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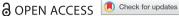
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**ABSTRACT**

This article explores perceived language climate in a nation-specific setting – a largely unexplored research field. It contributes to the literature on intergroup relations (specifically the relations between ethnolinguistic majority and minority groups) in terms of social identity and ethnolinguistic vitality theories. More specifically, the research focus on Swedish speakers in Finland and analyse the perceived language climate from a societal-minority perspective. Since the majority/minority proportions differ between municipalities and regions, we examined two levels: participants' own municipalities and the national level. Data originated from the national Barometer survey conducted in 2019 among Swedish speakers aged 18 and over ($n = 3{,}804$). Associations between perceived language climate and the explanatory variables were analysed using logistic regression. Overall, the analyses carried out reveals that ethnolinguistic identity, objective local vitality, access to services in one´s own mother tongue and political and social trust are closely linked and all contribute to explain a deteriorating language climate. However, different patterns were evident for the language climate at the local and national levels. The results can enhance our understanding of perceived language climate in a multilingual context.

## Introduction

Multilingualism, rather than monolingualism, is the rule in most modern states today (Bourhis, Sachdev, and El-Geledi 2007, 40), and this is often demonstrated in the form of a majority group and one or several minority language groups. Hence, relations might be harmonious, problematic or conflictual. The language climate in a society can partly be seen as a consequence of these relations. Language climate mainly refers to language attitudes, language maintenance and the relational outcomes between linguistic minorities and language majority speakers. This article focuses on perceived language climate from a minority language group point of view. As a starting point, language climate is a largely unexplored area of research even though it is closely related to research on intergroup relations and provides an insight into the complexity of the relationship between

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majority and minority language groups. The relations between ethnolinguistic majority and minority groups have received increasing attention in recent decades (Bilewicz and Soral 2020; Binder et al. 2009; Bourhis 2012; Bourhis and Sioufi 2017; Ehala, Giles, and Harwood 2016; Hewstone and Swart 2011; Liebkind, Nyström, and Honkanummi 2004; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). In addition to these relations being crucial for upholding the rights of minorities (e.g. whether they are able to use their mother tongue in everyday life situations), they are important for the overall stability of society and a sustainable multilingualism in an increasingly globalised context. Language climate does not pertain to only one single theoretical perspective. Therefore, we use an explorative approach that draws on interdisciplinary work from the fields of intergroup relations, social identity, vitality and trust.

This study explores the perceptions of the overall language climate among Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. The Swedish-speaking population accounts for approximately 5 per cent of the 5.5 million Finnish population (Statistics Finland 2018), which makes it the foremost minority in the country and with an official language status alongside Finnish-speakers (Allardt and Starck 1981). In practice, this means, for instance, that local municipalities that are formally recognised as bilingual, are mandated to provide services (e.g. healthcare services) in both Finnish and Swedish. However, over time, such relations may be destabilised by the growing number of new minority language groups in Finland (Pentikäinen 2015).

An analysis of the Swedish-speaking minority's perceptions of a possible deterioration of the language climate in Finland is warranted for several reasons. Firstly, in addition to addressing intergroup relations, it raises questions regarding the upholding of language rights. The proportion of Swedish speakers has steadily diminished in the post-war period, and in bilingual regions such as Uusimaa and Ostrobothnia, the Swedish-speaking minority is now becoming less visible due to increasing inflows of other minorities in the wake of global migration (Saarela 2020). Secondly, due to ongoing welfare state reforms and public expenditure cuts, the availability of services in the Swedish mother tongue is no longer guaranteed, even in bilingual regions (Lindell 2021). Thirdly, the nationalist-populist Finns Party has often criticised the rights of the Swedish-speaking minority in political debates, potentially causing concern for the future rights of this minority. This article contributes to the literature on relations between ethnolinguistic majority and minority groups by using theories of ethnolinguistic identity, ethnolinguistic objective local vitality, and trust to explain the perceived changes in language climate of the studied population. We recognise that the proportions of the minority differ between municipalities, hence we examine the perceived language climate at both the local and national level.

## Language, identity, and trust

The present study explores language climate from various theoretical perspectives. Firstly, research on intergroup relations, particularly between different minority and majority groups, has largely evolved from Allport´s (1954) contact hypothesis, according to which direct interpersonal contact between members of two antagonistic groups leads to a reduction of negative intergroup attitudes. Although research on intergroup relations has largely been related to prejudice and intergroup attitudes (Liebkind, Nyström, and Honkanummi 2004; Pettigrew 1998; Semyonov and Glikman 2009; Tropp and Pettigrew 2005), the same reasoning could be applied to perceived language climate – especially in a society with a distinct minority and majority language group. Secondly, the theory on ethnolinguistic identity suggests that in cases where language is a salient component of identification (as in our case), receiving services and being met within one´s own cultural frameworks are important for having people´s cultural and linguistic identity respected (Giles and Johnson 1987; Lukkarinen 2001; Vincze and Henning-Lindblom 2016). The language climate, from a minority point of view, can be closely associated with maintaining one´s own language in different social settings and feeling that one's linguistic identity is respected. Ethnolinguistic identity suggests that individuals may strive for a positive psychological distinctiveness along ethnolinguistic dimensions and adopt strategies for language maintenance and linguistic differentiation (Vincze and Henning-

Lindblom 2016, 489). Thirdly, and closely connected to ethnolinguistic identity, is objective ethno-linguistic vitality. According to the theory, demographic factors, institutional support, and status are three important structural factors determining the strong or weak vitality of a language minority (Bourhis et al. 2019; Giles and Johnson 1987; Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977). Socio-structural fac-tors, such as group vitality can affect the relations between language groups (Bourhis, Sachdev, and El-Geledi 2007, 15–16; Ehala, Giles, and Harwood 2016; Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2017). The language climate can be influenced by perceptions of the social and ethnic identities of minorities and their overall vitality; thus, identity and vitality are important factors for explaining how min-orities view themselves as a group and how they relate to other groups. Lastly, political and social trust are cornerstones of a healthy democracy (Warren 2018) and might contribute to explaining how minority groups perceive the societal climate, including the language climate.

Ehala, Giles, and Harwood (2016) suggest that communicating between groups is influenced by several parameters: emotional attachment to group identity, boundary impermeability, ethnocentr-ism, perceived vitality, perceived illegitimacy of intergroup relations, and perceived level of inter-group distrust. Of these, particularly three parameters seem significant for our study. Firstly, emotional attachment expresses the strength of identification with the ingroup (in our case per-ceived rapport with Swedish speakers). Secondly, perceived vitality involves the assessment of the relative strength of the ingroup in relation to a significant outgroup. Thirdly, outgroup distrust indicates the level to which the outgroup is distrusted (in our case rapport with Finnish speakers). Based on the interaction of these six parameters, Ehala, Giles, and Harwood (2016) identifies cold and hot identities. Cold groups are low-conflictual and characterised by intergroup stability and low intergroup passion, while hot groups are the opposite. When groups with different 'temperatures' come into contact, different intergroup processes are likely to result (see also Ehala 2010) and this might have an impact also on the language climate.

The remainder of this theoretical section discusses the role of ethnolinguistic identity from a minority perspective, explains how vitality and trust are linked to intergroup relations, and finally outlines the research questions that guided our analysis.

### *Ethnolinguistic identity*

Identity has been described as 'one of the slipperiest concepts in the social scientist's lexicon' (Liebkind et al. 2015, 113), but a starting point for a basic definition is a two-fold conception of personal and social identity. Within social identity theory (see e.g. Harwood 2020; Tajfel 1981; Verkuyten 2005), identity is firmly rooted in membership in various groups and relationships between individuals and their social environment. As one of multiple social identities, an ethnic identity differs from the others because it involves subjective beliefs about origins and can lead to one-dimensional identification of people, with language as a key criterion for labelling (Liebkind et al. 2015). Such one-dimensional and subjective attitudes contrast with the scientific view of ethnic identity as socially constructed and developed through social interactions (Verkuyten 2005). This latter view sees ethnic identity as constantly in flux and influenced by interactions, intergroup relations, and other social identities.

Although social identity entails various dimensions, minority or majority group status is a fre-quent and prevalent approach to studying the phenomenon. Branscombe et al. (1999) identified four different types of social identity threats – categorisation threats, distinctiveness threats, threats to the value of social identity, and acceptance threats – noting that distinctiveness threats greatly influence intergroup relations. Referring to previous studies, the authors concluded that a stronger identification with minority groups than with majority groups may be explained by a larger overlap of personal and social identity for the minority than the majority group members. The notion that people may be more willing to identify with a minority than a majority group was further seen as resulting from a lack of distinctiveness among majority group members. The sense of threat experi-enced by minority groups may, however, explain why minority group members in general display more in-group bias than majority group members.

Research approaches to investigating social and ethnic identity comprise cognitive, evaluative, and emotional dimensions and include three levels of analysis: individual, interactive, and societal. Our study predominantly addressed the latter two, defining the interactive level as the situated everyday interactions that construct social and ethnic identity, and the societal level as dominant discourses involving power and status differences between ethnic groups (cf. Liebkind et al. 2015).

For Swedish-speaking groups in Finland, biases towards their own language group, compared with the majority-Finnish speakers in Finland, are consistent with the results of other studies (Liebkind and Henning-Lindblom 2015). Swedish speakers describe their own language group more positively than the Finnish-speaking group, which may result from minority speakers' greater sense of being under threat compared to majority speakers (Liebkind and Henning-Lindblom 2015; Liebkind, Henning-Lindblom, and Solheim 2008). Additionally, as further confirmed by the above-mentioned studies, Finnish speakers tend to have relatively more negative connotations about their own language group than Swedish speakers. It may therefore be more important for minority speakers than for majority speakers to show belongingness to their own language group.

Regarding the ethnolinguistic identity of registered Swedish speakers in Finland, Liebkind and Henning-Lindblom (2015) pointed out that they identify strongly with both minority (Swedish-speaking) and majority (Finnish-speaking) Finns. The researchers concluded that this kind of double or multiple identity, which embraces a national identity as an 'umbrella' identity, seems to be representative of Swedish speakers in Finland. Furthermore, regarding double and multiple identities, the results of a more fine-grained analysis of ethnolinguistic identity among Swedish-Finnish young people from mixed language family backgrounds showed that they stand out as a particular category; that is, 'individuals with a Swedish–Finnish mixed language family background constitute a distinct ethnolinguistic group, which exists "between and alongside" Swedish speakers and Finnish speakers in contemporary Finnish society' (Vincze and Henning-Lindblom 2016, 493–494).

## Vitality

Ethnolinguistic vitality theory (EVT) was proposed by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) as a framework for assessing the role of sociocultural features that affect the strength of language minorities in multilingual contexts. They defined the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group as 'that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations' (Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor 1977, 308; Yagmur 2011). Ethnolinguistic vitality has been extensively researched in different multilingual contexts, such as in Canada (Bourhis et al. 2019) and Spain (Montaruli, Bourhis, and Azurmendi 2011), and has also been used as a conceptual tool in Finnish multilingual research for investigating intergroup attitudes (Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, and Teräsaho 2007), media use (Harwood and László 2012; Moring et al. 2011), and ethnolinguistic identity among young people (Vincze and Henning-Lindblom 2016). EVT provides a broader and more inclusive framework for the investigation of language maintenance and shift (Clément and Norton 2021; Yagmur 2011). According to the theory, demographic factors, institutional support, and status are three important structural factors determining the strong or weak vitality of a language minority.

Demographic vitality refers to the number and geographical pattern of an ethnolinguistic minority in various parts of a country or region. Important demographic features include the birth rate, mortality, the age pyramid, mixed marriages, and patterns of immigration and emigration. This is often used as a legitimising tool to grant language minorities institutional support, including in Finland. The demographic vitality of the Swedish-speaking minority has clearly changed during the last century (Finnäs 2003), mainly due to increased migration of Swedish speakers to Sweden, especially between 1950 and 1980. In the early twentieth century, Swedish speakers made up 13 per cent of the population (Saarela 2020) compared to about 5 per cent today. Despite the relatively high birth rate among Swedish speakers (Rotkirch, Berg, and Finnäs 2018), return migration has resulted in a

somewhat older age profile compared to Finnish speakers. Furthermore, globalisation and international migration have increased the number and diversity of languages spoken in Finland and have clearly affected the demographics of Swedish and Finnish speakers (Saarela 2020). Also, mixed marriages between the majority and minority language groups have increased in recent decades, with almost 40 per cent of Swedish speakers marrying Finnish speakers (Finnäs 2010), increasing the prevalence of hybrid ethnolinguistic identities.

Institutional support depends on the extent to which a language group gains formal and informal representation in a region's institutions. Whereas formal representation refers to the degree to which a linguistic group has gained control and power at national, regional, and municipal governance levels, informal representation refers to the degree to which an ethnolinguistic group has gained control in various local and private social, cultural, and health-related activities. Finally, status vitality involves the economic, social, sociohistorical, and language status of a linguistic group within or outside the mainstream community. Regarding institutional support and status vitality in a Finnish multilingual context, Swedish speakers have generally been considered an advantaged or even high-status minority with constitutionally guaranteed rights and comprehensive networks of institutions, organisations, and symbolic systems (Liebkind, Henning-Lindblom, and Solheim 2008; McRae 1999).

Ethnolinguistic vitality can influence the course of relations when language groups are in contact. A larger minority population and an absence of segregated homogeneous neighbourhoods and communities increases the likelihood of contact occurring. An increase in the minority proportion of the population increases the odds that two random individuals from different groups will establish positive and constructive contact (Semyonov and Glikman 2009); thus, the vitality of a language community is linked to majority and minority positions at the local, regional, and national levels. In this article, perceived language climate is examined at both the national and the local levels. This is important, not only because the Swedish-speaking population in Finland is a linguistic minority, but because the proportion of Swedish speakers at the local level might vary considerably from that at the national level; hence, perceptions of the language climate might also differ depending on whether they were assessed at the national or municipal level in Finland.

Ethnolinguistic vitality can be studied using both objective and subjective approaches. Whereas objective vitality and the strength of a minority can be assessed objectively using official statistics, subjective vitality must be assessed according to how individuals perceive the vitality of their group (Bourhis et al. 2019; Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981; Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2017). There is no widely accepted instrument for assessing objective vitality and how it should be operationalised (Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2017). This study examines objective vitality and in accordance with Vincze and Henning-Lindblom (2016, 491), we use the linguistic composition of municipalities as a proxy for the status and institutional support of the languages. Strength in number can be used as a legitimising tool to grant language minorities the institutional support they need to ensure their continuity (Bourhis, Sachdev, and El-Geledi 2007, 16). The proportion of Swedish speakers varies greatly, and the impact of minority proportions has been addressed by other studies (Henriksson 2012; Herberts 2012; Lindell 2021). In Ostrobothnia in western Finland, Swedish speakers make up 50.7 per cent of the population; in Turunmaa along the coast of southwest Finland, 5.7 per cent; and in Uusimaa in southern Finland, 7.7 per cent (Statistics Finland 2018).

The more vitality a group has the more likely is it that it will thrive as a collective entity in a multilingual setting. High vitality might also imply maintenance of linguistic distinctiveness of the minority. This encompasses serving the needs of the linguistic minority, such as government services offered in minority language at the local, regional and national level (Bourhis, Sachdev, and El-Geledi 2007, 16, 24). It might have an impact on language climate whether there are possibilities to use the own language not only in private everyday discourse but also in public domains such as the public administration. Although we acknowledge that national language policies affect the minority´s possibilities to thrive as a language minority, examining various policies is beyond the scope of our study (for a discussion on various language policies and their outcome see Bourhis, Sachdev, and El-Geledi 2007).

The language climate, from a minority point of view, can be closely associated with receiving welfare services in one´s own language and feeling that one's linguistic identity is respected. A recent study conducted in Finland showed that weak language skills in the majority language and a strong group identity related to positive attitudes towards language-differentiated welfare services (Himmelroos, Vento, and von Schoultz 2021). Receiving services, being met within one´s own cultural frameworks, and being communicated with in one´s own mother tongue are important for having people's cultural and linguistic identity respected. When individuals feel unsafe, embarrassed, or alone due to communication difficulties, it can affect intergroup relations between different language groups, but when individuals believe that their cultural and linguistic identity is respected, feelings of loneliness and alienation diminish, thus having a positive effect on intergroup relations (Giles and Johnson 1987; Hemberg and Sved 2021; Lukkarinen 2001; Nygård, Gustafsson, and Gustafsson 2011; Vincze and Henning-Lindblom 2016). Today, Finnish and Swedish speakers – at least in many parts of the country – do not form clear-cut language groups that live separately from each other and have different customs. A practical example of this is bilingual families, where both parents speak their own mother tongue with their children and possibly also with each other´s partner. Finnish and Swedish traditions often blend and co-exist in these families, as do the respective languages (Strategy for the National Languages of Finland 2012, 13–14).

## Political and social trust

People tend to view the groups to which they belong as more heterogeneous than those they do not belong to (so-called outgroups), giving rise to the stereotyping of outgroups. This is partly because people have more contact with members of their own group than with outgroup members, resulting in one's own group being seen as more diverse (Messick and Mackie 1989, 55). Limited inter-ethnic contact preserves the social distance between members of majority and minority groups (Semyonov and Glikman 2009). Bilingual people are in an interesting position because they belong to two language groups and thus are more likely to experience cross-language membership and, consequently, evaluate both groups positively (Liebkind and Henning-Lindblom 2015). Bridging contact between groups is also positively related to the fostering of generalised trust and tolerance (Anderson and Paskeviciute 2006, 786).

Trust is important for democracies, and political and social trust are seen as the cornerstones of healthy democracies (Warren 2018). On the one hand, social trust between citizens is essential for social cohesion, integration, and stability – features that are crucial for a well-functioning society. On the other hand, if trust in parliament is high, people are more likely to live by the policies and rules of this central decision-making institution. Previous research (Näsman et al. 2020) has suggested that political trust differs between Swedish and Finnish speakers in Finland, with trust in parliament being lower among Swedish speakers, but regarding social trust, no significant differences were observed between the language groups. One study suggested that Swedish speakers were particularly affected by the 2015–2019 parliament's political discourse on limiting linguistic rights for the minority group (Näsman et al. 2020). In this study, we therefore distinguished between trust in parliament and social trust and analysed their respective influences on perceived language climate change.

Close intergroup contact may increase empathy and enable an individual to take the perspectives of outgroup members into account. Such perspective-taking can promote more favourable intergroup attitudes by extending the sense of self to include the outgroup (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008, 923). Pettigrew (1998) further argued that friendship formation (in a contact situation) promotes better intergroup relations. Contact has also been positively associated with outgroup trust. Getting to know people from the other group usually increases trust in this group. The effects can be generalised from experience with one outgroup to attitudes toward other outgroups (Hewstone and Swart 2011).

To conclude the theoretical discussion, four approaches are distinguished that can enhance our understanding of perceived language climate. Objective local vitality (the minority proportion of the population in the local municipality and the region), ethnolinguistic identity (language identity,

rapport with Swedish and Finnish speakers), access to services in one's own language, and political and social trust. The aim of this article is to explore the links between these four approaches in order to understand how perceived language climate is affected by various factors. See Figure 1.

The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

(a) How much has the language climate deteriorated at a local and a national level?
(b) What can explain the deteriorated language climate and is there a difference between the local and the national level?

## Materials and methods

### The Finnish case

Finland is a bilingual country that constitutionally recognises Swedish and Finnish as the official national languages (The Constitution of Finland 1999). According to the Language Act of 2003, which was passed to ensure the 'right of everyone to use his or her own language, either Finnish or Swedish, before courts of law and other authorities, and to receive official documents in that language' (Constitution of Finland 1999, 17), public authorities must respond to the cultural and social needs of both linguistic groups on equal grounds. The language conditions of municipalities in Finland are determined by the Government every ten years. Municipalities can be either monolingual (Swedish or Finnish) or bilingual. The linguistic status of the municipality determines the linguistic status of the joint municipal authorities, counties and state authorities to which the municipality belongs. The minimum threshold for a municipality to become bilingual is that at least 8% of the inhabitants or a total of 3000 inhabitants have the minority language as their mother tongue. If the proportion of inhabitants who speak the minority language in a municipality drops to less than 6 percent and consists of fewer than 3000 inhabitants, the municipality becomes monolingual. A municipality that does not meet the minimum requirements for being bilingual may apply for the status of voluntarily bilingual on the proposal of the city council (Language Act 2003/423 2003).

Approximately 290,000 (5 per cent) of a total population of 5.5 million people are Swedish-speaking, whereas 88 per cent of the population is Finnish-speaking (Statistics Finland 2018). Other linguistic minorities account for 7 per cent of the population. Finnish municipalities (and administrative regions) are officially either monolingual or bilingual, depending on the size of the language minority community. Of the total 311 municipalities in Finland in 2018, 33 were classified
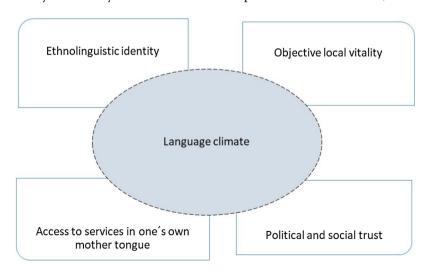


**Figure 1.** Theoretical approaches for understanding perceived language climate.

as bilingual (15 with Swedish as the majority language and 18 with Finnish as the majority language) and 16 were classified as monolingual Swedish (all located in the Åland Islands). The duties of regional and state authorities to provide services in both languages depend on the linguistic status of the municipality as monolingual or bilingual (Language Act 2003, 5). In bilingual municipalities, authorities are obliged to offer services in both languages; consequently, Finnish bilingualism combines both person-based principles (language rights throughout Finland) and territorial principles (Nyqvist et al. 2021). Only the bilingual municipalities were included in this study.

## Sample

The current study considered data derived from the national Barometer survey conducted in 2019. The Barometer is a citizens' panel that measures changes in attitudes among the Swedish-speaking population in Finland and consists of individuals who have agreed to answer questions annually. The data are collected through web-based questionnaires that are distributed twice to four times per year. An invitation to participate in the citizens' panel was sent out to 35,000 randomly selected Swedish speakers in Finland aged 18 and over, of whom slightly over 4,713 accepted the invitation. The Barometer survey 2019, used in this study, was sent to all of them in November 2019, and the response rate was 80.7 per cent ($n = 3,804$). The study included respondents from three regions – Ostrobothnia, Turunmaa, and Uusimaa – but excluded respondents from the Åland Islands (a monolingual region). The sample for the study therefore consisted of 3,312 individuals.

## Measures

### Outcome variable

Perceived language climate was measured with the following question: 'How do you perceive that the language climate (attitudes towards the Swedish language and bilingualism) has changed in recent years?' The response options were 'improved', 'unchanged', 'declined', and 'cannot say'. The same question was posed for different contexts: immediate surroundings, workplace/school, home municipality, mass media, local politics, and national politics. For the present study, the 'home municipality' and 'national politics' contexts were chosen as outcome variables to contrast local and national patterns. The variables were dichotomised so that 'declined' was coded as 1, 'unchanged' and 'improved' as 0, while 'cannot say' was regarded as missing.

### Explanatory variables
Ethnolinguistic identity:

- The variable regarding language identity was based on the question: 'Do you see yourself as bilingual, monolingual Swedish, or monolingual Finnish?' The variable was dichotomised and limited to those who identified themselves as either monolingual Swedish speakers or bilingual (i.e. not monolingual Finnish speakers; 0 = monolingual Swedish speaker, 1 = bilingual).
- Perceived rapport with other people was measured with the question 'To what extent do you feel connected with the following groups: Swedish speakers in your municipality and Finnish speakers in your municipality?' The response options were 'to a very large extent', 'to a fairly large extent', 'cannot say', 'to a fairly small extent', and 'to a very small extent', and the variables were dichotomised so that 'to a very or fairly large extent' were coded 1 and the rest of the options were coded 0 (i.e. 0 = low rapport, 1 = high rapport).

Objective local vitality:

- The proportions of Swedish speakers in a municipality are used as a proxy for status and institutional support (see Henning-Lindblom and Liebkind 2007; Vincze and Henning-Lindblom

2016 for a similar interpretation). The proportions of Swedish speakers in the Ostrobothnia, Turunmaa, and Uusimaa municipalities varied from 2 to 98 per cent and were divided into three levels: 0–2 per cent (low local vitality), 30–50 per cent (medium local vitality), and more than 50 per cent (high local vitality).

Access to services in one's own mother tongue:

- Access to services in one's own mother tongue was indirectly measured with the statement 'When I start a conversation with authorities in Swedish, I receive information in Finnish'. The response options were: 'strongly agree', 'partly agree', 'cannot say', 'partly disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. The variable was dichotomised so that 'strongly agree' and 'partly agree' were coded 1 and 'cannot say', 'partly disagree', and 'strongly disagree' were coded 0 (i.e. 0 = good access to services, 1 = poor access to services).

Political and social trust:

- Two measures of trust were included: trust in parliament and trust in neighbours. Trust in parliament was measured with the question 'How much trust do you have in parliament?'. The response options were 'very high trust', 'fairly high trust', 'neither high nor low trust', 'fairly low trust', and 'very low trust', and the variables were dichotomised so that 'very and fairly high trust' were coded 1 and the three other options were coded 0. Trust in neighbours was measured with the question 'How much do you trust your neighbours?' The response options were 'very much', 'somewhat', 'neither much nor little', 'a little', 'not at all', and 'cannot say'. The variable was dichotomised so that 'very much' and 'somewhat' were coded 1 and the rest of the options coded 0 (i.e. 0 = low trust, 1 = high trust). Although trust is not directly related to language, it can have an impact on the overall relations between language groups in society.

### Control variables

- The sample was divided into four age groups: 18–34 years, 35–49 years, 50–64, and 65 years and older.
- Education level was divided into lower and higher levels, where lower education referred to primary and secondary education and higher education referred to tertiary education (lower = 0, higher = 1).
- Gender (0 = woman, 1 = man) was based on self-report.

### Analysis

The distribution of the explanatory variables and their associations with a deteriorating language climate in the home municipality and in national politics was calculated using the chi-squared test. Bonferroni correction was used for variables containing more than two categories. Binary logistic regression was used for the multivariate analyses where the outcome variables of perceived language climate in the home municipality and in national politics were analysed separately. Model 1 included ethnolinguistic identity (language identity and rapport with Swedish and Finnish speakers), objective local vitality (the proportions of Swedish speakers living in the municipality and the region), access to services in one´s own language and political and social trust. Model 2 included additionally the control variables age, gender, and educational level. The same design was applied to both the language climate in the home municipality and the language climate in national politics.

## Results

Table 1 presents descriptive information about the study sample with regards to language climate and each explanatory and control variable. Notably, the distribution of the dependent variables (perceived language climate change in the home municipality and perceived language climate change in national politics) differed, with 21.8 per cent stating that the language climate had deteriorated in the home municipality and 66.8 per cent claiming that it had deteriorated in national politics.

Table 2 presents the distribution of the explanatory variables according to perceived language climate in the home municipality and in national politics. Regarding a deteriorating language climate in the home municipality, there were statistically significant differences in the distribution between monolinguals and bilinguals (ethnolinguistic identity), between those having low and good rapport with Finnish speakers in the municipality, according to whether respondents had been given information in Finnish by the authorities, between those having low or high political and social trust and between age groups. Differences were also noted between the regions and according to the proportions of Swedish speakers in the municipalities (objective local vitality). Regarding a deteriorating language climate in national politics, there were statistically significant differences between monolinguals and bilinguals, between those having low and good rapport with Finnish speakers in the municipality (ethnolinguistic identity), according to whether the respondents had been given information in Finnish by the authorities, between those with low and high political trust, between the age groups and according to education level. Again, there were also differences between the regions according to the proportions of Swedish speakers (objective local vitality).

The results of the regression analyses are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 shows perceived language climate changes in the home municipalities, and Table 4 concerns a perceived language climate change in national politics.

Regarding perceived language climate change in home municipalities, feeling good rapport with Finnish speakers in the same municipality, high political and social trust were associated with a lower likelihood of a deteriorating language climate, while feeling good rapport with Swedish speakers in the same municipality, living in Uusimaa and having a smaller proportion of Swedish speakers in the municipality (low objective vitality) were associated with a higher likelihood of a deteriorating language climate. Being given information in Finnish by the authorities was also associated with a higher likelihood of a deteriorating language climate. In model 2 all of these variables remained statistically significant and additionally, being bilingual, having higher social trust, and higher education were associated with a lower likelihood of a deteriorating language climate. In contrast, living in Turunmaa and higher age were associated with a higher likelihood of declining language climate in model 2.

Regarding a perceived language climate change in national politics, being given information in Finnish by the authorities was associated with a higher likelihood of a deteriorating language climate whilst living in Turunmaa or Uusimaa and high political trust were associated with a lower likelihood. In model 2 all of these variables remained statistically significant and additionally, having good rapport with Finnish speakers in the municipality was associated with a lower likelihood of a deteriorating language climate. Furthermore, higher age and having higher education were associated with a higher likelihood of a deteriorating language climate in model 2.

The results implied some differences between the local and national contexts regarding the factors that were associated with a deteriorating language climate. For example, somewhat contradictory, low objective local vitality in the home municipality was associated with a higher likelihood of a deteriorating language climate in the home municipality, while living in a region with lower objective local vitality was associated with a lower likelihood of a deteriorating language climate in national politics. Whereas having higher education was associated with a lower likelihood of a deteriorating language climate in the home municipality context, it was associated with a higher

**Table 1.** Sample characteristics (*n* = 3312).

|  | % | n |
|---|---|---|
| *Outcome:* | | |
| **Language climate in your home municipality** | | |
| Improved | 9.4 | 311 |
| Unchanged | 59.5 | 1970 |
| Cannot say | 8.4 | 277 |
| Deteriorated | 21.8 | 721 |
| **Language climate in national politics** | | |
| Improved | 6.4 | 211 |
| Unchanged | 16.8 | 555 |
| Cannot say | 9.1 | 301 |
| Deteriorated | 66.8 | 2212 |
| | | |
| *Ethnolinguistic identity:* | | |
| **Language identity** | | |
| Monolingual (Swedish) | 46.1 | 1527 |
| Bilingual | 53.9 | 1785 |
| **Rapport with Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | |
| Low | 10.4 | 346 |
| High | 88.1 | 2919 |
| **Rapport with Finnish speakers in the municipality** | | |
| Low | 42.3 | 1401 |
| High | 56.2 | 1860 |
| | | |
| *Objective local vitality:* | | |
| **Region** | | |
| Ostrobothnia | 34.8 | 1153 |
| Turunmaa | 12.6 | 417 |
| Uusimaa | 52.6 | 1742 |
| **Proportions of Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | |
| >50 % | 39.1 | 1295 |
| 30–50 % | 6.9 | 230 |
| 0–29 % | 53.4 | 1770 |
| | | |
| *Access to services:* | | |
| **Given information in Finnish by authorities** | | |
| Disagree | 42.1 | 1395 |
| Agree | 57.7 | 1910 |
| | | |
| *Political and social trust:* | | |
| **Trust in parliament** | | |
| Low | 46.4 | 1537 |
| High | 51.8 | 1715 |
| **Trust in neighbours** | | |
| Low | 32.6 | 1081 |
| High | 65.3 | 2164 |
| | | |
| *Control variables:* | | |
| **Age** | | |
| 18–34 | 22.5 | 745 |
| 35–49 | 20.2 | 670 |
| 50–64 | 24.1 | 799 |
| 65- | 31.7 | 1051 |
| **Gender** | | |
| Woman | 54.3 | 1799 |
| Man | 45.3 | 1500 |
| **Educational level** | | |
| Lower | 44.3 | 1467 |
| Higher | 55.2 | 1828 |

likelihood in national politics. Nevertheless, there were also similarities, with higher age and being given information in Finnish by the authorities being associated with a higher likelihood of perceiving a deteriorating language climate in both contexts.

**Table 2.** The distribution of perceived language climate change in home municipality and national politics according to included variables.

| Variables | Home municipality (n=3002) | | | National politics (n=2978) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Improved or unchanged (%) | Deteriorated (%) | p | Improved or unchanged (%) | Deteriorated (%) | p |
| *Ethnolinguistic identity:* | | | | | | |
| **Language identity** | | | .044 | | | .049 |
| Monolingual (Swedish) | 77.7 | 22.3 | | 24.0 | 76.0 | |
| Bilingual | 74.5 | 25.5 | | 27.2 | 72.8 | |
| **Rapport with Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | | .149 | | | .236 |
| Low | 72.5 | 27.5 | | 28.6 | 71.4 | |
| High | 76.5 | 23.5 | | 25.4 | 74.6 | |
| **Rapport with Finnish speakers in the municipality** | | | .005 | | | .013 |
| Low | 73.5 | 26.5 | | 23.4 | 76.6 | |
| High | 77.9 | 22.1 | | 27.5 | 72.5 | |
| *Objective local vitality:* | | | | | | |
| **Region** | | | <.001 | | | <.001 |
| Ostrobothnia | 87.2 | 12.8 | | 21.7 | 78.3 | |
| Turunmaa | 79.7 | 20.3 | | 28.4 | 71.6 | |
| Uusimaa | 67.5 | 32.5 | | 27.8 | 72.2 | |
| **Proportions of Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | | <.001 | | | <.001 |
| >50 % | 90.4 | 9.6 | | 22.4 | 77.6 | |
| 30–50 % | 69.6 | 30.4 | | 22.2 | 77.8 | |
| 0–29 % | 65.3 | 34.7 | | 28.7 | 71.3 | |
| *Access to services:* | | | | | | |
| **Given information in Finnish by authorities** | | | <.001 | | | <.001 |
| Disagree | 84.3 | 15.7 | | 29.6 | 70.4 | |
| Agree | 70.1 | 29.9 | | 23.0 | 77.0 | |
| *Political and social trust:* | | | | | | |
| **Trust in the parliament** | | | <.001 | | | .002 |
| Low | 72.1 | 27.9 | | 22.9 | 77.1 | |
| High | 79.3 | 20.7 | | 27.9 | 72.1 | |
| **Trust in neighbours** | | | <.001 | | | .613 |
| Low | 69.5 | 30.5 | | 25.1 | 74.9 | |
| High | 79.0 | 21.0 | | 26.0 | 74.0 | |
| *Control variables:* | | | | | | |
| **Age** | | | <.001 | | | <.001 |
| 18–34 | 81.3 | 18.7 | | 33.3 | 66.7 | |
| 35–49 | 80.9 | 19.1 | | 23.8 | 76.2 | |
| 50–64 | 75.9 | 24.1 | | 20.2 | 79.8 | |
| 65- | 70.0 | 30.0 | | 26.5 | 73.5 | |
| **Gender** | | | .126 | | | .327 |
| Woman | 74.9 | 25.1 | | 25.0 | 75.0 | |
| Man | 77.3 | 22.7 | | 26.5 | 73.5 | |
| **Educational level** | | | .398 | | | .019 |
| Lower | 75.2 | 24.8 | | 27.7 | 72.3 | |
| Higher | 76.6 | 23.4 | | 23.9 | 76.1 | |

Note. Bonferroni corrected p-values are reported for variables with more than two categories.

## Discussion

### Main findings

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of the overall language climate among the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. The research questions guiding this article related to factors that could explain perceived language climate changes and whether there were differences between

**Table 3.** Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI 95%) for declined language climate in the home municipality.

| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | OR | CI 95 % | p | OR | CI 95 % | p |
| *Ethnolinguistic identity:* | | | | | | |
| **Language identity** | | | | | | |
| Monolingual (Swedish) | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Bilingual | 0.87 | 0.71–1.06 | .153 | 0.78 | 0.64–0.96 | **.020** |
| **Rapport with Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | 1.56 | 1.13–2.15 | **.008** | 1.54 | 1.10–2.14 | **.012** |
| **Rapport with Finnish speakers in the municipality** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | 0.61 | 0.50–0.75 | **<.001** | 0.58 | 0.47–0.71 | **<.001** |
| *Objective local vitality:* | | | | | | |
| **Region** | | | | | | |
| Ostrobothnia | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Turunmaa | 1.37 | 0.97–1.92 | .075 | 1.45 | 1.02–2.05 | .038 |
| Uusimaa | 1.81 | 1.40–2.32 | **<.001** | 1.68 | 1.30–2.17 | **<.001** |
| **Proportions of Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | | | | | |
| >50 % | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| 30–50 % | 2.78 | 1.88–4.13 | **<.001** | 2.87 | 1.93–4.29 | **<.001** |
| 0–29 % | 4.40 | 3.42–5.67 | **<.001** | 5.03 | 3.86–6.55 | **<.001** |
| *Access to services:* | | | | | | |
| **Given information in Finnish by authorities** | | | | | | |
| Disagree | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Agree | 1.98 | 1.62–2.41 | **<.001** | 1.84 | 1.51–2.26 | **<.001** |
| *Political and social trust:* | | | | | | |
| **Trust in parliament** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | **0.72** | **0.60–0.87** | **<.001** | 0.75 | 0.61–0.91 | .003 |
| **Trust in neighbours** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | 0.78 | 0.65–0.95 | **.014** | 0.70 | 0.57–0.85 | **<.001** |
| *Control variables:* | | | | | | |
| **Age** | | | | | | |
| 18–34 | | | | 1 | | |
| 35–49 | | | | 1.39 | 1.01–1.93 | **.044** |
| 50–64 | | | | 1.88 | 1.39–2.54 | **<.011** |
| 65- | | | | 2.49 | 1.87–3.32 | **<.001** |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Woman | | | | 1 | | |
| Man | | | | 0.89 | 0.73–1.08 | .225 |
| **Educational level** | | | | | | |
| Lower | | | | 1 | | |
| Higher | | | | 0.81 | 0.66–0.99 | **.040** |
| Nagelkerke R Square | .187 | | | .209 | | |
| -2 Log Likelihood | 2816.497 | | | 2717.444 | | |

Note. Model 1 includes variables representing objective local vitality, ethnolinguistic identity, access to services in one´s own mother tongue, and political and social trust, Model 2 additionally includes the control variables age, gender, and educational level.

the explanations at the local and national levels. The results indicated that a deteriorating language climate could be explained by ethnolinguistic identity, objective local vitality, access to services in one´s own mother tongue and political and social trust. However, there were different patterns depending on whether the language climate was examined at the national or local level.

Regarding the language climate on the local level, higher age, poor access to services in one´s own mother tongue and feeling good rapport with the minority Swedish speakers in the

**Table 4.** Odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI 95%) for declined language climate in national politics.

| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | OR | CI 95 % | p | OR | CI 95 % | p |
| *Ethnolinguistic identity:* | | | | | | |
| **Language identity** | | | | | | |
| Monolingual (Swedish) | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Bilingual | 0.92 | 0.77–1.10 | .357 | 0.93 | 0.77–1.13 | .462 |
| **Rapport with Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | 1.04 | 0.77–1.40 | .787 | 1.15 | 0.85–1.55 | .375 |
| **Rapport with Finnish speakers in the municipality** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | 0.89 | 0.74–1.07 | .215 | 0.80 | 0.67–0.97 | **.025** |
| *Objective local vitality:* | | | | | | |
| **Region** | | | | | | |
| Ostrobothnia | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Turunmaa | 0.69 | 0.52–0.92 | **.011** | 0.67 | 0.50–0.90 | **.007** |
| Uusimaa | .077 | 0.61–0.96 | **.021** | 0.74 | 0.59–0.94 | **.013** |
| **Proportions of Swedish speakers in the municipality** | | | | | | |
| >50 % | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| 30–50 % | 1.14 | 0.77–1.69 | .523 | 1.08 | 0.72–1.50 | .723 |
| 0–29 % | 0.81 | 0.65–1.00 | .052 | 0.81 | 0.65–1.01 | .064 |
| *Access to services:* | | | | | | |
| **Given information in Finnish by authorities** | | | | | | |
| Disagree | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Agree | 1.46 | 1.23–1.73 | **<.001** | 1.47 | 1.23–1.76 | **<.001** |
| *Political and social trust:* | | | | | | |
| **Trust in parliament** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | 0.81 | 0.68–0.97 | **.020** | 0.79 | 0.66–0.94 | **.009** |
| **Trust in neighbours** | | | | | | |
| Low | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| High | 0.97 | 0.81–1.17 | .772 | 0.87 | 0.71–1.05 | .149 |
| *Control variables:* | | | | | | |
| **Age** | | | | | | |
| 18–34 | | | | 1 | | |
| 35–49 | | | | 1.53 | 1.16–2.00 | **.002** |
| 50–64 | | | | 1.98 | 1.52–2.58 | **<.001** |
| 65- | | | | 1.51 | 1.18–1.92 | **.001** |
| **Gender** | | | | | | |
| Woman | | | | 1 | | |
| Man | | | | 0.99 | 0.83–1.18 | .931 |
| **Educational level** | | | | | | |
| Lower | | | | 1 | | |
| Higher | | | | 1.45 | 1.20–1.74 | **<.001** |
| Nagelkerke R Square | .027 | | | .049 | | |
| -2 Log Likelihood | 3426.735 | | | 3146.014 | | |

Note. Model 1 includes variables representing objective local vitality, ethnolinguistic identity, access to services in one´s own mother tongue, and political and social trust, Model 2 additionally includes the control variables age, gender, and educational level.

municipality were associated with a deteriorating language climate. Conversely, higher education, being bilingual, having high political and social trust, and feeling good rapport with the majority Finnish speakers in the municipality seemed to be related to more positive perceptions of the language climate. This suggests that more contact with the majority group, being bilingual, and feeling rapport with the majority language group were favourable for the language climate. This corroborates with the findings from Ehala, Giles, and Harwood (2016) stating that outgroup trust and

intensity of outgroup contact can influence intergroup relations while lack of dialogue may enforce mutual misunderstanding. Bilinguals may deem their group´s status less relevant to intergroup relationship (Tropp and Pettigrew 2005). Thus, a double or multiple identity as a national 'umbrella' identity (Liebkind and Henning-Lindblom 2015) was generally related to more positive perceptions of the language climate. Objective local vitality also seemed to play an important role. Living in a region or a municipality with low objective local vitality were associated with a deteriorating language climate. According to Bourhis et al. (2019, 410) the more vitality a language group enjoys the more likely it is to thrive as a collective entity in intergroup setting (see also Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2017). Indeed, our results suggest that the vitality of the minority matters: in regions with lower proportions of language minority (Swedish) speakers, the perceived language climate seemed to have changed negatively.

Regarding the perceived language climate change on the national level, we concluded that, higher age, having higher education, and poor access to services in one´s own mother tongue were associated with a deteriorating language climate. Living in a region with lower objective local vitality was associated with a more favourable language climate.

Higher age and poor access to services in one´s own mother tongue were associated with a deteriorating language climate in both home municipalities and national level. The directions of the associations were sometimes opposite: higher education was associated with a deteriorating language climate on the local level but with a more favourable language climate on the national level. Furthermore, living in Turunmaa or Uusimaa was associated with a deteriorating language climate on the local level but with a more favourable language climate on the national level.

In this study, we analysed ethnolinguistic identity as a significant dimension of intergroup language relations in Finland that, according to our results, affects perceptions of the language climate at both the local and national levels. Swedish speakers in Ostrobothnia had the highest objective local vitality compared to other regions where the proportion of Swedish speakers was lower (i.e. Turunmaa and Uusimaa). The results indicated that perceptions of a language climate change on the local level are closely related to objective local vitality; hence, in municipalities with a higher proportion of minority (Swedish) speakers, the language climate was perceived more positively. The opposite result was found for the language climate on the national level, with regions with high objective local vitality, such as Ostrobothnia, reporting a deteriorating language climate. This was in line with a recent study on changes in trust in Ostrobothnia (Näsman et al. 2020), which found that Swedish speakers in particular reported low levels of trust in parliament. This was explained by a more restrictive minority language policy introduced by the 2015–2019 parliament, which caused lower levels of institutional trust among the language minority.

It has been argued that a community with a high level of vitality provides institutional support, including organisations, social networks, and symbolic systems, to meet the needs of its inhabitants (Bourhis et al. 2019; Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2017). These features are relevant for creating social cohesion and social capital, which the Swedish speakers, according to previous research (Sundback and Nyqvist 2010), have greater access to. Although we did not assess regional differences in vitality in depth, it is likely that regions and municipalities with higher levels of objective vitality can promote a strong ingroup minority identity and better rapport with Swedish speakers. A previous report suggested that the minority linguistic group should constitute at least 30 per cent of the population in a municipality to warrant functional bilingual services (Henriksson 2012), thus confirming our results that ethnolinguistic vitality matters. In our study, by using an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, we increased the knowledge on language relations and language climate from a linguistic minority perspective. Ethnolinguistic identity, objective local vitality, access to services in one´s own mother tongue and trust contribute to explaining the language climate on a local and national level. Additional research is warranted to advance in-depth theoretical insights in different multilingual contexts.

## Policy implications

Our results contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors affecting the perceived language climate from a minority perspective. Firstly, intergroup contact makes a difference. Feeling rapport with the majority group increases the likelihood of perceiving the language climate positively. This also decreases ingroup biases and creates positive feelings towards the outgroup. Social capital (especially bonding social capital) has proved to be strong among the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. Although bridging social capital is feasible for a society, bonding social capital contributes to a stronger ingroup bias. Facilitating greater formal and informal contact between the language groups might be a way to improve the language climate and to increase bridging social capital (Sundback and Nyqvist 2010).

Secondly, access to services in one´s own language is important. Inadequate services give rise to feelings of exclusion, resignation, and alienation. Services in the official minority language are important not only from a legal perspective but also from a language-climate perspective. It seems that language-differentiated services work well when there is a large minority, but when the proportion is less than 30 per cent of the total population in a municipality, special efforts are needed for it to work well (see also Henriksson 2012). All bilingual services need strategic long-term planning. We can also assume that a minority group's identity becomes threatened when the minority proportion is small, potentially causing a less favourable language climate.

Thirdly, older people seem to have more negative perceptions of the language climate. This might be because, as people grow older, they need more services. Language competence might also decrease with age, implying that services in one´s own language become more important for older people (Nyqvist et al. 2021). With higher age comes more life experience, and the development of language rights and services has decreased for the Swedish minority in many respects.

## Limitations

There are, some limitations to our findings. We relied on survey data for our analysis, and as for most surveys, people with lower education were underrepresented. We cannot state whether this had a great impact on the results because all age groups were still represented in our sample. In this study, we only analysed one minority group, although we are aware of the increasing numbers of other ethnolinguistic minority groups in Finland. According to the results from the Sami Barometer 2020, it is possible that many of our results could also be relevant for the Sami minority (Arola 2021). The Swedish-speaking minority in Finland was used as an example for addressing the perceived language climate from an ethnolinguistic minority perspective, and the results clearly suggest that objective vitality plays a crucial role in explaining perceived language climate. Future research might also include subjective vitality measures in order to also grasp perceived vitality among a minority group (Bourhis, Giles, and Rosenthal 1981; Smith, Ehala, and Giles 2017). Lastly, we used subjective experiences of perceived language climate. Although it would be valuable, where possible, to include an objective measure, subjective perceptions are important for exploring how citizens perceive the language climate in the society where they live. Furthermore, the analyses focused on variables associated with a deteriorated language climate, and we acknowledge that it would also be important to examine possible explanations for improvements in the language climate in future studies.

## Availability of data

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, ML, upon request. The data will be available for research, teaching and study at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive https://www.fsd.tuni.fi/en/ in the end of 2023.

## Disclosure statement

## Funding

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