

# Chapter 3

## ‘But They Call Us the Language Police!’ Speaker and Ethnic Identifying Profiles in the Process of Revitalizing the South Saami Language, Culture and Ethnic Identity



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**Abstract** The aim of this study has been to highlight the complexity of a linguistic community which has undergone two language shifts in less than one century. The different social actors are given a voice in this multiple environments. All these social actors and positions are important to take into consideration in future language planning. To strengthen the societal position of the language and culture, it is important to create learning resources and instruction programmes that are suited to all kinds of speakers and their linguistic and identity tangles. As Paine (op. cit.: 294) stated 15 years ago, the identity tangle consists of the question of *how* to be a Saami—and I could add: how to be *enough* Saami. How much *Saaminess* does one have to produce in the linguistic and ethnic markets to be able to claim linguistic and ethnic legitimacy? The growing group of new speakers is claiming legitimacy and authority on another basis than the traditional authenticity. In this way, they are creating parallel hierarchies and competing legitimacies.

**Iktedimmieh** Ulmie daejnie goerehtimmine lea gellievoetem aktene gieeldh siebriedahkesne vuesiehtidh mij lea göökte gielemålsomh åtne me aktene unnebe tjjem goh akte tjetiejaepie. Doh ovmessie sosijaale aktöörh aktene tjoejem åadtjoeh daennie gellielaaketje byjresisnie. Gaajhkh daah aktöörh jih sijnieh lea vihkeles krööhkestidh dennie bætijen aejkien gielesoejkesjimmesne. Juktie siebriedahkesijnem nænnoestehdedh gielesne jih kultuvresne lea vihkeles lieremevierhtieh jih bihkedimmieprogrammeh tseegkedh mah gaajhkesaarhts soptsestæjjide sjiehtieh jih dej tsagkesidie mejtie gielen jih identiteeten bijre utnieh. Goh Paine jeehti 15 jaepiej juassah, identiteetetsagkesisnie lea gyhtjelasse guktie lea saemine årrodh jih manne

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This chapter presents preliminary results from my ongoing Ph.D. project.

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maahtam lissiehtidh: Guktie nuekie saemine árrodh. Man jijnjem saemienvoetem tjuara buektedh dennie gïeeldh jïh etnihkeles sijjesne juktie mahtedh gïeeldh jïh etnihkeles legitimiteetem krieveth. Dïhte sjïdtije dâehkie orre saemiestæjijiste legitimiteetem jïh autoriteetem aktene jeatjah vâaroemisnie kreava goh dïhte aerpievuekien tjïelkevoete. Naemhtie dah baalte hierarkijh jïh gahtjije legitimiteetem tseegkieh.

### 3.1 Introduction

Due to radical changes in the relevant ideologies and education policies over the last century, the South Saami linguistic community of today is very complex. A small and fragile speech community used to be characterized by protection and maintenance strategies based on traditional values during the period of the active assimilation policies practised by the majority society. Today, as assimilation has more or less been replaced by a Saami-friendly policy and cultural revitalization, the linguistic community consists of new types of speakers. The traditional values are challenged in different ways as these new speakers are trying to find their place in the community of practice.

All societies have a range of speakers on different levels of proficiency and command, but Grinevald and Bert (2011: 47) argue that linguistic communities with endangered languages stand out from those with non-endangered languages:

There are two basic differences between the range of speakers of endangered and non-endangered languages. One is that, as the level of vitality of a language decreases, the proportion of supposedly marginal types of speakers will become more prevalent, perhaps rising eventually to become the bulk of the population of speakers. In this case, there may also be many varieties of second-language learners or speakers, as well as many speakers at different levels of language attrition. A second characteristic is that the phenomenon of language loss gives rise to some types of speakers that are specific to those circumstances, not so much in terms of their levels of knowledge of the language, but more in terms of sociopsychological traits that sometimes create unexpected interactions.

Using qualitative interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, this chapter addresses some of these *sociopsychological traits*, as Grinevald and Bert call them. Issues that arise under these traits, like negotiations over what constitutes *Saaminess* when it comes to language and ethnic identity, are highly present within the South Saami community. The set of values associated with the cultural and linguistic revitalization movement challenges and develops the traditional values. In recent decades, several South Saami institutions have been built, and great effort has been put into language planning and development. The South Saami community of practice is very diverse as the participants are positioned in highly different and sometimes contradictory positions to each other when it comes to linguistic experience and proficiency, language ideology, ethnic identification and language planning goals. Hence, they have disparate needs if they are to become stronger language users—or simply to be able to practise the

language in the first place—and to take full ownership of the Saami identity. Sometimes, the divergent backgrounds and perspectives lead to misunderstandings and conflicts—like the one in the title above where teachers are involuntarily referred to by others as 'language police'. This chapter aims to shed light on the different kinds of speakers participating in the South Saami community of practice and the complexity that these together constitute. Furthermore, it attempts to understand the interaction between the various social actors in light of historic circumstances, linguistic and ethnic *authority, authenticity and legitimacy*.

## 3.2 Speaker Types

Nancy Dorian was the first to point out different speaker types in an endangered linguistic community in her description of the death of East Sutherland Gaelic in Scotland (Dorian 1977). When she wanted to describe and document the dying language, she discovered 'considerable differences in the Gaelic of the oldest available fluent speakers and the youngest, the Gaelic of the latter showing reduction and loss in certain areas in comparison with the former' (ibid.: 23). The *semi-speaker* is described (ibid.: 24) as being at the lower end of the scale of the total pool of speakers. They 'could make themselves understood in imperfect Gaelic but were very much more at home in English'. Dorian's problem with the semi-speaker was how she could 'gauge the completeness and intactness of the version of the language which [she received] from [her] informants'. The semi-speakers are contrasted to *fluent speakers*, monolingual or bilingual, who have a good or full command of the language (loc. cit.). Later, the *rememberer* was added by Campbell and Muntzel (1989) (Grinevald and Bert 2011: 47). This type of speaker has an even poorer command of the language than the semi-speaker.

These earliest speaker types are categorized exclusively according to language proficiency—and with the purpose of documenting a previously unwritten and poorly documented language. Grinevald and Bert (2011) present a speaker typology based on more factors which take into consideration a greater part of the informant's individual (socio)linguistic characteristics. From this typology, the most relevant category for this study is the *neo-speakers*: 'Neo-speakers are learners of endangered languages in the context of revitalization programmes and activities' (ibid.: 52). They can reach any level of competence, but many become some kind of a semi-speaker. '[T]heir positive attitudes towards the endangered language and their particular vision of the endangered language community [...] propels them into conscious efforts to learn it' (loc. cit.).

### 3.3 New Speakerness

Prior to this particular publication by Grinevald and Bert (2011), according to their own account (ibid: 51), the term *neo-speaker* had not been referenced in the literature. But as they point out, neo-speakers ‘are becoming central to language revitalization, whose aim is partly to produce this kind of speaker’ (loc. cit.). As the number of minority languages being revitalized has been increasing over the most recent decades, there has been considerable need for this concept within the study of revitalizing languages. Hence, since 2011 the notion of the neo-speaker has been growing into a particular field of interest: *new speakerness*.

While all the other categories in the typology are constructed within the concept of language shift—the semi-speaker being a carrier of ‘decay’, the notion of the neo- or new speaker is constructed on the basis of linguistic revitalization and the reversed shift. In this context, the new speakers are the carriers of hope and ‘life support’ for the further existence of the language.

The new speakers are people

with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language, but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners. The emergence of this profile of speaker draws our attention to the ways in which minority linguistic communities are changing because of globalization and the new profiles of speakers that this new social order is creating. (O’Rourke et al. 2015: 1)

The new speaker reflects a new way to develop in the process where both majority and minority populations have ‘historically used language to legitimize claims to nationhood and cultural authenticity’ (ibid: 2). Also, the ‘new speaker’ label represents a new scientific perspective, namely

growing critiques in multilingual research of the fundamental epistemologies on which our understanding of language has been based. It prompts us to query how linguistics as a discipline has participated in the reproduction of linguistic ideologies, essentially through abstract notions of “nativeness”, which [...] have in fact been shown to have little or no empirical basis. (loc. cit.)

Even though minority language research has existed for a long time, the new speaker has not been given much attention—the concept has been left in the shadow of the *native speaker*.<sup>1</sup> O’Rourke et al. state that the linguistic terminology describing both new speakers and their language and the new form of the language appearing after the reversed shift are often represented by ‘*clinical* categorizations’ (ibid.: 10) with an underlying comparison to the former native, mother tongue speakers and their more ‘intact’ language. This is at worst delegitimizing both speakers and language, and

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<sup>1</sup>The notion of *nativeness* or the *native speaker* has been criticized by several, see, e.g. O’Rourke and Pujolar (2013), Hornsby (2015), Frekko (2009), Doerr (2009), Davies (2003), Bucholtz (2003), etc.

documenting 'linguistic *dis*-embodiment through interference, hybridization, grammatical simplification and other forms of tainted, corrupted or otherwise pathologic language practices of more "correct" linguistic models' (loc. cit.). One could say that the researcher in this way contributes to understanding the language—and its speakers—as museum items. The concept of the new speaker describes both the speaker and his or her language forms *without* the underlying comparison to something more 'genuine' or 'real'. It can be seen 'to represent a *re*-embodiment of the language [...] [and to] give new speakers recognition as linguistic models in and of themselves' (loc. cit.). Studies of new speakerness often provide descriptions of how the emergence of revitalization and the generations of new speakers challenge existing hierarchical structures and lead to new and multiplex negotiations of language and speaker authenticity, authority and legitimacy.

In this study, new speakers have not been investigated exclusively, but many of the informants are some kind of new speaker, and many of the conflicts and dilemmas in the South Saami linguistic community revolve around the questions of the status of the new speakers and their linguistic performances.

### 3.4 Saami Identity Negotiations

In the aftermath of World War II, the stage was set for fundamental changes in managing, negotiating and developing the Saami identity. The Saami areas in the northernmost part of Norway had been torched, and the country was being rebuilt under a strong ideology of unification. The Saami ethnopolitical movements grew stronger as the assimilation policy was gradually abandoned.

Social anthropologists have been present among the Saami people, especially in the northernmost regions, since the 1950s. Robert Paine was one of the first to describe both the coastal Saami communities<sup>2</sup> and the inland reindeer herding communities. He summarizes the development of the identity negotiations in the North Saami areas in Norway: In the 1950s, the struggle was between being Saami or Norwegian. The following decades the question turned into how to shape and reshape Saami culture, and after that again, the debate revolved around the criteria, and their validity, for Saami identity among the Saami people themselves (Paine 2003: 298). As the Saami ethnopolitical movements grew and claimed rights, the relations between power and collective identity in a Saami-Norwegian government context were changed. This introduced Saami self-determination, and with that comes the privilege of self-understanding, to be able to confirm or dispute (ibid.: 292). Vigdis Stordahl, who has studied Saami youth, describes the differences between the youth of the 1970s and the 1990s to illustrate the same development:

For the youth of the 1970s [...] the life project was to create a Sámi identity solely based on Sámi traditions [...]. This was a project in opposition to mainstream society. At the same

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<sup>2</sup>The coastal Saami communities were generally based on combined farming and fishing, and not extensive reindeer herding.

time it was in opposition to their own parent's generation whose life project had been either to keep quiet, hide their Sámi identity or to strive to be as clever as possible in Norwegian language and culture. (Stordahl 1997: 145)

[...]

The 90s generation is the first generation of Sámi [...] to have received training in Sámi language and culture throughout their school years. [...] [I]n contrast to their parents [they] have no lost Sámi past to avenge or mourn. [...] They are, on the contrary, claiming their right to determine their own terms and symbols of Sámi-ness which they feel appropriate to the demands of their own time. (ibid.: 147 f.)

Today, the pain of the *identity tangle*<sup>3</sup> for many lies not in the question of being or not, but *how* to be (Paine op. cit.: 294). Paine (ibid.: 295) then states his concern over the fact that the necessity for ethnopolitical programmes (which follows after a Norwegian hegemony) and the value of individuality are possibly incompatible entities. *Collective* uniqueness and *individual* uniqueness sometimes pull in each their direction.

The South Saami community has undergone more or less the same development as in the North, but with some important exceptions. In the South, the Norwegianization pressure has been more powerful, and the language and culture shift started earlier. The Saami coastal culture, based on fishing and farming, was already absorbed by the majority population by the second half of the nineteenth century (Hermanstrand 2014). This means the reindeer herding livelihood has been, and still is, an even more important factor than in the north when it comes to defining the Saami culture and identity—and who is an authentic Saami or not. These processes are not as well documented scientifically as the ones in the north, but Christina Åhrén (2008) has described the identity negotiations among young Saamis living in Sweden. She shows how an underlying ethnocentrism is the reason why Saami individuals are valued differently, and the particular Saami heritage one grows up with becomes the basis for divergent kinds of *Saaminess*.

[...][D]ifferent Saami symbols are given different value. The result is a dominating ethnocentrism based on a *cultural ladder* where the most original is valued the highest. Language, reindeer herding, traditional handcraft and other symbols with a long history are markers with high value. (ibid.: 161) (my translation from Swedish)

The Swedish policy towards the Saami population was slightly different from the Norwegian policy in the sense that the Saami population was divided in two, where only the settled Saamis were to be assimilated into the majority. The nomadic reindeer herders, on the other hand, were to be conserved and 'protected' from the Swedish majority society and modernity. The territorial rights of today are dependent on whether your Saami ancestors were reindeer herders or not. This is the main reason why the differences, negotiations and conflicts between the Saamis with a connection to the reindeer herding communities and those without are more severe in Sweden than in Norway. Still, this pattern, or *cultural ladder*, is also, as we will later see, definitely recognizable in the collected material from the Norwegian South Saamis.

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<sup>3</sup>My translation of *identitetsflope* from Paine's (2003) title.

### 3.5 South Saami Speaker and Ethnic Identifying Profiles

The fieldwork for this project consists of 28 qualitative interviews, and ethnographic participation and observation. The 28 informants range from 20 to 75 years of age—although most of them are in their 20s or 30s. They come from both the northern, middle and southern part of the South Saami area, from both Norway and Sweden—although most are from Norway, and they have different backgrounds when it comes to attachment to the reindeer herding units, language skills and education.

In the following, the findings relating to South Saami *speaker and ethnic identifying profiles* are presented. The term '*profiles*' has been chosen because it appears to be less fixed and static than the traditional term '*types*' from the speaker typologies. Questions of language usage and ethnic identification are tangled closely together in the informants' narratives of their experiences in the South Saami community of practice. Consequently, the profiles are called not only *speaker* profiles but also *ethnic identifying* profiles. *Identifying* suggests that this is an ongoing process throughout different stages in life, and there is sometimes discrepancy between the self- and other-attribution of identity. The categorization of the profiles is the result of a highly inductive method as there is no attempt to shape the data into non-overlapping, 'symmetrical' categories. On the contrary, the profiles are very much *overlapping*, both synchronously and diachronically in the way that one person can be several of the profiles both at the same time and also during a time span. They are *unsymmetrical* in the way that some of the profiles represent a large group of people, others a very few. Moreover, the criteria for the categorization do not follow a rigid system. The criteria are *generations, choice of shift or maintenance, self- and other-attribution of ethnic identity, linguistic competence and participation/status in the community of practice, language ideology and linguistic life project*. Some of the names of the profiles do not exist *literally* as labels in the community, others do. The informants' linguistic competence is not measured or tested, it is all based on self-reported proficiency and the ability to use the language.

There are contradictory relations between many of these profiles, and the following dramaturgy of the presentation is more or less built on opposition pairs.

#### 3.5.1 *The Older Saamis—Old Speakers*

The diversities in linguistic and ethnic command, experience, norms, attitudes, competence and identification do not always follow the generations, but to a great extent they do. The two first categories divide the population roughly into 'older' and 'younger' Saamis. Because the language and identity shift took place at different times in different parts of South Saepmie, it is difficult to draw exact time lines between who is older or younger in this context. 'Older' means actually that they grew up before the language shift in their family, while the 'younger' grew up after. The older Saamis have experienced the assimilation policy directly, and they grew

up with a stigma attached to their Saami identity. Most of them went to assimilation boarding schools where speaking Saami was not allowed, and some of them did not know Norwegian or Swedish when they started school. Many of them are fluent speakers of South Saami, but some do not know how to write the language. Those who can have learned it as adults. Their oral Saami is one of the traditional dialects, and their linguistic identity is strongly attached to it and the region it represents. The written standard or the ‘new’, revitalized spoken language based on it, sometimes appears foreign to this group. They often feel very strongly about what they see as linguistic mistakes and errors.

Some of the young ... they should consult us before writing something! There’s an example from a grave inscription - and they just got it *all* wrong!

### 3.5.2 *The Language Shifters*

These are elderly people today who once chose to make Norwegian or Swedish their home language. Most continued to speak Saami among the grown-ups, but the children were not included in the Saami conversations. Many of them strongly regret their choice today—and they question whether they actually made a ‘choice’. The pressure from the assimilation policy was strong, and many of them have traumas or bad memories from not knowing the majority language.

He said something to me in Norwegian, and I understood. But I didn’t know how to reply in Norwegian, so I remained silent. – Look, she must be stupid, he said to the other guy.

There were separate boarding schools for Saami children, and many lived far away from their families. The staff at the boarding houses often were Saamis, or at least knew Saami, but the teachers were seldom Saami, and it was not allowed to speak Saami in class. Sometimes, one could be punished for doing so. These experiences made many determined to give their children a better foundation before going to school.

We didn’t want our kids to experience what we did! We wanted a better future for them – and the future went via the Norwegian language. We thought this was the best for them – not to be Saami.

### 3.5.3 *The Non-shifters*

Others never stopped speaking Saami with their children—in some families the language shift never occurred. At the Saami congress in 1917,<sup>4</sup> one of the topics of

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<sup>4</sup>This meeting in Trondheim in 1917 is seen as one of the most important events in the history of the Saami ethnopolitical movement. For the first time, Saami people from Norway and Sweden met to discuss common issues and to claim rights as a united people.



discussion was to establish a separate Saami school where Saami children could have instruction both in and on Saami. Some years after this, the ethnopolitical movement was not very strong, but the ideas from the meeting must have been carried on by someone. For this reason, a language and culture shift took place, some of the people did *not* follow the hegemonic ideology and kept on speaking Saami, also with their children. Some of them are still today concerned with those who did *not* fight for the Saami culture and language when the pressure from the majority community was at its strongest:

They didn't stick with us then, when times were really hard. But now – as things are better - now it's popular to be a Saami - now, they come back, and they think that they know everything!

The pronoun 'they' does not necessarily point to the exact same persons—but rather to the descendants of those who made this choice of not transmitting Saami to the next generation. Kinship is a very central concept in the Saami culture, and the individual can sometimes be judged by the choices of the ancestors.

### 3.5.3.1 The Younger Saamis—New Speakers

The majority of the younger Saamis did not learn South Saami as children. What seemed to be the best choice for the previous generations turned into a big loss for the younger ones. This is called *the third (or second)-generation phenomenon* (e.g. Huss 1999; Tsunoda 2005 and Johansen 2009). Members of this generation are trying to gain bilingualism and trying to acquire and strengthen the language that was deselected by their parents or grandparents. They express a huge feeling of responsibility as the generation that has to secure the future of the language.

Almost on a daily basis, I feel guilty for not using the language enough, and for not doing enough to learn more.

Very many of them have had some kind of South Saami instruction during school, and due to this, they can write South Saami, but orally they are in part semi-speakers and in part new speakers—both individually and as a group. Many of them have grown up hearing Saami and have a partial understanding of the language. Perhaps, they are also able to speak some, especially in restricted domains. Most of their productive skills, however, have been learned in school. However, many have critical comments on how they were taught what they see as their *heart language*, or even *mother tongue*,<sup>5</sup> during school.

There was this focus on *grammar* all the time. We didn't learn how to just speak. If you said something incorrectly, they told you right away: That's wrong!

As they have been growing up parallel with the ever rising ethnopolitical and revitalization movement, they feel a strong pride about their Saami identity, but also

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<sup>5</sup>Even though they do not have what we think of as traditional mother tongue proficiency in the language, new speakers look upon South Saami as their "real" mother tongue.

a fundamental uncertainty because of their lack of linguistic skills. Most of them struggle with psychological barriers to speaking Saami due to fear of being caught saying something incorrectly:

It feels *totally* different to speak incorrectly in South Saami than in other languages, like for example English. It's like ... like having the skin stripped off - like someone is actually *flaying* you!

Instead of taking this risk of being 'flayed' on an everyday basis, most young Saamis end up speaking the *third variety* that they have in their linguistic register: an ethnolect consisting of a local Norwegian or Swedish dialect with certain Saami words embedded in it. We will return to this variety later. The inability to speak Saami fluently pains the young generation deeply due to two major discrepancies. The first discrepancy is between the self- and other-attribution of identity. Others, both from inside the Saami community, but also from the Scandinavian majority, do not see them as 'real' or 'complete' Saamis. They are often met with the expectation of being fluent speakers—an expectation they cannot fulfil. The second discrepancy is between what they feel inside and what they are able to express through their linguistic repertoire. For most of them, the Norwegian/Swedish language can never fully express their Saami identity. As already mentioned, they see South Saami as their mother tongue.

### 3.5.4 *The Half Saamis*

There is a stigma attached to having a non-Saami parent. Some of these people have experienced a double stigma during their adolescence. In Norwegian/Swedish contexts, they are sometimes *too much* Saami, and in Saami contexts they are sometimes not *enough* Saami. This is especially seen in the Saami environment where many of this group have grown up being ranked in a 'blood percentage system'.

Everyone knew who was half or a quarter or whatever. And we used it against each other: - You're only half, so you're not as good as me, I was once told. But I knew that the mother of that boy, was only 1/8th, so I got him back.

The young half-Saami in particular have a strong barrier against speaking Saami. Saying something incorrectly is like revealing an incomplete Saami identity. However, many of them say that the 'blood percentage ranking system' is now not as pressing as it used to be. As adults they have redefined themselves from having a 'double-half-identity' or a 'neither-nor-identity' to having a 'both-and-identity':

I'm one whole person! No one can come here and tell me I'm half. I am *both* Saami *and* Norwegian, ... maybe I feel slightly more Saami by the way, but it gives me a lot to have both.

### 3.5.5 *The Double Saami*

Some are in the fortunate position to be trilinguals. They have one South Saami parent and one North or Lule Saami parent. If one of the parents come from the 'Norwegian side' and the other from the 'Swedish side', they are even quadrilinguals and speak both Norwegian and Swedish in addition to two different Saami languages. This is a very big contrast to the reality of the young new speakers and the half Saamis.

You know what, I feel so rich! I feel like I can almost turn into different personalities, ... or show different parts of me when I speak the different languages. But of course, I miss more young people to speak with in both my Saami languages.

Obviously, these exclusive speakers have a very wide linguistic register to choose from when expressing themselves and their ethnic identity. However, they do not necessarily have an equal command of the two Saami languages.

### 3.5.6 *The Core Saamis*

The core Saamis have grown up in a reindeer herding family, they learned Saami as a mother tongue during their adolescence and both their parents are Saamis. They are at the top of the Saami hierarchy and possess definition power. They feel a strong ownership of both the Saami language and traditions.

Of course, I want to continue with reindeer herding. I've grown up with it, and I want to keep the traditions alive. It's both something I want, and some kind of ... Well, it's expected of me.

Some in this group have a dilemma when they are at Saami gatherings. They always want to speak as much Saami as possible, but are aware that speaking solely Saami can be perceived as excluding those who are not fluent speakers. At the same time, speaking Norwegian/Swedish to a new speaker who is not yet fluent may also be perceived as an exclusion or rejection. Sometimes, what learners of the language want is to be invited to speak Saami and practise their proficiency with the fluent speakers.

Because the last thing I want to do is to put someone in an embarrassing situation ... by addressing them in Saami, and then it turns out they don't understand what I'm saying. But yet I want to invite them into speaking Saami ... I tell you, it's a minefield!

Others do not see the dilemma and show little mercy for the new speakers.

I really don't get why this is so difficult. Why can't they just learn the language if that's what they want to do?

### 3.5.7 *The Reversed Shifter*

Almost all of the informants who do not already have children say that when they have children in the future, they will start speaking Saami as a home language. This goal of becoming a *reversed shifter* or a *new fluent speaker* for the sake of their future children is the reason why many spend time and effort in going to Saami courses. Echoing their ancestors, they do not want their children to go through the same as they did themselves. But for this generation what they want to avoid is loss of language and difficult identity negotiations. They want to empower their children and give them what they themselves did not have: bilingualism and a strong and complete Saami identity. Moreover, they have a very strong continuity perspective: Their contribution to the survival of the language is that they want to transfer the language to the next generation in a better shape than it was when they got it from their elders.

The ones who have actually come to this point, who have become parents and started to speak Saami with their children, displayed huge amounts of awareness, courage, effort and hard work—both before they had their children, and after they were born. Keskitalo (2005) talks about the emotional challenge it was for her to speak Saami to her newborn child for the first time: ‘I had to whisper’. Just becoming used to hearing one’s own voice speaking Saami can be a challenge.

Teaching a child a language which is not your own mother tongue demands not just positive attitudes but also linguistic skills—and a lot of self-discipline. One of the informants had the South Saami dictionary in a kitchen drawer—easily accessible during everyday routines:

Because when you’re in the middle of something – cooking with the kids, and you suddenly don’t know a word ... You just have to look it up immediately!

[...]

Once we were outside in the garden, and [the child] saw a snail for the first time. I didn’t know what “snail” was in Saami, so before I spoke to her about it, I ran inside and checked in the dictionary. Because I have this idea that the children will learn Saami better if they hear the Saami word *before* the Norwegian word, for the new things that they see and discover.

Not all are waiting until they have children to become reversed shifters. They study hard to learn the language, and often have a friend in the exact same situation to practise with. They make clear deals and arrangements about using the language and rehearsing together. They feel a very strong ownership of the language, and as they are studying the language at university, they possess a high metalinguistic knowledge and awareness.

I’ll speak the language no matter what they say – I don’t care, because the language is mine too. To learn it, I have to use it and make mistakes. Deal with it.

### 3.5.8 *The Language Police*

There are at least two main groups of the language police. One group comprises fluent speakers with formal education who very often work as teachers or language professionals. The other group comprises non-professional fluent speakers who are engaged in language matters. Both of them see themselves as the guardians of the language—they protect the language from deteriorating and being destroyed and changed by the Scandinavian languages. Throughout history, this linguistic purism has been a question of life or death for the language. Without these protecting attitudes, the language most likely would be out of use. However, if the ownership of a very small group of the population is too strong, and too exclusionary towards other speaker groups, it will have the opposite effect (Dorian 1994). Their goal is to help learners of the language speak the language correctly. If someone says something incorrectly, it is their task to make them aware of the mistake so they can say things correctly the next time. Some of them are not happy about being called language police.

But they call us the language police! We're only trying to help them!

However, many are aware of the possible negative effect correcting someone's language can have.

Maybe we need to discuss how we can do it [make someone aware of their mistakes] in a more careful way?

Many romanticize the language and the fluent speakers of the past, and have an idea of the old language as the most 'real' or 'genuine'.

Oh, but the ones who *really* knew how to speak the language, they're all dead by now.

### 3.5.9 *The Non-speaker*

The individuals in this group stand out from the rest of the informants as they are not attempting to speak Saami. They see that the language has important value, but for them personally, it is not important. They have a strong Saami identity, but they choose other items from the pool of Saami identity markers.

The language is not important to me – I actually don't miss it, and I don't have any problem seeing myself as a complete Saami without the language.

### 3.6 Interaction in Linguistic and Ethnic Markets

As we can see, the historic past with assimilation and language shift, resilience and revitalization has created a community where the social actors have widely varying ethnic and linguistic resources. Individuals of today are carrying the weight of their ancestors more or less fortunate choices from more than half a century ago. Different views of the world collide and create conflicting relations between the community members. The axes of the categories run in part alongside each other, and in part across each other. What generation the speakers belong to, referring to their own and their ancestor's choices, will and ability to speak the language, their managing of their ethnic identity and their long-term goals of how to realize their own ethnicity are all axes along which they spread out widely. In a small community of practice, these subgroups become even smaller, and some of these groups have had a marginalized position within the community.

However, what most of the social actors have in common is that their actions, choices and ideologies are adequate responses to the environment and historic circumstances in which they are shaped and executed. Most of them just want to put the history right again. The young new speakers, whose South Saami contains neologisms and errors, do not speak like that because they want to dilute the language. Indeed, the so-called language police do not want people to stop speaking Saami when correcting their language.

Since the two South Saami schools mentioned above were established in the 50s and 60s, several other Saami institutions and initiatives have successfully been established—both in Saepmie in general, and in South Saepmie. Along with the establishment of these, there have been numerous open and more hidden discussions around the topics of defining, developing and managing language, history, culture and identity, and the concepts of authority, authenticity and legitimacy are keywords in these negotiations.

As we have seen, Christian Åhrén describes a hierarchic *cultural ladder* where the most original is given the highest value. Through the descriptions of the speaker profiles and their quotations, one can also clearly see this pattern in this material. These values and evaluations lay the foundation for the interaction between the various social actors, both in the linguistic and the ethnic markets.

All the speakers and participants, and their linguistic and ethnic products, are evaluated by others in the South Saami linguistic and ethnic market. On top of the hierarchy is the 'untainted' South Saami—both ethnic and linguistic. The 'blood percentage ranking system' testifies to the hierarchy with the genuine Saami on top. Linguistically, we have seen that many of the speakers look back in time to find their ideas of the best or most authentic language. This is in general a very common idea about language, and O'Rourke and Walsh (2015: 69) give an example from an informant in a study of Irish: 'Liam is highly critical of language mixing and looks to the past for linguistic purity and authenticity. He is of the opinion in fact that there are no real native speakers left. They are all dead, he says'. This is exactly the same essentialist linguistic ideology as found in this material. It is a fundamental

belief among almost all participants in this study, independent of which profile I have categorized them into. Both new and elderly informants romanticized the speech of their grandparents and great-grandparents. The authentic language is seen as 'fixed and bounded, as a code rather than practice and as naturally given or taken for granted' (O'Rourke and Walsh 2015: 66). Scandinavian influence on the language is in part still interpreted within an assimilation policy view of the world as something that is threatening and destroying the language.

The authentic speakers are constructed as belonging to particular places, producing locally orientated language that is in and of that location. In [...] minority languages, authenticity has been tied tightly to the speech of rural peasants [in our case: reindeer herders] from isolated communities as these are speakers who have been seen as untainted by social contact with other cultures, particularly the [majority culture]. (Ó hlfearnáin 2015: 50)

What divides the new speakers from the old with respect to these views is that the new speakers know that this ideal is no longer a reachable reality. For them, the question of survival is the most important. As they are trying to change their surroundings, they are social constructivists in practice, even though not fully in their ideology.

Below the 'untainted' South Saami is the 'new' language, or the revitalized language—called both *School-Saami* and *Book-Saami*. The new speakers themselves have not acquired names,<sup>6</sup> but their language has—although these expressions most probably were invented as names for the written standard—before someone started to speak like that. The written standard was based more or less on one of the traditional South Saami dialects. For a long time, this was the source of conflict in the community. The standardization of the language and the institutionalization of it by founding the schools created a new form of linguistic authority. Strong voices belonging to the other dialect areas felt devalued by the increased status of the chosen dialect. As Costa et al. (2018: 2) state, '[t]his potentially establishes linguistic standards that speakers themselves cannot meet, together with new hierarchies that give advantage to some speakers over others'. Many of the elderly, who only learned Norwegian or Swedish in school, do not recognize the standardized language and do not feel at home in it. Since the standardization, the language is being used in more and more domains, and the new terminology, neologisms, the Scandinavian loan words and the use of old Saami words with a new semantic meaning are often foreign to the elderly.

The institutionalization of the language and culture has created many jobs where formal knowledge of the language is required. This has indeed opened the doors for the young new speakers. There are not enough people with sufficient qualifications to fill all the positions at schools, kindergartens, language centres, museums, universities, state and regional administrations and so on. Some get the chance to work with the language without being fluent speakers in the beginning, and this helps them gain authority in the linguistic market. Jaffa 2015: 42 points out that '[t]hese new forms of

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<sup>6</sup>In the North Saami area, however, the expression "new Saami" has been in use for a long time about those who did not grow up with a Saami identity, but as adults have taken back their ethnic identity.

authority [...] [from institutionalizing the language] do not replace traditional criteria but rather, exist alongside them, creating a multiple, complex ideological field’.

Below the School- or Book-Saami in the hierarchy of the linguistic market, we find the ethnolect, the spoken Norwegian or Swedish dialect with Saami words embedded in it. The embedded words are often linked to traditionally Saami domains like kinship, reindeer herding, traditional handcraft, place, landscape or other strong symbolic carriers of *Saaminess*. One informant puts it like this:

I remember really well how important it was to me, when I was younger, to speak like this. At least I knew *some* words - and I wanted to show everyone!

The Saami words work as identifiers for giving and receiving internal identity confirmation, a kind of *in-group unifiers*, and for the older and the fluent speakers they show that they know at least *something*—this can be seen as an attempt to gain authenticity by using vocabulary from high authenticity cultural concepts. This ethnolect is widely used in the community, and since this has not yet been researched, one can only guess that it might have been developed within the families where Saami went out of use. According to the young ones, they have always been speaking like this at home—both with their parents and grandparents. Although not everyone in the community is supportive of this way of mixing the languages, the social risks from speaking like this are much lower than when speaking erroneous Saami.

Erroneous Saami is at the bottom of the hierarchy. When trying to speak Saami fluently, speakers are trying to increase their authenticity as a Saami and their legitimacy as a Saami speaker. Being explicitly corrected can be described as being delegitimized as a Saami speaker and unauthenticated as a Saami person by someone who is, and who possesses the power of definition for what is legitimate and authentic or not.

In the new-speaker niche market, where more or less everyone is struggling in the same way to become legitimate speakers, trying to speak fluently has a high value. Very often the speakers have spent considerable amounts of time and effort on learning what they know, and achieving their level of linguistic proficiency has been hard work. Within this *revitalization ideology*, trying to speak fluently is what eventually will strengthen the language. But from an essentialist view, the errors are considered a threat to the existence and authenticity of the language, rather than the future of the language. The flayed-like pain that arises as the linguistic product, which has a high value in the new-speaker niche market, is being devalued and delegitimized by other social actors with a higher linguistic and ethnic authority in the larger linguistic market. The new speakers have to expose themselves to this potential pain as they again and again negotiate their participation in the linguistic market. The group of the reversed shifters shows that to be able to become a fluent speaker and state one’s own legitimacy as a speaker, one also has to overcome the identity tangles by approaching the identity issues in a constructionist view. One informant who has done exactly that, says:

There is no such thing as a more or less or higher or lower worthy Saami: I’m a Saami and that’s that. I have the right to speak the language too.



### 3.7 Summary

As the South Saami ethnopolitical movement slowly managed to turn the language and culture shift and establish institutions for maintaining and revitalizing the language and culture, the foundation was in place to enable major changes in the traditional society, and in its survival strategies, attitudes and so on, as well as in the hierarchies and authority structures in the South Saami community. Shame turned into pride and assimilation into resistance. The silence was replaced by open debate, and the invisible became visible and exposed to the outside world. Unity turned into differentiation, and collective uniqueness was challenged by individual uniqueness. The enemies became friends, and resistance was transformed into cooperation and partnership. Language loss was replaced by language regained, and the authentic language and culture was tainted by the majority as the borders between them were dimmed.

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