The Sámi Language(s), Maintenance and Intellectualisation

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This article gives an overview of the current sociolinguistic situation of the Sámi language(s) in Northern Scandinavia, focusing on the situation in North Norway in particular. After a brief description of the historical development, the article discusses issues, problems and practises relating to Sámi language politics and planning. Active and conscious Sámi language planning is a rather novel activity; since Sámi as a school language and an official language has only existed for a few decades. The history of the language as a regularly and frequently used written medium is indeed very short. Consequently, planning for the language to occupy a place in the intellectual life of the Sámi speech community is an even more novel activity.

Introduction

Apart from giving a presentation of the current situation of the Sámi (also written Sami or Saami, formerly Lapp) language(s) in Northern Scandinavia, the present paper discusses issues, problems and practices relating to Sámi language politics and planning in relation to the use of these languages in intellectualised domains. Active and conscious Sámi language planning is a rather new activity; since Sámi as a school language and as an official language has existed for only a few decades. The history of the language as a language of relatively widespread written use is indeed very short. Consequently, planning for the language to occupy a place in the intellectual life of the Sámi speech community is an even newer activity.

After having introduced the sociolinguistic and historical background of the intellectualisation of this particular minority language, I will give a brief presentation of the legal situation of the language, the place of the language in higher education, in the media, etc. The introductory and background parts of the present paper are rather comprehensive. The information given in these sections, however, is a necessary condition to understand and appreciate contemporary developments within this particular speech community.

There is not – and has never been – a Sámi nation-state. This means that in all the different states within which there are mother-tongue users of Sámi, the Sámi language is a minority language with no nation-state to lean upon. Furthermore, it means that, at this particular stage of history, any Sámi community, large or small, will be bilingual, at least. For instance, in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, the largest Sámi municipality in Norway, any Norwegian could settle and go on being monolingual Norwegian without many problems. An adult Sámi, not mastering Norwegian, however, would be a rarity in the very same community. The opposite example, a Sámi settling somewhere in Southern Norway without mastering Norwegian, is absolutely impossible. This, of course, implies that the issues and problems of intellectualisation for this very small minority language
Figure 1 Traditional Sámi areas in Norway, Sweden and Finland (Greller, 1996: 8)

are very different from those of a national language, be it as small as Sámi. The story I am going to tell, shows, however, that (re)vitalisation is possible and that a small minority language may well be developed and used within new societal areas in a highly literate society where the minority population has already developed literacy in the majority language before the (re)vitalisation process starts.

Sociolinguistic Background

The Sámi people are one of the indigenous peoples of Europe. They inhabit four different nation-states: Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. The traditional Sámi settlement areas are shown in Figure 1.

The term ‘Sámi’ is the accusative/genitive case of ‘Sápmi’, which denotes the land and the people. As seen in Figure 1, ‘Sápmi’ covers vast territories in Northern Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway. In the past, the habitat of the Sámi people was considerably more extensive than it is now. Still, there is no historical evidence of a centrally organised Sámi state or superstructure. However, traditionally, local organisations called siida regulated land use, administered laws internally, and conducted negotiations externally.

The language(s) spoken by the Sámi belong to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic family of languages. The different varieties form a continuum from the Kola peninsula in Russia to Dalarna in Sweden and Hedmark in Norway. These varieties are not necessarily mutually intelligible; the continuum can be divided into at least nine different languages or dialects: South Sámi, Ume Sámi, Pite
Sámi, Lule Sámi, North Sámi, Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, Kildin Sámi and Ter Sámi (see Figure 2).

In the literature, the regional varieties of Sámi have normally been considered and treated as dialects, because of very regular correspondences in phonology and similarities in grammar and vocabulary. However, the nine varieties differ from each other to at least the same degree as Germanic or Romance languages do. I therefore prefer to call them languages and not dialects, even though the Sámi themselves refer to their own variety and that of others, whatever variety they speak, in the singular form: sámegiella, saemien-giela, sämikielá (‘Sámi language’).

There exist six independently standardised written forms of Sámi: South, Lule, North, Inari, Skolt and Kildin Sámi. The three varieties that are not written (Ume, Pite and Ter Sámi) are now spoken only by a few elderly persons. All the written languages except for Kildin Sámi are based on the Roman alphabet, with certain diacritics added. Kildin uses a variant of Cyrillic.
Any estimation of the number of Sámi speakers is tentative, since reliable data are lacking. North Sámi has by far the largest number of speakers, up to 75% of the total population. If our point of departure is about 20,000 Sámi speakers altogether, 17–18,000 would speak North Sámi, between 2000 and 3000 Lule Sámi; Skolt, Inari and South Sámi would be spoken by between 300 and 500, Kildin by about 650 and Ume, Pite and Ter, as already mentioned, only by some elderly speakers. The majority of the mother tongue speakers of Sámi live in Norway, probably numbering about 10,000 (Sammallahti, 1998: 1–2).

Most Sámi-speaking people are bilingual in Sámi and either Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish or Russian. The majority of Sámi mother tongue speakers live in the interior part of Finnmark, the northernmost county of Norway. The municipalities of Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Kárásjohka/Karasjok, Deatnu/Tana (especially the previous municipality Buolbmát/Polmak) and Unjárga/Nesseby have a majority of Sámi people with Sámi as their first language. In this part of Sápmi the Sámi language is in widespread use within most societal and private areas. In the coastal and fjord-areas in Finnmark, Troms and Nordland, the three northern most counties in Norway, however, the original Sámi population has undergone a severe Norwegianisation. Similar processes took place in Sweden, Finland and Russia/the former Soviet Union. The process of very active assimilation lasted for more than a hundred years, from around the second half of the 19th century, up to long after World War II. In the coastal and fjord areas only a few elderly people have Sámi as their first language, and here Sámi is mostly used for private purposes. A process of revitalisation in recent years may, hopefully, change this picture in the future.

Apart from this general background, the present paper will mainly deal with North Sámi and concentrate on the Sámi population living in Norway.

A Brief Historical Overview

In 1981, when Professor Douglas Sanders, a Canadian lawyer, was asked to provide the Norwegian Supreme Court with an expert opinion on the relationship between the Sámi people and the Norwegian state, he declared: ‘The relationship between the Norwegian State and the Sámi people is colonial in its origins’ (Sanders, 1981). Exactly the same holds true for Finland and Sweden, and even more so for Russia/the former Soviet Union. Ole Henrik Magga, the first president of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament (Sámediggi), sums up 200–300 years of colonial history in this very concise and laconic way:

Sámi land was absorbed and divided up by the Nordic states and Russia in a historical process which began with trading, plunder and missionary expeditions. The borders were drawn up in 1751 and 1826, after which the states installed themselves as private owners of all land and water. The Norwegian state launched a systematic war against Sámi culture and language for 100 years, while the other states denied the existence of the Sámi as a people. (Magga, 1995: 220)

This means that the northern region of the Scandinavian countries is, and, for as long as we can tell, has been, multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual. This fact, however, has only recently been acknowledged by official authorities, and
by the public. It was in fact not till the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the southern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland became the target of immigration – by so-called guest-workers – that the issue of bi- or multilingualism was given any attention. Still, until recently, these countries have considered themselves, and have by others been considered, to be monolingual, monocultural and thus culturally homogeneous. The exception is Finland, which has always recognised its Swedish-speaking minority.

The Sámi minority was more or less invisible in the official presentation of the nations, in schoolbooks, in teaching and instruction, in spite of the fact that the Sámi people are the ethnic group that probably has the longest history within the region that now includes the nation-states of Norway, Sweden and Finland. However, if and when the Sámi were mentioned, the purpose was normally to add some picturesque exoticism to the picture of otherwise homogeneous nations. These attitudes towards the Sámi must be interpreted as a reflection of the originally colonialist relationship between the authorities of the Scandinavian states and the Sámi people. Today, the Sámi have gained the status of an indigenous minority, and very few, if any, question that formal status any more.

In modern times, the division of the Sámi area by state frontiers and the lack of support of a nation-state, in addition to the internal linguistic diversity, have complicated educational and linguistic policy for the Sámi people as a separate group. On the other hand, Sámi has existed as a written language for several hundred years. The oldest written Sámi material is a small dictionary from Kola written down by an English sea-captain in 1557. The first printed work was a tiny primer in a mixture of Sámi and Finnish, printed in Stockholm in 1619. From then on translations of the Bible into different varieties of the Sámi language have been on the agenda. From the 17th century onwards, religious books of various kinds, primers and some other schoolbooks have been published at different intervals of time. Literacy in Sámi was considered desirable for missionary purposes. Thus, since the 17th century Sámi has been in active use, both in spoken and written form, by the Church, and also at various periods by schools. From the second half of the 19th century, however, the Norwegian state authorities started carrying out a policy of assimilation, depriving Sámi of its function in primary education. The reasons were partly nationalistic, the nation-building process in Norway being at its peak. The idea of an intimate connection between a nation and its national language: one nation – one language (and one God), dominated. At the same time an expansion of the school system took place in the Sámi areas. In Norwegian schools all instruction was to take place in Norwegian only from 1880 onwards. Boarding schools were built for Sámi children, partly to keep them away from their Sámi environments. This was followed by other measures involving state language preferences, which were to have a highly destructive impact on Sámi society. For instance, in 1902, a law was passed to the effect that state-owned land in Finnmark, the northernmost county in the country, could be sold or hired only to Norwegian citizens who were able to speak, read and write the Norwegian language and who used this language in everyday life.

In short, during the second half of the 19th century, the Sámi language was banned. Since World War II, however, a gradual change has taken place. Little by little, the Sámi organisations in Norway, Finland and Sweden have managed to influence government policies so much that the Sámi population gained some
official recognition. The political breakthrough came in Finland, where an elected Sá mi Assembly was established in 1973. In Norway, a political crisis in 1980, due to the Alta River hydro-electric dam project, resulted in a series of events which in the end made the government establish two investigatory commissions to examine the Sá mi people’s cultural and legal position in Norway and to make recommendations as to future policy.

When the Norwegian government decided to go through with the Alta River hydro-electric dam project, there were massive protests. Sá mi demonstrators organised a hunger strike in front of the Norwegian parliament in Oslo; demonstrators from all over the country chained themselves together near the dam site to prevent construction of a road, 600 policemen were brought in to remove them, and another hunger strike began. The construction work was temporarily stopped, but was ultimately finished after a Supreme Court decision.

Within a few years, after the actions against the Alta River dam project, four major reports were submitted to the Norwegian government outlining proposals for a principled basis for an official Sá mi policy.

On 12 April 1988, Norway constitutionally recognised the Sá mi people as an integral part of the Norwegian nation-state. The following passage was added to the constitution’s §110:

It is the responsibility of the Norwegian state to ensure favourable conditions to enable the Sá mi people to maintain and develop its language, culture and social structures. (Greller, 1996: 90–91)

The Finns made corresponding amendments to their constitution in 1995. The Norwegian Sá mi Parliament was opened by the Norwegian king in 1989. All three Nordic countries, Norway, Sweden and Finland, have now established separate Sá mi Parliaments. In Norway, the Sámeláhka (‘Sá mi Act/law’) of 1987 gives the necessary regulations for the Sámediggi (‘Sá mi Parliament’). In 1990 an important amendment to the Sámeláhka concerning the language was approved:

Sá mi and Norwegian are equal languages. They should become equal in law according to chapter 3. (Greller, 1996: 91)

In the chapter referred to, the basic Sá mi language rights are stated. These rights apply generally in the so-called ‘administrative Sá mi language area’, the municipalities of Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Kárášjohka/Karasjok, Porsáŋgu/Porsanger, Deatnu/Tana, Unjárga/Nesseby in Finnmark and Gáivuotna/Kåfjord in the county of Troms. Everybody within this area has the right to use and to receive a response in Sá mi in all official connections.

The purpose of the Sá mi Act, is, as stated in its preamble, to make it possible for the Sá mi people in Norway to safeguard and develop their language, culture and way of life. In principle, Sá mi is now recognised as equal with Norwegian in formal status. Still, the Sá mi Act does not ensure full equality. Limitations of territorial applications represent rather strong restrictions. The Sá mi do not have the same rights everywhere in Norway. In many cases, the rights are restricted to the five afore mentioned municipalities in Finnmark and Troms, to the so-called ‘Sá mi district’.

The regulations of the Norwegian Sá mi Act are in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 27, and with the ILO convention
169 on indigenous and tribal peoples, which Norway has ratified, both the
general clauses, and those dealing explicitly with language. A Finnish Language
Act has been in effect since 1992. In Sweden the issues have been discussed in a
committee on Sámi affairs, but less progress has been made as compared with
Finland and Norway. Nevertheless, all three states now have directly elected
Sámi Parliaments, which in Finland came into being in 1973, in Norway in 1987,
and in Sweden in 1993. Formally, these are strictly consultative bodies, but they
have considerable weight and influence on the governments and the national
parliaments.

After World War II, the idea that all effective learning, including language
learning, should be based on the mother tongue (a right Norwegian- and Swedish-speaking schoolchildren have had for generations) gradually began to gain
ground also in relation to Sámi speakers. In 1959, as a part of a new general act
concerning primary education, Sámi was again allowed as a language of instruc-
tion in Norwegian primary schools, ‘on the decision of the ministry’, as the law
states. Later, the Primary School Act of 1969 stated that children of Sámi-speak-
ing parents in the Sámi districts were entitled to instruction in Sámi. In 1975, this
right was granted to everybody living in these districts, and in 1990, the relevant
paragraph of the Primary School Act was amended as follows, in accordance
with the Sámi Language Act:

(1) Children in Sámi districts have the right to be taught Sámi and to be
instructed through the medium of Sámi. From the seventh grade on the
pupils themselves decide on this matter. Children taught in or through the
medium of Sámi are exempted from instruction in one of the two Norwegian
language varieties [i.e. Bokmål or Nynorsk] in the last two years of school.

(2) On advice from the local school board, the municipality board may decide
that Sámi-speaking children shall be instructed in Sámi for all nine years of
compulsory schooling, and that Norwegian-speaking children shall learn
Sámi as a subject.

(3) Instruction in or through the medium of Sámi may also be given to children
with a Sámi background outside the Sámi districts. If there are at least three
Sámi-speaking pupils at a school, they may demand instruction in Sámi.
(Vikør, 1993: 91)

Language Maintenance and Intellectualisation

Gradually, since the 1970s, the Sámi language has been used more and more,
not only in schools, but also in other social domains, such as literature, newspa-
pers, periodicals, other media such as radio and television, and in administra-
tion. Education in Sámi is of course a sine qua non in relation to all these domains.

Sámi education

As mentioned previously, Sámi education has only recently been authorised
by law in Norway. Throughout the country there are a number (more than 50 in
1999/2000) of Sámi kindergartens. Primary schooling in Norway starts at the age
of six. The teaching of Sámi has expanded immensely since the early 1980s. Three
times as many schools are now involved in the teaching of Sámi. In 1999/2000
2347 pupils were taught Sámi, and Sámi was the medium of instruction in 19
There are two secondary schools using Sámi as the medium of instruction, one in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino and one in Karasjok. During the 1990s the average number per year in secondary schools has been around 450.

A Sámi college, Sámi allaskuvala was established in Guovdageaidnu in 1989. It started as a teacher training college, but has now expanded to several other fields within higher education. The medium of instruction is Sámi, and the administrative language of the college is also (North) Sámi. This is the only higher education institution teaching in Sámi. It is in fact the only higher education institution in the world in which the medium of teaching and administration and management, is an indigenous language. The college recruits students from all over Sápmi, with a clear majority from the Norwegian side. Finnish Sámi students receive their teacher training qualifications from Sámi allaskuvala, which has been accepted as the equivalent to Finnish education qualifications for several years, while Sweden just recently (in 2001) recognised qualifications from Sámi allaskuvala as equivalent to Swedish teacher training. The Sámi college is currently working to get its Sámi preschool teacher training programme accepted as a valid educational qualification in neighbouring countries. The University of Tromsø, which teaches Sámi language and culture at university level, and in Sámi, has established a centre for Sámi studies which is also active in all kinds of issues concerning indigenous people. Here, however, the medium of instruction is either Norwegian or English, except for the teaching of Sámi language and literature. Sámi is also taught at university level in Sweden and Finland.

It seems clear that the Sámi education system is strongest in early childhood education. Since the early 1980s, however, provisions at all levels of education have gone ahead rapidly. Corson (1995: 508) sums up the situation in Sápmi as follows:

School graduates in Kautokeino and Karasjok are fully bilingual in Norwegian and Sámi; they are the most successful bilinguals in the country. There is now greater Sámi language use among children than 15 years ago, even in mixed Norwegian/Sámi households. Even non-Sámi-speaking parents in the Sámi districts prefer to enrol their children in the Sámi-speaking classes, since the status of Sámi has increased because of the laws. Sámi graduates outside the six districts are less proficient in the Sámi languages, although this varies with the quality of the teachers and the teaching they receive.

Thus, the level of education has increased significantly among the Sámi population. The great bulk of them have graduated from other institutions than Sámi allaskuvala, i.e. from universities and colleges all over Norway and the other Scandinavian countries, and also from institutions in other countries.

In Norway, there is a great demand for educated bilingual and bicultural Sámi-speaking persons. There is a wide choice of positions available to them, in education at all levels, in the bureaucracy, in administration, in policy agencies, and in politics. Young Sámi women are now among the best educated social groups in Norway. This might seem unusual, but the same holds true of young Norwegian women in general compared to Norwegian men. A contributing
factor is that young Sámi men from reindeer-herding families see the traditional occupations as more relevant and attractive than higher education.

Sámi mass media

The situation within the Sámi mass media can best be characterised as unstable. The oldest Sámi newspaper *Nuorttanaste*, first published in 1898, is still in print. All in all, around 10 Sámi newspapers have been published for a shorter or longer period of time. The largest existing one, *Min Áigi* (circulation 1300) appears twice a week. Journals in Sámi have been published since the 1920s, but very irregularly. Since 1946, the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation has had regular broadcasts in Sámi, initially only 20 minutes a week, however. Now, there are separate Sámi radio stations in the three Nordic countries, all of which belong to the different national broadcasting networks. These stations are also responsible for Sámi television programmes. Regular Sámi television broadcasts started in Norway in 1990.

Sámi art

Alongside the revitalisation of modern Sámi society from the 1980s onwards, we have witnessed the flourishing of Sámi art. As far as Sámi language is involved in this flourishing, Sámi literature, music/song, theatre and film should be mentioned in particular. Novels and other literary genres have appeared in Sámi since around 1900. During the last few decades, the publication of different Sámi texts has increased steadily, and a growing number of well-known Sámi authors have appeared on the scene. Correspondingly, the rather famous *Beaivvoás Teáhter* (founded in 1981) has played an important role as a promoter of Sámi language and culture. One of the most well known film directors in Norway is a Sámi. He has directed a couple of films on Sámi topics, which partly use the Sámi language. A similar function as in film and theatre is seen in Sámi music. The production of music on compact discs and cassettes started in the middle of the 1980s. Traditional *yoiks* (Sámi folk songs) and poetry have meant a lot in this connection. The famous multi artist, the late Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, should be mentioned in particular.

Sámi intellectuals

Most of the different activities mentioned in this section involve what we could call Sámi intellectuals, many of whom have not had any or only very little schooling in Sámi. The historical development outlined in the present paper could not have taken place without these young, more or less well educated, often radical and even militant, intellectual Sámi. Still, up to the present day, Sámi has held only a marginal place in higher education. Most Sámi students still study through a medium of instruction other than Sámi throughout their tertiary education. Nevertheless, in theory, at least, one can have all one’s schooling in Sámi, if one wants to become a preschool teacher, a teacher, a journalist, or a linguist or literary scholar, specialising in Sámi. However, even in these cases, one can hardly avoid some Norwegian or English as medium of instruction from time to time.
Sámi language planning

Traditionally, when Sámi was not used in schools or as an official language, it still played a significant role as a written language for religious purposes, and a continuous history of 300–400 years can be traced for Sámi as a written language within the religious field. Stylistically, written Sámi in religious texts has therefore developed a diverse and varied register. Furthermore, there is a very strong interest within the Sámi community in the new Sámi Bible translation that is currently taking place. On the other hand, there are fields within which the Sámi written language has no established traditions of use, e.g. for legal purposes. This causes problems as to what the proper Sámi sources should be when it comes to important questions concerning land and water rights.

The Sámi language planning agency in Norway is known as Sámi giellaráddi (Sámi language council). It is an advisory body for the Sámediggi and other public institutions on questions concerning the Sámi language. Its tasks, which are laid down in the Language Act of the Sámi law of 1992, are to implement measures to protect and develop the Sámi language in Norway, to advise and inform about the Sámi language, to compile a register of qualified translators and interpreters, and to develop national and inter-Nordic co-operation as regards language questions (Greller, 1996: 77). Furthermore, the language council also has responsibilities for standardisation, such as developing and approving new terminology for the three Sámi languages in Norway, and deciding on the spelling of Sámi words and expressions in accordance with the general principles of Northern Sámi orthography (Greller, 1996).

Even before the Sámi giellaráddi was established, Sámi professionals had started developing Sámi terminology for new fields (e.g. the medical doctor Egil Utsi has done a lot to develop a specific Sámi medical terminology and to translate medical terms into Sámi). Other fields that should be mentioned in which Sámi giellaráddi has taken active part are: sports, mechanics, technology and physiotherapy.

Concluding Discussion

The Sámi language functions as an important ethnic criterion and symbol, possibly surpassing any other single cultural feature as a unifying force. Taking into consideration that there are hardly any monolingual Sámi left, it is understandable that this symbolic function is crucial as a language maintenance device. These days, all speakers of Sámi must be considered bilingual. All of them, with virtually no exceptions, master Norwegian in addition to Sámi. Many of the Norwegian Sámi also master Finnish. This means that the issue of ethnicity and its relation to language is as persistent and pressing in Norway as it is in the rest of the world where ethnic awareness has evolved during the last few decades. Thus, issues of social justice in the form of collective rights for the minority groups – including language rights – have been heavily debated. Theoretically at least, the language rights of the Sámi have been fully recognised. Still, because of the many different Sámi languages, it is in practice almost only the speakers of the Northern Sámi language – roughly 75% of the Sámi population – who have had their linguistic rights realised. At present, Northern Sámi seems to have a firm base in education and in literature, and partly in the mass media as well.
Furthermore, the Sámi language and culture are strongest in those areas where the traditional industries – reindeer-herding, agriculture, fishing and hunting – together with the utilisation of outlying grazing grounds and forests, are being preserved. In such stable Sámi societies only small changes in language use have occurred. However, only about 10% of Sámi make their living from the reindeer-herding-industry. Most Sámi have gone through the same development and modernisation as the rest of the Western world, with great social, cultural and linguistic consequences. From this perspective, the role of the Sámi intellectuals as language preservers becomes crucial.

Because of the concentration of 80 to 90% of Sámi in the traditional core regional areas, the language is used in all types of everyday contact and communication – in commerce, administration and education. Furthermore, there is a growing tendency to use Sámi geographical names in post, tele- and other communications, in road and street signs, and in official and private advertising.

Gradually, the language is also being learnt by a small part of the non-Sámi-speaking population. Previously there used to be strong social barriers to learning the language of the Sámi. Apparently, inequities in status were linked to learning the language of the minority groups.

Thus, the core area is the optimal area and a stepping stone for language revival and revitalisation in other areas. What happens here is critical to the rest of the Sámi-speaking area.

In his book, *Reversing Language Shift*, Fishman (1991) heavily stresses the crucial importance of the intimate family and local community level for the maintenance of a minority language. He distinguishes between two levels of language usage: (1) the informal intergenerational usage at home, in the family and the near neighbourhood, versus (2) the outside ethnolinguistic influences, the language of education, the workplace, the mass media and the language of governmental services. He points out, very poignantly, that without having sufficiently safeguarded level (1), trying to control level (2) is equivalent to constantly blowing air into a tyre that still has a puncture (Fishman, 1991: xii).

Language rights, language obligations, language education up to tertiary level are all important factors, of course. But, still, bearing Fishman’s punctured-tyre metaphor in mind, we must not forget that schooling and official language use come after – and not before – intergenerational transmission of the language has already occurred. So as long as there is intergenerational first language transmission of a language, that language variety is still to be considered a living variety. On the other hand, of course, what is not transmitted cannot be maintained.

This situation gives motivation for a rather optimistic conclusion: currently the Sámi languages are transmitted from generation to generation, to a higher degree than was the case during at least the three previous generations. This holds true not only for North Sámi, but definitely also for Lule Sámi in Norway, and even for South Sámi, but there the number of speakers is so small that it is hard to conclude anything at all as far as the future is concerned. Nevertheless, the process of revitalisation in the marginal areas, introduced and supported by the Sámi intellectuals, already seems to have produced results. Sámi is spoken to newborn babies by Sámi-speaking mothers and/or fathers in different parts of Sápmi, and even outside Sápmi. Some of these parents are able to use Sámi in
their jobs, in the municipal administration, as teachers, as public servants, etc. Small children are read to in Sámi, they listen to Sámi children’s TV; some Sámi children hear the language on the street, in shops, and learn it in school, etc. Both inside and outside the core Sámi area there is a growing number of babies who are immersed in Sámi from day one. So why should the tone in which I conclude this paper not be an optimistic one?

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Notes
1. This estimate is probably rather low. In Iskkadeapmi sámeigiela geavaheami birra (Sámi giellaráddi, 2000: 1), there is an estimate of 25,000 speakers of Sámi in Norway only.
2. Now it is from the eighth grade
3. Schooling in Norway is now compulsory for 10 years.

References