

# Local Processes and Practices of Policy Implementation for Sami Languages

## An Ethnographic Study in Administrative Areas for Sami Language in Sweden

### Introduction

In 2019, UNESCO proclaimed the year 2022 as the start of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. The preservation, promotion, and revitalisation of Indigenous languages is central in this decade, as

[p]eople's ability and freedom to use their chosen language is essential for human dignity, peaceful co-existence, reciprocal action, and for the general wellbeing and sustainable development of society at large. (UNESCO 2021: 5)

Five Indigenous languages are spoken in Sweden. The public sector has been responsible for the protection and promotion of the South, Ume, Pite, Lule and North Sami languages since 2000. That year marked a turning point in Swedish language policy, which until then had been focused on promoting the Swedish language (Hult 2004). Colonial and assimilative policies, including a segregationist educational system and deportations of North Sami speakers to other Sami language areas, created complex cultural contexts in Sápmi (Lantto & Mörkenstam 2008).

Increased mobility in recent decades has led to communities where people have linguistic ties to different Sami languages, which can divide a community. However, shared strong ties to a different, but similar, heritage can unify a community as well and support revitalisation efforts of several Sami languages (Outakoski & Vangsnes 2021: 12). What revitalisation means depends on the context. From a more traditional perspective, language transmission between generations and within a community is seen as a critical factor, and revitalisation efforts are focused on increasing the number of speakers and social domains where a language can be used (cf. Fishman 1991).

### Processes and Practices

In this project, local processes and practices of the implementation of policy for Sami languages are analysed using an ethnography of language policy approach (Hornberger & Johnson 2007). The purpose is to explore how identified processes, practices, activities and observed discourses influence policy implementation in a large geographical area where different actors are active and potentially collaborate. The focus is on some of the municipalities that are Sami language administrative areas in Sweden. In such areas, individuals have more language rights and, among other things, the possibility to participate in municipal consultations (Hetteima & Outakoski 2020: 8–10).

Observations will provide ethnographic accounts of local processes, practices, and activities, while interviews with local actors will focus on actors' experiences and understandings. Relevant actors can be decision-makers that are not actively involved in the implementation process, civil servants operating within different aspects of this process, actors that interpret and carry out the implementation, and those towards

whom a policy is directed. A critical discourse analysis of the data and policy documents can offer understandings of the recontextualization of language policy, with a focus on language, power, and ideology (Johnson 2011).

The process of policy implementation is affected by a diversity of actors in various contexts. A critical approach is used to investigate how different local actors with diverse roles influence this process, and how the actors influence and relate to each other within the process. Such a critical approach connects to the Indigenous research paradigm, in the sense of contesting power relations, aiming to contribute constructively to the transformation of society, and trying to include the interests of the marginalised and disempowered (Kovach 2018). The theoretical framework is constructed within an ecological approach to language planning, which is based on the idea of creating an ecological balance to maintain cultural diversity by focusing on linguistic diversity and community involvement (Mühlhäusler 2000).

#### REFERENCES

- Fishman, J.A. (1991). "‘Where’ and ‘why’ does language shift occur and how can it be reversed? Locating language shift in social space and in societal dynamics," in *Reversing Language Shift. Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*, ed. J.A. Fishman, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 39–80.
- Hettema, L.J. & Outakoski, H. (2020). *Sámi. The Sámi Language in Education in Sweden*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Ljouwert: Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning.
- Hornberger, N.H. & Johnson, D.C. (2007). "Slicing the onion ethnographically. Layers and spaces in multilingual language education policy and practice," *TESOL Quarterly*, 41, pp. 509–532.
- Hult, F.M. (2004). "Planning for multilingualism and minority language rights in Sweden," *Language Policy*, 3, pp. 181–201.
- Johnson, D.C. (2011). "Critical discourse analysis and the ethnography of language policy," *Critical Discourse Studies*, 8, pp. 267–279.
- Kovach, M. (2018). "Doing Indigenous methodologies. A letter to a research class," in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, eds. N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing.
- Lantto, P. & Mörkenstam, U. (2008). "Sami rights and Sami challenges. The modernization process and the Swedish Sami movement, 1886–2006," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33, pp. 26–51.
- Mühlhäusler, P. (2000). "Language planning and language ecology," *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 1, pp. 306–367.
- Outakoski, H.-M. & Vangsnes, Ø.A. (2021). "Giellariššu. Indigenous language revitalisation in the city," *Multiethnica*, 41, pp. 11–30.
- UNESCO (2021). *Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022–2032)*, Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Lieuwe Jan Hettema  
Dept. of Language Studies  
Umeå University  
Sweden  
[lieuwe.hettema@umu.se](mailto:lieuwe.hettema@umu.se)