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Welfare Services from a Minority Perspective. Explaining Satisfaction with Language-Based Welfare Services among Swedish-Speaking Finns

Staffan Himmelroos, Isak Vento and Åsa von Schoultz

Public Policy and Citizen-Based Practices That Support Social and Health Services for Official and Co-Official Language Minority Communities. An International Perspective: What Has Really Been Achieved and Where Are the Gaps?

Politiques publiques et pratiques citoyennes soutenant les services sociaux et de santé pour les communautés minoritaires de langues officielles et co-officielles. Une perspective internationale : ce qui a été accompli et ce qui reste à faire

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Article abstract

This article explores perceptions of welfare services from the perspective of a linguistic minority, the Finland-Swedes. Since Finland has an extensive universal welfare system and is an officially bilingual country, the relatively small Swedish-speaking numerical minority has equal rights to welfare provision in their mother tongue. This provides an analytically promising case, as expectations toward the Finnish welfare system are high, while delivering quality language-based welfare services to minorities can be challenging. We hypothesize that attitudes regarding language-based welfare service are guided by either rational self-interest, *i.e.* language skills, or ingroup identity. Our analyses are based on a survey among a random sample of Swedish-speaking Finns in the winter of 2018-2019. We found that the attitudes toward language-based welfare services were guided by both self-interest and identity, but their impact depended on whether respondents were asked about their specific evaluation of, or general desire for, language-based welfare services.



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Abstract

This article explores perceptions of welfare services from the perspective of a linguistic minority, the Finland-Swedes. Since Finland has an extensive universal welfare system and is an officially bilingual country, the relatively small Swedish-speaking numerical minority has equal rights to welfare provision in their mother tongue. This provides an analytically promising case, as expectations toward the Finnish welfare system are high, while delivering quality language-based welfare services to minorities can be challenging. We hypothesize that attitudes regarding language-based welfare service are guided by either rational self-interest, *i.e.* language skills, or ingroup identity. Our analyses are based on a survey among a random sample of Swedish-speaking Finns in the winter of 2018-2019. We found that the attitudes toward language-based welfare services were guided by both self-interest and identity, but their impact depended on whether respondents were asked about their specific evaluation of, or general desire for, language-based welfare services.

Résumé

Cet article explore la perception des services sociaux du point de vue d'une minorité linguistique, les Finlandais suédophones. La Finlande a un système de protection sociale étendu et universel. Puisqu'elle est un pays officiellement bilingue, la minorité suédophone, relativement peu nombreuse, a des droits égaux à des services de protection sociale fournis dans sa langue maternelle. Cette situation présente un cas prometteur pour nos analyses, étant donné que les attentes à l'égard du système de protection sociale finlandais sont élevées et que la fourniture de

services de protection sociale de qualité et dans leur langue à des minorités constitue un défi. Nous émettons l'hypothèse que les attitudes à l'égard de la langue de prestation des services de bien-être social sont guidées soit par un intérêt personnel rationnel, c'est-à-dire les compétences linguistiques, soit par l'identité de groupe. Nos analyses se fondent sur une enquête auprès d'un échantillon aléatoire de Finlandais suédophones réalisée au cours de l'hiver 2018-2019. Les résultats révèlent que les attitudes à l'égard de la langue de prestation des services de bien-être sont guidées à la fois par l'intérêt personnel et par l'identité. Toutefois, l'effet de ces attitudes varie selon qu'il s'agit de l'évaluation des répondants ou de leur désir général à l'égard de la langue de prestation des services de bien-être.

Abstrakti

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan käsityksiä hyvinvointipalveluista kielivähemmistön näkökulmasta. Suomi on maa, jolla on kaksi kansallista kieltä ja kattava yleinen hyvinvointijärjestelmä, mikä tarkoittaa, että lukumäärältään pienellä ruotsinkielisellä vähemmistöllä on yhtäläinen oikeushyvinvointipalveluihin heidän omalla kielellään. Tämä johtaa suuriin odotuksiin hyvinvointipalveluista samaan aikaan, kun näiden palvelujen tarjoamisessa pienemmällä kansallisella kielellä on usein haasteita. Tutkimme, ohjaako kielipohjaisia hyvinvointipalveluita koskevia mielipiteitä oman edun tavoittelun rationaali eli enemmistön kielen kielitaito vai kielipohjainen ryhmäidentiteetti. Analyysimme perustuvat kyselytutkimukseen satunnaisotoksella ruotsinkielisiä suomalaisia talvella 2018–2019. Tulokset osoittavat, että mielipiteitä kielipohjaisista hyvinvointipalveluista ohjaavat sekä oma etu että ryhmäidentiteetti, mutta lopputulos riippuu siitä, arvioivatko vastaajat kielipohjaisten hyvinvointipalvelujen saatavuutta (spesifi arvo) vai ilmaisevatko he yleisiä odotuksia hyvinvointipalveluista äidinkielellään.

Abstrakt

Denna artikel undersöker uppfattningar om välfärdsservice ur en språkminoritets perspektiv. Finland är ett land med två nationalspråk och med ett omfattande universellt välfärdssystem, vilket betyder att den numerärt sett lilla svenskspråkiga minoriteten har en jämlik rätt till välfärdsservice på sitt eget språk. Det leder till höga förväntningar på välfärdstjänster, samtidigt som det ofta finns utmaningar i att kunna leverera dessa tjänster på det mindre nationalspråket. Vi undersöker huruvida åsikterna gällande språkbaserad välfärdsservice styrs av ett rationellt egenintresse, dvs. språkkunskaper i majoritetsspråket, eller av språkigbaserad gruppidentitet. Våra analyser bygger på en enkätundersökning bland ett slumpmässigt urval av svenskspråkiga finländare under vintern 2018-2019. Resultaten visar att åsikter om språkbaserade välfärdstjänster både styrs av egenintresse och av gruppidentitet, men att utfallet beror på om respondenterna utvärderar tillgången till språkbaserad välfärdsservice (en specifik värdering), eller anger en allmän förväntan om välfärdsservice på modersmålet.

Nota Bene

The authors are presented in alphabetical order, but all have contributed equally.

Introduction

It is said that public welfare services form the bedrock of European social models (Svallfors, 2012, p. 1). Likewise, universal public welfare has been connected to societal stability and economic growth (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009), equality (Bryson, Bitmann, & Donath, 1994; Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996), and a high level of political and social trust (Rothstein, 2010). Given the significance of welfare services in advanced societies, it is not surprising that scholars have paid a great deal of attention to attitudes regarding these services, and how they are provided. An important development in the research on welfare state attitudes are studies exploring the relationship between cultural diversity and support for welfare services, in relation to the increasing number of immigrants in many welfare states (*e.g.*, van Oorschoot, 2008). While immigration is an important dimension of cultural diversity, there are also other relevant elements and perspectives to be considered.

The aim of this study is to contribute to this body of literature by analyzing the perceptions of welfare services from the perspective of a historic minority within a bilingual national setting. Our specific focus is on the Swedish-speaking language group in Finland, as we study perceptions of welfare services from a minority perspective. Swedish-speaking Finns, also known as Finland-Swedes, constitute a numerical minority in a country with two national official languages (Finnish and Swedish), which provides the minority with equal rights to welfare provision in their mother tongue. However, based on previous research, we know that the provision of health and social care, in particular, can be complicated in bilingual communities (Drolet, Bouchard, Savard, & van Kemenade, 2017). Even relatively small linguistic barriers can result in concern about the quality of welfare services among members of minority groups. This may include a fear of not receiving services as quickly in the minority language (Drolet, Dubouloz, & Benoît, 2014), the belief that services in the minority language may be of lower quality (Drolet, Arcand, Benoît, Savard, Savard, & Lagacé, 2015), or the inability of the service provider to understandably communicate in the minority language (Deveau, Landry, & Allard, 2009). All of the above may reduce the trust and willingness to use different welfare services.

Finland and Finland-Swedes represent an interesting case for two reasons. First, Finland is a country with an extensive universal welfare system, which accentuates the expectation that it should provide services on equal grounds to all citizens, irrespective of the national language they speak as their mother tongue. Second, Finland-Swedes, despite having a relatively low demographic vitality, represent a group with an otherwise strong ethnolinguistic vitality (Liebkind, 1999; Allard & Landry, 1994). This is largely a result of the developed political, cultural and economic resources of the group (Bengtsson & Grönlund, 2005). Hence, this study is carried out within the context of a welfare system that emphasizes inclusivity and targets a group with a strong identity that is likely to defend its language rights.

Another contribution of ours is that we compare the explanatory power of two different theoretical perspectives: one inspired from earlier research on welfare service attitudes and the other from social psychology. The first is rational choice theory, emphasizing the role of self-interest in opinion formation, and the second is social identity theory, emphasizing group identification as a driver of attitudes. In the case of our current study, this implies examining whether perceptions of language-based welfare services are influenced by the minority's needs for access to services in their native tongue (rational perspective) or is spurred by normative, value-based factors related to social identity.

Our analyses are based on a recent, high-quality survey carried out among a random sample of Swedish-speaking Finns in the winter of 2018-2019 (n=1341). The study includes questions on welfare provisions on two different language-related issues: perceptions of access to welfare services in Swedish (specific evaluation) and of the importance of language-based welfare services (a more general evaluation).

Our findings suggest that both theoretical perspectives contribute to elucidating perceptions of language-based welfare services. Weak skills in the majority language (Finnish) are negatively related to evaluations of access to welfare services in Swedish, and positively related to a prioritization of language-based welfare services. We also find that ingroup identity (positive evaluation of being a Finland-Swede) contributes to a higher prioritization of language-based services.

Welfare attitude theories

Welfare attitudes in Western democracies have been thoroughly studied since the 1980s, when systematic continent-wide and global citizen surveys became more common. These studies have served both an academic interest, to theorize the relationship of individual attitudes, public policy and institutional context, and a more policy-oriented interest of predicting the future of welfare states (Svallfors, 2012). The significance of welfare attitudes has also been studied more generally by relating it to political trust and democratic legitimacy (*e.g.*, Kumlin, Stadelmann-Steffen, & Haugsgjerd, 2017; Laegreid & Christensen, 2005).

In the literature, it is common to distinguish, on the one hand, between citizens' attitudes about state-run welfare services *in general* and, on the other hand, between citizens' attitudes about *specific* welfare services (Blomberg & Kroll, 2002). The former, also called diffuse welfare attitudes, are related to the principals of the welfare system (*i.e.*, how the system ought to work). Generalized, or diffuse welfare attitudes can be considered as normative evaluations of the system and have been found to be related to broad ideological or political values (Staerklé, Likki, & Scheidegger, 2012). Specific welfare attitudes, on the other hand, are related to specific services or policies, which are often based on an

evaluation of real-life experience (Blomberg & Kroll, 2002). Although plausibly influenced by an individual's values, this type of specific attitude has been found to be strongly related to rational evaluations related to self-interest. From this perspective, it follows that those who need – or are likely to need – a certain welfare service are more likely to hold positive attitudes regarding that service than those who are less likely to require it (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Cook & Barrett, 1992; Svallfors, 1997).

However, welfare attitudes are related to anticipation, meaning that they are formed by what citizens expect from the state. In this light, studies have found that welfare opinions vary largely according to the different welfare regimes (Svallfors, 2012), originally made famous by Esping-Andersen (1990). Still, longitudinal studies tracking national trends have found them to be rather stable with little or no evidence of life-cycle effects causing values to change over time (van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012). Cross-group comparisons within nations have found diverging attitudes between citizens and the socioeconomic and political elite, but these also appear to be more or less constant (Blomberg & Kroll, 2002). Moreover, the attitude toward specific welfare services depends on entitlement rules. Citizens are far more likely to approve of a universal welfare system than a means-tested one (Johanson & Mattila, 1994).

The context of the study

Finland-Swedes as a (numerical) minority

Finland has two main linguistic groups: ethnic Finns (who speak Finnish) and Finland-Swedes (who speak Swedish). Finnish and Swedish are the national languages of Finland, although Swedish is spoken by a mere 291,000 Finnish citizens, or about 5.2% of the population (*Statistics Finland*, 2019). Even though Finland-Swedes represent a fairly small numerical minority, the *Finnish Constitution* of 1999¹ and *Language Act* of 2003² establish that the cultural and societal needs of both language groups should be considered on equal grounds (Myntti, 2015). The status of the Swedish language in Finland has a relatively straightforward historical explanation. For six hundred years, between the 13th and 19th century, Finland constituted the eastern half of the Kingdom of Sweden, thereby establishing the high status of the Swedish language in Finland, which is still present today (Tandefelt & Finnäs, 2007).

Finnish legislation is original in that it protects languages according to the principle of both individual rights (*i.e.*, all citizens have equal rights independent of the national language they have as their mother tongue) and territorial rights. Individual rights come into

1. *Constitution of Finland* (Suomen perustuslaki), 731/1999.

2. *Language Act* (Språklag) (Finland), 423/2003.

play for the operation of the central government, whereas territorial rights are at the municipal level and are based on the demographic structure of the municipality (Myntti, 2015). Specifically, the territorial language rights of Finnish municipalities can be broken down into two main categories: unilingual Finnish municipalities and bilingual municipalities. On mainland Finland (not including the Åland Islands, which is an autonomous region where Swedish is the only administrative language), municipalities are either unilingually Finnish or bilingual. This means that Swedish-speaking citizens are entitled to service in their own language when they interact with bilingual municipalities or national government services, but not in interactions with unilingual municipalities (*Language Act*, 2003; Myntti, 2015).

Not only are there differences in territorial rights, depending on whether the municipality in question is bilingual (Swedish and Finnish) or unilingual (Finnish), there is also considerable variation when it comes to linguistic composition. The Swedish-speaking population in Finland is primarily concentrated in municipalities along the West and South coasts of Finland (Tandefelt & Finnäs, 2007). In some bilingual municipalities, the overwhelming majority of inhabitants are Swedish speaking, although there are also a few examples of municipalities that have voluntarily taken on a bilingual status, even though only a very small minority speak Swedish as their native tongue (Statistics Finland, 2019).

Finland-Swedes in a universal welfare model context

As a typical Nordic welfare state, Finland offers a robust case for testing welfare attitudes related to minority rights. The core of the Nordic welfare service model is arguably universalism (Greve, 2007; Kildal & Kuhnle, 2007); and one of the main arguments for a universal welfare state is that its inclusivity spurs consensus and broad support from the citizenry (Greve, 2007). The characteristics of the Nordic model can be contrasted to the Anglo-Saxon model, which is defined by means-tested service provision on market terms, and the Central European model, which relies on an insurance scheme and conserves social status rather than promoting interclass mobility (Esping-Andersen, 1990). In Finland, with its extensive universal welfare model, it is anticipated that citizens will have high expectations regarding the level of welfare services delivered, independent of the national language they speak. It can be argued that the universalism of the Nordic model, in principal, offers the best starting point for a national language minority's equal welfare services. However, the universalism of the model also generates high expectations for being treated equally, independent of language.

That said, delivering welfare services to a numerical minority language group based on the same expectations as the majority group, is not without its challenges (Bäck, 2006). This is especially apparent in the context of the Nordic welfare model, which has undergone substantial change, and is under increasing pressure due to ageing populations, immigration and other challenges generated by globalization (Kvist & Greve, 2011).

To recognize any internal state variation in attitudes toward welfare services, the administrative level responsible for the provision of welfare services ought to be considered. Most large or medium-sized Western European countries have a three- or four-tier state administrative structure, where the responsibility for health care is usually situated at the regional administrative level (Loughlin, Hendriks, & Lidström, 2011). In Sweden, for example, the regional administration is the administrative level responsible for health care (Lidström, 2011). However, in Finland, the state is organized according to a two-tier administrative structure with power located in both the central administration, or the government and its ministries, and at the municipal level. In this unitary decentralized model of administration, municipalities have extensive autonomy in the provision of basic health care, social service and education, within the limits of generally-formulated national requirements. Although much of the service provided is governed and arranged in joint municipal organizations specializing in one sector (Sjöblom, 2011), national requirements determine the service criteria. Much like in the case of linguistic rights, municipalities are the key administrative level responsible for the provision of welfare services (Blomberg & Kroll, 1999). Hence, municipalities that differ from each other in many respects including population size, economic situation, health and social service spending, and linguistic composition are central to the understanding of language-based welfare service attitudes in Finland.

Welfare service attitudes in a linguistic minority context

When exploring attitudes concerning welfare services among the Swedish-speaking minority, we need to consider how they relate to each other and the linguistic context to which they belong. According to Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory (SIT), social categorization is a central tool for organizing one's social environment. However, social categorization is not only about how individuals see and identify themselves, but also about which groups and individuals they identify and align themselves with (Lange & Westin, 1981; Verkuyten, 2005). Individuals categorize themselves and others based on similarities and differences, thereby making it possible to separate between ingroup members (those belonging to the same category) and outgroup members (those not belonging to the same group) (Hogg & Abrams, 2001). The Finland-Swedish ethnic identity derives from a categorization based on the language they speak as their native tongue and from the relationship with the dominant language group, the ethnic Finns (Liebkind, 1999; Liebkind, Teräsaho, & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2006).

As mentioned above, in relation to earlier studies of welfare attitudes, *specific* welfare service perceptions have been found to be strongly related to rational behaviour and self-interest (Cook & Barrett, 1992). Most studies focusing on the impact of rationality have defined it as economic benefit, hence reflecting the economic tradition. Rationality and

self-interest are not, however, necessarily solely related to economic resources. The same logic can be used with other types of resources that are likely to influence perceptions on the topic. Viewed from the perspective of this study that is concerned with the welfare perceptions of a language minority, receiving health care or social services in one's mother tongue can be seen as a rational foundation for self-interest in terms of economic factors.

Due to the relatively limited number of Finland-Swedes in Finland, circumstances dictate that many conduct much of their daily life using the Finnish language. Hence, the national language spoken natively by the majority of Finns, that is Finnish, also plays an important role in the identity of Finland-Swedes (Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Teräsaho, 2007; Liebkind *et al.*, 2006). Since the language context for Finland-Swedes varies when it comes to the private (*e.g.*, family) context and the regional and municipal context, Finnish language skills vary considerably within this Swedish-speaking group in Finland. Some are fully bilingual, whereas others who live their lives almost exclusively in a Swedish-speaking environment are often less so (Tandefelt & Finnäs, 2007).

For individuals with a lower mastery of the majority language, access to welfare services in their mother tongue is likely to be a high priority; and experiences relating to welfare services are liable to be influenced by language-related matters. Still, it is important not to equate language skills with language identity. Research by Henning-Lindblom (2012) suggests that higher confidence in one's ability to speak Finnish does not reduce identity within the ingroup of Finland-Swedes. That said, strong language skills might still make you less concerned about receiving welfare services in the minority language.

Moving on to diffuse or general welfare perceptions, previous research points toward a different type of explanatory factor. General perceptions of welfare services are considered a product of more abstract values, such as ideological predisposition and cultural values (Staerklé, Likki, & Scheidegger, 2012). When these findings are examined under the lens of the minority and language-based welfare service perspective applied in this study, then social identity theory becomes relevant. Ethnic identity is, after all, not merely about how we categorize ourselves and others, but also the capacity or possibilities for expressing a particular identity. To understand generalized perceptions of language-based welfare services from a minority perspective, we ought to consider social identity strength. Having a positive ingroup identity is likely to be related to general expectations regarding the prioritization of language-based welfare services.

Departing from the rational choice theory approach emphasizing self-interest and social identity theory emphasizing social group belonging, we want to test whether language as self-interest or language-identity factors affect the attitudes of Swedish-speaking Finns toward welfare services in Swedish in Finland. In line with previous research on welfare service perceptions, we hypothesize that specific attitudes are strongly related to rational

calculations based on self-interest, while diffuse welfare service perceptions are mainly driven by cultural values related to social identity. More specifically, we expect that (H1) *weaker Finnish-language skills have a negative effect on specific language-based welfare service attitudes*, given that those with weaker skills have greater incentive to seek out services in Swedish and are more likely to be confronted with negative experiences, when those services are unavailable or lacking in quality. We also expect that a (H2) *stronger Finland-Swedish ingroup identity has a positive effect on general language-based welfare service attitudes*, since a more positive social identity is likely to reflect how individuals feel Finland-Swedes (the ingroup) should be treated in general.

Research design, data and method

Our study is based on a national survey (von Schoultz, Himmelroos, & Vento, 2019) carried out with a random sample of Swedish-speaking Finns in the winter of 2018-2019. The survey is part of the 5th wave of the European Values Study (EVS) and was conducted on behalf of the Swedish Literature Foundation in Finland, to overcome what is a very common problem (from a minority perspective) in national surveys based on random sampling, that is a low number of minority-group respondents.

The invitation to participate in the survey, along with a hard copy of it, was distributed to a random sample of 3,600 Swedish-speaking Finns on both mainland Finland and the Åland Islands. The invitation and three subsequent reminders also included instructions on how to respond to the survey online. There were, altogether, 1,341 completed responses to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 37%. Roughly 80% responded using the mail survey, leaving 20% who responded to the survey online. Considering the substantial length of the survey (an average response time of 45 min.), the response rate is quite respectable. In this study, we only include Swedish-speaking respondents from mainland Finland, as the respondents from the Åland Islands are situated in a different linguistic context (Swedish being the only administrative language in the autonomous region).

The survey included the full EVS questionnaire, with a few additional questions relating specifically to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. In this study, we rely on the additional questions regarding welfare provisions from a language perspective; perceptions of access to welfare services in Swedish (specific evaluation) and how important language-based welfare services are perceived to be (a more general evaluation). We also rely on items on Finland-Swedish identity and language skills.

We test competing assumptions of language-based self-interest and identity as explanations of attitude toward specific language-based welfare services and general language-based welfare services with Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. We also discuss alternative

models and provide robustness checks considering the intergroup variation of respondents between regions and municipalities, using mixed modeling that allows for random group variation.

Dependent variables

Our two dependent variables concern language-based welfare attitudes. The first reflects what we consider a more specific attitude: “Access to welfare service in Swedish in Finland is good”³, which is used to measure the rational dimension of language-based welfare attitudes among Finland-Swedes. The item is measured on a ten-point scale (1-10), with 1 representing the lowest evaluation of welfare service delivery in Swedish and 10 representing the highest. In the analyses, the coding has been normalized and changed to vary between 0 and 1.⁴

The second dependent variable reflects general or diffuse support for language-based welfare services and is measured by the following attitudinal item: “It does not matter whether one can have welfare service in Swedish in Finland, as long as the service is good”⁵. Again, this was measured on the same ten-point scale as the first variable and recoded to vary between 0 and 1, 0 indicating that language does not matter and 1 that service in the Swedish language matters a lot.

Explanatory and control variables

The main explanatory variables in our study are related to ingroup identity and language skills. We measure ingroup identity using a four-point item: “How proud are you to be a Finland-Swede?”⁶. The item has again been normalized to vary from 0 to 1, where 0 is “not proud at all” and 1 is “very proud”. Confidence in one’s own Finnish language skills is measured with the question: “How good do you consider your Finnish language skills?”⁷. The item was measured on a ten-point scale (1-10), where 1 equals a complete lack thereof and 10 perfect language skills. The variable on language skills has been recoded to vary between 0 and 1.

We also include several control variables in our main analysis, which can be divided into two key groups. First, we have variables used to control for the linguistic context of the respondents. These variables include the legal status of the Swedish language at the municipal

3. Translated from the Swedish original: *Tillgången till välfärdsservice på svenska i Finland är god.*

4. See Appendix for descriptive statistics on all variables.

5. Translated from the Swedish original: *Det spelar ingen roll om man får välfärdsservice på svenska i Finland så länge servicen är god.*

6. Translated from the Swedish original: *Hur stolt är du över att vara finlandssvensk?*

7. Translated from the Swedish original: *Hur bra anser du dig kunna finska?*

level, taking into consideration whether it is a unilingual (Finnish-speaking) or bilingual municipality. We also control for the size of the Swedish population in the municipality and number of inhabitants. The latter two are included to consider any potential interaction between Swedish speakers at the municipal level and potential resources the municipality has at its disposal for providing welfare services. It is worth noting that, in many cases, the proportion of Swedish speakers is defined by the size of the municipality. This means that, in the municipality with the largest number of Finland-Swedes, the capital city of Helsinki, the language group still only represents about six percent of the inhabitants. The number of Finland-Swedes and the number of inhabitants have both been converted into a common logarithmic scale (log 10), to include the fitting of a linear explanatory model to the variables that are typically exponentially associated with dependent variables.

The second group of control variables is included to consider the theories and previous empirical research on welfare service attitudes. We include sociodemographic and economic variables, such as age, gender and education; the first two, in particular, have a recorded effect on welfare service attitudes (van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012). We also add a control for public spending on social and health care per capita in the municipality, to control for the level of service as an explanation of welfare attitudes. Furthermore, we include political orientation on the left-right dimension, where 1 signifies left and 10 right on the one-dimensional political ideology scale. This controls for confounding explanations to welfare attitudes, which can be dependent on the individual's political stance. We also include a variable on general public welfare opinion, to be able to rule out endogeneity in the estimation of language-based welfare attitudes. This is measured with a classic question measuring different values on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 places greater emphasis on the sentence: "individuals should take more responsibility for providing for themselves", and 10 places greater emphasis on the sentence: "the state should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for"⁸. Last, we include a measure of social and health care spending per capita (in euros), to consider the capacity and economic situation of the municipality that has the duty to provide the welfare services. All municipal level register data used in our variables (population, inhabitants and spending) are derived from information obtained from Statistics Finland (2019) on Finnish municipalities in 2018.

Analysis

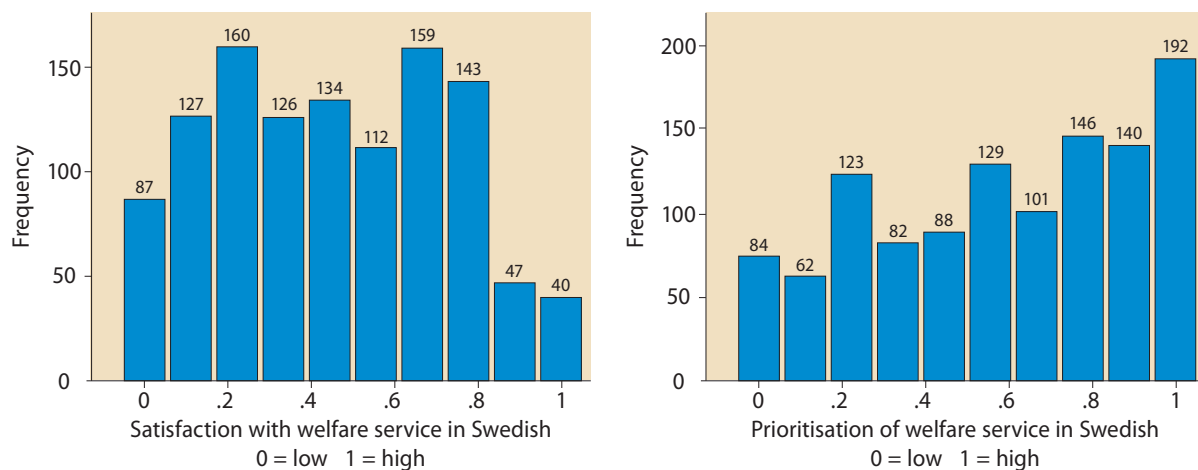
We report the findings from our analysis in two steps. First, we present our dependent and main explanatory variables from a more descriptive standpoint, to give the reader an understanding of the respondents' specific and diffuse attitudes on language-based welfare

8. Translated from the Swedish original: 1 = *Människor bör ta större ansvar för att försörja sig själva* and 10 = *Staten bör ta större ansvar för att alla får vad de behöver*.

services, as well as Finnish language skills and ingroup identity among Finland-Swedes. Second, we engage in a more in-depth analysis using OLS regression models fitted to specific and diffuse attitudes about language-based welfare services.

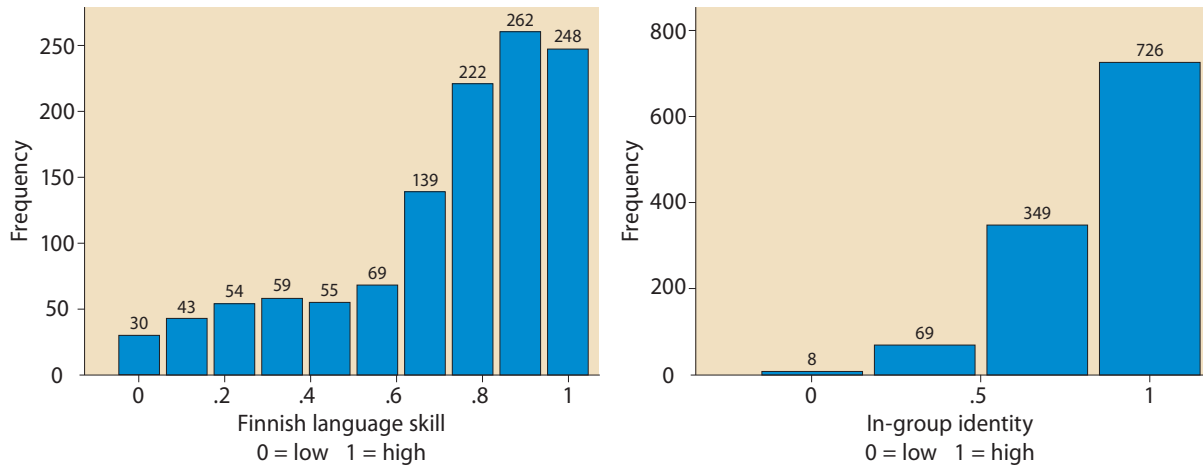
In Figure 1, the distribution of specific and general attitudes toward language-based welfare services are reported. Based on these, we find that 33% ($n=87+127+160/1134$) of respondents are fairly disappointed (0-0.2 on a scale of 0-1) with access to welfare services in Swedish in Finland, while 20% ($n=230/1134$) of survey respondents are very satisfied (0.8-1 on a scale of 0-1). This leaves about half of the respondents who are neither very satisfied nor very dissatisfied with access to welfare services in their native tongue. The equivalent descriptive analysis for general attitudes about language-based welfare services suggests that 33% ($n=146+140+192/1137$) are strongly of the opinion (0.8-1 on a scale of 0-1) that it matters whether service is provided in Finnish or Swedish, even if the service is good. In addition, 23% ($n=259/1137$) believe that the language in which service is provided matters little or not at all (0-0.2), while 35% do not hold a strong opinion.

Figure 1
Distribution of Dependent Variables, Specific Attitudes (Satisfaction)
to the Left and Diffuse Attitudes (Prioritization) to the Right.



Both specific and diffuse attitudes regarding language-based welfare services among Finland-Swedes imply a sense of urgency and importance when it comes to the provision of welfare services in the native tongue. With regards to the satisfaction measure, 56% of respondents are more dissatisfied than satisfied with the service provided in Swedish. Regarding the prioritization of the language used when welfare services are provided, we find that it leans strongly toward service in Swedish being important, even when service is otherwise good, with 62% of respondents being more likely to respond in this way.

Figure 2
Distribution of Main Explanatory Variables, Finnish Language Skills to the Left and Ingroup Identity to the Right



Regarding the main explanatory variables, it is important to note that both are skewed. In the case of Finnish language skills, 62% of the respondents in the data report having a very good or perfect command (0.8-1 on a scale of 0-1) of the Finnish language, while only 11% report having very weak or no command (0-0.2 on a scale of 0-1) of the language. For ingroup identity, the results are even more remarkable, as 66% of the Finland-Swedes living on mainland Finland report having a very strong ingroup identity (very proud to be Finland-Swede), while only 8 respondents or less than 0.1 percent of the population say they have very low ingroup identity (not proud at all). The results show that Finland-Swedes have both a good command of the majority language and a strong ingroup identity, but there is still variance that may help us explain attitudes toward language-based welfare services. In the next part of the analysis, we put these variances to the test, as we try to explain specific and general attitudes regarding language-based welfare services.

In our explanatory part of the analysis, the first model has been fitted to analyze the more *specific* attitudes regarding language-based welfare services (Table 1, column 1). As hypothesized, and in line with the expectation that rational considerations affect specific welfare attitudes, specific attitudes (satisfaction) regarding language-based welfare services are found to increase with the respondents' Finnish skills (0.089, $p < 0.05$). However, social identity, that is the pride taken in being Finland-Swede, is not statistically associated with specific attitudes regarding welfare services.

The covariates Swedish population per municipality, size of municipality and official municipal language are not statistically significant. The sex of the respondents is statistically significant (-0.80, $p < 0.001$), meaning that the data provides evidence of women, on

average, having a lower opinion of specific language service than men. Age and education are not statistically significant, whereas social and health care spending per capita increases the specific welfare service attitude (0.0001, $p < 0.01$). The respondents' political orientation and general public welfare opinion are not statistically significant.

Table 1
OLS Regression of Language Skills and Identity
on Swedish Welfare Service Attitude

VARIABLES	(1) Specific language-based welfare service attitude			(2) General language-based welfare service attitude		
	Beta coefficient	Std. error	p-value	Beta coefficient	Std. error	p-value
<i>Explanatory variables</i>						
Finnish language skills	0.089*	0.041	0.031	-0.182***	0.046	0.000
Ingroup identity	-0.049	0.045	0.280	0.204***	0.050	0.000
<i>Language context covariates</i>						
Swedish count /municipality (log10)	0.052	0.034	0.133	0.018	0.038	0.627
Size of municipality (population) (log10)	-0.018	0.021	0.398	0.005	0.023	0.842
Official municipal language dummy	-0.018	0.062	0.773	0.027	0.069	0.690
<i>Control covariates</i>						
Sex (male baseline)	-0.080***	0.019	0.000	0.031	0.021	0.144
Age	-0.001	0.001	0.319	-0.001	0.001	0.336
Education dummy	0.001	0.020	0.948	0.060**	0.022	0.007
Social and health care spending per capita	0.0001**	2.96e-05	0.001	2.01e-05	3.28e-05	0.539
Political orientation	0.076	0.044	0.089	-0.166**	0.050	0.001
Public welfare opinion	0.044	0.040	0.267	0.009	0.044	0.840
Constant	0.007	0.162	0.967	0.466***	0.179	0.010
Observations	855			855		
R-squared	0.046			0.077		

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

With the second model, we analyze *general* attitudes toward language-based welfare services (Table 1, column 2). Here we find that respondents' general attitudes are affected by both Finnish language skills and strength of ingroup identity, contrary to expectations. Attitudes (prioritization) of general language-based welfare services decrease with language skills (-0.182, $p < 0.001$), whereas attitudes (prioritization) increase with the pride taken in

being a Finland-Swede (0.204, $p < 0.001$). Hence, the data provides evidence that minority language-based welfare services are of lesser importance to those with increased skills in the national majority language. In addition, and in keeping with our formulated hypothesis, the data provides evidence that strength of minority language identity increases the priority given to minority language-based welfare services. For general attitudes, we find that both the cultural identity perspective and rational self-interest perspective help us understand attitudes regarding language-based welfare services.

The covariates Swedish population per municipality, size of municipality, official municipal language, sex and age are not statistically significant. The dummy of tertiary degree is significant (0.60, $p < 0.01$), meaning that, on average, respondents with a polytechnic or university degree place more value on Swedish language-based welfare services than respondents with a lower education. Social and health care spending per capita is not statistically significant. Political orientation is significantly associated (-0.166, $p < 0.01$) with general language-based welfare service attitudes, which is interpreted as a more right-leaning political orientation, decreasing the value associated with Swedish-based welfare services. The general public welfare opinion is not statistically significant in relation to general language-based welfare service attitudes.

Robustness checks and additional analyses

The multiple regression models were checked for multicollinearity by calculating the variance inflation factors (VIF) and tolerance values (1/VIF) (see Appendix). All VIF values were clearly below the commonly-held threshold for multicollinearity, 10, and even below the stricter threshold 5 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). The tolerance values were reciprocally all clearly above 0.1 which, if not exceeded, is considered, as a rule of thumb, to be an indication of multicollinearity.

To control for the robustness of the findings presented above, we tested several additional models. The intergroup variation of respondents between regions and municipalities was tested with mixed modeling that, contrary to OLS models, allows for random group variance. The results using fixed effects were largely similar to the OLS estimation, and the random intercept variance between regions and municipalities was not significant.

In addition, we modelled the interaction effects between independent variables and context covariates, to test for any potential effect of conditionality of self-interest and language-based identity on language-based welfare service attitudes. Here, we found the effect of language skills on general attitudes toward language-based welfare services to be moderated by the size of the municipality. The negative interaction term was post-estimated at local values, or margins, of the predictor, showing that Finnish language skills have a positive effect on general welfare attitudes in small municipalities, while it is negative in larger

cities. This would suggest that our finding that Finnish language skills are negatively related to the importance of receiving welfare services in Swedish is strongly driven by inhabitants in larger cities. The other interaction models were not statistically significant.

We also tested a model whereby a dummy variable for the bilingual region of Ostrobothnia was included. At the time of data collection, a structural reform of the health and social services system in Finland was still being planned, and these plans included measures that would have been particularly consequential to the Swedish-speaking population of that region. One of the outcomes of this abandoned reform would have been that the major hospital (Vaasa hospital), in the predominantly Swedish-speaking area of Ostrobothnia, would have seen a reduction in service levels (RP 224/2016 rd). However, this would have meant that Swedish-speaking citizens would have been transferred to another hospital, in a completely Finnish-speaking part of the region, and there was concern that service in Swedish would suffer as a result (Teir, 2016). Notwithstanding, the variable did not generate a statistically significant effect.

Discussion and concluding remarks

This study examines attitudes toward language-based welfare services from the perspective of a language minority. Based on previous research on language minorities, we have reason to believe that the mechanisms of opinion formation toward welfare services in these groups differ when compared to that of language majorities. Rational, self-interest related mechanisms, for example, are likely to relate to language needs, rather than economic gains. Furthermore, ingroup identity is expected to affect the general emphasis placed on language-based welfare services. The empirical question of the extent to which a language minority forms its opinions of language-based welfare services based on self-interest, and on a normative, value-based identity, has been the focus of this study, targeting the specific case of Finland-Swedes.

The study offers support for two theoretical perspectives. The first hypothesis, proposing that strong skills in the majority language leads to more positive attitudes regarding specific language-based welfare services, is supported. We also find that women, on average, have a lower opinion of specific language services. An explanation for this could be that they have a greater number of experiences with public welfare services, due to their traditionally greater responsibility for childcare within the family unit. Both findings are in keeping with previous research on specific welfare attitudes. Furthermore, the fact that public welfare opinion – which was added as a covariate to strengthen the exclusion of confounding explanations – only show a low, and in our model insignificant, effect gives us reason to believe that our model (and our main explanatory variable) captured the specific language-based welfare service attitudes in the way we theorized.

The more general language-based welfare service attitudes can, in turn, be explained by both rational self-interest and identity-related values. In line with our hypothesis, strong ingroup identity increases the appreciation of welfare services in a minority language. However, the study also finds that weaker skills in the majority language increases the importance attached to receiving welfare services in the native tongue. This is a reasonably intuitive result, since those with weaker language skills are likely more concerned with the service they receive, while those fluent in Finnish (many of whom are fully bilingual) are likely not to pay much attention to the language they speak when they are in contact with welfare service providers.

The lower concern for language-based services among those with stronger language skills could become problematic from a more long-term perspective, especially if it also means that these individuals are less likely to use services in the minority language. Since the Swedish-speaking population in Finland is fairly small, an unwillingness to make use of language-based welfare services among some members of this group would mean that there is relatively little demand for these services, and that they would, seemingly, be costly to uphold. For the members of the minority group who have a weaker command of the majority language, any reductions in the level of language-based services would likely further reduce their level of satisfaction. In turn, this could lead to an increasing lack of trust in the universal welfare system among members of the minority group.

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Appendix

Descriptive Statistics of Dependent, Independent and Control Variables

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	VIF model 1	VIF model 2
Dependent variables							
Specific welfare attitude	1135	.451	.278	0	1		
Normative welfare attitude	1137	.589	.318	0	1		
Independent variables							
Finnish language skills	1181	.716	.273	0	1	1.23	1.23
Ingroup identity	1152	.852	.213	0	1	1.10	1.11
Control variables							
Swedish population (log10)	1213	3.977	.531	.407	4.560	3.65	3.69
Size of municipality (log10)	1213	4.664	.696	3.284	5.812	2.56	2.55
Official municipality language dummy	1210	.940	.237	0	1	2.51	2.56
Sex	1211	.515	.500	0	1	1.06	1.06
Age	1211	56.571	18.867	19	87	1.14	1.14
Education dummy	1166	.413	.493	0	1	1.14	1.14
Social and health care spending per capita	1213	3109.83	358.632	2498.04	5090.09	1.33	1.33
Political orientation	993	.590	.241	0	1	1.30	1.32
Public welfare opinion	1110	.419	.255	0	1	1.18	1.19

Keywords

linguistic minority, universal welfare, Finland-Swedes, identity, Finland

Mots-clés

minorité linguistique, système de bien-être universel, Finlandais-Suédois, identité, Finlande

Nyckelord

språkminoritet, universell välfärdsservice, finlandssvenskar, identitet, Finland

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