

# Aspects of Identity: Rights and Obligations of Ethnic Groups

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The background of this paper lies in my studies on migration of American Finns in the USA and in my preliminary research plan on the encountering of ethnic groups in Nairobi slums. This paper includes theoretical speculation on the problems of migration and on the change of encountering ethnic groups in new cultural settings. What follows is to be taken as an epistemological speculation crusade based on my empirical experience.

A dominant culture gains supremacy at the expense of the rights of ethnically rich local cultures. A dominant culture often tends to dictate to ethnic groups by determining and/or restricting the vernacular, other spiritual culture, and material culture. The non-dominant group aware of this state of affairs, however, is best qualified to recognize its own needs and interests.

In speaking of the status of ethnic cultures, we should view the culture bearer (= tradition bearer) subjectively, as a rational being with his own concepts of the world and their value to him, the norms imposed on him and his own desire to abide by the norms of the dominant culture. The behaviour intentions of the culture bearer and his actual behaviour are the sum of all these influences. However, we have to remember Edward Hall's words about culture as a "silent language" (Hall 1959). Traditions and conventions are silent in the sense that they are often unconscious. People who claim to act rationally and to be motivated only by considerations such as efficiency, are unconsciously guided by rigid and pervasive traditions. To lay bare these traditions, ethnic identities, is a central task of the anthropologist (Peacock 1988: 4).

Ethnic identity and the rights and obligations of a local ethnic inhabitant or a migrant may be viewed from the perspective of Ajzen's theory of intended behaviour (Ajzen - Fishbein 1980; Fishbein - Ajzen 1975) which I would like to adapt in this context: a culture bearer's decision to influence the profile of his own identity and local position depends on his confidence and ability to improve his status, i.e. on his cultural competence and his intention to develop his own culture and tradition. These are affected by cultural norms and the culture bearer's attitudes towards his own ethnic culture and tradition. The culture bearer's ability to control his own behaviour thus influences at least his intention and may also have a direct effect on his behaviour and tradition. The more apposite / precise the culture bearer's belief in his ability to control his own cultural behaviour is, the more predictable his behaviour will be. Aspects of the cultural competence, rich and different in nuance, in my mind are: 1. **cultural instinct of self-preservation** (e.g.

non-conscious attitude towards the preservation of one's own culture and tradition), 2. **cultural self-confidence** (e.g. non-conscious reliance on the strength of one's cultural background; non-analyzed knowledge on one's culture and tradition), 3. **cultural self-consciousness** (e.g. to be aware of and able to analyze the basic elements [e.g. values, tradition, beliefs] of one's own culture), 4. **cultural self-esteem** (e.g. [high] appreciation of one's culture), and finally, 5. **cultural right of self-determination** (e.g. national independence, political action).

Among the cultural minorities of the Finno-Ugrian peoples, for example, it would be interesting to examine whether the theory of intended behaviour can be used to predict the culture bearer's efforts to enhance his cultural, traditional and life profile. In metropolitan slums such as in Nairobi it would be interesting to study if this theory could at all be used to predict the striving of a slum inhabitant who has migrated from a different ethnic territory to enhance his life profile. Expectations for migration may be different from real migrant conditions where there is unemployment, diseases and health problems and where unsatisfactory living conditions and the culture shock cause severe problems. There are many traditional and current theories of culture shock. Traditional theories are grief and bereavement theory (migration as a loss; psychoanalytical theory); theory of fatalism and locus of control (theory of applied sociopsychology); selective migration theory (sociobiology) and theory of expectations (applied sociopsychology). Current theories are theory of negative life experiences (sociopsychology); theory of social support networks (clinical psychology) and theory of value differences (sociopsychology) (e.g. Furnham-Bockner 1986; Suojanen 1992). What might be the culture-political implications of the intended behaviour theory in different kind of culture areas, types and migration experiences?

Cultural and ethnic self-respect can be regarded as an important means of self-control in the life of the culture bearer. From a psychological point of view, cultural identity constitutes a set of socially acquired habits and behaviour complexes which control emotions. The distinctive concrete culture of the Finno-Ugrian peoples is, e.g., the material, influential element of their cultures the preservation of which is conducive to the survival of their cultural habits. No wonder, therefore, that it is often so difficult to relinquish one's cultural identity (cf. emigration, double identity, unstable identity). Relinquishing happens, e.g., in ethnic groupings in urban settings (slums) in Africa: migration to a metropolitan slum is a major cultural change that unites traditional ethnic groups in a totally new way; and in addition they face a new multilingual ethnicity. It is also no wonder that one's own ethnic identity cannot be cast aside, however willing the advocates of cultural integration (like bureaucratic authorities) may be to do so (= the assimilation of sub- and ethnic cultures by the dominant culture). Study of the African migrant's life story, life history and life conditions in different urban settings is in my mind urgent, especially from the point of view of the culture shock, value and belief system and cultural encountering.

An analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of cultural identity among the Finno-Ugrian peoples should also be embarked on without further delay. Does a

minority identity possibly carry a **cultural stigma** (= spoiled identity; cf. Ervin Goffman 1963)? If not, the very conditions for the existence of ethnic groups should be brought to the attention of the dominant culture at the first possible opportunity, in a language which the dominant culture understands. Basic research could begin with the theory that **cultural attitude, cultural norm** and **cultural competence** together explain the **intention** to develop a healthy ethnic identity despite the sociocultural situation. The intention to raise the status of one's own culture, when combined with competence (means, ability), would account for the behaviour of the culture bearer. The theory further presupposes a link between the cultural attitude, the cultural norm and the cultural competence.

It can be assumed that a person's cultural attitude and cultural norm are bound to his cultural intention to raise the status of his own culture, but not to any direct try to actually raise it. Cultural attitude and cultural intention (i.e. what the individual, as a product of his culture, actually *does* and *intends to do*) are closely linked - just how closely is something that needs to be studied. On the other hand, the cultural norm and the cultural intention may be explained by random factors. The intention to raise the status of one's life from the status of an ethnic group is not alone sufficient to bring about a try to do so. Faith in the ability to achieve it is also required. Similarly, cultural competence (i.e. in the case of a fully competent culture bearer who is also in command of the means and devices of maintaining his ethnic identity) does not necessarily result in an attempt to raise the cultural status unless there is a clear intention. Are cultural intention and cultural competence independent factors, e.g., in Finno-Ugrian cultures or in ethnic urban groups of Nairobi slums? What is the evidence provided by history and the present day? These would be interesting questions for research.

Can it be assumed that those members of ethnic groups whose attitude is culturally positive are more likely to make a real effort to develop their life and ethnic position than those who are indifferent, negative or lacking in cultural competence (e.g. members of ethnic groups supporting the dominant culture)? Do those who feel committed to raise their cultural status actually do anything about it? In other words, is a person's ethnic intention influenced more by his ethnic attitude than by his ethnic norm? And do ethnic competence and ethnic intention exist independent of one another?

Do the intentions to raise the status and identity of ethnic groups and the culture bearer's belief in his own ability to bring about such a change correlate with what he actually does, i.e. his realistic efforts to improve his identity? If the ethnic group itself has no faith or coherence that it will succeed (e.g. in migration situations), it is unlikely to launch any true attempts, despite its intentions. Ethnic beliefs, e.g., in Africa and the world views they represent seem to support practices that nourish innocence, poverty, a lack of choices in life and the existence of environmental problems. In a compulsory migration situation these can lead to indifference and resignation in life. The Swahili expression *shauri la Mungu* 'choice of God' in East Africa is an example of fatalism, and it is used when people and cattle are threatened by starvation and aridity. Likewise, it may be conjectured that an ethnic

group's faith in its own ability to achieve an independent ethnic cultural status is not necessarily a sufficient guarantee that any serious effort will be made; a conscious intention is also required. People's ethnic intentions are largely explained by their attitudes and the norms relating to the culture as perceived by them in their environment. Attitudes are often more important than norms in the conflict between dominant and non-dominant cultures.

It would, therefore, be interesting to embark on a study, e.g., among the Finno-Ugrian peoples or ethnic groups in African urban slums on if the basic concepts of the theory of intended behaviour can be used to predict the deterioration or weakening and / or the improvement or strengthening of the status of ethnic cultures. Can the findings be given a culture-political interpretation? Are the members of the Finno-Ugrian ethnic nations subjectively rational as regards their own cultures? The same can be asked about slum inhabitants of ethnic groups in African metropolises.

Thus, the vital factors to the enhancement of the status and profile of an independent ethnic group are cultural attitudes and cultural competence. Competence is founded on the culture bearer's own observations of his culture, his tradition and his environment, on social influence and the emotional cultural climate in current and traditional settings. If the cultural independence, cultural status and profile and ethnic identity of the Finno-Ugrian peoples or Nairobi ethnic slum people will be improved, it is important that the cultural cooperation includes an outlet for the **cultural stress** caused by a non-dominant ethnic status in a new sociohistorical and environmental setting. The cultural ability of the tradition bearer should be improved by helping him recognize his unique background more consciously and the dominant culture should be made dependent on the ethnic groups on the ethnic groups' own terms. Dominant culture should give the ethnic groups its total support and help them recognize their uniqueness.

The main concerns in this cultural cooperation and research are the conservation of ethnic cultures, protection and development. These call for the widespread participation of teachers and other people dedicated to science, the arts and various fields of culture.

## ETHNIC IDENTITY IN RELATION TO LINGUISTIC IDENTITY

Sometimes it is not easy to deal with the question empirically. A change in behaviour, for instance, need not necessarily indicate a change in identity. It may merely signify a change in outward circumstances or possibilities. Can we talk about identity only when it implies a difference between group and personal identities or the conscious and unconscious opportunity of choice? Although language is more closely related to identity than many other factors, it is difficult to prove an immediate link between them; but a link does exist. The connection between language and identity concerning English in Africa is determined by Joseph Schmied on three levels:

1. interlinguistic choice, i.e. the choice to use English and not other languages,
2. intralinguistic choice, i.e. the choice of a particular variety of English, and finally,
3. conscious delimitation of certain varieties and features through overt or covert prestige (See Appendix 1).

The first level applies, of course, only when English is a part of the speaker's repertoire (1). The second level applies when speakers have access to a wider range of registers, sociolects or, at least, interlanguages within English (2), and the third level applies when relatively stable community-specific attitudes towards certain varieties and features have developed (3).

It may also be necessary to express different identities through language or language varieties, which happens through **code-switching**. Code-switching usually indicates a change in the social identity of the speaker as opposed to **code-mixing** which, in principle, does not.

The following example refers to a complex situation in Kenya (Scotton 1989: 338) where two Kikuyu speakers are interrupted by a Kisii and a Kalenjin speaker, who both switch from Swahili to English:

**Kisii:** Ubaya wenu wa Kikuyu ni ku-*assume* kila mtu anaelewa Kikuyu.

(= The bad thing about Kikuyus is that they assume that everyone understands Kikuyu.)

**Kalenjin:** Si mtumie lugha ambayo kila mtu hapa atasikia? (= Should you not use a language that every person here understands?) (We are supposed to solve this issue [with force]).

The definite final switch to English which indicates that the speaker at last wants to talk business, illustrates the markedness theory of code-switching, as it has been formulated by Scotton. She emphasizes social parameters, as opposed to formal: "--- individual switches (i.e. points at which switches occur) do not carry any social message. Rather, it is the overall pattern of using two languages which conveys social meaning. And the message is that the participants have shared and simultaneous membership in two social identities, those symbolized by each of the languages used" (Scotton 1989: 334). That was also my observation about code-switching when I began to do my field work in the Nairobi slums of Kibera, Kawangware and Kangemi in 1991.

What is special about English in comparison with other languages today is that English has a unique range in terms of geographical and perhaps parallel, identificational extension; it can signal **international**, **national** and **subnational identities**. It can be seen not only as the language spoken 'from Cairo to the Cape', but also as the language of the educated modern family, the language of the progressive, modernizing nation or the language of the international or pan-African technical communication network (Schmied 1991: 183-184).

I have also empirical experience concerning linguistic and ethnic identity. In 1985-86 and in 1989-90 I had an opportunity to do research on ethnic identity,

world view and communicational models among American Finns (first, second, third generation migrants) in different parts of the U.S. (on the West Coast: Washington, Oregon, California; in the middle of the continent: Indiana, Illinois; in the northern states: Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin; and on the East Coast: Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Georgia and Florida). The field work was partly **inductive** (participant observation, free conversations, interviews, ego picture tests; drawing tests concerning migrants' home country; videotaping migrants' homes which I regard as a symbolic universe of one's ethnic and personal identity); partly the work was **deductive** (a questionnaire on life narrative, social and other activities, national symbols, structured and standardized statements concerning migrants' ethnic barriers, position and life models; a value questionnaire with open and closed questions and statements). **Qualitative comparison** between different migrant cases (ethnographical **case study**) was the essential methodological choice for the research.

On the basis of communicational behaviour, the American Finnish linguistic identity seemed as **ideal types** (see Appendix 2):

1. Some American Finns approve their americanization completely and regard it as a self-evident fact. They live apart from other Finnish migrants and do not have any contact with them. It was very difficult to make contact with this group and to persuade them to participate in the study. **American English** is the most important identity symbol of this group: it is the only language they use (**monolinguals**). They are totally acculturated to the American culture and their conception of every-day reality derives from the surrounding American life. Their Finnish origin is no longer an existent reality to them. Nearly all the Finns of the third migrant generation belong to this group, but they can also be detected among the first generation migrants. (By first American Finnish generation I mean those who migrated to the U.S. and built their lives there.) Americans, of any origin, are the only member and reference group for the totally acculturated. I call them **culturally Americans (assimilated)**.

2. Some American Finns approve their americanization **passively** as an obligatory necessity in life. They maintain their Finnish identity through the Finnish language and social activities, they have friends who belong to the same ethnic group and they have contacts in Finland. The **Finnish language** is the most essential identity symbol of this group. Apparently, they are **monolinguals** and have a poor command of English. This is an interesting and problematic characteristic of group identity. In this type of an identity group a Finnish way of thinking and Finnish world view prevail; many a phenomenon is either projected or transferred to the present cultural context. However, preserving and maintaining the original Finnish identity seems to be a difficult and even a painful process that requires extreme activity owing to the disapproval of acculturation in the U.S., where the informants have been living for decades (even 30-40 years). The only way they can organize their lives and solve their identity problems is to hold on to their own ethnic

background and have frequent contacts with Finland in order to get a feeling of some social approval and membership. I call this group **culturally Finns (poorly assimilated: rejection)**.

3. Some American Finns approve their americanization as a natural, **essential and optional part of their lives** which has its foundations in the Finnish culture; they regard their roots as positive and productive. These people are **bilinguals** and switch from Finnish to American English as easily as they change clothes. They seem to be **cultural chameleons**. They have adopted the American culture and it is not a problem or calamity to them. I call them **bi-** or **multiculturals** because they may also have a third cultural factor that has come into their families through marriage (e.g. marrying a member of another ethnic group).

4. Some American Finns **would like to have acculturated to the American culture but have failed**. Most of them came to the U.S. when they were very young, without education, profession, or any command of English, and furthermore, without adult age command of the Finnish language or culture. They came to work for American millionaires and businessmen unprepared; they worked in hotels, restaurants, on farms, in mines or they did logging; they have always had "less appreciated jobs". Consequently, these people have worked all in the U.S. all their lives and many of them have never had time for education or language studies. That is why they have never really learned English; "kitchen English, mine English, logging English" have been sufficient tools in earning one's living. They could not any longer even use their own vernacular, which had to be put on the shelf or to be freezed. Therefore, their speech is completely outdated and archaic in Finland; even the command of their original vernacular is poor. Their main language is **Finglish**, a curious **conglomerate**, mixture of Finnish and English. The following displays some examples of the vocabulary of this conglomerate:

**petiruuma** 'bedroom' (in Finnish *makuuhuone*)

**livinruuma** 'living room' (in Finnish *olohuone*)

**kitsi** 'kitchen' (in Finnish *keittiö*)

**pootsi** 'porch' (in Finnish *kuisti*)

**koolata** 'call' (in Finnish *soittaa puhelimella*)

**runnata** 'run' (a business; the household) (in Finnish *hoitaa, vetää, johtaa jtk.*)

**supraisi** 'surprise' (in Finnish *yllätys*)

**känseri** 'cancer' (in Finnish *syöpä*)

**haali** 'hall' (in Finnish *seurantalo*)

**känslätä** 'cancel' (in Finnish *peruuttaa*)

**tsekata** 'check' (in Finnish *tarkistaa*)

**mainari** 'miner' (in Finnish *kaivosmies*)

People in group 3 can also use Finglish, but they are fully capable of discerning Finnish and English as different language systems. People in group 2 use Finglish, too, and that is why they are close to group 4 because of their poor command of English in the present cultural context.

Many of the people in group 4 say that it would be completely impossible to move back to Finland: they do not understand the current Finnish language. On the other hand, their admission to the American culture is blocked, because they lack the most crucial symbol of identity, the command of the language spoken in their present cultural context. These people are **semilinguals living in a cultural void or vacuum (deculturation)**. They lead a unique kind of life which will never exist anywhere after them. I also saw ethnographic films about northern state of the U.S. (by M. Loukinen) that illustrate the semilingual life situation quite well.

The above mentioned groups were the ideal types of language identity groups among my American Finnish migrant informants in the U.S. at the end of the 1980's. However, identity groups derived from **value inquiry forms** seem to be very different from language identity groups. Both code-switching and code-mixing is also happening among American Finns. Humorous detail is that many of them regard themselves as experts of "pure current Finnish".

We can now ask how the **cultural identity** of Finnish migrants has formed. Besides the Finnish language, other identity symbols seem to be relevant in the American Finnish cultural setting. Among these symbols are the Kalevala epos, the Kalevalian heritage in the form of various social societies (e.g. **Kalevaiset** 'The Kaleva people', **Pohjalaiset** 'People from Ostrobothnia', Finland etc.), the wearing of Finnish national dress in social activities, the playing of Finnish folk music (e.g. five stringed kanteles and other folk music instruments such as the accordion and the violin), and the preservation of Finnish food habits and customs (as, e.g., setting the table carefully; making liver casserole, rutabaga casserole, meat balls or **mämmi** [=Finnish Easter dish made of rye meal and malt]; cooking mead at the first of May or baking Finnish **pulla**).

American Finnish migrants have some similar identity (Suojanen 1991: 4-12) problems as native Africans when they move to urban settings. In metropolitan slums they face a melting pot of different ethnic origins and languages with varying world views and identities, as Finnish people when they moved to a strange continent at the beginning of this century. Identity dilemmas and life and culture shock problems should urgently be studied from the personal, individual and qualitative point of view.

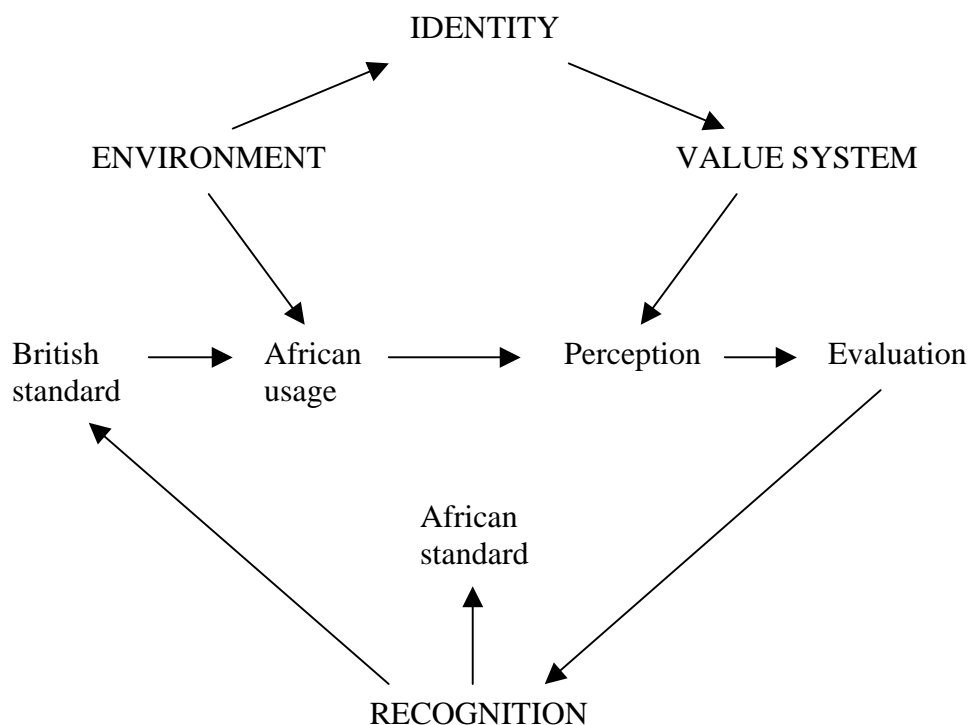
Finally, let me summarize the situation of English in Africa as Dr. Joseph Schmied put it in 1991: Sociolinguistic research on English in Africa tries to define specific African **national identities** as resting on various distinct concepts of **cultural identity** as well as on various **overlapping regional identities**; here language and its message which are chosen by the speaker and interpreted by the hearer, is seen as a means of expressing a personal and / or a **group identity**. "Thus, if a market woman responds in English to a white man's question in an African lingua franca, she expresses one part of her identity, just as when she speaks in her



mother tongue to her market neighbours to express another. Similarly, a hotel manager may talk in basilectal English to his African cleaners and in acrolectal English to his foreign guests. These examples support the idea of modern etno-psychological research that **personal identity is often to be seen as the sum of heterogenous overlapping identities**. Fundamental categories of human social identity, such as age, sex, ethnicity, social class and situation, are reflected in language and its variation, and thus attitudes towards language phenomena can give us important clues to the dimensions of human nature (Schmied 1991: 185)."

APPENDIX 1

Joseph Schmied: Factors in the process of perception, evaluation and recognition of African forms of English (Schmied, *English in Africa* 1991: 179)

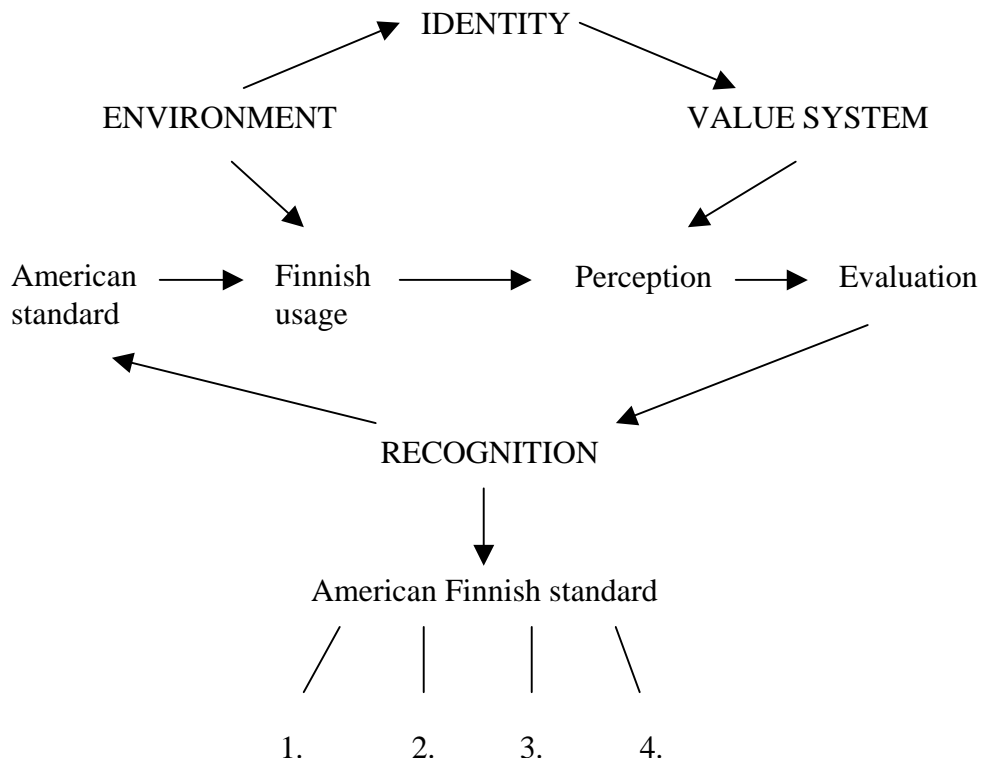


Connection between English and identity can be determined on three levels:

1. interlinguistic choice, i.e. the choice of using English and not other languages
2. intralinguistic choice, i.e. the choice of a particular variety of English, and finally
3. conscious delimitation of certain varieties and features through overt or covert prestige.

APPENDIX 2

Päivikki Suojanen: Factors in the process of perception, evaluation and recognition of Finnish forms of English in the USA



1. Culturally Americans --> assimilated --> monolinguals (American English)
2. Culturally Finns --> rejected --> monolinguals (Finnish)
3. Culturally Finnish Americans --> integrated --> bilinguals (cultural chameleons)
4. People in the cultural vacuum --> deculturated --> semilinguals (Finglish)

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