

# Meänkieli in Sweden

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## Short facts

Meänkieli (earlier Torne Valley Finnish) is a national minority language in Sweden. There are about 40 000-60 000 speakers. The traditional core area of Meänkieli is located in Torne Valley and its surroundings but the language is nowadays spoken all over the Sweden. The traditional Meänkieli area is multilingual: besides Meänkieli, Swedish, Finnish and Sámi are spoken there. Tornedalins are a border minority. Linguistically Meänkieli is close to Finnish. However, speakers have a different identity and their language has been developing in separation from standard Finnish.



The boarder river Torne



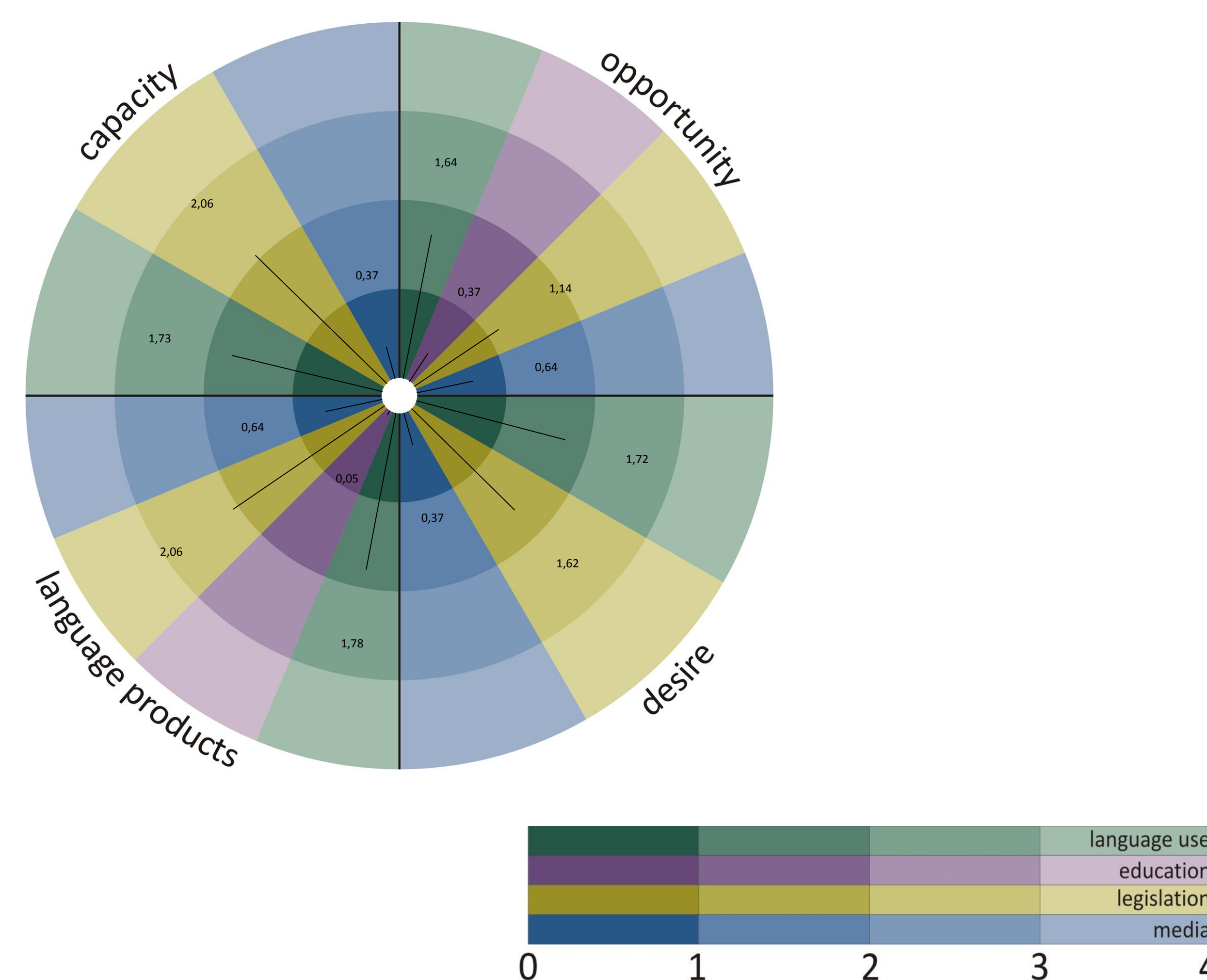
Meänkieli administrative area in Northern Sweden.  
Map by Kristiina Karjalainen.



Multilingual road sign in Pajala.

## EuLaViBar

- Overall, Meänkieli receives very low scores in all of the dimensions and focus areas of the EuLaViBar. The highest scores are around 2, which indicates that the language shift is on-going or advanced. The lowest scores are between 0 and 1, indicating that in some areas the language is severely threatened or even endangered.
- Meänkieli has the strongest position when it comes to the focus area Capacity (1.6) . In the scope of this study, capacity in Meänkieli exists, but it is under threat.
- In the area of Opportunity, the vitality of Meänkieli is somewhat lower (1.2) than in Capacity. When it comes to opportunities to use the language, the score is very low mainly because of the dimensions of Media and Education.
- The average scaling for the focus area Desire is 1.6. However, the results are rather contradictory.
- The average score for Language Products is 0.71. The score is lowered by the dimensions Education and Media. With regard to Language Products, it can be argued that more products are needed, but also, more information on the existing products. Encouragement to create and demand products in Meänkieli would also be inevitable.



Measuring the vitality of Meänkieli is a complicated task. There is still rather good capacity in language among older generations but the situation is changing rapidly. The opportunities to use the language are better than earlier when it comes to legal position but at the same time the language shift is affecting the domains of the language. Also, one of the issues that are especially visible in the ELDIA data is the effect migration has had on Meänkieli.

## ELDIA's results

- The ELDIA research conducted among the speakers of Meänkieli was very successful in terms of response rates (over 60% for the questionnaire).
- ELDIA gives new and significant information on the Meänkieli speakers living outside of the bilingual area, as over 60% of the respondents do not live in the administrative area in the North. Importantly, this group has not been studied earlier.
- Meänkieli (Torne Valley Finnish) is a language undergoing heavy language shift. The situation of Meänkieli is still rather good, as there is a considerable number of speakers with good competence in the language. However, the speakers are mostly over 50 years of age and the rate and intensity of the language transmission was reported to be very low. However, there seems to be some desire among younger people to transmit the language to the younger generations.
- The main language of the respondents is Swedish, which is used in all domains of life, also in private domains. Meänkieli is mostly used in private domains, but not so much in public. The implementation of language policies bringing the language to the public domains has not been able to change the situation yet. The use of media is affected by the small number of media products available in Meänkieli.
- Written skills in Meänkieli are weak. This is affecting people's opportunities to use the language in a number of domains, such as the domains of media and with authorities.
- Respondents showed surprisingly little awareness of the legal status of Meänkieli and the public domains in which Meänkieli is used to some extent.
- Meänkieli speakers have rather mixed attitudes towards their language.
- The potential of descendants of Finnish speakers should not be underestimated in the revitalization of Meänkieli. Most of the younger people who considered themselves to be speakers of Meänkieli in this research had a one parent from Finland.