Plain language in two official languages. Is there an advantage?
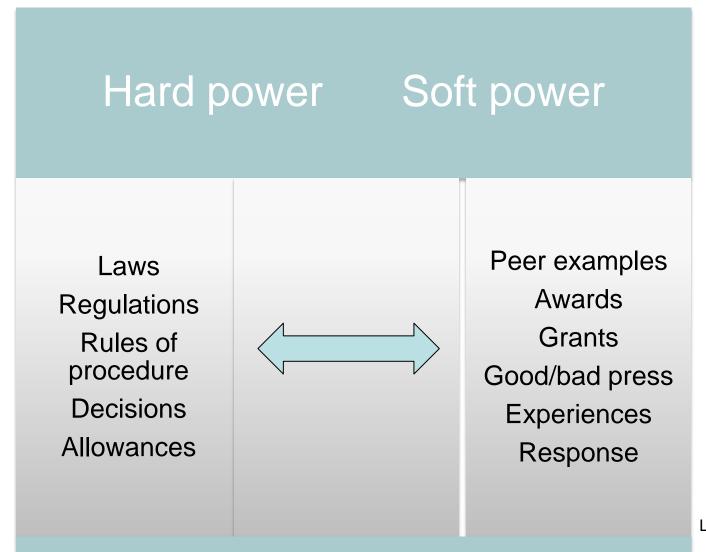
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Efnil, 8 October 2015 Helsinki

Hard power		Soft power
Laws		Peer examples
Regulations		Awards
Rules of procedure	⟷	Grants
Decisions		Good/bad press
Allowances		Experiences
		Response

Clear administrative language actors in Finland

- ## Institute for the Languages of Finland

  – adviser for Government in matters of Clear Administrative Language in Finnish and Swedish since 1976

- ## Government Swedish Language Board

  – permanent group fostering clarity and comprehensibility in the legal and administrative Swedish used in Finland since 1960

  - Handbook on Swedish Legal Language 1986

    – Fifth edition coming 2016 (*Svenskt lagspråk i Finland*)

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Actors, regulations and institutions

- Government Administration Department 2015
  - unit under the Prime Minister's Office, responsible for the quality of administrative language for all ministries
  - includes all government translators
- Government Committee on Administrative Language 1979
- Government Decision on Administrative Language 1982
  - obligation on Government Agencies to use clear language
- Administrative Act 2003
  - obligation on all authorities to use appropriate, clear and comprehensible language

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Action Plan for Clear Administrative Language

- Included in the Government Programme of 2011

- Prepared by a working group of officials, information officers, university teachers and plain language experts 2013-2014

- Hearings and surveys on

  - needs and resources of government and municipal agencies for plain language work

  - good and bad experiences of general public of interaction with public agencies.

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Action Plan 1/2014: focus on organizing

The public agencies should

- recognize that language is the main tool for most of work in public agencies

- take texts and writing into account when planning and developing their work

- cooperate and share good practices and materials.

Administrative language must be clear, appropriate and comprehensible, in Finnish and in Swedish.

Focus on creating structures

Proposals for Parliament and Government:

- "ombudsman" (for clear administrative language)

- term bank (including terms, job titles and organization names)

- act on place names

- clarity campaign (for public agencies, cf. Open Government Partnership)

- rules of procedure

  – on the formulation of names, job titles and terminology

- Instructions for legal drafters about plain legal language

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Plain language tips for public agencies

A list of measures – or a process

1. Set goals for language and texts

   Translation can provide a quality check.

2. Plan measures, make commitments

Plain language tips for public agencies

3. **Structure the plain language work** (coordinator and team)

> Translators should be included in the plain language team.

4. **Provide help** (contacts, instructions, language toolkits)

> More languages, several perspectives on plain language.

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Plain language tips for public agencies

5. Put texts in process descriptions, describe text processes

   Translators can help to write better texts.

6. Focus on most important texts

   Clarity is language specific.

Plain language tips for public agencies

7. Plan for clarity in document production systems

> Both languages must be catered for in planning.

8. Collect feedback in several ways and use it

> Language versions get different feedback.

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Plain language tips for public agencies

9. Provide visual information and easy-to-read texts

   Easy-to-read materials are needed also in Swedish.

10. Do not produce unnecessary texts

    Translators see overlaps but cannot act.