

Heritage of the Tower of Babel? Language Policies in Multilingual Contexts of Liturgical Singing



In the beginning of the Bible there is a story that tells of the Tower of Babel. Monolingual early humankind tries to build a tower with its top in the heavens, but God sees it as a threat. To solve the problem, God confuses the language of humans, so that they no longer understand one another's speech – or singing – and scatters them around the world.

Owing to globalisation, migration, and the expanded circulation of information, multilingualism is a much-discussed topic in the present-day world (Martin-Jones & Gardner 2012: 1). In this article, we delve into the language policies of different churches in different historical multilingual contexts from the point of view of liturgical music. In our five case studies, we ask what languages are used for, and what kind of language policies can be found regarding liturgical vocal music.

We use *liturgical singing* as an umbrella concept that includes all vocal worship music in different churches. In four Lutheran cases, we consider hymns, spiritual songs, and liturgical melodies according to the Western tradition. We make a distinction between different song collections: a *hymnal* is an officially authorised collection of hymns, whereas a *hymnbook* refers to a book used in congregational singing in worship services without institutional authorisation. Song collections for other congregational events are *spiritual songbooks*. The practice of Orthodox worship, the context of one case, differs significantly from the Lutheran, as services are sung or recited throughout. Prayers, responses, Biblical readings, musically more complex hymns, and other texts (all prescribed by rubrics, i.e., liturgical instructions, and found in liturgical books, not composed by performers) form a continuous musical dialogue through the alternating voices of clergy, chanters, and congregation.

We take *language policy* to consist of language practices (the choices made by individual language users), values, beliefs, and ideologies about language (what languages or varieties people think should be used), and language management (efforts to modify the language practices and beliefs of people), following Bernard Spolsky (e.g., 2021: 9). Language policy can be considered at different levels of society and in different domains

(ibid.). Our case studies consider all three components of language policy, with different foci in each case. “All five cases examine the same domain, religion – more precisely Christian liturgical singing – but the levels range from individual worship services to congregations and nationwide churches.

To study language policy, historical and cultural events and processes must be considered, as they have an impact on the status of languages as well as on language use (Ricento 2000: 20). We approach language as communication or discourse, which means understanding language as an activity bound to time, place, and contexts. We do not explore language as a code, or a system with a certain structure and certain properties, such as grammar and vocabulary (cf. Johansson & Pyykkö 2005: 12). The discussion of multilingual phenomena should be moved, as Monica Heller (2007: 1) says, ‘towards a more processual and materialistic approach which privileges language as social practice, speakers as social actors and boundaries as products of social action’. This kind of approach orients language studies towards process and practice, both of which are discussed in our cases.

All our cases stay in a liturgical or congregational context, which means that we focus on communities, and topics such as music as a form of personal devotion are not included. From the perspective of community, language is communication, an interactive activity between speakers in a socio-cultural context. However, language is not just a communication tool used to transfer messages from one actor to another, it is also used to construct meanings (cf. Searle 1995: 60–61). The linguistic resources that speakers – or writers or, indeed, singers – utilise are organised in ways that make sense under certain social conditions (Heller 2007: 1). Each Christian community has its own communication needs and practices, in which one or more languages can be used. For that reason, all the cases in this article are unique. However, some parallels can be explored, even across historical boundaries.

The languages under investigation in our case studies have different statuses in their linguistic surroundings. Some of the settings comprise a demographic majority language and one or more minority languages, and the socio-political status of the languages is also noteworthy. In case study number I especially, the language in focus is a vernacular in contact with minority prestige languages (see Owens 2000: 2–4). Cases III and IV describe postcolonial situations that have their own characteristics, especially regarding former colonial dominant languages (see Phillipson 2012 and, e.g., Paksi & Kivinen 2021).

We started working together in the spring of 2022 when we prepared a joint session for the conference *Encounters at Borders and across Borders*. In that session, we presented our cases and discussed their similarities and differences. After the conference, we continued remote meetings to write the article. The entire text is co-written by all the authors; the first drafts of the case studies, however, were written by the respective researchers.

Others commented on them, and they were edited and finalised together. Based on joint ponderings, the introduction, discussion, and conclusions are mainly written by Samuli Korkalainen and Tuuli Lukkala, but edited by all five authors together.

In the first case, Kristel Neitsov-Mauer delves into linguistic boundaries in Estonian hymnody. The second case by Samuli Korkalainen deals with the language shift in Finnish–American hymnody. In the third case, multi- and monolingual hymnals in Norway are studied by Per Kristian Aschim. These three cases represent cultural historical and hymnological research. In addition, Neitsov-Mauer presents her own observations on contemporary trends. The fourth case, the multilingual situation in which Lutheran churches in Namibia and Angola live and work, stems from Jan Hellberg's ethnomusicological research. Finally, the ethnographic research of Tuuli Lukkala on the soundscapes of Orthodox Christian worship in Finland asks, amongst other things, how participants experience the possible multilingualism of services. The presentation of the cases is followed by a comparative discussion and conclusions.

The first case, broadest in its temporal scope, extending from the seventeenth century until today, examines how language policies in place under different kinds of political regimes can shape a culture of liturgical singing.

Case I: Linguistic boundaries in Estonian Lutheran hymnody – from 'which language' to 'which kind of language'

What happens with a national hymn-tradition in a land under shifting foreign rule, and shifting linguistic and cultural pressure from the power in charge? The answer is that it changes. The following is a hermeneutic look at the impact of foreign language and culture on hymn singing in Estonia. A historical perspective reveals the background of today's Estonian culture and inspires questions about how to cope with foreign influences.

Estonians have constantly been living in a field of linguistic tension due to several external influencers. For about a thousand years, different foreign languages have been used in Estonia and Livonia: both Low German and German, sometimes Swedish, and later Russian (Raag 2009: 241). The Estonian language was spoken by the native inhabitants. After the Reformation, it was clear to the missionaries that to get to the heart of the indigenous people, it was necessary to know the local language, and print material in it. This material might initially have seemed foreign to the locals, but, over time, it became familiar, and certain traditions were even adopted from outsiders. The first Estonian-language hymnbook was published in 1637, and towards the end of the seventeenth century, under Swedish rule, two hymnbooks in Estonian and their reprints were printed,

all ten of them edited by Baltic Germans.

After the Great Northern War (1700–1721) Estonia was ceded to the Russian Empire. The political change was associated with a theological turn: the Lutheran Orthodoxy was replaced by Halle Pietism. The influence of politics in hymns can be clearly seen: the Russian Tsar was open to Pietism, and Halle's theologians had a great influence in Estonia (Winter 1953: 255), as a result of which eighteenth-century Estonian hymnals were compiled by Pietist pastors (Paul 1999: 412–413). Since the second half of the eighteenth century, the Herrnhut Brethren also had a significant impact on the national spirit of Estonia. While the Brethren are generally praised for their closeness to the people, they, on the other hand, contributed to the demonisation of Estonian folk songs that were considered savage by the Brethren and therefore remained in their disdain (Veske 2018 [1869]: 6; Rutiku 2003: 255).

The privileges of the Baltic-German nobility were preserved under Russian rule: Baltic autonomy (*Balti erikord* in Estonian) was in force. The strength of Baltic Germans was that they communicated with Estonians in Estonian. From the last third of the nineteenth century, Russians tried to impose their ideas through Russianisation policies, and in Russian, and as a result, the German way of singing (rhymed verses vs. alliteration) became an integral part of Estonian culture (Scholz 1990: 151) and Estonians started to write such hymns themselves. Under Russian rule, Estonian culture tended more to grow towards German traditions; Russian oppression thus pinned the Estonians to German culture (Rutiku 2003: 259). The influence was so relevant that the Estonian Orthodox Church also published rhymed books for singers at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The current Estonian Lutheran Hymnal *Kiriku Laulu- ja Palveraamat*¹ was published in 1991, in the first months of the restoration of Estonian independence (the first independent republic was founded in 1918). The Hymnal received a cultural award at the time, drawing attention to the hymn as a cultural phenomenon (Salumäe 2017: 39). Today, congregational singing plays an ambivalent role in Estonian society. According to the survey of the Estonian Council of Churches (Elust, usust ja usuelust 2020), 67 per cent of people in Estonia never go to church, and only 5 per cent attend church services every week. This means that only a small number of people are exposed to singing and using hymnals in church. On the other hand, there is a certain metaphysical relationship with hymn singing in Estonian society: it has a recognisable flavour of the past, which is perceived as positive because it is traditional, and traditions are gladly kept alive in Estonia.

¹ The first edition was printed in Toronto in 1991 and the second edition in Tallinn in 1992. The Hymnal was issued by the Consistory of EELC in cooperation with the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Abroad (now reunited).

In 2016, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) started to prepare a new hymnal to be published in 2025 (Uus lauluraamat n.d.). When editing the new hymnal, the prime question is how the final product could reach as many people as possible. The project is taking place at a time when Estonia is one of the least religious countries in Europe (Religionszugehörigkeit 2019), and less than twelve per cent of Estonians declare themselves being members of the Lutheran Church (Annual information for employees of the EELC). The task of compiling a hymnal for all age groups and people with a broad variety of church experiences thus becomes a special challenge. For financial reasons, a hymnological companion (that describes the context and the authors of the hymns) must be dispensed with, which seems particularly disadvantageous due to the lack of church education in Estonia. Consequently, when there are only a few ‘customers’, the editors must be aware of the language and words used in the hymnal. One hidden problem is a lack of understanding of Christian vocabulary in general (Sooniste & Schihalejev 2022: 13).

There will be 900 hymns in the new Hymnal. About 400 hymns of the current Hymnal will be taken over into the new one, which is problematic since some of these are not broadly known and their language is old-fashioned. One of the compiling commission’s aims is to ensure that the new Hymnal is better understandable in the current time. It should show a wide range of songs and hymns from different traditions and, as the former Secretary of Commission Eerik Jõks says, it should be less a book of history (Jõks 2018), yet at the same time it should remain a traditional Lutheran hymnal. A separate topic is chorale singing concerning the rhythm of the language. Jõks (2021) points out that especially in the case of translated hymns, it is very important to pay attention to Estonians’ own idiomatic awareness. At the moment, the tendency is to rhythmise the chorales, to make them rhythmically near to the originals (most of them are of German origin). According to Jõks, isorhythm (all notes of the same length) gives a better chance to perceive the rhythm of the Estonian language and thus makes hymns easier to sing.

In present-day Estonia, linguistic problems are not overcome – they have simply changed. Formerly hymns had a foreign origin and had to be translated into Estonian, whereas today, Christian vocabulary must be explained to a non-Christian reader. Hymn singing lives in its own niche, but it still has a certain influence on the cultural meta-level. For this reason, there is a need to study closely what kind of language will keep hymn singing alive in the future.

The Estonian case exemplifies the singing culture in a vernacular language emerging and finding its way through the influences of minority prestige languages. The situation is different when we study the self-adopted language policies within minority immigrant groups in the midst of the language and identity politics of the surrounding dominant culture.

Case II: The language change in Finnish-American hymnody

This case study delves into the transition from the use of the Finnish language to the English language in the assimilation process of Finnish immigrants into American society from the 1920s onwards. The topic is studied by exploring the contents of songbooks produced by Finnish churches in the United States with a close and critical reading. The analysis is made from the perspective of generations using Mark Mullins's (1987) ideal-typical three-stage model of the life-cycle of ethnic churches: from (1) a monolingual stage when the language of the old home country is used, through (2) a bilingual stage to (3), another monolingual stage, this time referring to the language of the host country.

In the late nineteenth-century United States, Finnish Lutherans founded many churches, even though in Finland, spiritual movements operated within the same church. The *Suomi Synod* was formed to be a counterpart of the state church of Finland, whereas the *National Church* had its origin in the Evangelical Movement. The Laestadians formed *Apostolic Lutheran* congregations and gradually split into several groups (see, e.g., Kaukonen 2014). As Mullins (1987: 323) describes, in the first typical stage of an ethnic church the congregations were monolingual. These churches started to print spiritual songbooks, the first volumes of which were only in Finnish because all of their editors were first-generation immigrants (see Appendix 1). The use only of Finnish was an unquestioned language policy; 'the Finnish mind' and the Finnish language were seen combined (see, e.g., *Siionin Lauluja* 1919: 5).

Most Finnish immigrants from the turn of the twentieth century were single young adults, who started families in the United States. Consequently, large numbers of their children reached adulthood in the 1920s and 1930s (Hummas 1990: 87, 89) and embraced the idea of being 'Americans of Finnish descent' rather than Finns (Jalkanen 1969: 211–212). Accordingly, English-language songs began to be included in many Finnish-American hymnals and songbooks (see Appendix 2). One could easily think that the reason was practical; people got married to other Americans and used mostly English in their everyday lives, which led to the domination of English. On the contrary, there was tension between two competing strategies: preserving Finnishness and becoming American.

From the 1890s to the 1920s, nearly 23 million new immigrants arrived in the United States. To transform them into Americans, educational, cultural, and political practices were set in place by multitudinous institutions, organisations, and individuals under the term 'Americanisation' (Hahner 2017: 22, 30, 54). Finnish children also went through the English-language Americanising educational system. In addition, in the 1920s, it was often taken for granted that immigrants stood on a lower plane mentally, morally, and spiritually than the American-born due to their inability to speak English and follow the local customs (Wargelin 1924: 15–17). From this perspective, it can be assumed that at least

some Finns wanted to show that they can sing in English as well.

At all events, the Finnish churches entered the second stage of Mullins's (1987: 325) model, in which ethnic churches are forced to start responding to the tension caused by cultural assimilation. This means using the language of the host country alongside the mother tongue. The first Finnish songbook that included an English-language section was *Siionin Lauluja*, published by the Suomi Synod in 1919. In the Apostolic Lutheran songbooks, English sections started to be included from the 1930s onwards. According to Mullins (1987: 325), ethnic churches are more characterised by organisational rigidity than being open to change. Accordingly, the ultimate reason for including English songs in Finnish songbooks was the need to keep the increasingly Americanised youth in their own ethnic community. The gradual language shift was considered inevitable, and in this situation the policy was to introduce the language used by the youth (see, e.g., *Siionin Lauluja* 1924: 7–8; Heikkinen 1986: 154). To preserve the ecclesiastical tradition of the home country, even the Finnish worship agenda was translated into English, and the liturgical melodies were modified so that it was possible to sing them in English (Order 1935). Therefore, this kind of policy was aimed at protecting an ethnic religious group.

In the Suomi Synod, a profound assimilation took place, whereas most Apostolic Lutherans only adopted the language. The English-language sections of the songbooks of the Suomi Synod consisted only of songs taken from American hymnals, while the English versions in the Apostolic-Lutheran collections mostly were translations of Finnish hymns and songs. One reason for this was that the Suomi Synod cooperated with other American churches while the exclusive Apostolic-Lutheran groups only maintained close relations with their counterparts in Finland.

The language policies of the Finnish-American churches gradually began to differ from each other. Some Apostolic Lutheran groups are still in the second stage of Mullins's model: Finnish is even now used to some extent, and Finnish-language songs and hymns are included in a few present-day songbooks. Many Apostolic Lutherans have close connections with their Laestadian counterparts in Finland, as a result of which many couples are married across the Atlantic Ocean. The arrival of a substantial number of new immigrants offers an opportunity to continue ethnic religious services (Mullins 1987: 327–328).

In the third stage of the life-cycle of ethnic churches, structural assimilation and the disappearance of the first generation leads to monolingualism, at this point referring to the language of the host society. The future of the churches is usually either organisational dissolution or reorientation (Mullins 1987: 327). The first option was put into practice when the Suomi Synod and the National Church merged with other Lutheran churches in the 1960s. After this event, neither church published Finnish-language songs but used the English-language hymnals and worship agendas of their new organisations. The decision for the merger was made in both churches independently, which indicates

an advanced stage of structural assimilation into American society. Apostolic Lutheran groups that switched to using only English – also in their songbooks – can be considered examples of reorientation, and their connections to Finland decreased significantly or were completely severed.

The Americanisation policies resulted in many, if not all, ethnic churches assimilating into the dominant culture, ceasing to use their original language. Another case of strong policies to assimilate minority cultures and languages is that of Norway, where, however, the story of languages in hymnbooks and hymnals has a different ending.

Case III: Multilingual and monolingual ways of caring for minority languages in hymnals of the Church of Norway

This case study examines two different ways of caring for minority languages, i.e., the languages of the Sámi indigenous people, and the national minority language of the Kvens, in hymnals and hymnbooks in the Church of Norway: by publishing monolingual hymnbooks and hymnals in the respective minority language, and by including hymns in minority languages in the main hymnal of the Church of Norway. Three Sámi languages are officially recognised as indigenous languages in Norway: North Sámi, Lule Sámi, and South Sámi. The Kven language has since 2005 been recognised as a language distinct from Finnish, the language of a national minority with Finnish roots (Niemi 2010: 152–154).

A brief review of the publication history of monolingual hymnbooks and hymnals in minority languages is followed by a short quantitative analysis of the hymns rendered in minority languages in the most recent common hymnal in the Church of Norway, *Norsk salmebok* 2013, which, alongside hymns in Norwegian, includes hymns in the four recognised indigenous and minority languages, almost always with parallel text in Norwegian, or else Swedish or English.

The context of this hymnbook history consists of the Norwegianisation policy in 1851–1959, the revival of the Sámi languages in the following period, and the revival of the Kven language since the 2000s (Sannhet og forsoning 2023: 386–424, 494–506). Torjer Olsen, Professor in Indigenous Studies at the Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø, speaks of three strategies in dealing with Sámi and indigenous themes in textbooks in the wake of the Norwegianisation policy: a strategy of *absence*, a strategy of *inclusion* – on majority premises – and a strategy of *indigenisation*, taking more of an indigenous perspective (Olsen 2017: 72–73). In this context, the categories will be applied to the two ways of caring for minority languages in hymnbooks and hymnals.

Monolingual hymnbooks and hymnals: A hymnbook in North Sámi was published as

early as 1870, the same year as the first official Norwegian hymnal, *Kirkosalmebog* edited by M.B. Landstad. Due to its union with Denmark (1523–1814), Norway did not develop a hymn-writing tradition of its own until well after 1814. The first North Sámi hymnbook was extended and revised in 1878. Both these versions were edited by J.A. Friis, a professor in Sámi and Finnish, assisted by Lars Hætta, a North Sámi. A third edition from 1897 was edited only by Norwegians and included many new hymns translated from the versions in the first official hymnal in Norwegian of 1870. The first hymnal in North Sámi, authorised in 1957 and published in 1960, was also a work only of Norwegians and was to a large extent a North Sámi version of the revised Norwegian hymnal from 1926. However, this *Gir’ko-Sál’bmagir’ji* never became popular, and could not replace the old hymnbook from 1897. The spelling in *Salbmagirje* 1897 was revised in 1996, and this hymnbook is still in use. The latest publication in North Sámi is a hymnbook supplement from 2005 (Aanestad 1965; Wiig 1965; *Gir’ko-sál’bmagir’ji*; Holter 2020; Skaadel, forthcoming).

A hymnbook in Lule Sámi, *Julevsáme sálmmagirje*, was published in 2005, and a hymnbook in South Sámi, *Saalmegærja*, in June 2023. Both were joint works of the Churches of Sweden and Norway. A new hymnbook in the Kven language, *Kväänin virsihäfti*, was also published in 2022. Since only a few people among the Kvens use the Kven language, this hymnbook is multilingual, rendering texts in Norwegian and Swedish as well as in Kven, Finnish, and even the Meänkieli language (the Finnish spoken in the Torne Valley in Sweden).

The most recent monolingual hymnbooks published in the 2000s can be designated as part of a ‘strategy of indigenisation’, creating hymnbooks from the point of view of the indigenous people. This might even be the case regarding the early North Sámi hymnbooks from 1870 and 1878. The 1897 hymnbook and the 1957 hymnal serve the same function as the two older books, but were formed more from the Norwegian majority perspective, accompanying inner missionary efforts towards the Sámi from the 1880s onwards. Making hymns in North Sámi available to the Sámi speaking members and congregations in the Church of Norway, but edited and selected on the premise of the majority, makes the two latter books examples of the ‘strategy of inclusion’. The North Sámi people are included in the singing of the Norwegian hymn tradition translated into the North Sámi language.

The multilingual hymnal: The Norwegian 2013 Hymnal includes fifteen hymns in each of the four languages, i.e., North, Lule, and South Sámi as well as the Kven language (overview in the index of *Norsk salmebok 2013*: 1421–1422). Out of the total of 60 minority-language hymns, 34 are common Norwegian hymns translated from Norwegian into Sámi and Kven languages. This makes it possible to sing in the Sámi and Kven languages some central Norwegian hymns, distributed throughout the liturgical year. This practice corresponds to Olsens ‘strategy of inclusion’.

The ‘strategy of indigenisation’ is at play in this hymnal in three ways. (1) Some Sámi hymns are included and made known to the Norwegian-speaking members of the Church of Norway. Ten out of sixty hymns are originally written in one of the three Sámi languages. (2) Eight Sámi and Kven folk tune melodies are linked to texts translated into the Sámi and Kven languages. (3) Translations of German or Finnish hymns which were used within the spiritual traditions of the Lule Sámi and the Kvens are now made available in Norwegian. These are hymns from the eras of Lutheran Orthodoxy and Pietism, transferred mostly through the Laestadian tradition.

The two ways of caring for minority languages in hymnbooks and hymnals in the Church of Norway are complementary. Together they might strengthen the recognition of minority languages in the hymn singing and liturgical life of the congregations in the Church. Both monolingual and multilingual hymnbooks and hymnals can serve strategies of ‘inclusion’ and ‘indigenisation’ in different ways. This depends on to what extent the hymnbooks and hymnals are edited on the premise of the majority or minority.

The current role of the language of the former colonial power varies in different post-colonial settings. Unlike in Norway, in Namibia and Angola the former languages of power do not have a dominant status in the churches. The linguistic situation is more complex, and values guiding the language strategies of church bodies and individual church members are varied.

Case IV: Layers of language for local worshippers in nation-state Christian churches in post-colonial southern Africa

When the earliest missionaries, Lutherans from Finland, arrived in the Owambo region in present-day Northern Namibia and Southern Angola in 1870, they began translating Christian texts. Today, Lutherans in Namibia and Angola have the Bible, hymnals, and services in local languages. However, as the language situation is complex and changing in both countries, questions of languages in worship and music are still acute in their churches.

This section derives from a research project on localisation and performed values in worship musicking. Musical localisation can be seen as ‘the process whereby Christian communities take a variety of musical practices – some considered “indigenous”, some “foreign”, some shared across spatial and cultural divides; some linked to past practice, some innovative – and make them locally meaningful and useful in the construction of Christian beliefs, theology, practice, and identity’ (Ingalls et al. 2018: 3). Participants promote localisation so that they are increasingly able to perform the values that they

would really wish to perform in their worship musicking. However, the relations between values within a social group can be such that a dominant value can override another value that also is considered important (Robbins 2013). Here, parts of the project's ethnographic material – interviews, recordings, and participant observation made mainly in Namibia, but also in Angola – are used to investigate the localisation of language in worship and music, and the values that motivate this process, in two churches.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN; abbreviation pronounced 'Elsin') has 600,000 members in Namibia's population of 2.5 million and is its largest Christian church. This is due to its origins in northern Namibia, which is more densely populated than the more arid central and southern regions. Namibia has had three official languages: German when it began as German South-West Africa, Afrikaans and English when it was a South African protectorate after the first World War, and only English since independence in 1990. When speakers of Owambo languages² first encountered missionaries they did not know German (the language of their colonial rulers) nor Finnish (that of the missionaries), so collaboration took place only in local languages. Modernisation and urbanisation have changed this. Today, some younger Owambos do not fully relate to their parents' mother tongue and would wish to worship in English instead. In 2017, a parish and choir member in Northern Namibia, born in 1962, said:

...even my own children. My first-born, we speak Oshindonga very well with him, but when it comes to praying, he wants to pray in English. [...] He said he can't express himself in prayer in Oshiwambo. But other things we speak Oshiwambo. [...] My daughter... [...] ... when I'm speaking she says: 'No, no [...], I can not understand you.' 'Why?' She's saying it in Oshiwambo, yes, but she said 'No, your words are too deep.' [...] ...in the elders' meeting at the church, when we are thinking of introducing English services in the morning, we thought of the young people. (Interview conducted by Jan Hellberg.)

Today, many urban ELCIN parishes have an early Sunday service in English in addition to the main service in a local language. In a changed language situation, the same values – identification and understanding – that once motivated using only local languages now motivate a different choice. This is also localisation; as English has become some younger participants' preferred worship language it, too, has become local.

More than one local language is used in ELCIN. When Finnish missionaries and Owambo Christians started worship among speakers of the Kwangali language in the Kavango area in the Northeast in the 1920s and 1930s, hymns in Oshiwambo were used to

² As a group, these languages are called Oshiwambo ('the Owambo language'). Of the seven languages only two, Ndonga and Kwanyama, are written languages.

start with. This is roughly equivalent to Danes singing in Swedish or Estonians singing in Finnish. In the 1950s, when hymns in Kwangali were introduced, some asked: ‘Are we supposed to understand what we are singing?’ (Personal communication with Håkan Hellberg, a medical missionary in Kavango 1958–1963). In this situation – caused by practical reasons – identification, or mystic holiness, became a more dominant value affecting language choice than understanding.

Today, a full hymnal in Kwangali (*Marusumo*, ‘Hymns’) furthers localisation in the Kavango region. ELCIN’s main hymnal (*Ehangano*, ‘The Covenant’) contains mostly hymns in Oshiwambo (that is, in Ndonga or Kwanyama) but also a few hymns in Kwangali, furthering the inclusion of the Kwangali-speaking minority in the church. In ELCIN services in towns in central Namibia, Oshiwambo is the main or only language and *Ehangano* is used, due to the strong numerary dominance of Oshiwambo speakers. In 2017, near the end of a service in Namibia’s capital Windhoek, a Kwangali speaker bypassed the pre-planned hymn set and the leadership of the official hymn starters, and started a praise hymn in Kwangali which often is sung at the closing of a service in his home area, and is included in *Ehangano*. Everyone joined, with a slight general surprise at this gesture of civil disobedience in the otherwise very orderly ELCIN way of celebrating, a gesture that seemed to say: ‘Remember, we Kwangali-speakers are here, too!’ (Jan Hellberg’s field diary and video recording). The value that spurred this linguistic intervention was identification rather than understanding; Kwangali speakers living in central Namibia are generally fluent in Oshiwambo.

With 60,000 members in a country of close to 30 million, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Angola (*Igreja Evangelica Luterana de Angola*, IELA; abbreviation pronounced ‘Iela’, with the vowels pronounced as in Portuguese) is small compared with ELCIN. It has been formed through several separate mission endeavours: old German and ongoing Finnish missionary influence as well as border-crossing mission work by ELCIN members in the south, and different European Lutheran influences further north. These influences have merged as the state has accepted the registration of only one Lutheran church. IELA works in diverse regions using Portuguese in its organisation but local languages in services. Many different hymnals are used; parishes use the most suitable hymnal available in their language, often from some other denomination. Only Oshiwambo speakers in the far south use a Lutheran hymnal, ELCIN’s *Ehangano*. Understanding is the driving value, and in most cases overrides Lutheran identification. In 2017, IELA’s general secretary expressed a wish that, in the future, his church would have its own unified Lutheran hymnal (Personal communication with the general secretary). This would combine understanding and Lutheran identification. However, a great challenge will be to make this hymnal not only token-wise representative of every linguistic group, but also practically usable for worshippers of every language within the church – to make

it serve not only inclusion, but also localisation.

Like in Namibia and Angola, in the increasingly multilingual Orthodox parishes in Finland understanding what is sung is an important factor when decisions are made regarding languages of worship, but other considerations, such as identification, can be at play as well.

Case V: Languages in the soundscapes of Orthodox Christian worship in Finland

Parishes of the present-day Orthodox Church of Finland are considerably more multicultural than they were a few decades ago (Martikainen & Laitila 2014: 165–170). Despite increased human mobility, this is exceptional among countries where Orthodox Christians are in a minority, as it is common that Orthodox people of different ethnic backgrounds have each formed their own churches (Chaillot 2006: 21). In Finland, however, most Orthodox people regardless of their background attend the same churches and services of the Orthodox Church of Finland together.³

Finnish has been used as a liturgical language since the latter half of the nineteenth century (Harri 2013: 33) and it gradually replaced Church Slavonic as the main language of worship in Finland between 1918 and the 1950s (Hämynen 1995: 10–11; Hirvonen 2017: 101–104). Today, alongside Finnish, parishes strive to use other languages spoken or understood by the congregation (Martikainen & Laitila 2014: 165, 169–170). A dozen languages can be heard in divine services – some regularly and some occasionally.

Some services are announced in advance to be in a certain language or certain languages. However, whether the main language has been specified or not, small parts can be said or chanted in other languages as well. As the structure of a given type of service is rather constant, it is possible to follow it independently of the language(s) used.

Tuuli Lukkala's research concerning Orthodox Christian worship in Finland considers languages as a part of the soundscapes of participants of worship. Soundscapes are here defined as auditory or sonic environments and the hearer's subjective perceptions and experiences of them (Thompson 2002: 1–2). The research draws from soundscape studies, and within the broader context of cultural studies, the methodology applied is ethnography (e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson 2019: 1–20) with reflexive realist assumptions (e.g., Hammersley 1992: 52–54; Fine 1999: 535–539). The research design is an applied one:

³ There are some parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in Southern Finland (see Martikainen & Laitila 2014: 159, 165–166).

relatively short fieldwork periods were spent in all 21 parishes of the Orthodox Church of Finland (see Lukkala 2020: 287–289). It is also insider ethnography, as the author is a long-time member of the community studied.

Based on the ethnographic research material, consisting here of field diaries and semi-structured interviews, three brief examples of different ways to consider languages in worship are presented. First, the use of different languages within a single service may be regarded as bringing together people from different linguistic backgrounds and uniting them. A Finnish-speaking interlocutor (congregation member) first tells Lukkala in an interview why they like to hear other languages in a service which is mainly in Finnish: ‘It increases the community feeling. And also that there are others than me and people of my language [...] that the perception kind of broadens, or a glimpse of, that we are much more. Or that we are *something else, too*.’ They go on to consider what it would feel like if there was a fragment in a familiar language within an otherwise unintelligible service: ‘I guess it feels like you have been taken into account. And it kind of engages you better, in a way it is like an expression of love, that we share this common thing [...] or it is something unifying.’

On the other hand, monolingual services performed in different languages within the same parish may be thought of as reinforcing the divisions between groups defined by language:

In this parish [...] per cent of members are non-Finnish speakers. We wanted to serve in Church Slavonic so that they would not go to the Moscow Patriarchate. But if we do all-Church Slavonic services, there will be a ghettoing, two completely different groups. Then again if we use Slavonic [in a service not marked as a Church Slavonic service], there are people whom it disturbs. (Tuuli Lukkala’s field diary, conversation with a priest and a cantor, Finnish-speakers.)

Experiences of individual participants in worship, however, vary greatly, as we have already seen in the previous excerpts: some people like to hear other languages, others may be disturbed by their use. The third example demonstrates that the importance that one attributes to having services completely or partly in a certain language may depend, for example, on one’s language skills, which can change over time. This interlocutor, in whose parish there are multilingual services but none completely in Church Slavonic, reflects on their own experience of the familiar language of worship losing significance as they have learnt Finnish:

It is interesting to listen to Church Slavonic, it reminds you of the home country, your own culture, it is important but not as necessary as [...] years ago when we moved here [laughs] and didn't understand anything [...]

we are very grateful, back then there were [services all in Church Slavonic], and then it was important [...]

but there are other people who perhaps moved here a few years ago, for them it is still important, that is why it would be good to have such Slavonic services. (Interview with a Slavic language speaker, a congregation member, conducted by Tuuli Lukkala.)

Language policies regarding worship, more or less consciously adopted and adapted to circumstances, can thus be experienced to have different, even opposing effects. For example, multilingual services may bring a feeling of unity in a multilingual community, whereas separate monolingual services may divide people into linguistic groups that have little contact between them. However, other considerations make the situation more complex, as certain languages may be frowned upon by some, and monolingual services in one's own language can have strong meanings, especially for recent immigrants.

A church is a community that has a theologically motivated goal to bring people together while caring pastorally for each individual's needs. The question of language use can highlight how, in our increasingly multilingual societies, this can lead to tensions felt at the level of practical activities in the church, as the church actors and authorities strive to negotiate the multifarious and sometimes conflicting experiences and values of individual persons as well as the needs and aims of the community to reach an ever-deeper unity.

Language policies and liturgical singing: Comparison of case studies

Changes in political powers and authorities in the course of history shape liturgical singing, among other spheres of ecclesiastical culture, and the use of languages plays an important part in these processes. The case studies presented provide ample examples of the effects of language policy – language practices, language beliefs, and language management – on cultures of liturgical singing.

In Estonia, the use of the vernacular paved the way for the popularity of the German culture of hymn singing, and its popularity increased as a reaction against attempts to force the use of Russian. A different case of the role of language as a preserver of national, cultural, or ecclesiastical heritage is voluntary immigration to a new host country. In the

early nineteenth-century United States, Finnish immigrants either adopted the ideas of Americanisation or saw it more important to maintain Finnish ecclesial heritage, as a consequence of which Finnish hymns, songs, and liturgy were translated into English. In both the Estonian and Finnish-American cases, the musical tradition and its language were separated from each other by translating the texts into Estonian and English, respectively, but the outcomes were different. The Baltic-German musical tradition remained, whereas that of the Finns was assimilated.

The pattern of Americanisation of the Finns resembles the Norwegianisation process towards the Sámi and Kven minorities. It took place in the same period, and the loss of the mother tongue was central. Nevertheless, there was a remarkable difference: in Norway, the government pursued the assimilation of native populations into a linguistically and culturally uniform Norwegian population – although some clergymen supported the minorities' use of their own language in religious matters (Sannhet og forsoning 2023: 200); whereas, in the United States, many Finns embraced the Americanisation policy and pursued its goals themselves. Such a policy is effective only when people internalise the need for assimilation and no longer pass on their linguistic heritage to their children. In the United States, only a few Apostolic Lutheran songbooks of today include individual songs in Finnish, whereas in Norway, the Sámi and Kven hymn traditions lived on in their own contexts, showed resilience and could be revived after the Norwegianisation policy had been abolished.

Language policies are always closely tied to social and political circumstances. The linguistic practices that characterise multilingualism, on the one hand, arise out of certain social conditions, which lead people to interact in particular ways in order to live together. On the other hand, multilingual practices shape new ways of interacting socially, culturally, and politically (Patrick 2007: 111). In Namibia, in a service in the dominant local language Oshiwambo, a hymn inserted spontaneously in the local minority language Kwangali is an example of using a different language as a marker of presence, a reminder of heterogeneity. This kind of multilingual language practice arises from local congregants' language beliefs and can have an impact on forming strategies of language management in their church as well. In the Orthodox Church of Finland, multilingualism in services is used consciously in striving to consider, acknowledge, and engage speakers of different languages.

The authorisation of hymnals, whether mono- or multilingual, is language management happening on the level of a whole church or a group of churches. Where authorised hymnals are in use, the possibilities for language management on more local levels, such as in a congregation, are more limited. If these kinds of hymnals are not available, as in IELA in Angola, or if the church authorities publish only the most basic music books in the dominant language and thus lack, in effect, an official language policy,

as in the Orthodox Church of Finland, local congregations can be a more important level on which language management takes place.

The availability and usability of books, music, texts, and translations are examples of practical and quite universal questions related to multilingual services and liturgical singing. Such issues may lead church members to make compromises and give up some things to attain others. Sometimes these compromises are linguistic and contain the possibility of leading to a language shift, as in the case of Finnish Americans, sometimes theological. The situation with hymnals in Angola shows that language can be more important than denominational differences in the teaching expressed in hymns. Furthermore, in the United States, many of the English-language songs that the Finnish immigrants included in their hymnals came from denominations other than Lutheranism.

Language can be seen as a basic human right of its speakers, in which case attention is focused on the promotion of linguistic rights. This leads to minorities being considered equal language users in the community (Johansson & Pyykkö 2005: 17). Language can also be seen as a resource, which means that language is not only the resource of its speakers, but also the wealth of the entire community (Johansson & Pyykkö 2005: 18). In Norway, the inclusion of hymns in minority languages in the main hymnal, with parallel text in Norwegian, leads to enrichment both ways: hymns from the Norwegian hymn-tradition become available in the Sámi and Kven languages, and hymns in Sámi and hymns from Finnish traditions become available in Norwegian. In Namibia, recognising old and present-day linguistic minorities in the church (those who wish to use Kwangali or English in addition to the now dominant Oshiwambo) is a continuation of an earlier, extremely important shift in language policy: the recognition of local languages in face of colonial oppression, to which missionary and church language policies contributed decisively. Considering language a human right, it is curious that the new Estonian hymnal, being compiled at present, is not going to include hymns in any South Estonian minority languages, although there is a tendency to activate the use of these languages (see, e.g., Koreinik 2011).

Some differences in our cases also stem from theology. Since the Reformation, Lutherans have strived for everyone to understand everything in worship. This well-intentioned principle has contained a problematic obverse when several languages have not been used in the same service, and thus the speakers of different languages have been separated into their own groups. This happened in the nineteenth-century United States, where every language community had their own churches, and did not merge until English had begun to dominate. A common language thus brought ecclesiastical unity.

The Orthodox, on the other hand, have no theological obstacles to using several languages in the same service. Indeed, liturgical manuscripts show that there have been multilingual services for centuries (e.g., Galadza & Neroth van Vogelpoel 2019: 40–42).

Moreover, many Orthodox churches use old liturgical languages (such as Byzantine Greek and Church Slavonic) that participants only partly understand (discussion on comprehensibility vs sacrality of language in, e.g., Liddicoat 2012). However, in many Orthodox contexts where the vernacular is used, including Finland, discussions about understanding the liturgical language used, using several languages – and, for example, using music composed in a certain language as opposed to music adapted from another language – continue until this day, which means that the issues are far from resolved.

Because the texts sung in Orthodox worship are prescribed mostly by the same rubrics everywhere, it is possible to follow a service and know at least parts of it even if one does not understand the language. In Lutheran worship, hymns are chosen for a particular service, which means that the theological content of the service varies, and a congregant cannot know what is said if the language is unfamiliar. Nevertheless, Lutherans also can face, and get used to, situations in which everybody does not understand everything, as was the case for the early Kwangali-speaking churchgoers, who had to sing in another language for a long time and became content to do so.

Even for present-day Lutherans, it no longer seems necessary to always sing everything in their own language. For example, short Taizé songs, sung in many languages, are increasingly popular in many countries. In Estonia, they will also be included in the forthcoming hymnal, which means that they will be ‘canonised’. This example, as well as the exclusion of minority hymn traditions from the earlier Norwegian hymnals, emphasise the potential of the authorisation processes of hymnals to either promote or limit multilingualism.

Conclusions

We have outlined different language policies in different contexts of liturgical singing through five cases. Some of these policies are voluntarily adopted, and some are forced by inevitable social and cultural changes or external pressure. We endeavoured to describe and understand, even criticise, the different language policies under study, striving to find resemblances and dissimilarities. We have found many similarities, yet each case is unique due to different ecclesiastical, cultural, social, and political contexts and history.

According to the Old Testament, after the attempt to build the Tower of Babel, tongues were mixed, but people continued to praise God in different languages. We have given a glimpse of understanding of what it means in the context of liturgical singing. A desire to praise God ‘correctly’ and in the ‘right’ language makes it challenging, and as shown, there are different options to operate in a ‘proper’ way, whatever it means in varying historical and cultural contexts. Regardless of the language community or its size,

the language of liturgical singing is always tied to theological and stylistic expressions, typical of each denomination. The unique style of liturgical singing in each church is the bearer of certain traditions and therefore important for the community. Sometimes a certain style or familiar practice can make a musical expression understandable even if the language is foreign. Language policies have an impact on how different traditions of liturgical singing are kept alive and new ways of singing are created and adopted. Unlike in the story of the Tower of Babel, different languages are not a problem in today's multicultural world. On the contrary, multilingual language policies can bring speakers of different mother tongues together, enrich liturgical singing, and create unity.

As our research perspective was tightly focused on language policy, there are several possible directions for further research. For example, Lutheran hymn-writing and the relationship between traditional and contemporary songs should be explored. Many aspects of the relationship between language policies and liturgical singing could be studied further as well, and we hope that scholars of liturgical music will be inspired by our case studies to include issues of language policy in their research.

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Appendix 1

Finnish-language spiritual songbooks and hymnals edited and published in the United States. (If there are several editions, only the first one is listed.)

		Apostolic Lutheran	Suomi Synod	National Church	Baptist	Congregationalist	Methodist	Pentecostal
Hengellisiä Lauluja. Laulanut Paavali Ervasti y. m.	n.d.	x						
Amerikan Pyhäkoulun Laulukirja	1902		x					
Wähäinen Wirsi-Kokoelma	1903	x						
Rauhan-Sointuja	1906						x	
Siionin Säveliä	1906					x		
Sointuja Siionista	1911						x	
Siionin Matka-Lauluja Siionin Kansalle	1913	x						
Hartauslauluja	1915		x					
Kokoelma Hengellisiä Lauluja Jumalanlapsille	1916	x						
Matkalauluja	1916		x					
Matkalla. Taskulaulukirja	1918		x					
Uusia ja Vanhoja Armon Lasten Lauluja	1918	x						
Uusi Pyhäkoulun ja Nuorison Laulukirja	1918						x	
Itä-Amerikan Ev.-Luth. Nuorisoyhdistysten Liiton Laulukirja	1920		x					
Uusi Hengellinen Laulukirja	1920	x						
Matkalla Jerusalemiin. Kokoelma hengellisiä lauluja	n.d.				x			
Hengellisiä Lauluja ja Wirsiä	1923	x						
Viimeisenajan Pasuuna, eli Valittuja Lauluja	1927							x
Pieni Kokoelma Hengellisiä Lauluja	1929	x						
Virsikirja Amerikan suomalaisille ev.-lut. seurakunnille	1941			x				
Uusia Rauhansointuja	1947					x		
Uskovaisten lauluja	1948	x						

Appendix 2

Bilingual (Finnish and English) songbooks edited and published in the United States. (If there are several editions, only the first one is listed. The only exception is the second edition of Hengellisiä Lauluja ja Virsiä because the first edition was monolingual, i.e., only in Finnish.)

		Apostolic Lutheran	Suomi Synod
Siionin Lauluja	1919		x
Pyhäkoulun Laulukirja	1924		x
Amerikan Siionin Laulut ja Virret	1930	x	
Hengellisiä Lauluja ja Virsiä, 2nd ed.	1934	x	
Lauluja ja Virsiä Pyhäkouluille ja Kodeille	1934	x	
Uusia ja Vanhoja Hengellisiä Lauluja	1935	x	
Siionin Laulut ja Virret	1945	x	
Hymns and Songs	1948	x	
Spiritual Hymns and Songs	1974	x	
Uskovaisten virsiä	1961	x	
Songs of Believers	1981	x	
Selected Hymns and Altar Services	2005	x	

