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Reasons for name changes in Finland

Name change cannot be examined as an independent phenomenon. It has to be discussed within the broader framework of societal change. Social structures began to change dramatically in Finland in the second half of the 19th century. This influenced all aspects of life – including work and social life – and brought about significant changes in the Finnish name repertoire. People in agrarian communities generally lived in geographically and socially limited environments and received little knowledge of the outside world. There was also very little change in their working lives. What little change there was came about as a result of people moving to another place to live (in particular the Savonian settlers who, from the end of the Middle Ages to the 17th century moved en masse westwards, northwards and eastwards, where the orthodox Karelians lived) or changes in people's livelihoods, (e.g. an end to woodcraft and hunting after the Middle Ages, shifting from slash-and-burn to field cultivation techniques, from using hay from natural pasture to cultivated hay, and from collective working patterns to mechanised techniques, etc.) There has always been change, but it was the most pervasive starting in the second half of the 19th century – a time when society became more community-based, large numbers of people were moving from the countryside to the cities, the economic structure in Finland was changing fundamentally, and travelling and communication were becoming easier.

In old agrarian communities the use of names was restricted almost solely to places, people and domestic animals, and there were very few other types of proper names. In the 19th century, names started to appear for a few shops, products, newspapers and societies. There were, however, very few names of organisations, and the few that existed referred mostly to parishes, jurisdictional divisions, provinces, and military battalions or companies. Foreign names had been learned from the Bible or through contact with traders and soldiers. The introduction of newspapers opened up the world to Finns, even though the publication of foreign news was sometimes restricted in 19th century Finland.

Today the names of far-away places, people, companies and organisations are in everyday use in Finnish, thanks to the media, marketing and different kinds of organisations. The Finnish name repertoire is also much broader than it was in the 19th century or prior to that. People can no longer get by with knowing just the names of places in their near vicinity; rather, they are expected to have an overview of the names of ever larger and more varied entities.

Analysing name change and the problems associated with it

It would be difficult to examine change at a general societal level, in large part due to the sheer volume of material available. Researchers have been able to observe change taking place (e.g. V. Wallin 1897, A.V. Forsman 1902, V. Nissilä 1962: 51–56; E. Kiviniemi 1972 and 1978: 75 f., M. Viljamaa-Laakso

1999). There is also some research available specifically on name change in Finland, e.g. V. Nissilä 1957, M. Koski 1959, G. Harling 1973, G. Harling-Kranck 1976, A. Naert 1979, R.L. Pitkänen 1987, and a collaboration project between the University of Helsinki and the Research Institute for the Languages of Finland 1994–2001 (see Ainiala 1997 and 2000). Research conducted in the 1990s concentrated on observing changes in and the disappearance of the names of a few rural villages. There was also some small-scale research conducted in the 1970s and 1990s to determine how many and what kind of names people knew, i.e. how broad their name repertoire was.

Because the research presenting name change quantitatively has focused on traditional rural place names and microtoponyms, we cannot draw any broad conclusions concerning changes in place names of the whole country. However, general works on names and nomenclature refer to this research and present the view that changes in place names (usually in microtoponyms) generally occur in small communities and with names that have few users (e.g. Kiviniemi 1990: 27–43, Ainiala & Saarelma & Sjöblom 2008: 122–125). On the other hand, changes in macrotoponyms – a well-known phenomenon – have received less or no attention at all.

Name change can, of course, be researched quantitatively, e.g. by calculating how many names in a particular region have changed and by analysing how and why they have changed and what types of names are subject to change. Research conducted on collections of archived names, however, usually indicates the validity of the name archives instead of the actual number of names that exist or their changing patterns.

If name change is scrutinised from the point of view of the user or speaker, a quantitative approach quickly runs into the problem of inadequate material. The names archived in collections have not all been used to the same extent or in similar ways: some names have been in constant and widespread use, while others are merely curiosities or may even have been invented for the purpose of an interview. This has occurred in the past during compilations of traditional place names and in recent surveys conducted over the Internet for the compiling of slang names used by school children.

What types of names change?

When discussing name change in Finnish nomenclature, it is not merely changes in place names or the disappearance of microtoponyms or of rarely used names that is important, although research conducted in this field has produced seemingly high percentages of change (Ainiala, Saarelma & Sjöblom 2008: 123 f.). What is more significant is the broadening of the name repertoire of normal Finnish people and changes in the names of the objects, places and organisations they come into contact with in their everyday lives. The names of large features have always been subject to change, in fact, people have often initiated such changes on purpose. One example is the redrawing of the borders of administrative divisions over the past ten years in Finland. This has resulted in changes in the names of provinces, regions, municipalities, cities, and of entirely new entities. The merging of municipalities has sometimes necessitated changing street names to avoid overlap and confusion in street addresses.

Due to the importance of the names of key places in communication, a quantitative method of research is rarely adequate. Perhaps a better approach would be to study the changes along with their causes and historical roots. A factor that complicates the relevance of such research is that the core nomenclature is constantly shifting, and in a society that is becoming increasingly heterogeneous, the core nomenclatures of various groups of people differ markedly.

Causes of change

I will now discuss some of the causes of changes in core nomenclature¹ using material from the Dictionary of Finnish Place Names (*Suomalainen paikan-nimikirja* 2007) as examples. The dictionary is an etymological resource comprising approximately 4,700 key Finnish place names. The headwords include all Finnish municipality and city names, the names of many large geographic locations and bodies of water, and of national parks and well-known cultural sites. Most of the names come from an older substratum of place names.

I will not discuss name changes such as phonetic variation and reduction (fore-, middle and back clipping), translations and adaptations of names, epexegetic names and shortened or inflected forms of names. Names are passed on orally, and in bilingual communities they are often translated. In such situations, however, I will consider the original name that was passed down orally through the generations. This research therefore only includes names that have been replaced with a new name.

It is impossible to categorically list the causes for name changes, because several different factors may have worked together to initiate the process of change and to guide it in a particular direction. Because concrete events in the world are often the underlying cause for name changes, the final catalyst – a need or decision – tends to be quite straightforward and sometimes even sudden. Conversely, it often takes a long time for a new name to become established. The old name slowly dies out as those who remembered and used it die out. When the number of speakers who use the new name increases, it becomes established in common usage. There is a transitional phase when several versions or variations of the name may exist alongside each other. Names that are changed or replaced by official mandate often filter more quickly into general circulation.

A significant number of the names of Finnish cities, municipalities, and parishes have undergone some type of alteration; sometimes they have even been replaced by a completely different name. Many replacements by different names have occurred as a result of shifts in administrative borders (*Säräisniemi* > *Vaala*), the separation of a filial parish from its mother parish (*Saamainen* > *Leppävirta*), changes in municipal status (*Helsingin maalaiskunta* > *Vantaan kaupunki*) [*Fi. maalaiskunta* means *rural municipality* and *kaupunki* means *town, city*], changes in centres of administration (*Tavinsalmi* > *Kuopio*), an old

¹ Changes in nomenclature include the appearance of new names as well as the disappearance of and changes in old names, including their replacement with new ones.

vicar being replaced by a new one (*Pärnäsää > Angelniemi*),² new vicarages (*Kuukkajärvi > Uurainen*) or new churches (*Uusikylä > Nastola*), or of parish districts becoming independent (*Prunkkala > Aura*). Sometimes a parish name gradually became established when it was named after a house in the village whose inhabitants were actively involved in parish administration (*Pidisjärvi > Nivala*). The new name may also have been 'borrowed' from a well-known geographic location, e.g. a lake or hill (*Kuusjärvi > Outokumpu*). Sometimes a place name may have been changed to avoid confusion between two similar parish or municipality names (*Haapajärvi > Haapavesi, Hämeen läänin Koski > Hämeenkoski, Eura > Tarvasjoki*).

Sometimes place names changed after a significant event, e.g. when a new ruler came to power. The Swedish royal family and the Russian imperial family left their imprint on Finnish city names, and even on a few municipality names. When a new ruler came to power, he sometimes changed certain place names while leaving others unchanged. One example is *Vechelax Nystad*, (The new town of Vehkalahti), which was built in 1660. In 1721 it became a border-town on the Russian-Swedish border, and in 1723 it was renamed *Fredrikshamn*, (Port Fredrik) after king Fredrik I of Sweden. Another example is the Finnish town of *Salo*, which was named *Brahestad* (Town of Brahe) when governor-general Per Brahe acquired the parish and annexed it to his barony. In 1606 a city called *Mustasaari* (Black Island) was built on an island of that name, but in 1616 the city was renamed *Vasa* (Fi. *Vaasa*) after the Swedish royal family. From 1855 to 1917 the city was called *Nikolaistad/Nikolainkaupunki* (Town of Nicolaj), named after the Russian tsar and the Finnish grand duke. The southernmost island of the Suomenlinna coast fortress, *Vargskär* (Wolf Island), is now called *Kustaanmiekkä/Gustavssvärd* (Gustaf's Sword). In the 1750s the fortress on the island was completed and named after the Swedish crown prince Gustaf. When the village (later a parish district) of Hartola became a parish in its own right in 1784 by royal decree, it was named after Crown prince Gustaf Adolf. Nowadays the parish is called *Hartola* (Sw. *Gustav Adolfs*). A ridge called *Syrjänskorke* (*Syrjänskorke* 1510; i.e. Ridge Hill) was renamed *Keisarinharju* (Emperor's Ridge) after a visit from tsar Alexander I in 1819.

When a new ruler came to power, a new regime or ideology was introduced or when the inhabitants of a place changed, its name often changed as well. This was true regardless of the size of type of place. The most significant examples are the names of bodies of water and of culturally important symbols. The name *Suomenlahti* (Gulf of Finland) had appeared in the Finnish language by 1844. In Swedish it is known as *Bottenhavet* (*Bottenhafwet* 1791). Different groups of people have used different names for seas and their parts: as late as the 13th century the body of water was called *Mare Estonum* (Sea of Estonia) and *Mare Hochlandiae* (Highlands' Sea from the Swedish name *Högländ*), in 1539 *Mare Finonicum* (Nissilä 1965: 22) The reference to Finland in the name became possible only when the eastern regions of the Swedish Empire began to be called *Suomi/Finland*. Previously the term *Suomi/Finland* had referred to the

² There were two villages in the parish of Pärnäsää, Pärnäsää with the church and the other one, Angelniemi. A new vicar took the name *Angelnius*, and so the name *Angelniemi* replaces *Pärnäsää* as the parish name

southwestern region near Turku. – The Finnish name *Selkämeri* (Open Sea) came into use in the 1910s. Before that it had been known in Finnish as *Raumanmeri* (Sea of Rauma), named after the nearby town of *Rauma* (Sw. *Raumo*). In a map dating from 1595 it is called *Finnisch see*, but in older maps *Golfo Svetico* (1569) and *Mare Sveticum* (1539). The northernmost part of the Gulf of Bothnia, the Bothnian Bay, known in Finnish as *Perämeri*, came into use in 1910 with the compilation of a Finnish language atlas. Prior to that, the bay had been known in Finnish as *Kainuunmeri* (Sea of Kainuu), because the Region of *Pohjanmaa* (*Ostrobothnia*) used to be called *Kainuu*. The leisure area in Tampere, *Viikinsaari* (Viikki Island) used to be called *Kaidesaari* (*kaiide* means *rail* or *banister* and *saari* means *island*) after the island was annexed to the lands of Viikki Manor.

There are also several symbolically and ideologically important sites whose names have been changed, e.g. that of the Finnish prime minister's official residence. Built in 1873 as a summer villa it was named *Bjällbo* in Swedish. When purchased by the State to serve as a summer residence in 1904, it was given the Finnish name *Kesäranta* (Summer Shore). In the 18th century construction was started of a fortress on an island outside Helsinki as protection for Helsinki and Sweden against Russia. At the time Finland was part of the Swedish Empire, and so the fortress – nowadays a UNESCO World Heritage site – was named *Sveaborg* (*Fortress of Svea*). In Finnish the phonetic variant *Viapori* was adopted. Later on, after Finland won its independence and fought a bloody civil war, the Finnish flag was hoisted on the fortress on 12 May 1918. The Senate then renamed it *Suomenlinna* in Finnish (Castle of Finland). The name *Sveaborg* remained in use in Swedish. The centre of Luumäki, *Taavetti* (Sw. *Davidstad*), was named after the Russian Davidov fortress built there in the end of the 18th century, and the name gradually replaced the earlier village name of *Marttila* (named after the Marttinen family).

Religious and ethical ideas have also had an impact on place names, e.g. the introduction of «good» instead of «bad» in place names. A municipality in Southern Finland called *Pahajärvi* (Bad Lake) was renamed *Pyhäjärvi* (Holy Lake) in the 1720s; *Pahamaa* (Bad Land) or *Murhaluoto* (Murder Islet) was renamed *Pyhämaa* (Holy Land) when a church was built on the site in the 17th century. Ancient sacrificial rocks and places of worship had the word *piru* (devil) added to them, presumably after the advent of Christianity, when the older beliefs were condemned as pagan. The name *Vargö* (Wolf Island) hails from the Middle Ages and was officially replaced with *Bergö* (Rock Island) in the 1830s because the villagers felt the previous name was demeaning, as was the term for an inhabitant of the village – *vargungarna* (*Wolf cubs*).

Sometimes ideological or economic factors related to city or regional planning influenced names. In the 1950s, the city of Espoo started planning the construction of a garden city on the grounds of the Hagalund Manor. The name was to portray the underlying principles of closeness and affinity for nature and a Finnish identity, so it was named *Tapiola*, which is the name of the Forest king's empire in Finnish epic folklore. Swedish continued to use the original name *Hagalund* (Pasture grove). Another example is from the early 1960s, when a new suburb was built on *Aarnikanmäki* (Aarnikka Hill) in Helsinki. Right from the start, the suburb was named *Pihlajamäki* (*Rowan Hill*), which

was thought to be more appealing. In the municipality of Nummi-Pusula there was previously a hill called *Kivimäki* (Rock Hill), a name that was replaced when a new ski centre was built there. There was a lake called *Alhojärvi* (Lowland Lake) at the foot of the hill, so the generic name *Kivimäki* was replaced with a more appealing one – *Alhovuori* (Mount Alho). Place names have also changed due to popular demand. There is an area in Helsinki called *Gamlas* (Sw. *gammel* means *old*) that was originally named after an old house. During city planning in the mid 20th century, the name was translated into Finnish as *Vanhainen* (Fi. *vanha* means *old*). The population thought it was demeaning and so in 1959 it was renamed *Kannelmäki* (*kantele* is a traditional Finnish harp and *mäki* means *hill*).

If a church, factory, mill or other building related to the livelihood or administration of the population was built somewhere, the place was sometimes renamed after it. Many a *Kirkkojärvi* (Church Lake) or a *Myllypuro* (Mill brook) was previously called something else. The parish of *Savilahti* was founded in the 14th century, but in the early 16th century it was divided into two. One of the newly established parishes, *Vesulahti/Visulax*, was renamed *Mikkeli/S:t Michel* in 1664. The old *Savilahti* church had been dedicated to the archangel Michael, but it was not until the early 17th century that references to St. Michael's church and congregation appeared. In 1393 a church was built in the parish of *Räntämäki* (Sleet Hill), after which it was named *Vårfrukyrkan* (Church of our Blessed Lady). In 1865 the parish was referred to as *S:t Marie*, but even as late as 1897, the name *Räntämäki* was still used alongside *S:t Marie*.

The names of important geographic locations have also changed. In particular, the names of rivers and rapids tend to change often. Sometimes a river may be called by different names, depending on which part of the river the speaker is referring to. As time goes by, what was once the dominant name may give way to another. One of Finland's oldest and best-known rapids is *Ankkapurha* (*Ankapora* 1415 < *ankka* < *ankara* which means *hard, large* or *strong*, and *purha* which means *place of foam, waterfall*). The name is used in epic folklore as the name of a large, swiftly flowing river, in the same context as *Imatra* and *Vuoksi*. In the 19th century, the name had all but disappeared and the river was named *Anjalankoski* (Rapids of Anjala), after one of the villages on its bank. In the late 20th century locals reinstated the old name for tourism purposes and it was even incorporated in the base map of the region. In the municipality of Salla (previously *Kuolajärvi*) in Lapland there were two separate fells: *Sallatunturi* and *Pyhätunturi* (Holy Fell). When, during the peace settlement after the Second World War, *Sallatunturi* (which was well known as a winter sports centre), was given to the Soviet Union, *Pyhätunturi* continued its legacy as a tourist destination and was even renamed *Sallatunturi*, partly also because at the time another *Pyhätunturi* was becoming a popular tourist attraction.

Other factors that have significantly influenced names are changes in transportation and the road system. Travellers' lodges, ports, ferry connections, etc. sometimes resulted in name changes. More recently, the railway authorities have indirectly influenced the names of villages and regions through the names given to railway stations. Sometimes the names of stations are very arbitrary, e.g. *Wanda*, which was later changed to *Mosabacka*, the name of the nearby

residential area. At times they showed a lack of respect for local names, e.g. *Kuoras* > *Koura* (Fi. *koura* means *hand*, but *Kuoras* is an old abstruse name). Finland's first railway was opened for traffic in 1862 and soon after that, railway tracks traversed nearly the entire country. Railway stations and rail traffic operating points were built up along the routes and were given names. These names in turn influenced the names of nearby residential areas. Stations were sometimes named after a nearby lake or travellers' lodge, or even after a croft or a hill. Two examples of names that have developed like this are *Nummela* (the village's old name was *Torhola*) and *Siiinjärvi* (the name of a nearby lake replaced the municipality's original, short-lived name *Kasurila*). Sometimes stations were named after a village that was located a fair distance from the track. In such cases the village's name gradually changed to signify only the area around the station, e.g. *Matku* in Forssa.

When the postal service and post offices spread to the countryside, it was important to ensure that there was no overlap in the names of post offices or railway stations. Sometimes place names were given or changed in order of importance, e.g. the railway station built in the industrial community *Haapakoski* in the region of Jyväskylä was named *Haapaniemi*, because there was already a station called *Haapakoski* elsewhere in Finland (J. Iltanen 2009: 182 f.). The post office in the village of *Rytky* in Kiuruvesi was given a name that did not traditionally exist in the area – *Myllyniemi* (Mill Headland) – because *Rytky* was already in use elsewhere (S. Laitinen 1979). In this case the name of the post office did not become the name of the village, but it is still used in addresses, even though the old post office has long been closed.

In cases where villages and homes were named after their inhabitants, the names were sometimes changed when new inhabitants moved in. A family name may also have replaced an earlier, topographical name. In such cases the name indicated who owned or had the rights to a particular area. In Oulu there is a lake – and in later years also a part of town – that was named *Pyykösjärvi*, after the Pyykönen family that had settled in the area by the 18th century. As late as 1799 there are references to the lake as *Ylikuivasjärvi*, but by 1920 it was called *Pyykösjärvi*. Another example is the manor *Gerknäs* (*Gerknäs* 1540), which was renamed *Eriksnäs* in the 19th century when the *Nordenberg* family was ennobled under the name *Nordenskjöld*. *Eriksnäs* came from the family's oldest known ancestor, a crofter from Uppland called Erik Matsson who died in the 18th century. The changing of house and even village names according to their inhabitants is a relatively common phenomenon.

Conclusion

In total, out of the 4,000 instances in the Dictionary of Finnish Place Names 12 % of the names have either been replaced or have a parallel name in use alongside the dominant name. This material includes more instances of name changes resulting from bilingualism (translations and phonetic variations) than actually exist in the country's macrotoponyms. This is due to the selection criteria for the index words of the work and because a large portion of the key names come from bilingual areas in Finland or have been influenced by the other language.

In addition to names that were replaced, 21 % of Finnish names were altered through phonetic variations or translations from another language. There are 39 % of these instances in Swedish names and 32 % in Saami names.

Other phonetic changes such as various shortened forms, phonetic variations, etc. appeared in 15 % of Finnish names, 15 % of Swedish names and 19 % of Saami names. Other, mainly structural changes (epexegetis, ellipsis, etc.) occurred in 6 % of Finnish, 4 % of Swedish names and 2 % of Saami names. Of all the names, approximately 40 % remain unchanged. Of Finnish names 44 % remain unchanged, of Swedish names 27 % and of Saami names 42 %.

These statistics – whether absolute or relative – are not significant in and of themselves. What is important is the fact that almost all kinds of names are subject to change when people shape their environment. The changes discussed here have occurred over centuries, with changes in the core nomenclature taking place a little at a time, which creates a feeling of continuity. Names do not change all of a sudden; instead, new names mix gradually with older names. These changes have seldom made communication and the perception of places problematic. However, this was an issue on a few occasions in the 20th century when new areas in the Helsinki region were quickly being built up and named or after the turn of the millennium when administrative borders in Finland were re-drawn.

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