

**Language biographies as a key to study the role of Finnish language in the life of Finnish-Americans in Seattle**

This paper introduces my on-going Ph.D. research on changing functions and values of Finnish resources in the life of multilingual Finnish-Americans in Seattle and how these heritage language resources can be studied through language biographical interviews.

In the field of linguistics languages have been traditionally spoken of in monological terms and they have been studied as distinguishable and bounded entities. A key concept of my research is “*language resources*” (Blommaert 2010; Pennycook 2010), emphasizing the idea of language as a socially constructed and context-based phenomenon that enables or disables an individual’s action in the world. I apply here the broad concept of language resources that understands an individual’s language repertoire to not only consist of linguistic and communicative, but also of visual and emotional resources (Pietikäinen *et al.* 2008; Pahl 2004). I understand the language use as a collection of different linguistic and semiotic resources from which the language users can choose depending of their skills and the current context. Because every individual language (e.g. Finnish, English) is a collection of different kinds of resources, I understand multilingualism as an ontological feature of a language and thus, also every language user is ontologically multilingual. (Dufva & Pietikäinen 2009.)

Language biographies provide a unique way to study how individuals experience their language repertoire as well as to reflect the connections between individuals’ experiences and social, political as well as economical processes on the macro level (Pavlenko 2007). My data consists of 10 language biographic interviews in which Finnish-Americans in three generations reflect on the role of their heritage language during the course of their lives. During the interview I asked my informants to present a single object they personally deem most important to their Finnish heritage. This was done in order to encourage the informants to talk about the visual and emotional aspects of their Finnish resources. In this paper I study the type of resource Finnish language provides for different individuals with different backgrounds and at different stages of their lives, e.g. some find Finnish to be a communicative asset on the job market whereas for others the Finnish language relates most of all to their sense of identity through material artifacts.

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