

Finnish Language Newspapers - A Minority In Swedish Publishing

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The National Library of Sweden and the National Library of Finland are cooperating on a project to microfilm and digitize the Finnish language newspapers in Sweden and the Finnish newspapers printed in Sweden and smuggled for distribution in Finland. The project has the working title "Swedish news in Meänkieli and Finnish".

Finnish newspapers in Sweden can be categorized in three groups:

1. Newspapers published in the northern part of Sweden (Norrbotten) before World War I.
2. Newspapers that due to limitations in the freedom of speech could not be printed or published in Finland 1900-1927.
3. Finnish immigrant newspapers after World War II.

The birth of the Finnish press in Sweden

Northern Sweden, Norrbotten, has for centuries been populated by Laps and Finns. The Finnish population consists of various people coming mainly from two dialectal regions in Finland. The dialectal progress has been going on during many centuries. After the Finnish war in 1808-1809, in which Sweden lost its eastern province Finland to the Russian Empire, this fact became obvious. During the peace negotiations the Russians wanted to draw a new border. It was to be the language frontier between Swedish and Finnish. The border was instead drawn based on geographical attributes and thus the River Tornio has for over 200 years been the geographical border between Sweden and Finland. In this way the Finnish speaking population was divided between the two countries, of which Finland became a part of the Russian Empire and a Finnish speaking minority was a fact in Sweden.

This minority came into focus as Sweden began to build its elementary school system. In 1880 the first voices were raised to make the linguistic minority Swedish-speaking, although the Swedish speaking population was only a linguistic and ethnic minority in Norrbotten. In school the teaching language gradually became Swedish. As late as in the 1950s it was prohibited for the pupils to speak Finnish between the lessons. This linguistic process was paid special attention in the extremely patriotic communities in Finland. The language process had an impact on the Finnish newspapers and was reflected in the press on both sides of the River Tornio.

The first Swedish newspaper published partly in Finnish was Nyaste Riksgränsen. It started as a monolingual Swedish newspaper in 1875. The paper stayed monolingual for three years, but gradually the Finnish material increased. By 1879 half the content was in Finnish. This newspaper had a pedagogical bilingual layout, where the Swedish and Finnish columns ran side by side, in order to make the self-learning easier. The newspaper ceased publication in 1882.

The first monolingual Finnish newspaper was Rajalta (1875-1876). It was not long-lived. Only six issues were published.

In 1882 Haaparannanlehti was launched simultaneously with its Swedish edition Haparandabladet. It is considered to be a successor till Nyaste Riksgränsen. The two editions went on until 1923, when they were merged to an eight page newspaper. This paper is still published and has under its existence had many competitors, which have been forced to leave the scene as losers.

One such competitor was Pohjolan Sanomia, a newspaper which existed 1886-1888. This newspaper opposed against a statement which congressman Emil Key made during a debate in 1880: "It would be better if the Finns in Sweden were to learn Swedish". This statement was Key's answer to a proposition, in which a Finnish newspaper in Haaparanta would get state subsidies.

Eight years later, in 1896, a new Finnish language newspaper Pohjola began competing with Haaparannanlehti. Its language is an odd but interesting mix of the archaic language of Kalevala and a more modern Tornio dialect. In spite of this fascinating cocktail of Finnish, the last issue of the newspaper was published 28 April 1898.

A short-lived competitor was also a pair of newspapers titled Haaparannan Sanomat and Haparanda Nyheter. They were published 1916-1917.

In 1918 a new star was born on the Norrbothnian newspaper horizon: Samefolkets Egen Tidning. It is still alive in digital form. In 1922-1923 it was published as a bilingual Finnish edition with the title Samekansan Oma Lehti. It was meant to orient himself towards the Lapps who beside their own language spoke only Finnish. This newspaper was based in Uppsala, but like the newspapers mentioned below it was published in Haaparanta.

Newspapers in Exile

The first effort to break the limitations in the freedom of speech, which was a method in the russification of the autonomous Finland, was the paper Kaikuja

Euroopasta (Echoes from Europe) edited by Eino Wallin, which started in 1899. It was published in only nine issues, printed in Sweden and smuggled into Finland.

As the publishing of the Swedish speaking newspaper Nya pressen was prohibited by the Russian general governor Bobrikov, two of its journalists, Konni Zilliacus and Arvid Neovius, decided to start the newspaper Fria Ord in Stockholm. In parallel a Finnish language sister publication, Vapaita Lehtisiä, was launched. The two newspapers were smuggled into Finland mainly by boat. The journalists succeeded in their plans and the subscribers got their weekly illegal newspaper from August 1900 till November 1905.

About the same time a number of smaller periodicals were also published: Veckans Nyheter, Viikon Varrelta and Nordisk Revy. Veckans Nyheter was of course intended for publication in Finland, but was actually convicted in a Swedish court for violating the law of freedom of speech. This proves the fact, that the outlaw doesn't have it easy anywhere.

During the Finnish Civil War (1918) the same publishing pattern was repeated. A fraction of the Red revolutionaries succeeded in escaping to Sweden. In co-operation with Finnish emigrate organizations in Stockholm they published the newspaper Viesti (1918-1920). Partly simultaneously the Swedish leftist newspaper Norrskensflamman was published in northern Sweden. In 1919 the Finnish edition Revontulet was launched in Luleå. It lived a sporadic life until 1927. Both Viesti and Revontulet were smuggled into Finland and consisted of facts and news, which from a political point of view couldn't be published in Finland. The paper revealed also how brutally the winning side of Civil War dealt with human rights.

The Finnish Immigrant press in the 20th century

After World War II Finland was strongly and rapidly transformed from agriculture to industry. This formed a strong base for the emigration to Sweden, which at the same time lacked manpower. In 1961-1970 were 198.796 Finns emigrated to Sweden. A large number of them could not speak Swedish. New Finnish language newspapers were born out of the need for information.

The historian Jouni Korkiasaari has estimated that over 100 Finnish-language "newspapers" have been published in Sweden, if smaller political and religious publications are included. The list of immigrant and minority journals published in 1992 mentions 57 Finnish language "newspapers".

A number of Swedish newspapers have had Finnish pages or columns, although this is less common today. In 1971 there were 37 newspapers with a Finnish language page or column. In 1981 this number had fallen to 27. The most recent case is Borås tidning, which in 2011 declared that the Finnish page had lost its function and made the decision to discontinue it. The page had been published once a week since 1967 and had for a long time provided the Finnish speaking population in Borås with important information.

Since 2000 Sweden has five national minority languages: Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, Romani Chib and Yiddish. These are minority languages with a special historical tradition and those who use these languages have been given special rights, including the right to use Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami in contact with Swedish authorities in some municipalities that have a high proportion of Finnish, Meänkieli or Sami speakers.

In view of the history of the Finnish language in Sweden and the recent development concerning national minority languages it must be considered important to make the history of the minorities more accessible to researchers and the general public.

Of all the Finnish language publications in Sweden the following have been considered to be of interest in the present project:

1. Tukholman Sanomat (1951-58)
2. Tukholman Uutiset (1952-58)
3. Ruotsin Suomalainen (1972-)
4. Finn Sanomat (1974-1985)
5. Viikkoviesti (1995- 2005)
6. Ruotsin Sanomat (2003-2005)

Today there are only two newspapers published in Sweden exclusively or partly in Finnish, Ruotsin Suomalainen and Haparandabladet. The former started already in 1964 as an information bulletin for immigrants. The latter has about 25 % of its material in Finnish and Meänkieli and up until 2010 had its title also in Finnish. Recently however a new Finnish newspaper, Suomen Uutisviikko, has made an attempt to carry on the tradition of the immigrant press.

The project

In the present project the two libraries aim at highlighting the position of the historically important Finnish speaking minority in the public debate and in this way want to support historical research in a number of areas by means of digitization. In addition to academic researchers, especially genealogists have

shown great interest, but the newspaper material will of course attract a much wider audience.

The project can also be seen as a rescue and preservation project, because digitization is performed by first microfilming the newspapers and then digitizing the microfilms. The cooperation also makes it possible to exchange experiences and results from the digitization projects in the two national libraries.

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