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Marko Marjomaa

North Sámi in Norway:

An Overview of a Language in Context

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During the initial stage of the research project ELDIA (European Language Diversity for All) in 2010, "structured context analyses" of each speaker community at issue were prepared. These context analyses will act as a starting point for further deepened research by linguists, sociologists and lawyers. Thus, they will form the basis of further case-specific reports and the comparative report which will be the main outcome of the whole project. However, as these will be available for interested readers only at the end of the project, we wanted to publish shorter versions summarising our work so far already at this stage, thus providing up-to-date information for both the academic community and stakeholder groups. This paper, based on the context analysis by Marko Marjomaa, gives a brief and up-to-date overview of the status of and research about North Sámi in Norway.

As all papers appearing in the series Working Papers in European Language Diversity, these context analyses have been subject to an anonymous peer-reviewing process. Whenever the present document is referred to, due reference to the author and the ELDIA project should be made. For more information about the ELDIA project see http://www.eldia-project.org/.

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1 Introduction: Speakers of North Sámi in Norway

The Sámi (also spelled Saami or Sami) are indigenous people living in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The ancestors of Sámi were already living in the present Sámi domiciles before the Common Era. The traditional name of the Sámi homeland, *Sápmi* (in North Sámi), refers to the entire Sámi area in Russia, Norway, Finland and Sweden where the Sámi people live. The North Sámi language, one of the nine present-day Sámi languages, was traditionally spoken in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland, but due to migration North Sámi is now also spoken outside the traditional speaking area in, for example, the capital cities and their neighbouring areas of Norway, Sweden and Finland.

There is no register of ethnic affiliation in Norway, neither is there an official register of speakers of different Sámi languages. Therefore, the estimations on the total number of North Sámi speakers in Norway varies from 10,000 (Sammallahti 1998: 1) to 25,000 (Sametinget 2005). The number of North Sámi speakers in Sweden is estimated to be about 5000, and in Finland from about 2000 (Sammallahti 1998:1). The North Sámi are in the majority in the following municipalities in Norway: *Guovdageaidnu* (in Norwegian Kautokeino), *Kárášjohka* (Karasjok), *Deatnu* (Tana) and *Unjárga* (Nesseby). The municipalities of *Porsáŋgu* (Porsang) and *Gáivuotna* (Kåfjord) also have a noticeable concentration of North Sámi people. In addition North Sámi speakers live outside the central North Sámi speaking area, especially in the cities.

The ethnonym which North Sámi speakers use when referring to themselves is *Sápmi* (plural: *sámit*). The derivative *sápmelaš* (plural: *sápmelaččat*) is used as well. The word for 'language' in general is *giella* in North Sámi, and the Sámi language is *sámegiella.* A more specific term for 'North Sámi' is *davvisámegiella* (*davvi* 'north, northern'). The neighbouring nationalities have used different exonyms for referring to the Sámi people: *finne* (in Norwegian), *lapp* (in Swedish), *lappalainen* (in Finnish) and *lop'* (in Russian). As these exonyms are usually considered derogatory by the Sámi themselves, it has become more common nowadays to use ethnonyms based on *sápmi*: *same* (in Norwegian and Swedish), *saamelainen* (in Finnish) and *saám* (in Russian).

2 Socio-political Context

2.1 Legal and Political Position

Norway was the first state in the world to ratify International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention No. 169, doing so in 1990, and the Sámi people were formally recognised as an indigenous people of Norway. However, the legal and political position of the Sámi people in Norway has changed over the course of history. The Lapp Codicil (*Lappekodisillen*), which was an addendum to a border agreement of the *Strömstad Treaty* of 1751 between Denmark-Norway and Sweden (including Finland at the time) was positive towards the Sámi people. The Lapp Codicil recognised the right of the Sámi people to freely cross the borders between Denmark-Norway and Sweden on account of seasonal migration of reindeer herding. However, from the mid-19th to the about mid-20th century a negative influence was exerted by Norway's national assimilation policy called *Fornorskning* 'Norwegianisation' which was implemented in order to assimilate the Sámi people linguistically and culturally into the ethnic Norwegian majority. This period severely affected the Sámi society and its effects were felt in many different ways. For example, during the Norwegianisation period the use of the Sámi languages declined drastically, and negative attitudes towards the Sámi people and their culture spread among Norwegians and even among the Sámi people themselves.

A very important event which perhaps for the first time made Sámi issues publicly known both in Norway and internationally, was the *Áltá* conflict. The conflict reached its high point in 1978 when, the *Stortinget* 'Norwegian Parliament' decided to dam the *Áltá* river (Alta), and the decision triggered vigorous protests in the winter of 1981. Although the dam was eventually built across the river *Áltá*, the *Áltá* conflict marked a turning point in the Norway's Sámi policy. As a result, the new Sámi policy, *Sameloven* 'Sámi Act' was ratified in 1987 and the *Sámediggi*, 'the Sámi Parliament' was established in 1989. (Skogvang 2002: 21–22, 119–120.)

In 1980 the Norwegian authorities set up the Sámi Rights Committee and the Sámi Cultural Committee to clarify Sámi-related issues. The year 1987 saw the passing of *Lov om Sametinget og andre samiske rettsforhold* 'Act concerning the *Sameting* and other Sámi legal matters' (Sámi Act). In 1988 the Norwegian Parliament, adopted an amendment, Section 110 A, to the Norwegian constitution. This amendment states that the Norwegian state has the duty and responsibility to provide and ensure the conditions for the Sámi people to preserve and develop their culture, language and way of life. According to the Sámi Act the Norwegian and Sámi language have equal status, which in practice means the area of, *Sámegiela hálddášanguovlu* 'the Administration Area for

Sámi language*'*. The Sámi Act also enabled in 1989 the establishment of the Sámi Parliament, which is an elected assembly which addresses all issues in all areas of society that involve the Sámi in particular. It issues statements and acts as a consultative body for government authorities, and also administrates part of the funding allocated for Sámi-related purposes in the central government budget.

On 15th June, 2005 the Norwegian Parliament passed the *Finnmarksloven* 'Finnmark Act'*,* and *Finnmárkkuopmodat* 'the Finnmark Estate', was established. Finnmark Estate owns and administrates *95*% of the lands and waters of *Finnmárku* 'Finnmark county' (Hernes 2008: 12).The Finnmark Estate is managed by a board of directors, with three members appointed by the Finnmark County Council, and three members appointed by the Sámi Parliament. The establishment of Finnmark Estate can be seen as a response to the demands made by the Sámi people for acknowledgement of their ancestral rights to both waters and lands.

According to Sections 1–5 and 3 of the, *Sameloven* 'the Sámi Act', Sámi and the Norwegian languages have equal status. However, the language regulations mainly concern the North Sámi language in the Administration Area for the Sámi language. The Sámi language has also been mentioned in the *Grunnlov* 'Norwegian Constitution', in Section 110 A. The term *Landets Sprog* 'the language of the country', has been interpreted so that the two standard language forms of Norwegian, *Nynorsk* and *Bokmål*, as well as the Sámi language are de facto official languages of Norway.

The laws which are especially significant to the Sámi languages, vehicular languages, and other languages are listed as follows: 1) *Grunnlov § 110 A* 'The Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway'; 2) *Sameloven* 'the Sámi Act'; 3) *Opplæringslova* 'The Education Act'; 4*) Barnehageloven* 'The Day-Care Institutions Act'; 5) *Stadnamnlova* 'The place name Act'; 6) *Kringkastningsloven* 'The Broadcasting Act'; 7) *Kirkelove* 'The Church Act'; 8) *Menneskerettsloven* 'Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms'; 9) *Målbrukslova* 'The Act on Language use in official services'. These language laws have had a positive impact on the North Sámi language. The use of North Sámi has increased, and it has become common in a wider range of domains than before the laws regulating the use North Sámi language . However, a serious problem is that most of the regulations of the language laws concern only the Administration Area for the Sámi language. This means that the speakers of North Sámi who live outside this area do not have the same opportunities and rights to use North Sámi as speakers living within the Administration Area for the Sámi language. (For more information, see Granholm 2012.) Granting the Sámi people indigenous status caused widespread debate in Norway. Not all ethnic Norwegians were ready to grant indigenous status to the Sámi.

In addition, the two different kinds of minority statuses have caused friction between the Sámi and the Kvens, especially in the 1990s. Sometimes the Kvens saw the indigenous position of the Sámi as a threat to their own status, as one of the main reasons for disgruntlement was the fear that the Sámi people's indigenous status would give them more extensive rights to waters and lands than the rights enjoyed by other ethnic groups in the area. (Anttonen 1999: 371–372, 444–446)

2.2 Attitudes

The attitudes towards North Sámi have fluctuated throughout history. From the mid-19th century onwards, the fornorskning 'Norwegianisation' policy in Norway was to assimilate the non-Norwegian-speaking minority populations into the Norwegian-speaking majority in order to form a culturally uniform Norwegian society. The addition of Section 110 A to the Constitution of Norway in 1988, and the passing of the Sámi Act in 1989, officially marked the end of the assimilation policy, and since then the policy towards the Sámi people and the Sámi language has changed and taken a more positive direction. Today the attitudes of the Norwegian-speaking majority are more positive towards the Sámi people than earlier (Berg 2001: 1–4, Marten 2007: 113–130). However, some of the negative attitudes that evolved towards the Sámi people and the Sámi languages as a result of the Norwegianisation policy can still be seen in certain parts of Norway where the resistance of the Norwegian-speaking majority to any form of Sámi cultural rights has been very strong.

In the study of *Bård A. Berg* attitudes towards the Sámi people and Sámi issues were studied in newspapers *Aftenposten, Nordlys, Finnmark Dagblad, Altaposte and Finnmarken* in the period from 1.1.1996 to 31.12.1999. The newspapers in Finnmárku (Finnmark) were most interested in Sámi-related issues, and the tone of the discussions in these newspapers was more heated in Finnmárku than newspapers in any other regions. The most positive attitudes in newspapers were expressed towards language, school, research and higher education, culture, media and church. The most negative attitudes were expressed towards reindeer herding. (Berg 2001) According to the survey of the political programmes of the Norwegian parties in the election campaign in 2005, the views on Sámi issues in general were mainly positive (Marten 2007). However, according to the results of the study by Hansen et al. (2007), *Ethnic discrimination and bullying in the Sami and non-Sami populations in Norway*, the Sámi and the Kven populations experience significantly higher degrees of ethnic discrimination and bullying in their everyday lives than the ethnic Norwegians.

The negative attitudes towards the Sámi languages, which arose in the era of Norwegianisation and were also transmitted among the Sámi themselves, partly still exist. Gradually however, the attitudes

among the Sámi people have changed to a more positive direction and in some regions linguistic revitalisation has taken place, and the prestige and social status of the Sámi language has grown. Nevertheless, more research is needed on the attitudes towards the North Sámi speakers and North Sámi language, and more studies need to focus on the attitudes of the Sámi people towards Norwegians and other minorities, such as the Kvens.

3 Cultural Context

The North Sámi people have several cultural institutions in Norway. *Beaivváš Sámi Teáhter* (The Norwegian National Sámi Theatre Company), located in Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino), Norway, is the national theatre of all the Sámi people. There are several museums located in the North Sámi area and run by North Sámi people (e.g., *Várjjat Sámi Musea, Guovdageainnu gilišilju)*, and many public and special libraries have collections of literature written in Sámi or about the Sámi. In particular the *Sámi sierrabibliotehka* 'Sámi Special Library', in Kárášjohka (Karasjok) has an important role as the library has been given the special responsibility of keeping the archive of Sámi literature published in Norway wholly or partly written in any of the Sámi languages. Sámi Special Library gets a copy of texts which are, or substantial parts of which, written in the Sámi language. There are also some publishing houses (e.g., *Davvi Girji, DAT OS, Iđut, Čálliidlágádus)* which publish literature in the Sámi languages, most of the published texts being in North Sámi.

There are also ten Sámi Language Centres, eight of which are situated in the North Sámi-speaking area. These centres, funded mainly by the Sámi Parliament, counties and municipalities, have an important role in supporting and strengthening the Sámi languages and Sámi culture. The Sámi Language Centres work alongside the national educational system, and cooperate with the Sámi organisations and institutions, and organise courses and Sámi events for adults and children.

The North Sámi people are active in the field of culture and sports and they run several voluntary cultural and sport organisations, associations and clubs. Several cultural festivals (e.g., *Sámi Grand Prix*, *Riddu Riđđu)* are organised regularly, some receiving support from local and regional state authorities, and the Sámi Parliament.

The North Sámi have many cultural symbols, some of them old, some new, which characterise the group in regard to the majority Norwegian culture. Probably the most widely known cultural symbol is the Sámi coat *gákti*. Its form and decorations signify the area where the wearer of the Sámi coat comes from. The Sámi coat is still worn by some individuals even in every-day life, while many use it only for special family and formal public occasions and festivities. The form of the Sámi coat has

changed over time and is still changing. There are also modern versions of the Sámi coat as well as pieces of clothing which bear the features of Sámi culture, for example adornments. *Duodji* 'the traditional handicrafts', made of natural materials of the area constitute another visible cultural symbol typical of the North Sámi and of the Sámi cultures in general. Similarly, the North Sámi's traditional way of presenting music, *juoigat* 'yoiking', differs distinctively from the music of the surrounding majority. Additionally, North Sámi culture has a distinct and rich storytelling tradition. Another important part of North Sámi culture and of Sámi culture in general, is reindeer herding and husbandry.

Some new modern symbols have also been created with aim to serve as symbols for all the Sámi people, namely the Sámi flag and the Sámi national anthem called *Sámi soga lávlla* 'Song of the Sámi People'. There are also eleven common flag-flying days in the year which are recognised as official Sámi flag-flying days for all Sámi peoples in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

There are several prominent Sámi artists in different fields of the arts including painters and sculptors. Traditional handicrafts *duodji*, is also considered as a form of arts. North Sámi literature began to develop on a large scale in the 1970s, so that today North Sámi literature already spreads across all literary genres. One of the most prominent writers is Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001), also known as *Áillohaš* in North Sámi. He was a multitalented person: a poet, painter, musician and actor. In 1991 he was the first Sámi to win the Nordic Council Literature Prize with his book 'The Sun, my Father' *Beaivi, áhčážan*. The North Sámi film makers in Norway, Sweden and Finland have made a number of films in different genres, one of the most famous directors is Nils Gaup. There are also several prominent North Sámi speaking actors, such as Mikkel Gaup.

The Sámi in the Nordic countries were effectively Christianised and only fragmentary documentation remains of their pre-Christian shamanistic religion. As for their religious affiliation most North Sámi have traditionally belonged to Christian churches, in particular, the Lutheran state churches of the Nordic countries. Within the Lutheran churches, however, a religious revival movement called Laestadianism has had an important influence among the North Sámi, although its position is not as strong among young people today as it used to be. The founder of the movement, Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), a clergyman in Swedish Lapland, was Sámi himself on his mother's side, and also spoke and wrote in Sámi (North Sámi, Pite Sámi, Lule Sámi and Ume Sámi) and Finnish. As Laestadianism emphasises the role of lay preachers, it has traditionally supported the use of local vernaculars, in particular the Finnish/Finnic varieties of the Far North.

4 Language

4.1 General description of the language

The Sámi languages belong to the Finno-Ugric/Uralic language family and are most closely related to the Finnic languages (Finnish, Kven, Meänkieli, Karelian, Veps, Ingrian, Votic, Estonian and Livonian). North Sámi and its Finnic neighbours – Finnish, Meänkieli and Kven – are not mutually intelligible, but there are perceptible structural similarities which facilitate learning and borrowing. Due to close contacts and frequent Sámi–Finnic bilingualism, numerous words and even morphological elements have led to borrowings from and to the Sámi languages and their Finnic neighbours in both directions.

The Sámi languages form a continuum which is usually divided into nine languages, and they are, listing from West to East: South Sámi, Ume Sámi, Pite Sámi, Lule Sámi, North Sámi, Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, Kildin Sámi and Ter Sámi. All the Sámi languages have quite similar vocabulary and structure. Neighbouring dialects, for instance, Lule Sámi and North Sámi, are usually so close to each other in vocabulary that their speakers can understand each other quite easily. There are also steep linguistic boundaries between languages, for example between North Sámi and Skolt Sámi.

North Sámi and Norwegian belong to different language families, and there are several differences between them on all levels of language. One of the notable differences is that while North Sámi, like all the Sámi languages, has rich inflectional morphology, Norwegian expresses many grammatical relations with prepositions or other syntactic means. Another important difference is that North Sámi, like all the Sámi languages, does not have grammatical gender while Norwegian has. The Northern Norwegian dialects have been influenced by North Sámi, however the influence of the Norwegian to North Sámi has been even greater (Jahr 1984: 103–112).

The most important contact languages reflected in the vocabulary of the North Sámi are Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish. Due to the fact that North Sámi is spoken in three different countries, fragmentation i.e. the diminishing mutual understanding between speakers of different countries is a real threat and *Sámi giellalávdegoddi* 'Sámi Language Committee' has been established in order to combat this possible fragmentation, and, also to enhance language planning and to promote a new lexicon for North Sámi.

Several different forms of North Sámi literary language existed before the literary standard adopted in 1979 for use in Norway, Finland and Sweden. However, due to the dialectal differences within North Sámi, the relation between the literary standard and the spoken dialects can cause problems for speakers of different dialects when they write or read it. Nevertheless, today, the current literary standard is used in texts produced in North Sámi, and the majority of the North Sámi speakers accept the current literary texts and publications.

4.2 Language contact and multilingualism

Today North Sámi speakers in Norway are usually bilingual. The second language is generally learnt at quite an early stage, especially in mixed-language families. Before the Norwegianisation period, North Sámi speakers were commonly multilingual and could also speak, for example in Norway, both Norwegian and Kven. However, due to the assimilation policy, Norwegian became the dominant language and the natural chain of passing on the language almost ceased. However from 1970 onwards the situation has gradually changed. Today it is fairly usual that in mixed-language families both languages are used with the children (Huss 1999: 99).

Some North Sámi speakers speak Kven and also Finnish and Swedish. Their vehicular language in communication with Norwegian speakers is Norwegian, and Norwegian is also used as the vehicular language with speakers of other Sámi languages if they speak Norwegian or Swedish but not North Sámi. The most important change in the recent language landscape has been the revitalisation process (Todal 2003: 125).

North Sámi has adopted many new loanwords, mainly from Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish. However, the tendency is that North Sámi more often takes loanwords from Norwegian and Swedish than from Finnish (Magga 2002: 126). An example of a fairly new loanword is 'park,' in Norwegian *parkere* while in North Sámi *parkeret*. In addition, young people in particular have introduced English words into the North Sámi that they speak. In studies which have examined code-switching in North Sámi in Norway, it has been discovered that the code-switching is quite common and it usually occurs when there is a person in the group who cannot speak North Sámi (Eira 2004: 139). In this kind of situation the language is often changed to Norwegian.

4.3 Language use and maintenance

North Sámi is used in a wide range of domains. It is used in the media, in administration, in churches, in schools and in everyday life. However, the speakers of North Sámi do not have the same opportunities to use North Sámi both inside the Administration Area for Sámi language, and outside the area. In many domains, for example, with authorities, the use of North Sámi is only possible inside the administration area.

Nevertheless, the Education Act, grants the Sámi people the right to receive tuition in the Sámi language in any part of Norway, in primary and secondary school. In the Administration Area for Sámi Language, pupils also have the right to teaching through the medium of Sámi in primary and lower secondary school. Outside the area, Sámi-medium teaching must be arranged if there are at least ten pupils who want to attend the classes. Upper secondary school pupils have the right to receive tuition in a Sámi language throughout Norway.

For several subjects in primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school there is a specific *Sámi Oahppoplána* 'Sámi Curriculum', which means that the Sámi culture and traditions are taken into account in the content of the curriculum. The Sámi Curriculum is followed in all public schools in the Administration Area for Sámi language. Pupils outside the area follow the Sámi Curriculum, and if they have been taught in Sámi, they follow the Sámi Curriculum in the Sámi language. North Sámi can be studied as a first language, second language and as a foreign language. The two central institutions of higher education in Sámi language and culture in Norway are *Sámi allaskuvla* 'the Sámi University College' and *Romssa Universitehta* 'the University of Tromsø'. The management and instruction of the Sámi University College are also conducted in Sámi.

North Sámi is used regularly in different forms of the media. It is used in the newspaper *Ávvir*, which is published five times a week. NRK Sámi radio, a division of the Norwegian Broadcasting Company, also produces radio programmes, television programmes, an internet edition and miscellaneous new media platforms in Sámi language.

The use of North Sámi by different generations varies in different parts of the North Sámi area. The reason for these differences can be found in the Norwegianisation policy of the 19th-century. In the coastal areas North Sámi fell almost entirely into disuse, and the language survived only among older people. In the inland areas of Finnmárku, however, North Sámi survived better and is spoken in all age groups.

The successful revitalisation of North Sámi has taken place in many places in Norway. The revitalisation movement began in the core North Sámi area in Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino) and in

Kárášjohka (Karasjok) and has since spread to the other North Sámi speaking areas. For example language revitalisation initiatives have had an effect so that in certain parts of the coastal areas younger generations have begun to speak North Sámi again. Also the language laws and the possibility to use North Sámi in school and in kindergartens have strengthened the revitalisation process. However, quite often older people claim that the younger generations have a weaker command of the North Sámi language than older generations, however, there are no studies available on this topic.

Much research still remains to be undertaken into all the Sámi languages. In the field of linguistics the following issues in particular need more in-depth analysis: a) syntax, especially within the framework of modern linguistic theories; b) sociolinguistics, especially language preservation and bilingualism; c) North Sámi acquisition as a first and second language; d) language revitalisation; e) the use of new media and communication techniques and the use of North Sámi in these; f) North Sámi literature from the indigenous perspective; and g) North Sámi language as a conveyer of knowledge and bearer of culture and identity.

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