The main findings of the Prolang **1999 survey** in industry and business were as follows:

- a majority (74 %) of the employees state that they need two or more foreign languages in their work as a result of internationalisation, and 12 % need four or more FLs;
- English is the most needed language (100 %) and Swedish is rated as one of the three important languages by 86 %, German by 68 %, and French by 13 %, Russian by 17 % and Spanish by 4 % of the employees (the order depends on the percentage of not needing the language in question at all);
- employers are more concerned about the language skills of their employees than before, requiring demonstration of skills at recruitment;
- school language education provides a solid foundation of language skills;
- the most needed skills on average are spoken communication skills, but at the managerial level also written skills are needed and technical staff also needs good reading skills;
- the overall strongest skills according to both employees and employers are reading and professional vocabulary;
- the biggest problem areas are not knowing adequately many languages, lack of cultural/intercultural competence, and lack of confidence in speaking;
- men face more problems with language/communication at work than women; and women's communication capacity is not utilised fully in professional contexts;
- vocational language teaching prepares students relatively well for the workplace, but more attention is needed to boost spoken skills;
- the education of language instructors is too narrowly focused and should include more elements related to communication at work in different fields;
- comparison between employees with a vocational, polytechnic and university degrees in terms of skills needed indicates that the requirement for writing increases among university graduates, whereas spoken communication is slightly emphasized among vocationally trained employees; however, all employees need workplace communication in foreign languages, irrespective of educational background;
- more collaboration between workplaces and educational institutions is needed to bridge the gap between study and work.

(Source: Huhta, M. 1999: Language/Communication skills in industry and business – Report for Prolang/Finland. <http://www.oph.fi/English/publications>)

Academic theses dealing with some critical factors in international business contexts indicate that, for instance, Finnish engineers face problems because of their lack of intercultural competence during their work periods abroad, and this is in fact the most common reason for discontinuing the work period. Intercultural preparation during both academic study and on-the-job training should, therefore, be seen as part of becoming an expert in the field, as a component of knowledge management and tacit knowledge, as well as a source of competitive advantage and added value.

(Source: Fennica library database of academic theses and dissertations)

The **present situation** (end of 2003) in the corporate sector shows an increase in international contacts and resulting foreign language use. At the end of last year, every fourth Finnish employee in a managerial position had English as the corporate language, and over 50 % work in a multicultural workplace. Some 7 % have their immediate supervisor in some other country and the same number of employees have worked abroad themselves. Over 15 % of managers have employees or project group members who are abroad. The most common situations of language use in addition to spoken communication are writing e-mails, reading professional literature for updating expertise, writing reports, project plans and other documentation. The most international sectors of the present labour market are metal and technology industries.

(Source: Talouselämä, Helsingin Sanomat)

In a **recent survey** (August 2004) on the tendencies of development and the **role of language skills in recruitment** the Confederation of Finnish Industries ranked the future needs of language competence. According to this survey, language competence requirements will grow in importance as a criterion for recruitment, with mastery of Russian as the most rapidly growing foreign language. The four most common foreign languages to be needed are English, Swedish, German and Russian, in this ranking order. Considering the very limited competence in Russian among Finnish graduates, considerable measures should be taken to promote the learning of Russian at all educational levels. To cater for these future needs, the survey proposes that diversified language education should be started earlier than at present, and that bilingual and foreign-language-medium instruction should be increased at all levels.

(Source: www.tt.fi)

3.1.2. Public sector

Finland's membership in the European Union has greatly influenced the job profiles of civil servants in public administration in particular. The most important foreign languages in state administration are English, Swedish, and French, and the role of French has increased substantially. Of these, French is the language with the lowest level of competence among civil servants. Also, some traditionally very "domestic" ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, have had particularly great challenges because of EU membership and internationalisation. Language use situations have increased rapidly, and the requirement of the competency level has risen considerably. Language and communication skills are particularly important for career development, which has not been very strong in the public sector in general. Attitudes towards internationalisation, however, are very positive and motivation for further development of FL competence and skills is high.

The main survey findings on civil servant language skills and competences, conducted in 1997 before Finland had EU presidency, were the following:

- competence in French is particularly important among civil servants in higher positions and not so critical among clerical staff;
- younger civil servants have more confidence in spoken language than older;
- the most important language skills to develop are spoken skills and writing for selected audiences;
- most international work duties are related to meetings, negotiations, projects, and networking and their documentation;
- developing general international and intercultural competence is particularly important.

Needless to say, the strongest skills of Finnish civil servants – as has been typical of Finnish academics – are in English and Swedish, and in German. Proficiency in English has long surpassed that in the second national language Swedish. As some 15 % of civil servants have already worked abroad, the distribution figures have evened out to some extent, but, after English, German is still the most popular language to be studied at school, although French and Spanish have gained much more ground lately.

(Source: Sinkkonen, M. 1997: Valtionhallinnon henkilöstön kielitaidon riittävyys ja tarpeet kansainvälisessä yhteistyössä – Adequacy and needs of civil servants' language skills for international co-operation - Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä/SOLKI)

3.1.3. Business graduates

According to a survey done among **employers and managers of business graduates**, the greatest strengths of graduates are (in this ranking order) their solid knowledge and expertise in the fields of business administration and marketing, their ability for systematic and analytic work, language and intercultural communication skills, ICT mastery, holistic thinking, good learning skills, communication skills and presentation skills, team working skills and customer

service. When the same informants were asked about the core contents for business graduate expertise 80 % ranked language skills (in the two domestic languages + at least one foreign language at very high proficiency level) as the most important area, followed by presentation skills, negotiation skills and team working skills (all 60-65 %), leading people (55 %), etc. As regards the weaknesses observed, leadership skills, human relations skills were on top of the list, followed by practical know-how and attitude towards "trivial" jobs.

The two surveys done among **graduates** addressed their views of the language training provided during their degree studies (Business graduates in Finland have a compulsory requirement of 30-40 ECTS credits in language studies, covering the two domestic languages and two foreign languages.) These graduates have according to the annual surveys usually been quite satisfied with their language studies at the university. In these two surveys they suggested that language centre teaching to this group could focus even more on presentation skills, collaboration and writing, as well as on developing self-directive learning skills. In addition, they feel that they should know how to use foreign languages accurately and fluently, how to use persuasive and argumentative language in a credible and confident way, as well as how to communicate like an expert in their field. On the basis of this it seems that today's business graduates in Finland are quite well aware of the requirements of working life in their own field. Their professional union (28,000 graduated members + 12,200 student members) is one of the strongest and most active in terms of promoting the connection between working life and higher education.

(Source: Oksanen, J. 2003: synthesis of surveys conducted by the Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration and the Finnish schools of business and economics among employers and among the 2000 and 2001 business graduates; <http://www.sefe.fi>)

3.1.4. Ongoing studies on the labour market relevance of HE internationalisation

Employer views on the employability of internationally oriented students form the focus of two parallel studies which are being conducted by CIMO and Helsinki Business Polytechnic Helia. CIMO's study surveys the role of international experience in graduate recruitment, and the Helia study focuses on how international degree students are integrated in the Finnish labour market. The empirical parts comprise interviews and questionnaires targeted at some 3,000 private and public sector employers. The findings of the surveys are expected in late spring 2005.

(Source: www.cimo.fi /Cimo Online Newsletter 1/2004, Sept. 22, 2004)

3.2. Employment of "foreign" workers for linguistic reasons

Apart from the companies operating abroad and recruiting local professionals or Finnish professionals with mastery of these less widely taught and learnt languages, as well as some very specific language specialists recruited in Finland to cater for e.g. immigrant services, no trend in the direction of employing foreign workers could be detected in the job advertisement survey and no statistics could be found. However, with the expansion of the EU, recruitment in the Baltic countries is estimated to grow rapidly in the next few years, but this is not for linguistic but for economic reasons.

3.3. Results and outcomes of TNP1 and TNP2

As regards Finland, the outcomes and recommendations of the two previous TNP reports (TNP1: HE needs related to mobility and the labour market and TNP2: Use of New Learning Environments in HE language education) related to the present report can be summarised as follows:

- Preparation for mobility should be tailored to the needs of both study and future work, with particular attention to more systematic intercultural preparation. This requires closer co-operation and dialogue with the labour market actors and with other HE institutions.

- Promotion of multilingual and multicultural competence and diversification of the communicative competence (including mother tongue communication) of HE graduates is very important in view of the future labour market.
- Promotion of independent, life-long language learning skills, including both technology-created virtual environments and mobility-created at-home-environments, should be an integral part of language education. This requires systematic teacher and learner training and adequate technical and pedagogic support.
- Success in pursuing the previous aims presupposes institutional policies and systematic measures for their implementation

4. In regard to language graduates (bachelor and master) outside language-related industries and professions, what formal or informal linguistic and intercultural qualifications – languages / skills and competences – are known to enhance career prospects?

Similar surveys to the ones made for the purposes of non-language student education have not been conducted among language graduates, probably because a majority of them used to enter language teaching professions. With the general internationalisation of working life, however, language graduates are also increasingly working e.g. in the corporate sector in positions requiring language expertise (e.g. as technical writers, webmasters, translators, etc.). Some small scale studies indicate that as was suggested above on the basis of the 1999 survey, the typical content of language graduate's programmes is too narrow to provide for the skills needed in working as an expert in multidisciplinary teams. In order to prepare language graduates for new types of jobs, their education should also include e.g. systematic development of team working and project management skills, technical communication, documentation, and translation, as well as studies in some non-language fields (i.e. a wider basis than categories 3 and 5-6 above). It is more and more often acknowledged that the quality of, say, company web pages or project documents written in a foreign language is an important for the image of the company, which should offer increasing opportunities for language graduates who have additional expertise in some non-language field. In addition, language teacher education needs to widen its scope to include more opportunities to specialise in adult language education and its pedagogical practice. The roles and responsibilities of HE language education for non-language students and company-in-house language education need clarification, particularly as regards the development of strategic and intercultural communication competence, which is another area to be considered in the education of language specialists.

5. Outcomes of academic studies vs. labour market requirements and validation of learning, assessment, certification – what does the labour market recognise and value?

5.1. Higher Education degree requirements of all students

Due to the fact that both national languages of Finland represent less widely spoken and taught languages, Finland has long traditions in foreign language learning and teaching at all levels of education, including Higher Education. The reform of university degrees in Finland in 1975; (re)established compulsory language requirements for all university degrees, regardless of field of study. The statutory requirements state the following: the students must show in a documented manner that they have the necessary skills in academic reading in the first foreign language in order to manage their scientific studies in the discipline and to update and maintain their professional expertise in the field, as well as the necessary speech communication skills required by their profession. If a second foreign language is required, the students must show that they have the necessary academic reading skills in that language. In

addition, they must show in a documented manner their skills in the mother tongue and such written and oral skills in the second national language that are necessary for working in their profession in a bilingual district.

In other words, **all higher education students must study the mother tongue, the second national language and the first foreign language, and some degrees require studies in the second foreign language.** These studies are to be geared at discipline/profession-specific communication skills. The average compulsory requirement in languages varies between 6-40 ECTS credits, depending on the field of the student.

The language centre system of universities was established in 1975 to cater for these compulsory language studies for students of non-language disciplines. Language departments take care of subject studies in the language, but their students must also fulfil the degree requirement in other languages via the language centres. There are language centres in all universities (20).

Over the past decade, certain colleges have merged to form Polytechnics (19), which are also tertiary level institutions. Their establishment follows the same principle of geographical spread as did the university system in the past – with the idea of equal opportunities for all citizens. In the previous years each college had its own language unit, but some of them are now forming similar language centres to those at universities. The language requirements of Polytechnic students are the same as for university students and they are specified in the statutes.

The forthcoming move to the two-tier degree system pursued in the Bologna process will also bring about a new reform of Higher Education degree system and accompanying national statutes. In terms of volume, the new statutes (to come to force on 1 August, 2005) specify similar language requirements for all HE students, but the formulation has been changed to state “**language and communication skills necessary for updating knowledge in one’s field and for a successful management of communication in international environments**”.

5.2. Validation

Because of the well-established infrastructure related to language (and other) studies (the national school-leaving examination, compulsory degree requirements, national language proficiency examination), additional formal validation systems for Finnish graduates are normally not in use. In other words, employers have a relatively good idea of what job applicants can do in the language(s) on the basis of their formal education. The degree certificates usually have transcripts as their attachments, showing e.g. studies or internships abroad done as part of the degree. Perhaps for this reason, other qualities and more pragmatic communication skills are emphasised in the job advertisements, taking certain formal language and communication competences for granted. This, of course, does not mean that there is no need for change. In other words, despite the fact that all Finnish graduates have gone through extensive language training, that their skills are usually very good internationally speaking, and that HE language and communication education is discipline/profession-specific by nature, the real world of work still poses linguistic and intercultural challenges to graduates. Many company-specific, business-specific, and profession-specific communication skills cannot be catered for during the educational careers of the graduates to an adequate degree but only evolve from their actual job requirements and environments of operation. This is partly due to the fact that it is often difficult for students to make the transfer from academic skills to workplace skills, but can also reflect a situation where there is a mismatch between employer expectations and HE criteria of skills assessment. Thus, it is typical of companies to have their own in-company and staff development systems for the field of language education, too. Because of competitiveness, it is relatively difficult to obtain accurate information on the exact skills and competences that could perhaps be developed during the degree studies already,

which is why considerable attention has more recently been given in Finland to develop closer networking and collaboration between labour market actors and HE institutions particularly at the regional level. This is a direct outcome of the emphasis given at least in Finland to the third main function of universities, namely the societal function, and its impact and effectiveness in terms of regional development.

As regards evaluation at recruitment, more informal ways of exploring the extent of pragmatic language competence of university-educated graduates (e.g. interviewing in the foreign language) are more common today than in-house tests. Portfolios are also used in connection with CVs, but the ELP format is still largely unknown both among students and employers. International experience in general is very highly valued in the Finnish labour market.

6. Tentative recommendations for future actions and research

On the basis of the above, the following tentative recommendations for future actions in Finnish Higher Education language education and research can be made:

- The curricula of language and intercultural training for the future labour market should be based on the real needs of workplace communication and aim at developing versatile communication competence (see category description above). This aim requires a continuous dialogue between institutions and employers in determining their respective roles and in designing course contents and assessing success in the workplace. Transparency of both sides is a prerequisite for success.
- Building skills for the workplace presupposes more tailored pedagogical practices, e.g. flexibility and modularisation of course structures. This work is closely related to the implementation of the Bologna process.
- Assessment of communication skills should be systematised in such a way that there is joint understanding of the composition, scope, range and standards of these skills (i.e. real and true "can do" descriptions) between employers, educators, and graduates.
- A permanent forum should be set up, bringing together academics and administrators from Higher Education institutions, public and private sector employers, and employees' organisations, in order to ensure realistic communication training for professional life.
- Diversification of language and communication competence is needed, as is focusing on more demanding skills and competences at the HE level. This requires joint efforts from language centres, language departments and non-language subject departments and faculties, as well as consultation with the labour market actors.
- Specific attention should be given to the development of academic mother tongue skills (e.g. scientific writing and presentation skills) as a foundation for skills in other languages.
- Intercultural preparation and the development of intercultural communication competence should be seen as an integral part of becoming an academic expert and professional.
- Institutional and departmental language policies are needed to provide guidelines for strategic curriculum design and implementation.
- Development of independent (self-directed) language learning skills and of skills of using of both virtual and real new learning environments should be integrated more systematically in all HE language education. The graduates should develop these life-long learning skills at a level which enables continuous development.
- The education of language teachers and of language experts needs broader focusing and should include more elements related to communication at work in different fields and in different professional positions. This requires more collaboration between language departments, teacher education departments and labour market actors.

Although some of the above are already measures in which promising steps have already been taken in individual institutions, a more systematic approach is still largely lacking. More focussed research evidence is also needed in these areas.