



KAISA HÄKKINEN

# Spreading the Written Word

*Mikael Agricola and the Birth of Literary Finnish*

Studia Fennica  
Linguistica

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Finnish

Translated by Leonard Pearl

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# Preface

**F**innish culture has ancient roots, but it was not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century that Finnish had begun to be written down. The Protestant Reformation began in Germany in 1517, and the expansion of Lutheranism was the decisive impetus for literary development. The principle was that the people had to get to hear and read the word of God in their own mother tongue. If there previously was no literary language, it had to be created.

The first Finnish books were produced by Mikael Agricola. He was born an ordinary son of a farmer, but his dedication to his studies and subsequent work in the office of the Bishop of Turku opened up the road to leading roles in the Finnish Church. Agricola became a respected headmaster of the cathedral school in Turku, a Finnish Reformer and finally Bishop of Turku. He was able to bring a total of nine works in Finnish to print, which became the foundation of literary Finnish.

Finnish in Agricola's time was, in many respects, different than it is today. There still was no standard language because the Finns were scattered throughout a vast, scarcely settled country and spoke local dialects. For their whole lives, many of them interacted only with the inhabitants in their own home regions. Literary Finnish became a connective thread between the different dialects. A standard language independent from these regional dialects began to develop on the basis of the works of Agricola.

In practice, literary Finnish was essentially created through the translation of Latin, Swedish and German spiritual literature. In translating scripture, it was important for the original content of the text to remain unchanged, and for this reason, translating was done verbatim as accurately as possible. There were structural features that came into literary Finnish through translations that were not in the true vernacular. Furthermore, the literary language required a great amount of new vocabulary because its subject matter was different from that of the ordinary, everyday language. The lands and events found in the Bible were alien to Finnish culture as well. In describing these phenomena, Finnish means of expression had to be developed to be more diverse than before.

We divided *Spreading the Written Word: Mikael Agricola and the Birth of Literary Finnish* into six chapters. The first chapter outlines the historical background necessary to understand the life's work of Mikael Agricola and its importance. The second chapter describes Agricola's life in chronological order. Chapter three presents the Finnish works published by Agricola

and their most important non-Finnish exemplars. The fourth and most extensive chapter is a depiction of Agricola's Finnish: we divided it into sections according to linguistic level, starting with an examination of his orthographic system and its relation to phonetics, then describing nominal and verbal inflection, syntax, vocabulary and word formation. Agricola carried out his life's work as part of a Finnish and non-Finnish network of influential connections, which is described in chapter five. The sixth and final chapter examines the importance of Agricola's work, research on Agricola and his life's work and Agricola's role in contemporary Finnish culture.

Our book is not a translation of a previously published work in Finnish. We wrote it specifically with an international audience in mind. There has indeed been a depiction of Mikael Agricola, his literary work and his Finnish in published studies, but a majority of them has been released only in Finnish. Therefore, reading them requires prior knowledge on both Finnish history and culture, in addition to Finnish language skills. We provided background information on both history and language so that it will be possible for the international reader to understand the core content of the book. However, it is not possible to introduce analyses in great detail in a non-academic book. Nevertheless, the bibliography can provide the reader with the possibility to find further information.

Chapter four on the language in Agricola also introduces the main features of the structure of contemporary Finnish. This way, it will be possible to concretely highlight the differences between Agricola and contemporary Finnish. As a compliment to this, we provided paradigm tables of nominal and verbal inflection at the end of the book. There is also a list of historical figures at the end of the book, whose names in Finnish literature are found in different forms than those in international contexts. It is customary in Finnish to use Fennicised personal names adapted for historical persons, which is why it can be difficult to recognise a figure in Finnish literature on the basis of his or her internationally known name. Furthermore, as there is a bilingual tradition of place names in past and present Finland, we also provided a short guide to explain their use and nature.

Not all Finnish inflected words on their own can or could be translated without context. In this case, we used glosses in chapter four to clarify the morphological content of those words, striving to keep them as clear and simple as possible. On the other hand, we occasionally used glosses with a regular translation for clarification or to show a comparison. We provided a list of glossing abbreviations along with other symbols on pages 11 and 12 to help the reader become familiar with the nature of Finnish words.

Because Agricola's Finnish-language works are liturgical books, many of the linguistic samples in chapter four are from the Bible. The Bible in English and its many versions are conveniently and readily available online. We found the easiest portal to navigate through to be *www.biblegateway.com*. The website can display the different versions of a biblical line in a list, easily comparing them to each other on one page. Our goal was to select the linguistically closest English equivalent to the passage taken from Agricola. Thus, multiple Bibles were used for these samples. Passages not from the books of the Bible – a biblical gloss or an excerpt from a poem, for

example – have been provided in English with their source by the translator of our book. Unless otherwise noted, the author provided all other samples or selected individual words or phrases from Agricola and the translator provided their English equivalents.

We would like to praise the book *Mikael Agricola: Suomen uskonpuhdistaja* (1985) by Viljo and Kari Tarkiainen and the biography *Mikael Agricola: Elämä ja teokset* (2007) by Simo Heininen as particularly noteworthy sources in the sphere of previous studies on Agricola. Moreover, Viljo Tarkiainen's and Simo Heininen's research have provided an excellent foundation to this general overview. We also wish to highlight the work of those scholars who are no longer with us and who provided multiple works on Agricola's Finnish: Heikki Ojansuu, Martti Rapola, Osmo Nikkilä and Silva Kiuru. Others who have carried out research on Agricola can be found in chapter six. We provided the bibliography with English translations of all the Finnish works noted in this book to help the reader get acquainted with these studies.

Finland observed the anniversary of the 450<sup>th</sup> year of Agricola's death in 2007 as a national commemorative year. There were various projects under way for the anniversary year, including a variety of new studies and multidisciplinary research co-operation as well as a great deal of books and articles on Agricola and his life's work. There has continually been active research even after 2007, and as the bibliography shows, we used new information produced by these studies in the creation of our book.

This overview of Mikael Agricola's life's work and the beginning stages of literary Finnish is especially geared towards researchers and students. It provides information required on the development of Finnish language and literary culture and the features that have influenced them upon the meeting of the Middle Ages and the modern era. The book mainly focuses on language, history and cultural history, but in terms of theology and Church history, it also provides an excellent review on the progression and arrival of the Reformation and Lutheranism to Finland. It was written with a broad audience in mind, as a work of non-fiction for anyone interested in these subjects.

The author of the book is Professor Kaisa Häkkinen, PhD, a Finnish language researcher of the University of Turku whose areas of expertise are the history of Finnish and the Finno-Ugric languages, etymology and old literary Finnish. She has written many scholarly and non-academic books and articles, as well as participated in various projects on Mikael Agricola. The translator is Leonard Pearl, MA, a linguist specialised in Finnish and who has previously translated a book on Finnish onomastics into English. We would like to thank the Varsinais-Suomi Regional Fund of the Finnish Cultural Foundation for funding the translation of our book, as well as our publisher, the Finnish Literature Society, for committing to support the project.

*Kaisa Häkkinen and Leonard Pearl*  
*Turku*  
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The arrival of the Reformation was the decisive impetus for literary development in Finland. The principle of Lutheranism was that the people had to get to hear and read the word of God in their own mother tongue. If there previously was no literary language, it had to be created.

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This book describes the historical background of Mikael Agricola, his life, his personal networks, the Finnish works published by Agricola, research on Agricola and Agricola's role in contemporary Finnish culture. The most extensive chapter is a depiction of Agricola's Finnish. The book was written with a broad audience in mind, as a work of non-fiction for anyone interested in these subjects.



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