

Variation in Women's Name Phrases in Official Documents in Helsinki 1780-1930

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Abstract

This paper is based on my dissertation,¹ which is a socio-onomastic study of variation in women's name phrases in official documents in Finland during the period 1780-1930. The aim is to discuss both the changeover from patronymics to inherited family names and the use of surnames after marriage (i.e. whether women adopted their husbands' family names or retained their maiden names), before new laws in this area entered into force in Finland in the early 20th century. In 1920, a law requiring fixed family names put an end to the use of the patronymic as a person's only surname. After 1929, it was no longer possible for a married woman to retain her maiden name.

Methodologically, to explain this development from a socio-onomastic perspective, I have based my study on a syntactic-semantic analysis of the relevant name phrases found in parish registers, estate registers, trade licenses, gravestones, diaries and family announcements on newspapers. The analysis, which reveals the overall picture of various ways of denoting women in official documents, is based on frequency calculations of the different types of name phrases, as well as on describing variation in the structure and semantic content of the name phrases, e.g. social variation in the use of titles.

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Background

During the 150 years that my research covers, Helsinki grew from a small town to a big city. As long as Finland remained part of the Swedish kingdom, that is, until 1809, Helsinki was a small staple port with only a few thousand inhabitants. But when the country became a grand duchy under Russia and when, in 1812, Helsinki became the capital of Finland, the population began to increase rapidly. In 1827 the highest classes of society received a significant addition when the university was also moved from Turku to Helsinki.

At the end of the 17th century, the majority of the inhabitants of Helsinki were still Finnish-speaking, but in the course of the 18th century, the proportion of Swedish speakers increased; starting in the 1780s, Swedish was the dominant language in Helsinki. During the first half of the 19th century, migration did not yet affect the linguistic makeup of the city, as the majority of the migrants came from nearby Swedish-speaking rural areas. Those urban dwellers who came from the Baltic and from Germany also quickly acquired the majority language.

It was only starting in the 1850s that Finnish speakers began to move to the city in larger numbers. In 1890 the two linguistic groups were equally large, and twenty years later Finnish speakers comprised a clear majority. In official sources, Finnish began to become established after the bilingual city parish was divided into three Finnish and three Swedish

¹ Nakari (2011), see also Nakari (2007, 2009, 2013).

congregations. The largest foreign population group were Russians, who included both mobile soldiers and settled traders.

During the first half of the 19th century, Finland was still a typical class society, in which the aristocracy and the clergy comprised the upper classes and the bourgeoisie and farmers the lower classes. During the latter half of the 19th century, new relations of production and new political and economic views began to transform the social structure. The class society became an industrial society in which class and circumstance no longer necessarily went hand in hand. With industrialization and modernization, the significance of lineage was reduced and the family in the modern sense came into existence.

Women’s educational opportunities in Finnish society gradually improved after the authorities began to establish schools for girls in the 1860s. Until the start of the 20th century, however, the path to university and other institutes of higher education was opened primarily through private co-educational schools and by special request. In 1901 one-fourth of the students at the university were women. The women’s movement achieved an important goal in connection with the Parliament Act of 1906, when Finland became the first country in Europe to grant women the right to vote and to hold elected office.

Aims, Methods and Data

This study aims to discuss from a socio-onomastic perspective both the changeover from patronymics to inherited family names and the use of surnames after marriage, before new laws in this area entered into force in Finland in the early 20th century. In 1920, a law on family names that required fixed surnames put an end to the use of the patronymic as a person’s only last name. After 1929, it was no longer possible for a married woman to retain her maiden name.

Methodologically, to explain this development, I have based my study on a syntactic-semantic analysis of the relevant name phrases. To be able to analyze the extensive data, I have devised a scheme to divide the 115 different types of name phrases into 13 main categories. The analysis of the data for Helsinki is based on frequency calculations of the different types of name phrases sampled once every thirtieth year, as well as on describing variation in the structure and semantic content of the name phrases, e.g. social variation in the use of titles.

I from 1780	referred to together with spouse	title	given name	patronymic or metronymic	surname	patronymic or metronymic/ surname / "née"/ "married"	title	no. of instances
1	-/∞	t						58
2	-/∞	-/t	GN					211
3	-/∞	-/t/tt	GN	PA/ME			-/t	242
4	-/∞	-/t/tt	GN	PA/ME	SN	-/PA	-/t	103
5	-/∞	-/t/tt			SN			76
6	-/∞	-/t/tt	GN		SN		-/t/tt	2 192
7	-/∞	-/t/tt/ttt	GN		-/HS/MN	nMN/nPA/mHS	-/t	147
8	-/∞	t	GN		SN	SN		7
II from 1888	patronymic or metronymic	surname	surname/ 'née'/ "married"	given name	patronymic or metronymic	surname/ "née"/ "married"	title	
9	PA/ME			GN			-/t	86
10	-/PA	SN	-/SN/nMN	GN	-/PA/ME	-/SN/mHS	-/t/tt	623
11		HS/MN/nMN	-/nMN/nPA/HS	GN		-/nMN/nPA/mHS	-/t/tt	234
12		SN		GN			-/t/tt	1 935
13		SN	-/SN	GN		-/SN	-/t/tt	36
Total								5 950

∞	referred to together with spouse	HS	husband's surname
n.	née ("född")	ME	metronymic
MN	maiden name	PA	patronymic
GN	given name	t	title
m	married ("gift")	SN	surname

Table 1. Schematic representation of types of name phrases in the data, consolidated into 13 main types

The study is based mainly on parish registers from the period 1780-1929, estate registers from the period 1780-1928, and trade licenses from the period 1880-1908, but for comparison I also use family announcements in newspapers from the period 1829-1888, gravestones from the period 1796-1929, and diaries from the periods 1799-1801 and 1818-1820, altogether providing a corpus of 5,950 name phrases.

Variation Dependent on Time, Source, Social Class and Marital Status

The two most frequent types of name phrases account for over 45% of the data. These consist of the elements title, given name(s) and surname, as in *Jungf*: [*Jungfru* 'Miss'] *Christ*. [*Christina*] *Charl*: [*Charlotta*] *Stigzelia* (marriage record 1780) or *Lundell, Edla Amalia Cecilia, ogift* ['unmarried'] (baptismal record 1888). Even if women's names were written with surnames starting from the beginning of the period under investigation, the data also include 269 name phrases which include neither patro- or metronymic nor surname, e.g. *Voluntairen* ['volunteer'] *Carl Appelgren med sin hustru* ['with his wife'] (moving certificate 1795) or *Tim*. [*Timmerman* 'carpenter'] *Mickael Westerberg - Hustru* ['wife'] *Catharina* (birth registry 1780), as well as 318 name phrases in which the patro- or metronymic is given

instead of a surname, e.g. *Pigan* [‘maidservant’] *Maria Sigfrids dotter* (marriage record 1780) or *Andersdr* [*Andersdotter*], *Maria, jfru* [*jungfru* ‘Miss’] (moving certificate 1888).

Both patro- or metronymic and surname are included in a total of 726 name phrases, e.g. *Siömans Enkan* [‘sailor’s widow’] *Maria And:dr* [*Andersdotter*] *Antéen* (marriage record 1780) or *Willman, Serafina Mattsdr ju* [*jungfru* ‘Miss’] (moving certificate 1888). Name phrases that include patro- or metronymic as well as surname are associated primarily with the period when fixed surnames were not yet fully established. However, in my data from the moving registers for 1928 and 1929, the pastors in certain congregations still diligently recorded patro- and metronymics even though the use of surnames had been required by law for over eight years. The fact that name phrases including patro- or metronymic and surname occur at the end of the period specifically in moving registers can be explained by the rural connotations they were perceived as having. A large fraction of the migrants of course came from rural areas. By contrast, patronymics are rare in the sources that indicate what name phrases women themselves provide, i.e. in estate registers and trade licenses. This may be interpreted as an expression of emancipation.

In my data from official sources, the name phrases for women are most systematic in the marriage registries and in the birth and baptismal registries. By contrast, pastors were quite inconsistent in their notations in death and burial registries. The greatest variety of name phrase types occurs in moving records, which, at least to some extent, may reflect regional variation.

Variation in the registries may also reflect the different functions of the different sources. If the woman is responsible for underage children or for property, she is identified with as complete a name phrase as possible. For instance, *Pigan* [‘maidservant’] *Kurhushjonet*¹ [‘hospital worker’] *Maria Lindman* (birth registry 1828) as the mother to an illegitimate child and *hustrun* [‘wife’] *Amanda Ulrika Löfgren, född* [‘née’] *Samuelsson* (estate register 1928) as the executor to the estate of *kontrollören* [‘controller’] *Karl Ivar Löfgren*.

The great variation in name phrase types may also reflect the social structure of the population of Helsinki. Analysis of the content of the name phrases shows that the higher the social standing, the fuller the name phrase in the class society. Still in 1866 we can find, for instance, both *kanslisten i kejsrerliga senaten för Finland, Ewald Kuhlefelts älskade maka Anna Henriette Kuhlefelt, född Wasenius* [‘clerk in the imperial senate for Finland Ewald Kuhlefelt’s beloved spouse Anna Henriette Kuhlefelt, née Wasenius’] (*Helsingfors Tidningar* 31.1.1866) and *sjöforman A.W. Pettersons hustru Hedwig* [sea captain A.W. Petterson’s wife Hedwig] (*Helsingfors Tidningar* 9.1.1866).

Social differences can also be seen clearly in the use of titles. The name phrases in my data can include two titles in a row in order to indicate both status and marital status, e.g. *Klara Vilhelmina Littson, Generalsdr.* [*Generalsdotter* ‘general’s daughter’] *ogift* [‘unmarried’] (death registry 1858). An example of the use of two titles in a demeaning sense is seen in the name phrase *Pigan Qvinspersonen* [‘maidservant female person’] *Benedicta Charlotta Gustafsdotter* (moving certificate 1858). But both status and marital status can be

¹ According to SAOB (1938: K 3238) *kurhus* means ‘(ward of) a hospital for treatment of sexual diseases’; *hjon* ‘servant’.

indicated in a single title. Among the godparents in the birth and baptismal registry for 1780, for instance, the titles *friherinnan* [‘baroness’], *överstlöjtskan* [‘lieutenant-colonel’s wife’], *fru* [‘Mrs.’], *madame* and *hustru* [‘wife’] indicate married women from different social groups.

Until the end of the 19th century, the title was an important social marker, which clerks carefully noted in official documents, whereas the function of the title at the start of the 20th century appears more and more often to have been primarily to indicate marital status. Women’s entry into the workforce and education is, however, also seen in title use in the 20th century. Unmarried women were no longer denoted with titles such as *matrosdotter* [‘seaman’s daughter’] or *bondedotter* [‘farmer’s daughter’]; instead, they had their own professional titles such as *sömmerska* [‘seamstress’], *fabriksarbeterska* [‘factory worker’], *affärsbiträde* [‘saleswoman’] and *bankkassörska* [‘bank teller’]. *Pigor* [‘maidservants’] and *tjänstepigor* [‘serving girls’] were replaced by *tjänarinnor* [‘servants’], *hushållerskor* [‘housekeepers’] and *städerskor* [‘cleaners’]. Two titles can also express both marital status and education and profession, as with the name phrases *Berglöf, Inez Ingeborg frök., stud.* [Berglöf, Inez Ingeborg Miss, student – i.e. secondary school graduate] (moving certificate 1909) and *kassörskan, fröken Anna Lovisa Less* [‘cashier Miss Anna Lovisa Less’] (moving certificate 1909).

The development of name phrases for women in Helsinki 1780-1930 clearly reflects changes in the status of women in Finnish society, such as women’s suffrage and right to hold office in 1906. From being someone’s daughter, serving girl, wife or widow, for instance *hand: [handlanden] Pett: [Petter] Heidenstrauchs pig. [piga]* [‘merchant Petter Heidenstrauch’s maidservant’] (death registry 1780), *Rådman Bolwianders fru* [alderman Bolwiander’s wife] (death registry 1780), *Const: [Constantin] Blåfieldts Ea [Enka ‘widow’]* (death registry 1780) or *Pigan Stina Olofs dr [dotter]* [‘maidservant Stina Olof’s daughter’] (moving certificate 1799), the woman becomes an independent individual who can appear in official documents under her own name.

The development of power relations within the family appears to go directly opposite to societal changes. The fact that women began to take their husband’s surname after marriage can from today’s viewpoint be seen as a symbol of women’s subordinate status. But in the beginning of the 20th century, people viewed the shared name as expressing equality, that is, that the wife obtained the right to the man’s surname and thereby to the same social status.

In my data, married names are encountered for the first time in estate registries for the year 1780. Even though *Brandevachts Karlen* [‘firefighter’] *Johan Krook*’s widow writes her own name with her first name and her father’s name, she is referred to in the ingress with a name phrase that also includes her married name, viz. *Brandvachts Enkan* [‘firefighter’s widow’] *Christina Pehrsdotter Krook*. On the other hand, *Brita Degerman*, the widow of *Fiskaren* [‘fisherman’] *Hindric Degerman*, writes her own name using her married name but is also referred to in the ingress without a surname, but as *Encka* [‘widow’] *Brita Hindrichs dotter*. In the capacity of mothers in birth and marriage registries, married women are indicated almost throughout by their maiden names, but married names, on the other hand, are noted for baptismal witnesses in this source already in 1780. The earliest attestation of a married name in the comparative data stems from 1796 and occurs on a memorial stone in

Old Church Square in Helsinki. This is *Maria Elisabeth Wahlberg*, daughter of *handlanden* [‘merchant’] *Johan Forselius* and wife of *byggnadskonduktören*² [‘building supervisor’] *Olof Niklas Wahlberg*.

The fact that my attestations of married names at the end of the 18th century belong primarily to bourgeois circles, which in their struggle for a better position in society were most open to new ideas, is in accordance with previous research. On the other hand, aristocratic women had every reason to emphasize their origin, using their maiden names or married name + maiden name preceded by the word *född* [‘née’], which my examples from official data also show. Therefore my investigation of married women’s surnames in the diaries of 15-year-old *Jacobina Charlotta Munsterhjelm* around the turn of the century 1800 revealed an unexpected result. Namely, it emerges that all 37 married upper-class women bear married names, such as *Ebba Regina von Schoultz*, who was titled *fru* [‘Mrs.’] *Nyberg* in private circles (JCM: 86). Even if the practice of married names appears to have been implemented in the diaries studied, it is nonetheless impossible to know how the women in question identified themselves.

Conclusion

Syntactic-semantic analysis reveals the overall picture of the various ways of denoting women in official documents. In Helsinki towards the end of the 19th century, the use of inherited family names seems to be almost fully developed in official contexts. In the late 19th century, a patronymic still appears as the only surname of some working-class women, whereas in the early 20th century patronymics were only entered in the parish register as a kind of middle name. At the beginning of the 19th century, most married women were still registered under their maiden names, with a few exceptions among the bourgeoisie and upper class. Comparison with name phrases that appear in diaries, however, indicates that the use of the husband’s family name by married women was a much earlier phenomenon in private contexts than in official documents.

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² *SAOB* (1937: K 2092) lists among definitions for the word *konduktör* ‘foreman in construction; supervisor at a (larger, public) building; (acting) architect’.

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