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The Yoke and the Candy Bowl: Beliefs and Emotions in South Sami Revitalisation

Leena Huss and Sigrid Stångberg

Background

While Sweden has a rather long history of promoting language maintenance among immigrant populations, it was not until the year 2000 that a national minority and minority language policy was launched to protect minority languages and cultures that have a long historical presence in Sweden. The new policy was a result of the Swedish ratification the same year of two Council of Europe conventions: the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM). According to this policy, the five national minority languages of Sweden—Meänkieli (formerly called Tornedalian Finnish), Romani, Sami, Sweden Finnish and Yiddish—were to be protected and promoted on societal as well as individual levels, and three of them—Meänkieli, Sami (including North, Lule and South Sami) and Sweden Finnish—had their own administrative areas designated, consisting of seven municipalities in the northernmost parts of Sweden. In these areas, their speakers had the right to communicate with municipal authorities in their own languages.

They also had the right to childcare and care of the elderly ‘wholly or partly’ in the minority language (Swedish Parliament SFS 1999:1175; SFS 1999:1176).

During the following years, evaluations and criticism on the part of the Council of Europe, minority organisations, and various Swedish authorities showed that the implementation of the national minority policy was seriously lacking, and in 2010, a reformed minority policy was launched (Proposition 2008/2009). This was the year when the first traditional South Sami municipalities were included in the Sami administrative area—a fact that altered the official status of South Sami considerably and gave new opportunities to the South Sami to learn, use and develop their language. A Sami Language Centre divided into two locations within the traditional South Sami area was established the same year. The main task of the Language Centre was to develop and spread innovative revitalisation methods not only for South Sami but for all three Sami languages in Sweden, and already after its first six years of existence it could be regarded as one of the most successful ways of counteracting language endangerment in the country (Huss 2017).

In the following, some findings from a sociolinguistic study concerning the role of the reformed minority policy in South Sami revitalisation are discussed. First, the aims and the material used in the study are described briefly, followed by a description of the site of the study and its special characteristics. After that, the study participants’ perceptions of the role of the minority policy reform in Sami language revitalisation are taken up. Last, the presence and impact of thoughts and emotions concerning the ongoing revitalisation process is discussed, the question of ideological clarification is addressed and some suggestions are given to strengthen the ongoing revitalisation among the South Sami in Sweden.

The study: Revitalisation against all odds?

The present paper discusses some of the findings from a recently finished study titled *Revitalization Against all Odds? South Sami in Sweden*.¹ The aim of the project was to study the situation of the South Sami language and culture before and after the year 2000, when the national minority policy

1 The project was financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences) 2009–13.

first came into force in Sweden, and to investigate whether the new policy, including the minority policy reform of 2010, has impacted on the situation of South Sami in terms of linguistic and cultural revitalisation.

From the beginning, the project strove not only to highlight and analyse statistical and other objective data, but also the subjective thoughts and feelings of people somehow involved in South Sami revitalisation. During 2010, interviews were done with South Sami families, cultural workers and representatives for South Sami organisations. In 2011, questionnaires were distributed and answered by over 60 teachers and parents of school children studying South Sami in the municipal schools in Vilhelmina and Storuman or attending the Sami school in Tärnaby, Storuman. Around 50 school children also answered a questionnaire the same year.

This chapter presents a discussion of the questionnaire and interview findings, looking at salient themes that emerged in this process, without focusing on the quantification of outcomes.² Because we do not analyse patterns by age and gender, further details of the speaker population are not provided or identified throughout the article. However, as the local context of language and history are pertinent to the study, we proceed with a description of these in the next section.

Storuman and Vilhelmina, the sites of the present study

Two of the traditional South Sami municipalities added to the Sami administrative area in 2010 were Storuman and Vilhelmina. They are part of the southern Lappland county that is 250 kilometres in length and bordered by Norway in the west. There are around 6,000 inhabitants in Storuman and 7,000 in Vilhelmina, and approximately 10 per cent of them are of Sami origin.³

Reindeer herding is an important livelihood for those Sami who are members of the *samebyar* (economic reindeer-herding associations), but in Storuman there are also reindeer-herding Sami who are excluded from the local *sameby*. For them and for many other inhabitants, combinations

² See Appendix 1 for a summary of the interview and questionnaire tools used in this study.

³ Personal communication with Sigrid Stångberg. The percentage of Sami is a rough estimation, as registers of ethnic and linguistic populations are officially forbidden in Sweden.

of livelihoods such as hunting, fishing, handicraft and small-scale farming are important. Especially in winter, tourism and other livelihoods connected to it provide work for many.

Both in Storuman and Vilhelmina, reindeer herding as well as other Sami livelihoods have been impacted on by former state measures, such as the relocation of people and water regulations. In the 1920s and 1930s, the state relocated reindeer herders from the northernmost parts of Sweden to the southern part of the reindeer-herding area, and many of them landed in Storuman and Vilhelmina. In terms of language, this relocation resulted in all three Sami languages being spoken in the area. The reason given for the relocations was that the Norwegian and Finnish borders were closed for reindeer from Sweden, which led to a lack of grazing land in the North. In that context, the state categorised the Sami population in the South Sami area into two groups: those who were included as members in the officially recognised *sameby*, and those who were left outside. The latter was the case of the local South Sami in Storuman and Vilhelmina.

In the 1950s and 1960s, extensive hydro projects in Storuman and Vilhelmina led to the submersion of large areas of reindeer grazing lands and villages. Part of Storuman was heavily affected, as three villages were flooded and 250 Sami had to move elsewhere. Part of the local Sami history in the form of buildings, places of sacrifice, and artefacts were lost in the process.

Mining prospecting is another issue which has caused concern among the local Sami in Storuman and Vilhelmina. During the last decade, mining companies have shown increased interest in the area and an active resistance movement against mining has emerged among the Sami (Persson 2015).

The history of the Sami language in Storuman and Vilhelmina, as in all Sweden, includes a long period of forced assimilation policies, most efficiently carried out by schools, where the speaking of the Sami language was forbidden. This was also the case of the special Nomad Schools, boarding schools with a shortened education, established for the children of reindeer herders. Today, these schools are not boarding schools anymore and they are called Sami Schools. Nowadays, they are open to all Sami children, and one of their most important tasks is to teach the children Sami language and culture. The former Nomad School and present Sami School in Tärnaby, Storuman, is the only such school in the traditional

South Sami area in Sweden. Sigrid Stångberg, the second author of this chapter, was a pupil in the school when it still was a segregated Nomad School where the Sami language was forbidden (Stångberg 2015). Decades later, she was a teacher, and still later, the principal of the same school. She has been, and still is, a very central person in the South Sami revitalisation movement in the area. Over several years, she organised and ran joint language immersion camps for South Sami school children from Sweden and Norway that became very popular. She has also organised language immersion camps for adults, and, in 2014, she initiated a weekly drop-in language activity organised by the local Sami organisation in cooperation with the local Christian congregation and the Sami Language Centre. Since 2015, she also runs a small-scale individual South Sami language revitalisation project for adults, applying the Ulpan language learning method created in Israel.

Strengthened legal minority rights and the South Sami revitalisation

One of the key questions in the present study was the possible impact of the national minority policy on South Sami revitalisation. The results show that the participants generally perceive the national minority policy (2000, reformed in 2010) as a guarantee for language maintenance without which the South Sami language would very soon have been lost. One parent writes that without the new policy, '[W]e would continue to be deprived of our Sami identity and culture' (female 3, Storuman, 2010). Another parent comments:

The Sami have risen [in status] and they have been recognised as a people. I think [without the policy] we would have been assimilated into the majority population and there would only have been a few families left who would have had the strength to maintain the language (female 1, Storuman, 2010).

A third writes:

Of course the languages would be more concealed [without policy]. It takes time for languages to be accepted by the 'greater society'. When the languages become part of everyday life also for 'non-Sami', the situation of the whole Sami people is strengthened! (male 3, Storuman, 2010).

Several participants mention that new financial resources and new possibilities to learn and use the Sami language have emerged, but many also comment on the lack of implementation of the minority policy.

Many respondents thus clearly see the minority policy as a prerequisite of revitalisation on the individual level. The very fact that there is a minority and minority language law which gives special rights to Sami speakers is felt to have given a new legitimacy to language revitalisation efforts. Parents and teachers appear conscious of their legal rights and in some cases are prepared to act when the authorities are not fulfilling their obligations. There are several examples from the Sami media of parents who protest against the municipality's failure to fulfil its obligation to provide Sami-medium preschool education. Other examples of initiatives during the past 10 years triggered by the minority policy reform are community-based, government-funded revitalisation projects among parent networks and adult Sami, some of which were presented above. The local revitalisation movement has been supported by the fact that one of the two offices of the Sami Language Centre, serving all Sami languages, was opened in Tärnaby, Storuman, in 2010. This has greatly enhanced the visibility and use of South Sami as well as the other Sami languages in the region.

South Sami revitalisation and Fishman's GIDS scale

In Joshua Fishman's famous GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) (Fishman 1991), minority language transmission from parents to children is identified as the most important factor in reversing language shift from majority to minority languages. The role of school instruction is also deemed important, although not as important as language transmission within the family. Moreover, the most efficient school support for the minority language, according to Fishman, is given by a school controlled by the community where the language is used as a medium of instruction. In the light of all this, the situation of South Sami is weak: Sami is rarely spoken in families and the kind of support the municipal schools or the Tärnaby Sami School offer the children is limited to lessons on Sami as a subject, while the rest of the school instruction is in Swedish. Neither the municipal schools nor the Sami School are

community controlled. The Sami Schools have their own school board with a majority of members who are Sami, but they are state owned and part of the Swedish public school system.

Although Sami is a subject and not a medium of instruction in the municipal schools and the Tärnaby Sami School, the national minority policy reform has had beneficial effects, not least for South Sami pupils. In the municipal schools, two requirements for getting mother tongue tuition in the national minority languages were eased: the required minimum number of pupils in mother tongue classes was taken down to one pupil in the municipality, and the requirement of daily use of the language at home was dropped altogether. On 1 July 2015, the requirement that the pupils have at least some basic competence in Sami when starting was also dropped.

Several parents in our study commented on the fact that the National Minorities and Minority Languages Act (Swedish Parliament SFS 2009:724) from 2010 gave their children the right to preschool activities ‘wholly or partly’ in the minority language, which was a great step forward. However, some of them were worried about the nonexistence of strong bilingual or Sami-medium instruction models in the schools when their preschool children would advance to primary school. They feared that the good results from the preschool were at risk of fading because of that.

The minority language legislation has also impacted on other factors relevant for the GIDS scale, which would seem to strengthen the situation of South Sami beyond attained diglossia (Fishman 1991). Sami speakers nationwide now have the right to use their Sami languages in written form with authorities like the Ombudsmen of the Swedish Parliament, the Chancellor of Justice, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the Tax Agency and the Equality Ombudsman. In the Sami administrative area, contacts with the municipalities can take place in South Sami both orally and in writing. In childcare and care of the elderly in these municipalities, it is possible to use South Sami as the working language, and the municipalities are expected to actively recruit Sami-speaking staff. Even outside the Sami administrative area, municipalities are supposed to offer elder care in Sami if there are personnel available with Sami language competence, and there, too, municipalities are to ensure that such personnel are available, if needed. All municipalities in Sweden, not only those belonging to the Sami administrative area, are also supposed to offer South Sami language tuition in the school if parents ask for it,

and, as mentioned above, the requirements for getting such tuition have been lowered for the Sami and other national minority groups. There are also signs that more people than before enrol in courses in South Sami at various levels, up to university level. Nevertheless, as the Council of Europe monitoring reports, other evaluations and minority media reports show, there are continuous implementation difficulties especially in relation to school education in minority languages including South Sami.

Emotions and beliefs in the context of language revitalisation

While the official policy vis-à-vis the Sami and their languages has changed considerably and the South Sami revitalisation movement seems to have gained momentum in society, the interviews conducted in the study reveal the lingering, intergenerational legacy of colonially imposed traumas on the individual level. Negative and mixed emotions seem to cause problems even among the most dedicated language revivalists.

Linguist Aneta Pavlenko writes in her monograph about emotions and multilingualism:

As linguistic human beings, we get emotional about what languages we should and should not be using, when and how particular languages should be used, what values should be assigned to them, and what constitutes proper usage and linguistic purity (2005: 195).

Even though Pavlenko is not referring explicitly to language revitalisation, her comments are very much applicable in this context. Pavlenko's examples are often taken from immigrant and refugee contexts and, most often, the emotional value of the first language, be it negatively or positively perceived, is emphasised. However, Pavlenko also shows that strong emotional investment in a second language is possible in certain circumstances. What, then, about emotions and language revitalisation? What is the impact of thoughts, beliefs and emotions in the context where an individual wants to reclaim a language he or she never acquired or used before? Or when the language has been used around the person, resulting in some receptive but very few if any productive language skills? Or, when the language has virtually been beaten out of a child?

The traumas inflicted on Sami children in the former Nomad Schools or other schools and resulting in native language loss are not directly comparable to Pavlenko's examples of Holocaust survivors' rejection of their native German language in diaspora. Nevertheless, we could claim that many of the children in boarding schools, as well as many other Indigenous children in the world in similar circumstances were, like Pavlenko's German-speakers, 'scared out of language maintenance and internalized the feelings of fear, shame, and embarrassment linked to the language' (Pavlenko 2005: 205). The strong negative experiences of being threatened and punished for using their language as children affected them later in life when the opportunity to reclaim their Indigenous language came and was even desired within the community.

Nora Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer (1998) write about a Tlingit-speaker in Alaska, a former pupil in a residential school where only English was allowed, who could taste the soap in his mouth whenever he tried to use his Indigenous language. Similar difficulties have been found among adult Sami who have tried to relearn and use their lost language. Previous forced assimilation policies and negative school experiences strongly affected generations of Sami speakers in Scandinavia. Jane Juuso, a cognitive therapist from Norway and herself a North Sami, has created a method based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to overcome the emotional consequences of such policies. She observed that numerous non-Sami taking part in Sami courses quickly learnt the basics of the language and started using it productively, while those with Sami origin seemed to have great difficulties in learning and using Sami in spite of having heard and sometimes even having used the language earlier in life. For these learners, using the words of Pavlenko, 'historically shaped emotional memories' (2005: 208) seemed to play a role in the learning process. Juuso concluded that the negative language-related experiences among many Sami caused emotional blocks that hindered them from advancing in their studies in spite of a strong desire to take back the language. Her book was recently translated into Swedish and South Sami, and the method was tested and found useful by the Sami Language Centre in Sweden (2013). It has also been translated into English and is today used by the First Peoples' Cultural Council, British Columbia, Canada (Juuso 2015).

In Storuman and Vilhelmina, the heritage of former assimilation policies is felt by many Sami. Taking back a language used in the childhood home but negatively valued by the majority society is challenging because it

presupposes a personal revalorisation of a stigmatised identity. Moreover, even in a new situation where the state explicitly encourages minority language maintenance, the choice to learn and use the minority language is not always appreciated by the surrounding society, and negative reactions are possible.

One interviewee in the present study is filled with mixed feelings in a situation where he is speaking South Sami with his children in the presence of his own father. In his childhood home, only Swedish was spoken, and the interviewee is unsure of how much Sami his father actually knows.

My father is sitting beside and listening, or, he asks what did the reindeer earmark look like and I'm supposed to describe [using the Sami words for earmarks]. It feels awkward somehow. Because he might know what I'm saying, but anyway, I don't think he ... Why should I use a language that he does not ... that I think he might not know. But maybe he knows the language, I don't know. Maybe he knows those terms. But I feel uncomfortable. It is artificial somehow (father 2, Storuman, 2010).

Another frequently mentioned feeling is linguistic insecurity. One interviewee feels intimidated by perceived negative attitudes on the part of native speakers regarding his less-than-native competence in South Sami. Justified or not, these perceived attitudes make it harder for the interviewee to increase his use of Sami.

I don't know what it is but it is like a block one has. And that is weird. It shouldn't be like that ... It might be that you know that maybe ... the attitude I have understood for instance he has, well, if you can't speak Sami you shouldn't do it. Maybe it is something like that which is in the way (father 1, Storuman, 2010).

A strong personal commitment is called for when the use of the language is questioned within one's own family or the surrounding community. But even then, the trajectory of every individual, with all its twists and turns, makes the personal language revitalisation process dynamic and difficult to steer. One interviewee comments:

The language issue is like everything else in life—it comes and goes like the waves. It certainly depends on which part of your life you are in at present, so you'll want to try to keep the language alive, but let's say like it is now and like it has been the last ten years, it has been a bit difficult to keep the language going. Because you have just been working like a madman to keep the wolves from the door, so to say (father 2, Storuman, 2010).

He recalls memories from his school years, and a gradually growing interest in the South Sami language, then years filled with work and establishing a family, with little time left for language work. And even then, he recalls the joy of experiencing his children's interest in the language, and a nagging bad conscience about not doing enough himself.

Another interviewee describes the language issue as an arduous task, or a yoke, but at the same time something that simply must be done. He says:

[I]n general, there is a much stronger Sami consciousness and knowledge than before. People also show interest in their background and they are proud of their cultural heritage and so on. But the language, that is something that has been neglected in this region. So it is our responsibility to take it back. It is our task. But it is a bit onerous (father 1, Storuman, 2010).

The last two interviews show clearly that these fathers are fully aware of the endangered situation of South Sami and the historical background to it. They are also convinced that they have a personal responsibility for language maintenance. Both of them have made efforts to speak South Sami in their own families.

Using Sami is by no means common among all the families taking part in the research project. The questionnaire study shows that in only a very few of the families was South Sami used by one or several family members, and the percentage of fathers using Sami at home was even lower than that of the mothers. 'Using Sami' could also mean that Sami was used occasionally, or very rarely. Several parents commented that they sometimes made efforts to speak Sami at home, without revealing how successful these efforts could be. Several parents also described their efforts to learn Sami themselves. A father wrote: 'I'm learning Sami and teaching it to my children, and I'm pretty good at it right now. But the rest of my family only know a couple of phrases and some words' (male 2, Storuman, 2010).

Irrespective of the language or languages used in the family, all these parents had chosen Sami mother-tongue tuition for their children, thus signalling that they wanted their children to learn Sami. The parents seemed to have faith in the school system in restoring South Sami in Storuman and Vilhelmina, in spite of the largely interrupted intergenerational transmission of Sami in the family. Some parents commented that the

new minority policy was important for the survival of South Sami because it had made it easier to get mother-tongue support in South Sami in preschool and school, although this did not seem to have any stronger impact on the language choices made within the families. As many as a third of the 50 school children involved in the study reported that they only used Sami during mother-tongue lessons at school.

The main reason for not using Sami in the family seems obvious among the parents in Storuman and Vilhelmina. Many of them had not spoken Sami in their childhood homes. Their grandparents were the generation who had still heard and used Sami in their daily lives. One interviewee talked about her own grandfather who learnt Sami as a child but whom she never met herself because he died before the interviewee was born. Being of Sami origin was not taken up in the family, and the interviewee tells about the sadness and a feeling of loss it has caused her.

I don't think I was ever conscious about having Sami roots. It did not come up until I met [my husband] ... now both grandmother and grandfather are gone and my mum, I would say, would never say that she is a Sami. She would not do that. So it is like, you feel like, well it is so very sad. You feel that you have lost so much, but I and [my husband] say that we feel like we are now taking something back, yes, but you feel like that (mother 2, Storuman, 2010).

The feeling that the time has come to take back the Sami language and identity is strong in this interview, and the sadness expressed at first, later on turns to very positive feelings of joy and happiness about finally being able to access something valuable and extremely pleasurable:

You see, the Sami language is like a bowl of candy that you really long to plunge your hand into and grab whatever you want, like all of it, until the bowl is empty. That is how I would describe it. That is the relation you have to the language. There is an unbelievable longing for it, to be able to grab it (mother 2, Storuman, 2010).

A mixture of negative and extremely positive feelings is also present in the interview of a teenager. She never experienced the forced assimilation policy of the past, and she has had the opportunity to study South Sami at school. Her own family encourages her to use Sami. However, negative or questioning attitudes from the surrounding society play a role for her, too. She says:

I feel embarrassed, like, when I'm at school with Swedish friends and they don't know Sami and they just think it is weird and they don't understand anything. Then it is tough to speak [Sami] and it is quite embarrassing (daughter 2, Storuman, 2010).

Later on in the interview, she describes her language skills in a very positive way, proud of her multilingualism:

Well, my language, you could say it is like a power. Like a superpower, to be able to speak, like, several languages and, like, this superpower is so special! (ibid.).

While the participants generally perceive that the interest in the South Sami language is rising among adults, many express a fear and a belief that children and young people might not be as interested. For youths, Swedish and international youth culture and the English language are supposed to be more interesting than their Sami heritage.

However, unexpectedly positive attitudes and feelings vis-à-vis the Sami language were found in the answers of the special questionnaire from 50 school children in Storuman and Vilhelmina. Only around a tenth of them stated that they used Sami every day and none of them felt that they spoke Sami fluently or could use Sami in many different situations. Around 60 per cent also considered that Sami was a difficult language. Nevertheless, the South Sami language appears to arouse very positive associations in many of them. About 80 per cent stated that they found it pleasurable ('nice', 'good', 'cool' etc.) to speak Sami. About half of them mentioned that when they spoke Sami they felt 'like a Sami', 'more like a Sami', like a 'Sami who knows his/her language' or 'like myself', 'like a member of the family'.

A rather unexpected result was also that as many as 95 per cent of the children stated that South Sami was a 'useful' language—a result somewhat different from their parents and teachers who emphasised the identity function of Sami over the expected usefulness on the labour market (see below).

When asked which languages they wish they could speak in the future, over 70 per cent of the children wished that, among other languages, they would be able to 'speak Sami', 'speak fluent Sami', or 'more Sami', and around as many commented that South Sami felt 'close' to them, as opposed to 'distant'. One 14-year-old girl wrote:

I think that all Sami children should learn to speak and write Sami so that the language will not die out. I want to be able to speak Sami with others like they did in old times. I feel that learning Sami is an obvious thing to me. To be a Sami is something most people can't experience. I am going to teach my children Sami. When I hear somebody speak Sami with me I feel safe—at home (Storuman, 2010).

Ideological clarification in South Sami revitalisation

Fishman pointed to the importance of a prior ideological clarification in language-shift reversal (Fishman 1991). He argued that for revitalisation efforts to be successful, it was necessary for the speakers of minority languages to reflect on the causes of the situation at hand. Why was the language threatened? What was the history behind it? What could be done to improve the situation? And most importantly, what were the community members themselves prepared to do about the situation?

The crucial role of prior ideological clarification has also been emphasised by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) and Paul Kroskrity (2009). Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer attribute failures of revitalisation efforts among Alaskan native communities to the lack of prior ideological clarification. These communities openly showed a strong wish to take back their languages, and efforts were made to give adults and children more opportunities than before to learn and use their languages. When the methods proved unsuccessful, it was perceived that something in the technical aspect was missing, and efforts were taken to produce new materials, find new teachers or establish a new alphabet, just to see, later on, that even these efforts failed to produce new speakers (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 62). The authors point out that in spite of an openly declared willingness to take back the language, there is a general unwillingness among community members to be involved in the process themselves, which is a prerequisite of a successful language revitalisation. Instead, there was a tendency to expect that somebody else would do the job for them (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer 1998: 63).

Kroskrity defines what he calls 'language ideological clarification' in the following way:

Language ideological clarification is the process of identifying issues of language ideological contestation within a heritage language community, including both beliefs and feelings that are indigenous to that community and those introduced by outsiders (such as linguists and government officials), that can negatively impact community efforts to successfully engage in language maintenance and renewal (2009: 73).

Kroskrity states that identifying and raising awareness about linguistic issues could ideally lead to discourses between community members, or between community members and outsiders, with differing opinions, so that these discourses would lead to clarification or ‘foster a tolerable level of disagreement that would not inhibit language renewal activities’ (2009: 73).

When looking at the interview and questionnaire data from Storuman and Vilhelmina, we can find several similarities with the Alaskan situation described by Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998). While the Sami in general see the need of intergenerational language transmission, only a minority of the parents use Sami at home and most often in these cases it seems to be used rather irregularly. Most parents seem to believe, as in the Southeast Alaskan situation that Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer (1998) have described, that somebody else, or the educational system, will take care of the language, for example, when they are enthusiastic about the teaching of Sami at school but do not speak the language with their children at home.

However, the interviews and questionnaires also show that there is a strong historical consciousness among parents and teachers of the reasons for the present threatened situation of Sami. Many answers also reflect a conscious personally taken stance on the question. As shown above, some of the interviewees express clearly that it is the task of their generation to take back the language, although they find it personally demanding.

Language is seen by many as a core value (Smolicz 1992) in Sami identity and slightly over half (52 per cent) of the study participants claim that Sami culture would disappear if the language was lost. Even among many of those who claim the opposite (41 per cent), language loss is seen as something very negative in the Sami context. Although it would not threaten the total survival of the culture, the participants comment that the loss of the language ‘would reduce Sami culture to an empty shell’, ‘the culture would not really be the same’, the culture would lose

its strength', or it 'would only become a sales product'. Others comment, 'You are Sami in your soul and your heart, but language is important for yourself', and 'Strong efforts would be needed in other fields'.

The perceived high value of language in Sami identity was also reflected in the answers to a task to sort in descending order of relevance five suggested components of Sami identity ('Sami livelihoods', 'Sami food and clothing', 'Sami ways of thinking', 'Sami language', 'Something else; what?'). In 44 cases, language was chosen as the most, or second-most important component. The results for the rest of the suggested components were 34 (ways of thinking), 22 (food and clothing) and 16 (livelihoods) respectively.⁴

The importance of language in the minds of the participants was equally shown in the answers to questions concerning the teaching of Sami at school. The parents could choose between three alternatives:

The Sami language is important for my child:

- a. as part of Sami identity;
- b. as a merit on the labour market;
- c. for other reasons; what reasons?

In the last case, the participants were expected to suggest other motives. The teachers in turn were similarly asked which motivation (a, b or c) they thought was most important for their pupils. Sami identity as the only alternative was chosen by over a half (64 per cent) of all parents and teachers, and Sami identity combined with merit on the labour market was chosen by a quarter (25 per cent), resulting in a total of 92 per cent of the respondents mentioning identity in their answers.

In the light of these answers, another finding appears paradoxical. When asked if one could claim Sami identity without knowing a word of Sami or just a couple of words and phrases, a great majority (92 per cent) answered that one could do that without knowing a single word. One interpretation of such a result could be that there is a widespread understanding of the historical past and the assimilation policies which forced many Sami to stop speaking their original language and transmitting it to their children. This view was also confirmed in some comments and interviews. Given

4 The result for 'Sami livelihoods' can perhaps be partly explained by the exclusion of South Sami reindeer herders from the local *sameby* (see above).

the widely acknowledged importance of accepting all interested and committed people into revitalisation efforts, regardless of their capacity to use the language, these results can be interpreted as creating a very favourable environment for language revitalisation efforts. The next step is to find ways for various groups, from fluent speakers to beginners without any previous knowledge, to get suitable possibilities to advance in their individual language reclamation efforts.

Summary and discussion

The participants in the study were recruited with the help of a small number of people familiar with the situation of the South Sami in Storuman and Vilhelmina. Participation was voluntary, which can mean that the sample included proportionally more of those who are favourable to South Sami revitalisation than those who are not. Even given this bias towards recruiting participants who are involved in and enthusiastic about language revitalisation, our data still shows that there are considerable challenges involved with language revitalisation.

That said, the results also show that many people feel that there is a positive development regarding the possibilities of strengthening South Sami language and culture development in society. The new minority policy from 2000 and its reform 10 years later are seen to have made South Sami more visible and more useful on the labour market. New possibilities have emerged to learn and use South Sami, and parents and teachers feel that there is more official support for their language and culture than ever before. There are also new work opportunities for those with a competence in the Sami languages in the municipalities of the Sami administrative area and the cultural sector. There are better opportunities to get support for South Sami in preschool and school, and other kinds of language instruction is also available. It is also possible for anyone to use South Sami locally and in certain official contexts nationwide. The new value of South Sami is reflected in the answers of parents, teachers and the school children participating in the study.

While the study participants generally perceive the national minority policy as a guarantee without which the South Sami language would very soon have been lost, many of them point out that the implementation of the minority policy is lacking, which can slow down a positive development that would otherwise have been possible. Nevertheless, the

legal improvements, municipal efforts to highlight the Sami languages and cultures, and other measures are felt to have given new legitimacy to revitalisation efforts.

Many participants also feel that the new minority policy gives them compensation for past history and oppressive policies which deprived the Sami people of their language and stigmatised their culture and identity. A growing minority-political consciousness among the South Sami has also led to individual protests in the media when municipalities have failed to fulfil their obligations. Such protests hardly ever reached the media before the minority policy reform.

Signs of an ideological clarification in the form of a consciousness of the causes of the present endangered situation of South Sami and the need to act can be found in the data.

In spite of the fact that a majority of the participants view language as a core value in the South Sami identity, a great majority of them also, somewhat surprisingly, state that Sami language competence is no precondition for being Sami. The South Sami seem to accept the fact that many among them have lost or never learnt Sami because of former forced assimilation policies, while, because of that, the need for revitalisation is considered acute. Some take a personal responsibility for South Sami language and the culture, which sometimes can be heavy to bear. Many others again put their hope in the school system that they wish will give their children the language their parents and grandparents were denied. The present school support for Sami in Storuman and Vilhelmina is nevertheless very weak in terms of the Fishman GIDS scale.

All in all, the interviews and questionnaire comments show that former forced assimilation policies continue to cause problems for many individuals and families. In spite of a strong dedication to South Sami reclamation, individual parents have difficulty learning and using the language that was previously lost or suppressed. The task is to overcome one's own family history, and to revalorise a language and an identity that have been heavily stigmatised over a long time. Some results reflect ambivalent feelings and doubts on the personal level between a will to further revitalisation, on the one side, and an uncertainty about the wisdom or the feasibility of it on the other. However, taking part in language revitalisation is not only perceived as a burden, or a yoke, but also as part of a healing process and of

‘righting old wrongs’, two goals far beyond a mere language shift reversal. Such goals are likely to give strength and determination in a situation of seemingly overwhelming odds.

Finally, what could then be done to improve the prospects of South Sami language revitalisation in Storuman and Vilhelmina? The weaknesses of Sami language support within the school system make the role of the family and community all the more important in this context. The present cross-border South Sami language immersion camps for school children should be bolstered to compensate for the insufficient support from the school and to give the South Sami children from Sweden and Norway opportunities to meet each other. Many among the adult South Sami generation are in an acute need of opportunities to (re)learn Sami in ways that are compatible with demands of work and family life. Parent-network activities and family language programs, already in place in some Sami contexts in Sweden, would be helpful. The work of the Sami Language Centre, especially as regards applied Master-Apprentice programs (see for instance Hinton 2013 [2001]) and ways to tackle the emotional issues involved in revitalisation efforts (see above), should be continued and strengthened in the South Sami context. There is also an acute need for political work to upgrade the Swedish ratification of the ECRML to include primary and secondary school education so that strong models of bilingual and minority language medium education will become possible and accessible for South Sami children in Sweden. The insufficient support on the part of the education system is a serious impediment to the reclamation of South Sami as well as the other Sami languages in Sweden.

Appendix 1. Summary of interviews and questionnaires

Interviews

11 persons

No formal interview guide was provided; the interviewees could talk freely but the interviewers checked that the following issues were covered: language choice in childhood, during school years, and in the present family, as well as recounting of a possible incident/experience which had a special impact on language choice.

Questionnaires

62 adults (parents and teachers)

The questionnaire for adults contained 25 questions, some of them different depending on whether the respondent was a teacher or a parent. The main themes were:

- Language background: language choice/s in the family; use of Sami media, etc.;
- Self-identity;
- Thoughts about Sami identity;
- The role of language in Sami culture;
- The role of the national minority policy in South Sami revitalisation;
- Further efforts needed for revitalisation to continue?

50 school children

The questionnaire for school children contained 22 questions, most of which involved choosing between different alternatives or filling in missing words. The questions focused on: What language/s do you speak? / when? / with whom?

- What do you think of Swedish, Sami, English/other languages?
 - near/distant; easy/difficult; useful/of no use, etc.
- How do you feel when you speak Swedish, Sami, English or other languages?
 - ‘When I speak Sami, I feel...’ / ‘When I speak Swedish, I feel...’, etc.
- Which languages do you wish to know when you are a grown-up?

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