

AUGUST 2011

◆ FINISH YOUR FINNISH! ◆



Keep cool during this summer's heat wave in a chimneyless sauna building such as this in Enonkoski, Finland. *Sauna* is one of the few shorter Finnish words most English speakers know, but Finnish (or Suomi) words are rather long in the average. Some folks even wonder whether Finland's paper industry helps the language to be written down! There are 15 (!) cases in Finnish -- a Uralic-based language (a group including Hungarian and Estonian) and it's rare even among us professional linguists. Since Finland was a part of the Kingdom of Sweden from the 13th to the early 19th century, many Finns also speak Swedish.

Among many quirks foreigners will find different about Finnish is that the language has no grammatical gender, so 'he,' 'she' and 'it' are simply referred to as *hän*. There is also no definite or indefinite article, and you'll notice frequent use of the letters k and h as well as lots of vowels (and double vowels and double consonants!). Since the letters b, d, c, q, w and x don't exist in the Finnish alphabet, transliterating new words from other languages can be tricky. Such a different alphabet results in some sounds and words in English that Finnish people can't easily say.



The direct translation of words can also be charmingly amusing. For example, Santa (a beloved jolly Finnish fellow) is known as *Joulupukki* -- which means 'Christmas goat' -- from an old tradition when poor people would make goats out of straw at Christmastime to throw into friends' houses anonymously. Then there are the months, or *kuu*, meaning 'moon'. *Helmikuu* (February) is **pearl month**, honoring little pearls of snow that form on trees; *Tammikuu* (January) is **oak month** - a hard wood representing perhaps a hard winter.

When spoken correctly, Finnish also sounds quite pretty and may be why JRR Tolkien's Lord of the Rings Elvish language was strongly influenced by it.

◆ THIS MONTH'S HIGHLIGHT ◆

We recently translated the bio of Finnish composer and pianist Magnus Lindberg, current composer-in-residence with the New York Philharmonic.



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◆ FEATURE ◆ Lingua Quiz!

1. Mix & match these countries' names in

- | ENGLISH     | FINNISH         |
|-------------|-----------------|
| (a) USA     | (1) Yhdysvallat |
| (b) France  | (2) Saksa       |
| (c) Finland | (3) Ruotsi      |
| (d) Germany | (4) Suomi       |
| (e) Sweden  | (5) Viro        |
| (f) Estonia | (6) Ranska      |

3. Vote for the longest Finnish word:

- lentokonesuihkuturbiinimootoriapumekaanikkoaliupseerioppilas [a sort-of technical warrant officer trainee specialized in aircraft jet engines]
- epäjärjestelmällistytämättömyydellänsäkäänköhän [roughly "even with its quality of not being possible to be made irrational"]
- järjestelmällistämättömyydellänsäkäänköhän ["You mean, not even when done with a typical lack of systematization?"]

2. True or False -- Fun Finnish Facts:

- Meänkieli is a Finnish dialect spoken in Sweden.
- People named Finn are of Finnish ancestry
- Finland has more than 2,000,000 saunas for a population of 5.2 million.
- The term "Molotov Cocktail" used for a fire bomb was coined by Finns during the Winter War in 1939.
- Kven is a Finnish dialect spoken in Norway.

ANSWERS:

- (a) = (1); (b) = (6); (c) = (4); (d) = (2); (e) = (3); (f) = (5)
- (a), (c), (d) and (e) = all True; (b) = False
- Your choice!