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Colloquial Finnish

The Complete Course for Beginners

Daniel Abondolo

with dialogues by Hanna Björklund, Elina Multanen,
and Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi

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Daniel Abondolo

Abbreviations and symbols

Abbreviations

The names of the cases are always abbreviated with upper case letters, as follows:

ABL	Ablative	ILL	Illative
ACC	Accusative	INE	Inessive
ADE	Adessive	N	Nominative
ALL	Allative	P	Partitive
ELA	Elative	PRO	Prolative
ESS	Essive	TRA	Translative
G	Genitive		

Singular and plural are indicated by a preposed lower case s or p, e.g. sG = genitive singular, pILL = plural illative.

The codes s1 s2 s3 p1 p2 p3 refer to first, second, and third persons singular and plural.

Other abbreviations:

ac	active
adj	adjective
adv	adverb
cd	conditional
cj	conjunction
dir	directive
ind	indefinite (subject person)
inf	infinitive
itr	intransitive
pass	passive (participle)
pn	potential
PP	postposition/preposition
ps	present

pt	past
ptcpl	participle
sl	slang
sup	supine (past active participle)
tr	transitive

Examples:

- s1 pt first person singular past, e.g. **mä men|i|n** ‘I went’
 s2 pINE second person singular form of plural inessive,
 e.g. **tasku|i|ssa|si** ‘in your pockets’

Symbols

| (upright line) is used to separate the morphemes, i.e. the minimal meaningful units, of words, e.g. English ‘tree|s’, ‘friend|i|ness’, Finnish **puu|t**, **ystävä|i|s|yys**. To help you to distinguish derivational suffixes, which make words from words, an equals sign will be used: see Unit 1 for your first set of examples.

- + separates the members of a compound, e.g. English ‘apple’+‘tree’, ‘sun’+‘set’, Finnish **omena+puu**, **auringo|n+lask|u** (‘sun|’s+sett|ing’).
 > In grammatical sections, stands for ‘changes to’ or ‘is read as’, for example, **pp** > **p** formulates the change from **pp** in **kauppa** ‘shop’ to **p** in **kaupa|n** ‘of the shop’.

in vocabulary sections, refers the reader to the standard, literary Finnish form, for example, the notation **paljoks** > **paljonko** ‘how much?’ indicates that the standard, literary Finnish form corresponding to colloquial **paljoks** is **paljonko**.

A, O, U are used to capture regular correspondences between vowels due to vowel harmony, for example, **O** stands for **o** or **ö**, and **U** stands for **u** and **y**.

E, K, T, and other upper case letters signal morpheme-specific alternations between certain pairs of sounds, for example, both **t** and **e** alternate with zero in the inflexion of the word for ‘beer’: sN **olut**, sG **olue|n**. The shape of this word can thus be formulated as **oluTE**. You’ll learn more about how all this works gradually as you work your way through the book.

- # indicates lengthening of the preceding vowel; see Unit 2.
- Q** is found at the ends of morphemes (or as a morpheme in its own right), and stands for a variety of phonetic and grammatical effects: see Unit 2.
- X** see **Q**.

About this book

This book aims to provide you with the basics you need to communicate in Finnish. That means grammatical nuts and bolts, some useful vocabulary, and an idea of how to guess at the meanings of words you haven't heard or seen before. It's not a phrase-book or a tourist's guide to Finland; plenty of those are already available, and besides, all the phrase-books in the world won't get you communicating if you aren't equipped with the rules. On the other hand it is not a reference grammar; it is a textbook, so many of the more complex aspects of Finnish are presented gradually, in sections spread over several units. For ease of revision, a few topics are presented in summary, overview fashion, for example, consonant compression in Unit 1, or uses of the genitive in Unit 14.

Finnish is the first language of some five and a half million people. Most speakers live in Finland, but there are also significant enclaves in Sweden, Estonia, and Norway, and in the area around Lakes Michigan and Superior in the United States and Canada.

In the European context, Finland presents a rich paradox: geographically northern, it is culturally like neither Sweden nor Norway; geographically eastern, it is like neither Poland nor Ukraine. The main reason for this uniqueness is Finnish culture, which permeates and is borne by the Finnish language.

Neither Germanic (like Swedish, German, or English) nor Slavonic (like Polish and Ukrainian), Finnish is a Uralic language, and is thus related to Estonian and the Saami languages, and, more distantly, to Hungarian, as well as to Khanty, Mansi, and other languages spoken in the Russian Federation. Most Finnish vocabulary will therefore probably be new to you; the learning curve flattens out fairly soon, however, because once you enter the intermediate stages you will find Finnish vocabulary richly systematic and therefore relatively easy to learn.



Map of Finland

Finnish pronunciation presents few novel challenges, and the spelling is for the most part perfectly consistent. For English speakers, there are few unfamiliar sounds. Many will be relieved to learn that Finnish word-stress is predictably always on the first syllable.

Some of the grammar, too, is quite different from that of most European languages. But there is nothing intrinsically difficult about it; it is simply unfamiliar. If you keep an open mind as you work through this book, you may well discover that grammar can be interesting in itself; here, however, we'll just hit a few of the high spots to give you some idea of what's in store.

Finnish words take on many forms, and some Finns like to try to frighten foreigners with tales of sesquipedalian adjectives and case systems with fifteen-plus members. And in fact, Finnish nouns can and do take some fifteen different endings depending on their role in the sentence. The word for 'Finland', for example, **Suomi**, can also be **Suomesta**, **Suomeen**, and **Suomessa**, corresponding to English 'from Finland', 'to Finland', and 'in Finland'. But nothing as complicated as Latin or even Russian or German need be feared, for the endings, or suffixes, which appear at the end of this word (and which we shall segment in this book as **Suome|sta Suome|en Suome|ssa**) are essentially the same for *all* nouns, in both singular and plural. There is no grammatical gender, even in the third person singular pronoun: Finnish does not distinguish 'she' from 'he', or 'her' from 'him'. The Finnish verb is also quite straightforward, particularly when compared with that of English, French, or Spanish. Only one verb is truly irregular.

The Finnish lexicon is exceptionally rich, in part because of the built-in machinery which the language has for making and modifying words, in part because of its openness to foreign borrowings and the creativeness of its slang. If you are interested in folk poetry, you probably already know that Finnish is the key to one of the world's largest archives of orally transmitted verbal art. This oral tradition is also a source of extensive synonymy.

It is perhaps useful to stress that like any language, Finnish is more than a means of communication. It is also an object which can be studied for its own sake. You don't need to devote the rest of your life to studying it – though you may be tempted! – but the more thought and work you invest into Finnish itself, the more communication will become not only easier but more pleasurable.

The sounds of Finnish



(Audio 1:1)

The basic rule is this: don't rush; give all the sounds their due time and attention. (If you think you're holding a sound much too long, it's probably about right.)

Vowels (Audio 1:2)



The letters **i e a o u y ä ö** when written single stand for sounds which are always pronounced fairly *short*, *but never mumbled or clipped*, regardless of position. *Always long* are the sounds written **ii ee aa oo uu yy ää öö**, i.e. the same eight letters doubled.

The vowels may be classified roughly according to their manner of articulation as high (**i y u**), mid (**e ö o**), and low (**ä a**); front (**i y e ö ä**) vs. back (**u o a**); and rounded (**y ö u o**) vs. unrounded (**i e ä a**). *Rounded* here refers to the position of the lips, which are then pursed and slightly protruded. *High*, *mid*, and *low*, and, in parallel fashion, *front* and *back* refer to the relative positions of the tongue.

Listen to the recording and do your best to imitate these samples, concentrating on the vowel marked with *italics*. Remember to stress the first syllable, regardless of what else is going on later on in the word.

	Finnish	Meaning	Pronounced as in German	Pronounced as in English
i	kiva	smashing	<i>bitte</i>	'bit' (especially Australian)
ii	kiitos	thanks	<i>biете</i>	'bead'
u	kuva	picture	<i>gucke</i>	'cook' (especially Australian)
uu	kuuma	hot	<i>Schuhe</i>	(billed and) 'cooed'
y	kylä	village	<i>Hütte</i>	—
yy	tyyli	style	<i>müde</i>	—

ee	veteen	into the water	<i>gäbe</i>	‘square’, but with no trace of an <i>r</i>
oo	taloon	into the house	—	‘north’, but with no trace of an <i>r</i>
öö	keittiöön	into the kitchen	<i>Höhle</i>	—
aa	pataan	into the pot	<i>Ahnung</i>	‘palm’
ää	pesään	into the nest	—	‘ban’, but longer
e	keli	road conditions	<i>Bett</i>	‘bet’
o	Koli	(place name)	<i>solle</i>	—
ö	köli	keel	<i>Hölle</i>	—
a	kala	fish	<i>knapp</i>	‘palm’, but shorter
ä	käsi	hand	—	‘bat’

**(Audio 1:3)**

The letter sequences **ie** **uo** **yö** represent diphthongs. You may first attempt them by simply pronouncing a good Finnish **i**, **u**, or **y** followed by a good Finnish **e**, **o**, or **ö**. Avoid allowing the diphthong to ‘centre’, i.e. do not pronounce the second vowel as a *schwa* (as in Leeds or New York ‘near’, ‘cure’). Avoid, also, the temptation to lengthen the second vowel at the expense of the first (as in Italian *miele*, *buono*).

ie	kieli	language	—	cf. Jamaican ‘face’
uo	Suomi	Finland	—	cf. Jamaican ‘goat’
yö	syödä	to eat	—	—

**(Audio 1:4)**

Here are some more examples to practise. Make sure you can clearly hear the difference in length (of the vowels, again, in *italics*):

English	short	long	English	contrast
pig	sika	siika	herring	i : ii
of a row	rivin	riviin	into a row	i : ii
of a name	nimen	nimeen	into a name	e : ee
of a fish	kalan	kalaan	into a fish	a : aa
of a poem	runon	runoon	into a poem	o : oo
of sorrow	surun	suruun	into sorrow	u : uu
expenses	kulut	kuulut	you belong	u : uu
summer cabin	mökki	rööki	fag, cigarette	ö : öö
wrinkle	ryppy	ryppy	(alcoholic) drink	y : yy

Consonants

(Audio 1:5)



Most of the consonants also come in short and long varieties. Between vowels, the long consonants are written double. For example:

who?	kuka	kukka	flower
worm	mato	matto	rug
help	apu	vappu	May Day
heap	kasa	kassa	cash register
beer	olut	ollut	been

When two different consonants occur next to one another, either the first or the second is long. Length is indicated in spelling as follows.

(Audio 1:6)



- 1 If the first consonant is pronounced short and the second consonant is pronounced long, the second consonant is written double. Examples:

linssi	lens	lamppu	lamp
kantta	lid (sP)	valssi	waltz
kartta	map	palkka	salary
ankka	domesticated duck	telтта	tent
helppo	easy	kirppu	flea
marssi	march	herkkä	sensitive, touchy

(Audio 1:7)



- 2 In the reverse scenario, that is, if the first consonant is pronounced long and the second is pronounced short, *both consonants are written single*. Practise these examples:

länsi	west	tylsä	stupid
tunti	hour	halko	log
hanki	snowcrust	pelto	field
lampi	pond	halpa	cheap
norsu	elephant	itse	self
korpi	backwoods	yskä	cough

(Audio 1:8)



Special attention should be paid to the following letters:

h represents a sound much like English ‘h’ in ‘hut’, except when written to the left of another consonant letter, when it represents a voiceless velar fricative (as in German *Bach*) or a voiceless palatal fricative (as in German *ich*), depending, as in German, on the preceding vowel. Listen to these words and try to copy the differences:

sohva	sofa
lahti	bay
kirahvi	giraffe
karahvi	carafe
pihvi	steak
tyhjä	empty

b, d, g represent sounds much like those of English ‘bait’, ‘date’, and ‘gate’, except that the sequence **ng** stands for a long velar nasal [ŋ], not a sequence of velar nasal [ŋ] plus [g]. If you distinguish the medial sounds of ‘finger’ and ‘singer’, it’s the latter sound you want, but with a longer pronunciation. Examples:

Helsingissä	in Helsinki
ongelma	problem

In **nk**, the **n** stands for velar [ŋ] as in English ‘bank’.

Note: Many speakers often substitute other sounds for **d**: you will probably hear **j** and **r** most often.



Glottal stop and its consequences (Audio 1:9)

The Finnish alphabet has no symbol for the glottal stop, which is pronounced by most Finnish speakers at the ends of forms such as **istui** ‘sit!’ or **palaute** ‘feedback’. (Glottal stop is commonly heard in London, e.g. instead of **t** in ‘city’ and ‘not a lot’). In Finnish, the glottal stop often attaches to following consonants, making them longer; it has other, grammatical effects as well. To help you to acquire a good pronunciation and to render Finnish grammar more transparent, this book writes the glottal stop in grammatical sections and in the vocabularies as **Q**: for example, the two forms given above may be written **istuiQ**, **palauteQ**.

Nuts and bolts, and a few symbols

Many Finnish words will look long to you at first, but in most instances they break up readily into smaller, recurring parts with which you will quickly become familiar. To help you to see these smaller parts clearly, the vertical stroke (|) is liberally applied throughout this book, e.g. marking off the Finnish suffix **sto** in both **kirja|sto** ‘library’ and **laiva|sto** ‘fleet’ – words that are easy to remember once you’ve learned that **kirja** is ‘book’ and **laiva** ‘ship’.

In grammatical sections, a right-pointing arrowhead (>) will indicate change, as you might expect (an English example would be ‘y’ > ‘ie’ in ‘library’ > ‘librariels’), but in the vocabulary sections the arrowhead leads you from a *colloquial* form to a *more formal* Finnish form.

A note on slang

The ‘Colloquial Finnish’ (*puhekieli*) presented in this book is in fact a range of varieties of Finnish as spoken by younger people in Finland today, particularly in urban areas, when they are speaking casually and naturally. Very little slang is presented, as this would simply double one of your first tasks, namely the acquisition of the working parts of a basic vocabulary; and once you have learned the basic (colloquial *and* formal) word for ‘hand’, **käsi**, you will not find it especially difficult to slot in slang terms for the same thing, e.g. **tassu**, **handu**, **känny**.

Dictionaries and other grammars

The glossaries at the back of this book provide the essential forms you’ll need to complete the course. Soon enough, however, you’ll want to find out more, and you’re in luck: Finns are excellent dictionary-makers, and a wide range of sizes and types are available. If you go to Finland you can nose around in the second-hand bookshops (**divari|t**) you’ll find in every city in search of bargains.

It is usually well worthwhile to have a look at alternative descriptions of a language. While working with this book, or after you’ve finished it, you might want to refer to Fred Karlsson’s *Finnish: An*

Essential Grammar (second edition, Routledge 2008). If you can find it, you'll definitely benefit from Meri Lehtinen's *Basic Course in Finnish* (1963, 1967), which abounds in detail of description and has vast quantities of examples and exercises.

Web links

Some Wikipedia pages give reliable information about Finnish.

Once you have finished this book, you should be able to start using the excellent big online Finnish grammar on the website of the Research Institute for the languages of Finland at <http://scripta.kotus.fi/visk/etusivu.php>.

Unit One

Tutustutaan

Making contact

In this unit you will learn:

- how to say what country you're from, what you do, and how to ask the same about others
- how to ask and answer yes/no questions
- one way to express possession
- how vowels in a Finnish word cooperate with one another (vowel harmony), and how consonants fight (consonant compression)



Dialogue



Esittäytyminen Introducing yourself (Audio 1:10)



Juuso and Paul introduce themselves to each other.

JUUSO Hyvää päivää. Juuso Virtanen.

PAUL Hyvää päivää. Paul Smith. Hauska tutustua.

JUUSO Hauska tutustua.

JUUSO *Good day. (I'm) Juuso Virtanen.*

PAUL *Good day. (I'm) Paul Smith. Pleased to meet you.*

JUUSO *Pleased to meet you.*



Language point



(Audio 1:11)

To introduce yourself in Finnish, you say your name. It's polite to preface your name with a greeting such as

Hyvää huomenta! (lit. 'Good morning'), said in the morning

Hyvää päivää! ('Good day'), said throughout the day,
until it's time for

Hyvää iltaa! ('Good evening'), said in the evening

and to offer to shake hands. Usually, the phrase **Hauska tutustua** 'Pleased to meet you' gets thrown in, as well. Here's another example, with the 'I'm' (**Mä olen**) explicitly stated:



(Audio 1:12)

IRMA Hyvää päivää. Mä olen Irma Ojala.

SOPHIE Hyvää päivää. Sophie Grant. Hauska tutustua.

IRMA *Good day. I'm Irma Ojala.*

SOPHIE *Good day. I'm Sophie Grant. Pleased to meet you.*



(Audio 1:13)

In less formal contexts, the greetings **hei** or **moi** are used, and surnames dispensed with:

MASA Moi. Mä olen Masa.

HANNU Moi. Hannu.

MASA *Hi. I'm Masa.*

HANNU *Hi. (I'm) Hannu.*

Follow-up will usually consist of saying where you're from and what you do for a living. Let's go back to Paul and Juuso:

JUUSO Oletteko te englantilainen?

PAUL Olen.

JUUSO *Are you English?*

PAUL *Yes. (lit. 'I am.')*

Here's the follow-up to the conversation between Irma and Sophie:

IRMA Oletteko te opettaja?

SOPHIE Olen.

IRMA *Are you a teacher?*

SOPHIE *Yes. (lit. 'I am.')*

Formal Finnish doesn't really have a word that works like English 'yes'. Instead, the key word in the question is repeated. See also below, 'Answering "yes" to yes/no (-ko) questions'.

Exercise 1



Build short dialogues in which the Finns and foreigners listed below introduce themselves to each other. Use the greetings given above, and the phrases **Oletteko te X** 'Are you X?' and **Olen** 'Yes (I am)'; don't forget **Hauska tutustua**. Here are some nationalities to start with:

suomalainen	Finnish, a Finn
ruotsalainen	Swedish, a Swede
venäläinen	Russian, a Russian
eestiläinen	Estonian, an Estonian
englantilainen	English, an English person
amerikkalainen	American, an American
kanadalainen	Canadian, a Canadian
australialainen	Australian, an Australian
ranskalainen	French, a French person
saksalainen	German, a German
belgialainen	Belgian, a Belgian
puolalainen	Polish, a Pole
unkarilainen	Hungarian, a Hungarian
sveitsiläinen	Swiss, a Swiss
egyptiläinen	Egyptian, an Egyptian
somalilainen	Somali, a Somali
saamelainen	Sa(a)mi, a Sa(a)mi
romani	Romany, a Rom
walesilainen	Welsh, a Welsh person
skotlantilainen	Scottish, a Scot

Some Finnish names

Women

Marja Mäkinen
Satu Salokangas
Eila Elstelä
Raija Nieminen
Tiia Talvela

Men

Hannu Huttunen
Pekka Pitkänen
Kalevi Koponen
Samu Santala
Heikki Karapää

Some foreigners' names

Nigel Baker	Yuri Yavlinsky
Albert O'Rourke	Jorge González
Wilfred Owen	Seiji Nakamura
Angus Salmon	Szilvia Farkas
Françoise Peugeot	Annikke Rätsep
Renate Porsche	Wang Wei
Sergio Lamborghini	



Language points

To make statements like 'I am English' or 'I am an engineer', you have to know (1) how to use personal pronouns; (2) how to use the verb 'is'; (3) vocabulary for nationalities, countries, and occupations. These are the three areas which we shall explore in the next three sections.

Personal pronoun basics

English pronouns distinguish three subject persons, 'I' – 'you' – '(s)he/it' and singular from plural ('I' v. 'we', 'he' v. 'they'). So do Finnish pronouns, but the gender distinction 'he/she' is absent. On the other hand, other distinctions are important. We'll summarize these distinctions under four points:

- 1 *Full v. cropped*: 'I' is either **minä** or **mä**; 'you', if addressed to a friend, is either **sinä** or **sä**. In other words, alongside the full-length forms **minä** and **sinä** are shorter, or 'cropped' forms; the cropped forms are more colloquial.
- 2 'He', 'she', 'it' are all **se** in colloquial Finnish, and 'they' is **ne**. In more formal style, **se** and **ne** are used only when referring to animals or things; for humans, **hän** is used in the singular and **he** in the plural.

- 3 The third person pronouns (**hän**, **he**, **se**, **ne**) are not usually omitted; the others may be omitted if they are not stressed, but to include them (in their cropped forms, of course) is more colloquial.
- 4 When speaking to one person, you may express distance, politeness, or formality by using the second person plural. (In colloquial contexts, you use the second person plural only when addressing more than one person.)

The singular subject pronouns are a bit complex, so we'll overview them diagrammatically:

Subject person	s1	mă	mină		
	s2	să	sină	(te + p2)	
	s3		se	hăn	humans
				se	other
		colloquial ↔ formal contexts			

How to say ‘am’, ‘are’, and ‘is’: the verb ole- ‘be’

The most frequently used verb in Finnish is the verb **ole-** ‘to be’. Here are its present tense forms in more formal Finnish:

	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
1	(minä) ole n I am	(me) ole mme we are
2	(sinä) ole t you are	(te) ole tte you are
3	hän/se on (s)he/it is	he ovat they are

Finnish has no future tense, so English equivalents of **minä olen** also include ‘I will/shall be’. You’ll learn about a way to explicitly express future in Unit 6.

As mentioned in the preceding section, the p2 form (**te**) **ole|tte** is used not only when addressing more than one person, but also to express politeness when addressing a single person.

As mentioned in the previous section, colloquial Finnish uses **se** to refer to people, as well, and the cropped pronoun forms **mä** and **sä** are frequent. There are also two other differences: for ‘they are’, colloquial Finnish has **ne on** instead of **he ovat**; and for ‘we are’, colloquial Finnish has **me ollaan**. More on these forms in later units.

Vocabulary building: Danish engineers and so on

Countries and nationalities

You have already met several names of nationalities above, and you will probably have noticed that they all end in either **lainen** or **läinen**. This is because **lainen/läinen** is a suffix by means of which Finnish derives nationality names from simpler, shorter words, usually names of countries. The form with **a** is used if the word to which the suffix is added contains an **a**, **o**, or **u** (thus **tanska|lainen**, **puola|lainen**) and the form with **ä** is used elsewhere (thus **venä|läinen**, **sveitsi|läinen**). This sort of matching-up of vowels is called *vowel harmony*; you’ll learn more about it later on in this unit.

For now, you can use the list below to revise nationality names while you learn the country names on which they are based; if in doubt, refer back to the exercise at the beginning of this unit. Notice the irregularities – unexpected **-a-**, **-jä** – in the words for ‘Finnish’, ‘Swedish’, and ‘Russia’.

Nationality	Country	Nationality	Country
suoma lainen	Suomi	skotlanti lainen	Skotlanti
ruotsa lainen	Ruotsi	saksa lainen	Saksa
venä läinen	Venäjä	belgia lainen	Belgia
eesti läinen	Eesti	puola lainen	Puola
englanti lainen	Englanti	unkari lainen	Unkari
amerikka lainen	Amerikka	sveitsi läinen	Sveitsi
kanada lainen	Kanada	egypti läinen	Egypti
australia lainen	Australia	somalia lainen	Somalia
ranska lainen	Ranska	saame lainen	NB
walesi lainen	Wales	romani	NB

As the example **Wales/walesilainen** (pronounced [valesilainen] or [veilsiläinen]) shows, an **-i-** is added to foreign words which end

in a consonant in order to ease the attachment of the suffix; further examples are **Niger/nigeriläinen**, **Gabon/gabonilainen**.

Occupations

Like names of nationalities, names for occupations are usually derived from words. Such words are derived from simpler words by means of derivational suffixes, which we shall distinguish by prefixing them with an equals sign (=). Common derivational suffixes which form occupation names are **=isti** and **=ikko**, both of which are usually added to stems which you will either recognize or be able to guess:

pianisti	pianist (piano 'piano')		
klarinetisti	clarinetist (klarineti 'clarinet')		
kontrabasisti	double-bassist (kontrabassi 'double-bass'; note -s- v. -ss- !)		
muusikko	musician	matemaatikko	mathematician
mekaanikko	mechanic	botaanikko	botanist
poliitikko	politician	akateemikko	academic

Tip: The vowel in the syllable immediately preceding the occupation-forming suffix **=ikko** is usually long: **muusikko**, **matemaatikko**, **poliitikko**. Contrast **musiikki** 'music', **matematiikka** 'mathematics', and **politiikka** 'politics', with the vowel lengths reversed.

Also easy to recognize and remember are:

diplomaatti	diplomat
insinööri	engineer
poliisi(konstaapeli)	police (constable)

but probably not:

tulkki	interpreter
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The ending **ri** is frequent:

tuomari	judge
maalari	painter
leipuri	baker
lääkäri	doctor

The suffix **=ja**, which is added to verbs, is the closest Finnish equivalent to the English **=er** of *writer* or the **=or** of *director*. In later units,

you will meet some of the verbs from which these occupation names are derived:

opetta ja	teacher
kirjaili ja	writer
runoilij a	poet
asianaj ja	solicitor, lawyer
ohjaa ja	(film) director
valokuva ja	photographer
maanviljeli jä	farmer
sairaanhoita ja	nurse
tarjoili ja	waiter
toimisto-työnteki jä	office worker
opiskeli ja	student

The compound-element **mies** ('man; husband'; stem **miehe-**!) is also common, whether the person is a man or a woman:

laki mies	jurist (laki 'law')
meri mies	sailor (meri 'sea')
posti mies	mail carrier (posti 'post, mail')
palo mies	firefighter (palo 'fire which destroys a building')
lehti mies	journalist (lehti 'leaf; newspaper')

Finally, some older terms are made with **seppä** 'smith':

puu seppä	joiner (puu 'tree; wood')
lukko seppä	locksmith (lukko 'lock')
kello seppä	watchmaker (kello 'clock, watch')

Putting it all together

You have now met the three basics you need to know in order to say 'I am English', 'Harriet is an engineer', even 'The Frenchman is a musician'. The neutral, normal way is to string the three items together, subject–verb–predicate, in precisely that order. Thus we have subject (**minä**, **Harriet**, **ranskalainen**), then verb (**olen**, **on**, **on**), and finally predicate (**englantilainen**, **insinööri**, **muusikko**):

Minä olen englantilainen.
Harriet on insinööri.
Ranskalainen on muusikko.

Notice that both subject and predicate are in the nominative.

Exercise 2



Now combine and revise what you have learned in the preceding sections by translating the following Finnish sentences into English:

- 1 Minä olen englantilainen.
- 2 Minä olen insinööri.
- 3 Mä olen skotlantilainen muusikko.
- 4 Sä olet ulkomaalainen.
- 5 Te olette italialainen diplomaatti.

Exercise 3



Put into Finnish:

- 1 Are you a doctor?
- 2 She is a Hungarian director.
- 3 I am an English businessman.
- 4 He is a French mathematician.
- 5 I am a Canadian student.

Exercise 4



Use analogy, guesswork, and – if desperate – the answers in the back of this book to fill in the missing items in each line of the table below.

Nationality	English	Country	English
1 ____	Danish	Tanska	Denmark
2 kreikkalainen	Greek	____	Greece
3 ____	Norwegian	Norja	Norway
4 ____	Dutch	Hollanti	Holland
5 albanialainen	Albanian	____	Albania
6 ____	Ukrainian	Ukraina	Ukraine
7 ____	Turkish	Turkki	Turkey
8 ____	Portuguese	Portugalia	Portugal



Language point

Asking yes/no questions: -ko (and vowel harmony)

As you have seen, the Finnish for 'Are you?' is **oletteko**, in other words: the verb form **olette** 'you are' plus a suffix **-ko**. This is the standard way to form yes/no questions in Finnish: you attach this suffix to the word you're asking about. Thus **Onko se suomalainen?** simply asks whether or not someone is Finnish, but **Suomalainenko se on?** singles out 'Finnish', something like 'Is (s)he *Finnish*? (and not Norwegian, or . . .)'.

Now, this suffix is not always **-ko**. Like **=lainen/=läinen** and indeed like most Finnish suffixes it has two shapes. The difference between the two shapes lies in the vowel: for this suffix the shapes are **-ko** and **-kö**. Which shape you use depends on the vowels of the word to which the suffix is attached. The rule may be stated quite simply in two parts: (1) if the word has any of the vowels **u, o, a**, you use **-ko**, e.g.:

Onko se italialainen?	Is (s)he Italian?	(Italialainen contains a , so -ko)
Pariisiko?	Paris?	(Pariisi contains a , so -ko)
Lontooko?	London?	(Lontoo contains o , so -ko)
Turkuko?	Turku?	(Turku , the name of Finland's former capital, contains u , so -ko)

Similarly:

Ranskalainenko te olette?	Are you <i>French</i> ?
Huomennako?	Tomorrow?

(2) otherwise, you use **-kö**:

Sveitsikö?	Switzerland?	(no u, o, a in <i>Sveitsi</i> , so -kö)
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Similarly:

Helsinkiläinenkö sä olet?	Are you a <i>Helsinki</i> ian?
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In compound words, it is the vowels of the last word which are decisive. For example, the word **lukko|seppä** 'locksmith' takes **-kö** because the last member of this word, **seppä** 'smith' has no **u**, **o**, **a**: **Lukkoseppäkö te olette?** 'Are you a *locksmith*?'

To save time and space, we shall refer to the question suffix as **-kO**, with the upper case **O** to serve as a reminder that the vowel is **o** or **ö** depending on vowel harmony. Similarly, whenever a suffix has **a** or **ä** depending on vowel harmony, we shall write **A**, and upper case **U** will refer to the vowel pair **u** and **y**.

For a minor refinement of the vowel-harmony rule given above, see Unit 10.

Exercise 5



Ask politely (i.e. use **te** and the second person plural form of the verb) whether someone is:

- 1 Finnish
- 2 a locksmith
- 3 Russian
- 4 a policeman
- 5 French

Exercise 6



Ask these questions in Finnish, laying emphasis on the italicized words by attaching the appropriate form of **-kO**:

- 1 Is he *Japanese*?
- 2 Are you an *engineer*?
- 3 Is he a *firefighter*?
- 4 Are you *German*?
- 5 Is she a *politician*?

Answering 'yes' to yes/no (-kO) questions

You answer in the affirmative by repeating the verb form, if this is what was being questioned:

Oletteko te suomalainen?

Olen.

Are you Finnish?

Yes.

If the yes/no-question suffix **-ko** was added to any word other than the verb, you say **niin**; it is more polite to repeat the questioned word, as well:

Ruotsalainenko sä olet?	Are you <i>Swedish</i> ?
Niin, ruotsalainen.	Yes, I am.

Finally, there is simple **joo**. This corresponds more to English 'yeah' than to 'yes', i.e. it is used only in informal, colloquial contexts:

Oletsa suomalainen?	Are you Finnish?
Joo.	Yeah.



Language point

How to say 'Irma's friend' and 'the capital of France': the genitive case and an introduction to nominal stem-types

Have a look at these sentences:

Mikä sen opettajan nimi on?	What's <i>that</i> teacher's name?
Kuka tuo on?	Who's that?
Se on Irma'n ystävä.	That's <i>Irma's</i> friend.

The words **se**|**n**, **opettaja**|**n**, and **Irma**|**n** are all in the genitive case. The Finnish genitive does the work of the 's' in English 'Irma's friend' and the 'of' in 'the capital of France'.

To form the genitive of any Finnish nominal (= noun or adjective) you add the suffix **-n**. So 'Irma's friend' is **Irma**|**n** **ystävä** (where **ystävä** is 'friend') and 'the capital of France' is **Ranska**|**n** **pääkaupunki** (where **pääkaupunki** is 'capital'). The rest of this section shows you how to do this.

Non-alternating stems

For thousands of nominals like **Irma** and **Ranska**, you just add the **-n** to the 'citation form'. (This is the form of the nominal which is listed in dictionaries. It is also called the nominative singular, so we shall use the abbreviation **sN**.)

These nominals all have citation forms ending in vowels, and their shapes do not vary, or at least they vary in predictable ways (for the most widespread predictable way see ‘consonant compression’, below). We shall call them *non-alternating* stems because their stem endings remain unchanged to the left of the genitive singular (sG) suffix **-n**. All nominals that end in **a, ä, o, ö, u**, and **y** (or their long equivalents **aa, ää, oo, öö, uu, yy**) are non-alternating. Examples:

<i>Citation form (sN)</i>	<i>sG</i>	<i>English</i>
kala	kala n	fish
kesä	kesä n	summer
talo	talo n	house
hölmö	hölmö n	fool
savu	savu n	smoke
levy	levy n	record, disk

Any adjective modifying a noun must agree with that noun in case. So both ‘green’ and ‘house’ are in the genitive in **vihreä|n talo|n ovi** ‘the door of the green house’ (**vihreä** ‘green’) and both ‘green’ and ‘door’ are in the nominative in **talo|n vihreä ovi** ‘the green door of the house’.

Exercise 7a



Have a go at translating these possessive phrases into English. You’ll need the words listed just above, plus these: **pyrstö** ‘tail’, **ovi** ‘door’, **maku** ‘taste’, **loppu** ‘end’, **pöllö** ‘owl’, **siipi** ‘wing’, **koko** ‘size’.

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| 1 kala n pyrstö | 5 pöllö n siipi |
| 2 talo n ovi | 6 levy n koko |
| 3 kala n maku | 7 Liisa n huone |
| 4 kesä n loppu | 8 klarinetisti n tulkki |

Alternating stems

These are nominals whose shape changes when to the left of the genitive singular suffix. Most are easy to spot, once you know what

to look for. In this unit you have already met one very common type: nominals ending in **=Iainen** such as **ranskalainen** ‘French’, **egyptiläinen** ‘Egyptian’. These and *all* Finnish nominals (except **kymmenen** ‘ten’) that have a citation form ending in **nen** have a stem that ends in **se**, and it is to this stem that case suffixes are added. Have a look at these forms:

sN	ranskalainen	egyptiläinen
sG	ranskalaise n	egyptiläise n

It’s best to learn the groupings of alternating stems gradually; we’ll discuss them as they come up. For another important group of alternating stems see the section on e-stems later in this unit.



Language point

Boxes with tight lids: consonant compression

In the preceding section, you saw how adding the genitive singular **-n** can trigger changes in alternating stems. This section introduces you to another kind of alternation which this and other suffixes can trigger.

If you examine the nominative and genitive singular of the following three stems, you will notice that something is happening to the **t**.

<i>Citation form (sN)</i>	<i>sG</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Consonant alternation</i>
katu	kadu n	street	t ~ d
hattu	hatu n	hat	tt ~ t
hinta	hinna n	price	nt ~ nn

The **-t-** of **katu** ‘street’ is said to ‘weaken’ to **-d-** in the genitive **kadu|n** ‘of a street’; in parallel fashion, the **-tt-** of **hattu** ‘hat’ weakens to **-t-** in the genitive **hatu|n** ‘of a hat’, and the consonant cluster **-nt-** of **hinta** is **-nn-** in the genitive **hinna|n**.

One way to think of this ‘weakening’ is that it is a kind of *compression*. It is as if Finnish words were boxes full of various consonants and that suffixes like **-n** were tight-fitting lids: putting such a ‘lid’ onto

the top of a 'box' that is already full crams the 'consonant contents' of that word into a tighter, more compressed shape.

What kind of word is a 'full box'? One that has very little 'space' at the end, i.e. any word ending in a short vowel.

What kind of suffix is a 'tight lid'? Any suffix which consists of a single consonant (like our **-n**) or begins with two consonants. With certain exceptions which we will detail as we go along, adding any such suffix causes compression of any **p**, **t**, or **k** inside the 'box'.

For example, long **pp** compresses to **p**:

kauppa	shop
kaupa n	sG

and short **p** preceded by a vowel compresses to **v**:

apu	help
avu n	sG

On the other hand, the **p** of **vapaa** 'free' is not compressed when we add the 'tight lid' **-n**, because the long vowel (**aa**) at the end provides plenty of vowel space:

vapaa	free
vapaa n	sG

These and other, parallel alternations (which we shall call *consonant compression*) are quite regular. Consonant compression is not difficult to learn, because (1) it is regular (the rules will be introduced as we go along), and it is pervasive: it occurs throughout most of the grammar and lexicon of the Finnish language; (2) it operates in parallel (for example, all longs compress to shorts); (3) it is restricted: every alternation-pair involves a **p**, **t**, or **k**; apart from some slang vocabulary, no other consonants are involved in compression.

For ease of reference, all consonant changes due to compression are set out below. Do read it through now, but *not* with the aim of memorizing it! Read it through merely in order to familiarize yourself with the kinds of changes that are involved.

The changes are illustrated here by the form of the genitive, so what we have is a list of possessive noun phrases. Each consists of a noun in the genitive singular followed by another in the nominative singular. The consonant compression which is illustrated in each case is listed in the column on the right.

Compression

- 1 Long **pp**, **tt**, **kk**, compress to short **p**, **t**, **k**:

kauppa shop	kaupa n ovi the door of the shop	pp > p
lukko lock	luko n hinta the price of the lock	kk > k
tyttö girl	tyttö n nimi the girl's name	tt > t

Since this type (**pp** > **p**, **kk** > **k**, **tt** > **t**) involves the *length*, i.e. the quantity, of the consonants, we shall call it *quantitative* compression. Quantitative is the only kind of compression which affects personal names (**Pekka** 'Peter', **Peka|n** 'Peter's') and most foreign words.

All other types of compression are *qualitative*. They are:

- 2 To the right of a nasal (**m**, **n**, [ŋ], see p. 4), compressed **p**, **t**, **k** assimilate, i.e. they copy the nasal:

rumpu drum	rummu n pärinä the beating of the drum	mp > mm
Helsinki Helsinki	Helsingi n historia the history of Helsinki	nk > ng [ŋŋ]
hinta price	hinna n romahdus 'the collapse in (lit. 'of') the price	nt > nn

- 3 Otherwise, **p** (unless preceded by **s**) compresses to **v**:

apu help	avu n tarvitsija a needer (i.e., one in need) of help	p > v
halpa cheap	halva n hotelli n osoite the address of a cheap hotel	p > v

- 4.1 A **k** between two **u**'s or **y**'s also compresses to **v**:

puku dress, suit	puvu n hinta the price of the dress	k > v
kyky ability	kilpailukyvy n ylläpitäminen the sustaining of the ability to compete	k > v

- 4.2 but between other vowel combinations, compressed **k** melts into the surrounding vowels: