



How to Get There from Here? The Revitalization of the Lule Sami Language

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Abstract

Lule Sami is by UNESCO defined as a severely endangered language. Still, it is an official language in Norway spoken by some 500 people.

All of the Sami languages are endangered, partly due to the “norwegianization epoch” where the nation building was based on “one state-one language”. The language was more or less banned from use in public areas, and in schools. In the mid 80`s the policy changed and the Norwegian government tried to compensate for the consequences of the Nation building. The Norwegian king apologized on behalf of the government for treatment of Samis and the consequences for the language and culture. The law implemented rules for the right to be taught Sami at schools.

Lulesami has been the subject of very little study in the past. This is regrettable because the language displays characteristics that are rare and unique. Moreover, some of these characteristics are claimed to be impossible by some leading linguistic theories.

One of the goals of linguistics is to describe and explain the human faculty for language. Finding out the similarities and differences between languages, as well as how language is acquired by a child, is of central concern. The ultimate ambition is to learn how the human mind works and in order to facilitate this, the wide variation in language needs to be systematically described.

Currently, little academic literature is available about Lule Sami. It is important to rectify the situation because Lule Sami is a severely endangered language. The work at University of Nordland will be a vital step towards providing linguists with much needed data. Additionally, it will contribute to the amount of reference material available to the Lule Sami community in their language (re)vitalization efforts.

An important challenge in the description of Lule Sami is the potential loss of valuable linguistic data. Not only is there a low number of speakers, but the majority of speakers are elderly. It is therefore vital to document these informants' use the language as soon as possible. Languages show a tendency to simplify over time so the older generations of Lule Sami speakers likely use the language in a more nuanced manner than younger speakers.

Hypothesis:

Since the majority of Lulesami speakers are either elderly or young, the proposed study will show that the language displays marked evidence of change, perhaps influenced by the dominant culture languages of Norwegian and Swedish.

Methodology:

The first step in charting the hypothesized changes that Lule Sami is undergoing is to collect a sufficient amount of data. This is necessary in order to have an accurate and in depth description of the language.

In the end we will describe the efforts to vitalize Lule Sami as a spoken and written language.