



## Same old *paska* or new *shit*? On the stylistic boundaries and social meaning potentials of swearing loanwords in Finnish



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### ABSTRACT

As pointed out by numerous researchers in the “pragmatic turn” of borrowing, pragmatic borrowings into a recipient language tend to carry social and pragmatic meanings that distinguish them both from equivalent forms in the donor language and in the recipient language. With regard to swearwords in Finnish, it has been demonstrated earlier that *paska* ‘shit’ is among the most used swearwords, and that the lexical borrowing *shit* is favored among certain Finnish-speaking social groups. This raises questions as to the social meanings and stylistic potentials of this particular borrowing. The present article is based on survey results which present perceptual evidence on the borrowing *shit* compared to the heritage Finnish form *paska* in Finnish. The results are based on a modified (online) matched guise test (MGT) and open-ended response data collected from Finnish speakers across different regions and social groups (N = 446) in Finland. The modified MGT was created to test the hypothesis that there is a consensus among native Finnish speakers concerning the level of incorporation of *shit* into Finnish discourse styles, and that style matters. The styles (varieties) tested in the matched guise test were 1) urban colloquial Helsinki Finnish or Helsinki slang, 2) a widespread, mostly rural pronunciation, and 3) standard Finnish. The test results reveal that respondents were more accepting of the English borrowing *shit* when it was inflected in the nonstandard partitive form, *shittii*, typical of colloquial Helsinki Finnish, rather than in the standard partitive form, *shittiä*. In terms of respondent distribution, there was a general agreement across social and regional groups that the English borrowing is a mismatch in style with both standard and the relatively more rural styles of Finnish: the best match in terms of style is colloquial Helsinki speech. Written commentary from the respondents on the MGT provides further evidence on the perceptual climate and the social meaning potentials of the borrowing by indicating that the English form *shit* is considered a normal, even expected, element of urban styles or slang, while as part of a more rural-associated style, it is considered unnatural or artificial. As a whole, the findings support our hypothesis based on earlier work on lexical borrowing in Finnish: borrowing from English is currently a flexible and meaningful resource available for speakers to create an indexical link to global urban (sub)cultures and lifestyles.

### 1. Introduction

In order to understand mechanisms of linguistic variation and change, both the attitudes that are within conscious awareness and those below the level of consciousness (as well as somewhere in between) are worthy of study [1–3]. It is a well-known fact that not all aspects of language trigger equal attention or are equally available. In his classic typology, Preston labels *availability* as one of the four modes of folk linguistic awareness (see Ref. [2]; pp. 40–41 for more details of the typology). While phonological details and syntactic properties are often beyond the conscious awareness of non-linguists, the most available elements and targets of metacommentary tend to be lexical

items. Given the generally high level of availability of swearwords to everyday people, we carried out a perceptual online survey to gain insight into a few commonly used swearword loans from English compared to the heritage equivalents in Finnish. The overall experiment was designed to tap into both overt and covert attitudes towards the chosen English swearword loans *shit*, *Oh my God*, *damn* and *fuck*. According to our initial observations, all of these borrowings appear relatively frequently in computer mediated communication. In order to get an overview of the perceptual climate of these swearword loans, we wished to explore perceptions about them in a controlled fashion among Finnish speakers. In this article, we concentrate on the borrowing *shit* and its Finnish heritage equivalent *paska*.

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Besides the potential availability in folk consciousness, another motivation to focus on swearword loans is that in weak contact situations, English loans have been identified in the function of expressing negative emotions. According to a Dutch study (Zenner et al., 2015) based on reality TV material, the use of *shit* was the most frequently used loan [4]. Earlier research has also indicated that swearing, due to its emotionally charged character, fulfills a set of interpersonal and psycho-social functions not easily achieved through other linguistic means [5–8]: p. 351. Hjort [9] has demonstrated that *paska* ‘shit’ is among the most used swearwords in Finnish and that *shit* as an English loan is among the most popular loanwords (for similar findings on Swedish see also [5]). At the same time, numerous studies have indicated that such borrowings into a recipient language tend to carry social and pragmatic meanings that distinguish them both from equivalent forms in the donor language and in the recipient language (e.g. Refs. [10,11]). Such forms have been identified as *pragmatic borrowings*, a term introduced by Andersen [12] to define borrowings, chiefly from English, which do not add to the propositional content of utterance, but “carry signals about speaker attitudes” [12]; p. 18. Such forms do not normally fill a gap in the domestic lexicon, nor do they replace heritage forms. Rather, they tend to be in social and pragmatic variation with heritage forms, offering users an opportunity to access different stances or modes of expression than if they used the heritage equivalents ([11]).

The English language does not have official status in Finland, but it is the first foreign language of the vast majority of Finnish students ([13,14]). English is also widely used and available through a variety of informal channels such as non-dubbed television and other forms of media, and has been already for a few decades. According to self-reported Eurobarometer data, approximately 70% of the Finnish population is able to carry on a conversation in English ([15]). The constant exposure to English through mass and social media, as well as the educational situation, offers fertile ground for English loans to become adopted. A good example of this is *pliiis* ‘please’ in Finnish [16]. With the study reported in this article, we open up our previous findings to further scrutiny: do similar findings occur with a different set of pragmatic borrowings, namely with swearwords such as *shit*?

In this article, we are particularly interested in the social motivation of the English loan *shit* in Finnish compared to the heritage swearword *paska*. With this initial investigation, we aim to gain insights into the following research questions:

- 1) to what extent are the forms *paska* vs *shit* regarded as *available* and *appropriate* (acceptable) choices as part of different styles or varieties of Finnish, as assessed by the Finnish language community?
- 2) to what extent are the perceptions shared across regional and social groups, and
- 3) what are the implications of this study in terms of social motivation and social meaning potentials for such borrowings?

Our earlier findings on *pliiis* in Finnish indicate that the English loan is mainly perceived as an index of an urban style [16]. Against this finding (see also [4]), we expect that *shit* is ranked as more commonly heard (*available*) and also more *acceptable* (appropriate) by urban respondents than those from rural areas. The second research question is based on the hypothesis that in weak contact settings, meaning those that involve a foreign language, the use of English-sourced loanwords is more typical for youth [4,17]. Therefore, we expect some patterning in terms of age. As for the third research question, we can provide only limited evidence, as we concentrate on a single swearword pair with results stemming from a perceptual reaction task rather than interactional or other naturally-occurring data. With the present investigation, we wished to explore if the data would reveal any social patterns that would motivate further study in specific regions or social groups.

When it comes to swearwords, earlier perceptual studies in Nordic contexts have indicated that people generally believe men swear more

than women and that more educated individuals swear less than those with less education [9,18]. We return to these points in Section 4.

## 2. Data and methods

### 2.1. Data gathering and respondent profiles

The data was collected using the QuestionPro web-based tool, which allowed us to embed voice samples as audio files into the survey. The details of the questionnaire design and methodology is presented in section 2.2.

As research questions involving region and especially age were critical to the study, we aimed to establish avenues for distribution that allowed us to explore these factors. In March 2018 the survey link was distributed online in collaboration with the national Community College network in order to reach respondents from all parts of the country and from all age groups between 16 and over 60. The link was also distributed to popular discussion forums including Reddit Finland and the Vauva (‘Baby’) discussion forum, both known to involve a wide spectrum and a large number of users. Additionally, a few regionally profiled general Facebook forums were used, representing different parts of Finland. For these inquiries, we linked our survey to a dedicated Facebook page called *Kielitietoisuus* (‘Language Awareness’). The authors’ personal and professional networks were carefully avoided.

During a five-week period, there was a total of 446 finished responses to the survey, while there were 2800 views of the survey. The subject of the survey—that is, swearwords—may have been potentially off-putting to respondents, as was the requirement to listen to audio samples containing swearwords. These factors may at least partially explain the relatively high dropout rate.

Table 1 shows the demographic details for the 446 survey respondents. A cross tabulation of the responses shows quite even distribution of age groups across the regions of Finland. Demographic questions were asked of the respondents to track representation across social groups, as well as so these values could be used as external variables in our statistical analysis.

Although the final number of respondents was lower than anticipated, the demographic representation was satisfactory, with 46% of the respondents self-identifying as male, 48% as female and 6% as other/NA. The oldest age groups (50 through 60+) account for 15% of the respondents, which is in balance with the youngest age group: 16% of the respondents were under 21 years of age. In terms of educational background, the data is also well balanced. The majority, 54% of the respondents, have at least a lower tertiary degree. A little more than one third of the respondents (37%) report having an upper secondary education, and 7% has a basic education (see Table 1). Although not evenly distributed across geographic regions, these figures roughly correspond to the general education level of all Finns [19].

In terms of regional distribution of the data, two background variables were reported. Respondents were asked to supply their province of residence and the size of their municipality. The majority, 61% of the respondents, came from cities of more than 100,000 residents. It is

**Table 1**  
Demographics of survey respondents (self-reported); N = 446.

Age	gender	level of education	size of municipality	
27 aged 16–17	27	32 primary school	17 in < 5,000	17
43 aged 18–20	other/NA	164 upper	24 in 5,000–10,000	24
82 aged 21–25	215	secondary school	74 in 10,000–50,000	74
66 aged 26–29	women	106 community/ technical college	47 in 50,000–100,000	47
96 aged 30–39	men	136 university	271 in > 100,000	271
63 aged 40–49		7 other/no answer	12 in other	12
32 aged 50–59				
36 aged 60+				

important to note that most of the municipalities with a population of more than 100,000 are located in the southern part of Finland, and this is also the area that was most heavily represented in the survey. Eleven percent of the respondents reported living in a town with 50,000 to 100,000 residents, and 17% in a town with 10,000 to 50,000 residents. Less than 10% live in a place where there are less than 5,000 to 10,000 residents. All 19 provinces of Finland were represented in the data, although not equally.

## 2.2. Questionnaire design and methodology

To compare the availability and acceptability rates of the lexical pair *paska* and *shit*, a modification of the classic MGT technique [20] was employed. Respondents were asked to assess on a 7-point Likert scale the perceived availability (how common) and acceptability (how appropriate) of six utterances, each with the same semantic meaning 'just the same old shit.' The sample sentences used in this study were based on authentic examples found in the Suomi24 ('Finland 24') online discussion forum.

Audio samples, rather than written samples, were used on the overall survey to assess respondents' reactions to three variables: an *oh my god* task set, a *what the fuck* and a *shit*–*paska* task set.<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of the opportunity to write open-ended responses after each listening task item made it possible for the respondents to reflect freely on what they had heard.

To reduce external variation, the six audio samples for the task set involving *shit* and *paska* were all produced by the same middle-aged male voice. These six audio samples were presented in a sequence of a total of 11 audio samples. The other audio samples in the series consisted of one male and two female voices producing the *oh my god* task set (see Table 2 for the positions of *paska/shit* samples in the overall modified MGT task).<sup>2</sup> All samples in the task were tested through pre-survey focus groups to ensure that the voices elicited uniform reactions with regard to perceived age and gender of the speaker. While the traditional MGT seeks to tap into attitudes towards different varieties with relation to perceived personality traits, in this survey the *shit*–*paska* task set was created to elicit attitudes toward three phonological styles, labeled here as urban, rural, and standard Finnish.

Table 2 illustrates the phonological variation that was featured in the audio utterances. The speaker who voiced the recordings was coached by the authors to produce samples that contained the target sounds. The resulting recordings were tested for success of the target variables prior to going live with the survey.<sup>3</sup>

The lexical borrowing *shit* and the heritage form *paska* are the main variants of the study we report here. Other variables explored, as illustrated in Table 2, include phonological style: standard Finnish, urban colloquial Helsinki Finnish (called *urban* in Table 2), and rural dialect. In Table 2, these phonological variants are demonstrated in written Finnish in the first column. Samples 1, 2 and 3 show the standard Finnish pronunciation of *sama* 'same,' shown here in the partitive *samaa*. Samples 4, 5 and 6 show the widespread nonstandard, rural variant with gemination (*sammaa*). Gemination in Finnish are contrastive both in written and spoken language (e.g., *kuka* 'who' compared to *kukka* 'flower'), but in this example the geminate alternation is

**Table 2**

Voice samples with variable *paska* and *shit*, produced by a middle-aged male.

'Just the same old shit'	Phonological style, EN/FI variant	Order in survey
ihan samaa vanhaa paskaa	standard, FI	1/11
ihan samaa vanhaa shittii	urban, EN	4/11
ihan samaa vanhaa shittiä	standard, EN	5/11
ihan sammaa vanahaa shittiä	rural + standard, EN	7/11
ihan sammaa vanahaa paskaa	rural, FI	10/11
ihan sammaa vanahaa shittii	rural + urban, EN	11/11

an example of regional variation, a feature common in both eastern and western dialect areas of Finland. Samples 1, 2 and 3, compared to samples 4, 5 and 6, show a second example of phonological variation in Finnish, this time with regard to the word *vanha* 'old,' also appearing in the partitive *vanhaa* in these samples. Samples 1, 2 and 3 contain the standard variant, whereas samples 4, 5 and 6 contain the epenthized variant *vanahaa*; ie, there are three syllables rather than two syllables. Like the examples of geminate variation, this type of epenthesis is a well-attested and widespread feature of mainly rural dialects in Finland, but it is also evident in some non-southern larger towns such as Oulu in northern Finland [21,22].

Finally, a third phonological variable in the sample utterances is apparent in samples 2, 3, 4 and 6 in Table 2, regarding the partitive form of the word *shit*. Samples 3 and 4 show the standard form *shittiä*, with the two vowels *-iA* forming the partitive. There is a subtle but salient difference in this variant *shittiä*, vs the nonstandard *shittii*. The assimilated form of the partitive, *shittii*, is a form generally perceived as urban slang ([21]). Such vowel assimilation shows more progress in contemporary Finnish with *-OA* and particularly *-eA* vowel clusters (e.g., *kapea* > *kapee* 'narrow'; *maitoa* > *maitoo* 'some milk') than with *-uA* and *-iA* clusters (*katua* > *katuu* 'to regret'; *kahvia* > *kahvii* 'some coffee') (see Ref. [23]; p. 112 [24]; pp. 73, 86 [25]; pp. 55–64 [26]). There has been a rapid shift toward vowel assimilation in Helsinki speech during recent decades. In the 1970s, Paunonen's Helsinki data showed that the proportion of *-eA* > *-ee* was 68,8%, whereas in Lapalainen's study from the 2000s, the *-eA* > *-ee* change was already at 97% in Helsinki speech. The vowel sequence *-iA* > *-ii* has lagged behind the assimilation tendency in other A-final vowel sequences until the current age, with the overall assimilation proportion only 29% in the 1970s and no more than 58% in studies from the 2000s (see Ref. [26]).

It should be noted that all of these phonological variables are considered noticeable (salient) to the ears of Finnish speakers, which is why they are included in our study. Table 2 shows that we did not incorporate into the survey every possible combination of the phonological variables and the lexical variants *shit* and *paska*. This was for two reasons. First, we needed to limit the number of listening tasks to circumvent listening fatigue among the respondents. Second, our aim was to test the specific combinations of urban vs standard vs rural in relation with the target lexical items, and these six utterances were sufficient for that aim.

The survey respondents were asked to react to each of the six audio samples according to two different 7-point Likert scales, one scale measuring the value *The utterance is in my opinion/experience common* (value 1) ... *rare* (value 7) and the other measuring the value *The utterance is in my opinion/experience objectionable* (value 1) ... *acceptable* (value 7).<sup>4</sup> After assessing each sample first on the availability scale (how common) and then on the appropriateness scale (acceptability),

<sup>1</sup> A task involving the loan word *damn* was presented in written form.

<sup>2</sup> On the basis of the pilot groups' feedback, it is not likely that the respondents paid much attention to the fact that the *paska/shit* samples were produced by the same voice. The test phrases played as sample numbers 2, 6, and 8 in the survey were designed for testing the variable *oh my god* with one male voice and two female voices. This part of the voice sample data is reported elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> After the pilot phase, some of the samples in the set of total 11 were redesigned based on the pilot groups' feedback, for reasons having to do with perceptions of tone of voice or differences in affect, or with ambiguity of the speaker's perceived age.

<sup>4</sup> The Finnish *paheksuttava/hyväsyttyvä* as a bipolar adjective pair translates best as 'objectionable/acceptable' in English.

the option to further comment on each sample after hearing it was offered with the question *What more would you like to say about this phrase?* The further comment fields were the only nonmandatory fields in the survey.

We received 212 open comments on the six audio samples. These responses were analyzed using qualitative data driven content analysis [27]. Statistical analysis was conducted on the Likert scale responses. The analysis was based on linear mixed models (LMM; see Appendix for complete results), allowing us to account for within-person correlations. By including random effects per respondent, the approach allowed us to distinguish the population level effects from person-wise effect. The statistical significance threshold level was set to 0.05. N/A answers were dropped from the analysis.

### 3. Results

The results of our analysis are presented in the following order. First, the results of the two Likert scales from the online survey are presented in turn, starting with the *availability* scale, followed by the *acceptability* scale. For each of these scales, we compared the reported demographic details from the survey respondents against the outcome of the rankings, to assess whether age, sex, education, or size of municipality had a significant relationship to the rankings. In the latter portion of the Results section, we take a more in-depth look at the relationship of the phonological variation of the sample utterances compared to the reported demographic details. We also explore the main variants of the study, *shit* vs *paska*, according to demographic factors. The section ends with an overview of the survey respondents' open-ended written comments that were written as reactions to the question *What more would you like to say about this phrase?*"

#### 3.1. Availability of paska compared to shit

Table 3 gives an overview of the perceived *availability* of the six test samples. The samples are presented in the order of the mean values, from the most available (ranked as the most common) to the least available (ranked as the least common).

As seen in Table 3, the phrases with the heritage variant *paska* were, as expected, rated by far as the most common (available). The standard Finnish phrase containing *paska* was rated as the most available (M = 2.39) and the phrase involving rural dialect forms as the second most common (M = 3.66). The phrase involving two rural dialect features and the loan word *shit* was rated as the least available (M = 5.37). We checked the statistical significance of the mean differences with Tukey's HSD Post-hoc comparison. The outcome was that only the two phrases containing dialect forms (rural + urban: *ihan sammaa vanahaa shittii*) and (rural + standard *ihan sammaa vanahaa shittia*) were not statistically different in their mean values. Between all the other sentences there was a statistical significance in the difference in means.

While the ongoing morphophonological sound change described above falls out of scope of this article as such, it does have relevance for our current topic. As research on the *-iA > -ii* process indicates that it is a relatively slow sound change compared to other A-final vowel sequences in spoken Finnish, it is interesting that the respondents to this

**Table 3**  
Rated *availability* of six voice samples. Value 1 = most common, value 7 = least common.

voice sample	availability (mean rate)	StD
Ihan samaa vanhaa paskaa (standard)	2.39	1.43
Ihan sammaa vanahaa paskaa (rural)	3.66	1.91
Ihan samaa vanhaa shittii (urban)	4.12	1.87
Ihan samaa vanhaa shittia (standard)	4.75	1.82
Ihan sammaa vanahaa shittii (rural + urban)	5.19	1.77
Ihan sammaa vanahaa shittia (rural + standard)	5.37	1.8

**Table 4**  
Rated *acceptability* of six voice samples. Value 1 = least acceptable, value 7 = most acceptable.

voice sample	acceptability (mean rate)	StD
Ihan samaa vanhaa shittia (standard)	4.98	1.60
Ihan samaa vanhaa shittii (urban)	5.00	1.59
Ihan sammaa vanahaa shittii (rural + urban)	5.02	1.69
Ihan sammaa vanahaa shittia (rural + standard)	5.05	1.62
Ihan samaa vanhaa paskaa (standard)	5.07	1.50
Ihan sammaa vanahaa paskaa (rural)	5.09	1.61

study perceive the *ia > ii* variant (*shittii*; urban partitive variant) as more available than the standard form (*shittia*; standard partitive variant). According to our linear mixed model (see Table 1 in the appendix for a full report of the LMM model), survey respondents from cities larger than 100,000 residents reported the urban variant *shittii* as more available than respondents from small municipalities, implying that it is more used in urban environments or at least perceived as more common in these. However, respondents from cities of more than 100,000 residents also assessed the *shittia* variant as more available than respondents from rural areas. This means that regardless of the morphology, the loan *shit* is recognized as relatively more available in urban areas.

#### 3.2. Acceptability of paska compared to shit

Table 4 below offers an overview of the reported acceptability of the six sample utterances (see also Table 5 in the appendix for LMM results). The respondents were to assess each utterance in terms of how *acceptable* (vs *objectionable*) they found each sample they heard. With this Likert scale, a value of 1 stands for least acceptable, while the value of 7 stands for the most acceptable. The sentences are presented in Table 4 in rank order of the mean values, from least acceptable to most acceptable.

An interesting observation from this acceptability ranking scale compared to the availability ranking scale is the relative uniformity of the responses across the range of samples: for this scale, respondents seemed to evaluate the samples as more equally (un)acceptable, whereas there was a greater range in the responses to availability. The least acceptable sample contained standard Finnish phonological variants and the borrowing *shit*: *ihan samaa vanhaa shittia*, while the most acceptable, by a nonsignificant margin, was the rural sample: *ihan sammaa vanahaa paskaa*.

With regard to demographic information from the respondents, our model shows that age was the only factor to have a statistically significant effect, with the young adult age group (age 18–20) demonstrating more acceptance of the *shittia* and *shittii* samples compared to the youngest group (age 16–17) by an average of 1.2 units on the Likert scale ( $p = 0.019$ , SE 0.512). The model also indicates that the respondents over 60 years of age are more critical towards swearwords in general, both *shit* and *paska*. There was no statistically significant difference regarding level of education or sex of the respondents and attitude toward these variants (See Table 5 in the appendix for a full version of the LMM of this word pair.).

#### 3.3. Standard compared to rural pronunciation

There is a statistically significant difference in the model (Table 3 in appendix) on how respondents evaluated the two samples containing the heritage form *paska*, rendered once in standard Finnish *ihan samaa vanhaa paskaa* and once in a rural dialect style pronunciation *ihan sammaa vanahaa paskaa*. The standard variant was regarded as more common/available ( $coeff -1.291$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , SE = 0.095). This may

simply indicate that people are more used to hearing standard Finnish. Nevertheless, women tend to regard both of these samples as more common than men, with a difference of approximately 0.5 units on the Likert scale (*coeff*  $-0.457$ ,  $p < .002$ ;  $SE = 0.151$ ).

A similar sample pair was compared using the lexical borrowing *shit* (see Table 4 in appendix). The standard pronunciation *ihan samaa vanhaa shittiä* was compared to the rural dialect style pronunciation *ihan sammaa vanhaa shittiä*, with both samples containing the standard version of the partitive. Here it is good to bear in mind that we are dealing with swearwords, so the question of “standard” is somewhat of a gray area. Notwithstanding, it becomes clear that the heritage swearword is regarded as more common/available than the borrowed form. There was a significant difference in the acceptance of sample utterances containing *paska* compared to *shit* (see Table 5 in the appendix). Further, there was a resistance amongst the respondents to accept *shit* with the rural, nonstandard pronunciation forms. The standard pronunciation, which is not marked for geographic region, was regarded as more available/common with the variant *shittiä*, even though *shit* is established as a nonstandard form. While this offers a mismatch in style, the results tell us that the borrowing *shit* is even more of a mismatch when paired with a rural dialect style pronunciation (*coeff*  $-0.637$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding will be returned to later in Section 4.

None of the demographic details of the respondents were statistically significant in the comparison of these two samples: the reluctance to accept the borrowing *shit* in these samples seems to be relatively equal across social groups.

### 3.4. Comparison of (near) minimal pair containing *paska* and *shit*

So far, we have offered overall findings about the rankings of our sample sentences. As the key point of the study is to compare the use of the lexical borrowing *shit* to the heritage form *paska*, it is important to investigate a voice sample pair that is as close to possible to a minimal pair (to borrow a term from phonology) with regard to these two lexical items. That is, we need to observe an utterance pair that differs only with regard to the two swearword variants. To address this question, we compared the highest-ranked utterances on the availability scale that contained the target lexical variants. These are the samples *ihan samaa vanhaa paskaa* (standard) and *ihan samaa vanhaa shittiä* (urban). For this pair, there is a statistically significant different effect with a very small confidence interval [ $-2.574$ ;  $-2.208$ ];  $p < 0.001$ ] (see Table 5 in the appendix). The findings support the hypothesis that the respondents generally regard the heritage form *paska* as more common, which is an expectable finding. Further tests show that the age group 30–39 years old regarded both of these phrases as generally more common (by 1 unit on the Likert scale overall) than the youngest age group, 16–17 years old. However, none of the other social variables, including sex, level of education or place of residence was statistically significant for this utterance pair.

### 3.5. Overt comments on the sample utterances

In this section we provide a brief overview on how each of the voice samples were commented on in the optional free-form written responses.

Each of the six samples received between 22 and 54 free-form responses. The sample phrase *ihan sammaa vanhaa shittiä*, consisting of rural dialect features and the standard form of the partitive, along with the lexical borrowing *shit*, elicited the highest number of voluntary written commentary. The majority of these responses characterized the sample as unnatural, for example: “it does not sound normal,” “it is strange,” “artificial,” “never heard,” “someone who just moved from the countryside to the city might use this,” “dialect combined with teenager slang sounds weird,” etc. Some also viewed this sample as “funny” or “an irritating Anglicism.”

The phrases involving the heritage form *paska* were generally the most positively reflected on; see examples 1–3. With regard to the first sample they heard, *ihan samaa vanhaa paskaa*, many respondents commented that the appropriateness of this utterance is very context dependent, but generally it was considered a mild and normal utterance—“not appropriate with e.g. children or grandparents”—but otherwise a common and safe choice in a variety of situations.

- (1) *Informaalissa ympäristössä hyväksyttävää tuntemattomaltakin.* 'In informal situations acceptable even among strangers.' (male, BA degree, age 21–25)
- (2) *Hyvin tyypillinen lause itsellekin. Lauseen minusta voisi sanoa vaikka pappi saarnassaan.* 'Very typical even for myself. I think even a priest could say this in a sermon.' (male, MA degree, age 40–49)
- (3) *Kuulee usein töissä tai kaveripiireissä humoristisesti kun jutellaan kuulumista.* 'You hear this a lot at work or among friends in a humorous mood when news is being exchanged.' (female, BA degree, age 26–29)

As the very first voice sample, respondents were not able to compare the phrase *ihan samaa vanhaa paskaa* to any of the other audio samples, which, on one hand, can be seen as a weakness in the study.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the fixed order also has its advantages, as all the listeners had the same standard Finnish utterance as the reference point. The other voice sample involving the heritage form *paska* was uttered in a rural dialect style (*ihan sammaa vanhaa paskaa*), and it was heard as number 10 in a series of 11 samples (see Table 1 in section 2.2.) Approximately half of the comments conveyed positive assessments about the heritage form *paska* occurring in an utterance that was clearly heard as rural/dialectal. This utterance was considered e.g. “homely”, “appropriate”, “natural” and “better sounding” than the equivalent utterance containing the English borrowing *shit*.

Out of the 42 comments for the phrase *ihan samaa vanhaa shittiä*, as many as 19 concentrated on the *-iA* partitive form vowel sequence, which was regarded as “too careful”, “weird”, “unnatural” or “unexpected” (etc.); see examples 4–7.

- (4) *Oikeaoppinen partitiivi on outo tällaisessa lauseessa.* 'The correct partitive form is strange in a sentence like this.' (female, MA degree, 40–49)
- (5) *Kuulostaa omituiselta, että tässä on vaivauduttu taivuttamaan sana loppuun saakka huolella.* 'It's weird to go through the trouble of inflecting the word carefully till the end.' (NA, upper secondary education, age 20–29)
- (6) *Shittiä on vähemmän paha kuin shittiä.* 'Shittiä is less bad than shittiä.' (female, upper secondary education, age 30–39)
- (7) *Ei kuulosta kovin luontevalta.* 'Doesn't sound very natural' (female, MA degree, age 40–49)

The sample *ihan samaa vanhaa shittiä*, with the lexical borrowing containing the urban (assimilated) form of the partitive, was commented on 33 times, with the majority of focusing on the perceived urban style; see examples 8–9. The assimilated vowel sequence (*-iA > -ii*) triggered attention, too, but did not merit overt attention. Interestingly, comments on mixing English with Finnish, see examples 10–12 below, were much more common in the case of the sample with *shittiä*.

- (8) *Ärsyttävää Hesan murrettä yäk.* 'Irritating Helsinki dialect yuck.' (female, upper secondary education, age 40–49)
- (9) *Hipsteri joka haluaa olla teini.* 'Hipster who wants to be a teen.'

<sup>5</sup> We considered programming the audio samples to appear in a random order for each survey respondent, but due to technical problems, we ended up using a fixed order. This outcome must be considered in interpreting the findings.

- (female, BA degree, age 40–49)
- (10) *Englannin käyttö lieventää merkitystä.* 'English word softens the meaning.' (male, BA degree, age 40–49)
- (11) *Finglish on syvältä.* 'Finglish sucks.' (male, upper secondary education, age 20–29)
- (12) *Ei mitenkään negatiivinen. Shitti lieenee omaan korvaan siistitympi versio paskasta, mikä on jännittävää huomata.* 'Not anything negative. I realize that shittii sounds like a cleaner version of paska to me, which is an exciting thing to notice.' (female, MA degree, age 30–39)

Several of the *shittii* comments highlighted the perceived lower pragmatic force of *shittii* compared to *paskaa*, or noted how it creates some specific style compared to the heritage form. Some respondents wrote that they had never heard such an utterance, but still found the variant *shittii*, perceived as urban slang, as more natural than *shittiä*, containing the standard partitive form.

#### 4. Discussion

In this article, we have concentrated on the lexical borrowing *shit* compared to the heritage Finnish form *paska*, with the aim to gain understanding of how the borrowed form relates in use and perception to the heritage form. The data for the systematic comparison came from respondent assessments of a voice sample data set, which we characterized as a modified MGT. In this study, we paid attention to traditional extra-linguistic categories such as age, sex and level of education of the respondents, in addition to whether the respondents are from urban or rural areas, as these are all factors found to be significant in previous studies of lexical borrowing from English and studies of swearing (see the Introduction). It turned out that the categories of sex and education of the respondent played a very small role in the evaluation of the *paska* vs *shit* voice samples, while some significance effects were found with age. However, the fact that there is a high degree of agreement on the evaluation of the target forms, independent of the social variables, seems to support that there are a number of stylistic and situational factors at play in the choices between *shit* and *paska*. This is also clearly indicated in the open response data.

In terms of tolerance (acceptability on the Likert scale), *paska* and *shit* are surprisingly similarly evaluated across all respondent groups, notwithstanding that respondents aged 60 + seem to be less tolerant toward swearing in general. The oldest age group and the youngest age group patterned similarly in their (negative) assessments of swearing. With this finding, it is difficult to ascertain whether the two age groups hold similar attitudes, or if for the youngest age group, the English lexical borrowing *shit* has become nativized to the extent that it is regarded to have similar pragmatic weight as *paska*.

Hardly any statistically significant effects were found in the results which evaluated perceptual distinctions between the heritage form *paska* and the lexical borrowing *shit* as part of three different phonological styles: standard (colloquial) Finnish, a widespread rural dialect style and Helsinki urban colloquial style.

The most important findings had to do with the population size of the respondents' home municipality. More urban dwellers, in this study considered to be those from a town of more than 100,000 residents, found the English lexical borrowing *shit* more available, according to Likert scale results, than respondents from more rural areas, which was according to our hypothesis.

In open commentaries about the *shit* phrases (provided by 5–12% of the respondents depending on the test phrase), respondents frequently pointed out that the English loan is softer in pragmatic weight. It is possible then, that for at least some respondents, *shit* is a relatively positive choice because of this reduced pragmatic force. This finding is in line with previous observation on pragmatic borrowings in Finnish (e.g. [11]), indicating that the social styles associated with borrowed swearwords patterns with other borrowings such as *pliis* 'please' in

Finnish. Peterson and Vaattovaara (2014) [16] have indicated that in the case of *pliis*, the English loan contributes to the social system of politeness in requests, not by replacing the heritage equivalents but by offering a stylistic resource particularly for the function of certain types of requests with low social distance.

One of the most interesting findings of the study concern the assimilated *-iA* > *-ii* (*shittii*) variable, which appears in the partitive form of *shit*. This assimilated variant showed a high degree of nativization in that it participates in a sound change typically associated with the urbanized southern part of Finland. Interestingly, according to our data, the respondents were more sensitive toward this perceived urban style of the partitive form than they were toward to lexical borrowing *shit* itself. Based on a number of apparent and real time sociolinguistic studies on variation of Finnish, Mantila [20] has categorized the A-ending vowel sequence assimilation as one of the most expansive ongoing sound changes in Finnish society, and claimed that the assimilated variant is used for expressing urban identity [20]; p. 329. This theory gains support from our perceptual data on the *shittii* variant. Ethnographic evidence is still needed to confirm these findings, but the reaction task results together with the open response material form solid preliminary evidence; it seems that respondents find the *-ii* variant a natural part of the Finnish nativization of the English borrowing. This finding points to an unexpected level of integration concerning this borrowing. The standard partitive form *shittiä*, in turn, is assessed as slightly less available and, importantly, not natural. This is interesting since both variants *shittiä* and *shittii* can be easily found for example on Twitter and discussion forums. This is, once again, a detail implying urban style(s) as the default social index of *shit*, which is in line with other studies demonstrating the urban style associated with lexical borrowings from English [4,11,14].

As with any study, there are limitations to be mentioned concerning the reliability of the results. First of all, the samples were played in the same order for all survey respondents. While this procedure also has its advantages, as already mentioned in the methodology section, a second concern is that only one voice was used for the *shit/paska* word pair. Regardless of the efforts put into the pilot phase, it remains unknown how the choice of a middle-aged male voice as the test voice has had an effect on listener evaluations. Applying at least two different voices, for example a male and female voice, might have resulted in more revealing results in terms of social evaluation patterns, but at the same time this measure would have introduced external variables beyond the focus of this investigation.

Finally, while the number of responses gained was not in line with our initial expectations, the survey did gain ample and even representation across age groups, genders and regions, offering what we consider quite reliable evidence about the current state with regard to the lexical choices in question.

In this initial investigation of data from our overall survey, we have chosen to examine only the lexical pair *shit-paska* in order to allow us to optimally handle just one portion of our robust data in a systematic fashion. This approach seems warranted. Our work so far on the overall data set indicates that each lexical borrowing carries its own social meanings and connotations: each swearword borrowing is on a distinct path. As we continue to work with the data gained from this experiment, we will no doubt be able to draw further higher-level connections about the interplay of these resources.

#### 5. Conclusion

The outcome of an online survey study answered by 446 respondents, aged 16 through 60+ from throughout Finland, gave strong support to the hypothesis that the swearword *paska* 'shit' is a widespread component of Finnish vocabulary. While the perception of the lexical borrowing *shit* is not as everyday (available) as *paska*, the results show that both of these lexical variants are more or less acceptable. While *paska* seems to have a relatively low pragmatic weight, the

results demonstrate that the pragmatic weight of *shit* is even lower. Furthermore, the present data implies that the English loan *shit* is largely considered as an element of urban Finnish, indicated by an analysis of the demographic properties of the respondents, but also because an urban, nonstandard phonological variant of *shit* in the partitive form, *shittii*, was viewed as more acceptable by the respondents than the standard Finnish variant, *shittiä*. Taken together, these two pieces of evidence point toward *shit* as a well-integrated component of a vernacular urban style in Finland. These findings, though, must be taken for what they are: the results of a modified matched guise test that forced respondents to evaluate the target terms. Non-elicited evidence to support our initial findings is clearly in order.

**Declaration of competing interest**

There is no conflict of interest for the first author, Johanna Vaattovaara. The second author, Elizabeth Peterson, is a co-editor for *Ampersand: An International Journal of General and Applied Linguistics*,

**Appendix**

the journal in which this article appears. Elizabeth Peterson has not handled this co-authored manuscript. The manuscript has undergone typical blind external review, and the reviewing and editorial process has been handled by the co-editors of the special issue *Lexical borrowing as expression of culture, identity and attitude – empirical investigations into the social meaning potential of loanwords*.

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Table 1  
Linear Mixed Model Regression results for Availability: rural vs urban variants

	Coef	Std.Err	z	P >  z	[0.025	0.975]
No. Observations	798					
No. Groups	399					
Min. group size	2					
Max. group size	2					
Mean group size	2.0					
Method					REML	
Scale					0.7325	
Likelihood					- 1415.5060	
Converged					Yes	
Intercept	5.599	0.373	15.022	0.000	4.869	6.330
Slang (shittii)	0.158	0.061	2.606	0.009	0.039	0.277
Municipal > 100 000	-0.316	0.178	-1.770	0.077	-0.665	0.034
Age 18-20	-0.040	0.554	-0.073	0.942	-1.126	1.045
Age 21-25	0.179	0.534	0.336	0.737	-0.868	1.227
Age 26-29	0.325	0.551	0.591	0.554	-0.754	1.405
Age 30-39	-0.436	0.550	-0.793	0.428	-1.514	0.642
Age 40-49	-0.193	0.577	-0.335	0.738	-1.325	0.938
Age 50-59	-0.205	0.616	-0.333	0.739	-1.412	1.001
Age Over 60	-0.449	0.594	-0.756	0.450	-1.612	0.715
Female	-0.071	0.184	-0.386	0.699	-0.432	0.290
Upper secondary school	-0.107	0.463	-0.230	0.818	-1.014	0.801
Community/college	-0.093	0.497	-0.187	0.852	-1.067	0.881
University	0.092	0.506	0.182	0.856	-0.900	1.084
Other/no answer	-0.024	0.974	-0.025	0.980	-1.933	1.885
Random effect	2.457	0.334				

Table 2  
Linear Mixed Model Regression results for Acceptability, standard vs urban variants

	Coef	Std.Err	z	P >  z	[0.025	0.975]
No. Observations	798					
No. Groups	399					
Min. group size	2					
Max. group size	2					
Mean group size	2.0					
Method					REML	
Scale					0.1984	
Likelihood					- 1125.5882	
Converged					Yes	
Intercept	4.548	0.344	13.220	0.000	3.874	5.223
Standard (shittiä)	-0.015	0.032	-0.477	0.633	-0.077	0.047
Municipal > 100 000	0.087	0.165	0.529	0.597	-0.236	0.411
Age 18-20	1.206	0.512	2.354	0.019	0.202	2.210
Age 21-25	0.867	0.494	1.754	0.080	-0.102	1.835
Age 26-29	0.991	0.509	1.946	0.052	-0.007	1.990
Age 30-39	1.170	0.509	2.299	0.021	0.173	2.166
Age 40-49	0.823	0.534	1.541	0.123	-0.224	1.870
Age 50-59	0.912	0.569	1.602	0.109	-0.204	2.028
Age Over 60	0.589	0.549	1.072	0.284	-0.488	1.665

(continued on next page)

Table 2 (continued)

	Coef	Std.Err	z	P >  z	[0.025	0.975]
Female	-0.030	0.170	-0.174	0.862	-0.364	0.304
Upper secondary school -	0.681	0.428	-1.589	0.112	-1.520	0.159
Community/college	-0.509	0.460	-1.108	0.268	-1.411	0.392
University	-0.373	0.468	-0.796	0.426	-1.291	0.545
Other/No answer	-1.759	0.901	-1.952	0.051	-3.525	0.007
Group Var.	2.317	0.548				

Table 3

Linear Mixed Model Regression results for Availability, standard vs rural variants

No. Observations	798			Method	REML	
No. Groups	399			Scale	1.7918	
Min. group size	2			Likelihood	-1515.9680	
Max. group size	2			Converged	Yes	
Mean group size	2.0					
	Coef	Std.Err	z	P >  z	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	4.375	0.307	14.230	0.000	3.772	4.977
Standard (paska)	-1.291	0.095	-13.620	0.000	-1.476	-1.105
Municipal > 100 000	-0.198	0.146	-1.358	0.174	-0.484	0.088
Age 18-20	-0.127	0.453	-0.280	0.780	-1.014	0.761
Age 21-25	-0.297	0.437	-0.681	0.496	-1.154	0.559
Age 26-29	0.027	0.450	0.060	0.952	-0.855	0.910
Age 30-39	-0.613	0.450	-1.364	0.173	-1.494	0.268
Age 40-49	-0.370	0.472	-0.784	0.433	-1.295	0.555
Age 50-59	-0.298	0.503	-0.592	0.554	-1.284	0.688
Age Over 60	-0.358	0.485	-0.738	0.460	-1.309	0.593
Female	-0.457	0.151	-3.033	0.002	-0.752	-0.162
Upper secondary school	-0.020	0.379	-0.054	0.957	-0.762	0.722
Community/college	-0.051	0.406	-0.126	0.900	-0.848	0.745
University	-0.049	0.414	-0.120	0.905	-0.860	0.762
Other/No answer	-0.052	0.796	-0.066	0.947	-1.613	1.508
Group Var.	0.991	0.143				

Table 4

Linear Mixed Model Regression results for Availability, standard vs rural variants

No. Observations	798			Method	REML	
No. Groups	399			Scale	0.6059	
Min. group size	2			Likelihood	-1392.0495	
Max. group size	2			Converged	Yes	
Mean group size	2.0					
	Coef	Std.Err	z	P >  z	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	5.241	0.387	13.559	0.000	4.483	5.999
Standard (shittii)	-0.637	0.055	-11.551	0.000	-0.745	-0.529
Municipal > 100 000	-0.445	0.185	-2.404	0.016	-0.808	-0.082
Age 18-20	-0.183	0.575	-0.318	0.751	-1.309	0.944
Age 21-25	-0.071	0.554	-0.129	0.898	-1.158	1.015
Age 26-29	-0.263	0.571	-0.460	0.645	-1.383	0.857
Age 30-39	-0.963	0.571	-1.687	0.092	-2.081	0.156
Age 40-49	-0.788	0.599	-1.315	0.189	-1.962	0.386
Age 50-59	-0.820	0.639	-1.284	0.199	-2.072	0.432
Age Over 60	-0.373	0.616	-0.605	0.545	-1.580	0.834
Female	-0.094	0.191	-0.493	0.622	-0.469	0.281
Upper secondary school	-0.356	0.480	-0.741	0.459	-1.298	0.586
Community/college	-0.334	0.516	-0.647	0.518	-1.345	0.677
University	-0.225	0.525	-0.427	0.669	-1.254	0.805
Education_5	-0.304	1.011	-0.301	0.763	-2.286	1.677
Other/No answer	2.738	0.395				

Table 5  
Linear Mixed Model Regression results for Acceptability *paska* versus *shit*

	Coef	Std.Err	z	P >  z	[0.025	0.975]
No. Observations		798				
No. Groups		399				
Min. group size		2				
Max. group size		2				
Mean group size		2.0				
Intercept	4.820	0.295	16.315	0.000	4.241	5.399
Standard	0.130	0.075	1.736	0.083	-0.017	0.277
Municipal > 100 000	0.082	0.141	0.586	0.558	-0.193	0.358
Age 18-20	0.450	0.437	1.030	0.303	-0.406	1.306
Age 21-25	0.359	0.421	0.852	0.394	-0.467	1.185
Age 26-29	0.3314	0.43	0.763	0.446	-0.520	1.183
Age 30-39	0.494	0.434	1.138	0.255	-0.356	1.344
Age 40-49	0.139	0.455	0.305	0.760	-0.753	1.031
Age 50-59	0.237	0.486	0.487	0.626	-0.715	1.188
Age Over 60	-0.655	0.468	-1.399	0.162	-1.573	0.263
Female	-0.099	0.145	-0.682	0.495	-0.384	0.186
Upper sec school	-0.189	0.365	-0.519	0.604	-0.905	0.526
Community/college	-0.066	0.392	-0.169	0.866	-0.835	0.702
University	-0.002	0.399	-0.006	0.995	-0.785	0.780
Other/No answer	-0.603	0.768	-0.785	0.432	-2.109	0.902
Random effect	1.195	0.167				

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