

ABSTRACT

To Be Or Not To Be? A Study On The Adhesion Of Five Language Groups Into Finland

More than three out of four speakers of Estonian, Russian, English, Somali and Arabic living in the Greater Helsinki area feel like they are part of Finnish society either fully or to some extent. 1,527 persons living in the Greater Helsinki area were interviewed for the study.

Significantly fewer consider themselves Finnish. Estonian speakers consider themselves Finnish less often than average, with only 10 percent of them considering themselves completely or somewhat Finnish. Somali speakers consider themselves Finnish most often (43 %).

Identification with one's own country of origin – or, in the case of second-generation immigrants, with the family's country of origin – is considerably more common in all language groups. Almost 90 percent of Somali speakers consider themselves completely Somalian. In the other language groups, more than 70 percent of people identify with the country of origin either fully or to some extent.

Some people identify both as Finnish and as natives of their country of origin. As many as 43 percent of Somali speakers have this kind of parallel identity. As for Arabic and English speakers, around 25 percent of them have such a parallel identity. Among speakers of Estonian (5 %) and Russian (12 %), parallel identities are significantly more unusual.

Contacts with the country of origin are common in all the surveyed language groups: more than 70 percent of people in all these language groups have very much or quite much contact with people in their country of origin. Close contacts are most common among Estonian speakers (91 %).

There are significant differences between the language groups when it comes to the number of Finnish friends and acquaintances. Almost all English speakers have at least five friends or acquaintances who belong to the majority population, and a large majority of Estonian and Russian

speakers also have many people of Finnish origin in their immediate circle. By contrast, 45 percent of Somali speakers and 32 percent of Arabic speakers have no friends or acquaintances who belong to the majority population.

71 percent of Somali speakers would like to live in a neighbourhood with plenty of people belonging to their own language group. This is more unusual in the other language groups: roughly half of Estonian and Arabic speakers and only one out of four Russian and English speakers are of this opinion.

All language groups think that there are problems in the realisation of equality. With the exception of Arabic speakers, a narrow majority in all language groups feel that they are not in an equal position with the majority population.

Experiences of discrimination in the labour market are most common among Somali speakers (89 %), but prevalent also among speakers of Russian (51 %), English (40 %) and Arabic (57 %). Estonian speakers (27 %) feel discriminated against in the labour market less often than others.

In addition, many persons belonging to language minorities feel that Finnish people have a very biased view of their country of origin and that the Finnish media depicts the minority in a negative light in their news coverage. Somali and Arabic speakers have the most critical attitudes towards the media, but a slight majority of Russian speakers are also of this opinion.

Despite the experiences of discrimination, around 90 percent of persons belonging to the surveyed language groups are very or somewhat pleased to live in Finland. The knowledge of the Finnish language plays a crucial role in this respect. Those with excellent knowledge of Finnish are very pleased to live in Finland.

The majority of persons belonging to language minorities are quite certain or absolutely certain that they want to live in Finland for the rest of their lives. The most confident are Arabic speakers, out of whom 60 percent are absolutely certain that they want to stay in Finland. In the other language groups, significantly fewer people feel this way. Less than one third of Russian and Somali speakers are absolutely certain that they want to stay in Finland, whereas only one in five English speakers and one in ten Estonian speakers think that way.