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	作成者: Helander, Nils Øivind
	メールアドレス:
	所属:
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State Languages as a Challenge to Ethnicity in the Sami Land

Nils Øivind Helander
Nordic Sami Institute

The Sami in Northern Scandinavia and Finland are often considered to be the single most fortunate and advanced Northern minority people in the world as far as both their political status and their material standard of living are concerned. Nevertheless, the Sami territory is traversed by several state borders, and the fates of the Sami in the different Nordic countries are not identical. The paper discusses the impact of the state borders on various aspects of the inherited Sami language and culture.

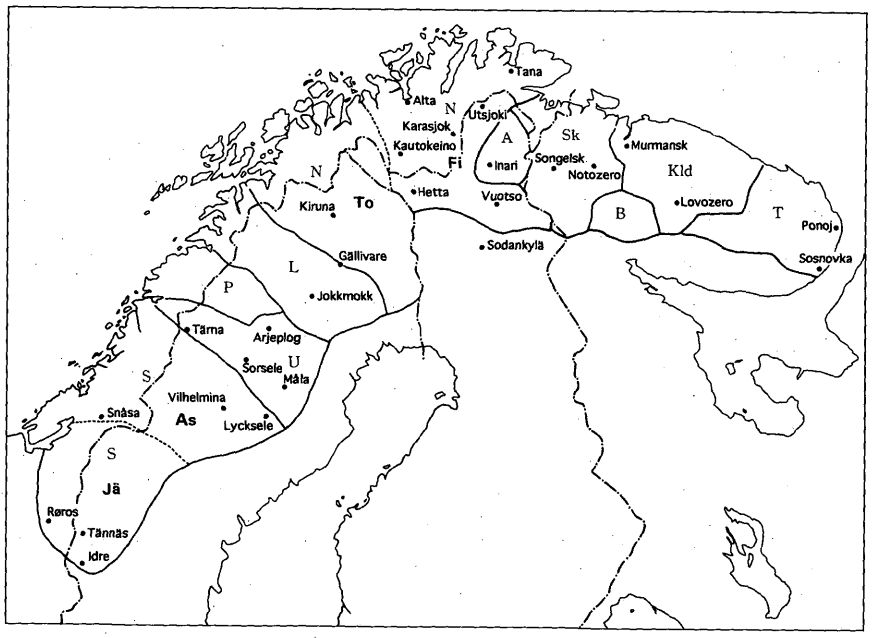
1. THE SAMI LAND AND THE SAMI LANGUAGE

With regard to the formation of nations and the drawing of borders on the map, the Sami language and culture are in the same situation as many other langages and cultures. Rather few countries have a population whose members have all the same mother tongue and ethnical background—in this connection I am not speaking about those members who have another mother tongue because of immigration from other countries. Some of these multilingual countries have more than one official language, others have just one. Usually a country's main language is the language of the majority of the population, or the language of the dominant social upper-class. The foundation of national states and the manifestation of the borders in the Sami area had a great impact on the Sami culture. The main slogan was for a long time "one country, one language", and it was not until our time that the idea of the rights of the minority and aboriginal people gained ground in the political awareness of the majority populations.

The Sami culture has, of course, been influenced by the majority cultures since long before the existing political borders were drawn and the whole Sami territory became part of the four countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The border between Norway and Sweden was drawn in 1751, and during that period Finland was also part of the Swedish kingdom. 75 years after that, in 1826, the border between Norway and Russia was also established, and this time Finland had become part of Russia. Before the drawing of these borders, the Sami people had for hundreds of years experienced robbery, trade, taxation and missionary work from those trying to get the Sami area under their control. These contacts had an impact on the language, and on the basis of loanwords and place names, it is still possible today to get a picture of how these contacts took place.

Cultural influences, in general, are manifold. Firstly, there is the mutual or *bilateral* cultural exchange, which takes place on an equal footing, e.g. when two cultures accept one another on an equal basis, i.e. the one is considered just as valid as the other. Secondly, there is the "one-sided" or *unilateral* cultural relationship. Unilateral cultural influence can be measured in terms of both strength and ability to effect. The strongest power of influence is possessed by those that control all official and public institutions, at the same time considering their own language and culture superior to the other. If, in addition, this power is accompanied by a policy of active assimilation, then it can no longer be regarded as influence but, rather, as suffocation. This state of affairs is often viewed as a majority-minority problem. The Sami language situation can be assessed in the light of these factors. To get the best possible picture of the situation for the Sami language as it is today, I will try to describe this situation as part of a process that has an important past and an even more important future.

First of all, I will present a survey of the Sami area, in Sami called *Sápmi* or *Sámieana(n)*:



Map. The geographic distribution of the different Sami languages, according to Pekka Sammallahti. S = South Sami, including the Jämtland (Jä) and Åsele (Ås) dialects. U = Ume Sami, P = Pite Sami, L = Lule Sami, N = North Sami, including the Torneå (To), Finnmark (Fi) and Sea Sami dialects, A = Anár (Inari) Sami, Sk = Skolt Sami, B = Áhkkil (Babinsk) Sami, Kld = Kildin Sami, T = Ter Sami. Note: Since World War II, Skolt Sami is spoken also in Inari, Finland.
Source: [AIKIO & AIKIO-PUOSKARI & HELANDER 1994: 61].

There are great dialectal differences within the Sami language, but the different idioms form a continuum, and neighbouring villages are able to understand each other even across fairly deep linguistic boundaries. Six of these dialectal groups, South, Lule, North, Skolt, Inari and Kildin Sami, which can also be regarded as different languages, have their own orthographies. It is estimated that out of the total Sami population about 35,000 speak Sami, and of these about 80 per cent speak North Sami [SAMMALLAHTI 1990: 439].

In a modern society like that of Norway, with compulsory school and education, an abundance of written literature, daily radio and television programs, and many other arenas where the official state language is used, it is no wonder that the Sami language as a low-status language has had its strongest bastion in private life as the means of communication within the family and in other kinds of private gatherings. This has been the situation for the great majority of the Sami-speaking people who attended primary school in Norway before the beginning of the 1970s. The generations before that period had experienced an official policy of cultural and linguistic assimilation. Several generations had been brought up in an education system which had as its declared aim to Norwegianize the Sami people. In Finland and Sweden there was a similar attitude towards the Sami culture, except that in Sweden, since the beginning of the 20th century, the only part of the Sami population that was officially regarded as Sami and allowed to practise their own cultural activities was formed by the reindeer herders. In Russia, there has been a process of Russification of the Sami people, and it is not until recently that possibilities have appeared for the Sami to fight for their cultural and linguistic rights.

In the Nordic countries, there was a gradual change of attitude after World War II, but it was not until the end of the 1960s that initiatives were taken to establish the Sami language as a subject in primary school. By that time, outside the Sami core area the language had in many places come to an end as a means of communication. Today, in Norway, for instance, there are areas which used to be Sami-speaking, but where the official language became dominant and replaced Sami completely. Between this Norwegianized state and the other end of the scale, where the language is still the daily means of communication, there are areas where only the old generation masters the language. In places where the Sami language is still spoken, but where children speak the country's majority language, the future for the Sami language is very uncertain. A positive attitude and a reawakening of the Sami consciousness is necessary, but not enough, to maintain Sami as a living language in these areas in the future.

There are no exact figures on the Sami population, but estimated numbers in public reports are 40,000 for Norway, about 6,000 for Finland, 15,000 for Sweden, and 2,000 for Russia. The total Sami population would then be less than 70,000. Compared to the total of about 1.5 million people living in the Sami area, the Sami population is a small minority. As for the speakers of Sami, it is even more difficult

to get an exact number. Current estimations are 20,000 for Norway, 10,000 for Sweden, 3,000 for Finland, and 1,500 for Russia. [AIKIO & AIKIO-PUOSKARI & HELANDER 1994: 51], [NOU 1984: 18], [SAMMALLAHTI 1990: 439.] Information on the number of Sami-speakers in Russia is particularly controversial, and it may actually be as low as 700 (Leif Rantala, personal communication).

2. STATE BORDERS AND LINGUISTIC DIFFERENTIATION

As is the case with many other languages, the cultural influences that reached the Sami are also reflected in the Sami language and its various spheres of use. One example is offered by the Sami written languages, which were initiated by clergymen. The very first Sami book was printed in Sweden in 1619, after which it took more than one hundred years before Sami publications started appearing on the Norwegian side (then controlled by Denmark). These early written works, many of which were translations published during the eighteenth and nineteenth century for use in missionary work, came to form the basis for the subsequent development of the Sami written languages.

The fact that the Sami Land is divided between four countries has always been a great challenge for the development of a common Sami language policy. It was not until the beginning of the 1950s that Samis from the different Nordic countries started to co-operate on an organisational level, and from the very beginning co-operation on language issues has been among the main topics on the agenda. The rebuilding process following World War II, which in many places had left Sami villages destroyed, brought about a great change in both the material and the immaterial way of life. At the same time as the general attitude towards the Sami culture became more positive, the demand for an extension of the vocabulary adapted to new things and phenomena increased by leaps and bounds. Already during the first Sami Conference in 1953 professor Erkki Itkonen proposed to start the terminology work, and five years later a list was presented consisting of 2,000 terms that should be translated into Sami. The main purpose of this work was to create a vocabulary which could be used when translating school textbooks into Sami. As the next step, a language committee was established in 1971, and three years later the committee was gathered in Ohcejohka in northernmost Finland for one month. The result of this work-shop was 1,500 new Sami words with translations into Finnish and Swedish. [HELANDER 1993: 222]. During the twenty years since this work was done, a lot of the new words have become common in the modern vocabulary, though there are also many examples of proposed new words that did not gain ground.

From a purely linguistic point of view, the loanwords present in Sami confirm the fact that the Sami people did live in close contact with the neighbouring peoples long before the foundation of the modern national states. All of the early loanwords that can today be identified as such are of an Indo-European origin.

They can be divided into several chronological layers, the oldest of which comprises items borrowed from some ancient Indo-Iranian idioms. There are also about twenty old Baltic loanwords, normally dated to the early Bronze Age. Many of the old German loanwords in Sami may have come via the Finnish language, or already during the period of a common Sami-Finnish proto-language, though it cannot be ruled out that there were separate direct contacts between the early Sami and some Germanic population. Finally, the most recent layers of Indo-European loanwords derive from Russian and the Scandinavian languages. The amount of loanwords from the old Nordic language is estimated to about 3,000. Traces of early contacts with the Sami are also found in the Nordic languages themselves.

As for words borrowed from Finnish, it is not always easy to say whether they are loans or items of vocabulary shared on a genetic basis. Sami and Finnish have a common origin, which, according to a widely accepted view can be traced back to a common proto-language spoken about 2500 BC somewhere in the Eastern Baltic. In any case, there are very many words shared by Sami and Finnish, especially the northernmost dialects of Finnish. Some of these have even found their way to other languages, as is the case with the English word *tundra*, which was most probably transmitted via Russian from the Kildin Sami word *tundar*. More recently, natural scientists have also started making use of Sami terms for different kinds of snow and ice in order to establish a precise terminology. [AIKIO 1992: 52–59], [SAMMALLAHTI 1990: 452–453].

Knut Bergsland has on the basis of old loanwords between Sami and the Scandinavian languages estimated that the contacts date back to the so-called primitive Scandinavian period, centuries before the Viking period. In his paper *Saamen kieli ja naapurikielet* (The Sami language and its neighbours) Bergsland [BERGSLAND 1977], in addition to giving thorough information about lexical borrowings, also describes some interesting syntactic loans. Most of his examples belong to the strata of loans that have existed in the Sami language for such a long period that people usually do not think of them as loans. In the following, I will concentrate on the layers of foreign elements and structures that are still recognized as such, perhaps not by all Sami-speaking people, but at least by the older generation. As also mentioned by Bergsland [BERGSLAND 1977: 7], it is not always possible to find a logical explanation for the presence of innovations in a language. The origins of innovations are often to be searched in the sociolinguistic framework.

The impact of the official state languages is easiest to observe in the case of loanwords. Sometimes, however, peculiarities of phonology and syntax can also be traced back to the competing official languages. This is often due to the phenomenon of bilingualism. Nowadays most Sami-speaking people are bilingual, meaning that they also master either Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, or Russian. In the border areas many people are trilingual. Very often Sami people use loanwords without wholly adapting them to the rules of Sami pronunciation. This means, for

instance, that a single international word can be pronounced differently by different speakers of Sami (the examples are from North Sami) due to the different pronunciations of the immediate source languages, e.g. */musihkka/* on the Finnish side vs. */mʉsihkka/* on the Norwegian and Swedish side, with the latter form being pronounced with a first-syllable vowel quality that is originally not possible in Sami. Other similar examples are */kultura/* vs. */kʉltʉra/*;*/instituhtta/* vs. */institʉhtta/*, and */turista/* vs. */tʉrista/*. Loanwords with the letter *y*, as in *fysihkka* and *psykologiija*, are also pronounced differently in different countries: the Samis in Finland use the Finnish pronunciation, while the Samis in Norway and Sweden pronouncing the letter in the Scandinavian way. Sometimes it happens that all the three Nordic languages have adapted international loanwords differently, with three different Sami shapes as the result. An example is offered by the word for 'police', which can be heard as *poliisa* or *boles* in Finland, *pulitiija* or *puleteaddji* in Norway and *puliisa* in Sweden. The recommended standard forms are *poliisa* or *politiija*.

Linguistic influence is manifold and comprises also the semantic and morphosyntactic levels of language. Thus, for instance, the verb *veardidit*, which means 'to compare to/with' (as regards value) and 'to liken to' resembles the Scandinavian verb *vurdere* , which means 'to consider' or 'to estimate', and has therefore been given this meaning. Since the Scandinavian *vurdere* is a word very frequently used by politicians and bureaucrats, the new use of *veardidit* by radio and newspaper journalists is about to replace the original meaning. The problem is not that there does not exist any corresponding verb for Scandinavian *vurdere*, but it is the strong influence of the frequently used Sami word *veardidit* in its new meaning in the media language that pushes away such other Sami verbs of the same semantic sphere as *árvvoštallat* and *guorahallat*.

There are also examples showing how the influence of the Finnish language is changing the meaning, or giving new meanings, to words used on both sides of the border. For instance, the verb *oaivvildit*, which means 'to think' or 'to suppose', has originally only been used with a human subject. The new tendency is that the influence of the Finnish verb *tarkoittaa*, which means 'to mean' and can be used with both human and non-human subjects, has made it possible to use *oaivvildit* with a non-human subject, too. For a Sami-speaking person in Finland it apparently does not sound strange to use the verb in this way, and the new use seems to be widely accepted, althoug it sounds strange in the ears of those Samis who do not speak Finnish.

Occasionally it also happens that the differences in the strategies of developing new terminology in the different Nordic countries are reflected by the Sami language. The term for 'university', for instance, is in the Scandinavian languages *universitet,* but in Finnish it is *yliopisto*. This has lead to two different words in Sami, *universitehta* and *allaoahpahat*. The Sami terms for 'junior college' are in Finland *logahat* from the Finnish *lukio*, in Norway *joatkkaskuvla* from the Norwegian *videregående skole* and in Sweden *gymnása* from the Swedish *gymnasium*. These examples involve both direct loans and loan translations. In

many cases, it would even be difficult to agree on a common terminology, since the underlying contexts are so different. So for instance, the Norwegian *kommunestyre* and its etymological counterpart in Swedish *kommunstyrelse* do not denote the same thing—the Norwegian word means 'local council', while the Swedish word means 'executive committee of local council'. As a result, the Norwegian Sami *gielddastivra* (a direct translation) has another meaning when used on Swedish side. A related example: the Samis on the Finnish side speak of *gielddaráđđehus* (translation from Finnish *kunnanhallitus*) whereas on the Norwegian side they use the word *ovdagoddi*, both meaning 'executive committee of local council'. Of course, it would be easier to communicate across the borders if one could agree upon common terms, but as long as the Nordic countries do not co-ordinate their terminologies, the Samis cannot do so, either.

The Sami language and the Scandinavian languages belong to different language families, and they are accordingly structurally quite different whereas Sami and Finnish are structurally much more alike. Therefore, the trends of development in Sami that are due to Scandinavian influence are sometimes radical and may even bring new grammatical categories into the language. An example of a new category introduced into Sami is the use of the numeral *okta* 'one' as a correspondence to the Scandinavian indefinite article. The original type of sentence expressing indefinity, as in *viesus lei bussá ja beana* 'there is **a** cat and **a** dog in the house' is today very often replaced by the new type *viesus lei **okta** bussá ja **okta** beana*. Similarly, the use of *dat* 'that' as definite article as in Scandinavian has gained ground, both as a definite article, as in ***dat** buoremus muorjjit leat **dan** nuppi seahkas* '**the** best berries are in **the** other sack' instead of *buoremus muorjjit leat nuppi seahkas*, and as a formal subject, as in ***dat** lea duohta ahte son dan muitalii* '**it** is true that he told it' instead of *lea duohta ahte son dan muitalii*, or ***dat** lei idja* instead of *lei idja* '**it** was night'.

The use of prepositions in verb phrases in Scandinavian is also affecting the Sami syntax. Examples are: the use of *olggus* 'out' in *gávnnahit olggus* instead of just *gávnnahit* 'find out', the use of *ala* 'on' with *jurddašit* 'think of' (Scandinavian *på*), and the use of *birra* 'around' with *niegađit* 'dream about' (Scandinavian *om*). Occasionally, the Scandinavian prepositions also influence the stucture of Sami noun phrases. For instance, the Sami postposition *vuolde* 'under' has received a new usage under the influence of the Norwegian and Swedish preposition *under*. In traditional Sami it is usual to use finite verbs where the Scandinavian languages use prepositional constructions with *under*. Phrases like *gieđahallama vuolde* 'under treatment', *huksema vuolde* 'under construction', and *dutkama vuolde* 'under investigation' can now be heard quite often instead of the verb phrases *gieđahallojuvvo* 'is being treated', *huksejuvvo* 'is being built' and *dutkojuvvo* 'is being investigated'. It is also becoming more and more usual to hear adverbial phrases like *soađi vuolde*, *čoahkkima vuolde* and *girkostallama vuolde* instead of *soađi áigge* 'during the war', *čoahkkima áigge* 'during the meeting' and

girkostallama áigge 'during the church service'.

The tendency to use postposed attributes can likewise be traced back to Norwegian and Swedish. Such often-used phrases as *ovdaolmmoš searvvis, namma gávpogis* and *vuosttas beaivi čakčamánus* instead of *searvvi ovdaolmmoš* 'the chairman of the association', *gávpoga namma* 'the name of the city' and *čakčamánu vuosttas beaivi* 'the first of September' are examples of postposed locative attributes which are competing with (and often defeating) the original preposed genitive attributes. Similar constructions with the postposed attribute in illative, as in *evttohusat rievdadusaide* and *sivva buollimii* instead of the compound *rievdadusevttohusat* 'alternation proposals' and the preposed genitive attribute construction *buollima sivva* 'cause of the fire', are also due to the influence of the Norwegian and Swedish preposition *til(l)*. Also, where Norwegian has constructions involving a verb plus a clause object, as in *bestemor syntes at jeg var altfor ung* 'grandmother found me too young' or in *jeg syntes bilen var for dyr* 'I found the car too expensive', Sami can use a construction of the type *áhku* ***mielas*** *mun ledjen menddo nuorra* and *mu* ***mielas*** *biila lei menddo divrras*, or, alternatively, a verb phrase with a direct object, as in *áhkku* ***nuorašii*** mu 'grandmother "too-younged" me' and *mun* ***divrrašin*** *biilla* 'I "too-expensived" the car'. The young generation of Sami-speaking people seems to prefer the variants that are closest to the Norwegian and Swedish sentence patterns. It remains to be seen when, or if at all, such innovations due to Scandinavian influence will spread to the Sami language spoken on the Finnish side of the border.

The phenomenon that is sometimes called "the substantive disease" is easy to diagnose. I have already mentioned some examples and showed the source of "infection". There are also several examples of how this phenomenon has affected Sami verbal construcions, as used on the Finnish side. For instance, the deverbal noun *orrun* 'feeling', as used in a construction like *Sutnje boðii fuones orrun*, reflects a direct translation from the Finnish *hänelle tuli huono olo* 'he felt unwell'. The more common Sami expression is *son šattai illávejiid*. Also, the impact of the Finnish written language, which uses much more participle and substantive constructions than the spoken language, tends to bring into use similar constructions in written Sami. Sometimes this works very well, sometimes not. For instance, we can occasionally find constructions of the type *son lea sihkkar nieidda boahtimis* instead of *son lea sihkkar ahte nieida boahtá* 'he is sure that the girl is coming'. In the most extreme cases, the new constructions will be immediately understandable only for those who understand Finnish, as is the case in *eisseválddiid bivdagis*, deriving from Finnish *viranomaisten pyynnöstä* 'on the request of the authorities', used instead of *go eiseválddit bivdet* 'when the authorities request'.

It is a clear tendency that written Sami shows much more interference from the dominant state languages than does the spoken language. The reason for this is quite clear. Most adult Samis who write Sami have been taught the process of writing mainly in the official language. This leads to a greater degree of syntactic

influence from the official language when the sentences have to be produced in written form. Sometimes it looks as if the author has changed to a language code that differs markedly from the ordinary syntactic rules of Sami. This phenomenon is commonly observed when ordinary people translate texts into Sami without possessing the experience and consciousness of a professional translator.

Proper language usage is a normative term which implies that some kind of language usage is regarded as the best and recommended one. This norm forms the basis of the language as it is supposed to be used in school textbooks as well as in media and other official uses, a basis for all education in Sami. To keep the language uniform in order to be able to use it as a common means of communication irrespective of state boundaries in the the Sami area, is also one of the great challenges of Sami language planners. This challenge is fully comparable with one that involves the adaption of the language to the conditions of a modern and fast-changing society.

The use of kinship terms is an illustrative example of how language changes. The Sami language has a terminology for uncles and aunts that differs much from modern Norwegian, but not so much from Swedish and Finnish. Like the latter two languages, Sami makes a difference between paternal and maternal uncles, but, additionally, Sami also makes a difference depending on whether the uncle is older or younger than father. On the mother's side, however, uncles are not differentiated in this way, whereas aunts are. The whole terminology is as follows:

On the mother's side:	*goaski* 'aunt (older than mother)' *muottá* 'aunt (younger than mother)' *eanu* 'uncle'
On the father's side:	*eahki* 'uncle (older than father)' *čeahci* 'uncle (younger than father)' *siessá* 'aunt'

Nowadays this terminology, like also the terminology of relationship by marriage, tends to be simplified, and it is obvious that one reason is the impact of the majority state culture. In Norway, the Sami today very often use the Norwegian terms *tante* 'aunt' and *onkel* 'uncle' as loanwords. The use of the traditional terms is, nevertheless, encouraged by language planners in, for instance, radio programmes on language.

Another example from the field of kinship terminology: Traditionally, Sami people have many godfathers and godmothers. A few years ago in a parish in Norway it was, however, decided that there should be an upper limit (6 persons) on how many sponsors of this kind were to be allowed. The reason was the lack of space in the official forms that are used for recording the names of a child. Many people have reacted against this new decision, and the matter has been raised to a political level. The new usage was seen by the Sami as an obstacle to maintaining

the traditional network of relatives, which may comprise a very large number of individuals. The terminology relating to these relationships manifests the existence of close connections not only between the sponsors and the child, but also between the sponsors' children and the godchild: alongside with the term *risváhnemat* 'godparents' the Sami use the expressions *ristoabbá* 'godsister' and *risviellja* 'godbrother'. Such terminology reflects the importance of the system of godparentship in the social network of the Sami.

State languages also affect the system of proper names, both Christian names and surnames, and also place names. Most of the original Sami first names were regarded as pagan by the church and prohibited when the Sami were Christianised. The new system of Christian names that the Sami were forced to accept has, however, been adapted to the Sami language, and the resulting name forms are today considered as ethnically Sami. Nevertheless, it was not until about twenty years ago that these name forms were permitted to be used as official names, though there is information that clergymen had occasionally used Sami name forms in official documents even before that [SOLEM 1970: 47]. However this may be, most Samis have today personal names that are both structurally and materially identical with the names used by the majority population in each country. It is true, as a new development, some representatives of the young generation have true Sami names, both of an old "pagan" and other origin.

There is, however, a great difference between the official and the daily use of names. In the spoken language, there are two traditional patterns. In one of them the personal name of an individual is preceded by his or her surname, while in the other it is preceded by the personal name of one of his or her parents. As an illustration, we may take my own name, which has the official Norwegian form *Nils Øivind Helander*. The corresponding Sami form is either *Máre Jon Niillas* or *Heländir Niillas*. It may also be noted that among the women of the reindeer-herding Sami it was not customary to adopt the surname of the husband when they got married; instead, they continued to use their own inherited surname [SOLEM 1970: 60]. Much later, this habit has now become usual also among Scandinavian women.

Most of the place names in the core area of the Samis are of a Sami origin, and they are also marked as such on the official maps. Some of these names have been adapted into the official state languages, and, as a result, the original Sami name forms have occasionally been replaced by new distorted forms. This development seems to be due to the official status of the written form of place names. The situation is much better today, for Sami place names are now protected by law, and they can be made visible in all official use, for instance on road signs.

3. THE FUTURE OF THE SAMI LANGUAGE

A living language can be regarded as a continuous process where something is always becoming different from what it used to be. In the preceding survey, we

have got acquainted with some of the evolutive trends in Sami that are caused by other languages and cultures. Under the modern conditions, it is sometimes possible to witness the appearance of new linguistic phenomena almost at the very moment when they are introduced into the language. In particular, the great demand for translations seems to be a challenge for people using Sami in official connections. It is my impression that the generation of Sami-speaking people who are very skilful in the majority language very easily take linguistic shortcuts not only in the form of loanwords, but also as concerns word order and syntactic constructions. All of this may appear regrettable in the eyes of those who stick to a purist language policy and think that a language should develop without outside influence.

To a certain point it is true that external influences can be restricted, provided that the speech community concerned possesses the proper means to do it. Ideal possibilities to pursue a purist language policy exist in societies which are in full control over all the relevant social institutions. The Sami language has for centuries been in the opposite situation. Lacking any legal status, it has actually been the target of official attempts aiming at bringing the language down altogether. Fortunately, however, this old official attitude has now been replaced by a more positive atmosphere, which gives the Sami language and culture possibilities to live and prosper. In Finland and Norway bills were passed a few years ago that secure the use of Sami in official connections at the local and district level. In Sweden no similar law exists for the time being, but the newly elected Sami Parliament has been given the responsibility to work out a language policy.

As for the future, there are both positive and threatening signs. Marjut Aikio [Aikio 1994], who has been studying the situation of the Sami language in Finland, compares the situation in a small reindeer-herding village in 1975 with the situation of today. Twenty years ago the Sami language was forbidden at school, and during the school year the Sami children had to live in a non-Sami-speaking environment, where they were constantly ridiculed by Finnish-speaking majority children. Even Sami parents chose to speak Finnish with their children, leaving the Sami language only as a means of communication between elderly people. At the same time, however, there was a rise of ethnic consciousness, which gradually broke the taboo and allowed the parents, especially the mothers, to start speaking Sami to their children. Since then, the situation has evolved in a favourable direction, but there are still major problems to be solved in order to cope with the attitudes of the Finnish-speaking majority. According to Aikio [Aikio 1994: 66–67], one crucial question to be answered in the near future is whether enough political will can be found to revitalize the Sami language, and to fullfil the aims of the Sami Language Law. It is likely that Finland's deep economic depression will have a negative impact on the outcome.

Historically, many villages all over the Sami Land once experienced a language change of this kind, but it happened during times when people saw no possibility to alter the situation. In many of these villages the Sami ethnic consciousness has

recently been revitalized, so that people are once more beginning to speak of their ethnicity and even to wear the old, almost forgotten Sami national costume. Many people are also eager to learn the Sami language, though it seems extremely difficult to get it adopted for daily use in the community.

A very important role in the development of the Sami language is played by those institutions and private persons who are in a position to influence and inspire the language users. Among these, the authors of Sami literature are among the most important "language ambassadors", and they have, indeed, done very much in order to develop the language and make it more visible. Among the authors of today we may mention, for instance, Kirsti Paltto, Rauni Magga Lukkari, Eino Guttorm, Jovnna V. Ánde West, Kerttu Vuolab, Inger Haldis Halvari, Marry Somby, Ellen Marie Vars, Lars Matto Tuolja and Stig Gælok. Theatres like Beaivváš, Rávggoš and Dálvadas, and film makers like Nils Gaup are also doing a remarkable work for the promotion of the language, not to forget the skilful text writers and singers Nils Aslak Valkeapää (Áillohaš) and Mari Boine. Gaup, Valkeapää and Boine are also internationally well known as skillful representatives of the Sami culture and language. All of these artists, together with media workers and teachers, play a very important role in developing the Sami language in such a way that tradition and renewal can be harmonized.

In spite of influences from the state languages and cultures, the Sami language and culture retain their Sami identity. The Samis continue to regard themselves as a distinct population, even those Samis who do not speak the language any more. The language is, of course, a main cultural keystone, but there are other important parts as well, like, for instance various cultural traditions and ways of living and dressing. A small non-isolated society will always easily be exposed to influences from other cultures, but this need not mean a definitive threat, as long as the society itself is able to have control over the situation. The Sami culture has for a very long period been in an almost fatal situation, in which the dominant majority cultures have been forced upon the Sami with a complete assimilation as the goal. This program lead to the disappearance of the Sami language in many places.

Yet, a new hope has appeared, and today, after twenty years of national revitalization, the Sami cultural consciousness is very strong. Together with the increasing feeling of responsibility among the dominant majorities of the Nordic countries, this positive trend is also a challenge. In the future, the Sami language should be further developed to meet all the needs of an official language, supposed to function as a useful instrument of communication in the modern and very fast-changing world. For the Sami, it is very important that the limited and scattered resources that can help with the task of language planning can freely operate across the state borders. The most important thing is, however, that the Sami people can feel free to use their language in all possible situations of daily life.

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