

Living in two languages in Finland

What's it like to live in a place where people speak two languages? Watch this video to learn what some people in one town in Finland think.

Before you watch

Match the words with the definitions.

a perfect match	to change from one thing to another
eager to do something	to add something interesting to
to get to know somebody	something that combines well with something else
to be surrounded by something	to have something on all sides
somebody's place	very friendly to visitors or new people
to spice with	very excited to do something
to switch between	to slowly learn more about somebody
super welcoming	a person's home

Transcript

The people that come here, they speak sometimes Finnish, sometimes Swedish. Sometimes we switch between sentences. Sometimes you forget. Oh, did they speak Swedish, did they speak Finnish? Just speak whatever.

It's so natural for us to live in a language environment like this.

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Well, in areas where you have both Finnish and Swedish speakers, [the] law requires you to have signs in both languages: majority languages on top and the minority language on the bottom.

With a population of almost 50 per cent Finnish and Swedish speakers, Hanko has had to swap languages regularly over the years.

We don't consider it a problem, we consider it more a richness of our culture. So now the majority language [is] Finnish. If more Swedish people move in, the majority language would change, then we would need to change all our road signs. We would do it happily.

Swedish speakers are only five per cent of Finland's population. Still Swedish is an official language in Finland.

Swedish is my mother tongue, then I speak almost perfect Finnish. When we speak Swedish together with friends, we always spice it with Finnish words. Finnish a very rich language and has at least 30 words describing snow, while Sweden has only a few.

Most Swedish speakers live in the south and west of Finland. Ekenäs is an 85 per cent Swedish-speaking town in the south. This Finnish couple was attracted to move here by Swedish culture. Here are people who only speak Swedish and people who only speak Finnish, but, still, we are, like, managing to have conversations. They say everything in Swedish and Finnish and let you as a customer to choose which language you prefer. I grew up in central Finland and my mother tongue is Finnish. I really like this Swedish language. It's kind of round and soft. Ekenäs is a perfect match for me, because here I'm surrounded by the language. Once moving here we had this inner question that, are we allowed to be here as Finnish speakers? But we have lived here for two years now. People were super welcoming and open for us and they were eager to get to know us. When we go back to our parents' place, where you don't hear any Swedish, I kind of miss that. Everybody in the whole world should speak more languages. Without the language you cannot really get into the culture. I hope that kids learn more – maybe three, maybe five, why not six?

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After you watch

How many languages do people speak where you live? Discuss with a friend that how these languages have affected you and your culture. Also, remember you can read the transcript at any time.

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