

# Finglish

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On her first day in the Americas, Finnish Professor Marja-Liisa Martin was told by her hostess: *Artturilla on paita uunissa*. Translated from Finnish this meant: *Arthur has a shirt in the oven*. However, translated from Finglish, the sentence makes a lot more sense: *Arthur has a pie in the oven*.<sup>1</sup> Similar confusing, often comical, exchanges have been happening for about 100 years. Finglish is what happened to the Finnish language when Finns, apart from their mother-land, adapted to the English speaking environs of the United States and Canada while being kept apart from linguistic changes in Finland.

### *The Finnish Language and Finns in America*

Finnish, a language spoken by about 5 million people, belongs to the Baltic-Finnic group of the Finno-Ugrian family of languages<sup>2</sup>. Major members of this language group are Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian, and the Sami languages and dialects of northern Scandinavia.

The Great Famine of the late 1860's in Finland was a catalyst for widespread emigration. The famine had a devastating effect on Finland's economy and was especially difficult for the landless<sup>3</sup>. The large migration wave lasted from the early 1880's through the start of World War I, when tens of thousands of Finns emigrated to America. Most Finnish immigrants worked in the mines or the lumber industry, and many later became farmers.

By 1930, there were 142,478 persons in the United States of Finnish birth, 148,532 people with Finnish parents, and 29,526 Americans of part-Finnish parentage. This adds up to 320,536 potential speakers of Finglish in the United States, with 124,994 reporting Finnish as their mother tongue<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, M. "Finnish as a Means Of Communication in Thunder Bay." Paper presented at Finn Forum '79 Conference (November, 1979), 11

<sup>2</sup> Keresztesi, M. "The Riddle of the Uralic Peoples." Detroit: Wayne State University.

<sup>3</sup> Levlin, P. "Genealogy Corner: The Great Famine of the 1860's in Finland." *Swedish Finn Historical Society Newsletter* 2 (1993).

<sup>4</sup> Mencken, H. L. *The American Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Knopf (1936), 675

When two languages abruptly come into contact with each other, change can happen quickly, especially if speakers of the foreign language become isolated from their homeland. A sentence such as *Pussaa peipipoki petirummasta kitsiin* (*Push the baby-buggy from the bedroom to the kitchen*) was quite startling to Finns in Finland as it contained not a single Finnish word.<sup>5</sup> A new dialect, Finglish, was born.

A couple of my great-grandparents, Mauritz Randell and Lydia Klint, emigrated to the United States in 1887 and 1890 and each lived in America for over 40 years without ever learning any English. Finns settled in Finnish communities, and one could survive using Finnish / Finglish. Immigrants often worked jobs that required only manual labor, such as mining or lumbering. The long hours and socioeconomic status of the immigrants tended to preclude any kind of adult education. The new Americans had already passed a stage where second-language-acquisition would have been much easier. Finally, many immigrants also did not have a formal secondary education upon which to build learning a new language.

All speakers are looking for the best, most suitable ways to express themselves. Foreign lexical elements are inserted where there is a lack of at-present vocabulary on the part of the speaker.<sup>6</sup> In the case of *peipipoki* (*baby buggy*), the Finglish speaker is already using the Swedish loanword *peipi* which would soon become archaic in Finland. The English-speaking environment reinforced the root word, *peipi*, and introduced the novel concept of *buggy*, so it is perhaps unsurprising that *peipipoki* was used in place of the proper *lastenvaunu*.<sup>7</sup> There was no immediate Finnish feedback so the new American dialect was allowed to flourish unabated. It would have been impossible to keep the "pure" Finnish with all of the new experiences and having to cope with unfamiliar circumstances. By the time new words got to America, such as *lentokone* for airplane, Finglish had already invented the word

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<sup>5</sup> Hadden, L. "Lexicons in Contact: A Neural Network Model of Language Induced Change." *Center for Research In Language Newsletter* 11 (Jan 1988), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Halmari, H. *et al.* "Patterns of English-Finnish Code switching in Finland and in the United States." *AfinLan vuosikirja* 56 (1956), 92

<sup>7</sup> *Lastenvaunut* literally means *child's car*. However, the word Finnish word *vannu* did not become part of the Finglish vocabulary, and was replaced instead by *kaara*.

*ilmalaiva*. Neither speakers of Finnish nor English can understand Finglish without training or practice, especially if the Finnish speaker does not know any English.<sup>8</sup>

There are idiosyncrasies in different Finglish-speaking communities (*garage* has been documented as *krääts*, *kraatsi*, *räätsi*, and *raatsi*). However, there is enough consistency in Finglish for it to be considered a single dialect<sup>9</sup>. The Finglish of Oregon, Michigan, Florida, and Massachusetts follows the same general patterns.

### *Finnish and English: A Comparison*

<b>Finnish</b>	<b>English</b>
SVO	SVO
ADJ + N	ADJ + N
POST., CASE	PREP <sup>10</sup>

Finnish is similar to English in that its structure is Subject-Verb-Object. The English sentence *The sauna is ready* is analogous to the Finnish *Sauna on valmis*. In Finnish as in English adjectives precede nouns: *big bear* is the same as *iso karhu*. A minor way that Finnish differs from English is that it does not contain articles such as *the* or *a / an*.

A structural feature that one can easily recognize as peculiar to Finno-Ugrian Languages is the use of grammatical affixes and post-positions. The complex Finnish case-marking system can denote subjective, direct object, genitive and partitive functions, and can express location, direction, time, instrument, and manner. The prepositional phrase *in a car*, becomes *autossa* in Finnish. Finnish has fifteen case endings while Hungarian has about two dozen<sup>11</sup>. Another interesting feature of Uralic Languages, already exemplified in the introduction of this paper, is the unique way that possession is expressed. Translated literally, *Artturilla on pieta* is *Arthur-to*

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<sup>8</sup> Tuominen, J. "An Introduction to Finglish." Tampere: Department of Translation Studies.

<sup>9</sup> Martin, M. "Finnish as a Means Of Communication in Thunder Bay." Paper presented at Finn Forum '79 Conference (November, 1979), 1, 8

<sup>10</sup> Poplack, S. *et al.* "Distinguishing language contact phenomena: evidence from Finnish-English bilingualism." *World Englishes* 8 (1989), 392

<sup>11</sup> Kulonen, U. *The Origin of Finnish and Related Languages*. Helsinki: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Press and Culture (1998).

*is shirt*, or put more clearly, *For Arthur there is a shirt*. There is no verb *to have* in Uralic languages.

Finnish, along with Spanish, and Polish, is a language whose orthography strives to be entirely phonetic. Two extra vowels, ä and ö, have been added to accommodate this phenomena. In Finnish there is no use for superfluous letters such as c, q, x<sup>12</sup>. The letters b and z also do not exist and d occurs only rarely. The Finnish written language is pronounced how it is spelled. Finnish words are also spelled phonetically.

### *Phonemic Properties of Finnish and Finglish*

#### 1. Words must end in a vowel

Vowels at the end of words are necessary for the words to fit into the Finnish case system. There is an overwhelming preference for /i/. An /a/ or other back vowel may be used if neither the first nor second syllables of the root morpheme contain /i e ä ö / as in the *ruuma* for *room* and *vorkka* for *fork*. All Finnish and Finglish phonology follows strict rules of vowel harmony: front vowels /ä ö y/ and back vowels /a o u/ can never be mixed. /i/ and /e/ are neutral and can go anywhere.<sup>13</sup>

Included in the following chart is my mother's name, *Karen*. The name *Kareni* does not exist in Finnish or English, but that is what she was called by her Finglish-speaking neighbors in Calumet, Michigan.

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>
Karen	Kareni
car	kaara
lawyer	loijari
room	ruuma

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<sup>12</sup> Bloomfield, L. *Language*. New York: Henry Holt and Company (1933), 86, 89, 291

<sup>13</sup> Hellstrom, R. "Finglish." *American Speech* 51 (1976), 90. 91

There are a couple of rare cases in Finglish where words break the rule of vowel harmony, an occurrence that does not happen in Finnish<sup>14</sup>:

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>
heart attack	haartätäkki <sup>15</sup>
to serve	sörvata <sup>16</sup>

## 2. Words must begin with a single consonant.

Historically the Finnish language has converted most initial consonant clusters into a single consonant. For example, Germanic loan-words that started with /#skr, #str, #spr, #kr, #tr, #pr, #gr, #dr, #br/ were all transformed to the simple /#r/ <sup>17</sup>

If a word in English begins with two or three consonants, all but the last consonant will be deleted.

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>
trouble	rapoli
stove	touvi
stripe	raippi
grocery	rosseri <sup>18</sup>

## 3. English Voiced Consonants Stops /b d g/ get devoiced and become /p t k/

The voiced English stops /b d g/, are foreign or rarely used in the Finnish language. Finnish speakers can not pronounce them without a considerable amount of practice.<sup>19</sup> The voiced stops were replaced by their voiceless counterparts.

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>
yard	jaarti
lumber	lumperi
beer	piiri
garbage	karpetsi <sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In Finnish, there are instances of new borrowings and compound words that break the vowel harmony rules.

<sup>15</sup> Hellstrom, R. "Finglish." *American Speech* 51 (1976), 91

<sup>16</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. "Some Observations on Finglish in Florida." *Ural-Altäische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986), 28

<sup>17</sup> Hellstrom, R. "Finglish Revisited." *Glossa* 13 (1979), 70

<sup>18</sup> Tuominen, J. "An Introduction to Finglish." Tampere: Department of Translation Studies.

<sup>19</sup> Hellstrom, R. "Finglish." *American Speech* 51 (1976), 90

<sup>20</sup> Tuominen, J. "An Introduction to Finglish." Tampere: Department of Translation Studies.

#### 4. A sequence of three contiguous vowels is not allowed

If a word has three contiguous vowels, including the vowel that will be added to fit the word into the Finnish affix structure, it is broken up by either inserting a glide /j/ or a stop /t/.

English	Finglish
pie	paita
to play	leijata <sup>21</sup>

#### 5. Interdental and Palato-alveolar Fricatives and Affricates /θ ð č ʃ ž / are not allowed

The palato-alveolar affricates /č ʃ/ : (*ch* as in *church* and *j* as in *jar*)

become de-palatized to /ts/ before a short vowel: garage raatsi  
become a long fricative /ss/ after /n/: orange orenssi

The palato-alveolar fricatives /š ž/: (*sh* as in *shoot* and *z* as in *azure*)

become /s/: shower sauveri

The interdental fricatives /θ ð/: (*th* as in *the*)

Become /t/: birthday pörtteri

#### 6. Voiceless fricative /f/ and glide /w/ become a /v/

The unvoiced fricative /f/ becomes a voiced fricative /v/: forest voresti

The English glide /w/ is replaced by /v/: wire vairata

#### 7. Stops in final position are lengthened

English	Finglish
suit	suutti
drink	rinkki <sup>22</sup>

#### 8. Aphesis

In Finnish, the accent of every word in the language is on the first syllable. The first syllable of an English phoneme may be lost if the accent is on the second syllable.

<sup>21</sup> Tuominen, J. "An Introduction to Finglish." Tampere: Department of Translation Studies.

<sup>22</sup> Hellstrom, R. "Finglish." *American Speech* 51 (1976), 91-92

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>
apartment	paartmentti
department	parmentti
garage	raatsi
account	kaunt/kauntti <sup>23</sup>

### 9. Tense English vowels become long vowels or diphthongs

#### **Long vowels**

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>
freezer	riisari
cake	keeki

#### **Diphthongs**

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>
frame	reimi
stove	touvi <sup>24</sup>

### kt > ht does not effect Finglish words

In traditional Finnish, when words were borrowed into the language, /kt/ becomes /kh/. The Swedish *inspektor* > *pehtori* and *architect* > *arkkitehti*. However, Finglish has abandoned this rule. The English verb *collect* has become *kollektaa* in Finglish, even though there is a word *kolehti* in Finnish, which refers to the offertory at a church service (i.e. *the collection plate*).<sup>25</sup>

### *Finglish morphology*

There are three elements of Finglish morphology. First, Finglish is the Finnish of old that immigrants originally brought with them when they crossed the Atlantic Ocean. Secondly, Finglish absorbed many English loan words into its vocabulary. This is a representative feature of the standard assimilation processes of immigrants. In addition, Finglish words were sometimes shorter (*roki* for *truck* instead of *kuorma-auto* and *bisnes* for *business* instead of the Finnish *liiketoiminta*).<sup>26</sup> Forgetfulness of the Finnish word,

<sup>23</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. "Some Observations on Finglish in Florida." *Ural-Altäische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986)

<sup>24</sup> Hellstrom, R. "Finglish." *American Speech* 51 (1976), 91

<sup>25</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. "Some Observations on Finglish in Florida." *Ural-Altäische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986)

<sup>26</sup> Mencken, H. L. *The American Language, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York: Knopf (1936), 678.



even if temporary, also accounts for English loanwords.<sup>27</sup> Lastly, new words had to be coined when new situations and experiences were encountered.

Historically, Swedish was the language spoken by the educated classes in Finland. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Finland was swept by a wave of nationalism and Finnish was raised to a status equal that of Swedish. In 1888 Elias Lönnröt published the Kalevala, a collection of Finnish folk poems. Many Swedish surnames were translated into Finnish or given Finnish pronunciations: *Vidberg* is now *Viipuri*.<sup>28</sup> Completely new Finnish surnames such as *Saunakorpi* started to appear.<sup>29</sup> Finland gained independence in 1917, and with the help of the Finnish education system many Swedish elements of the language were removed. Since much of the Finnish emigration took place prior to independence, the emigrants kept the Swedish elements of their Finnish and in many cases could not have been aware of the changes to the language taking place in Finland.<sup>30</sup> This has led some to call Finglish Fingliska.

**Finglish words of Swedish Origin**

<b>English</b>	<b>Swedish</b>	<b>Finglish</b>	<b>Modern Finnish</b>
towel	handduk	hantukki	pyyheliina
onion	lök	lökki	sipuli <sup>31</sup>
pork	fläsk	läski	sianliha
soup	soppa	soppa	keitto or liemi
housemaid	piga	piika	palvelijatar
bed	bädd	peti	vuode

Although the words for bed (*peti*) and soup (*soppa*) sound like English, these words pre-date the immigrants' travel to America, and as such should be considered Swedish loanwords. Although the origin of these words is not English, their existence as English cognates undoubtedly reinforced their use in America.

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<sup>27</sup> Martin, M. "Finnish as a Means Of Communication in Thunder Bay." Paper presented at Finn Forum '79 Conference (November, 1979), 17

<sup>28</sup> Olsio, T. (e-mail). "Vidberg name in Isojoki" E-mail(14 September 2003).

<sup>29</sup> It is perhaps appropriate that I met a man named *Saunakorpi* at the Finnish sauna in Pembroke, Massachusetts.

<sup>30</sup> Sahlman, S. "The Finnish Language In The United States." *American Speech* 24 (1949): 14-24

<sup>31</sup> Kurtti, J. (e-mail). "American Finnish Dialect." E-mail(23 April 2004).

Many of the old Swedish words currently seem old-fashioned or even vulgar in modern Finnish. To call someone a *piika* in Finland is a derogatory term, however there is nothing derogatory about *piika* in American English.<sup>32</sup>

Along with the English words of Swedish origin, some words of Finnish origin that have since left the Finnish lexicon remain in English:

#### Archaic Words from Finnish that remain in English

English	English	Modern Finnish
perukkalainen	person from the same town as the speaker	
mojakka	meat stew or fish chowder <sup>33</sup>	keitto
korpsua <sup>34</sup>	pancake	pannukakkua
nisu	wheat	pulla or vehnä <sup>35</sup>
ankkajuoma	homemade beer	kotikalja
ämmi	grandmother (affectionate) <sup>36</sup>	
kultavelia	soup made from dried fruit (desert)	sekahedelmasoppa <sup>37</sup>

New English coinages are comprised of mostly nouns, with fewer verbs, very few adjectives and almost no adverbs. In his 1976 article entitled “Finglish” Robert Hellstrom postulates that part of the reason for the lack of adjectives is explained by the notion that “Finns have a reputation for being laconic, even in their native language.”<sup>38</sup>

However, adjectives are not nonexistent:

#### English adjectives

English	English	Modern Finnish
roffi	rough	epätasainen
toffi	tough	sitkeä
pisi	busy	touhukas or kiire
smartti	smart	älykäs <sup>39</sup>

Words in English that are naturally plural adopted the plural stem in their English morphemes:

<sup>32</sup> Sahlman, S. “The Finnish Language In The United States.” *American Speech* 24 (1949): 14-24

<sup>33</sup> Martin, M. “Finnish as a Means Of Communication in Thunder Bay.” Paper presented at Finn Forum ’79 Conference (November, 1979), 14

<sup>34</sup> Some local regions of Finland, including the Jalasjärvi-Kurikka area, still use the term Korpsua.

<sup>35</sup> Savolainen, S. (e-mail). “Finglish Question.” E-mail(26 April 2004)

<sup>36</sup> Kurtti, J. (e-mail). “American Finnish Dialect.” E-mail(16 April 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Niinioja, S. (e-mail) . “Request help with Finnish in America.” E-mail(15 April 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Hellstrom, R. “Finglish.” *American Speech* 51 (1976), 90

<sup>39</sup> Mencken, H. L. *The American Language, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York: Knopf (1936), 679.

### English plural confusion

English	Finglish (in plural construction)	Modern Finnish
towels	tulsut	
cookies	kukeksia	pikkuleipä
crackers	kräköksiä	keksi

In the case of *tulsut*, a Finglish singular *tulsu* exists and retains an English plural remnant. However, if you ask a speaker of Finglish what the singular form of *kukeksia* or *kräköksiä* is, they are apt to respond with the traditional Finnish words *pikkuleipä* or *keksi*.

New innovations needed to be added to Finglish morphology. For example *Kielinen* was used to describe anything not Finnish. While not a particularly useful word in Finland, it was necessary in America.<sup>40</sup>

When new situations arose, such as area codes, political ideas, and the threat of nuclear annihilation, the Finnish speaker in America was left to innovate their own word instead of waiting for the Finnish word to trickle down across the ocean.

### New innovations and idioms

English	Finglish	Modern Finnish	Notes
area code	aluekoodi	suuntanumero	This construction combines the Finnish word for area and the Finglish word for code.
airplane	ilmalaiva	lentokone <sup>41</sup>	
atom	atomi	ydin or atomi	Though atomi is not improper Finnish, the word ydin would be unfamiliar to an American Finn.
walker	volkkeri	kävelyteline	The walking aid used by senior citizens.
pace-maker	peismeikkeri		
computer	kompuuteri	tietokone <sup>42</sup>	
bootlegger	puutlekkeri	trokari. <sup>43</sup>	
Russian citizens	Ryssät	Venäläiset	This reflects cold war attitudes in America
soviet	soviet	neuvostoliito	
undertaker	hautaantoimittaja		This word literally means person who provides a grave for the dead one. There is no corresponding occupation in Finland. <sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Martin, M. "Finnish as a Means Of Communication in Thunder Bay." Paper presented at Finn Forum '79 Conference (November, 1979), 15

<sup>41</sup> Savolainen, S. (e-mail). "Finglish Question." E-mail(26 April 2004)

<sup>42</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. "Some Observations on Finglish in Florida." *Ural-Altäische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986), 28

<sup>43</sup> Mencken, H. L. *The American Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Knopf (1936), 678.

<sup>44</sup> Sahlman, S. "The Finnish Language In The United States." *American Speech* 24 (1949): 14-24

telephone	jouru kello <sup>45</sup>	puhelin	This word literally means ‘gossip bell’ and was used in Northern Michigan
small tractor	rapapassi	traktori	Translates literally to ‘mud bus’. Contains both the Finnish ‘rapa’ and Finglish ‘passi.’ Used near Bruce’s Crossing, Michigan.
refrigerator	jääpaksi	jääkaapi	Translates literally to ‘ice box’. Contains both the Finnish ‘jää’ and Finglish ‘paksi.’

In old Finnish, *hyvästi* was used to say *good-bye*. The word has since evolved to mean only farewell, however in Finglish *hyvästi* is still an appropriate casual good-bye.<sup>46</sup>

Verbs were not immune to new Finglish coinages:

**Finglish verbs**

<b>Finglish</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Modern Finnish</b>	
ritairata	to retire	vetäytyä	found among Florida Finns
rikomentata	to recommend <sup>47</sup>	suostiella	
pikka	to pick up	kerää	
pläänätä	to plan	suunnitella	
juusata	to use <sup>48</sup>	käyttää	
piilata	to peel	hilsellä	

The verb *to peel* has gone through an interesting change in the Florida dialect of Finglish. When an informant was told that perhaps the Finnish *hilsillä* may be used instead of the Finglish *piilata*, it was explained to the researcher that *hilsillä* refers only to dandruff, and if one is discussing peeling paint *piilata* was the correct word.<sup>49</sup>

Finglish creates homonyms but the speaker has developed a tolerance for it:

<b>Homonym</b>	<b>Translation from Finnish</b>	<b>Translation from Finglish</b>
peili	mirror	pail
piiri	circle	beer
sovelta	to adapt to	shovel <sup>50</sup>
paita	shirt	pie
pussaa	kiss	to push

<sup>45</sup> Drake, C. (e-mail). “Finglish.” E-mail(15 April 2004).

<sup>46</sup> Kurtti, J. (e-mail). “American Finnish Dialect.” E-mail(16 April 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. “Some Observations on Finglish in Florida.” *Ural-Altische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986), 28

<sup>48</sup> Mencken, H. L. *The American Language, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*. New York: Knopf (1936), 679.

<sup>49</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. “Some Observations on Finglish in Florida.” *Ural-Altische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986), 28

<sup>50</sup> Martin, M. “Finnish as a Means Of Communication in Thunder Bay.” Paper presented at Finn Forum ’79 Conference (November, 1979), 11

Finglish morphology also succumbed to many English idioms. *Pick up the eggs* became *Pikkaa munat* instead of the proper *Kerää munat*. The English expression *hurry up* has been economized into one Finglish verb: *horioppi*. The English idiom *stick out like a sore thumb* has been known to be translated literally into the unusual *kuin kipeä peukalo*.<sup>51</sup>

The verb *to take* is literally *ota* into Finnish. In Finglish one might translate the English idiomatic expression *take care of the boy* using the verb *ota*, where the proper verb in Finnish would have been *pidä*. *Sadie took care of the chickens* becomes *Seidi otti huolen kanoista*. The idiomatic farewell *Take care of yourself* can be translated quite literally as *Ota huolen itsestäsi*, which would sound very strange to a native Finnish speaker. In Finnish traveling involves the following construction: *menne autolla* (*go by way of a car*). The English *take a car* prevails in Finglish so the statement becomes *ota auto*. Notice that *auto* appears in the nominative form and does not have a case ending.<sup>52</sup>

A fairly well-dispersed Finglish word used to describe a modified tractor is *jukeri*, or *jokerri*. Finnish Americans often speak very fondly of the *jukeri's* they had while growing up on a farm of any size. The origins of the word are not obvious. Some theorize that the Finnish colloquialism for a very stubborn person, *jukuripää* (*stubborn head*)<sup>53</sup>, is its source. A homemade tractor would certainly act in a stubborn way and one can imagine a farmer throwing names at his *jukeri* while trying to repair it. However, there is an old American English term for a home-made modified vehicle, *Joker*, that is the likely origin<sup>54</sup>. It is very interesting that the Finglish *jukeri* outlasted the English *Joker*.

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<sup>51</sup> Martin, M. "Finnish as a Means Of Communication in Thunder Bay." Paper presented at Finn Forum '79 Conference (November, 1979), 11

<sup>52</sup> Sahlman, S. "The Finnish Language In The United States." *American Speech* 24 (1949): 14-24

<sup>53</sup> Niinioja, S. (e-mail) . "Request help with Finnish in America." E-mail(15 April 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Kurtti, J. (e-mail). "American Finnish Dialect." E-mail(16 April 2004).



Fig. 1

A **Jukeri**. 1930 Model A truck converted into a tractor with modified wheels and frame. Niilo Polo, photo taken 1949-1953 in Esko, Minnesota. From the collection of Roxie Aho<sup>55</sup>

### *Syntactic elements of Finglish*

When a 1947 American Finnish newspaper, the *New Yorkin Uutiset*, was studied by H.L. Mencken and later Siiri Sahlman, many grammar errors were found. As Finglish was in many ways an oral language, this should not have come as a surprise.

Since English is a language almost devoid of case endings, it is expected that Finglish would lose some affixes. The term *presidenttivaaleissa* (or *presidential election*) was used in the newspaper. However, the word *presidentti* should have appeared in the genitive case: *presidenttin*. An advertisement for a Lawyer states that his office is *Lähellä City Hall*, or *Near city Hall*. *Hall* should take a paritive case ending and be *Hallia*. Even though *Hall* is an English word, case endings are still necessary to be innovated to fit into Finnish grammar. If the office was near Terra Haute, the construction should still be *lähellä Terre Haute'a*. Later, the Finnish possessive suffix was missing from a noun in the phrase *meidän nuoriso* (*our youth*), which should have read *meidän nuorisomme*. The proper construction *minun kirjani* (*my book*) becomes *minun kirja* in many examples of Finglish.<sup>56</sup> However, it should be noted that it is not uncommon in Finland for this construction to also colloquially lose its case ending.

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<sup>55</sup> Aho, R. (e-mail). "Jukkuri." E-mail(17 April 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Mencken, H. L. *The American Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Knopf (1936), 677.

*Impact of Finglish on speakers of English*

Anybody who visits a heavily Finnish area of the Americas will report back that the thick brogue is unmistakable. Below are two examples of the Finglish accent on American English from two different informants. Although they originate in very different parts of the country, it is interesting note how similar they are:

**Finglish-English code switching from Fox, Montana:**

"Paappa is vit his ractori butting the heinä in da paana"  
"I would like to puy a bare of klopes (gloves)"  
"Dat boor peipi vas left on da seitvooki krying so muts"<sup>57</sup>

**Finglish-English code switching from Chassell, Michigan**

"Too pits" (two bits)  
"Pig rout in mall ricks" (big trout in small creeks)  
"Ko dis vay tu akat peets" (Agate Beach)<sup>58</sup>

When Siiri Sahlman-Karlsson visited Florida in 1986, she discovered three Finglish constructions that sounded very familiar to me. Although my mother does not speak Finnish or Finglish, these constructions, unique only to Finglish, are part of the lexicon of my family and many others in Northern Michigan:

***Florida Finglish (does not speak English) / Northern Michigan Finglish-English***

<b>English</b>	<b>Finglish</b>	<b>Finglish-English</b>
Go Ahead	Go Hed	Go Head
Imagine	Mäjın	Mäjın as in <i>Mäjın that?</i> Or <i>Can you mäjın?</i>
He is supposed to	His poustu <sup>59</sup>	He's poustu

Finglish confusion has made a permanent impression on the spelling of many Finnish names. Many names contain the foreign character *b*, such as *Boti*<sup>60</sup> (*Poti*), *Besola* (*Pesola*), and *Bekkala* (*Pekkala*) due to the Finglish /p/ being perceived as an English /b/. In fact my own name, *Randell*, originates from *Rantala*, where the Finnish /t/ was mistaken as an English /d/. It is very difficult to fight the effects of Finglish on American perceptions of the language. Walter Gentala's grandfather was disappointed

<sup>57</sup> Kujala, M. (e-mail). "Request help with Finnish in America." E-mail (14 April 2004).

<sup>58</sup> Seppala, H. (e-mail). "Request help with Finnish in America." E-mail( 14 April 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. "Some Observations on Finglish in Florida." *Ural-Altäische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986), 33-36

<sup>60</sup> Sterle, S. (e-mail). "Finglish" E-mail(14 April 2004).

that people pronounced his name, then Kentala, with the hard English /k/ rather than the soft Finnish /g/. To solve this problem, he changed the spelling of his name and much to his horror people pronounced it with the English /j/.<sup>61</sup>

Local residents in Hancock, Michigan, are so attached to the Finglish influence on their language that a monument has been constructed in its honor. On highway US-41 the following sign stands at the top of Quincy Hill:



Fig. 2 Clyde Randell next to the Kowsit Lats sign in Hancock, MI.

Using the properties discussed in this paper, we can see that Kowsit Lats translates from Finglish to Cowshit Flats<sup>62</sup>.

### *The future of Finglish*

There are psychological problems attached to Finglish. The speaker may be left with a feeling that he or she is “no longer competent in any language.”<sup>63</sup> The speakers of Finglish generally note that the Finnish spoken by Finns is somehow “purer”<sup>64</sup>. In 1949 Siiri Sahlman wrote: “as long as the mastery of English remains an obstacle to Finns,

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<sup>61</sup> Gentala, W. (e-mail). “Request help with Finnish in America.” E-mail(16 April 2004).

<sup>62</sup> This is perhaps the only sign in the United States to allude to an American cuss-word. When “Wimpi” Salmi approached the Houghton County Road Commission to construct the sign, he had to prove that there was in fact a cow pasture down that road. Beck, Julie Stevens (e-mail). “Kowsit Lats sign.” E-mail(14 April 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Hellstrom, R. “Finglish.” *American Speech* 51 (1976), 92

<sup>64</sup> Sahlman-Karlsson, S. “Some Observations on Finglish in Florida.” *Ural-Altäische Jahrbucher Ural-Alataic Yearbook* 58 (1986), 25



Finglish will be spoken.”<sup>65</sup> It is a paradox that once one is better at English they are more conscience of their Finglish and may try to remove it from their speech.<sup>66</sup>

New waves of Finnish immigrants will struggle to keep Finglish alive. Since the new arrivals usually settle near other Finns, the Finglish words will continue to be passed on to the next generation. However, as each year passes the country of Finland is becoming increasingly bi-lingual. The Finnish school system is world-renowned for its excellence. I traveled to Finland in the summer of 2003 and I would have been hard-pressed to find a young person that did not speak English with a moderate-to-high degree of fluency. In addition, much of the television programming is in English with Finnish subtitles. Finally, the Internet makes new Finnish coinages instantly available to Finns everywhere in the world, and the Finnish people tend to be very technologically literate. As English competency increases Finglish will decrease, and sadly Finglish, as a dialect, will slowly become extinct. However, I have no doubt that Finnish Americans will do their best to keep their novel expressions alive as long as they can.

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<sup>65</sup> Sahlman, Selma S. “The Finnish Language In The United States.” *American Speech* 24 (1949): 14-24

<sup>66</sup> Hellstrom, R. “Finglish.” *American Speech* 51 (1976), 92

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