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Diglossia and Bilingualism Among Two Minorities in Sweden

1. INTRODUCTION

The problems of linguistic minorities will be dealt with in this article. Even though only two Finnish language groups in Sweden are considered, it may be possible to draw some conclusions about linguistic minorities in general. At least three different types of social conditions can create linguistic minorities: (1) First, a strong country may absorb neighboring regions in order to guarantee its security or economic well-being. A by-product of this process is the creation of border minorities. (2) The second condition might be called colonialistic. Nationals of a strong country may take over regions, either near or far, which are important for the economy of the mother country. In order to exploit the national resources of these regions, the mother country may bring technological know-how and its own language to the undeveloped areas. (3) Thirdly, labor may move to areas where capital and other requirements for production are available. In this case, immigration gives rise to linguistic minorities.

As a result of these conditions, two languages are used for intrasocietal communication. The language of the dominant group will be used mainly in spheres which interest it and which it wishes to control, such as administration, law, education, and ecclesiastic affairs. The other language is primarily used in unofficial spheres such as home and private life. This functional differentiation of languages in a society is called DIGLOSSIA in the sociolinguistic literature (Ferguson 1959).

Diglossia is a societal-level concept. It means that the community contains two behavioral, attitudinal or value systems which are reflected in different languages. The functional differentiation of languages in society does not, however, necessarily entail BILINGUALISM on the part of the individual (Fishman 1971). The degree to which diglossia and bilingualism are linked on the individual level depends on the contact