How to Revitalize an Indigenous Language? Adults' Experiences of the Revitalization of the Sámi Language

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Abstract

The purpose of the research: Language revitalization means that an extinct language is taken in active use. Language revitalization can also save an endangered language from extinction. The Sámi form an indigenous people whose language is endangered. A marginal group of people with Sámi ancestry has revitalized the Sámi language. The materials and methods: This study focused on these adult Sámi-speaking people (N=10) who had revitalized the language. They were interviewed of their language revitalization process, especially how they became language revitalizers. This was a narrative study. The results: The results show that language revitalization is a process that demands strong motivation and courage at the individual level. The process includes difficult experiences and the support from the community is not any obviousness. The study contributes information about a less studied and topical viewpoint to the revitalization of indigenous languages.

Key words: Indigenous people; Language revitalization; Linguistic diversity; Language maintenance; Identity; Motivation

INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the phenomenon of language revitalization based on the narratives of Sámi language revitalizers. During the past few decades, language revitalization has aroused more and more interest because indigenous peoples' awareness of the significance of language has strengtehened and concern of the extinction of small languages has increased.

Michal Krauss (1992; 1998) was the first to pay attention to language extinction. His work started the scientific discussion about and research on endangered languages at the beginning of the 1990s (Krauss, 1992; 1998). Minority and indigenous populations have started to revitalize their languages because the decrease in the number of language-speakers has been worrying (see Buss & Laurén, 1997; Dorian, 1994; Harrison & Papa, 2005; Reyhner, 1999; Rohani *et al.*, 2012; Zuckermann & Walsh, 2011).

Successful language revitalization necessitates that the nation state has an official language policy supporting minority languages. In addition to this, the society should have positive or neutral attitude toward minority languages and an active mouthpiece who is interested and enthusiastic about language revitalization and who becomes heard (Fishman, 1991; Huss, 2012). However, language revitalization does not begin with anyway near as benign circumstances as described above.

The Sámi language belongs to the Finno-Ugric languages. Traditionally, linguistics distinguihes ten different Sámi languages. Nine of them are still spoken in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, and all of them are endangered. According to the definition of endangered languages, the North Sámi language (15,000-25,000 speakers) is endangered; Lule Sámi (2,000 speakers), South Sámi (700 speakers), Inari Sámi (300 speakers), and Skolt Sámi (430 speakers) languages are seriously endangered, and Ter Sámi (< 20), Pite Sámi (20 speakers) and Ume Sámi (20 speakers) are critically endangered.

The last speaker of Akkala Sámi died in 2003 (Seurujärvi-Kari, 2011; Unesco Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, 2011; Ylikoski, 2009). Earlier, there were even more Sámi languages: for example, Kittilä Sámi, Kemi Sámi, and Kuolajärvi Sámi have already disappeared (Aikio, 2000; Itkonen, 1948a; Itkonen & Äimä, 1918; Saarikivi, 2011; Tegengren, 1952).

This article focuses on the North Sámi language. At the moment, North Sámi is spoken in the northern parts of Finland, Sweden, and Norway by approximately 15,000-25,000 speakers. It is that largest Sámi language, and according to some estimations, as much as 75 % of Sámi-speakers speak North Sámi (Ylikoski, 2009).

THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION

Language revitalization can be defined from various points of view. Basically, it refers to action that aims at revitalizing a language in areas where it is in danger of disappearing. In other words, it supports the vitality of the language. The purpose is to increase the number of language speakers and widen the domains of using the language. These domains are, for example, home, school, circles of acquiantances, work, media, social media, and official language usage (Fishman, 1991; Helander, 2009; Todal, 2002).

According to Leena Huss (1999), language revitalization can also happen so that an older generation learns the language of their people and starts using it, or that people who have learned their language only verbally learn also use the language in writing. Marja-Liisa Olthuis (2003) mentions the chain of language protectors referring to a construction of such a favorable language environment that ensures the natural passing of the language and the established societal status of the language.

In this study, language revitalization refers to a situation where the Sámi language is re-introduced after the partly or totally extiction of the language in the speaker's family. Therefore, language revitalization is a process that involves a reversing language shift (RLS) (Fishman, 1990; 1991). The purpose of reversing language shift is to slow down and prevent the extinction of a language at the individual level, in social relationships, and in the society (Fishman, 1991). Reversing language shift at the individual level and in social relationships means that people, who have previously had only a passive knowledge of language (one understands the language but does not actively speak it, see e.g., Clément *et al.*, 1994; Laufer, 1998) or have not known the language, learns or activates the minority language and starts using it. At the community level, reversing language shift means that minority languages have started to be used in such situations and institutions in which the dominant language was previously used (Fishman, 1991; Huss, 1999; Tse, 2001).

Language revitalization is preceded by a phase during which the language has not been passed or has been passed only partly from one generation to another. Language shift means a process during which language speakers do not pass on their language to their children or do not use the language any longer (e.g., Fishman, 1990; see also Bettoni & Gibbons, 1988; Hulsen *et al.*, 2002). Language replacement can seem voluntary and outsiders of the language group can think that the speakers of the minority language start to learn the dominant language of their own accord and finally talk the language to their children (Fishman, 2001; Hirvonen, 2008; Pasanen, 2010). The common misunderstanding is that this guarantees them with better livelihood and position. Therefore, the perspective to language shift among indigenous peoples (Benjamin, Pecos, & Romero, 1996; Crawford, 1996; Holm & Holm, 1995; McCarty & Zepeda, 2006; Pease-Pretty On Top, 2004; Sims, 2001; Wilson, 1999) is somewhat different than, for example, among immigrants who start using the language of the target country (e.g., Hulsen *et al.*, 2002) or using a new language in certain domains instead of the native language (see e.g., Berg *et al.*, 2001). In indigenous contexts, language shift is far from voluntary, but merely a consequence of the inequal treatment of minority and majority languages. Inequality may be due to the direct or indirect assimilation policy while in societies, that provide the same rights to minority and majority languages, language shift is not likely to occur (Pasanen, 2010).

Language revitalization is a complex and multidimensional process that requires both societal and individual action. At the societal level, language revitalization is connected to the national and international legislation and cultural policy. Whereas at the individual level, language revitalization is affected by attitudes, cultural heritage, and circumstances in which the speakers of the language live (Pietikäinen *et al.*, 2010). Anna-Riitta Lindgren (2000) considers the process of language revitalization as a part of linguistic emancipation. Emancipation means that the position of a group of minority language speakers is strengthened by creating fair societal structure and equal opportunities of participating for exmaple language revitalization (Giddens, 1991). Thus, emancipation refers to action that does not aim at restoring the situation of the language but at widening linguistic rights so that people can start using the language in public arenas of life (Lindgren, 2000).

METHOD

The purpose of this study was to analyze the Sámi language revitalization from the adult language revitalizers' point of view. The following research questions were set at this study:

(1) How did the language revitalizers start language revitalization?

(2) What factors motivated them to revitalize the Sámi language?

(3) How does the surrounding community regard the new language speakers according to the language revitalizers' perceptions?

This was a narrative study (Bruner, 1985). Narrative in research can be defined from a variety of scientific perspectives, such as a process of information construction, research data, analysing method, and professional tool. From the point of view of information processing, narrativity can be seen as a way of knowing and nature of knowledge. The purpose of narrative research is to produce an authentic viewpoint of reality instead of objective truth. Therefore, narrative research aims at obtaining local, personal, and subjective information. Indeed, the subjectivity of knowledge distinguishes narrative research from traditional qualitative research (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993). Narrative research is also closely related to social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The narrative approach was considered suitable for researching the experiences of the minority group of the Sámi language revitalizers. The study is interdisciplinary as it is connected to the field of education, sociolinguistics, and Sámi research. The narrative data were obtained by interviewing ten Sámi-speaking people. They are called research partners along the spirit of indigenous research: the research participants are not considered as a research target but as active collaborators constructing knowledge together with the researcher (see Sarivaara, 2012). Moreover, research partners were considered equal to the researcher, and the interview situations were based on mutual interaction, equal participation, and sharing of opinions. Interviews were performed either in North Sámi or Finnish according to a research partner's choice.

The research partners of this study were non-status Sámi. This definition refers to their position within the official Sámi community in Finland. They form a marginal group: for one reason or another, they do not belong to the official electoral register of the Sámi Parliament of Finland (Act on Sámi Parliament, 974/1995). This position challenges language revitalization in many ways. The research partners had learned the Sámi language in their adulthood and use it daily in various domains of life. They speak Sámi fluently. They have learned and spoken Finnish at their childhood homes but they do have Sámi ancestry according to the family tree. The Sámi language was lost in their families at some point. The research group consists of people of various age: the oldest research partner was born in the 1940s and the youngest in the 1980s. Five of the interviewees were women and five were men.

This article is based on Dr. Erika Sarivaara's (2012) doctoral research. The findings are further discussed as the purpose is to produce information about pedagogical practices of learning Sámi language to support language usage, teaching, research, and decision making. Various possibilities and obstacles concern language revitalization, but they can be analyzed through scientific research. This study contributes to the discussion of revitalizing endangered indigenous languages (see also Keskitalo, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2011).

RESULTS

The Start of Sámi Language Revitalization

The initial reason for revitalizing language was the language replacement that had taken place in the research partners' families previously. The following excerpt illustrates the deliberation of one of the research partners concerning language studies and one's own background. The research partners' childhood homes had been monolingual, in other words, they had previously used only the Finnish language.

I had this sort of a sad feeling. If I have some Sámi ancestry, so why I have to learn the Sámi language like this? (Research Partner no. 6)

Many research partners had been aware of their Sámi ancestry already when children. However, it does not directly mean that one starts studying the Sámi language. Instead, living in a Sámi community in adulthood and the wish to integrate in the Sámi community ignited the desire to learn Sámi. The following data excerpt shows that the person had moved in the Sámi community and thinks that his knowledge of Sámi has had a salient role in getting know the people and the place of domicile:

The greatest benefit has been to putting down roots here. It has been much more natural since I learned the Sámi language. I have started to understand life and being here, and people, too, I guess – and started to feel like home here in general. (Research Partner no. 9)

One of the research partners started to study Sámi because of the Sámi ancestry but the wish to get connected with the local people mattered too:

At first, I was curious. I wanted to learn the language to get to know the people. – I think that my Sámi ancestry has initially gave the impetus and made me interested in the Sámi people, culture, and language. – But after moving here [in the Sámi community], I think that the community has had more influence than my ancestors and background. (Research Partner no. 2)

A Sámi-speaking circle of friends could also inspire to study the language. In addition, a Sámi-speaking spouse and the spouse's family have given the motivation to learn Sámi. The following research partner also acknowledged the knowing of language as the means of understanding the cultural discourse profoundly:

The push to starting Sámi studies was my friends speaking Sámi to each other and I had learned to listen to Sámi. – The Sámi language makes a really important part of that all because without knowing the language you cannot get in the culture that well. If you wish to know the culture, you have to learn the language. (Research Partner no. 3)

As the previous quotations show, the surrounding community has functioned as the inspirer for learning the Sámi language. On the one hand, the Sámi community has given the chance and supported learning the language. On the other hand, language revitalization was based on the research partners' will to learn the language in order to build the connection to their own history and strengthen their identity (Todal, 2002). Likewise, King (2009) emphasizes the meaning of cultural identity for reversing language shift. Several research partners mentioned clearly that knowledge of their Sámi ancestry motivated them first to learn Sámi.

One of the research partners had contemplated for a long time whether to start studying the Sámi language and tried to find the courage to do that. His Sámi ancestry had affected greatly, and yet, he had found it difficult to start studying. Finally, after taking a course in Sámi handicrafts, he took heart and started:

> That has bothered me a little. So I have not just suddenly became interested in the Sámi language but it has probably occupied my mind for a long time, this Sámi issue and my own history. – I think it was after taking the course on Sámi handicraft which encouraged me a little. There were local Sámi, too. I got to know them and started to think about my roots and became encouraged and thought that perhaps I could try the language, too, and whether I would learn it. (Research Partner no. 1)

In all, it seems that the Sámi anccestry has been one of the most crucial motivators. In addition, these language revitalizers were clearly interested in the Sámi culture:

> I have always been interested in the Sámi language and culture. And when I found out that our family has Sámi blood, I thought what if I started studying the Sámi language. (Research Partner no. 5)

The research partners were aware of the possibility of studying the Sámi language, especially at the Giellagas Institution of the University of Oulu, at the University of Helsinki, and the Sámi Education Institute in Finland, and the Sámi University College in Norway. The Sámi Education Institute, located in Inari, Finland, has offered studies in the North Sámi language and culture since 1993. The study program is one year long and prepares new Sámi speakers every year making the Sámi language revitalization possible (Vuolab- Lohi, 2007).

> But I remember that I had had a look at old Sámi-speaking text books already earlier and learned a few words. I had been interested in the language for a who knows how long time. I guess I saw the ad in the newspaper saying that this course starts here [in Inari] and I became encouraged and applied to it. I studied along my work which was not full time [at the time]. I was curious whether I would learn that Sámi language. (Research Partner no. 1)

Education has been a significant factor supporting the learning of the Sámi language and strengthening the knowledge of the language. Several research partners had studied the language also independently with the available scarce learning materials. Some mentioned their parents activity for the Sámi language, too. Research partners told that their parents had woke up to the endangered situation of the language and wanted to support their children's learning and speaking of the language.

It is worth noticing that language revitalization among those research partners who live outside the official Sámi Domicile Area is challenging because the residential environment is Finnish-speaking. Yet, a large proportion of people with Sámi ancestry lives in Helsinki, which is the capital city of Finland, located in the south. Since 1988, Ry City-Sámit Rs has operated in the metropolitan area of Finland. The association was founded by the Sámi who lived in the area. The fundamental goal of the association was to gather the metropolitan Sámi, strengthen their Sámi identity, and further their opportunities to use the Sámi language in the urban area dominated by the Finnish-speaking population (Ry City-Sámit Rs, 2012). One of the research partners who lived in Helsinki had started to familiarize with the language of his greatgrandfather by self-learning. Language studies extended at the university through Sámi studies. The members of Ry City-Sámit Rs regarded the research partner's studies and Sáminess positively:

> I borrowed the Davvin book fromt the library and read it for a year by myself. Then I took Sámi studies for a winter. – Those city-Sámi would always say "go ahead, join us, you are one of us". (Research Partner no. 7)

The community has to tolerate language revitalization actions in order to make revitalization succeed. Language revitalizers' language skills vary and therefore, the community also has to accept people with defective knowledge of language (see also Dorian, 1994). On the other hand, the starting language learner has to have determination, courage, and tolerance to failures.

Motivating Factors in Language Revitalization

The most important condition for revitalization of an endangered minority language is motivation. Individual language speakers and their children have to have a genuine will to maintain, revitalize, and develop their language (Fishman, 1991; Fishman, 1999; King, 2009). Next, we will analyze the motivation for learning the Sámi language in the research partners (see Gardner & Lambert, 1959; 1972; King, 2009; Todal, 2002).

The motivation of people who speak the majority language but want to learn the minority language can be explained with concepts of instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; 1972). Studies of motivation to learn a language in the terms of reference of indigenous peoples emphasize the meaning of cultural identity, intrinsic motivation, such as bearing responsibility for the endangered language, or continuation motivation (King, 2009; Todal, 2002).

Instrumental motivation is extrinsic and means that a person wants to learn the language in order to achieve social or personal, instrumental values, in other words, practical benefits and advantages. Learning a language

can, for example, be financially beneficial (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; 1972):

> I have sometimes sold Guksis [a wooden cup] to Norway by speaking Sámi, and you would not even cope there with the Finnish language. (Research Partner no. 1)

The reasearch data showed that learning the Sámi language meant increase in intellectual capital, and indirectly new work opportunities, too:

> It seems that the more I know the language, the better I understand the Sámi culture and the issues within the Sámi community. – It is good for work, it [knowing the language] can open many work opportunities. Now, I have studied the Sámi language for two years. I became enthuastic about studying it because I was interested in Finno-Ugric languages in general. (Research Partner no. 6)

At the time the interviews were done, five research partners had Sámi as working language and three had mostly Finnish but occasionally Sámi. Two were students. Knowledge of Sámi could also help gaining admission to university because some universities have quotas for Sámi-speaking students. All this illustrates the reality that, inevitably, the knowledge of the Sámi language is instrumentally beneficial at least in the official Sámi Domicile Area. However, the research partners did not particularly highlight the instrumental value of knowing the language.

As shown in the first result chapter, the wish to integrate in the Sámi-speaking community can be the motivating factor. A person who has integrative motivation to learn the language admires people who speak the target language and their culture, and want to conncet with them. The person may even be able to identify with the target group (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; 1972).

Motivation to revitalize a language can also be seen related to identity questions. The following research partner had wanted to strengthen her Sámi identity by learning the Sámi language. The person finds her Sáminess still fragile and needs strengthening of cultural identity:

> I wanted to learn Sámi perhaps for my identity, to strengthen it. My identity is still unclear. It does not bother me every day but every now and then I have moments when it hurts. (Research Partner no. 4)

Motivation can be multidimensional: the following research partner was first interested in his greatgrandfather's language, but later his goal was to learn Sámi in order to be able to contact his relatives:

> Once in the library, I noticed that there is Davvin. Would that be my greatgrandfather's language? And if I sometime find out who are my relatives, it will be good to know the language. And I thought that I have to learn it. I cannot just go to a house and tell that I am a distant relative. (Research Partner no. 7)

The aforementioned stories represent the motivation of continuity and strengthening cultural identity. According to the data, learning a language may help one identifying with the history of one's family and the chain of Sámi generations. Therefore, the Sámi ancestry and feeling of belonging to the Sámi people have inspired to study the Sámi language.

The results show that most of the research partners were initially inspired by their Sámi background. Three of them were clearly motivated in integrating in the Sámi community. Instead, instrumental motivation did not come up clearly in the interviews, perhaps partly because it is not considered a very positive or flattering reason.

Perceptions of the Reactions of the Surrounding Community

How the surrounding community responds to the new Sámi-speaking members affects crucially language revitalization. Usually, language speakers illustrate their identities by choosing the new language but the shift can also be based on political reasons that may be connected to language maintenance, too (Huss, 1999; Wei, 1994). The way the Sámi-speaking community stands with the new Sámi speakers has been studied abundantly (see e.g., Andersen, 2011; Johansen, 2006). According to the research, it is not simple to start speaking Sámi in adulthood because emotions can be strongly tied to the language. The Sámi language may have been strongly criticized in the new speaker's childhood home, and these negative or even traumatic experiences may make it hard to start speaking the language (Andersen, 2011).

> You have to be a little stubborn, and I was relatively shy. I was so afraid of making a mistake and people would start laughing. How to cope with that? I decided that this is not how it goes, I must not be afraid. And I had some good friends with whom I could practice. (Research Partner no. 2)

Research partners of this study expressed the shyness of speaking the language and the lack of appreciation of their imperfect Sámi knowledge. The research partners entered the linguistic community little by little, but sometimes these experiences may lead to exclusion from discussion:

> Sometimes I speak Sámi [with other Sámi-speaking people]. It depends on the other. Some of them want. I want to answer in Sámi to those who want to speak Sámi [with me]. But there are few people who always change into Finnish or who start speaking Finnish when I come although they are Sámi-speaking. Then, I will not speak Sámi because if they think that I speak so poorly Sámi that it is difficult to listen or I would not understand everything, so I do not want to make them [speak Sámi with me]. So, I do not use it that much and that is why I know only a few words. (Research Partner no. 4)

Inger Johansen (2006) studied attitudes and obstacles to the language revitalization of the South Sámi. According to the research, linguistic purism is one of the obstacles because new speakers feel that the linguistic community necessitates grammatically correct Sámi language. Johansen noted that new language speakers can be excluded from the community and that the process can be quite stigmatizing. Linguistic purism, thus, refers to language speakers' demand of the purity of language (Brunstad, 2003; see also Dorian, 1994). Linguistic

purism makes Sámi speaking difficult for those who are not native speakers. In other words, the speaker does not feel speaking Sámi safe which can lead to exclusion from the linguistic community and finally the extinction of the language (Johansen, 2006). Indeed, many of the research partners reported that they find it safe to speak Sámi with other new Sámi speakers or with their children. This hinders the usage of Sámi language dramatically and introduces a selective starting point for using the language.

> I speak Sámi with them here at school. Sometimes, it is easy to speak Sámi with someone who is not a native speaker. He or she will not start saying that you did not say it like that, or we use to say it like this. (Research Partner no. 7)

The experience of using Sámi can become very uncomfortable when the people of the surrounding community have a purist attitude to the language:

> I find it unpleasant to speak Sámi. – They do not want to hear me trying to find the right words. – If sometimes I say a vowel of wrong length, they want to correct me, and it does not feel nice. They do not listen what I say but how I say it. (Research Partner no. 8)

The purist attitude hinders the new Sámi speakers from strengthening the Sámi language revitalization. Unfortunately, Finnish-speaking Sámi form the majority of the Sámi of Finland. This fact makes it clear that each and everyone who knows even one word of Sámi is valuable and important to the Sámi community. What is especially important is that even those with weak knowledge of Sámi would be allowed to speak (cf. the Inari Sámi community which welcomes speakers with incomplete knowledge of Sámi, see Pasanen, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Learning the Sámi language in challenging circumstances and considering the history of colonization make an interesting form of individual and social self-education that simultaneously molds learners' identity and worldview. As this study showed, language is more than a means of communication and therefore learning a language and using it can be seen an educational project that has wide utility value.

Jeanette King (2009) introduced the concept of language fanatics when referring to people who had dedicated to learning an endangered language and speaking it fluently. Dedication to language revitalization in adulthood can be explained by strong commitment to and responsbility for the endangered language. For example, this ideology has enhanced the learning of Maori language as the second language. King emphases that people who are dedicated to maintaining the endangered language have a key role in passing on the language, for example in the role of a parent or a teacher.

However, learning a language in adulthood requires huge effort, and high motivation and patience. In other words, the one studying the language usually has a strong and inspiring reason for making the effort. The process of learning a language involves familiarizing the culture because language is one of the most fundamental structures of a culture. Language also functions as a bridge between the operationalization of subjective experiences, in other words in the interaction between one's cultural identity and the surrounding reality (Hall, 2003). The Sámi language provides a window for the wholistic view of the Sámi culture (Lehtola, 1997).

In sum, a typical language revitalizer is motivated and has studied the Sámi in adulthood with demanding language learning methods such as self-learning. Mostly, the linguistic community has responded positively to the new speaker's efforts and welcomed him or her in the community. This can be seen a very crucial factor for the success of language revitalization. A typical language revitalizer has also made a difficult choice and decided to speak Sámi to their children or grandchildren. The non-status Sámi introduced in this study form an important group of Sámi language speakers. Therefore, the motivation to learn the language is not only instrumental, but if one wants to achieve a higher degree of proficiency, one has to have a sociocultural orientation to learning the language (Clément *et al.*, 1994).

Naturally, there are some reliability issues that have to be discussed. How reliable are these narratives? What was left unspoken, what was prettified? It is impossible to know but one way of analyzing the data is certainly by reflecting on the main researcher's position. Namely, the data collection was conducted by Dr. Sarivaara who is a Sámi woman herself and identifies herself as a non-status Sámi. Her knowledge and the familiarity with the culture and language can be considered crucial not only when seeking for access to the field (addressing people who belong to the target group) but also when interpreting the data and results. Without insight into the process, such interpretations might be difficult or erroneous, or even impossible, to make. In addition, the research theme covers a marginal group, a taboo within the Sámi. The insider role of the researcher in this study was the prerequisite of being able to do the interviews and obtain data in the first place.

DISCUSSION

The language replacement that took place in the history of the Sámi makes a serious threat to the linguistic diversity of the Sámi. The language shift started already generations ago and still continues to some extent. Because of the shift, the passing of Sámi language on next generations is disturbed. Today, all Sámi languages are endangered. The experiences of linguistic ruptures are well-known also within other Indigenous societies. Barbra Meek (2010) argues that gaps and discontinuities "are part of life"; they do not inevitably signal the loss or "death" of a language (p. 162). For example in Hawaii, the extensive language

shift began already in the 1800s. However, as the result of a language revitalization movement that began in the 1970s and 1980s, many young people speak Hawaiian fluently (Wilson & Kamana, 2009).

This study showed that at least some people with Sámi ancestry are willing to bring back the language and strengthen the Sámi identity. According to the results, the non-status Sámi who speak the Sámi language makes an important strength and support to the Sámi community. They contribute to the important effort of Sámi language revitalization. According to Fishman (1990), "RLS emphases must concentrate on family-neighborhood-community building boundary-setting efforts" (p. 5). Every new language speaker has a significant role in the revitalization process.

Minority languages with small number of speakers do not need predictions of the inevitable and irreversible poor development but understanding and detailed actions to change the direction. The purpose is not to solve problems from outside but providing models and tools for the community itself to boost linguistic continuity. Ways of thinking are embedded in language, and as such, it is essential for to understand how the language is structured and used within the community (see e.g., Borden, 2012). Tiffany S. Lee (2009) points out that of the awareness of language loss and their personal impacts on their families and communities can motivate youth to reclaim the language. She concludes that a critical Indigenous consciousness can be seen as important impact for language revitalization efforts.

Learning a language in adulthood represents a worldview of solidarity (Anonby, 1999). The Sámi-speaking non-status Sámi have learned the Sámi language successfully. They find maintaining and supporting the endangered language important and meaningful. Their efforts are based on a strong ideological commitment to the language, and the dedication to language revitalization provides them with the role of the bearers of the culture (see also King, 2009). The revitalization of indigenous languages is a salient means of the decolonization process.

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