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**Introducing the Imperial Language:**  
**Early Russian Language Tools for Use in Finland**

The transferring of Finland from Sweden to Russia in 1809 meant the introduction of a new imperial language to the population of the country, whose main native languages were Swedish and Finnish. Although, in practice, contacts between the Grand Duchy and the Imperial Government were long maintained in French and German, it immediately became necessary to train the administrative elite of Finland also in the Russian language. To some extent, the most urgent need was helped by the services offered by Russian-speaking officers, scholars, and clericals from Old Finland (the guberniia of Wyborg), which had been under Russian rule already since the peace treaties of Nystad (1721) and Åbo (1743). However, it was natural to think that, gradually, all of Finland would become linguistically integrated with the rest of the Empire, meaning that the knowledge of Russian would become increasingly common. It was also speculated that Russian, ultimately, might replace Swedish as the language of higher culture in Finland.

At the time of the union, Russian was a language whose national status even in Russia was still in the making. It was long maintained by national activists in Finland that Russian was an irrelevant language, which would never be able to compete in significance with French and German. Even so, there was initially no inherent hostility towards the Russian language, and any opinions and actions concerning the matter were based on practical considerations. The Russian rulers themselves also had no clear idea of how much time and effort the introduction of Russian in the Grand Duchy would take. Although a knowledge of Russian became a formal requirement for Finnish governmental and clerical officials as early as 1818, a practical problem was created by the lack of teachers and teaching tools. The single most important method used by Russia to solve this problem was to grant scholarships to Finnish students for studying Russian in Russia (Ketola 2007). Although the number of scholarships was always very limited, the intention was that the scholarship recipients would, after returning to
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Finland, gradually take up the task of language teaching. As it turned out, this strategy was basically correct.

Already prior to the union with Russia, formal education in Finland had been almost totally centered on language teaching. There were two main lines of study and professional specialization. On the one hand, there was the ecclesiastic career, whose representatives, often talented sons from peasant families, but even more often members of hereditary priestly lineages, took comprehensive and systematic courses in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Latin and Greek, in particular, were the backbones of school education, and an amazing variety of textbooks at different levels was produced for use in ‘grammar schools’, gymnasiums, and the university (Lagus 1890). On the other hand, there was the military career, which was typically open for sons of noble families, but occasionally also for individuals with other backgrounds. Latin and Greek were not completely absent in their curricula, either, but the focus was on modern languages, i.e., French and German.

In this system, neither Swedish nor Finnish were taught as ‘languages’, though the actual language of instruction was almost invariably Swedish (and only in special cases Latin). Grammatical terminology was introduced via Latin grammar studies, and after acquiring fluency in Latin the student was able to proceed to any other ancient or modern language without conceptual difficulties. From the perspective of today’s egalitarian school system it is almost impossible to realize how intellectually challenging the educational program of the early 19th century was. To increase the students’ competence in linguistic analysis, as well as in Swedish, the curriculum also included the study of special textbooks of ‘general grammar’, such as those of G. J. Mechelin (1837) and J. F. Homén (1839). There is no doubt that the school system favoured individuals with verbal and analytic skills, although there is evidence that, with a proper background and perseverance, less talented individuals were also able to acquire lower-rank ecclesiastic and military positions.

An important difference between Russian and the other modern (and classical) languages was that Russian had not been taught in the country at all during the Swedish period. Teaching tools for the language – textbooks, grammars, parleurs, and dictionaries – had to be created rapidly and out of nothing, and specifically for use in Finland, while for other languages the extant tools used in Sweden were also available. In fact, the textbooks used for teaching French and German in Finland during the early 19th century were all produced in Sweden, though often reprinted by the local printing houses in Finland. For Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, study materials were also produced locally. For Russian, however, no previous tools existed, and the printing houses initially did not even possess Russian types. Although the type problem was solved relatively rapidly, types for special needs, such as for accented vowel letters, continued to be scarce until the 1830s.
In the present survey, the Russian language tools published in the period between 1810 and 1860 will be discussed. This was the initial period of Russian studies in Finland, and it was characterized by a basically positive, though gradually deteriorating, attitude towards Russian as a foreign language. In 1863, with the liberal reforms of Alexander II, Russian temporarily lost its position as an obligatory subject in the Finnish education system. The reintroduction of the language in 1872 took place in an atmosphere less favourable than the previous one, and towards the end of the period of autonomy, Russian ended up being the most hated school subject in Finland. Although the number of students studying Russian increased rapidly, and although, correspondingly, an increasing number of language tools was published in the last decades of Russian rule, the results were in no proportion to the investment. This was a clear difference with the earlier decades, when relatively good results were achieved by much more modest means.

Previous work on Russian language studies in Finland has focussed on the historical context behind the introduction of the imperial language (von Bonsdorff 1912, 384–406), on the evolution of university positions in the field (Aalto 1987, 129–153), as well as on the general development of Russian (Vahros 1968; Mustajoki 1987) and Slavonic (Kolari 1985) studies in the country. In the present discussion, the focus will be on the bibliographical documentation of the language tools produced, as well as on the personal backgrounds and motives of their authors. The discussion will not include academic dissertations. Of the latter, the best known is that of Carl Gustaf Sjöstedt (1824), whose person has been the object of some biographical research (Rönkä 1997). In general, academic work on Russian during the period examined was still scarce and of a low standard, while practical language tools were relatively abundant, and often of a surprisingly high quality.

Even before systematic language studies could be started, there was a practical need to communicate with the new rulers of the country. This was particularly relevant to representatives of the military and bourgeoisie, who, in general, did not have a background in classical languages. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first Russian language tool produced for use in Finland was a small practical parleur, compiled by Anders Johan Hipping as early as 1810 and printed in St. Petersburg [1]. Hipping (1788–1862) was one of the first educated persons from Finland who was introduced to the learned circles of St. Petersburg and who subsequently helped strengthen the cultural ties between the Grand Duchy and the empire (Karhu 1980). Apart from his ecclesiastic career, he became known as a historian who worked with Russian original sources. His parleur was, however, not an original work, for it was essentially a translation of Vegelins Deutsche und Rußische Gespräche, published earlier in St. Petersburg. The work is extremely con-
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cise and structurally simple, containing thematic word lists and 35 ‘lessons’ with conversational material.

Another parleur of a very similar type and scope was compiled and printed, this time in Åbo, in 1814, by Johan Christopher Frenckell (1789–1844), who was the third in a succession of book-printers bearing the same name. It is not clear where Frenckell had picked up his Russian, but he clearly seems to have known at least the elements of the language, though his parleur itself is a translation of the third edition of the Russischer Dolmetscher für Deutsche by N. C. Kreye (1813). Like Hipping’s work, Frenckell’s parleur [2] also contains thematic word lists and conversations, but it also features a basic grammar as well as notes on the pronunciation. Some of the information is, moreover, oriented towards people knowing not only Swedish but also Finnish. It was probably not so much due to its merits as to Frenckell’s position as a book-printer that the parleur was later reprinted four times (with the fifth printing published in 1879). After Frenckell’s death, his printing-house also issued, in 1847, another parleur in two versions [19-20]. The larger version, which included Finnish, was reprinted as many as eight times (the ninth printing was in 1918).

Parleurs did not, however, serve the needs of systematic studies of the language. For this purpose, textbooks and grammars were required. By a fortunate coincidence, the two first students from Finland to study Russian in Russia on a scholarship turned out to be exceptionally talented and diligent (Mikkola 1939; cf. also von Bonsdorff 1912, 388–394). Soon after their return from Moscow in 1812 after an adventurous escape from Napoleon’s army, Erik Gustaf Ehrström (1791–1835) and Carl Gustaf Ottelin (1792–1864) published a Russian grammar, printed in St. Petersburg in 1814 (with the foreword dated in Åbo in 1815) [3]. Although intended for ‘beginners’, this work is the first ‘modern’ description of the Russian grammatical system written in Swedish, following only the grammar of Groening, published more than 60 years earlier (1750). It goes without saying that the authors draw on contemporary Russian grammars, especially the Russische Sprachlehre für Deutsche by Johann Heym (1789) and the Neue theoretisch-praktische Russische Sprachlehre für Deutsche by August Wilhelm Tappe (1810). Even so, the compilation of a competent Russian grammar by two students aged hardly over 20 after a few months’ studies of the language is a remarkable achievement. One inevitably asks if, considering all the relevant variables, any school grammar of Russian produced for use in Finland has ever superseded this first attempt. The work of Ehrström and Ottelin also compares favourably with the first Finnish grammars published in Russia by Johann Strahlmann (1816) and Grigorii Okulov (1836).

The subsequent lives of Ehrström and Ottelin are well known. Ehrström, who as a young student had also written two personal travel accounts from Ostrobothnia (1808) and Tavastland (1811), was appointed lecturer of Rus-
sian at the University in Åbo in 1816. Disappointed with the progress of Russian studies in the country, however, he left the university for an ecclesiastic career and was put in charge of the Swedish parish in St. Petersburg. In spite of his Swedish mother tongue, Ehrström was a prominent proponent of Finnish, but his parallel propagation of Russian as the imperial language created an unpleasant conflict with contemporary national leaders, especially with Adolf Ivar Arwidsson. In his views, Ehrström, who combined Fennophily with Russophily – and not with the more typical Finnish Russophoby – remained rather alone in his time (on this, cf. also Engman 2000). Even so, posterior Finnish historians have tended to mention him as one of the early heralds of the national movement. By contrast, Ottelin has come to be regarded as a ‘collaborator’, whose later position as the Bishop of Borgå was widely seen as a ‘reward’ for his services to the imperial government. However this may have been, the principal responsibility for issuing the later editions of the textbooks after Ehrström’s move to St. Petersburg (1826) and early death (1835) lay on Ottelin.

The grammar of Ehrström and Ottelin was republished twice, in 1830 (with the support of the Finnish Cadet Corps) and 1836. It came to form the first part in an entire series of textbooks, which also comprises a volume of exercises [4], a reader [5], a vocabulary [6], and commentaries [7], published between 1818 and 1822 and then republished between 1831 and 1845. In its first edition, this series comprises altogether over 1,850 pages. It may be noted that the first edition of the volume of exercises, which according to bibliographical sources was printed in 1818 in St. Petersburg, was almost completely destroyed by the fire of Åbo in 1827, with only a few copies surviving (one of them, though lacking a foreword and a titlepage, at the National Library of Finland). The second edition of 1845 (reprinted in 1856) was prepared for publication by N. W. Åberg, who is also known as the author of a Russian history textbook (1846).

As a document of the time, the most interesting volume in the series is formed by the commentaries, published as an ‘appendix’ to the reader and comprising the Swedish translation of Johann Severin Vater’s typological notes on Russian (‘Afhandling om Ryska Språkets Egenskaper’), as well as a collection of didactic considerations authored by Ehrström (‘Några Reflexioner, under hänsigt till Ryska Språkets Studium och Närvarande Arbetets Begagnande’). Vater (1771–1826), who was a noted German theologian and philologist of the time, was to some extent familiar also with Finnish and quotes Finnish language material in his notes. More importantly, Ehrström presents a comprehensive view of the tasks and methods of language studies in the Finnish education system. According to him, a complete education should contain studies of three classical and Biblical languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew), two national languages (Finnish and Swedish), and three modern languages (Russian, German, French). Among the modern
languages, Russian should be given the first place not only because of its status, but also because of the closeness of Russian grammar to Latin. With a similar argument, strengthened by national considerations, Ehrström propagates that Finnish should gradually take over the position of Swedish as the principal national language.

It has to be mentioned that the reader of Ehrström and Ottelin had one predecessor, in that Mikhail Manicev (Manitzef), who together with Pavel Druzhinin had arrived in Åbo in 1812 in order to teach Russian at the university, had begun compiling a textbook for Swedish-speaking students. The book is listed among the sources of Ehrström and Ottelin under the title *M. Manitzefs Läsebok för Begynnare i Ryska Språket, med dertill hörande Rysk och Svensk Ordbok* (Åbo, 1813). It is unclear, however, whether any copies of the book survive (the National Library of Finland has no copy). In any case, the publications of Ehrström and Ottelin made any previous works, including the grammar of Groening, obsolete. Ehrström also replaced Manicev at the university, and Druzhinin left Finland a few years later.

After Ehrström had left the university his position was given to the young Gabriel Geitlin in 1826. Geitlin (1804–1871) had only learnt the language as a student in Åbo, but due to his natural talent he had reached a fluency in Russian already before he was sent to Russia on a scholarship in 1827. Returning to Åbo, Geitlin initially planned a career in Russian studies, a field of which he was in charge as acting professor in 1829–1830. In Russia, he had become familiar with the work of N. I. Grech (Gretsch) (1787–1867), who was just publishing his popular Russian grammar in three different versions. Of these, Geitlin chose the shortest and most practical version, originally published as *Начальная правила русской грамматики* (1828), and translated it into Swedish in 1829 [8]. To this he added in a rapid succession a volume of grammatical exercises and text samples [9] in 1830 (reprinted in 1842) and a translation of a parleur by Heym [10] in 1831.

Geitlin’s most important contribution to Russian studies was his Russian-Swedish dictionary [13], published in 1833–1834. In spite of its concise format, this dictionary was the first of its kind and remained long a basic tool for practical translation work. At the time when the dictionary was published it had, however, become clear that Geitlin would not be promoted to a full professor of Russian, a position then still reserved for native speakers. This is why he turned his attention to Arabic and Persian and gained, already in 1835, the chair of Oriental literature, from which he later moved to Biblical exegetics. In all these fields, he published significant contributions, including, perhaps most importantly, a grammar of Modern Persian (1845). By all standards, Geitlin was one of the greatest philologists of 19th century Finland. Even so, his involvement in Russian studies earned him a reputation of a ‘conservative’ Russophile in the eyes of the increasingly anti-Russian Finnish national activists of the time.
A rather unexpected contribution to Russian language studies was made by Johan Henric Avellan, professor of history and former rector of the Finnish university. Avellan (1773–1832), who was much senior not only to Geitlin, but even to Ehrström and Ottelin, was no major scholar himself, and he is unlikely to have mastered Russian particularly well. He had, however, an interest in pedagogical innovations, and in the field of language teaching he became a propagator of the so-called Hamiltonian method, developed in the 1820s by the British pedagogue James Hamilton. Following this method, which essentially involves the addition of an interlinear word-by-word translation to foreign-language texts, Avellan prepared a Russian reader [11], which he completed shortly before his death in 1832. In an unfinished pedagogical treatise [12], posthumously published in the following year as a preface to the reader, he explains in detail his views concerning both education, in general, and language teaching, in particular. Compared with the more practical approach of Ehrström, Avellan’s formulation is a rather diffuse mixture of philosophical and psychological considerations. His ultimate impact on the development of Russian studies in Finland remained minimal.

Of a more lasting influence was the work of Matthias Akiander (Akkonen). A native speaker of Finnish from Old Finland, Akiander (1802–1871) was fluent in Russian since his youth. After working as a translator and schoolteacher he was appointed to teach the Russian language at the Finnish university, initially as a lecturer (1834) and finally as a full professor (1862). Akiander was known as an exceptionally modest man, but as a scholar he was both innovative and versatile. Among other things, he published a pioneering and theoretically advanced description of the Finnish sound system (1846). He also compiled a history of early Russia (1844), and most of his later publications were concerned with historical research, partly based on Russian sources. To support his educational goals he published several ABC books (also in Russian) as well as a particularly successful Russian school grammar, first issued in 1835 [14]. Akiander’s grammar, which was praised by contemporaries for its didactic merits, was reprinted four times (fifth edition in 1873), and it was also published in a Finnish translation (1864), making the earlier grammar of Ehrström and Ottelin gradually obsolete. Even so, it has to be said that Akiander’s grammar covers only the needs of elementary language learning, while Ehrström and Ottelin offer useful information also for the more advanced learner.

During Akiander’s years as a lecturer, Russian language tools were also produced by two prominent native-speaking Russian scholars, Jacob Grot (Яковъ Карловичъ Грошъ) and Stefan Baranowskij (Степа́нь Ива́новичъ Барановский), both of whom worked as professors of Russian at the Finnish University. Grot (1812–1893), who was the more important of them as a scholar, is well known as a sincere friend of Finland, who tried – mainly in vain – to create an understanding towards Russian culture among the local
academic circles. As a university teacher, he was a realist, who was well aware of the obstacles he met, and in his teaching he focussed on the basics. In 1848, Grot published a Russian textbook [21] as well as a reader [22] with vocabulary [23], all of which were reprinted later. Although not without didactical ambition, his textbook is even more concise than Akiander’s grammar. The reader, however, represents clear progress, in that it is considerably more ‘modern’ than that of Ehrström and Ottelin as far as the selection of texts is concerned. This was the decade during which Johan Ludvig Runeberg had published his Russian-inspired romantic poem Nadeschda (1841), and Grot, who was fluent in Swedish and a friend of the poet, answered by translating some of Runeberg’s (other) poems and including them in his reader. To complement the works of Akiander and Åberg, Grot also authored a ‘handbook’ of Russian history (1850–1852).

Baranowskij (1818–1890) was basically a geographer and statistician with an interest also in popular education. Like Grot, he prepared an elementary textbook of Russian [16] with vocabulary [17] (second edition in 1856), as well as a reader [24] (second edition in 1860). He also prepared a separate small volume of lithographed samples of Russian handwriting [15]. Compared with Grot, Baranowskij keeps in his reader more strictly to Russian original literature, serving extracts from Pushkin, Zhukovsky, Lermontov, and Басни Крылова. All of his language tools were published with a Russian title, while Grot always used Swedish as a metalanguage. When Grot returned to St. Petersburg in 1853, Baranowskij stayed, leaving Finland only in 1862. By this time, the situation had finally ripened to allow the Finnish-born Akiander to be appointed to the chair of Russian.

In retrospect, it is curious to see the multitude of language tools produced in parallel without much coordination between the individual authors. In the years between 1844 and 1848, for instance, Baranowskij, Grot, and Akiander were all active producing elementary grammars, textbooks and/or readers for more or less the same purpose. The general trend was to lower the standard, with, especially, the grammars becoming less and less sophisticated. The most concise Russian grammar of the period was produced by an anonymous author for the needs of the Finnish Cadet Corps in 1858 [27]. There was, however, also a need for a more comprehensive grammar. This need was filled by Wilhelm Avellan (apparently no close relative to Johan Henric Avellan), who prepared, in 1848, a Swedish translation of the second edition (1834) of the Практическая русская грамматика of Grech [25]. With 600 pages (plus 30 tables), this translation remains until today the single largest grammatical work on Russian prepared for use in Finland.

Of great practical value was also the large Swedish-Russian dictionary issued by the State Secretariat (government office) of the Grand Duchy in 1846–1847 [18]. The dictionary was mainly composed – on the basis of extant dictionaries between Russian and other European languages – by Johan
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Georg Hornborg, but after his death it was completed by Otto Meurman, a military officer and government official, under the supervision of Jacob Grot. Otto Meurman, who had studied in St. Petersburg, died already in 1850. He was the elder brother of the better known political activist Agathon Meurman (1826–1909), who much later authored the first Russian-Finnish dictionary (1895). A short list of additions and corrections to the Swedish-Russian dictionary was published by Carl Anders Merlin in 1851 [18c]. In the same year, a new official trilingual Russian-Swedish-Finnish ‘hand dictionary’ [26] was also published to replace Geitlin’s earlier work. This was the first time that Russian and Finnish were combined in a lexicographical work (excluding parleurs).

Altogether, in the period before the reforms of Alexander II, some 25 original and translated language tools, including separately issued vocabularies and commentaries, were published for use in Finland. Counting also the reprints and re-editions of these works, the total number of different publications in the period 1810–1860 rises to nearly 50 volumes. This was a period when Swedish still remained the sole language of school instruction and higher education in the Grand Duchy. Starting with the Finnish translation of Akiander’s grammar (1864), however, Finnish would gradually receive a stronger position, and towards the end of the 19th century, Swedish and Finnish became more or less equal as tools of language instruction in schools. The goals and results of Russian language instruction varied greatly depending on the changes in the number of weekly hours devoted to the language in the official curricula. However, the time of pioneer work was over, and the authors of new language tools could always look back to the publications of the previous period. In some respects, these remain unsurpassed by any later achievements.

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Chronological list of Russian language tools for Finland (1810–1860)


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Notes on the sources

The bibliographical data concerning most of the publications listed above are quoted according to original volumes contained in the author’s personal collection, which has been accumulating since the late 1960s. This collection would not have been possible without the help of specialized antiquarian booksellers, among whom the author wishes to single out Andrew Eriksson of Runebergs Antikvariat, Helsingfors. Several less common editions have become accessible via the collections of the National Library of Finland and the School Historical Library of the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, University of Helsinki. The author also thanks Professor Marja Leinonen ja Dr. h.c. Harry Halén for useful technical advice. The biographical information quoted in the text is based on standard reference tools, including *Finsk biografisk handbok* (1903), *Helsingfors Universitet: Lärrare och tjänstemän från år 1828* (1925), *Kansallinen elämäkerrasto* (1927–1934), *Suomen kansallisbiografia* (2003–2007), and *Энциклопедический словарь* (1890–1907).
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