Sculpting Time: Temporality in the Language of Finnish Socialism, 1895–1917

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Grand Duchy of Finland had the largest socialist party with parliamentary representation in Europe (Eley 2002, 66). The breakthrough of Finnish socialism has not yet been analyzed from the perspective of 'temporality'—i.e., the way human beings experience time. This paper examines socialist experiences and expectations by asking three questions: 1) What are the key differences between socialist temporality and non-socialist temporalities in the early twentieth century? 2) What kinds of meanings do socialists attach to the past, present, and future? and 3) Do the actual revolutionary events in Finland—such as the General Strike in the autumn of 1905 and the Russian Revolution in March 1917—change the socialist perception of time in any way?

The data set consists of digitized newspapers published in Finland from 1895 to 1917. The raw text files of all the Finnish newspapers will be downloaded from the National Library of Finland (Pääkkönen et. al. 2016) and lemmatized with the LAS command-line tool (Mäkelä 2016). Four different sub-corpora representing the main political languages of the time will be constructed based on the political affiliation of the given newspaper: socialist, conservative-nationalist, liberal-nationalist, and Christian. The political affiliation will be determined using earlier research on Finnish newspapers (Tommila 1987).

The methodology combines traditional conceptual-historical approaches with the corpus-linguistic methods of keyness, collocation, and key collocation. Conceptual historians have studied the life spans of certain fundamental key concepts through the qualitative analysis of the concepts' temporal layers and linguistic contexts—e.g., the variation of parallel and counter concepts attached to key concepts in different times and places (Koselleck 2004). Corpus linguists, on the other hand, have used computational methods to find patterns in vast text collections (Baker 2006).

The keyness method can be used to show all the words that are used more frequently than expected by pure chance in socialist texts compared to non-socialist texts. Words connected to temporality will be then chosen manually from this keyword list for further analysis. Thus, there is no predetermined operationalization for temporal vocabulary; rather, a bottom-up approach is used. Keyness analysis will shed light on the question of how the socialist formulation of the past, present, and future differed from competing non-socialist perceptions of time.

Collocates are words that appear more frequently than expected by pure chance in close proximity to the search word. The collocates of socialist temporal words found in the keyness analysis will be

quantified in order to find tentative information on the meanings that socialists gave to the past, present, and future in their political language.

Finally, the variation of socialist temporality through time will be analyzed by quantifying the collocates of temporal words *before* and *after* major political upheavals in 1905 and 1917. In practice, all the words appearing in a window of five words to the left or right of the studied temporal word will be collected and combined into one 'post-revolutionary' mini-corpus, which will then be compared with all the 'pre-revolutionary' collocates of the same noun. While collocates can reveal the semantic content of a temporal concept, this method—which could be called key collocation— reveals semantic differences in the use of temporal concepts at different times.

The underlying hypothesis is that identifying the changes in socialist temporality will improve our historical understanding of the political ruptures in Finland in the early twentieth century. The results of the analysis will be uploaded to the GitHub repository (https://github.com/rt80119/dhn2018), and they will be compared to Reinhart Koselleck's famous theory of 'temporalization of concepts' – expectations towards the future supersede experiences of the past in modernity (Koselleck 2004, 9–25, 255–275).

The paper will eventually form a part of my ongoing dissertation project, which merges a close reading of archival sources with computational distant reading of digital materials, thus producing a macro-scale picture of the political language of Finnish socialism.

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