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Media Language Planning During a Pandemic – the Influence of Covid-19 on Language Recommendations to Swedish Media in Finland

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Abstract

A global crisis, like the Covid-19 pandemic, can change not only societies but also languages by a great input of new terminology. For speakers of a minority language, media is in a key position to provide them with these new words in their own language. In the case of Finland-Swedish, the Swedish media in Finland is helped by professional language advisers in this language planning task. This study analyses the media language management in Finland-Swedish media, through a content analysis of language recommendations published between February 2020 and April 2021, as well as interviews with media language advisers. The analysis shows that about a quarter of the language recommendations published during these 15 months are coronavirus-related. The topics in the recommendations follow the development of the outbreak in Finland, showing how closely the language advisers work with the news organizations. Contrary to normal situations, the Finland-Swedish media language advisers could not fully rely on the language recommendations from Sweden, due to their different Covid-19 strategies. Instead, the norm authorities were experts in ministries and official institutions, illustrating how language planning is done collectively. The Finland-Swedish journalists rely heavily on the media language recommendations, showing a certain linguistic insecurity, which according to Muhr (2012) is typical for speakers of non-dominant varieties of a pluricentric language.

Keywords: media language planning; Finland-Swedish; Covid-19; coronavirus; minority language media; pluricentric language;



Introduction

"If we do not have words to describe our reality, not only does our language die, but also our perception of our surroundings."

With these words, a journalist at the Swedish department of Yle, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, describes their perception of Yle's role for the Swedish language in Finland (Stenberg-Sirén, 2018). The quotation reflects several aspects of the influence of minority language media (MLM) on language maintenance and minority language vitality discussed in the literature (Cormack, 2007; Zabaleta et al., 2010; Markelin, Husband & Moring, 2013; Jones & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2013). It implies that media provides the language community with sufficient words and concepts for describing and understanding current events in society, thereby enhancing the vitality of the language and enabling the language minority group's participation in the public sphere. However, for the most part, the academic discussion about this issue remains on a theoretical level. Following their overview of research on MLM, Browne and Uribe-Jongbloed (2013) stake out a research agenda for MLM. One of the aspects they highlight is the lack of research on the role MLM institutions play in developing and maintaining the standard language, by asking "How might/how do the media play a role in the actual development of standards, including the very important dimension of creation of new terminologies for various phenomena?" (ibid, p. 17.) This study focuses on precisely that aspect, using the case of the Covid-19 pandemic and Swedish-language media in Finland.

By reporting on news and current affairs, journalists constantly face the task of finding words for new phenomena in society. This corpus-planning task is emphasised for journalists working in a minority language, since new concepts often occur in the majority language first. Such an example can be found in the province of Friesland in the Netherlands, where the scientific institute for language and culture, the Fryske Akademy, published a wordlist with coronavirus-related terminology in the minority language of Frisian to guide the MLM journalists (Fryske Akademy, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically affected all parts of society and increased media consumption (Newman, 2020), which has accentuated the need for new words in many domains. For example, in the annual 'Words of the year' list published by Institutet för språk och folkminnen in Sweden (the Institute for Language and Folklore, 2020), more than half of the words are Covid-19-related.

The challenges of finding appropriate new terminology are part of the journalistic



process. However, the journalists do not come up with these words single-handedly; in the Swedish media in Finland, at least, they often turn to professional language advisers.¹ Media language management has a strong position in Finland-Swedish media, but has rarely been the object of documentation or analysis (see however, Gustafsson, 2017a). Professional language planning is part of *language management*, which in Spolsky's (2004) model for language policy accounts for one of three components, the other two being *language practices* and *language beliefs*. The exceptional year of 2020 has emphasized the role of language planning, making it a relevant object for study.

The aim of this study is to analyse the language management in minority language media during a (inter)national crisis, through the case of Covid-19 and Swedish media in Finland. In an extreme situation like a pandemic, how is media language management carried out? Which language issues have surfaced in connection to the pandemic, and which authorities do the Finland-Swedish media language advisers rely on?

I aim to answer these questions by analysing the media language recommendations published during the pandemic and by interviewing media language advisers working with Swedish media in Finland. In order to provide some background to the analysis, I begin with a discussion about how Finland has handled the Covid-19 pandemic. In the following sections, I reflect on the status of Swedish in Finland, present the Finland-Swedish media landscape and shed light on the media language management in Finland-Swedish media in general, before turning to the main focus of the present study. Finally, I discuss the results of the analysis and reflect on their implications.

1. Finland and Covid-19

The effective way in which Finland has handled the Covid-19 pandemic has received international attention ("Why is Finland coping so well with the coronavirus crisis?" n.d.) and the country has been very successful in keeping the number of infected down. Finland has also managed well in comparison with the other Nordic countries, where we see higher numbers of infected people (Worldometer, n.d.). The reasons behind the successful strategy are manifold, but one of the most crucial factors is the heavy restrictions imposed by the Sanna Marin government (Tiirinki et al. 2020). These include temporarily closing the borders, strong recommendations to work from home and remote schooling (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, n.d.).

Another aspect, not to be underestimated, is the steady supply of information from



different official sources as well as from the media. Starting at the end of February 2020, the government has regularly held press briefings, giving information about the coronavirus situation, announcing new restrictions or guidelines as well as answering questions from journalists. Several television channels have broadcast the press briefings live and they can also be watched on the Prime Minister's Office's YouTube channel. As of early May 2021, 106 press briefings were available on the YouTube channel. In accordance with the Finnish Language Act (423/2003, 32 §), official information crucial for people's lives, health or safety must be provided in the two national languages, Finnish and Swedish. From the start, the press briefings were simultaneously interpreted into Finnish sign language and after a couple of weeks, most of them were also simultaneously interpreted into Swedish. The interpretations received much attention as two of the interpreters were granted a language award for their efforts (Nummenmaa & Morney, 2021).

Many of the press briefings have been led by Prime Minister Sanna Marin, who has been accompanied by different ministers and health officials. Unusually enough, two of the top ministers during this period were Swedish-speakers: the Minister of Justice, Anna-Maja Henriksson, and the Minister of Education, Li Andersson. During press briefings, they have given statements in both Finnish and Swedish, and answered questions from Swedish-speaking reporters in Swedish, as can be seen for example in a press briefing from March 5, 2021, where Minister Henriksson is asked questions in Swedish by a reporter (Prime Minister's Office, 2021). In addition, one of the main health officials giving public statements during this time, the Director of the Department for Health Security at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL),² Mika Salminen, is also fluent in Swedish and has often been interviewed in Finland-Swedish media. Even though the use of Finnish clearly dominates the official statements and press briefings, this practice has normalised the parallel use of Finnish and Swedish, and brought Swedish, as the less spoken language, into the national arena.

However, this crisis has made apparent the need for information in many other languages as well. On a global scale, information about Covid-19 has been lacking for minority groups (Piller, Zhang & Li 2020). In Finland, the national authorities have not been serving the immigrant communities nearly enough, whereas the main cities in the capital region (Helsinki,³ Espoo,⁴ Vantaa⁵) are providing some information about the coronavirus in Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Dari, English, Estonian, Kurdish, Persian, Russian and Somali. In addition, the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle has broadcast coronavirus news in Arabic, Kurdish, Persian and Somali, in addition to the established news services in English, Karelian, Russian



and Sámi. The information – or lack thereof – in other than the national languages should be analysed in depth, and deserves an article of its own. However, this article is restricted to Swedish, the less spoken national language in Finland, and how the media language planning has been carried out during a year with Covid-19.

2. Swedish and Swedish media in Finland

Throughout this article, I refer to Swedish in Finland as a *minority language*. However, this term is not completely accurate. Swedish is spoken by a minority in Finland, but it is a national language with the same legal status as Finnish, the majority language. In 2020, the number of registered Swedish-speakers was 287,871, which constitutes 5.2 percent of the population (total population 5 533 793, Statistics Finland, 2021). The actual number of people with knowledge of Swedish is much higher, though. Since a person can register only one mother tongue, there are quite a number who are registered as Finnish-speakers, but still speak Swedish. These are either bilingual or live in a bilingual family, for example due to marriage. About a third of the Swedish-speakers have a Finnish-speaking partner, and two-thirds of the children in Finnish-Swedish bilingual families are registered as Swedish-speakers (Saarela, 2021). The Swedish speakers are mainly located along the western and southern coast and on the Åland islands.

Swedish is considered a pluricentric language, i.e. it is a national or official language in more than one country (Clyne, 1991). Swedish in Sweden is the dominant variety, since it is spoken by 85 percent of the population in Sweden, and Swedish in Finland can be seen as a non-dominant variety (Norrby, Lindström, Nilsson & Wide, 2020). Still, Finland-Swedish does not meet all the criteria in Muhr's (2012, pp. 39-41) typology of non-dominant varieties. For instance, the language community shows great loyalty towards Finland-Swedish and there is a strong language planning apparatus in place. Bijvoet and Laureys (2001, pp. 209-212) see several similar features in Flemish (Dutch as spoken in Belgium) and Finland-Swedish. They are both non-dominant varieties in multilingual countries, sharing the linguistic space with French in Belgium and Finnish in Finland. The dominant variety is spoken in the neighbouring country (The Netherlands and Sweden, respectively) and the two pairs of countries have been part of the same nation historically. Finland-Swedish and Flemish are surrounded by several vital dialects and they use archaic words compared to the dominant variety, while simultaneously incorporating loan words from the local majority languages (Finnish and French). In both societies, language is important and often an issue for societal discussion, not infrequently concerning language attitudes, where even purist tendencies can be seen. Cultural



and media content is easily available in the whole language area, and journalists are seen as norm-setters.

There are of course many differences between Flemish and Finland-Swedish as well; one of the most important is size. Flemish is spoken by about 6 million people,⁶ which is more than the entire population of Finland. The size of the dominant languages differs as well: French is a world language, whereas Finnish is spoken mainly in Finland. Even though there is not any cross-border support from Sweden, Swedish-speakers in Finland might find some encouragement in the fact that, when compared internationally, Swedish is spoken by considerably more people than Finnish. For many, Sweden feels culturally close; for example about 70 percent of Finland-Swedish teenagers use media content from Sweden regularly (Stenberg-Sirén, 2021) and many Swedish-speakers move to Sweden for studies or work (Kepsu & Henriksson, 2019). However, there is no evidence that the use of media content from Sweden has a significant impact on the Swedish variety spoken in Finland, like the accelerated language shift in Austrian German towards the dominant form of German as used in Germany, which Muhr (2003) ascribes to language contact through media. Still, news and current affairs in Sweden are of interest in Finland, which is something the Finland-Swedish newspapers take into account (Vincze & Holley, 2013, p. 67).

The Swedish-language media landscape in Finland is rich in relation to the size of the language group (Vincze & Moring, 2013, p. 49). One of the main actors is the public service media provider, Yle. The Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle is by law bound to "treat in its broadcasting Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking citizens on equal grounds" (Act on the Finnish Broadcasting Company). The Swedish-language programming is organised in a separate department, called 'Swedish Yle', with its own director and organisational structure. Swedish Yle produces two national radio channels: Yle Vega, a traditional full-service radio channel, including news and regional content, and Yle X3M, aimed at a younger audience. In addition, the television channel Yle Fem broadcasts Swedish-language television programs in a channel slot shared with a Finnish-language television channel. Considering media consumption trends of today, it is important to note that Yle's extensive online services, as well as content for mobile apps and social media, are also available in Swedish.

In addition to the public service media, there is a considerable number of newspapers in Swedish. All the newspapers are private, and several of them are owned by foundations, with subscriptions and advertisements as their main sources of income. The numbers of



subscriptions as of 2020 are listed in brackets following each newspaper below, according to Media Audit Finland (2021). KSF Media owns the three newspapers in southern Finland: *Västra Nyland* (6,424), *Östnyland* (5,355) and the main newspaper covering the capital region *Hufvudstadsbladet* (29,623). The newest part of KSF Media is *HBL Junior* (subscription numbers not available), a biweekly newspaper for kids. In Ostrobothnia on the west coast, the publishing house HSS Media is the main actor, and also has three newspapers: *Österbottens Tidning* (11,491), *Vasabladet* (15,669) and *Syd-Österbotten* (5,225). In the southwest, ÅU Media owns *Åbo Underrättelser* (5,318) and the Finnish-Swedish bilingual newspaper Pargas kungörelser (3,731). On the Åland islands there are two newspapers, *Ålandstidningen* (subscription numbers not available) and *Nya Åland* (subscription numbers not available), as well as a separate public service company *Ålands radio och tv* (for a thorough analysis of the Åland mediascape, see Lindén, 2021). Finally, there are several hyperlocal newspapers in the Swedish-language parts of the country.

Working side by side with the media houses is a Swedish-language news agency, *Svensk Presstjänst* (SPT), owned by the newspapers collectively. SPT serves the newspapers with news articles and coverage of press briefings. Another part of SPT's services is media language management, which will be presented more fully in the following section.⁷

3. Media language management

Language planning is an important part of the language standardization process. Haugen's (1966, 1983) classic model includes the four steps of *selection* and *codification of the norm*, as well as *implementation* and *elaboration of function*. After a standard variety has been accepted and it has reached a certain degree of status and is used in several domains, language planning moves on to continuous cultivation and modernization (Haugen, 1983; Ammon, 2004). For a language in use, the language users are the main cultivators and un-official language planners, but in certain domains, such as media, professional language advisers step in. According to Ammon (2004), certain media genres, like newspapers, constitute model texts and broadcast news journalists can be called model speakers who are actively producing and reproducing the standard variety. According to Ammon (2004, p. 277), language norm authorities are one of the social forces maintaining a standard variety. It is part of the professional role of norm authorities to correct other people's language use, the most typical example is teachers in educational contexts. In addition, language norm authorities can be found in publishing and broadcasting, as editors-in-chief, producers, or as media language advisers. Therefore, media

language management is an effective way to develop and keep the norm updated, since media language has the potential to reach large parts of a speech community.

Media language management can also be seen as part of the theory of language policy. Spolsky (2004, p. 5) distinguishes between three components of language policy in a speech community: "its *language practices* – the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its *language beliefs or ideology* – the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of *language intervention, planning or management*" (my emphasis).

In this study, I focus on the specific context of minority language media, and journalists as professional language practitioners. Naturally, the language practices in media are multifaceted and vary according to medium, platform, and genre, as well as to the characteristics of the individual journalists. In the case of Swedish media in Finland, there is a strong tradition of relying on language "rules" and advice from the language advisers, and a general view among media practitioners is that the media language should be of high quality (Stenberg-Sirén, 2018, Gustafsson, 2017b). My earlier study of the Finland-Swedish radio and television news showed that Swedish Yle's news journalists follow the pronunciation guidelines closely (Stenberg-Sirén, 2018). My analysis of phonological variables from news broadcasts from 1970 to 2009 shows a shift towards an even more formal pronunciation. In addition, some socially marked phonological quantity features have become regionally and socially more neutral, leading to a sociolinguistic neutralization of the spoken standard language in the news. In other words, the *language practices* of the news journalists are very close to the norm for the standard language. In accordance with the selected norm, we see a strong standard language ideology among the Yle-journalists (Stenberg-Sirén, 2018), and they assume a great responsibility for the minority language, connecting it to Yle's public service mission.

The third component of language policy is language management. According to Spolsky (2019, p. 326), language management is "the way in which some individual or group or institution set out to modify the practices and beliefs of members of the community". In his modification of the theory of language policy, Spolsky (2019) splits language management into two groups: *language managers with authority* and *language advocates without power*, for example language activists trying to revive a language. He also adds the level of the individual, noting the importance of self-management when speakers try to modify their proficiency and



repertoire. In his historical account of Language Management Theory (LMT), Nekvapil (2016) points to differing definitions and interpretations of the concept *language management*, showing the vast complexity of the field. It is beyond the scope of this article to go deeper into the conceptual discussion, but I will conclude that the language management in question here is on an institutional level (Nekvapil, 2016) performed by language managers with authority (Spolsky, 2019); in other words, the professional language advisers working with media language.

3.1 Language management in Finland-Swedish media

The media language management for the Swedish media in Finland goes back to 1980, when language advisers at the Institute for the Languages of Finland⁸ (hereinafter the Language Institute) sent their first language recommendations to the Swedish radio at Yle. In 1983, the process was formalized and a part-time language adviser was employed. In the 1990s, the newspapers followed suit, and an agreement about a language adviser was made between the Language Institute and *Hufvudstadsbladet* in 1994. (Gustafsson, 2017a). Today, media language management is part of the Swedish news agency, SPT. Two media language advisers are working with the newspapers (the newspapers on the Åland islands are not included in the service) and one language adviser is working with SPT's own journalistic output, as well as the website Mediespråk, where some of the language recommendations are published. Until recently, a third media language adviser working with Yle was part of SPT's organisation, but she is now directly employed by Yle. All in all, there are four media language advisers working with the media houses.

The media language advisers work in close proximity to the news journalists and answer their questions on a daily basis. They give recommendations regarding lexical issues, pronunciation, and linguistic norms, which are often related to daily news events. They also monitor the news language on all platforms and give the journalists feedback on their work, as well as organise workshops and publish guidelines (Gustafsson, 2017a). The language recommendations are written cooperatively and sent to the journalists through different channels. In Yle and HSS Media, the language adviser regularly sends out language advice through e-mail, whereas in KSF Media, ÅU and SPT the language adviser posts language advice in a Slack-thread⁹ dedicated to language issues. Some of the recommendations are also published on the website Mediespråk (n.d., a). According to the language advisers interviewed for this study, since the website is available to the general public, the language



recommendations published there need to be even more meticulously formulated. This means that some of the recommendations might be published on the website considerably later than in the media houses.

On a higher level, the media language advisers cooperate with the leading language specialist¹⁰ in charge of media language at the Language Institute's Swedish department. Even though the Language Institute is an official language management organisation, its task is not to implement a specific language policy from above, like the examples mentioned in Spolsky (2009). Rather, it is devoted to language documentation, language cultivation and guidance, giving language advice, public statements and arranging courses for government and municipal officials (Institute for the Languages of Finland, n.d.). Extremely important media language issues are discussed in the Media Language Group (Mediespråksgruppen i Finland), consisting of language experts and media representatives (Mediespråk n.d., b). The group is chaired by the leading language specialist and it convenes a few times a year. A similar group can be found in Sweden (Mediespråksgruppen i Sverige), and the leading language specialist and at least one of the media language advisers from Finland are part of the Swedish group as well, which reflects the close cooperation between the language planning institutions in Finland and Sweden (Gustafsson, 2017a).

4. Research questions, empirical data and methods

The main research question motivating this study is: How has the Covid-19 pandemic been reflected in the media language management in Swedish media in Finland? Supporting questions are: Which language issues are covered in the media language recommendations and which language authorities do the language advisers rely on? In order to answer these questions, I analyse two sets of data: language recommendations published from February 2020 to April 2021, and interviews with language advisers working with the Finland-Swedish media.

I interviewed three language advisers: two media language advisers working with the media houses, and the leading language specialist from the Swedish department of the Language Institute. I conducted a semi-structured group interview with the three of them together at the beginning of May 2021 (hereinafter quoted as Interview with language advisers, 2021). The interview was based on a specific set of questions but allowed for discussion and open dialogue. The interview was done as a video call; it was recorded and then transcribed. The answers were analysed according to the research questions, but also allowing for new themes to arise. During the next three weeks, I asked follow-up questions by e-mail and

telephone, mostly relating to specific language advice. Even though it is relatively easy to figure out the identities of the interviewees, since they participate in the capacity of their professional roles, I do not refer to them by name. In this way, I want to put the focus on what they convey as professionals, and not as individuals. The interview was conducted in Swedish, and the quotations included in this article have been translated into English.

The dataset of language recommendations has been gathered from several sources. Firstly, I collected the language recommendations posted on the website Mediespråk. Since the search function does not include publication time as an option, it was not a feasible task to sort through all the posts to find the ones published since the start of the pandemic. Fortunately, the language advisers were able to provide me with a list from the content management system, which included all of the language recommendations from the beginning of March 2020, starting with the first Covid-19-related post. From March 11, 2020, to the end of April 2021 a total of 37 language recommendation posts were published on the website.

Secondly, I collected the language recommendations distributed to Yle. However, during the critical period from January to April 2020, Yle lacked a language adviser. The previous language adviser changed jobs in January, and a new one was not recruited until May. The number of language recommendations is therefore lower than normal. Still, from May 2020 to April 2021, a total of 77 e-mails with language recommendations were sent to the Yle journalists.

Thirdly, I wanted to include the language advice published in the Slack-channel for the newspapers in the analysis. Since I do not have access to the in-company workspaces, the language advisers assisted me by providing a list of the headlines of all the language recommendations from the time period in question, as well as a copy of all coronavirus-related language recommendations. In total, 123 language recommendations were published for the newspaper journalists from the first coronavirus-related one in February 2020 to the end of April 2021.

In total, 200 e-mails and Slack-posts with language recommendations were sent to the media houses from February 2020 to April 2021 and a total of 37 language recommendations were published on the website Mediespråk from March 2020 to April 2021. These numbers include all the language recommendations, not only the ones related to Covid-19. In addition, many older posts on the website were reactivated through a new piece of advice or a reminder. Typically, they are language recommendations related to certain holidays (for example



reminders of the names of the days around Easter or May Day, or terminology related to annual traditions). The reactivated posts can also relate to special terminology (for example legal terms or health care administration) or to general grammar issues (for example prepositions or abbreviations). In other words, we see that some language issues are recurring and that the lifespan of the language recommendations listed on the website Mediespråk is long. Of the 37 recommendations published on the website during the time period analysed (02/20–04/21), 19 are coronavirus-related. A list of these can be found in the Appendix.

Of the 200 language recommendations distributed to the media houses, some are only reminders pointing to prior-published advice without adding anything new. When removing them, we are left with 195 language recommendation posts. I analyse these language recommendations on two levels. Firstly, I analyse the whole data set to get a picture of the entire output during the year, with specific focus on how many of the language recommendations are coronavirus-related. Secondly, I analyse the coronavirus-related recommendations in detail. As Neuendorf (2017) points out, content analysis includes both quantitative and qualitative elements, as this study does. I examine the thematic topics covered in the recommendations and analyse how the recommendations progress over time. Subsequently, I focus on the authorities that are mentioned in the recommendations, including the normative sources referred to and comparisons to other languages. Since the number of language recommendations is limited, it is not relevant to perform a detailed quantitative analysis - instead I will discuss the distribution on a general level. Some of the language recommendations I discuss in more detail, but I will not undertake a deeper linguistic analysis of all the recommendations, since many of the nuances would be lost in translation. This would be an interesting topic for a follow-up study, though.

5. Analysis

The content analysis shows that in general, the language recommendations posted in the different channels are quite similar in style. This might be due to the fact that many of the language recommendations are formulated by the language advisers collectively (Interview with language advisers, 2021). However, some of the language recommendations distributed to Yle also include pronunciation guidelines, which of course are not relevant for the newspaper journalists. Even though the style is similar, the length of the language recommendations vary. Some of them are very short, just a few lines, whereas others are long, and might contain several recommendations in the same post. The following example is a shorter post about how to use



the word quarantine, posted on March 11, 2020 for the newspaper journalists and on the website Mediespråk.

Ord med karantän

Sammansättningar med karantän kan bildas med eller utan s i fogen: karantänsläkare eller karantänläkare. Var trots det konsekvent och använd ett skrivsätt i en och samma text.

Använd gärna uttrycken sätta i karantän, bli satt i karantän, sitta i karantän, ligga i karantän, hållas i karantän i stället för "försätta" i karantän.

Källor: Språkinstitutet och Svensk ordbok

11.3.2020

This language recommendation illustrates the general pattern of all the posts. It starts with a headline and then goes straight to the main points; in this case how to use the word quarantine in compound words and in phrases, with examples and recommendations. At the end, sources are referred to (the Language Institute and Svensk ordbok, a lexicon that describes the Swedish language in modern use) and finally the date of publication.

In the following sections, I go deeper into the analysis. I start by analysing the content of the recommendations relating to Covid-19, focusing both on thematic distribution and on chronology. Using two cases ('phases' and 'face masks'), I analyse how new terminology enters the language and which language sources are used, thereby discussing the language planning authorities. Throughout, I use the analysis of the language recommendations and the interview data in parallel.

5.1 Coronavirus-related content

Deciding which language recommendations are coronavirus-related was harder than one might think. Naturally, those dealing with coronavirus-related terminology are obvious, but many are borderline. For example, there are several recommendations about general language issues that use coronavirus-related examples. Others might not explicitly mention coronavirus but may be about an issue relevant because of the pandemic, for example how to write about over 70-year-olds (who were considered a risk group). In the end, I decided to count all the language recommendations covering an issue related to or mentioning the pandemic in any way, directly or indirectly, as coronavirus-related. Of the 195 recommendations, 56 were related to



coronavirus, which is the equivalent to about a quarter of all the language posts. According to the interviewed language advisers, this is a high number, and it reflects the strong need for information that was noted especially in spring 2020, at the start of the pandemic:

"I do not think there was a single day when we did not work with some coronavirusrelated language issues. The world has not seen anything like this in modern times and there was such a strong need for information – understandable information – about medical issues, school arrangements, restaurants, the pronunciation of different medicines... yes, all aspects of society. You could call it an information tsunami." (Interview with language advisers, 2021)

The chronology of the published recommendations is not clear-cut, since many were published at different times in the different channels. Regardless of the exact dates, one can still see how the recommendations follow the development of the pandemic in Finland. About half of the coronavirus-related language recommendations were published during spring 2020, when the seriousness of the coronavirus crisis became clear and news about the virus dominated all newscasts and newspapers. The situation calmed down during summer 2020, which is seen in the number of recommendations as well. Only a handful of coronavirus-related language recommendations were published during the summer months. From October 2020, the virus situation worsened and this was followed by a rise in the number of language recommendations, and they remained at a high level until April 2021, when the period of analysis for this article ended.

The content of the recommendations correlates with the advance of the pandemic. This is illustrated by the first three topics. The first language recommendation is about the name of the virus and the resulting illness, followed by advice about how to use the word quarantine and which words to use when reporting about different events being cancelled. During spring of 2020, the language recommendations cover several healthcare issues, for example how to describe the hospitals' care capacity, the names of healthcare institutions in other countries and what to call the tests for antibodies. In March 2020, the Finnish government declared a state of emergency, which led to rather lengthy language recommendations about how to deal with the complicated legal terms. The restrictions can be seen in advice about more everyday matters as well, for example how to deal with the terms social or physical distancing, and what the best words for takeaway food are. Another regularly occurring issue is what to call face masks, a discussion I return to below.

In autumn 2020, the authorities introduced different phases for describing the spread of the virus and the severity of the situation. Many of the language recommendations concern the names of the phases, which are described in detail in the next section. The reinforced restrictions can be seen in language advice about closed schools, different types of restaurants and opening hours. At the beginning of 2021, the dominant theme was vaccines and vaccinations, with several recommendations concerning the names of the vaccines and how to pronounce them. Among the last language recommendations published during the period analysed in this study, we find themes like coronavirus passports and post-Covid, which neatly completes the circle.

On a more general level, two themes dominate the content: health issues and restrictions. Naturally, these overlap to some extent since the restrictions are made for health reasons. The health issues are about the virus itself, the number of infected people, healthcare and vaccines. The language recommendations about different restrictions can be separated into two groups: individual and societal. The individual restrictions apply to, for example, the use of face masks, quarantine regulations and the contact-tracing app launched to track exposure to the virus, whereas societal restrictions are lockdowns, closed restaurants and homeschooling. In conclusion, we see that the language advisers are in touch with current developments and that they play a part in shaping the vocabulary used throughout the crisis.

5.2 Professional terminology entering 'normal' language and the case of 'phases of the pandemic'

According to the language advisers interviewed, it has been a challenge to formulate language advice about complex matters from many different areas. In general, they do not deal with specialized terminology, but in this case, they have had to expand their areas of expertise into several areas, including medical and legal terms:

"Normally, we give advice about the standard language, and not specialized terminology, but this year has shown that the line between professional language and standard language has shifted. We have received many questions that would demand expertise that we do not have. Professional terminology has been absorbed into normal language and this has perhaps been the biggest change, linguistically speaking." (Interview with language advisers, 2021).

In addition to cooperating with the language planning organisations in Sweden, the Finland-Swedish language advisers have domestic partners to turn to. Perhaps the most important



partners are the official translators at the Prime Minister's Office and different ministries. In their daily work, they translate legal documents, laws, statements and press releases, and they might be the ones deciding upon the Swedish terminology in many cases. In relation to the pandemic, the terminologists at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) have been an important source of information.

One example of how the authorities work together with specialised terminology is the case of the 'phases', as mentioned earlier. The authorities came up with three phases to describe the spread of the coronavirus and the resulting levels of restrictions. For a long time, there was some confusion as to what the three phases were to be called in Swedish. In the first language recommendation about this issue sent to Yle's e-mail list at the beginning of October 2020, the language adviser refers to previous discussions about the terms, which probably took place during a meeting or another 'live' situation. The main point in the recommendation is that the previously recommended term for the second phase, 'upptrappningsfas', should be avoided going forward. Apparently, several authorities, for example THL and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health had used 'upptrappningsfas' and therefore the media language advisers had recommended that word. However, after a couple of weeks, the Language Institute had given their recommendation, concluding that the best solution would be to avoid the word entirely and use an alternative phrasing. Still, if a substantive was needed, they recommended 'accelerationsfas'. The media language adviser finishes her letter by stating that the translators at the Prime Minister's Office will now avoid the word 'upptrappningsfas', but that "we will see where the authorities land...". The never-ending story about the phases continued throughout the autumn, with several revisions of the recommended terms. At the end of October 2020, one of the media language advisers writes about an upcoming meeting between representatives from the Ministries, the Prime Minister's Office, THL and the Language Institute in order to agree upon which terms to use. The following language recommendation starts with the sentence: "I hope this is the last time I write to you about what the different phases of the coronavirus pandemic should be called." It continues by describing the terms agreed upon: 'basnivå' (base level), 'accelerationsfas' (acceleration phase) and 'samhällsspridning' (community spread). Later on, the terms for the phases appear in several reminders. In one language recommendation from the end of November 2020, the media language adviser mentions that the terms agreed upon are not consequently being used by all the authorities, but she still urges the journalists to stick to the norm. The issue returns in a language recommendation from the end of February 2021, where the language adviser writes:



"Obs! Även om minister Henriksson använde ett annat ord på pressträffen nyss så är rekommendationen fortfarande att använda uttrycket **fasen för samhällsspridning** för den allvarligaste fasen av pandemin." (Note! Even though the Minister [of Justice], [Anna-Maja] Henriksson used another word in the press briefing just now, the recommendation is still to use the expression **the phase of community spread** for the most serious phase of the pandemic.)

This is an example of what the language management process may look like when new words enter society quickly (in Finnish) and several authorities try to find relevant equivalents in Swedish. It also illustrates how many people and institutions there are that are actually acting as language norm authorities (Ammon, 2004) in different capacities, working as translators or terminologists and thereby shaping the official language. However, their work is not coordinated or guided from 'above', which might make language management arbitrary in some respects, and dependent on the individuals. On the other hand, when government translators are working close to the experts in their respective fields, they may have a better possibility to find the best words and phrases than a language-planning group consisting of linguistic experts.

In the interview, the media language advisers express their gratitude for the help they get from professionals in government institutions, but explain that the biggest obstacle is the different timeframes they work with. Journalists might need an answer within the hour for a news broadcast or a newspaper deadline, whereas the government officials might respond after several weeks. The media language advisers still appreciate this network and point out that the pandemic has emphasised the need for medical expertise to help them find the right medical terms in Swedish. In addition, they mention examples of how they themselves have been able to provide advice and lexical solutions to the government's translators, and that they are of use to one another.

5.3 Language authorities and the case of 'face masks'

In 46 of the 56 coronavirus-related language recommendations, there are references to some kind of sources; often several sources are mentioned. For example, in a language recommendation about what to call the vaccine Sputnik V, the sources mentioned are the Language Institute, the media language advisers at the Swedish Television (Sveriges television, SVT) and Swedish Radio (Sveriges radio, SR), a Russian newspaper article, an article from SVT and the correspondent working for Swedish Yle in Russia. The media language advisers also mention in the interview that the journalists can be very helpful in finding accurate terms



for specialized words since they are experts in their fields.

The sum of all of the references made in the 46 language recommendations is 112. Of these, 38 are to language planning actors (the Language Institutes in Finland and Sweden, the website Mediespråk, the Swedish media language advisers and generally "språkvården", language management). Almost as many, 30 references, are to different authorities (health authorities, ministries, laws etc.); 27 are to dictionaries (the most common one being Svensk ordbok¹¹); 10 are to media content, and the final seven are to other sources (for example specific individuals or Wikipedia). Most of the dictionaries used as sources in the recommendations are Swedish, but only four of the 30 references to authorities concern an institution in Sweden. In all four cases, the reference is to the Public Health Agency of Sweden (Folkhälsomyndigheten i Sverige, the equivalent of THL in Finland).¹² Of the 38 references to language planning actors, only nine concern language advisers or language organisations in Sweden. This can be seen in Table 1.

Language planning actors	References
Language Institute in Finland, incl. publications	14
Mediespråk	9
Finland-Swedish media language advisers	1
Finnish colleagues	2
Language Institute in Sweden, incl. publications	4
(Media) Language advisers from Sweden/colleagues	5
General language management	3
Total	38

Table 1. References to language planning actors in the coronavirus-related language recommendations.

Note: author's own table, compiled from data across the various institutions. References with a grey background are from Sweden.

In the 56 coronavirus-related language recommendations, other languages are compared with or are mentioned 49 times. Only 10 of these are references to Swedish, compared to 27 cases of references to Finnish (and 7 to English, the rest being German or 'general language'). This shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has been a national matter in many respects, despite its global spread.

Normally, the cooperation between the Finland-Swedish language advisers and their counterparts in Sweden is close, and the time period analysed is no exception. Many coronavirus-related issues have been discussed in the media language group in Sweden, as well as directly with the two media language advisers at the Swedish public service media



companies. However, in the interview conducted for this research, the Finland-Swedish language advisers explained that they have not always been able to turn to their Swedish colleagues for guidance, due to societal differences and to the diverging strategies adopted by Finland and Sweden in handling the pandemic:

"Even though we have been in close contact with our colleagues in Sweden, we have not always been able to rely on their help, because our societies are different and we have had different strategies for coping with this. The official information released by our authorities always have our own society and the Finnish language as its starting point, so we have had to be creative and find many solutions on our own." (Interview with language advisers, 2021).

The discussions about language policy decisions regarding specific words have also shown the different approaches to language management in Sweden and Finland. The media language advisers point out that whereas the need for clear answers is strong in Finland, the approach is different in the media language group in Sweden (Mediespråksgruppen i Sverige):

"In some cases, when we have raised a question about a specific word the Swedish participants have been of the opinion that we can 'wait and see'. They can afford to let the language users create the norm, which we as a minority language cannot do. Our journalists demand clear answers right away, and we have to give it to them." (Interview with language advisers, 2021).

One particular case mentioned by the language advisers, is the Swedish word for face masks. Since the recommendation to use face masks was implemented much sooner in Finland than in Sweden, the question about the preferred term came up in Finland first. In Finnish, the most common word is '*kasvomaski*', which directly translates to '*ansiktsmask*' in Swedish (and *face mask* in English). Most Swedish-speaking Finns automatically started using the direct translation '*ansiktsmask*'. After some terminological detective work, the Finland-Swedish language advisers concluded that '*ansiktsmask*' is more of a general term for different kinds of face-protective gear, and instead the appropriate term would be '*munskydd*' (directly translated: mouth protection). The terminological investigation was sent to the Language Council of Sweden, which supported the suggested recommendation by the Finland-Swedish language advisers. Consequently, the Finland-Swedish media language advisers published a post about the recommended word '*munskydd*' on the website Mediespråk (19.5.2020), comparing it with other Swedish terms and their Finnish counterparts, and with references to several dictionaries,



language authorities, health institutions, and terminological databases.

However, a few months later, in October 2020, Swedish language specialists from the Language Council of Sweden published a blog post (Holmér, Tingsell & Webjörn, 2020) discussing the different words in use and whether or not the word '*mask*' should be avoided. They concluded that even though the word '*mask*' traditionally has referred to theatre or masquerades, or to protective gear like gas masks, it cannot be excluded from use in this new context. Since '*mask*' is used so frequently, it has been conventionalized, meaning that people in general understand and accept the word in this context, and therefore the word '*mask*' should be accepted too. This case is an example of how the Swedish language specialists are able to base their recommendations on language use, thereby opening up for broader variations.

General language recommendations differ from targeted advice to a group of professionals, and in the interview, the Finland-Swedish media language advisers emphasise that they seldom can afford the same type of reasoning as their Swedish colleagues do. The journalists demand clear-cut answers and 'simple solutions'. Of course, this is nearly impossible in language planning, which nowadays is less prescriptive and more descriptive (af Hällström-Reijonen, 2019). However, according to the interviewees, offering several alternatives to the journalists is not a good solution since that might lead to uncertainty. Therefore, the media language advisers might give stricter recommendations to the journalists than they would to other language users. They emphasise that for journalists working in a minority language - possibly with a certain insecurity about their own linguistic expertise - it is safer to take the easy way out and choose a solution that is rock-solid. They might not necessarily dare to use, for example, unusual words, since they fear that people might react negatively. Especially in the news, it is important that the language is neutral and does not divert attention away from the content. The language advisers point out that a minority language journalist does not have the same linguistic space as a majority language journalist:

"If you read a text from Sweden with some unusual wording or constructions, you do not necessarily question the correctness of the text. But, if the text is written by someone from Finland, you easily think that the deviations are mistakes or a sign of bad language skills." (Interview with language advisers, 2021).

According to Muhr (2012, p. 29), nations with a dominant language variety regard language change differently depending on where the change takes place. In his view, language changes in the dominant variety "are perceived as 'natural' (and after some time codified) whereas the



developments of the 'non-dominating varieties' are more or less seen as secessionist and a danger to the unity of the language." According to the media language advisers interviewed, the first part seems to be accurate for the language advisers in Sweden. They allow for variation and let usage guide them, which might lead to elaboration of the language. However, Finland-Swedish language advisers take on a more conservative role in regard to deviations in the non-dominant variety. They express a firm belief that deviations from the Swedish standard norm might endanger the Swedish language in Finland. This 'survival strategy' is the foundation for the language planning in Finland (af Hällström-Reijonen, 2019), which in some sense might be seen as a form of social purism (Vikør, 2010, p. 19).

The general reluctance to allow for deviations from the norm might be mirrored by the journalists and result in a certain degree of uncertainty. According to Muhr (2012, p. 40) it is not uncommon among speakers of a non-dominant variety to feel insecure, which might lead to a preference for the dominant norm. Linguistic insecurity has traditionally been associated with regional or social varieties in relation to a standard/prestige variety (Labov, 1966), but Preston (2013, p. 324) broadens the concept and includes all situations when someone feels "they are not able to perform the linguistic job at hand." Hence, when taking a purist stance, one minimises the risks of being wrong. According to the media language advisers, this might be an explanation for the journalists' strong demand for language advice:

"Our journalists listen to our recommendations much more than they do in Sweden, where the language advisers might give a recommendation, but then the language users go in another direction anyway. Here the situation is different and the journalists really need our advice and want clear recommendations, not several different alternatives." (Interview with language advisers, 2021).

The media language advisers point out that they have a direct channel to almost all of the Finland-Swedish journalists, which is very unusual and only possible in a small community. Of course, it comes down to the individual journalist if they actually read the recommendations, but in the language advisers' opinions, they reach the journalists well. They also feel that they have the support of the editors-in-chief, and that the journalists trust them and value their work (which can also be seen in Gustafsson, 2017b).

6. Summary and discussion

The aim of this study was to analyse how the Covid-19 pandemic is displayed in language management in Swedish media in Finland, which language authorities the language advisers

rely on, and which language issues were dealt with during the pandemic. These questions were approached through a content analysis of the media language recommendations published from February 2020 to April 2021 and an interview with media language advisers.

The analysis shows that 56 of the 195 language recommendations distributed to the media houses during these 15 months were coronavirus-related. Most of the recommendations relate to either health issues or restrictions. The recommendations follow the development of the outbreak in Finland, showing how closely the language advisers work with the news journalists. The media language advisers emphasise the role of minority language media, especially in a crisis. The need for information is great and it is important to get understandable information in one's own language, which the media can provide. This study has shown that MLM can play an important role in creating new terminology and mediating it. In this way, media language advisers are expanding and updating the lexical code of the standard language (Haugen, 1983), whereas the journalists contribute to the elaboration of the function of the standard language.

An aspect making this news event unusual is the long duration of the crisis and its impact on all parts of society. This has resulted in an expansion of our everyday vocabulary and an input of professional terminology into "normal" language. Since many of the new words emerge from official statements and regulations, the government translators have a key position in finding the appropriate words in Swedish. Even though there is some collaboration between official translators and terminologists and the professional language advisers, their work is not coordinated or guided from 'above'. In other words, there are several institutions involved in managing the official language, which can lead to some confusion, as was the case with the words for the different phases. This study has highlighted the fact that the normative power structure is scattered to some extent. In practice, the language management is divided between the official language norm authorities, i.e. the language planning organisations, and semiofficial norm authorities working with translations and terminology in government institutions.

Another language norm authority is the language planning organisations in Sweden. However, in this case, the Finland-Swedish language advisers have not been able to rely on their Swedish counterparts as much as usual. Only four of the 30 references to authorities and nine of the 38 references to language planning actors in the language recommendations concerned organisations in Sweden. The two countries have had differing strategies for fighting the coronavirus and most of the restrictions are based on national legislation, making the



language management of this global pandemic partly a national matter. One result of this is that the Finland-Swedish media language advisers, to some extent, have had to work more independently from their Swedish colleagues. In the case of Covid-19, some issues appeared on the agenda in Finland first, forcing the Finland-Swedish media language advisers to find recommendations and solutions for new vocabulary in Swedish, thereby influencing the language norm in the Finland-Swedish national media.

In addition, this study touches upon the different approaches to language management in Sweden and Finland. In Sweden, the dominant norm centre, language advisers allow for variation, which is a luxury the Finland-Swedish media language advisers feel they cannot afford. In a minority setting, language users are more restricted, and MLM journalists might not have the same linguistic flexibility as their majority language colleagues. The Finland-Swedish journalists have to constantly position themselves against a majority language. In their daily work, they read and translate Finnish texts, interview Finnish-speaking people, use Finnish media and discuss with their Finnish colleagues. In addition, they also need to reflect on their Swedish when travelling to Sweden and speaking to Swedes. In both cases, they need to manage their own language and they are always 'different'. Consequently, many Finland-Swedish journalists have a high linguistic awareness, and perhaps a certain linguistic insecurity, typical of speakers of a non-dominant variety (Muhr, 2012). Therefore, they require quick and clear answers from the media language advisers, and as a result, the media language advisers feel appreciated and trusted by the journalists. In conclusion, this win-win situation seems fruitful, and the two groups work closely together in elaborating the official code of Finland-Swedish.

Conclusions

Despite all the research conducted on MLM, it is easy to agree with Cormack's (2007, p. 52) view, that "[m]ost people working in minority language media have no doubt as to the usefulness of their work, but there is a paucity of empirical evidence." This study has shown how MLM can bring new vocabulary into society, and sheds light on the complex processes playing out in the editorial background, thereby at least partly answering the call from Browne and Uribe-Jongbloed (2013). However, this study cannot give us information about to what extent these new words are absorbed by the language community and if – and how – they spread to other domains. As Cormack (2013, p. 263) points out, there is a need for studies on the practices of language communities in relation to the media. Language is always on the



move, and language variation and change is perhaps even more likely to spread bottom-up through informal channels, since legacy media and established media houses are just one actor among many in the mediascape of today (Hogan-Brun, 2011). This question would be an interesting subject for another study.

Despite the limited number of language recommendations available for this study, several interesting features emerged that would motivate further research. One topic is the semi-official language norm authorities identified in the terminologists and translators working in government institutions. How aware are they of their role in developing the Finland-Swedish standard language? Do they perceive of themselves as language norm authorities, a label they received in this study? It would also be interesting to do a comparative study of the Finnish media language management of Covid-19 to explicate potentially different strategies for a majority and a minority language in the same country. In future studies, it would also be interesting to go deeper into the process, and by using ethnographic methods, for example, observe the interaction between the media language advisers and the journalists. Such a study could reveal overt and covert language attitudes, explore if the journalists indeed have linguistic insecurities, and investigate the views on language policy by – in Ammon's (2004) terms – the norm authorities as well as model writers and speakers. These are the ones cultivating and expanding the standard language norm (Haugen, 1983), and we know far too little about them.

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Notes

¹ I use the term *media language advisers* for the Swedish word 'mediespråkvårdare', since they mostly work with giving language advice to journalists.

² The Finnish name is Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos and the Swedish name is Institutet för hälsa och välfärd.

³ Helsinki's coronavirus information in different languages (Helsinki, 2021).

⁴ Espoo's coronavirus information in different languages (Espoo, n.d.).

⁵ Vantaa's coronavirus information in different languages (Vantaa, n.d.).

⁶ For the number of Flemish speakers, see ATLAS (n.d.).

⁷ In October 2021, it was decided that SPT will be shut down by the end of that year due to economic difficulties (Häggblom, 2021). Media language planning will continue, but it remains to be seen how it will be organized.

⁸ In Swedish: Institutet för de inhemska språken.

⁹ Slack is a digital workspace.

¹⁰ The term in Swedish is 'ledande språkvårdare'.

¹¹ Svensk ordbok describes the Swedish language lexicon in modern use. It is based on a lexical database developed at the University of Gothenburg and it is published by the Swedish Academy, Svenska Akademin (Göteborgs universitet, n.d.).

¹² Folkhälsomyndigheten is the Public Health Agency of Sweden (n.d.).



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Appendix: Coronavirus-related language recommendations on the Mediespråk website

Ord med karantän 11.3.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/ord-med-karant%C3%A4n

Det nya coronaviruset och sjukdomen covid-19 12.3.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/det-nya-coronaviruset-och-sjukdomen-covid-19

Smittade 12.3.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/smittade

Myndigheter i andra länder 12.3.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/st%C3%A4lla-in

Ställa in 18.3.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/st%C3%A4lla-in?search=st%C3%A4lla%20in

Undantagsförhållanden råder i Finland 24.3.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/undantagsf%C3%B6rh%C3%A5llanden-r%C3%A5der-i-finland

Hämtmat, att beställa hem mat och avhämta mat 25.3.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/h%C3%A4mtmat,-att-best%C3%A4lla-hem-mat-och-avh%C3%A4mta-mat

Tänk på avståndet vid fysisk distansering 7.4.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/t%C3%A4nk-p%C3%A5-avst%C3%A5ndet-vid-fysisk-distansering

Personer över och under 70 år 8.4.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/personer-%C3%B6ver-och-under-70-%C3%A5r

Munskydd, andningsskydd 19.5.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/munskydd,-andningsskydd

Coronaepidemin: basnivå, accelerationsfas och samhällsspridning 27.11.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/basniv%C3%A5,-accelerationsfas-och-samh%C3%A4llsspridning

Butiken är öppen 9–21 8.12.2020 https://www.mediesprak.fi/butiken-%C3%A4r-%C3%B6ppen-9%E2%80%9321

Blodgrupp O 12.1.2021 https://www.mediesprak.fi/blodgrupp-o

Tajt tidsplan när processen snabbas upp 26.1.2021 https://www.mediesprak.fi/tajt-tidsplan-n%C3%A4r-processen-snabbas-upp

Fortsättningsvis – också i fortsättningen 22.2.2021 https://www.mediesprak.fi/forts%C3%A4ttningsvis-%E2%80%93-ocks%C3%A5-i-forts%C3%A4ttningen

Restauranger och serveringstillstånd 22.3.2021 https://www.mediesprak.fi/restauranger-och-serveringstillst%C3%A5nd

Dö och avlida 6.4.2021 https://www.mediesprak.fi/d%C3%B6-och-avlida

Johnson & Johnsons vaccin 7.4.2021 https://www.mediesprak.fi/johnson-och-johnsons-vaccin

Så bra som möjligt 19.4.2021 https://www.mediesprak.fi/s%C3%A5-bra-som-m%C3%B6jligt