

## Language Revitalization Efforts of Meänkieli among Small Children in Sweden

The Arctic language environment is multilingual with several indigenous, minority, and majority languages in everyday use by the Arctic population. While the Sami languages are used transnationally in the Nordic countries, the additional Uralic languages Kven in Norway and Meänkieli in Sweden have only more recently received status as national minority languages in their respective countries. In this project, my focus lies on language policy and planning for Meänkieli, a national minority language in Sweden. Prior to its recognition in 2000 (ECRML 1998), Meänkieli was formally regarded as a variety of Finnish, but Meänkieli as a term has been used locally since the 1980s in the northernmost parts of Sweden (Lainio & Wande 2015). This late recognition may have contributed to a public unawareness of Meänkieli and the minority group among the majority population (ISOF 2020). Meänkieli was used in Sweden long before the border between Sweden and Finland was drawn in 1809 and is thus a part of both the Swedish and the Arctic linguistic ecology.

Although Meänkieli is to some extent in use, contemporary multilingualism among the minority group needs statutory protection and perseverance. Meänkieli has traditionally been a domestically spoken language but today it is used for the most part by older people and is not available to younger generations to any great extent (Valijärvi et al. 2022). In language revitalization studies, language survival is often closely connected to intergenerational mother tongue transmission (Fishman 1991), that is, parents' possibilities to use the language with their children. When this language transmission is compromised, minorities depend on language education to learn and develop their languages. In this project, the focus of interest is the right of children to learn, develop, and use their national minority language in educational settings. The objective is to study the language socialization process of small children in Meänkieli-medium preschools.

In Sweden, the rights of national minorities to learn, develop, and use their national minority languages are stated and regulated in the National Minorities and Minority Languages Act (SFS 2009:724) introduced in 2010, and are further supported in the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and the School Ordinance (SFS 2011:185). Municipalities have the responsibility to arrange preschools with Meänkieli as a medium of instruction. This makes preschools available language spaces where language socialization of Meänkieli can take place, which is particularly important to children and their families who do not have access to Meänkieli in their homes.

Educational language policies are essential to language revitalization. By studying the language socialization process of small children in Meänkieli-medium preschools, I intend to provide insights into factors influencing language transmission patterns and how language policies, ideologies and practices impact language socialization processes and outcomes. This knowledge can inform planning strategies that support Meänkieli language revitalization efforts among small children and promote language use and language transmission within the speech community.

## REFERENCES

- ECRML = *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1998). "Text of the European charter for regional or minority languages," Council of Europe; [www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/text-of-the-charter](http://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/text-of-the-charter); accessed on 19 April 2023.
- Fishman, J.A. (1991). *Reversing Language Shift*, Clevedon: Multilingual matters.
- ISOF = Institute for Language and Folklore (2021). *Nationella minoriteter 2020. Vad vet Sveriges befolkning om dem?* ['National minorities 2020. What does the Swedish population know about them?']; <https://isof.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1559951/FULLTEXT01.pdf>; accessed on 19 April 2023.
- Lainio, J. & Wande, E. (2015). "Meänkieli today—to be or not to be standardized," *Sociolinguistica*, 29:1, pp. 121–140; <https://doi-org.proxy.ub.umu.se/10.1515/soci-2015-0009>; accessed on 19 April 2023.
- SFS = Svensk författningssamling (2009:724). *Lag om nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk* ['Act of national minorities and minority languages']; [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2009724-om-nationella-minoriteter-och\\_sfs-2009-724/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2009724-om-nationella-minoriteter-och_sfs-2009-724/); accessed on 28 April 2023.
- SFS = Svensk författningssamling (2010:800). *Skollag* ['Education act']; [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800\\_sfs-2010-800/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/); accessed on 28 April 2023.
- SFS = Svensk författningssamling (2011:185). *Skolförordningen* ['School ordinance']; [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skolforordning-2011185\\_sfs-2011-185/](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skolforordning-2011185_sfs-2011-185/); accessed on 28 April 2023.
- Valijärvi, R.-L., Blokland, R., Kangas, E., Ackermann-Boström, C. & Kuoppa, H. (2022). "Meänkieli," *Linguistic Minorities in Europe Online*; <https://doi.org/10.1515/lme.18469972>; accessed on 19 April 2023.

Janica Jokela  
Dept. of Language Studies  
Umeå University, Sweden  
[janica.jokela@umu.se](mailto:janica.jokela@umu.se)