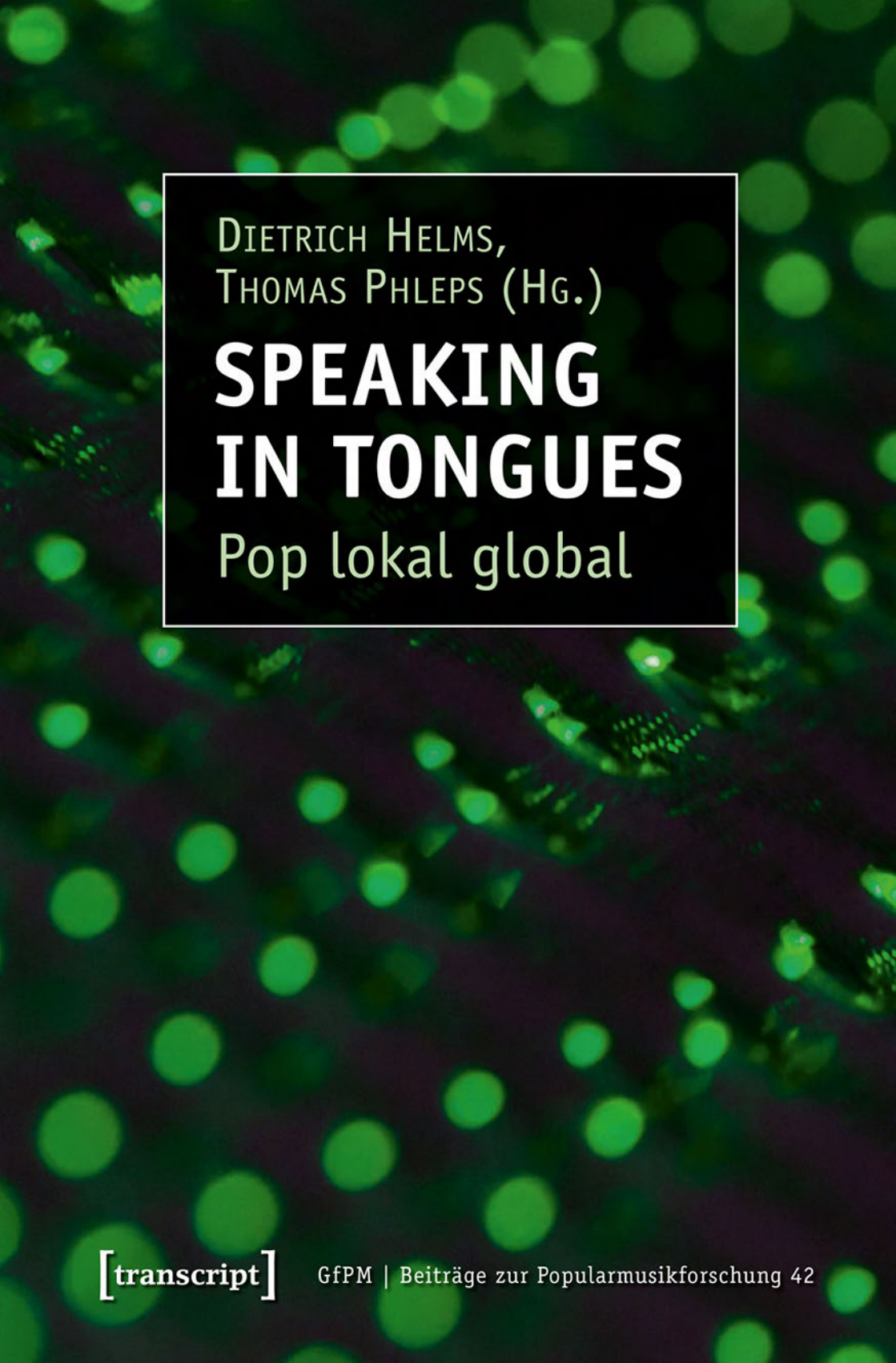


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SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Pop lokal global

Dietrich Helms, Thomas Phleps (Hg.)
Speaking in Tongues

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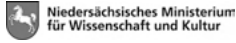
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EDITORIAL

Speaking in Tongues nannten die Talking Heads 1983 ihr fünftes, bis dahin erfolgreichstes Studioalbum. In Interviews dieser Zeit verriet David Byrne, der Name der LP gehe auf seine Zungenrede beim Schreiben der Songs zurück: Er habe zunächst Nonsense-Silben gesungen, bis er eine passende Phrasierung gefunden habe, anschließend habe er diese durch klanglich vergleichbare Worte ersetzt. Rhythmus und Klang sind – zusammen mit dem assoziativen Potential einzelner Phrasen – Ausgangspunkt und Basis der Texte und nicht eine kohärente, eindeutige Textaussage. Diese Gewichtung der Bedeutung der Lyrics lässt sich verallgemeinern. Wie die Rede der Apostel am pfingstlichen Beginn ihrer Aussendung streben Popsongs – zumindest nach den Missionsbefehlen derer, die sie vermarkten – ideal eine globale Verbreitung an. Populäre Musik muss daher eine Sprache sprechen, die möglichst vielen etwas sagt, sie muss vor allem klingen, um Anklang zu finden. Verstehen ist bestenfalls von sekundärer Bedeutung für die Kommunikation. Seinen Reim kann sich jeder selbst machen, der iranische Taxifahrer wie der deutsche Musikwissenschaftler – nicht nur auf Modern Talkings Weltmusik. Die Sprache der Musik allein jedoch, mit der sich Haydn einst in London verständlich zu machen hoffte, weil er glaubte, man verstehe sie »durch die ganze Welt«, reicht unserer Erfahrung nach nicht für einen Welthit – so viel Sprachlosigkeit macht offenbar ebenfalls keinen Sinn, auch wenn ein Harmonieschema im entsprechenden Kontext durchaus auch politisch sein kann.

Sprachen bedeuten nicht nur in ihren Worten, sondern auch per se. Mag z.B. dem Jugendlichen in der geistigen Enge Nachkriegsdeutschlands oder in einem armen Viertel Istanbuls der Text eines Songs in der Weltsprache Englisch nach großer Welt und globaler Solidarität der Jugend geklungen haben, nimmt ein lateinamerikanischer Konsument vielleicht auch den kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Imperialismus der Weltmacht USA und eine Gefahr für lokale Musikkulturen wahr.

Sprache öffnet nicht nur Welten, sie schließt auch andere aus. Identitätsbildung ist in der Logik des Kommunikationssystems der populären Musik der große Gegenspieler einer globalen Verbreitung. Pop will beides: Von möglichst vielen oft gehört werden und doch einzig sein und der Individuali-

sierung dienen. Er funktioniert nur, wenn beide Pole ausbalanciert sind. Worte aus anderen Sprachen, die in den Text einfließen, oder eine dialektale Färbung bringen neue, manchmal exotische bzw. exotistische Geschmacksrichtungen des Einheitsbreis. Das andere Ende der Skala bilden Songs, die zwar musikalisch grundsätzlich eine internationale Sprache sprechen, deren Texte jedoch in Minderheitensprachen verfasst sind. Der Verzicht auf englische Lyrics kann – besonders im Fall kleiner Sprachen – das Identifikationspotential stark erhöhen und den Hörerkreis einschränken. Gleichzeitig signalisieren eher global verbreitete Musiksprachen wie Rock oder HipHop jedoch Zeitgemäßheit und Offenheit und eröffnen auch denjenigen Möglichkeiten der Aneignung, die die Sprache nicht oder nur rudimentär beherrschen. Die Rezeption von Songs in der Weltsprache Englisch außerhalb des angloamerikanischen Sprachraums hat gezeigt, wie das (mit umgekehrten Vorzeichen) möglich ist. So kommuniziert populäre Musik in Zungenrede, spricht aber auch in vielen Zungen – nicht selten gleichzeitig.

Die Beiträge des vorliegenden Bandes sind Schriftfassungen von Vorträgen, die anlässlich der 25. Arbeitstagung der Gesellschaft für Populärmusikforschung / German Society for Popular Music Studies e.V. (ehemals ASPM) vom 29. September bis 2. Oktober 2014 in Kooperation mit dem Institut für Musikwissenschaft und Musikpädagogik der Universität Osnabrück zum Schwerpunktthema »Die Sprachen der populären Musik. Kommunikation regionaler Musiken in einer globalisierten Welt / The Languages of Popular Music. Communicating Regional Musics in a Globalized World« in Osnabrück gehalten wurden. Ganz besonderer Dank gebührt dem Institut für seine Unterstützung und seinen KollegInnen und Studierenden für ihre Gastfreundschaft. Die Herausgeber bedanken sich ganz herzlich bei den GutachterInnen des Peer Review-Verfahrens, die leider, aber selbstverständlich ungenannt bleiben müssen. Wir bedanken uns ebenso bei der Universitätsgesellschaft Osnabrück und besonders dem Niedersächsischen Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur, die die Tagung und den Druck dieses Bandes gefördert haben.

Wer mehr wissen will über die GfPM, über aktuelle Forschungen, Publikationen und anstehende oder vergangene Tagungen, findet diese Daten, Fakten und Informationen rund um die Populärmusikforschung und vieles mehr unter www.popularmusikforschung.de und in unserer Internetzeitschrift *Samples* (www.gfpm-samples.de).

Dietrich Helms und Thomas Phleps
Osnabrück und Kassel, im Juli 2015

WHY DO SONGS HAVE WORDS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES? NEGOTIATING MINORITY IDENTITY THROUGH LANGUAGE CHOICE AMONG SWEDISH-SPEAKING MUSICIANS IN FINLAND

Johannes Brusila

The main heading of this article is a paraphrase of the title of Simon Frith's seminal essay »Why Do Songs Have Words?« (1987), which, in my opinion, remains a neat critical summary of the various traditions of studying song lyrics. Since then, the study of music and lyrics has developed further in various directions, but only rarely has the choice of language been dealt with more systematically (notable exceptions being Berger/Carroll 2003). Yet, it is obvious that choosing which language to use in song lyrics is of great importance for the artists, the media and the listeners. Even the use of single phrases, code-switching, nuances in pronunciation, or dialect can signify important ethnic, social, or aesthetic positions. The choice of language also has consequences for the structure and sound of the music, its industrial dissemination and economic potential, and how it is received and understood.

The aim of this article is to ask what motivates artists themselves in the choices they make in respect of language and how these choices relate to their sociolinguistic and cultural contexts, musical framework and construction of identity. I have focused on popular musicians who belong to the Swedish-speaking population of Finland – a minority that I have studied for several years. Many members of this so-called »Finland-Swedish« minority are often capable of using different forms of Swedish, at least basic English and frequently also Finnish, which means that they make a conscious choice when they decide which language to use. As language is a key element in this minority's identity, the language of a performance is frequently discussed in the Swedish-language mass media in Finland and artists have thus often articulated opinions about their own choices. The minority position of Finland Swedish also offers an opportunity to bring to the fore many of the

key questions brought up by sociolinguistics, music research and identity studies in this area.

Music and Language

To ask why songs have words in different languages inevitably includes complex issues surrounding the relationship between language and music, which can range from »music as/in/about language« to »language as/in/about music« (to use the terminology of Feld/Fox 1984: 26-29). Simplistic premises regarding the meaning of words can obstruct an analysis and hinder it from arriving at a deeper understanding of the various uses of language in connection to music. When discussing the language choices within the Swedish-speaking minority of Finland I have chosen to focus on three dimensions of language and how these dimensions relate to song lyricism, as follows: language as a tool of communication, language as an aesthetic element of musical expression, and language as a constituent of social construction.

For many artists throughout the world language choice is most likely fundamentally about communication; in other words it concerns expressing yourself in a language that you know and that is understood by the audience. The question of comprehensibility and the verbal exchange of ideas consequently frame both the artists' language and their career choices. As a result of the historically recent, but nevertheless firmly established, European nation-state ideology, the issue of language is also often understood to be a choice between developing a domestic career, using the national language of the artist's home country, or an international career, using English. However, the tensions between the many variations of national languages, dialects, minority languages, regional languages and so on, imply that the comprehensibility of a language, particularly when used in sung lyrics, is often much more complex than a matter of simple semantics.

Furthermore, it is questionable to what extent any analysis that merely sticks to the level of comprehensibility can grasp the manifold levels of lyrical expression. As Frith (1987) has already revealed in his discussion of song lyrics, content analysis and theories of lyrical realism have a tendency to trivialize the musical context of the words and assert simplistic, direct relationships between a lyric and the social or emotional condition it describes and evokes. Song words undoubtedly communicate meanings and in that sense understanding the lyrics is an important aspect of the music, but a full understanding of the semantic level is not necessarily required for a lis-

tener to enjoy the song. Following Frith we can assume that the listener can appreciate it although he or she may not know the language and even though the words may be open to numerous interpretations. In fact, the ambiguity of the lyrics can be precisely what makes the song feel personally relevant and offer people the terms in which to articulate and experience emotions.

The use of words in combination with music always incorporates an aesthetic dimension. Words can be used as a means of creating beauty or as a tool for personal creativity. In fact, it is possible to argue that the semantic level is of minor importance in popular music, or as sociolinguist Peter Trudgill (1983: 159) has stated: »pop-music is a field where language is especially socially symbolic, and typically low in communicative function, high on the phatic and self-expressive«. In aesthetic terms, a personal expression is created by combining language and music in myriad ways. This might include not only adding words to a melody but also musical speech surrogates, *Sprechgesang*, recitation, lamentation and a number of verbal and non-verbal devices used by the performer, such as sighs, pleas and non-sensical playing with words and syllables. Thus, the meaning of a song is not necessarily only communicated through the words used; instead, it can be argued that the language provides raw material for a whole vocal performance. A study of only the text without the »phonotext«, in other words of the interaction between words and music in the enunciation of the song, is therefore clearly inadequate (Lindberg 1995).

The choice of language and the creation of a phonotext reflect aesthetic norms, which in turn are socially, historically and culturally grounded. Often genres create an interpretative framework for our understanding of linguistic-aesthetic values. It is in relation to genre conventions that artists position their stances and listeners form their attitudes towards the music. However, as Edward Larkey (2003: 148) has pointed out, it is also worth remembering that genre may perform an ironic function, by creating interpretative expectations that are overturned as a result of unanticipated humorous connections between discrepant stylistic features.

Finally, language not only communicates semantic and aesthetic meanings; on a more general level it is a fundamental constituent of our social lives. Following social constructionist approaches it is pertinent to argue that language not only describes, but actually discursively constructs our ideas of reality (e.g. Burr 1995). For example, our self-conception and feelings of belonging and identity are lived through linguistic behaviour and often institutionalized through linguistic practices. For multilingual speakers language choice is not only an effective means of communication but also

an act of identity; we maintain and change ethnic group boundaries and personal relationships, and construct and define »self« and »other« within a broader political economy and historical context (Wei 2000: 14f.). These processes can also lead to far-reaching language ideologies, which express people's beliefs and interests concerning the structure and use of language within social life.

The choice of language in music is always related to this socially framed linguistic context. »Musicking«, to use Small's expression (1997), includes not only song lyrics but also musicians' talk about music and even general social interactions around musical practices that do not necessarily directly discuss music. On a broader level, governmental structures, political parties, jurisdiction, the culture industry and numerous other institutions can outline, regulate, safeguard and counteract linguistic practices within the musical sphere. However, as creative artists, musicians not only follow or reproduce these structures, but also actively think about them and transform them (Harris/Carroll 2003: xiv). By choosing between and combining the linguistic practices of various social statuses, dialects and slang, musicians can publicly think about, enact and perform their identities in imaginative ways.

The Swedish-Speaking Minority of Finland

The sociocultural dimensions of language are crucial for a primarily linguistically defined ethnic grouping such as the Swedish-speaking minority of Finland (for general overviews, see e.g. Allardt/Starck 1989 and Åström et al. 2001). Swedish is the formally registered mother tongue of approximately 290,000 people in Finland, representing roughly 5.5 per cent of the total population. Despite the small size of the Swedish-speaking population, Finland is officially bilingual and according to the constitution, Swedish-speaking Finns have the right to equal levels of access to public services as does the majority population. It is of course questionable to what extent equality can be achieved in practice on all formal and informal levels of society. As a result, many Swedish-speakers feel that their linguistic position is threatened and the language ideology of the political party of Swedish-speakers in Finland, *Svenska Folkpartiet*, is based on the idea that monolingual institutional solutions secure bilingualism, because bilingual institutions ultimately lead to monolingual Finnish dominance.

Although legislation and political measures have offered some guarantees for Swedish governmental institutions, they have no effect on, for

example, free market popular culture. The Swedish-speaking population is simply too small and culturally heterogeneous to viably sustain its own profitable niche in the music industry of Finland.

Despite attempts to build marketing and distribution channels for Finland-Swedish music, all enterprises have remained commercially modest and ultimately they have all been forced to shut down (Jan-Erik Lindqvist, interview 13.3.2007). Over the years, only one record company, Okay's Music, has survived, focusing entirely on releasing Finland-Swedish music. However, Okay can also be thought of more as an idealistic project than a profit-making enterprise, as its sales figures have usually amounted to around a few hundred copies per record and 1,000 copies for a successful record (Törnroos 2015). Contrary to many other small countries in Europe, the sales figures for domestic music have always been high in Finland and most of the successful music produced domestically has been performed in Finnish. This means that the music industry in Finland has traditionally tried to persuade musicians to sing in Finnish and only the artists who have aimed at an international market have used English, whereas Swedish is not seen to have any market potential at all. Generally speaking, only a few artists with a Swedish-language repertoire have had an opportunity to get a recording contract with any of the mainstream companies in Finland. Thus, it is natural that the artists who aim at a professional career performing in Swedish have moved to Sweden and tried to break through in the Swedish music industry and media.

As a primarily linguistically defined ethnicity, Finland-Swedish self-identification is constructed as a difference in relation to three major »others«: Finnish majority culture, the culture of Sweden and what might be summarized in the concept »international culture«, which, in the case of popular music is concretized in the use of the English language (Brusila 2008; Brusila 2009; Brusila forthcoming). When Finland-Swedish popular music and particularly its linguistic dimensions are explicitly debated in public, Finland-Swedishness is typically constructed in relation to these anti-poles. I have visualized this identity formation in a schematic diagram (see figure 1). The core of this Finland-Swedish self-identification positions itself in relation to the three fixed points of the outer circle; that is, its self-identification is based on a feeling of difference, or distance, from the Finnish, Swedish and international cultures. In this core, popular music is institutionalized in small-scale activities, within the home or Swedish associations and often supported by the third sector. Between the core and the outer circle is a complex, diversified border zone, where many Swedish-speaking musicians

have operated in practice, switching between languages, musical genres and structures.

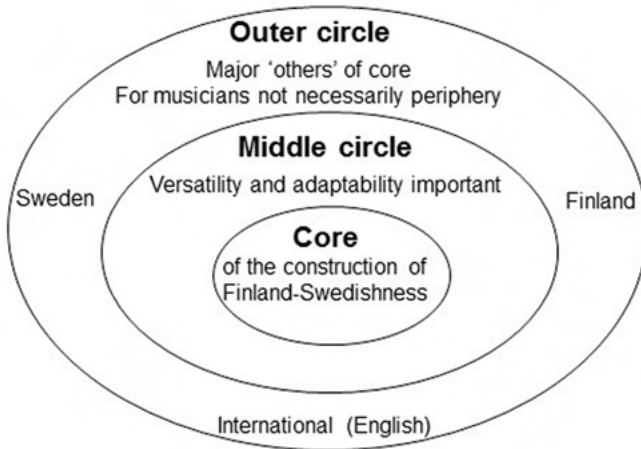


Figure 1: A schematic presentation of the discursive construction of Finland-Swedishness (ibid.). The core of Finland-Swedish self-identification is constructed in relation to the three major »others« of the outer circle. The middle circle consists of a diversified border zone where many musicians operate.

It is important to understand that this is a general description of how an ethnicity, called Finland-Swedishness, is constructed, not a description of an essence of Finland-Swedishness, or of how all Swedish-speaking individuals understand their identity. As a discursive construct (following theories of e.g. Barth 1969; Hall 1992 and 1996), this Finland-Swedish formation is processual and subject to continuous negotiations. In fact, for many Swedish-speaking musicians the outer or middle circle can form a central stage for their professional activities, working in, for example, a multilingual environment, or singing only in Finnish for a Finnish majority audience. It is the complexity of these career choices and their linguistic dimensions, which I will turn to now.