**Language and Culture Show and Tell: Finnish**

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**Transcript**

**Slide 1**

My name is Riitta Valijärvi. I teach Finnish language, culture and history at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies here at UCL. I am first going to tell you a little bit about Finland and the general features of Finnish. You will also find out what item in the UCL Art Museum collections inspired this presentation.

The main focus in this taster will, however, be on local cases in Finnish. What is a local case? It is a grammatical ending (also known as suffix) that is attached to words. They have the same meaning as English prepositions **in, on, at, from, into**.

**Slide 2**

Finland is a republic in Northern Europe between Sweden and Russia. The Finnish name for Finland is SUOMI. The capital of Finland is Helsinki. Note that in Finnish it would be pronounced Helsinki. The stress is always on the first syllable.

The population of Finland is around 5.5 million and the currency is euro.

Finland is known as the land of 1000 lakes but in fact the number of lakes is 188,000. The map on the right shows clearly where the bigger lakes are. The word for lake is JÄRVI. I have this word in my surname. Finnish surnames often have to do with nature. Finland not only has lakes but also a lot of forest: 75% of the areal is covered in forest, both farmed and wild.

**Slide 3**

Basic facts about Finnish. Finnish is a Uralic or Finno-Ugric language related to Estonian and Hungarian, as well as Sámi languages, Karelian and a dozen other languages spoken in Russia. Finnish and languages related to Finnish typically have many endings. I have provided an example here. The word here autoissanikin contains the stem AUTO ‘car’, the plural ending -I-, the local case ending -SSA that means ‘in’, the ending -NI which has the meaning ‘my’ and the final ending -KIN that means ‘also’. The meaning of this word is therefore ‘also in my cars’. Languages that behave like this, that is languages that stack endings, are called agglutinating or concatenating.

Finnish does not have grammatical gender. This saves time when learning vocabulary because you don’t have to remember whether a word is masculine or feminine, like French and Spanish. Also Finnish has just one third person pronoun HÄN which means both ‘he’ and ‘she’. Finnish does not have a definite or indefinite article either. AUTO can, depending on the context, mean ‘a car’ or ‘the car’.

What makes Finnish easy to learn is that it has a number of loanwords form both Swedish and English. Swedish is similar to English and easy for native speakers of English to understand. You will see some of these loanwords very soon.

**Slide 4**

This is the image from UCL Art Museum collection that inspired this taster and reminded me of Finland. You will need a couple of words from this image later. Lake is JÄRVI in Finnish, Switzerland, where this lake is, is SVEITSI. Turner is BRITTILÄINEN. All nationality adjectives end in -LAINEN, for example ESPANJA is Spain and Spanish is ESPANJALAINEN. Finally, boat is LAIVA.

**Slide 5**

Let’s talk about local cases. Finnish has two sets of local cases: internal and external. AUTO car takes the ending -SSA and AUTOSSA means ‘in a car, in the car’. The internal local cases are used with rooms, buildings, vehicles, anything that is a box or a container. External local cases are used with surfaces (like a beach, table, floor), vicinity (near something) and also with people. So RANNALLA means ‘on a beach, on the beach’ with the ending -LLA ‘on’. Both series have two more endings that involve movement away from (AUTOSTA ‘from the inside of a car’, RANNALTA ‘from the surface of the beach’) and movement towards (AUTOON ‘into the car’ with a doubled vowel, RANNALLE ‘onto the beach’).

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Here are some additional examples. We are focusing on the endings without movement: -SSA ‘in’ and -LLA ‘on, at, by’. The first one is POSTISSA which means ‘in the or a post office’. It’s a building so it takes an internal local case, the SSA-ending. The next one is BUSSISSA. In Finnish you are ‘in a bus’ literally, just like you are ‘in car’. It is a container or a box, and you go inside. The third one is KYLÄSSÄ ‘in a village’. Towns and villages, forests and parks also take this internal local case ending ‑SSA.

The next example is KURSSI ‘course’. It is an activity or abstract thing, so you are KURSSILLA ‘on a course’. KIOSKI takes external local cases as well as you did not historically go inside a kiosk, you bought things through a small window outside. Finally, PRESIDENTILLÄ can mean ‘at or with the president’ or ‘the president has something’.

You may have noticed that sometimes the endings have dots in them, namely with the words KYLÄSSÄ ‘in a village’ and PRESIDENTILLÄ ‘with the president’. Why would this be the case?

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Vowels are in Finnish divided into three groups. Back vowels are pronounced in the back of the mouth and they are A, O, U. Front vowels are pronounced with the highest point of the tongue near the front of the mouth and they are Ä, Ö, Y. You can’t mix these two groups in one word. And for this reason, endings adjust accordingly: if a word has a back vowel, you use the back-vowel version -SSA (for example, AUTOSSA ‘in a car’) and if the word has front vowels, you use the front-vowel variant ‑SSÄ (for example, KYLÄSSÄ ‘in a village’). You can mix the neutral vowels with both groups within a word but if a word only has neutral vowels you use the front-vowel version of the ending (for example, PRESIDENTILLÄ ‘with the president)’

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Next I want to briefly look at changes that can happen when you add an ending. So the word for Finland is SUOMI. Note how the I at the end of the word becomes an E when we add the ending. it becomes SUOMESSA. This happens with old Finnish words, but not with loanwords. JÄRVI ‘lake’ would behave in the same way, the final I would become E. For example, JÄRVESSÄ.

The next word is ENGLANTI ‘England’. The I remains an I as it’s a loanword but there is softening of the NT sound near the ending. So it’s ENGLANTI but ENGLANNISSA. This happens with all words with the NT sound.

The next word is Finland’s capital Helsinki. It’s a Swedish word originally so the I remains an I but the NK combination is weakened to NG before the ending. So it’s HELSINKI but HELSINGISSÄ This change is systematic as well. Note the dots in the ending with Helsinki as it only has neutral vowels.

The last two examples are about a change in meaning depending on the ending. For example, JÄRVI ‘lake’ can take both endings. JÄRVESSÄ means ‘in a lake’, JÄRVELLÄ means ‘on a lake’. KATOSSA means ’in the ceiling’ but KATOLLA ‘means on the roof’.

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Kiitos! Thank you!

**Slide 10**

Here are my sources and links to the UCL Art Museum. My email address is here if you have any questions.