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New speakers of Sámi: From insecurity to pride

Content Language

English

Metadata of Language(s) Covered in Article

Language: Sámi (North Sámi, Coastal Sámi, Sea Sámi)

Glottocode: nort2671

ISO-3 Code: smi

Dialect(s) + Glottocode(s): sme

State(s)

Norway

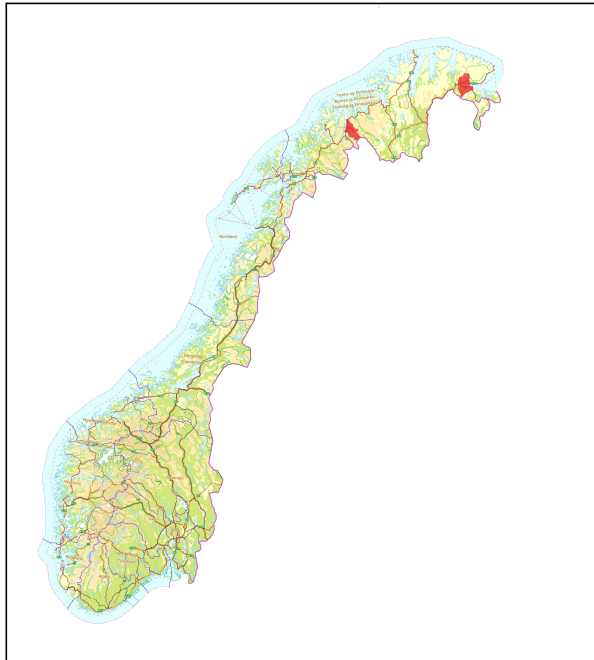
Region(s) [optional]

Troms and Finnmark county

Keywords

new speakers | language shift | reclamation | revitalisation

Illustrative Map



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Abstract

This article examines language reclamation and adult language learning processes from the individual perspective by focusing on experiences of language reclamation and emotions and reflections through this process. We draw on data from interviews with new speakers (O'Rourke 2015) of Sámi in two small Sea Sámi municipalities Gáivuotna and Unjárga in Northern Norway. They have acquired Sámi through immersion or bilingual educational programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners. New speakers who reclaim an indigenous language often have to re-evaluate their own levels of linguistic competence and creatively (re)structure their social practices. For many new speakers, the process of taking their language back is characterised by a feeling of pride and investment, but also emotional challenges. The analysis of the material sheds light on their feelings, reflections and experiences of their trajectories of language learning and reclamation and shows how changes in language use may come about in conjunction with important life events, such as for instance becoming a parent or changing jobs. Further, our analysis shows that speakers develop strategies to help them progress from insecurity in the initial stages of language reclamation to a point where they feel safe and at home in their language.

1. Introduction

The study was carried in Northern Norway in the Sea Sámi municipalities Gáivuotna and Unjárga, based on interviews with seven participants, five women and two men aged 21-58. Our aim is to understand their experiences, feelings and thoughts connected to learning Sámi as an adult and to explore how new speakers manage the journey from insecurity during the initial stages of language reclamation to feeling pride when they get to the point of speaking Sámi. For many new speakers, the process of taking the language of their parents and grandparents back is characterised by a strong investment, but also emotional challenges. The analysis of the material sheds light on their feelings, reflections and experiences of their trajectories of language learning and reclamation. In line with Leonard (2012: 359), we see language reclamation as 'a larger effort by a community to claim its right to speak a language and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives'. We situate our study in two indigenous communities, but take experiences of individual social actors as our starting point in order to shed light on tensions and possibilities of language reclamation.

2. Background

The Sámi people are an indigenous people who traditionally live in the Northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway and on the Kola Peninsula in northwestern Russia. The ten Sámi languages belong to the Finno-Ugric language family. Sámi languages do not follow the borders of the countries but follow an East-West band [see map], resulting in situations where the same Sámi languages are spoken in different countries. Each language has main dialects and sub-dialects, and there is mutual comprehension between neighbouring varieties (Todal 2002; Todal crossref-LME). The North Sámi language is the most spoken language of all the Sámi languages. There are no comprehensive census data

on the numbers of Sámi speakers, but it is assumed that about 90 percent of the Sámi-speaking population speak Northern Sámi, primarily in Norway, Sweden and Finland (Rasmussen & Nolan 2011: 37). This is also the Sámi language spoken in Gáivuotna and Unjárga, though these villages have their own dialects (Rasmus 2017: 16). The northernmost area of Norway has traditionally been multilingual, with two Sámi languages (North and Skolt Sámi) spoken in addition to Norwegian and Kven, a Finnic language. From about 1850, the Norwegian authorities implemented an official national policy aimed at Norwegianising the Sámi and Kven peoples, and assimilatory legislations and measures were introduced, targeting language use, cultural practices and land ownership. This is referred to as the Norwegianisation process, and was one of the key factors for the widespread language shift, both in Sámi and Kven communities (Pietikäinen, Huss, Laihiala-Kankainen, Puoskari and Lane 2010).

According to UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, all the Sámi languages are endangered. Northern Sámi, the Sámi language with largest number of speakers, is listed as a definitely endangered language. (UNESCO-Atlas, nettside) Currently all the Sámi languages are in minoritised position everywhere else than in municipalities Kárásjohka and Guovdageaidnu in Norway, where Northern Sámi is spoken (note that minoritised refers not only to numbers of speakers, but social and political hierarchies and relationships between languages, see Pietikäinen et al. (2010), and Costa, De Korne and Lane (2017) for discussions). In 2014, the Norwegian Government appointed a committee whose task was to review legislation, measures and schemes for Southern, Lule and North Sami languages in Norway. This resulted in the Norwegian Official Report *Váibmogiella – Hjertespråket* ("Language of the heart") with proposals for legislation, measures and schemes for the Sámi languages to help revitalise and develop Sámi languages in Norway (NOU 2016: 18). The *Váibmogiella* committee assessed that the Sámi language in Gáivuotna and Unjárga are on different levels both in terms of speakers, and in terms of linguistic infrastructure, such as sufficient access to public services in Sámi and number of Sámi courses offered in the schools. In Norway, several municipalities have opted to belong to "Sámi language administrative district", according to § 3.1 of the Act concerning the Sámediggi (the Sámi parliament) and other Sámi legal matters (the Sámi Act). The committee underscored that the situation of the Sámi municipalities in the Sámi language administrative district roughly fall into two groups, namely Language maintenance municipalities (*språkbevaringskommuner*) and Language vitalisation municipalities (*språkvitaliseringskommuner*). In the first category of municipalities, there is sufficient Sámi language competence for the Sámi language to be used in all public domains, including public administration, whereas in the latter category there is a much stronger need to vitalise the Sámi language. The committee placed Gáivuotna in this category, while Unjárga was categorised as one of the municipalities with enough language resources and a high enough number of speakers for the Sámi language to be sustainable in the municipality (NOU 2016: 20).

Gáivuotna is located in the westernmost part of Northern Norway and today about 2100 people live in the municipality. Traditionally, people in the area relied on fishing and small-scale subsistence farming. This is an area where Kven, Sámi and Norwegian have been spoken and historically, multilingualism was a widespread phenomenon. Since the Norwegianisation process started in the middle of the 19th century, people in Gáivuotna have experienced both oppressive policies, language shift to Norwegian and then revitalisation of the lost languages (Johansen 2009: 4).

The municipality of Unjárga is located further east. During the past 100 years, people traditionally mainly have lived by small-scale farming, fishing and reindeer husbandry. Today about 900 people live in this municipality. The municipality notes in their plan for bilingualism that one of the strengths of their language work is that most of the people in the area have a positive attitude to the Sámi language, indicated by the fact that more parents choose Sámi language for their children in the kindergarten and school education system. Even though the children have had their entire schooling in Sámi, the Norwegian language is the most spoken language among young people (Språkplan 2017).



Unjárga-Nesseby. Foto: Bent Johansen

3. Language learning and minoritised languages

According to historical and sociolinguistic studies of Sápmi, the effects of the Norwegianisation process were strongest in coastal Sámi areas. Rasmussen and Nolan (2011: 35–36.) describe the Norwegianisation process as a tidal wave or tsunami:

“

It initially hit the land in the southern areas of Sápmi and then rolled up the coast to the north. It first swept the language away from the coastal Sámis. Then it flooded into the fjords erasing the language from most of the Sámi settlements

The Norwegianisation and the long-term policies linked to this process contributed to and accelerated language shift in both Unjárga and Gáivuotna, and this was the most significant cause of language shift, which in turn led to many Sámi people not acquiring their family’s language. Now many who have not had the possibility to learn the language at home because of the consequences of the Norwegianisation process, have a desire to speak the language of their parents and grandparents. It seems to be common all over the Sápmi that many people have acquired a solid passive competence, some of them already as a child, or in the educational system or as an adult in further education. Many of these individuals with passive language never start using it actively in social occasions with other people. The term *språksperre* ‘language barrier’ is frequently used to describe the fear of speaking Sámi experienced by many Sámis who have learned the language through the educational system or have passive competence because Sámi was spoken in their home. Still, they find it difficult to speak Sámi in everyday life (Todal 2007). Often those who have a relation to Sámi find language learning as an adult very difficult and say that it hurts when you cannot speak the language you already understand Juuso (2009: 20).

Both municipalities in this study, Unjárga and Gáivuotna have first experienced language shift from Sámi to Norwegian and later seen a revitalization of the Sámi language, like many other places in Sápmi (Todal 2002: 10, 68). The future of a language is always in the hands of its speakers, and in this sense there is a need for more language users in Sámi communities if the language is to prevail. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that individual language users often play a key role in language revitalization processes. Hinton, Huss and Roche (2018: 495) conclude: “A “healthy” language is one that is supported at home, at school, in the community, on the job, and in the media. We have seen that attention to only one of these venues is never enough”. This understanding also underlies the report *Váibmogiella - Hjertespråket*, as it underscores the need for a wide range of domains and activities for the Sámi languages to be used and developed by their speakers. Individuals who make efforts to learn the minoritised Sámi language, often in their own home places play a part in all these domains.

4. Language reclamation and new speakers

Numerous investigations of language shift, language maintenance and language revitalisation have been conducted, focussing primarily on language communities, intergenerational transmission of minority languages and education, and the consequences of language shift (Kulick 1992, Fishman 1997, Hornberger 2002, 2006, Lane 2010, McCarty and Nicholas 2014, De Korne 2017). In contrast to language shift and loss, language revitalisation is often seen as an emancipatory process, and Dorian (1987) points out that language revitalisation efforts may provide some compensation for the pain of stigma and ridicule experienced by minority language speakers, mitigate negative family attitudes, and valorise traditional lifeways and transmission of ethnic history. Acquiring and indigenous language or becoming a speaker of an indigenous language share many traits with second language acquisition, but there are some important differences. One difference is many of an indigenous background often have a passive competence of the indigenous language, and therefore their learning process may be different. Another, and perhaps more important factor, is that starting to speak an indigenous language often is closely connected with identity, belonging and emotions. Further, the ‘second language’ label is a misnomer as many such speakers have been exposed to the language and perceive it as belonging to themselves, their family and community. For such reasons, the term ‘new speakers’ have been used as an emic category both in revitalisation movements (notably in the Basque Country, and Galicia, Brittany and Wales), and later also as an analytical concept (in Catalonia or Ireland for instance). O’Rourke and Pujolar (2015) use the term new speakers to describe “individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners”. Because new speakers engage with languages other than their “national” language(s), they need to cross existing social boundaries, re-evaluate their own levels of linguistic competence and creatively (re)structure their social practices to adapt to new and overlapping linguistic spaces O’Rourke and Pujolar (2015). We find that new speakers is a particularly apt term for analysing language learning in indigenous contexts because acquiring an indigenous language is not second language acquisition or acquisition of a foreign language. For the participants in our study, Sámi is not a second language, but rather their community language and a language linked to ethnicity and belonging. As in other geographical contexts, new speakers of Sámi also have to deal with issues of legitimacy and linguistic authority as they often have to struggle to be recognised as authentic and legitimate speakers by more traditional speakers, and sometimes even by themselves. To underscore these aspects we have therefore opted to use new speakers as a descriptive and analytical term.

5. Data and method

The data for this article was collected during summer 2017 in the municipalities Unjárga and Gáivuotna when Sini Rasmus, who is a Sámi language speaker as a mother tongue speaker from Roavesavu on the Finnish side of the river Deatnu that demarcates the border between Norway and Finland, conducted fieldwork. In addition to the data gathered, we also draw on our background from Sámi and Kven communities, Sini Rasmus’ experience as a Sámi language teacher in primary school, secondary school and during the last years in adult education, and Pia Lane’s long-term fieldwork in the North.

The data amounts to a total of 8 hours of recordings. All data have been transcribed and coded for recurring themes such as language in childhood, Norwegianisation, self-assessment of language competence, barriers for speaking, language courses, reflections on the future, and emotions and identity in relation to the Sámi language etc.. In total five women and two men (aged 21 to 58 in 2017) participated in the interviews, and for this article we mostly draw on data from four of the participants. We use pseudonyms for the participants and do not give any detailed information (such as age or occupation), because the communities are small and participants might be recognised if too much information is given. For the same reason, the data is transcribed according to North Sámi and Norwegian orthography because a transcription closer to the spoken language would reveal which village the speakers come from. Had we chosen the latter transcription method, the participants could be recognised quite easily. All participants had taken part in several Sámi language courses arranged in their home municipality Unjárga or Gáivuotna. Some of the participants had also continued studying Sámi language in other places where courses were arranged, or at the University of Tromsø. All of the participants knew the Sámi language well, and at the time when interviews carried out, some of participants chose to answer in Sámi, some answered mainly in Norwegian, and some used both languages. Those who chose to speak Norwegian during the interviews had solid passive competence in Sámi.

The focus of the semi-structured interviews was to get a picture of the participants' linguistic background and get an overview how much they were exposed to Sámi language in their childhood, how much they understood, and whether they tried to speak Sámi as a child. If they had spoken Sámi, the participants were asked to describe the situations when they tried to speak Sámi. They were asked to think about what they felt and how they experienced those situations. Another key concern for us was to understand the different kinds of motivations to learn to speak Sámi language as an adult and the experiences and emotions connected to this process. Participants were asked to describe situations when they attempted and decided to use Sámi in everyday communication by reflecting on who they speak Sámi with, places and occasions where they speak Sámi, and what kind of topics they talk about. All the participants had heard Sámi language in their childhood, three had Sámi as a subject in school, and some had even tried to use the language with some trusted people as a child.

6. Feeling of shame and facing expectations of others

It seems that it can evoke curiosity and a wide range of feelings, when you as a child notice a language in your environment, at least if your close ones speak the language, such as in our study. An illustrative example is the interview with Jovvna who talked about how his father spoke Sámi but did not pass the language on to Jovvna. Now Jovvna speaks Sámi with his children, and he says that becoming a father was one of the reasons he started speaking Sámi:

‘

Jovvna

Moddii áhčči dajai ahte dál dii galgabehtet sámegeiela oahppat (.) Don álo smiehtat manne mun in máhte dán. Mus lea álo leamašan miella oahppat sámegeiela. Muhto dathan leamašan váttis álgit hállat (.) Áhčči lei olu eret. Go bođii ruoktot, de lei menddo maŋjit eará giela álgit oahppat (.) Go galggaim mánáid oazžut de moai hálaime mángii sámegeiela birra ja mo galge oazžut mánáid sámegeiela hállat. Mun jáhkán dat lei okta dehálaš áššiin manne mun álgen sámegeiela hállat.

A couple of times said my father that now you children are going to learn to speak Sámi language (.) You always wonder why I am not able to speak the language. I have always wanted to learn to speak it. But it has been difficult (.) My father was away from home a lot. When he came at home, it was too late to start learning (.) When we were having children we spent a lot of time talking about Sámi language, how to get children to speak Sámi. I think that was one of the reasons why I started speaking Sámi.

When they were expecting their first child, Jovvna and his wife “spent a lot of time talking about the Sámi language”. Parenthood is a life event that may be experienced as a significant point of transition in life, and such transitions are described by Pujolar and González (2012) as specific biographical junctures where individuals enact significant changes in their linguistic repertoire. In Catalan sociolinguistics, the term *mudes* is used to refer to such life transitions and as a tool for analysing what it means to adopt a new language in social life (Pujolar and Puigdevall 2015). We will return to the concept of *mudes* later in the article.

In our study, all the participants had at least one Sámi-speaking parent, but none of the parents had actively chosen to pass the Sámi language on to the next generation. As recounted by Inga and Per in the examples below, this meant that they all had heard Sámi spoken in their childhood.

‘

Inga

Mun lean álo gullan sámegeiela (.) Dalle go áhčis ledje guossit geat sámástit. Dahje go mun ledjen áhku luhtte. Ii juohke beaivvi.

I have always heard Sámi language (.) When other people who spoke Sámi came to visit my father. Or when I was at my grandmom. Not every day.

“

Per

Jeg har vokst opp med, ikke sant, samisktalende foreldre. Men du skjønner dem ville jo ikke snakke samisk til oss (.) Og alle i den generasjonen, de var jo samisk som de snakket, når de hadde besøk. Så ville dem ikke snakke samisk til oss. Det skjønner jo man selvfølgelig man når man blir voksen. Man skjønner litt mere hvordan det fungerte.

I have grown up with, right, Sámi-speaking parents. But you understand that they didn't want speak Sámi to us (.) Everyone in that generation was Sámi and they spoke when others came to visit us. They did not want to speak it to us. Of course as an adult you understand that. You understand more why everything was like that (referring to Norwegianisation and the parents' bad experiences from the boarding school times and the decision not to pass the language to him).

The theme Norwegianisation was present both directly and indirectly during the interviews. Some of the interviewees stated that the main reason why their parents did not pass the language to next generation was the Norwegianisation processes. They mention many of the challenges their parents had gone through related to being Sámi, and the bad experiences they faced at the boarding schools. Therefore, they understood their parents' choices, and that they simply wanted to do what they thought was right for their children (see Lane 2010 for an analysis of language shift in a Kven community). Many of the interviewees said that their parents did not wish the same burden to their children and therefore chose not to pass Sámi language:

“

Birgit

Mine foreldre brukte det kun som et sånn et hemmelig språk seg imellom, sånn at vi barna sku ikke forstå, sånn at vi ikke sku forstå noe. Så det er på grunn av fornorskninga så prata ikke dem samisk til oss. Fordi det dem hadde opplevd så ville dem ikke at vi sku gå gjennom det samme.

My parents spoke “secret language” with each other so that us children would not understand what they were saying. Because of the Norwegianisation they chose not to speak Sámi language to us. Because all the things they had gone through and they did not want us to experience the same as they did.

Although the situation for many Sámi people in Norway is much better now than some decades ago, conflicts can still appear, as mentioned for example by Siri who explain how prejudice and conflict may resurface:

“

Siri

Det jeg har møtt av fordommer er jo ikke sant i tidligere tider. Også nu så må man i enkelte tilfeller forsvare hvem man er. Det kan bli litt sånn dårlig. Ikke så mye som tidligere. Jeg tror ikke for så vidt ikke at fordommene har forsvunnet. Dem tror er mer skjult enn tidligere. Hvordan skal jeg si det. Dem er der. Dem

kommer opp til overflate ved enkelte anledninger (.) Vi har en sak om vegnavn. Skal det være på samisk eller norsk eller. Det kan komme i forbindelse med reindriftutøvelse.

Now there is not as much prejudice against the Sámi as it was before. But nowadays you might come to situations where you must defend who you are. Sometimes it can become quite bad. Not so much as before. But I do not think the prejudices are completely gone. I think, in a way they just are more hidden than before, and those people are still here. They show themselves sometimes (.) We have a case about addresses, within it should be in Sámi or Norwegian or. Discussions occur also when it concerns reindeer husbandry.

Similar experiences are related by another participant Birgit who was told that her son should not study Sámi:

“

Birgit

Han hadde en lærer som egentlig jeg oppfattet var imot samisk. Ikke samisklærer men hannes kontaktlærer han som hadde klassen. Han sa til oss at han burde slutte på samisk for at han sku lære norsk bedre. For at han slet med norskfaget. Det var på grunn av at han var samisk. Det sier litt om holdningen som kanskje er hos noen lærere.

My son had a teacher who I actually perceived as being against Sámi. Not the Sámi language teacher but the class teacher. He said to us that maybe my son should quit studying Sámi language so that he could learn Norwegian better. He was not so good in Norwegian. It was because he was Sámi. I think this tells a bit about what kind of attitudes some of the teachers have.

Birgit's description of the teacher's negative attitude is described as somewhat subtle, through her use of the phrase 'who I actually perceived as being against Sámi', manifested through his action of suggesting that her son should stop studying Sámi. It does not appear that Birgit shares the teacher's opinion that her son's Sámi tuition caused problems for his acquisition of Norwegian. Rather, she seems to first position the teacher as against Sámi, then voice the teacher's opinions and finally conclude with an evaluation: "I think this tells a bit about what kind of attitudes some of the teachers have". It seems that many people both in Unjárga and Gáivuotna still are cautious and very aware that they might come into conflicts when it comes to the Sámi language or lifestyle.

In his study of Gaeltacht new speakers, Walsh (2019: 232–233) also identified a range of emotions, including feeling shame of not being able to speak Irish even though having grown up in the traditional heartland of Irish. In Sámi context, we find similar sentiments. Our data show that sometimes the feeling that you cannot speak your own parent's language leads to feeling of shame, as expressed by Siri the following manner:

“

Siri

Hvis jeg blir usikker på hva som blir sagt, jeg kan bli flau. Jeg har lett for å slå om hvis jeg oppdager at jeg misforstår. Hvis jeg er usikker så går det automatisk over på norsk. Vet ikke, jeg kan også føle skam. For at jeg burde vite, jeg burde kunne. Det å ikke kunne, det å misforstå. Jeg har liksom prøvd gjennom årene overbevise meg selv at jeg representerer egentlig personer i mitt område og den historien som følger med og de konsekvensene det har. Men allikevel så kan jeg altfor ofte føle den skammen (.) Men jeg burde ikke føle den skammen (.) Jeg har ikke snakka med andre om det. Fordi jeg synes det er skammelig å snakke om den skammen også. Jeg burde egentlig ikke føle den skammen.

If I get insecure of what is said I get embarrassed. I switch language (to Norwegian) if I observe that I misunderstand. If I get insecure, I automatically shift over to Norwegian. I don't know, I can also feel shame. Because I should know, I should manage. The fact that you don't know, that you misunderstand. I have tried many years to convince myself that I represent the people from this area and all the history behind us and all the consequences because of that. But still and too often I can feel that shame. (.) But I shouldn't feel to be ashamed. (.) I haven't talked to other people about that. Because I think that too would bring more shame. I think that I shouldn't be feeling that shame.

Siri clearly has an inner conversation with her herself repeating that she should not feel shame. This is clearly something that is difficult, and she finds it hurtful even though she understands why she feels like this. Such a feeling of shame and feeling of insecurity may cause a need to feel that the other person who you talk with knows you and understands where you are coming from. Siri continues:

“

Siri

Det er lettere å snakke med Elisabet, Yngve og Isak for den saks skyld fordi dem kjenner historien om meg. De skjønner konteksten. Dem forventer ikke nokka utover det. Snakker man på norsk så er det enklere.

It is much easier to talk with Elisabet, Yngve and Isak, because they understand my background. They understand the context. They do not expect so much from me. If we would speak a little bit Norwegian also, it does not bother me.

For Siri it is easy to talk to some of the people who she knows already, maybe because she does not have to use energy to speak Sámi perfectly, or to be afraid that they have to switch and continue the conversation to Norwegian if she is not able to say everything in Sámi. Some of the participants saw both positive and negative aspects of other people knowing their background, and even though shared background could lead to a feeling of safety, as in the example above, commonality was experienced as making one vulnerable. Other participants said that they felt that they were expected to speak properly and not make mistakes, like Jovnna.

“

Jovnna

Jus mun galgen hállat de mun galgen máhttit dan albma láhkai. Mun in sáhte boastut hállat. Dalle šattai áibbas sperre. Mun smihtten earát gal vurdet ahte mun máhtán albmaláhkai hállat. Mun jáhkán dat šattai ekstra sperre. Manne don leat aktiivvaláš go don it máhte sámegiela. Manne váccát gávttiin go it máhte sámegiela. Don it leat albma sápmelaš dalle.

If I was going to talk, then I had to talk perfectly and properly. I thought that I could not say something wrong. If I did that, the barriers came out. I thought that everyone expected that I should speak perfectly. I think that became an extra barrier. Why are you so activist if you cannot speak Sámi language? Why do you use your Sámi clothing when you do not speak Sámi language? You are not a real Sámi person then.

Such expectations, perceived or real, made him self-conscious and became what he describes as ‘an extra barrier’ to speaking Sámi. This excerpt also illustrates how new speakers feel that they have to talk “perfectly and properly” to be recognised as a legitimate speaker, and this struggle often brings about a feeling of not being “good enough”.

7. Self-criticism, shyness and insecurity

New speakers may be perceived by others and sometimes by themselves as having insufficient and/or different type of linguistic competence (Walsh and Lane (2014: 3). Also, in many other studies New speakers talk about self-criticism and barriers that prevent them from speaking. Todal (2007) observed that such barriers, perceived or real, made one choose not to speak Sámi, or choose to speak only a little at time. His participants explain that these barriers are rooted in their minds already in their childhood. In contrast, they do not experience such barriers when speaking a foreign language such as English. Though linguistic insecurity and barriers to speaking are known from second language acquisition research, see for instance Sevinç (2017). Based on data from Ojibwe language reclamation, King and Hermes (2014) point out that the emotional aspects of language learning in indigenous contexts seem to be stronger than in second language acquisition contexts because of identity politics and social control as to who has the right to claim the role of an authentic speaker run deeper in indigenous settings.

Our study lends support to King and Hermes' insights as for our participants, starting to speak Sámi language feels difficult. One interviewee describes that it was mentally tough to produce sentences in Sámi language because the language differs so much from Norwegian, so she found that for her speaking Sámi demanded concentration and constant reflection:

‘

Siri

Altså med engelsk så går det sånn, fordi at man er vant og det er likt norsk. Med samisk, krever det mye tenking: Hvordan skal jeg putte det her, forstår jeg, misforstår jeg, hva betyr det ordet, hvordan skal jeg putte den her setningen sammen, bruker jeg rett kasus, bruker jeg rett bøyning. Sånn at blir det mentalt for tungt. Hvis det blir for mye så trekker jeg meg unna.

With English, it goes like this (meaning easily), because I am used to using English and it is quite similar language to Norwegian. In Sámi, it requires a lot of thinking: How to build the sentences, do I understand, do I misunderstand, do I use the right words, is this sentence build up correct, do I use the correct case, and how to conjugate the word correctly. It all becomes too heavy mentally and if it becomes too much for me, then I give up.

Many of the participants had similar descriptions of situations when they tried to produce oral language, and they often found thinking about grammar and how the language is built up and finding semantically correct words, strenuous and energy-consuming. Participants also felt, or had experienced earlier, that speaking Sámi felt unnatural. Several reported that this was linked to habitual language choice and being used to speaking primarily Norwegian with some of their interlocutors:

‘

Siri

Det er ikke mange jeg kan snakke samisk med. (.) Jeg er ikke vant til å snakke samisk med folk. Dermed så, hvis jeg møter Aili på privaten så snakker jeg norsk til ho, fordi eg er vant til å snakke norsk med ho selv om jeg vet at ho kan samisk. Så, det er begrensninger.

There aren't many people I can speak Sámi with. (.) I'm not used to talking Sámi with others. So if I meet Aili in private I speak Norwegian to her because I am used to talking Norwegian with her even though I know she knows Sámi. There are some limitations.



Inga

Mun dieđán muhtin olbmot sii máhttet sihke dárustit ja sámástit, muhto singuin mun álohii dárustan. Lea váttis molsut giela. (.) Muhtin olbmuiguin lea váttis molsut giela. Fáhkka álggát sámástit. Dat ii leat lunddolaš.

I know people who can speak both Norwegian and Sámi, but I have always spoken Norwegian with them. It is difficult to change languages. (.) With some, it is difficult to change languages. Suddenly you start talking Sámi. It is not natural.

A recurrent challenge for all the participants was that changing language of communication with people they had known before they had learned Sámi was very difficult, which in turn led to a lack of conversational partners. Changing language of communication may be challenging when a language choice has been made. This is documented in other settings as well. Pujolar and Puigdevall (2015:182) for instance, observe that some new speakers' transition to speaking Catalan was to make it a habit to speak Catalan with new acquaintances, precisely because every day norms of language choice preference language consistency in interactions with the people you already know. In general, and not only in indigenous contexts, changing language of interaction can be experienced as difficult because we socialise each other to use a certain language in interactions, and this language then becomes the unmarked choice. However, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, it may be that changing language with someone who is close to us, might make us feel more vulnerable than when we change language of communication in more peripheral contexts. This poses a challenge for vitalization movements because the goal of language revitalization is to ensure that new people become speakers, or to "bring the language forward to new users and uses" (King 2001:26). If new speakers do not engage with traditional speakers, they miss out on strengthening their competence and command of the indigenous language, and equally importantly, they might use the language in certain domains only. Fear of belittlement for trying out the indigenous language in conversation (King and Hermes 2014:277) encourages learners to favour more passive or more performance-based approaches, such as book learning or participating in ceremonies and settings where language use is ritualised.

The feeling of insecurity when speaking Sámi seems to have both an outer and inner dimension. While new speakers often are worried about criticism and negative reactions from others, many of the participants in this study talked more about self-criticism than being judged by others, though some participants mentioned some occasions and some particular persons they never want to speak Sámi language with. Per was well aware that he is self-critical, and had even experienced that this was pointed out by others:



Per

Skal du snakke språket så skal det liksom være, riktig. (.) Jeg var med i en ledergruppe. (.) Vi hadde sånn metode, test med psykolog. Så sa han at jeg var veldig selvkritisk.

If you are going to speak Sámi language you should speak it, correctly. (.) I was a part of a group of leaders. (.) We had a kind of method, a test with a psychologist. He said that I am very self-critical.

Shyness, and being self-critical, is something that many of the participants mentioned. One says that if her husband would be the one who is learning the language, he could go to the local store and start speaking. She compared herself to her husband and concluded that she will maybe never be able to do that. Others conclude that shyness is a part of the language learning progress when you are beginning to actively speak the language and a stage one has to work one's way through. When asked if it feels scary to speak Sámi in public, Inga described it like this:



Inga

Dat lei veaháš váralaš hállat sámegillii almmolaččat. Measta čirron. Dat lei veaháš erenoamáš. (.) (Barggus) Dáppe ii leat leamaš váralaš obanassiige. Muhtin sajiin sáhtta leat ainge go leat odđa olbmot. Ja mun lean maid ujus olmmoš.

I think it felt a little bit scary to speak Sámi language in public. I almost started crying. It was a special moment. (.) But I do not think it is scary to speak Sámi language here (at work) at all. I still sometimes feel it is scary to speak (Sámi) when I speak to people I have not met before. And I am also very shy person.

Many of the participants, even those who have spoken Sámi many years, said that they could hear when they said something wrong: “I can hear when I say something wrong, but I just need to think and then try to speak correctly.” Jovvna describes his oral language in the following manner:



Jovvna

Mun han hálán nu ollu boastut, muhto mun geahččalan oahppat ja sojahit sániid. Dathan lea váttis sojahit nu mo vássánaigái ja guvttiidlogus muhto mun geahččalan. Mun smiehtan dan birra ja geahččalan njulget go lean boastut dadjan.

I say so many things wrongly, but I try to learn and conjugate the words. It is difficult to conjugate the words for example to past tense and in dual person but I try. I think a lot about this, and when I say something wrong, I try to say it again correctly.

It might be the case that when you have heard a language spoken by your close ones and you have formed an image of how the language should be spoken, that your passive language competence may also prevent speaking. New speakers are very attuned to the behaviour of their interlocutors and analyse their reactions, and this might result in new speakers with a good passive competence still being reluctant to speak. Jane Juuso (2009) has developed a program in order to assist such silent speakers and encourage them to start speaking.. This program draws on principles and methods from Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to help people overcome barriers in situations when they wish to speak Sámi, but are afraid or hesitant to do so. This program aids new speakers in paying attention to their feelings and wishes, and also helps them identify what strategies they use in order to avoid speaking Sámi. The aim is then to help speakers change negative thought patterns and develop new strategies and then try these strategies out in concrete situations, such as greeting the shop assistant in Sámi and then continue to build on positive experiences. Because our participants understood Sámi well and their passive language skills were good, they also knew their own regional dialect well. The data shows that the participants thought a lot about their own dialect and how important it was to them to learn the way of speaking like their parents and/or grandparents. Some participants expressed frustration of what they described as “learning language double up”, meaning the written language and the local dialect, like Inga says:



Inga

Mis lea sierra suopman, mun dovddan ahte mun ferten oahppat dan min suopmana. Muhto universitehtas dadjet ahte dan maid don logat ii leat riektá. Don it sáhte nu dadjat, dat ii mearkkaš dan. Dat lea álohii nu. Mun ferten álo oahppat sihke min sániid ja maiddáid dan girjegielá. Dáppe mun sáhtán min giela geavahit. Mu mielas lea eahpevuoggalaš go ferten oahppat goappašagaid. (.) Go mu giella ii leat nu nanus, mun šattan maiddáid eahpesihkar, sáhtángo mun geavahit daid sániid.

We have our own dialect, and I feel that I want to learn our dialect. But they at the university say that this language is not correct. You cannot say it like that, or that's not correct. It is always like that. I must learn both our words (i.e. the dialect) and also the written language. Over here, I can use our language. I think it is unfair that I must learn both. (.) Because my language skills are not so strong, I get unsure if I can use the words.

New speakers desire to learn their own dialect sooner than standardised Sámi, which may be part of the reason that their oral language skills do not progress as fast as they wish. Speaking a standardised version of an indigenous language may make traditional speakers perceive new speakers as less authentic, and this may lead new speakers reluctant to speak. For many new speakers of Sámi, reclaiming their language is tied to belonging to family, social networks and land, but in educational settings often a more standardised variety is taught. A recurrent comment in the interviews was that they saw language as belonging to the local community, and attempting to reconcile a standardised variety with the local dialect, may be experienced as a tension by some. Such tensions are known in other geographical contexts as well. O'Rourke and Ramallo (2013:290) point out how traditional speakers of Galician may perceive new speakers as not sounding real or authentic and demarcate their privileged position as authentic speakers, which in turn might prevent new speakers from using the minoritised language.

8. Making safe spaces to speak Sámi language

The reported feeling of shyness, self-criticism and unsafety led us to asking the following question: what are the places, persons and occasions when a new speaker feels that the environment is safe enough to speak the target language? Feeling safe when speaking Sámi seems to be an important part in the beginning of the process of becoming a speaker.

Some of the difficulties in acquiring spoken proficiency in Sámi seems to be related to language structures, conjugation patterns and pronunciation because Sámi grammatical structure and phonology differ so much from Norwegian. The latter is exemplified by Jovvna, who describes his first times talking Sámi in the following manner:

“

Jovvna

Lei hirbmat váttis oážžut njuokčama johttit rivttes láhkai ja oážžut rivttes jienaid.

It was really hard for me to get the tongue in my mouth go as I wanted and make the sounds as I wanted.

Mun álgen go ožžon vuosttaš máná. (.) Dušše dalle go ledjen okto suinna. Go eamit lei das de mun hállen dárogiela. Dat lei nu váttis álggos. Go moai leimme okto de mun savkalin nu ahte hárvánin daid jienaide ja sániid dadjat. Diená mun álgen. Dat lei issoras váttis. Dat veahkehii ollu. (.) Manai sullii ovttá jagi ovdal go sáhtten hállat sámegiela dalle go eamit maid lei das.

I started [talking] after I got my first child. (.) Only when I was alone with her. When my wife was present, we only spoke Norwegian. It was really hard in the beginning. When we were alone, I whispered (in Sámi) so that I got used to the sounds and words. I started like that. It was really hard. It helped a lot (to whisper alone with the child). (.) It took about one year before I was able to speak Sámi when my wife was with us.

One of his strategies for practicing talking was to whisper in Sámi when he was alone his baby, and in this way the new speaker could get used to the sounds of language without others listening when he talked to his child.

Many of the participants talked about the Sámi language learning courses as a place to practice their language use in the beginning of their journey to start using the oral language. All the participants had participated in several language courses, both locally arranged courses by local Sámi language centres (Isak Saba guovddáš in Unjárga and Giellasiida in Gáivuotna) and courses arranged by for exaple other institutions, also on a higher education level. Language courses fulfil many important functions, not only for learning a language, but also by providing possibilities for interacting with other learners, as underscored Per: “I just participated to a language course and I think it was easy to talk Sámi language there.” It seems that this new speaker participated in the course not only to learn the language, but also to get an arena to use the language. He understood Sámi, but never talked Sámi outside the language course setting where he found it easy to speak Sámi. Several participants said they benefited a lot from the courses, among other things by learning grammar and achieving better productive language skills. Most of the participants expressed that they preferred courses that were based on their own dialect and gave preference to local language skills.



Isak Saba guovddáš, language centre in Unjárga. Foto: Máret Ingá Smuk

The language centres in both municipalities were described as important arenas for language revitalisation and maintenance. The participants experienced language centres as conscious and targeted, and in particularly their efforts related to the local dialects, history and culture were mentioned, for instance by Siri, who like Inga in the example above, underlined the importance of learning Sámi in a local setting:

‘

Siri

På en måte så det er våres miljø og det blir ikke fremmed. Og de synliggjør også og tar i bruk våres kultur. Det er våres mattradisjoner og våres duodji tradisjoner i sin undervisning. (.) Det er veldig fint det å knytte sammen kultur og språk. Sånn at det blir en helhet at det ikke blir noe fremmed. (.) Språksentre sine kurs i forhold til min språkutvikling har vært alfa og omega. Det har vært viktig at dem har knytta kulturen våres til undervisningen. Det har jeg også hørt flere sagt. Fordi på en måte så må man bygge opp om sin egen identitet som same. Jeg kan datofeste når tid jeg ble same. Jeg har jo bestandig vært det, men det har ikke vært like bevisst.

In a way it's our environment, and this doesn't become strange. And they also use and make our culture visible. In the teaching there are our culinary traditions and duodji (handicraft) traditions. (.) It is very nice this – to connect culture and language so that it becomes a whole and not something strang (.) The language centre's courses have been alfa and omega for my language development. It has been important that they

have connected our culture to the teaching. I've heard others say this, too. Because in a way one has to bolster one's one identity as Sámi. I can put a date to when I became Sámi. I have always been this [Sámi], but it hasn't always been this conscious.

Later in the interview, Siri says that her discovery of Sámi identity as linked to writing an academic text as a student about the coastal Sámis, and she then realised that this concerned her as well. She also came to realise that many local place names are Sámi, and that all these names had meaning and that the Sámi language is connected to the local region. The importance of locally arranged language courses was mentioned in many other interviews. Employees at the language centres and the teachers of the local language courses often were considered as the trusted ones to speak Sámi with. In some cases, this feeling of safety extended to other course participants as well, and after language courses some of the participants continued using Sámi language outside the course with some other students.

The data shows that a feeling of equality with the interlocutor is important to the new speakers of Sámi. Particularly in the beginning of the language learning process, many of the new speakers would withdraw from the conversation if it was too fast paced or their interlocutors were too proficient. Birgit had found equality and safety in sisterhood: "I speak Sámi with my sister and mother [...] With my sister, it is easier to speak Sámi, because we have learned it the same way". When asked who it was easy to speak Sámi with, the answer was often children and the elderly. Some of the participants work with children or elderly people and express that such environments can feel like safe spaces for them. Many participants use Sámi at work, perhaps because the nature of their work or their workplace require that one uses Sámi, and therefore this pushes them to speak. On the other hand, some other participants described using Sámi at work as optional in that they might opt to speak Sámi, as illustrated by Birgit:

‘

Birgit

De fleste ganger jeg velger å snakke samisk, det er jo egentlig på jobb. Da snakker jeg med de pasientene som oftest begynner å bli glemsk. Og det er liksom ikke så farlig å snakke med dem. For at dem, det kan godt hende det hadde vært det samme å snakke med andre, de ser ikke rart på meg enda om jeg ikke sier alt riktig. De kan svare meg tilbake på samisk innimellom. Kan liksom prate normalt uten at jeg føler at dem veier meg liksom på hva jeg sier og ikke sier. Men jeg vet at mye av det sitter i mitt hodet. At det egentlig er bare tøv.

Most of the time when I choose to speak Sámi, is actually at the job. Those times I speak with patients who starts to get dementia. It is kind of, not so dangerous to speak with them. Because, maybe I could also speak with others, but they do not look at me strangely even though I do not say everything correctly. Sometimes they can answer back to me in Sámi. Somehow, I can speak normally without me feeling like they are criticizing me. Although I do know that these thoughts are just inside my head.

Ellen who works in a Sámi daycare found this to be a place where she could speak Sámi, stating: Ja, jeg bruker det på jobb i samisk barnehage og litt på skolen, der jeg får til. "yes, I use it [Sámi] at work in the day-care and a bit in the school, there I manage. She then goes on to describe how she has started to speak Sámi also with her mother and áhkku "grandmother", who initially had refused to speak Sámi with Ellen, stating that she did not understand and 'couldn't be bothered to speak Sámi" with her granddaughter:

‘

Ellen

Og så bruker jeg det litt med áhkku. Jeg har prøvd å snakke samisk med henne tidligere, det lille jeg kunne, men hun har bare sagt "nei, jeg skjønner ikke, jeg gidder ikke å snakke samisk med deg." Men nå har hun blitt litt eldre, og hun sier ofte ting automatisk på samisk, sånne små kommentarer og sånt. Da prøver jeg å snakke litt samisk til henne også. (.) Jeg kan ikke påstå at jeg har begynt å snakke så mye samisk egentlig,

bare der jeg må. Med unger så går det bra, men med voksne så gjør jeg ikke det. Jeg har begynt å snakke litt hjemme. Kanskje fordi jeg har vært nødt til å øve med mamma, så har det ballet litt på seg.

And then I use it a bit with áhkku. I've tried to speak Sámi with her before, what little I know, but she has just said: "no, I don't understand, I can't be bothered to speak Sámi with you." But now she is a little older, and she often says things automatically in Sámi, small comments and such. Then I try to speak some Sámi with her, too (.) I can't say that I have started to speak so much Sámi actually, only when I have to. With kids it's fine, but with adults I don't do it. I have started to speak a little at home. Perhaps because I had to practice with Mum, then the ball continues rolling.

It seems that Ellen perceives using Sámi with children as one of her main safe spaces. As mentioned above, new speakers are very sensitive to the behaviour of their interlocutors and analyse their reactions. Especially when new speakers start using the language in social settings outside the classroom and attempt to carry out a conversation in Sámi, they feel uncertain if they have understood everything correctly and if they will manage to reply and follow up on comments made by their interlocutors. Inga describes how she had an inner dialogue in these settings and in a sense monitoring her own comprehension and language production:

‘

Inga

Álggos lei veaháš váttis. Mun muittán mun álohii veahá nie láven beare guldalit maid dat lohket. Ipmirdan go mun visot? Na joo, várra mun sáhtán geahččalit juoidá dadjat. Jo, dat maid ipmirdit! Ferten álohii testet veahá.

In the beginning it was really difficult. I can remember that I always used just to hear what they were saying. Do I understand everything? Well, yes, maybe I can try to say something myself. Yes, they understand! I must test a little bit.

When is new speaker of Sámi secure enough to use the language? This is how Siri describes that situation:

‘

Siri

Når jeg føler at jeg behersker så blir jeg fryktelig glad. Når jeg kan flire med andre. Så skjønner jeg at yes! Da blir jeg litt stolt.

When I feel I have control, I become very happy. And when I can laugh with others. then I understand that "yes"! . Then I am proud of myself.

Like Ellen and Inga, other participants also had increased their language use and started using Sámi in their daily lives. Jovnna explains how he developed a strategy for speaking more Sámi. He would chose people he could speak Sámi with and kept finding more conversational partners such he could speak Sámi with more people and his use of Sámi increased.

‘

Jovvna Mun välljejin moadde olbmo geaiguin mun hállen sámegiela, geat ledje juo sámástan muinna. Muhtimat leat hállan dárogiela muinna muhto sii maid álge sámástit veaháš muinna. Ja hálan ainge sámegiela singuin. Mun lean joatkán dainna ja lean maiddái viiddidan dan geainna mun hálan. Dál han šaddet beare eanet ja eanet. Dat han lea buorre (.) Muhtumin hálan dárogillii olbmuiguin ja muhtumin go sámástan de vástidit sámegillii. Jus livččen dávjjit hállan singuin de várra mun sámástivččen singuin. (.) Dál eanet ja eanet olbmot hállet sámegiela muinna. Dat lea šaddan lunddolaš dál.

I chose a couple of persons whom I spoke Sámi with. Those persons had already spoken Sámi to me earlier. Some of them had spoken Norwegian to me also but they also have started speaking Sámi with me and I still talk Sámi with them. I continued in this way, and I have also chosen more people with whom I speak. And now there are more and more of them. Well, that's good. (.) Sometimes I speak Norwegian with some people (who can Sámi) and when I speak Sámi they respond in Sámi. If I talked to them more often then maybe I would speak Sámi with them. (.) Now more and more are talking Sámi with me. Now it has become natural.

To get new language arenas, some participants would make it a habit to start conversations in Sámi with new people. Anne is one of those who has taken Sámi language in use in everyday and sees opportunities to expand language use:

‘

Anne

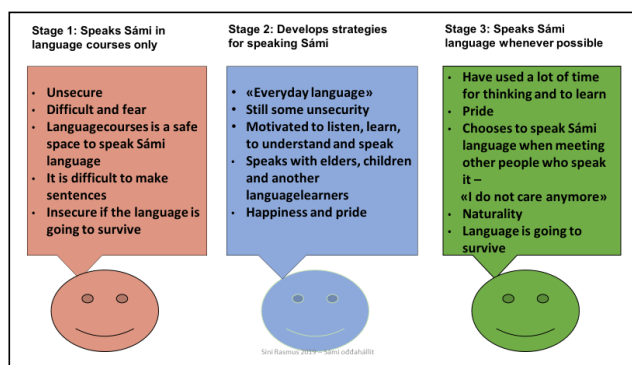
Hálan dál sámegiela juohke beaivvi nu mo barggus, vaikko geainna. Ođđa olbmuiguin álggahan sámegillii jus dieđán sii máhttet sámegiela.

Now I speak Sámi every day, for example at work and with all kind of people. When I meet new people, I always start a conversation in Sámi if I know they can speak it.

It is difficult to determine how much and how well new speakers have to use the language before they feel that it is natural to speak Sámi. It seems that if they do not experience speaking Sámi as natural, the rate of using oral Sámi is lower. In the examples above, we have seen how these new speakers through finding safe spaces gradually have increased their use of Sámi. They recount how this has aided them in speaking Sámi more frequently, in new settings and with more people, even to the extent that they have changed language of interaction with some of their friends, family members and colleagues. In the following section, we will show how such trajectories and mudes can be seen as stages of language reclamation.

9. Stages of reclaiming Sámi

Learning and mastering a language is always individual. This study highlights themes and issues brought up by all the participants. The participants and their experiences can be divided into three different stages according to their attempts and strategies for speaking Sámi, and such stages may exemplify linguistic mudes in the Sámi context. In the study of Catalan, mudes (singular muda) are defined as changes in language behaviour of subjects at different stages in life and the linguistic muda places the focus on the fact that language choices are life investments with open meanings. (Pujolar & Puigdevall 2015). Muda is also connected to age, because a muda often occurs at moments of transition in our lives that have an important effect on different aspects of social identity, see Pujolar & Puigdevall (2015) for a discussion of mudes in the Catalan context. In the process of reclaiming Sámi, we have identified three main stages or mudes. Stage 1: Speaks Sámi in language courses only, Stage 2: Develops strategies for speaking Sámi and Stage 3: Speaks Sámi language whenever possible. These stages illustrate some steps that may be taken when reclaiming Sámi as an adult, see the figure below (based on Rasmus 2019: 57-60).



Based on Rasmus 2019

9.1 Stage 1: Speaks Sámi in language courses only

Participants on this stage expressed that they only want to speak Sámi in a language course because they are most comfortable with speaking in such a setting. This is described as a place where it is safe to speak Sámi and a place where they are expected to speak Sámi. The reasons that the language was not used outside the course could be that the speakers, when not in a language learning context, were afraid that they would “ruin” the language or worried that others should not have to change to Norwegian because they did not understand everything that was said in Sámi.

As we have seen, this stage may feel difficult because among other things self-criticism, fear of being judged by other speakers and fear of using the language. Many expressed that therefore they do not even try to speak the Sámi very often outside the language course. During the interviews, participants frequently expressed a feeling of insecurity, wondering if the language is going to survive in their own lives and in their community. Still the desire to use the language is there. Even though at this stage new speakers do not speak Sámi often in public, they are aware of places and arenas where they can hear and have the opportunity to use the language. They look up to all those new speakers that have taken the language back and use it in everyday life. They also have expectations to others, like politicians to work for the better for language. Some expressed that they found it difficult to talk with people who spoke what they termed as “good Sámi”, fearing that their own spoken Sámi skills were not good enough. Some, as they progress through their language journey, realise that talking to more proficient speakers is a means for developing their Sámi, and try to leave their comfort zone and speak Sámi with more people.

9.2 Stage 2: Develops strategies for speaking Sámi

Like other studies also show, learning a language in the classroom does not automatically lead to people using it routinely in social life. (Pujolar & Puigdevall 2015: 168). Participants on Stage 2 had chosen some people who they are comfortable speaking Sámi with. Such people might be a language course teacher, other students from the course, or someone close to them, small children or old people who are grateful that someone speaks their mother tongue to them. Some participants even said that it is easier to talk to people who know their history.

They still describe their own language skills as simple and limited. Many expressed that they were not able to express themselves in Sámi and stated that the lack of words makes it difficult to produce whole sentences and keep the conversation going. The things that were easy to talk about was eating, clothing and homework. For example, they found that expressing feelings in Sámi was difficult. Even though the use of Sámi was more frequent than for those on Stage 1, when they encountered difficulties speaking Sámi, they often switched to Norwegian.

It could also be that many became more aware of the Sámi language in their own environment, as Ellen expressed: “Now I hear Sámi everywhere. It may be that I am more aware and I listen more now.” At this stage you listen, read and try to find more places to use and develop your spoken language, and the result seems to be that one starts to speak at least some Sámi in other settings than a language course, for instance as at work. At this stage, new speakers are very motivated to learn more, and many expressed a feeling of happiness and pride for their achievement in speaking Sámi language more and more.

9.3 Stage 3: Speaks Sámi whenever possible - “I do not care anymore”

New speakers who had reached this stage, felt that they could speak Sámi everywhere. Interestingly, all the participants on Stage 3 used the same sentence in describing this stage of language use: “I do not care anymore.” All the informants, like on the first and second stage, say that it has been difficult and that they have made worked hard to learn the Sámi language. The description of their language journeys was that they had made a lot of effort thinking about grammar, semantics, their own feelings and of other peoples’ expectations. Inga describes her journey from the difficult beginnings to a feeling of mastery a pride:

6

Inga

Álgnos lei váttis oahppat ođđa sániid muhto dál dat bohtet hui johttilit. Mun jáhkán go hállagoađát de lea álkit oahppat sániid. Álgnos manná veahá njozet ja de luovvana. Jus áiggot oahppat sámegeiela de fertet mannat kursii. Ja de gávdnat báikki dahje olbmo geainna leat oadjebas sámástit. Mun jáhkán lea buorre jus dus lea olmmoš geainna sámástit.

At first it was hard to learn new words, but now I learn them very quickly. I think when you just start talking it is easier to learn new words. At first, the whole progresses very slowly and suddenly everything opens out. If you are going to learn Sámi then you should find a language course. And then you must find a place or a person you dare to talk with. I think it's best if you find such a person.

Even though new speakers on this stage still are aware of their mistakes and failures, they now see the fruits of their perseverance and the hard work they have put in to learn Sámi. They have managed to break out of their negative thought patterns and express feelings of pride and happiness because they have succeeded in using the language Sámi in their everyday lives.

10. Conclusion

In this article we have shown that passive language competence in childhood may later trigger an interest in the minoritised language, and at important moments of transitions, new speakers may start asking themselves: How come that I don't speak this language? The participants in this study have some important common traits and experiences. They state that when they started speaking Sámi, they found that while they could follow a conversation, they found it hard to contribute and this could silence them. This could be due to emotions related to the Sámi language, the social and geographical context and the fact that initially, speaking Sámi demanded focus and energy because these new speakers had to focus on grammar in addition to making sure that they understood what their interlocutors said. They also felt that they had to speak correctly so that those they were interacting with understood them and did not switch to Norwegian. Norwegian and Sámi are very different typologically, and participants said that learning the grammar of the Sámi language and then producing grammatically correct sentences were demanding and difficult. Some expressed that speaking Norwegian, at least initially, felt more natural than speaking Sámi, perhaps because focussing on these grammatical differences was draining, or because they found it difficult to change language of interaction with family, friends and acquaintances. As we have seen, many found it hard and sometimes even impossible to change from Norwegian to Sámi when Norwegian had been established as the language of social interaction. In spite of this, some had managed to make this transition and a fruitful avenue both for future research and language revitalisation programmes would be to investigate and identify further successful strategies employed to achieve this change.

New speakers of Sámi do not lack inner motivation to participate in Sámi language courses and to learn more Sámi. They experienced learning a standardised variety as challenging because they sometimes felt that speaking a standard version of Sámi could be perceived as inauthentic. For these new speakers, learning and mastering the local dialect was seen as important because speaking a local variety was seen as an expression of belonging to family and the local village or region.

In conclusion, we wish to highlight a key question: What makes someone take the step to start speaking? We have identified key mudes such as speaking Sámi with an elderly grandmother who is forgetting Norwegian, taking up a

job where Sámi skills are necessary or speaking Sámi when attending a Sámi course. All these are important, but the most significant transition is entering parenthood. This might make new speakers re-evaluate their own social practices, but also realise that they now are in a position to make a different language choice than the one their parents did; these new speakers make an active decision to speak Sámi with their children. This then leads them onto a new language journey where they raise the next generation of Sámi speakers who hopefully will grow up in a climate characterised by a far greater degree of acceptance of Sámi language and culture. All actions carry with them trajectories of the past, while also projecting possible futures (Lane 2017). For parents choosing to speak Sámi with their children, they see the language as having social and/or emotional value for the future. Minority languages are sometimes perceived as remains of the past, but the existence of new speakers is an important sign that Sámi has chances to prevail in the future. Hence, as pointed out by Leonard (2012), a community may claim its right to speak a language and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspective, as these parents have chosen to do. Ultimately then, language reclamation is about individual and collective struggles for agency.

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Related articles/sources in LME

[primary_sources_excel_table](#)

External sources

Appendix



	Title	Entry/Asset type	ID
Current Entry	New speakers of Sámi: From insecurity to pride	Research_Article	12818309
Outbound links: Entries & External Sources	Entry title	Entry type	Entry ID
Outbound links: Assets	Asset title	Asset type	Asset ID
	Map of Norway	image	13398810
	To young persons in Unjárga	image	13399028
	Isak Saba languagecenter	image	13402563
	Three stages	image	13170115
	Primary Sources Template.xlsx	supplementarymaterial	12959233
Inbound links: Entries	Entry title	Entry type	Entry ID