

Recensioner

**Richard Wilkins & Pekka Isolatus (eds.):
Speech Culture in Finland**
New York, University Press of America, 2008, 226 p.,
ISBN 0-7618-4453-8

Finding the Finnish Finn

Is there such a thing as a common Finnish speech culture? Most people would probably – and without hesitation – answer yes. Now they can find some support for this view in a book about *Speech Culture in Finland*. The book is edited by Richard Wilkins and Pekka Isolatus. Wilkins is Associate Professor at Baruch College, CUNY, where he specializes in the study of language and social interaction. Isolatus is Professor at the Department of Speech Communication and Voice Research at University of Tampere, where he specializes in the study of political communication and mediated interpersonal communication. The book contains an introductory chapter on Finnish Speech Culture and nine chapters reporting on empirical studies of different kinds of speech cultures in Finland. The articles examine “terms for talk, the regulation of talk, relational dialectics face-work, intangibles, strategic communication, and argumentation”.

All the articles are written in a clear and lucid style. They share one common assumption: speech is a social rather than a linguistic entity. Communication is viewed as systematic, social, and culturally distinct.

The articles also share the same theoretical and methodological approach: ethnographic enquiry. The qualitative approach to the study of language has – as the editors note – “a long and well documented history in Finland” (: 7). *Speech Culture in Finland* follows this tradition.

The studies conduct fieldwork in situ to inform the observations through a theoretical ethnographic framework. They take “cultural idioms, native categories and phrases, as points of access into communication systems” (: 13), and several of them are comparative cross-cultural studies.

With only one exception, all the chapters use data consisting of qualitative interviews. Finns and Mexicans give their view on the two nations’ different

perceptions of *honesty* (Chapter 2); Finns explain about silence and quietude as a Finnish *natural way of being* (Chapter 3), or about the term *asiasta puhuminen*, meaning “to speak to the fact of the matter” (: 64, Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, Saira Poutianen and Maija Gerlander present interviews with dissertation advisors and advisees; in Chapter 6 the author talks to singles in order to examine “face-concerns of middle-aged singles supportive communication” (: 122). In Chapter 8, Päiva Vaahterikko-Mejia interview Finnish and Chilean business people in order to examine whether “intangibles can strengthen trust or mistrust in Finnish-Chilean business relations” (: 151).

Qualitative interviewing is an appropriate approach when studying speech cultures. The data-based studies of the book do indeed seem to verify many earlier observations and confirm the existing picture of Finns as performing a certain kind of communication culture (cf. p. 10).

However, using interviews and self-report data does present methodical challenges. Ira A. Virtanen, author of the chapter on “Finnish Supportive Communication” (Chapter 6), expresses it in this way: “self-report methods are challenged with acquiring reliable data on indirect supportive communication and on words not only intended but also uttered in support situations” (: 133).

Interviewing people can teach us what they think about – or would like us to think they think about – certain kinds of communication. But we cannot assume that interviews teach us about how people actually communicate. If we want to learn about this, we should observe them and look carefully at what they say and how they say it. Analysing people’s thoughts on speech culture and analysing their actual speech provides us with different insights. If we want to know about Finnish speech culture – or any other communication culture – we should do both. However, observation and text analytical studies are rare in this book.

In his study of “Silence and Quietude as a Finnish *natural way of being*”, Donal Carbaugh has used both field observations, interviews, surveys, video documents and various other materials. Still, what is primarily reported in the study is people talking about the phenomenon, not people actually performing it.

If we wish to examine whether Finns are silent people we should not *ask* them if they are silent, but observe whether they actually *are* silent in certain situations. This is exactly what Jukka-Pekka Puro does in his study of “The Silence of the Finnish Sauna”. When you talk to Finns about silence, they will provide you with well-known proverbs assuring you of the existence of the silent Finn: “He who speaks much, knows little”, “Speak less, think more”, “You are considered wise if you don’t say a word”, “Silence wins all”.

However, as Puro mentions, such words may represent “ideals, not reality” (: 141). We also have the same kind of proverbs in many other languages. It is quite common in Danish and Norwegian language usage to say things such as: “Speech is silver, but silence is golden”. And we all know the Wittgenstein quote: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”. If we all truly followed the direction of this proverb, the world would certainly be a very quiet – and rather boring – place. The existence of similar proverbs praising silence and thoughtfulness in other countries, of course, does not establish Finnish silence as myth (cf. 141). So, Puro has gone to the sauna to observe whether the Finns speak or not. He then compares observations and data from interviews. It turns out that the silence of the sauna is a complex issue. It is a cultural rule that one does not talk, however depending on the situation, this rule is often violated: “When a young father and a small child are together in the sauna, the father is usually silent, because he wants to teach the child. It can be assumed that if the same father were in the sauna with his friends, he would act quite differently” (: 147).

Tuula-Riitta Välikoski’s study on “The Finnish Criminal Trial as a Speech Communication Situation” uses a method of triangulation combining information from the Government Bill and the Criminal Procedure Act with observation of criminal cases and a questionnaire completed by prosecutors. In 1998, the proceedings of Finnish criminal trials were changed from written forms to spoken ones. The study shows that the “Finnish way to conduct a criminal hearing is to take heard words literally and to appreciate the speaker’s role without any interruptions. [...] Participants must obey and closely follow the formal procedure as opposed to creating any relationships” (: 185). In the Finnish judicial understanding,

a successful trial procedure “has achieved its goals if the litigant party has understood both the procedure and the verdict” (: 185), even if the verdict is not favourable to a given individual.

In the paper on Finnish televised election debates, Pekka Isotalus uses a text analytical perspective, examining “how agreement and disagreement are expressed in practice” (: 200). When analysing presidential debates, functional theory studies from the US consider debates to consist of attack and defence, and he emphasizes the importance of the character of the candidate. Isotalus’ study shows that in Finnish political debates, expressing agreement is as important as expressing disagreement. The explanation is that in a multi-party system such as the Finnish one, good relationships must be maintained “because after the election they may be partners in cooperation” (: 204).

So, does the Finnish Finn exist when it comes to speech culture? The book more or less confirms that this is indeed the case.

Taken together, the articles emphasize that Finns still seem to appreciate silence, and they have a need for autonomy and privacy that seems stronger than that of, for instance, Norwegians, Swedes and especially Danes (even though these nationalities were not used as comparisons). Mostly, the book teaches us that Finns would prefer to maintain harmony rather than to argue directly. In his article about Finnish and Mexican honesty in business contexts (Chapter 2), Eila Isotalus talks of the essence of the Finnish idea of honesty: *mean what you say, and do what you say*, thus indicating a certain Finnish kind of honesty. However the article also shows the importance of social relations when considering such concepts. We assume that honesty means the same thing in different cultures, but it probably does not. The Finns do take words seriously. They believe, Isotalus writes, that a person should be personally committed to or invested in what he or she says: “*do not say anything you do not really mean*. In practice this means often avoidance of using emotionally charged words” (: 23).

So, on the one hand, *Speech Culture in Finland* teaches us that there is indeed such a thing as a Finnish speech culture, in which certain views on communication and communication styles across different situations, genres and groups of people are shared. On the other hand, the book also reveals that Finnish speech culture does not differ substantially from other cultures. As the editors write: Finns are not so different as they would like to be. Still, judging from most of the articles, Finns are indeed special in certain respects. The contributions of the two American scholars indicate this. Donal Carbaugh, in his text on Silence and Quietude as a Finnish *natural way of*

being” (Chapter 3), establishes that the state of being called *omissa oloissaan* is a key cultural term in expressing a Finnish code of “distinctly, albeit natural, form of Finnish action” (: 50). The term means *being alone in a good way*. Carbaugh takes the existence and use of the term as a natural Finnish “desire to be quiet and contemplative, to be undisturbed in one’s own thoughts” (: 50).

In the same way, Richard Wilkins notices, in his text on the so-called “*asiasta puhumisen* event” (Chapter 4), that lack of participation characterizes Finnish adult students and differentiates them from their American counterparts. Initially he referred to the Finnish students as *distant, closed, and unwilling to discuss anything in class room* time. However, the concept of “*asiasta puhumisen*” refers to an infocentric tendency involving a wish to “speak to the fact of the matter” an inclination to “get to the point” and “stick to the matter”. Based on mediated discourse, self-report data and interviews, Wilkins establishes *infocentrism* as a “central motivational feature of *asiasta puhumisen*.” He develops three code rules for this Finnish kind of infocentrism: The first “identifies a model speaker as *matter-of-fact*”; the second rule is a cognitive one orienting participants towards informational content and motivating them to listen and understand. The third rule “suggests that sim-

licity in expression is the preferred performance in speech” (all quotes page 79).

I am sure that Wilkins is correct in claiming that the “*asiasta puhumisen* event invokes a more infocentric model of personhood and sociality” (: 80), and in maintaining that such knowledge could help educators understand “what it is that Finns are valuing as a demonstration of knowledge and an educational engagement” (: 80). But at the same time, we should be cautious not to let ourselves be led into national essentialism. Just as the desire for silence can be found in other (speech) cultures, so can the urge to get to the point.

In similar ways, many of the other communication practices and ideals described in *Speech Culture in Finland* also exist in other speech cultures. Even though they might be especially prominent in Finland, they are not exclusively Finnish. It is likely that Finnish speech culture does not deviate in kind, but rather in degree.

Jens E. Kjeldsen
Department of Information
Science and Media Studies
University of Bergen

**Lisa Gjedde & Bruno Ingemann (eds.):
Researching Experiences. Exploring Processual and
Experimental Methods in Cultural Analysis**
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, 192 p.,
ISBN 9781847186003

This book takes a smart approach to media studies. The authors have created media set-ups in a laboratory, and investigate what happens when informants use them. Gjedde and Ingemann approach the media using methods from information science, and this is refreshing. Much of media studies stand at a safe distance from the flesh and blood of communication, doing text analysis, traditional qualitative interviews or statistical research.

Gjedde is Associate Professor at the Danish School of Education, at Aarhus University. Ingemann is Associate Professor of Communication at Roskilde University Center. For years they have got their hands dirty in the media laboratories in Roskilde and Aarhus. They have organized six experimental projects dealing with the experience of media texts

and technologies, and this book sums up the insights gained.

In a pointed phrase, Marshall McLuhan once said that media researchers should move from the ivory tower to the control tower, meaning that they should stop studying events after the fact and start making designs for people’s everyday media use. *Researching Experiences* takes a step in this direction. The potential of their research to make an impact on (Danish) society is great, due to the direct involvement with the technological materiality of the media.

Their experimental method consists of systematic variations on one and the same media experience, by exposing informants to them and recording what happens. They filmed informants in a variety of locations, like the picture gallery museum where you walk

from room to room and in the laboratory trying out touch-screen artworks in the dark. Their method of preparing, executing and documenting their experiments seems fundamentally sound, and I would love to be allowed to study the raw data (prepared texts, voice recordings, video footage, etc.). Also, the authors are acutely aware of the implication of their own presence in the experimental setting, and also reflect on the impact of the artificial laboratory setting on informants (p. 148).

What I really like about the project is the increasing focus on the active, conscious participation by informants as the chapters progress. *The Mirage Project* had 16 informants who read four different versions of a newspaper article (the use of photographs varied). Gjedde and Ingemann made four sets of such articles, so that each informant read 16 texts (p. 13ff). The design of the variations is interesting, and it is the most controlled of the experiments undertaken in the book. The result of this project was the four gazes, which will be discussed below.

The Museum Inside Project used a camera and microphone attached to the informant's body to capture more of the ongoing experience (they call it walk-video), and this helps the researchers get closer to the real-time experience of informants as they move about. Pairs of two informants walked around in the large rooms of a gallery, and discussed what they saw (p. 68ff). This approach is more original than the first one, and it also involves the informants more since they know they are the 'stars' of the video/mike. In my opinion the walk-video is a good observational method that should be tested by other researchers as well.

The most interesting project in Gjedde and Ingemann's portfolio is *The Vala Project*. It is an equipment-intensive experiment, where pairs of two informants watch and interact with a video artwork on a big touch-screen in a darkened room. Informants were filmed from several angles throughout the experiment. The authors describe a female informant's active appropriation of the experience. In order to get the best possible outcome, she repositioned herself at several distances and angles, and was highly individualist and sensitive in relation to the touch screen (p. 156). The methodology, which Gjedde and Ingemann call 'ReflexivityLab', is open to a range of media and computer interactions, and should be pursued further by Nordic media researchers.

The authors of course interpret a range of statements and actions produced by their informants, but they are arguably a bit too enthusiastic in their involvement with the informants. In the *Museum Inside Project* there is a passage that illustrates the

problem: "What makes them wonder is the sheer [sic] size of the pictures, which are so big that you feel overwhelmed by them and nearly too close to them as a spectator" (p. 80). We are not told that the point of being overwhelmed by large pictures is based on input from the informants; and it comes across as a rather common-sensical observation on the part of the authors (are you overwhelmed by large pictures?). But otherwise the interpretative use of the data material is excellent.

I particularly like the artwork for the book. There are drawings, black/white photos and a section of colour plates from the six projects that really help the reader understand what the various projects looked like, and what movements and behavioural details were studied.

The book is less impressive when it comes to the theoretical dimension. The theoretical interests are too scattered, and Gjedde and Ingemann's empirical interest in active participation doesn't really come across in their theoretical discussions. Notions of initiative, identity formation and empowerment are absent.

The authors identify their approach as a version of cultural analysis, with inspirations from John Dewey's theory of experience, British cultural studies (Stuart Hall), cognitive science and various forms of media theory ranging from Barthes to Manovich.

They present a neutral schema of experience. They distinguish between the mode of representation and the mode of reminiscence (p. 180), which corresponds to perception and later thought about an act of perception. In the mode of representation, the human being can apply four strategies of gazing or reading, where the picture is used either to reflect on oneself and one's life, for its pragmatic use value, where the gaze is locked into current stereotypes, or where it is open-minded (p. 72-73). During any of these forms of gazing or reading, the person will engage four fields of experience: knowledge, emotions, values and actions (p. 105). During and after the given act of experience, the human can engage in process dialogue with a narrative perspective, work dialogue with a pragmatic perspective, or reflection dialogue with an intertextual perspective (p. 175). In sum, this is a neat system that could be illustrated in a table for easy access.

But I am not too sure about the use value of their scheme. The authors make their ontological categories of experience without reference to previous humanistic research on experience. Not surprisingly, the categories often fit with fundamental hypotheses from the humanities, but in the context of the book, they often seem to be generated by the experiments in a grounded theory, or they are picked up from

contemporary literature without reference to their deeper roots.

In my opinion, the high level of theoretical abstraction that the authors aim at requires precise positioning in relation to the classical texts of sociology, hermeneutics and phenomenology. If Gjedde and Ingemann had compared the use value of their system with some of the other theoretical systems relating to human experience, they would have helped us understand exactly we can learn from *their* approach.

There is a formidable list of ideas in the field of cultural studies and reception theory that are not considered in *Researching Experiences*. It is strange that the authors don't relate 'experience' to the phenomenological tradition at all. Writers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Don Ihde and Vivian Sobchack have written about perceptual experience, in general terms and in relation to technology and the media. There are no traces of social constructivism in the book, and the absence of Bruno Latour's works on laboratory settings and technological action is regrettable. Berger and Luckmann's sociology of experience, Wolfgang Iser's theory of the act of reading and Hans Robert Jauss's empirical reception research would have helped us better understand what the topic is. On the sociological wing there are writings by Harold Garfinkel, Erving Goffman and George Herbert Mead that could help explain the informants' self-reflexive participation, but these are not consulted.

The core of my critique is not the lack of name-dropping, but the fact that the authors don't seem to

have created their terms and categories with a clear purpose. There are no normative reflections by the authors, and *ipso facto* their research presents itself as value neutral. It seems that Gjedde and Ingemann have no particular interests to defend, no journalistic ideals to flag, no sociological or psychological mechanisms to defend against opposing views, and no doctrines about behaviour that could be applied in a particular sector of society (teaching, media production, etc.). I would say that *Researching Experiences* contains an implicit humanism that is quite typical of cultural studies, and which presumes the greatest possible tolerance towards informants and people in general.

Returning to the slogan by McLuhan, the authors have stepped down from the ivory tower and are in contact with real people, but they don't have a strategy that would put them

in the control tower and guide people's actions in relation to media behaviour. Despite these critical comments, my overall opinion is that *Researching Experiences* is a smart and thought-provoking book. I recommend it highly for anyone in the field of media studies and information science who is considering doing experimental studies.

Lars Nyre
Department of Information
Science and Media Studies
University of Bergen

Peter Dahlén:

Sport och Medier. En introduktion

Kristiansand, IJ-forlaget, 2008, 628 s., ISBN 9788271472542

Dette er en bok som belyser mange sider ved medias dekning av sport, men også det fenomenet vi har sett de senere årene, nemlig at sporten selv tar i bruk media. Den består av 18 kapitler, med følgende titler: Sport, medier og populærkultur; Sportsjournalistikken i pressen; Sportens bilder; Sport på film; Sporten i litteraturen; Sport i radio; Sport på tv; Sport og digitale medier; Mediesportens publikum; Mediesport, rase og etnisitet; Mediesportens helter og stjerner; Sport, medier og nasjonalisme; Mediesport og kjønn; Sport og reklame; Medier og livsstilssport; Sport som videospill; Sport og musikk; Sport som kitsch. Boken bygger på forfatterens egen innsamling av

litteratur og empirisk material over mange år. Hensikten er ”å gi en introduksjon til forskning, teorier og vitenskapelig litteratur om forholdet mellom sport og medier”.

Innledningsvis reflekteres det over det faktum at mediesport til nå har hatt lavstatus som akademisk disiplin, noe forfatteren åpenbart er provosert over. Som det ganske riktig påpekes, har sport og media vært neglisjert i den akademiske verden, sammenlignet med andre deler av kulturen. Faktisk er det ikke lenge siden sporten ble definert innenfor kulturlivet. Fortsatt er den nok ikke stuerein i alle leire. Dahlén ser imidlertid en lysning i enden av tunnelen – bl.a.

pga. den raske framveksten av internasjonale journals med fokus på dette fagfeltet.

Den til nå stemoderlige behandlingen av sport og media innen academia gjør imidlertid bøker som denne svært verdifull. Dahlén viser en imponerende god oversikt over relevante publikasjoner, noe boken gjenspeiler. Man får inntrykk av at ambisjonen har vært å presentere et forskningsmessig leksikon innen dette feltet – noe han langt på vei har lyktes med.

Boken berører svært mange temaer, for mange, vil kanskje enkelte hevde. Blant temaene kan nevnes:

- sportsjournalistikkens utvikling det siste århundret
- konkurransen mellom de ulike aktørene involvert på tilbudssiden (TV, Internett, radio osv.)
- fenomenet senderrettigheter – som jo har blitt et viktig element innen TV sport – og som er en konsekvens av den tiltakende konkurransen
- konflikten mellom å drive kritisk journalistikk og samtidig promotere idretter og arrangementer media har kommersielle interesser i (dvs. kjøpt rettigheter for)
- behandlingen av sport innen litteratur og film
- hvordan idretten selv har etablert seg som en medieprodusent – eksempelvis gjennom etableringen av klubbkanaler
- hvordan den teknologiske utviklingen har utfordret og forandret rollene til det eksisterende media
- hvordan media behandler fenomenet patriotisme
- dyrkingen av helter

Dette representerer imidlertid bare en liten knippe av de mange problemstillingene som berøres.

Boken kan også leses som en historiebok, hvor perioden i hovedsak strekker seg fra starten av det 20. århundre og fram til i dag. Man får god innsikt i de store forandringene som har skjedd på flere av områdene. For noen av feltene er perioden av naturlige årsaker kortere, eksempelvis gjelder det temaer som *Medier og livsstilssport* og *Sport som videospill. Kommersialisering og teknologisk utvikling* er imidlertid to viktige stikkord. Mange av analysene berører konsekvenser knyttet til disse to fenomenene – direkte og indirekte.

I hovedsak baserer de 18 kapitlene seg på empiriske funn og refleksjoner fra den eksisterende forskningen. På de fleste områdene presenteres ulike forskningsmessige perspektiver – noe som må be-

traktes som et stort pluss. Det faktum at en del av forskningsfeltene har betydelige mørke hull når det gjelder vitenskapelige artikler, gjør at Dahlén også har måttet ty til master- og hovedoppgaver. Spesielt gjelder det den skandinaviske forskningen. Selv om dette kan betegnes som en svakhet – er det selvsagt ikke noe forfatteren kan klandres for. Man må forsyne seg av det som er tilgjengelig. Forhåpentligvis vil dette forandre seg med tiden, etter hvert som feltets akademiske status forbedres. Dahléns bok kan faktisk bidra til å forbedre nettopp dette, ved at den representerer et nyttig verktøy for framtidige forskere som ønsker å bringe stafettpinnen videre.

Det ambisiøse omfanget av temaer fikk oppmerksomhet i en anmeldelse av boken på Idrottsforum.org (Eriksson 2008). På den ene siden ble den lovprist for å dekke mange felt. Samtidig ble dette framhevet som en svakhet fordi det reduserte mulighetene til å gå i dybden – noe som spesielt gjaldt behandling av teorier. Dette førte til at forfatteren tok til motmæle (Dahlén 2008). Siden både anmeldelsen og Dahléns svar er offentlig tilgjengelig, velger jeg å knytte noen kommentarer til meningsutvekslingen mellom de to.

Når man skal anmelde en slik bok er det viktig å ha respekt for forfatterens egen målsetting, som altså var å "*gi en introduksjon til forskning, teorier og vitenskapelig litteratur om forholdet mellom sport og medier*". Aktive forskere vil lett kunne finne områder innen sitt eget spesialfelt som kunne vært grundigere behandlet. Dette gjelder også undertegnede, som kunne listet opp problemstillinger innen sfæren sport-media-økonomi hvor boka kunne gått dypere til verks – for eksempel mht. teoriproblematisering. Jeg betrakter imidlertid en slik tilnærming som å skyte over mål siden hensikten var å gi en introduksjon til temaene, ikke å gå i dybden. For de som ønsker dyp-tpøylene analyser finnes det rikelig med artikler, og etter hvert også en del bøker, å forsyne seg i.

Bokens styrke er nettopp at leserne får en tilfredsstillende innføring i forskningen på de aktuelle områdene. Alle kapitlene har lange referanselister. Disse fungerer som nyttige hjelpemidler for de som ønsker å fordype seg videre, eksempelvis studenter som er på jakt etter litteratur til sine oppgaver, det være seg på alle nivåer. En konsekvens av at forfatteren har prioritert bredde er at boken nok egner seg bedre som inngangsport til avhandlinger, enn som undervisningslitteratur. I all fall gjelder det undervisning på masternivå.

En bok som gikk mer i dybden på alle disse feltene ville nok krevd mer enn én bidragsyter. Det er simpelthen umulig for en forfatter å foreta teoretiske dypdykk i alle temaene Dahlén berører. Hvorvidt det

bør være et mål at en bok som favner så bredt, også skal gå i dybden kan imidlertid diskuteres. Personlig har jeg ikke sansen for dette. Hvis man skal fordype seg i smalere temaer bør man lete i journaler – ikke i leksikalske bøker som denne. Med dette som utgangspunkt er det grunn til å takke Dahlén for et viktig bidrag som mange studenter vil ha nytte av når de skal orientere seg i jungelen av problemstillinger knyttet til sport og media.

*Harry Arne Solberg
Trondheim Økonomiske Høgskole
Høgskolen i Sør-Trøndelag/HIST*

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