

Finnish  
in  
45 Minutes

# Finnish: A “Hard Language”?

- ▶ Cases, cases, cases!
- ▶ Consonant gradation
- ▶ Long, unfamiliar words...
- ▶ (Insert horror story here)

Finnish: A “Hard Language”?

FORGET ALL OF THAT!

It's really not that bad.

# Finnish is Easy!

- ▶ Finnish is made up of the same sorts of “parts” as other languages
- ▶ Yes you have to learn them
- ▶ But trust me, there's nothing you haven't seen before!

# Cases

Forget for a moment everything you've heard about Finnish cases.

Try and forget that it even *has* cases.

## Example:

Does this look like confusing grammar?

Hän asuu Oulu ssa

*S/he lives Oulu in*

## Example:

What about when it's written like this?

Hän asuu Oulussa.

*S/he lives in Oulu.*

# Cases

- ▶ Almost all Finnish cases work like prepositions in FRA/DEU/etc.
- ▶ Only three that might be new (Genitive, Accusative, and Partitive)
- ▶ And only the Partitive is even vaguely confusing

So what about consonant gradation?

# Consonant Gradation

- ▶ What about all the forms of consonant gradation? Do I have to memorize them?
- ▶ *mekko mekot*, but *tahtoa tahdon*, etc.
- ▶ (No, not really — we'll get to that shortly!)

## Consonant Gradation (Overview)

Lots of Finnish words have internal stem changes:

- ▶ *häntä* 'tail', *hännät* 'tails'
- ▶ *kerta* 'time (instant)', *kerran* 'time (GEN)'
- ▶ *nahka* 'leather', *nahan* 'leather (GEN)'

## Phonology Detour!

	Labial	Coronal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p	t (d)		k	
Fricatives		s			h
Nasals	m	n		ŋ	
Semivowels	v	(d?)	j		
Liquids		r, l			

## Consonant Gradation: 4 simple rules

- ▶ In clusters ending in double *p*, *t*, or *k*, the last C is deleted: *mekko mekot* 'dress dresses', *kartta kartat* 'map maps'
- ▶ *mp, nt, lt, rt, nk* > *mm, nn, ll, rr, ng*: *pinta pinnat* 'surface surfaces', *Helsinki Helsingin*
- ▶ *p* > *v*, *t* > *d*, *k* >  $\emptyset$ /*j/v*: *papu pavut* 'bean beans', *koti kodit* 'home homes', *tähti tähdet* 'star stars', *teko teot* 'deed deeds', *puku puvut* 'suit suits' (between two *u* or *y*), *kurki kurjen* 'crane cranes' (between a consonant and *e/i*)
- ▶ *s* or *t* before a consonant blocks gradation

## Consonant Gradation: cont'd

- ▶ That's it! In all other cases, there is no gradation.
- ▶ There are also some words, including most names and foreign words, in which gradation doesn't occur, even though it could.
- ▶ Some dialectal variation, but don't worry about that right now!

## Consonant Gradation: cont'd

But what about these words?

- ▶ *sade* 'rain', *sateen* 'rain (GEN)'
- ▶ *koe* 'test', *kokeet* 'tests'
- ▶ *varvas* 'toe', *varpaat* 'toes'

## Consonant Gradation, cont'd

- ▶ Gradation originally arose in closed syllables
- ▶ Words like *sade* 'rain', plural *sateet* have an unwritten glottal stop after the final e
- ▶ The long vowel in the plural and other inflected forms was originally two separate syllables, with the first open: \**sateket*, \**varpaset*

## “Irregular” Stems

- ▶ Some nouns end in *-i* in the Nominative, but have a stem in *-e-* in all other forms: *nimi nimet* 'name names'
- ▶ Isn't that irregular?

## “Irregular” Stems: cont’d

- ▶ Not really. Underlyingly, these nouns have stems in *-e-*.
- ▶ However, word-final *e* became *i* in an earlier version of Finnish!\*
- ▶ Hence the “irregular” Nominatives.

\*Note that nouns of the *sade* type do not belong to this group. That *e* is not really word-final, since it’s followed by a glottal stop.

## “Irregular” Stems: cont’d

- ▶ This is taken a step further in *vesi* ‘water’, whose stem is *vete-*
- ▶ Another sound change turned  $t > s$  before  $i$
- ▶ Hence an “irregular” noun that isn’t so irregular after all!

## “Irregular” Stems: cont’d

Nominative	vesi
Genitive	veden
Partitive	vettä

## Vowel Harmony

- ▶ Words with *a*, *o* or *u* cannot contain *ä*, *ö* or *y*, and vice versa
- ▶ Think of it this way: all *a*'s and *o*'s must either have dots or not, and *y* is basically *ü*.
- ▶ *e* and *i* don't matter (though they take *ä*, *ö* and *y* in suffixes)

## Vowel Harmony: Caveats

- ▶ A word is a root plus suffixes. Vowel Harmony doesn't apply across compounds.
- ▶ Prefixes are treated as compound elements
- ▶ (But there aren't that many prefixes)

# Summary

- ▶ Finnish isn't scary!
- ▶ If you break the hard things down, they become more familiar
- ▶ There's always a pattern underneath — you just have to find it!

# Thank You!

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