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Defining legitimate taste in Finland:

Does mother tongue matter?

Introduction

In this paper we will investigate the socially constructed concepts of good and bad taste in Finland: both among the population majority and its important minority, the Finnish Swedes, a group traditionally considered to represent a more legitimate or correct taste than the linguistic majority. As cultural capital in this context consists of knowledge about cultural products, cultural activeness and judgement on cultural products, how are the two latter discussed in focus groups consisting of either Finnish or Swedish speakers? More importantly: what tools do the different language groups have for defining and analyzing taste?

The focus group data scrutinized here[1] is generated for a pilot study of an ongoing research project *Cultural Capital and Social Differentiation in Contemporary Finland*. The data offers valuable information about consumption of culture, participation, identification of cultural products and their importance as well as ways of speaking which can be analysed as such (Rahkonen et. al, 2005). In each focus group interview (see Heikkilä & Kahma 2006), two areas of culture (out of seven)[2] were discussed along with a short section about cultural events and participation. Finally good and bad taste were discussed in the last section of the interview, making the entire interview last for approximately one hour. In this article we concentrate us mainly on this last section: the collective judgements on good and bad taste.

The case examined in this paper consists of focus group data of altogether twenty groups, of which ten are Finnish-speaking and ten Swedish-speaking. We have chosen these specific groups from the entire data (consisting of more than 40 focus groups) to form two palettes of groups as similar as possible regarding background information

[1] See Annex 1.
[2] Culture was approached through a frame of seven key topics ranging from music, cinema, television, arts, reading and clothing to participating in different kinds of events and leisure activities.

on age, gender and education in order to study the impact of mother tongue upon taste better[3]. Even if we in chapter 3 tend to use more quotations of focus groups made with middle-aged or older people[4], the overall scrutinized groups have been selected in order to give a large scope on each language group.

The Finnish Swedes, forming 6 per cent of the national population, are an interesting cultural counterpoint for the majority for two reasons. Moreover, they form a social and cultural world of their own, having their own cultural products, newspapers, TV and radio channels, editors and institutions with heavy Swedish influence. Traditionally, in popular imaginary of the majority, the Finnish Swedes are also thought to be wealthier, healthier and generally better-off – even if they in reality are a very heterogeneous group that differs little from the majority on a socio-economical scale (cf. Ågren 2001). This often mythical perspective can be examined both by comparing the language groups and by studying their attitudes towards each other. These important factors will be dealt with further in this paper.

We will start by sketching out the course of the interviews, after which two questions will be addressed. First, how do the groups relate to the culture of the other language group and what kind of other cultures are brought up? It is interesting to see how the linguistic minority relates to the culture of majority and vice versa. Second, how is taste covered and measured in the groups and what can be said to represent good taste? We will examine whether there are differences in talking about and constructing taste between the different language groups.

1. Class, pluralism, mother tongue or something else as a basis for formation of tastes?

During the last couple of decades Pierre Bourdieu's *La Distinction* (1979; in English 1984) has been one of the most discussed works in social sciences regarding the study of taste. *Distinction* deals with differences and distinctions and their relationship to the formation and division of people's lifestyles in French class society. According to Bourdieu taste was the key area of emergence of class differences.

The idea of class based taste and lifestyle differences has been contested by theories and research on cultural pluralism and individualisation: already in the 80's the individualisation was seen as having moved "beyond classes and layers" (Beck 1986; cf. also Gronow 1997). In Gerhard Schulze's (1992) gigantic work *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft* categories of taste are examined as horizontal groups instead of classes. A more recent exemplar of research breaking away from class has been Bernard Lahire's (2004) *La culture des individus*, where Lahire suggests that taste is

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[3] The ages of our interviewees range from 16 to 91 in the linguistic majority groups and from 16 to 87 in the Finnish Swedish groups and. Group sizes range from 3 to 12 people. Excluding altogether four groups of only men or women, in all Finnish Swedish groups there has been a fairly equal proportion of sexes, whereas in the Finnish-speaking groups 6 out of 10 groups consisted of only men or women. More information is provided in Annex 1.
[4] Like, among others, Lahire (2004) has noted, contemporary youth culture is fairly mixed and tolerant; the study of the cultural taste of middle-aged and especially older people reveals many more differences.

continuously negotiated and reformed thus individuals in pluralistic society are now more free than ever to diffuse a variety of cultural products (both legitimate and popular) into individual taste patterns. The notion of pluralism presupposes the existence of a vast range of cultural products and certain acceptance towards the new.[5]

Finland makes a peculiar case, if we talk about the applicability of the theory of distinction – or pluralism for that matter. There have only been a few – yet not systematic – attempts to apply the theory of distinction to Finland[6]. Overall the applicability of class perspective to Finland has to be questioned: for example Tarasti (1990, 207) has suggested that it is typical for Finnish culture to have very little cultural objects with which distinctions can be made. Whereas other cultures are rich and are continuously receiving foreign and even contradictory influences, which encourage understanding and interpreting a plural world of cultural signs, Finland has lacked this type of cultural interaction and culture has become dull and static, as all foreign influences are perceived as threatening. Therefore Finnish culture includes very few influences and has borrowed few elements from other cultures. Even the ones borrowed have remained peripheral. (Tarasti 1990, 197–198.) It is widely accepted that Finland embraces some kind of uniform culture. The assumption of uniform culture in Finland involves an idea of only minor differences or even undeveloped or lacking taste hierarchies (cf. Mäkelä 1985, 247–260; Liikkanen 1996). The idea of cultural uniformity also clashes with the idea of cultural pluralism and individuality.

According to Olli Löytty (Lehtonen et. al. 2004, 47, 111–112) the uniform culture that is often explained with language, ethnic resemblance or national character or isolation from the rest of the world is a myth that presupposes ignorance of obvious differences nationally and influences from elsewhere. Finland is not a monocultural country, which is evident for example if the question of language is addressed. The Finnish Swedes are, in international scope, an interesting minority[7]. Even if they count for only 6 per cent of the population, in many ways they seem to be relatively much more visible in the Finnish society. The popular view of the Finnish Swedes having a statistically more successful life has proved to be true by many researches (Hyyppä & Mäki 2001; Saarela & Finnäs 2004). The Swedish-speaking males in the northwest Vaasa region, for instance, live four years longer than their Finnish-speaking counterparts in the same area. The Finnish Swedes have also proved to form much happier families (Finnäs 1986; 1997): they divorce so rarely that the even linguistically mixed marriages have better prospects than the purely Finnish-speaking ones.

[5] Pluralism comes close to the so-called omnivorousness thesis which refers to taste embracing a wide range of cultural products freely chosen from cultural categories of very different statuses. It has been claimed that omnivorousness, another thesis strongly challenging Bourdieu's theory, has replaced classical highbrowness as a legitimate taste (cf. Peterson & Kern 1996).

[6] The theory of distinction has mainly been applied by Keijo Rahkonen and J.P. Roos. Their research has however been limited to rather small data and restricted groups of people such as the metal workers and the Finnish intelligentsia (Roos & Rahkonen 1985; Rahkonen, Roos & Seppälä 1989; Rahkonen & Roos 1993).

[7] There is a lot of literature on how to define the minority status (cf. Finnäs 1986): do we refer to the official language status in the population register (which is subjective data in the sense that parents, for instance, are allowed to choose their child's language independently of their own linguistic status) or to cultural identities of different levels? Often the Finnish Swedes also adapt their linguistic identity to a certain extent, working or acting in the society in Finnish, or often marrying a Finnish-speaker.

Many researches have explained the differences in health and demographic integration with social capital (Hyyppä & Mäki 2001): the Swedish-speakers form a smaller and a well integrated society, and they share more values and traditions than the majority. There lies also a historical explanation in the status of the Finnish Swedes: they formed the ruling elite when Finland was a part of Sweden from 1150 to 1809 and partly kept those positions after the Russian occupation. Nevertheless, there is also still a large proportion of peasants and farmers among the Finnish Swedes (Allardt & Starck 1981) and the economical structure of the minority does not differ much from that of the majority's. The rights of the Finnish Swedes have been well preserved: they are offered all the public services in their mother tongue, and a plethora of institutions and associations keeps a close watch on their condition. This is why it is somewhat problematic to define the Finnish Swedes as a minority: like McRae has noted (1996), there is hardly any linguistic minority in the world with so much power and equal (or better) living conditions than those of the majority.

2. The analysis: mapping the discussions

In this article, focus groups are used as a way of studying values, attitudes, and the social formation of opinions[8]. The possible consensus reached discussing taste in a group covers all of these areas. A consensus, moreover, is always not reached: there are distinctive ways of marking differences within the group which range from agreeing, ignoring or even disagreeing completely to building an open confrontation. Different groups also have different tools in building their discourses (Silva & Wright 2005); in the following chapters we will discuss these aspects in depth.

Further effort was needed to map the discussions, since focus groups do not themselves offer tools for analysis. We start our analysis by taking a careful look on the dynamics of the discussions and how the groups reach consensus. In order to identify the construction of the consensus, the utterances can be divided into two categories: statements and reactions. Statements are utterances which either start by answering the question or bring something new to the conversation. Whereas statements tell more about the content of the interview, the reactions are very interesting from the perspective of outlining the formation of consensus.

We have divided the reactions into three types according to how they relate to the previous remark. Firstly there are reactions that express agreement and acceptance to what was said before – sometimes even encouragement to the previous speaker to go on (like "How interesting!" or "I totally agree!") Secondly, there are reactions that do not include a clear reaction to what was said before – this includes everything from silence to ignorance (utterances like "Mm" and purely rhetorical questions such as "Really?"). These reactions can include both silent acceptance and disagreement – or

[8] Focus groups are a research method of growing popularity, and there is a growing amount of literature on how to conduct (Fern 2001; Morgan 1988), moderate (Fern 2001, 73–95; Stewart & Shamdasani 1990, 69–86) and analyze them (Knodel 1993; Morgan 1988). Traditionally focus groups have mostly been used as a part of marketing research, health education or a pilot research for quantitative research (Wilkinson 1998). In the recent years focus groups have been accepted as a method with lots of qualities even if used alone, but that has meant concentrating more on traditional purely sociological research.

ignorance – but it is impossible to guess which the case is. Finally, there are reactions in which a participant openly expresses a disagreement or challenges what was previously stated in the group ("No way!" or "That's rubbish!"). We want to emphasize that this division leaves out many interesting factors concerning the situational group dynamics and the linguistic competences of individual participants. But it serves excellently our research question: how is taste actually defended, built and gradually formed in relatively heterogeneous groups, and how is a possible consensus built – if it is built at all.

After a short examination on the course of the discussions we will take a more careful look on the language groups separately. We will proceed taking a more careful look on how the language groups relate to their own and each others' culture. Then we will address the construction of taste. We will use excerpts from the focus groups[9] interviews to show how good and bad taste are constructed and characterized.

3. Taste matters in two different languages[10]

> In Finland silence is not equated with failure to communicate; it is an integral part of social interaction. In Finland it is considered impolite or inappropriate to force one's opinions on others – it is more appropriate to nod in agreement, smile quietly, and avoid opinionated argument or discord. (Lewis 2005, 68.)

Lewis (2005) has pointed out in his research on Finnish business culture that Finns have a distinctive communication style compared to other western nationalities. Introversion, modesty, quietness, not interrupting, and the use of silence characterize the communication between the Finns. Lewis even describes the Finn as a person having an "obsessive talent for self-effacement and ultra-taciturnity, where opinions are strongly held but often unvoiced." As negative as these features may sound, he also describes Finns as adaptable, tolerant and easygoing, essentially polite and tolerant on the outside (secretly despising some that fail to conform to some standards of behaviour). (Lewis 2005, 65, 103.)

When we contemplate the applicability of Lewis' conclusions in our case, it must be noted that there may be differences between the two linguistic groups which Lewis has not taken into account. As the language groups do not live in separate spheres, they seem to relate differently to the cultural products in different languages. The language of either the artist or artwork is not relevant in certain areas of culture such as visual art (paintings, photographs) or artistic performances such as dance, instrumental music, but in some areas of culture language is a very important divider. Self evidently in (non-translated) literature, TV-programmes and theatre language is very important and consumption tends to concentrate according to it.

The groups belonging to different linguistic groups proved to talk about very different cultural products, even if the frames of the discussions were identical. For example the Finnish-speaking groups talked mainly about literature, music and television programmes that had been made in their own language. Also English cultural products

[9] All names have been changed. Background information is provided according to forms filled by the participants. The possible initials refer to the moderators (the authors).
[10] The analyzing chapters 3.1 and 3.2 are written by Nina Kahma and Riie Heikkilä, respectively.

were much discussed. Instead the cultural products in Swedish mentioned were limited to certain Swedish-speaking authors translated to Finnish, films of certain Swedish film directors known worldwide such as Ingmar Bergman, and certain programmes on FST (the Swedish channel) with Finnish subtitles. Based on the interviews, the surface of contact to the culture of the minority is limited to a few singular cultural products – that in most cases are either translated into Finnish or at least come with subtitles. We might even say that Swedish culture is almost in the same position as any other cultural products not in Finnish or English.

When it comes to the Finnish Swedes, the most striking difference is that it is generally easier for them to initiate a conversation about culture and speak freely about their tastes. Maybe this is why they tend not only to name more cultural products than their Finnish-speaking counterparts when asked about tastes, but also usually display a wider variety within them. This variety tends to be greater even among single groups.

Quite independently of the legitimacy of the cultural products, the variety of the cultural products mentioned by the Finnish Swedes is larger also on the socio-geographical scale. As already mentioned, the Finnish Swedes have a plethora of institutions, media and therefore cultural products reserved uniquely for themselves. Finnish Swedes not only consume culture of their own cultural universe, but also that of the Finnish-speaking Finland or the globalized culture (like the Finnish-speakers), and, more interestingly, the cultural products of Sweden. Lönnqvist (2001, 16) has noted a clear difference between the cultural orientations among different Finnish Swedes: the bourgeoisie has traditionally picked its tastes from the European cultural hierarchies; the working class, on the contrary, has always tended to be turned towards Sweden and purely Swedish cultural products.

This division can still be seen in the Swedish-speaking focus groups: the more educated interviewees display a wide range of internationally known cultural products, whereas the less educated tend to pick their likes and even dislikes from the Swedish or, in some cases, domestic arena. The tastes of the majority are almost always limited to purely Finnish or sometimes international products. As specific focus groups are not compared here but only language groups, this tendency broadens notably the general cultural profile of the Finnish Swedes and enhances their possibilities of distinction, something that Tarasti (1990) has shown to consider difficult for the (Finnish-speaking) Finns. It also introduces their openness for the *cultural Other* in a larger sense: if the variety of cultural likes and dislikes within a group is big in itself, the group disposes of a large cultural competence.

3.1 Finnish-speakers

3.1.1 Refusing to disagree

Our data on the Finnish-speaking groups supports to some extent the findings of Lewis on how the Finns communicate. Cultural consumption proved to be a rather sensitive and personal topic and the conversations were characterized by tolerance and formation of – at least apparent – consensus. The course of discussion turned out very consensual. The Finnish-speakers' conversations basically consist of statements that

bring something new into the conversations and remarks that express agreement and acceptance. Comments which openly express disagreement or challenge what the previous speaker(s) said are rare.

Remarks that express agreement and acceptance were prevalent in all of the interviews. There were much less remarks that did not include a clear reaction, and even less those that expressed disagreement or sought open confrontation.
In almost all of the Finnish-speaking focus groups some of the group members stressed that the group was tolerant and open to a variety of cultural products and genres. Some group members would even describe themselves as omnivores. Thus when answering a question the first comment usually defined what types of cultural products could be brought in to conversation i.e. would the group for example talk primarily about esteemed cultural products such as opera and classical music, or about more popular items.

However, certain type of questions awoke different type of group interaction. What comes to questions concerning activeness, a vast variety of cultural products and categories were usually brought up and freely described. In this type of questions the group members ended up taking turns and listing their leisure pursuits that may have even clashed with what was previously said. The group members would nod or mumble acceptingly on each others pursuits. We might even say that little interaction occurred among the group – different interests were rather displayed than disputed.

What comes to the questions concerning liking and personal preferences, the reactions to what was being said were more varied. In general questions concerning preferences were more easily answered than questions concerning dislikes. Judging tended to be avoided and dislikes were hardly commented (unless the target was distant to the whole group, for example youth music to the elders). As in the next example, the answers to questions concerning dislikes had to be sometimes virtually dragged out:

> I[11]
>
> **NK:** And what kind of music don't you like?
> **Tapio:** The music that we don't like isn't necessarily bad.
> **Seppo:** I haven't listened to anything that I don't like.
> **NK:** But what do you personally consider bad?
> **Tapani:** Well, I for example don't like jazz in particular. Nor the kind of heavier rock.
> **Tapio:** I listen to a good deal of all kinds [of music]. I may not like everything exceedingly, but I listen to all kinds.

Whereas naming dislikes was avoided, as the previous example shows, questions concerning likings such as "what kind of books do you like?" were usually met with less awkwardness. The group members would take turns and each group member would answer without other group members commenting. This resulted to the groups seemingly unanimously listing some cultural products and genres. The likeability of the products and genres were mostly agreed upon[12]. There were practically no disagreeing remarks – instead they were formulated as statements on something else than liking, for example understanding or having enough knowledge on something as the next excerpt shows:

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[11] Executives in Helsinki region, age 43–69, 5 men.
[12] We must remember that all of the groups were so-called natural groups.

II[13]

> **Aili:** … then there are some wonderful non-figurative pieces that give a sensation, feeling of something fresh. Then there are the likes of Kauko Lehtinen[14], who draws peculiar details in his works. I simply don't appreciate that the least bit.
> **Helmi:** I draw back this much that I may look at a modern painting that I think has wonderful colours.
> **Aili:** Right.
> **Helmi:** So that although there's no more than the wonderful colours, it is…
> **Ellen:** Yes, so that it is alive and it has depth, so that it is not a mere surface. Nowadays there's quite a bit of modern art. But with colours they can make it work.
> **Helmi:** But that kind [of paintings], where two lines have been drawn like this, and different colour applied to the squares… That I can not comprehend.

The likings of others were in none of the interviews directly judged as unworthy. It seems, likings are considered as a part of one's personality – therefore subjective likings can not be judged directly by others.

As opposed to questions concerning activeness and liking that are covered by talking about concrete cultural items, questions concerning taste and taste judgements provoked conversation about more general and non-specific matters. They were more evidently answered in collaboration and consensus and defined by the group as a whole. The comments presented in the conversations were never contested. Disagreeing arguments were virtually absent from the conversation.

If we believe in theorists such as Bourdieu claiming that taste differences embody class differences and that taste differences manifest differences in societies, how can they be detected on the basis of a data in which manifesting contrasts is being avoided – or can they even be detected? In what follows a construction of consensuses on taste in the Finnish-speaking groups will be addressed in detail.

3.1.2. Constructing taste

Woodward and Emmison (2001) have pointed out that in social sciences the idea that judgements of taste are much more than mere aesthetical reflections upon hierarchies of cultural products is often neglected. In their study, good and especially bad taste were far more often described by levels of appropriate behaviour, discreetness and interpersonal conduct than by cultural products of any kind.

Even if our research primarily covers judgements of taste on different areas of culture, our main findings resemble the one pictured above: when discussing good and bad taste, the groups usually turned the discussions into behaviour, taking others into consideration and dressing according to the situation. This moralistic judgement of taste, which Woodward and Emmison see as the most prominent one, can thus be seen clearly in our data. Especially bad taste is often defined "the wrong kind of behaviour", "treating others with disrespect" and so on. Good taste is defined more abstractly and, following Woodward & Emmison (2001, 302–303) as question of

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[13] Retired clerical workers and housewives, Helsinki, age 82–88, 4 women.
[14] Kauko Lehtinen (1925–) is an internationally respected Finnish surrealist.

quantity (there is a “correct” amount of something), composition (something simply “goes together”) or quality (“elegance” or “timelessness”). The following example from the interview of well educated middle-aged women shows a typical reaction to bringing up the question of good taste:

III[15]

NK: I have one more question for you. It’s about good taste. How would you define good taste?
[silence]
Eila: What can I…
[laughter]
Riitta: The Fazer Blue[16].
[laughter… silence]
Kirsti: Does it exist in general? Is there good taste and is there bad taste? I mean tastelessness exists, but…

As in the previous example, the groups belonging to the Finnish-speaking majority usually stayed silent for a little while when asked to define good taste or the opposite, bad taste. It varied how keenly the groups would discuss taste: usually some of the interviewees would totally shut themselves out of the conversation, or just keep on nodding, whereas the more confident talkers would enumerate features of good or bad taste. The conversation usually revolved around clothing, home decoration and manners. Thus what is eye-catching is that there was no difference of opinion expressed when talking about taste.

The groups would generally refrain from giving clear rules on what is good/bad taste. They usually stated taste matters as relative “it is not always unequivocal... Some may think they have good taste and some others think, it isn’t quite so”, “I’m not quite sure there is something that can be considered good in general”, “beauty lies in the eye of the beholder”, “I have no idea how to define it”, “something, in which everything falls into place”, “it is something that can be admired”, “it is something that pleases everyone” and so on. In addition to seeing good taste as something relative, the groups also saw good taste as something subjective and a personal matter beyond all judgement.

Conversation on good taste usually turned to discussion on values and manners: good taste is “representing and behaving in a way that doesn’t insult or hurt others”, “valuing others”, “knowing what kind of behaviour is appropriate in different situations”, “not irritating or disturbing others on purpose” and so on. These involved sometimes concrete sets of rules – for example how it is appropriate to be dressed in the opera, when it is appropriate to call a person by his/her first name and so on.

Conversation on good taste was usually intertwined with clothing and home decoration. In clothing good taste was seen as the ability to use colours, dress stylish and personal, looking tidy and so on. Although dressing up was seen as something requiring skill and knowledge on correct ways of combining things, the groups avoided judgement:

[15] Professionals of arts and executives, eastern Finland, age 41– 70, 11 women.
[16] The most traditional Finnish chocolate brand.

> "In the flea market you see all kinds of people, and there was […] a punker or a Gothic girl, who had shaven her head from the sides, and dyed it with many colours… and then thoroughly black clothes and jewellery… one might say she didn't maybe have too good taste, but in her own style she was quite…". (Tapio 59, director of finance)

As in the previous example, naming some style as tacky or tasteless was avoided, although usually some styles were named incomprehensible. Despite of the apparent acceptance towards all kind of styles, clothing manifested itself as an important area where one must know how much is enough (cf. Woodward & Emmison 2001, 302). In the interviews of the language majority taste in clothing was strongly measured in quantities: one should not show off too much, or have too much glitter. On the other hand dressing up to occasion was considered important. In clothing one should also take factors such as time frame into consideration. More open criticism was usually expressed towards what the fashion used to be. What used to be in fashion may turn into symbol of bad taste in a matter of decades – for example mini skirts and *Miami Vice* clothing. Things that are in fashion now were described as bad taste mainly by the older groups:

> "And then there is… I get irritated if someone is dressed up according to the latest fashion, and when… sometimes… it applies maybe better to women than men… when you go like "Oh dear, can she really go out in that equipment?". But it also must be respected; you cannot go and tell her to go home real fast!" (Pertti 79, teacher)

In home decoration the idea of quantity was totally absent. The groups emphasized that good taste is being able to create comfortable surroundings. What is good taste in home decoration thus is more subjective.

In some of the groups bad taste was approached less carefully than good taste, although abstract definitions such as "bad taste is narrow-mindedness" and "we cannot make any generalizations based on one case" were brought up for beginning. Whereas concrete examples on good taste were hardly articulated, examples on bad taste were. The examples included direct comments on the most obvious popular and rude markers of bad taste in behaviour such as farting, burping, vulgar expressions in speech and bad behaviour (not taking others into account, not letting others speak etc.). In the area of clothing, concrete examples contained piercing and tattoos, and too revealing clothing. Discussion on wearing too little sometimes turned into moral judgement as the next example shows:

> IV[17]
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> **Tarja**: And then, it is quite funny, when we think about clothing...
> **Osmo:** Well, good taste is not in high demand today.
> […]
> **Kimmo:** I think today... I am… I'm getting 59 soon and I think I bear myself smoothly…
> **Osmo:** We are all oldies here…
> **Kimmo:** … in any company, but I don't get it that young girls dress up like porn stars.
> **Osmo:** Yeah, that is…
> **Kimmo:** I believe it is bad taste. They do not comprehend that… So if they get treated as pornstars, then they are not to complain. It is like a typical example of bad taste.
> **Osmo:** They send out signals that they don't live up to… And so… they should blame themselves.

[17] Professionals of arts and executives, Helsinki, age 59–70, 2 women, 2 men.

Kimmo: Right! If they get treated like porn stars… it comes naturally.
[…]
Kimmo: They [the parents] are way off the track, if they haven't told them what kind of treatment results of… being half naked…..
Tarja: In summer they carry a backpack when they go out. When they have gone around the corner, they change and put on their horrid war paint.
Osmo: And in the autumn they get an abortion.

As in the previous example, talk about bad taste concentrated mainly on areas which can easily be perceived and judged such as clothing and manners. Other areas of culture such as music, TV-programmes, and theatre plays were brought up only in singular cases. It seems quite interesting that the groups would not talk about areas of culture that were discussed before during the interview when the question of taste was brought up. It seems that by concentrating on easily perceivable topics instead of personal judgement on cultural products the groups distanced the conversation away from themselves.

The definitions of good and bad taste in the Finnish-speaking groups ranged from graphic examples to more abstract definitions. What is peculiar in the conversations is that the groups avoided conflict and direct negotiation of the definitions and seemed to construct their ideas on good and bad taste in collaboration. Lack of obvious disagreement is not a proof of either cultural homogeneity nor genuine tolerance and acceptance. Instead the willingness to represent oneself as a tolerant and omnivore may result from unwillingness to argue and the disability to talk about differences. The talk about being omnivore seems to obscure the differences between the individuals in a same group; in several groups many members defined themselves as omnivores, which may actually not be the case. We cannot draw the conclusion that there would be mere tolerance towards a wide range of cultural products, or no differences or distinction inside as well as outside the groups.

The applicability of focus groups must be questioned if we're hoping to attain knowledge on the differences in taste and cultural consumption between singular group members thus; it seems consensuality is a marker of a distinct conversation culture of the Finnish-speakers. It seems to be distinctive to the Finnish-speaking groups to avoid direct conflict or seeking differences only to distant targets of criticism. The apparently unanimously built consensus may not actually be a sign of lacking differences and lacking distinctions, but rather a proof of a distinctive code of communication.

3.2. The case of the Finnish Swedes

3.2.1. Agreeing to disagree

The tendency of polite agreement and a certain search for consensus, already shown to be a part of the Finnish universe of discourse, naturally manifests itself among the Finnish Swedes, too. The logics of the discussion, moreover, are dramatically different. As the Finnish speakers pick "items from the box" being very influenced by what the first speaker has said and keeping the conversation in those frames, the Finnish Swedes usually take the previous speakers' comments as challenges or cues. It is this tendency that leads the Finnish-speaking focus groups towards polite, neutral

consensus and the Finnish Swedes towards multifaceted, typically self-disclosing elaborations. Therefore the most striking difference between the language groups is that the Finnish Swedes, as a rule, show stronger patterns of agreeing – strong, characteristic markers of sharing the same opinions – but also disagreeing.

According to Silva & Wright (2006) these breakings from the consensus are linked with the general cultural competence of the group in question; they quote Fern (2001, 30) who states that focus group participants with better social statuses usually are more deviant from the group. Status, apparently, gives more cultural and rhetorical confidence. As we are not comparing single groups but bigger clusters of language groups (which, like we have seen, form two similar palettes containing similar groups), we can not draw these conclusions here. Nevertheless, it was soon clear that the groups of Finnish Swedes were far livelier and more at ease with the situation of conversation than the Finnish speakers. In the following examples, two very different groups, with a very high and low cultural status, respectively, express their opinions about taste.

I[18]

RH: What then, in your opinion, is good taste?
Bob: It's so terribly difficult! What you have posed is a very difficult question. Because everything lies in how these things are used... or how they are said to...
Katy: Taste evolves all the time!
Bob: Not at all! Good taste is always good taste. Bad taste is bad taste.
Katy: No! It changes!
Bob: You see... I've been in Rome for example, and I...
Katy: And I have been in Stockholm!
Tom: And I have been drunk.
Bob: There has always been bad taste.
Katy: Sure. But there are lots of things that were considered beautiful in the past. And they *were* beautiful!
Lisa: Now you're mixing things.

II[19]

RH: Is there something else you'd like to say about taste that you don't like at all?
[Silence]
RH: Nothing?
Viola: Well, it's not exactly that you hate something...
Max: Things like metal and chrome are not too fancy.
Peter: Miina Äkkijyrkkä[20] and her metallic...
Max: Those cows!
Viola: They are fantastic!
Peter: No, I don't like them at all!
Max: They're great I think.
Viola: That woman really has imagination!
Peter: Well, I don't know...
Viola: I think her art is quite clever.

[18] Professionals of arts and executives, Helsinki, 54–75 years, 3 women, 6 men.
[19] Lower executives, Helsinki region, 42–79 years, 2 women, 4 men.
[20] Miina Äkkijyrkkä (1949–), (at the moment called Liina Lång, previously Riitta Loiva) is a Finnish artist and cattle farmer. She has caught much attention with her eccentric scrap art sculptures on cows, which can be found scattered through Finnish cities.

Even if the data quoted comes from two socially very different groups, both examples display the fact that the Finnish Swedes really do disagree about matters of taste – and that disagreeing is not a feature of only groups with higher statuses, like Fern (2001) has claimed. Strong personal opinions like the ones expressed above are typically seen in all of the focus groups made with Finnish Swedes, who seem to be more culturally confident with pointing out deviating opinions and even clearly disagreeing. Sometimes these features come out in forms of joking (like in the first example on drunkenness) or through allusions[21], which can also be seen as a sign of feeling comfortable with the situation (Kitzinger 1994, 108). This general willingness to disagree, to challenge others verbally and even to provoke has been the most striking feature among our Swedish-speaking groups.

3.2.2. Finnish Swedes constructing taste

When it comes to defining good and bad taste, the Finnish Swedes follow the general pattern outlined both by the previous chapters on the language majority and Woodward & Emmison (2001): good taste is most often pictured with abstract definitions, bad taste by concrete, specific examples. Depending on the group this is almost a rule: good taste is, depending on the group, something "eternally beautiful", "within the simple and classic" or "a personal decision of each of us". Bad taste, quite on the contrary, is often pictured with the help of images of behaving or dressing in a way that does not fit a specific context. Even very specific cultural products, such as the classical but culturally somewhat banalized Finnish Aalto vase or the already famous Muhammad pictures published in Denmark are brought up as examples of bad taste.

Like the previous examples show, taste is a question of moral and interpersonal conduct also in the context of the Finnish Swedes. In our data there are, however, much less direct comments on the most obvious popular and rude markers of bad taste ("earrings are terrible", "young girls dress too daringly") from the part of the linguistic minority, whose opinions generally are somewhat more abstract and open-minded "behaving well is important", "acting in a way that respects the others is crucial".[22] The Finnish Swedes interviewed also tend to soften their statements by the end of the interview by introducing a consensus on both good and bad taste even it would first have been disagreed about.

Like Woodward & Emmison (2001, 310) show, the more the group disposes of educational (and therefore often cultural and social capital), the more abstract the definitions of both good and bad taste are. The awkwardness of speaking about taste in general leads into utterances that do not really display personal opinions, only something generally learned or something that the participants think that the research might appreciate as an answer. In the last example a group with very modest cultural competence discusses good taste, making it clear that the Finnish Swedes do not really dispose a more legitimate culture than that of the majority just because their mother tongue happens to be Swedish. The ways of speaking about culture and reaching agreements are simply different.

[21] Our groups of Finnish Swedes have, for example, twice spontaneously begun to sing together (*sic*).

[22] This openness and liberality of the Finnish Swedes' moral and political attitudes is continuously noted by McRae (1996).

III[23]

RH: I have one more question which draws together everything we've spoken about. It's about good taste. How would you define good taste?
[Silence]
Tim: It's divided into two like the bottom…
[Laughs]
Elena: So do you mean clothes, colours, or…?
RH: Whatever comes into your mind.
Gina: You mean how colours fit? Mixing red and orange… I don't like it at all. I don't think blue and black fit either at all.
Tim: Yeah, black shoes and blue socks…
Anna: Simply don't fit!
Louis: Does this question concern clothes or behaviour?
RH: Whatever you want.
Louis: Well, you have to behave neatly. And that includes respecting the surrounding people and dressing according to the circumstances…

The example also shows that taste, generally speaking, is tied more into questions of behaving according to the social situations than personal tastes on specific cultural products. Quite differently from the language majority, the Finnish Swedes rarely stay silent for a long while or avoid the question; on the contrary, they are generally very alert in the situation of the group discussion, always trying to respond even if the question seems difficult[24] and (like the example above shows) repetitively asking the interviewer *how* exactly the question should be answered if they feel intimidated by the often abstract theme. What is clear is that the Finnish Swedes dispose of a different, possibly more European culture of conversation with longer historical roots in the bourgeoisie tradition than their Finnish-speaking counterparts. They clearly lack Lewis' (2005) stereotypical characteristics of a silent Finn seeking for consensus in a conversation. This goes especially for adults: like Woodward & Emmison (2001) have noted, more abstract or broad definitions of taste can rarely be found among teenagers, and therefore groups with very young participants are more difficult to compare.

Can it thus be stated that the Finnish Swedes also have a bigger cultural competence? Yes, if we adopt the traditional but somewhat naive conception of cultural competence meaning merely a large repertoire of cultural products mentioned and being able to express one's views even if they do not always fit the groups' general tastes and, finally, skills of handling a semi-formal situation in the way that Silva & Wright (2006) have pointed out. But like we have seen, our data does not show that the Finnish Swedes would be more culturally competent than the majority; the enormous difference lies simply in different ways of handling cultural and taste questions in a group and agreeing (or disagreeing) about them. The picture of a culturally uniform Finnish culture is therefore in serious decadence – and not only because of the different ways of speaking about culture of the two language groups.

[23] Lower executives and manual workers, Helsinki region. 32–70 years, 5 women, 5 men.
[24] Jokes like the one told by Tim are often tactics of making an awkward situation more comfortable (cf. Silva & Wright 2005)

4. Conclusion: is there uniform taste?

Finnish culture may not be as uniform as is often stated. The groups proved to have strict ideas about taste differences and how they can be identified and classified. Thus on the basis of our analysis it is impossible to lean either towards class-based taste hierarchies or more individualistic approach such as the lahirean idea of individual socialisations and taste patterns (Lahire 2004). Thus the differences between our Finnish and Swedish speakers are mainly differences *inside* the discourse: culturally determined ways of speaking that come out as linguistic *habitus*, always both individual and social.

The fact that we are dealing with two different languages makes the question even more multidimensional to scrutinize. Like we have seen, the Finnish language majority and the Finnish Swedes look culturally quite different: whereas the former usually try to reach a consensus discussing taste matters or simply stay quiet, the latter use tactics like provocation, allusions, or jokes just to have the chance to express their personal opinions. This difference is reflected in the common image of the Finnish Swedes as a better-off minority that has access to a more legitimate taste – apparently merely because of their prestigious language status. In spite of this popular image, looking at our data it is impossible to conclude that the language groups would notably differ in questions of cultural competence even if the Finnish Swedes are such a culturally visible and historically important minority. Like it has also been noted, in many cases the differences simply stem from different codes of communication.

As we (Heikkilä & Kahma 2006) have previously noted, the focus group discussions embrace to some extent constructing consensus between the group members. We ended up suggesting that the method in itself could mute the diversity among the groups. It is possible that the focus group as a method suits better the Finnish Swedes, who are more accustomed to a formal culture of conversation and are possibly equipped with better competence for situations of public conversation that include expressing one's opinions – they simply have more experience on a special "groupness" that Hydén & Bülow (2003) have thought to be the key of a successful focus group. Nevertheless, we do not suggest that the Finnish-speakers are left without differences in taste or even strong cultural hierarchies – they just do not come up in conversation as easily as those of the language minority.

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ANNEX I. Summary: Information on the focus groups used in the analysis

Finnish-speaking groups

1. Executives, Helsinki region, age 43–69, 5 men.
2. Retired clerical workers and housewives, Helsinki, age 82–88, 4 women.
3. Professionals of arts and executives, eastern Finland, age 41– 70, 11 women.
4. Professionals of arts and executives, Helsinki, age 59–70, 2 women, 2 men.
5. Clerical workers in a governmental institution, eastern Finland, age 26–51, 4 women, 1 man.
6. Professionals of health care, southern Finland, age 35–56, 4 women.
7. Students of a vocational school of technology, Helsinki, age 17–18, 4 men.
8. Executives, clerical workers and students, southern Finland, age 19–67, 1 woman, 6 men.
9. Inhabitants of the same sheltered accommodation block, Helsinki, age 78–91, 6 women, 4 men.
10. Lower executives, south eastern Finland, age 59–79, 4 men.

Swedish-speaking groups

11. Executives, priests, Helsinki region, age 58–70, 4 men.
12. Retired executives, housewives, age 68–81, Helsinki, 3 women, 3 men.
13. Professionals of arts and retired executives, western Finland, age 60–66, 3 women.
14. Professionals of arts and executives, Helsinki, age 54–75, 3 women, 6 men.
15. Lower executives, Helsinki region, 42–79 years, 2 women, 4 men.
16. Higher and lower executives, teachers, western Finland, age 46–87, 6 men.
17. Students of a vocational school of technology, Helsinki region, age 17–19, 4 men.
18. Students in a high school, Helsinki, age 16–17, 3 women, 3 men.
19. Retired engineers, teachers and housewives, Helsinki, 5 women, 4 men.
20. Lower executives and manual workers, Helsinki region, age 32–70, 5 women, 5 men.