

*”If you don’t speak the language, you’re excluded. You’re a tough one, so to say.” – Conceptions of being a Sámi today as reflected in interviews on language and identity with Sámi people in Enontekiö, Finland*

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**Abstract**

According to Seurujärvi-Kari (2011: 223), besides Sámi traditions related to lifestyle, the Sámi language can be regarded as “one of the most important ethnic symbols” of the Sámi people today. The question of how central the Sámi language actually is in defining a modern Sámi mostly residing in urbanized contexts with respect to other elements of Sáminess led me to study the Sámi-Finnish community of contemporary Enontekiö in Sápmi, the indigenous Sámi territory of Finnish Lapland. The discussion in this article is based on semi-structured interviews conducted in the municipality of Enontekiö during 2015–2016 with ten participants born between 1950s and 1980s who identify themselves and whom the local community also identify as Sámi people. In the analysis participants’ personal past and present experiences of Sámi language use are explored, and an emphasis is placed on revealing individual language attitudes towards the Sámi language with the aim of answering the following research questions:

1. How is the perceived importance of the Sámi language in personal identity constructions reflected (1) in the role Sámi has played in the lives of the participants and (2) in the attitudes of the participants and their parents to language use and language transfer?
2. To what extent is language perceived by the participants as a prominent aspect of their Sáminess with regard to non-linguistic expressions of Sáminess when they include traditional ways of life, traditional territory and contacts with the Sámi?

Throughout the article generalizations are avoided and the focus is purposefully on individual experiences and perceptions in order to gain a better insight into what the maintenance of the heritage language means when constructing individual Sáminess in the local community of Enontekiö today.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** indigenous language, indigenous identity, language maintenance, language attitude

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## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1 Studying the endangered language community

Traditionally, an endangered language community is constituted of L1 and L2 speakers and former speakers of an endangered language who also claim a membership in a particular endangered language community, mainly by their ancestry or by family relations with a member or members of that endangered language community. For the purposes of this study I selected participants from the Sámi community of Enontekiö according to this traditional definition. Throughout the study I avoid using notions the literature often use (see Dorian 1977, Grinevald and Bert 2011, Hornsby 2015) to distinguish speakers according to their language knowledge, but I rather rely on participants' own perceptions of their language proficiency.

As a rule the sociolinguistic investigations of endangered language communities give insights into any or all of the three components of which Spolsky (2004) defines as language policy: (1) language practices, i.e. norms and patterns of language use, (2) language beliefs, i.e. language attitudes<sup>2</sup> towards language, language use and language transfer, (3) language management, i.e. language maintenance and revitalization efforts.

According to Sallabank (2013) beliefs and attitudes are key elements in the success of these efforts, in shaping language practices. Similarly, language practices can transform attitudes towards language. According to Gal (1979), when examining an endangered or minority community in the process of language change, it is essential to explore the attitude of the minority community towards its heritage language, its value and that of the majority towards the endangered language and culture. Thus, in this study I pay careful attention to participants' attitudes towards the use, value and transmission of the heritage language.

Previous research into attitudes towards endangered languages highlighted the attitudes of the remaining speakers in order to determine the relative vitality of those languages ignoring the fact that attitudes do change with time. Similarly to other countries, in Finland there has been a gradual shift in both minority and majority attitudes towards the positive, favouring the revitalization of the Sámi languages spoken in Finland. Although this shift in attitudes has been recognized in the literature, attitude shift or its relation to language use and language transmission has not been widely studied. This paper intends to contribute to the field by showing how language attitudes have changed in the

<sup>2</sup> Hogg and Vaughan (2005:150) defines attitude as “a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioral tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols”.

course of participants' lives and how they are reflected in language use and language transmission in the Sámi language community under investigation.

Language practices and language attitudes alike can vary not only along time but also along education, occupation, language proficiency, ethnic identification, ancestry, the language of upbringing etc. (see Fasold 1984). Consequently, this study would be incomplete without considering some of those attitudinal variables becoming relevant during the analysis. However, it is out of the scope of this study to reflect on the relationship between attitude and behaviour discussed mainly in studies of social psychology. Besides the interaction between attitude and behaviour, people's attitudes to their heritage language also affect the status of that language in the community, and therefore they are good indicators of language health (see Baker 1992).<sup>3</sup>

Sallabank (2013) in her studies on the minorities on the Isle of Man and in the Channel Islands also claims that participants' construction of attitudes and identities are so similar that they need to be studied together. Similarly, in this study the investigation of attitudes to language is particularly salient as they influence the way members of the endangered language community construct their ethnic identity<sup>4</sup> today.

## 1.2. Studying the language and identity link

It has been claimed by many authors in several disciplines that, due to modernisation and globalisation, today's indigenous minorities have been assimilating into majority communities at an alarming rate and encountering difficulties to various extents in maintaining their heritage languages and their traditional lifestyles. It is especially so in urban environments where minority members tend to leave their traditional ways of living, which induces changes in minority identity, as well as in the community's attachment to its heritage language as a rule.

In the literature there is a general view of language regarded as fundamental to cultural identity (e.g. Fishman, 1991; Nettle and Romaine, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar, 2010), but there is a disagreement regarding the degree of importance of language in preserving minority identity. For instance, Sallabank (2013) points to the fact that although literature tends to emphasize the close link between language and identity, language shift in indigenous minority communities would not happen if speakers were strongly attached to their heritage language, i.e. the minority language was a principal aspect of their identity. Similarly, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) maintain that minority

<sup>3</sup> On the relationship of language use and language attitudes in the minority community of Enontekiö and Sodankylä see Duray 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Personal identity, according to Edwards (2009:19), relates to the notion of personality: the sense of sameness and continuity that persists across time and space, the self-consciousness and awareness that assures us of "the fact that a person is oneself and not someone else"

communities can preserve their ethnic identity even if they lose their heritage language. As another example, Irish language use is claimed by Eastman (1984) to have only a symbolic role in the construction of the Irish identity. He also notes that the heritage language becomes an ‘associated’ language of the community, i.e. the heritage language remains part of their identity but loses its functions in everyday interactions. Williams (2009) in his study of the Welsh community in Caernarfon, North Wales states that the participants in his study do not consider the knowledge of Welsh as a prerequisite for regarding someone as Welsh, but still they see language competence as a salient element in their minority identity.

According to Dorian (1999), during the process of language loss the heritage language can be replaced by other identity markers which are just as functional as the ancestral language used to be. As one example, Searles (2010) found that although Inuktitut language proficiency turns out to be a significant marker of Inuit identity, living in the traditional territory, the traditional skills of hunting, fishing, seal-skinning are also important elements of Inuit identity. Other studies have also considered the role of traditional territory in identity constructions and have demonstrated that it is also salient for the identities of other indigenous communities. Another study, however, by McCarty et al. (2006) investigating the link between language and identity among Navajo youth in the United States concluded that there is a very strong link between the Navajo language and Navajo identity.

Considering the Sámi identity Seurujärvi-Kari (2011:257) states that “language is an important indicator of identity and a constructor of a sense of togetherness for the Sámi” and also underlines that e.g. family, Sápmi, the common place of origin for the Sámi people and Sámi traditions are also essential ingredients of being a Sámi today. Similarly, Lindgren (2000), Lilja (2012), Svonni (1996) also point at the prominent position of the knowledge and/or the use of the Sámi language when defining a Sámi in today’s Finland. According to Lindgren (2000), the link between identity and language in case of the Sámi can be so strong that it is language that can still remain a fundamental constituent of Sámi minority identity even in urban contexts, although migration away from Sámi indigenous territories mostly into Finnish urban environments has resulted in a quite complex Sámi identity which is even more complex in the case of Sámi people who having gained urban experiences return to their homeland.

Collectively, the literature referred to above proves that the link between language and identity can vary significantly across indigenous communities and that supposedly there is a strong link between the Sámi language and the Sámi identity, while non-linguistic elements of that identity also play a salient role in forming today’s Sámi identity. What remains unclear is how salient

language is in the identity construction of today's Sámis and what kinds of non-linguistic constituents this identity is constructed of at the place of research. As valuable as the abovementioned studies are, they often fail to account for the personal perceptions of community members, i.e. for the ways they relate to their heritage language and culture. This is the area of research to which my study aims to contribute.

## **2. Methodology and research question**

### **2.1. Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews constitute the source of data in this article. The interview topics and questions have been designed based on the questionnaire I used in my longitudinal study on minority language use and language attitudes in the same Sámi community (Duray 2015). The interviews in this particular study have been structured to map (1) the domains and patterns of personal language use, (2) language attitudes, (3) the presence of Sámi communities involved in the maintenance of the Sámi language and culture in Enontekiö and the participation of the interviewees in their activities, (4) the ways personal Sámi identities are constructed. The block of questions under (4) on Sámi identity construction is in the focus of this investigation containing closed and open-ended questions on the role of the Sámi language and other elements of Sámi culture in the construction of today's Sámi identity. The interview ends with an 'identity game'<sup>5</sup> requesting the participants to arrange constituents of Sámi culture in order of importance with regard to their own Sáminess (see Appendix for interview structure). The interviews lasted about one and a half hours each.

The first participant of the series of interviews analysed in this study was 8/F/1950s, a Sámi language teacher at the local primary school of Hetta who invited me to visit the school and her Sámi classes in August 2015. 8/F/1950s also invited me to her home where she talked about her life in her Sámi family. A series of interviews followed recruiting participants, altogether ten, through the snowball technique. Not being a Sámi myself I was treated as an outsider rather than an insider, thus participatory observation was only possible at the school, at the Health Care Centre and at the home context during interviews. It is important to note that the size of the sample is relatively small, thus it does not allow for generalisations.

### **2.2. Data analysis**

Personal interviews were roughly transcribed and excerpts are presented here throughout the analysis to highlight participants' contribution to understanding

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Csilla Horváth (RIL HAS, Hungary) for the idea of enquiring about the Sáminess of participants in the form of an 'identity game'.

each notion of the analysis. Due to the peculiarities of the research site, the local Sámi community under investigation and the number of interviews conducted during the fieldworks of 2015-2016 I needed to approach my data set in a way that it best serves the purpose of the research. Thus, I examined the ‘identity game’ first and was curious to understand what each aspect of a Sámi identity, both linguistic and cultural, meant for each participant and to note the importance of these aspects in relation to one another in the participant’s own sense of Sáminess. Although I do not consider a quantitative analysis of the ‘identity game’ plausible, I still indicate the order of importance in numbers to note the position of the Sámi language with respect to the non-linguistic elements as perceived by the participants. Similarly, I do not wish to generalize about the norms of language use or language attitudes, but rather I take into consideration the personal linguistic profiles and language attitudes as they relate to the way each participant construct his or her own Sáminess in the ‘identity game’, as well as aim to cross-examine data for all participants to grasp the similarities and differences among the variables of language use, language attitudes and identity construction. An important note to take here concerns the enquiry about language attitudes, as well as about the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of identity. Both of them are inevitably influenced by the presence of a linguist resulting in participants possibly shedding a more positive light on language attitudes towards the Sámi language and attributing a more prominent role to the Sámi language in their identity construction than they would normally do. Despite the fact that previous literature also accounts for language attitudes, as mental constructs, being difficult to assess and that participants might give socially desirable answers in interview situations, interviews are still considered to be applicable means of enquiring about attitudes (Garrett 2007).

### **2.3. Research questions**

The following research questions aim to test the hypothesis that language is fundamental to the cultural identity of the participants who belong to the Sámi community of Enontekiö, Finland:

1. How is the perceived importance of the Sámi language in personal identity constructions reflected (1) in the role Sámi has played in the lives of the participants and (2) in the attitudes of the participants and their parents to language use and language transfer?
2. To what extent is language perceived by the participants as a prominent aspect of their Sáminess with regard to non-linguistic expressions of Sáminess when they include traditional ways of life, traditional territory and contacts with the Sámi?

In this study it is not possible to generalize over the relationship between language and identity in this particular minority community, because, as has been referred to above, the sample size is too small. Rather, I intend to give a detailed analysis of personal attitudes towards language and identity.

### 3. Research site

#### 3.1. Enontekiö as the place of research: demographic and geographical data

Sápmi, the homeland of the Sámi people stretching along the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia as far as the Kola Peninsula, is associated with the Sámi identity despite the fact that today only about 40% of the Sámi people in Finland live in their Sámi homeland. Enontekiö is one of the three northernmost Sámi municipalities in Finland bordered by Sweden and Norway. The rural landscape of Enontekiö is composed of vast territories of Sámi reindeer husbandry, scattered villages and is a popular tourist destination for skiers and hikers in every season. Hetta (NSámi: *Heáhtta*) is the administrative centre of the municipality of Enontekiö, which is home to about 800 people, of whom cc. 200 are Sámi people constituting thus about 11% of the population within the municipality. The rest of the Sámi people live dispersed in the villages of Enontekiö. The majority of the population, 1,893 people, in Enontekiö is Finns (Tilastokeskus 2017).

The visual representation of Sámi in Enontekiö is a reflection of the minority language policy of Finland favouring the use of Sámi languages, that of the Sámi Language Act, and of the norms of language use in the local Sámi community investigated by Duray (2008, 2014, 2015). The linguistic landscape of Hetta is thus dominated by bilingual road and street signs with the Sámi name following the Finnish one. Most of the notices and the few nonofficial signs in public spaces are monolingual Finnish indicating that the local speech community predominantly uses Finnish in their everyday lives. Monolingual Sámi notices and symbols, as well as Finnish-Sámi bilingual signs are present in the schoolscape and reflect the positive attitude of the community towards Sámi language and culture (see Duray–Horváth–Várnai 2017).

#### 3.2. Domains of language maintenance and revitalization

Besides the family domain there are several mainly formal domains where Sámi can be or is used by local Sámis, the Sámi Language Act ensuring the right to do so in public services. The domains where Sámi could be used in Enontekiö are the Hetta primary and upper school, the kindergarten *Riekkö*, the village church, the Health Care Centre, the Old People's Home, the local authorities, the bank, the post office, shops, the grocery store, and the Fell Lapland Visitor Centre.



One of the most notable domains of language maintenance is the school. According to recent statistical data (see Huhtanen–Puukko eds.) in Enontekiö presently there are about twenty or so students who study in Sámi and about twice as many who study the Sámi language. Sadly, while the number of students who study in Sámi has remained stable throughout the past couple of decades, the number of students studying the Sámi language has steadily decreased from about a hundred to only about forty. By way of comparison, the number of students studying Sámi has increased in all the other three municipalities of Lapland within the homeland of the Sámi people. Sámi is used exclusively as a means of instruction and interaction at two communities in Hetta: the Sámi groups of the kindergarten and of the Hetta School. There used to be a language nest in Hetta for a short period of time in 2000; today thanks to the initiatives at the municipality level the system was reintroduced at the beginning of 2018. It is important to note here that not only Sámi children learn Sámi at school, but there is a group of Finnish students who study Sámi once a week. According to their teacher, 3/F/1960s, 90% of these Finnish students continue studying Sámi later in life.

One of the participants, a Sámi teacher at Hetta primary school reports that at the beginning of the 1990s, when she moved to Hetta, there were a lot of mother tongue speakers of Sámi who were able to speak Sámi proficiently, while today she claims there are only a few left. She also believes that Sámi children consider Sámi as a compulsory course at school that their parents force them to take on. She considers the language skills of these children to be so poor that they immediately start using Finnish outside the Sámi class. The youngest age groups no longer use Sámi outside the classroom at all, hardly ever at home, as she remarks. She teaches only three Sámi students at the lower grades of the Hetta primary school. In Kilpisjärvi and in Peltovuoma (both in Enontekiö) Sámi is the language of instruction for only one student, as she claims.

Another participant is presently teaching Sámi to nine Finnish students in the first grade once a week. She says her aim is to prevent children from developing prejudice against the Sámi and their language. The initiation seems to be a success as 90% of the children continue their Sámi studies. This same participant also teaches Sámi five or six hours a week to a group of Sámi children who used to attend the Sámi language group in the kindergarten but were made to enrol in Finnish classes by their parents. She believes that it is of utmost importance to enrich the Sámi knowledge of these Sámi children.

Although there are about twelve children in the Sámi language group in kindergarten *Riekkö* in Hetta, teachers there believe that children also tend to use Finnish in the home domain and that some of the children even have to give up learning Sámi when starting school because their mothers want them to do so as they themselves do not speak Sámi at all. One of the Sámi kindergarten



teachers drew my attention to the fact that as opposed to Sámi people in their 40s and 50s, Sámi people in their 20s and 30s today are more eager to learn Sámi and regard it significant in maintaining and transferring their heritage language and culture to the young generations. This younger generation of Sámis are aware of the fact that they have better employment opportunities in the Sámi homeland if they can speak Sámi. She also argues that the older generations in Enontekiö seem to have a negative attitude towards Sámi and are ashamed of speaking Sámi outside the family, most probably due to their negative experiences during many years of assimilationist tendencies up to the 1970s.

Another domain of language maintenance, the Hetta church has played a significant role in the lives of Sámis in Enontekiö, weddings and funerals being the events where Sámi families have traditionally gathered since the 1950s. During these occasions participants claim that they still often use Sámi with their relatives. Although occasional church services have recently been introduced in Sámi, they are visited by only a few of the participants. Traditionally, it used to be the church service on St. Mary's Day where the Sámi people of the region gathered, from the 16th century onwards, to baptize their children and bury their dead. Today St. Mary's Days (*Márjjábeaivvit*) is an annually held cultural event of the Sámi in Hetta, which has been organised by the local Sámi Culture Association, *Johtti Sápmelaččat*, since 1971. Although the participants consider the event a significant one where most of the Sámis in the region assemble for reindeer races, lassoing competitions, as well as for Sámi music and cultural performances, the Sámi church service then is no longer a popular formal event to bring Sámis together.

The Health Care Centre can also be regarded as a domain where Sámi is encouraged to be used. It employs one nurse who is responsible for attending Sámi patients in Sámi. Similarly, there are nurses at the Old People's Home in Hetta who speak Sámi with the elderly Sámi there if there is a need to. Although, according to the regulations (see Sámi Language Act), the Sámi people have the right to use Sámi with the authorities in the homeland of the Sámis, most of the participants note that they refrain from speaking Sámi in front of the local authorities, or at the bank, at the post office or in the shops, as most people can speak Finnish and so can all of them, thus they do not consider it to be a problem to rely on Finnish as the means of communication most of the time. All of the participants regard Sámi as the most natural choice when it comes to fluent interaction at those places.

In addition to the places mentioned above, Hetta also hosts another domain that maintains Sámi culture. It is the Fell Lapland Visitor Centre with a permanent Sámi exhibition on Sámi culture. Hiking trails lead from the centre up to the top of Jyppyrä hill, which used to be a popular destination for local Sámis.

It was a custom to place reindeer antlers and silver coins on the *Seitakivi* (a stone) there in order to bring good health and well-being for the Sámi family.

### 3.3. Sámi communities in Enontekiö

The communities attracting local Sámis are involved in the activities of social, educational and political institutions and organisations. Most of them aim to maintain Sámi culture and, thus, to strengthen the local Sámi community in Enontekiö. Some of them work as the local branch of some organization or institution residing in centres of Sámi activities, e.g. the Sámi Parliament in Inari and *Sámi Duodji*, an organisation that sells genuine Sámi handicrafts across Lapland. The Sámi Education Institute (SAKK) organizes courses of Sámi crafts in Hetta and in some villages in Enontekiö where, according to my participants, mostly Sámi people assemble to learn how to make, for instance, Sámi coats, belts, scarfs and silver jewellery. These courses can last from August until May or for shorter periods of time and are organized in the evenings. Participants explain that today these courses are no longer as popular as they used to be a couple of decades ago when most of the course participants were of Sámi origin and when the teacher used to speak Sámi during course sessions.

They also claim that there used to be a number of events nearby Enontekiö, where Sámi families came together, e.g. the Sámi festival of Davvi Suvva (Breeze from the North) in the 1970s, but today there are hardly any, except for Sámi concerts and performances at school. Thus, today Sámi families in Enontekiö travel e.g. to Inari and to nearby Kautokeino, Norway, to enjoy Sámi events. It is only the events of St. Mary's Days during which quite a number of families even from Sweden and Norway gather to watch the reindeer races. Some of the participants admit that they are eager to visit the events, while some others are not interested at all. Participants also mention that after the weekly church service some Sámis, about 5 or 6 people, usually stay for coffee organized by the local congregation where they only use Sámi in their interactions.

Another Sámi community is formed at the school premises where young and elderly Sámis get together four times a week to practise Sámi. One of the participants has also drawn my attention to the Sámi youth organization in Hetta which her older daughter attends and where Finnish is the main means of communication to discuss issues related to the lives of the Sámi youth. She also mentioned the old Sámi people's club and the Sámi club for small children's families where there is a tendency to use Sámi in conversations.

The Sámi association *Johtti Sápmelaččat*, a central political and cultural body, was established in Enontekiö in 1969 and today has about 160 members who are also eligible to vote in the election of the Sámi Parliament. The *Sámi Soster ry* is a community of Sámis who foster the social and health services of Sámi people in Hetta. *Eanodaga Sámiid Searvi* is a small organisation re-

sponsible for publishing Sámi literature and setting up small-scale Sámi events. Communities of reindeer herders also bring together Sámis in Enontekiö to discuss issues related to reindeer herding, but, as reindeer herders in the sample note, they use Finnish during these discussions.

Most participants report that they regularly attend family celebrations, today mainly weddings and funerals, while some women also frequently participate in courses of Sámi crafts and most of the men in the meetings of reindeer herders. Yet, one of the reindeer herders states that he is totally ignorant of Sámi communities in Enontekiö. Interestingly, he is the one who is currently involved in some research and is writing the history of reindeer herding in the Sámi families of Enontekiö (see 6/M/1950s).

#### **4. Participants**

During 2015–2016 I conducted interviews with the participation of ten Northern Sámi people residing in the municipality of Enontekiö, mostly in the centre of Hetta.<sup>6</sup> Pilot interviews were conducted during 2015 with three interviewees out of whom two proved to be key participants and have helped me recruit interviewees for the first session of interviews in 2016. The interviews took place at the homes of the interviewees, whom I had contacted either by e-mail or by telephone upon arrival in Hetta.

Most of the participants consider themselves Sámis and fluent or good speakers of Northern Sámi. Fluent speakers also have fluent listening and reading skills as a rule, but they often lack writing skills.<sup>7</sup> Regarding their ancestry, most of the participants have Sámi parents, and all of them Sámi grandparents as well. Yet, only two of the participants were brought up in Sámi, the rest of them used either both Sámi and Finnish or only Finnish in the family of their childhood. Six women and four men who took part in the interviews were born between 1950s and 1980s and were brought up and resided in the municipality of Enontekiö most of their adult lives. Men pursue traditional Sámi occupations, three of them being reindeer herders, one of them a craftsman, while women mostly work in the fields of education and social services in the urban areas of Hetta in addition to being involved in the traditional Sámi way of living to a certain extent. As for the mobility of participants, reindeer herders have not left Enontekiö or its rural vicinity, while those working in the spheres of education and social services have had some urban experiences when studying inside or outside Finnish-Lapland in institutions of secondary and/or higher education, e.g. in Oulu, in Rovaniemi, in Kemi or in Ivalo. Six of the participants are married, most of them to Finnish spouses, while the others are single.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Finland (cf. Tilastokeskus) provided the contact details of Sámi nationals residing in Enontekiö.

<sup>7</sup> Data is based on self-assessment of the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Basic information on the participants is summarized in Table 1 below. Before the interviews I informed the participants that the research is anonymous and assured them that when writing about their lives, perceptions or attitudes I will present them in the way and in the sense that they had been reported to me.

As regards the data on participants, the variables of (1) ethnic identification, (2) self-assessed proficiency in Sámi, (3) the language of upbringing, (4) ancestry, and (5) type of occupation, i.e. whether it is related to traditional Sámi culture or not, are the most significant variables to consider in this analysis in order to understand how participants relate to the importance of the Sámi language and/or other elements of Sámi culture when defining their Sáminess today. The association of these variables with the construction of Sámi identity is considered in the discussion of this article.

Table 1. Participant data summary

Participant	Date of birth	Gender	Place of upbringing	Place of residence	Occupation	Sámi language proficiency	Identification	Ancestry	Language of upbringing
1/F/1980s	1980s	Female	Enontekiö	Vuontisjärvi, Enontekiö	Nurse	S, L, R, W: Fluent	Sámi	M: Sámi, F: Finnish, GP: Sámi	Finnish
2/M/1970s	1970s	Male	Enontekiö	Hetta, Enontekiö	Craftsman, Silversmith	S, W: None, L, R: Basic	Sámi	M, F: Finnish, GP: Sámi	Finnish
3/F/1960s	1960s	Female	Enontekiö	Palojoensuu, Enontekiö	Teacher of Sámi, Crafts-woman, Reindeer Herder	S, L, R, W: Fluent	Sámi-Finnish	M, F: Sámi, GP: Sámi	M: Finnish, F: Sámi
4/F/1960s	1960s	Female	Enontekiö	Hetta, Enontekiö	Sámi Social Worker	S, L, R, W: Fluent	Sámi	M, F: Sámi, GP: Sámi	Sámi
5/M/1960s	1960s	Male	Enontekiö	Näkkälä, Enontekiö	Reindeer Herder	S, L, R: Fluent, W: None	Sámi	M: Sámi, F: Finnish, GP: Sámi	Finnish
6/M/1950s	1950s	Male	Enontekiö	Hetta, Enontekiö	Reindeer Herder, Craftsman	S, L, R: Fluent, W: None	Sámi	M, F: Sámi, GP: Sámi	M: Finnish, F: Sámi
7/F/1950s	1950s	Female	Enontekiö	Hetta, Enontekiö	Payroll Secretary	S, L, R, W: Fluent	Sámi	M: Sámi, F: Finnish, GP: Sámi	Sámi-Finnish
8/F/1950s	1950s	Female	Utsjoki	Hetta, Enontekiö	Teacher of Sámi	S, L, R, W: Fluent	Sámi	M, F: Sámi, GP: Sámi	Sámi
9/F/1950s	1950s	Female	Enontekiö	Hetta, Enontekiö	Nurse	S, L: Good, R, W: Fluent	Sámi	M, F: Sámi, GP: Sámi	M: Finnish, F: Sámi
10/M/1950s	1950s	Male	Enontekiö	Palojärvi, Enontekiö	Reindeer Herder	S: Basic, L: Fluent, R, W: Basic	Sámi	M, F: Sámi, GP: Sámi	Finnish

#### **4.1. Participant profiles: identification with the heritage language and culture**

Although participants have been selected for this study if they identify themselves as Sámi people, and they indeed confirmed this, I am still eager to know the reasons, most of all whether the linguistic aspect of their Sáminess emerges in response to the question why they consider themselves to be Sámis. Five of the participants, three of them reindeer herder men, did not give a reason why. The excerpts below illustrate that the others, however, emphasize their Sámi roots and values, as well as the Sámi way of thinking about the world when identifying themselves as Sámis. None of them refer to the knowledge or usage of the Sámi language as a salient aspect of their Sáminess or crucial to their identity.

*“I was born and raised a Sámi” (9/F/1950s)*

*“I have always thought of myself to have a Sámi identity” (7/F/1950s)*

*“My family, relatives and friends are Sámi ... Others think in other ways, for example, about family relations” (1/F/1980s)*

*“I was born a Sámi and raised in the Sámi culture ... all of my basic values are consistent with the Sámi culture and I was raised according to them ... these Sámi values are shared by all of my family members and my Sámi friends” (4/F/1960s)*

Each participant claims to be proud of being a Sámi person except for one man who used to be a reindeer herder and today is retired. His two sisters, also interviewees in this study, explain that their brother is not like the other reindeer herders, because he was forced by his parents to be one and accordingly he did not like being involved in it. Interestingly, although during the interview he claimed that he was not interested in talking about his past as a reindeer herder, he enthusiastically talked about his present project of writing about the history of reindeer herding in Enontekiö and about travelling to Inari to collect materials and carry out research on this traditional Sámi way of living. He is also a talented craftsman who makes traditional Sámi objects of wood. He showed me some of these objects while we were listening to Sámi yoik music. When asked to have a photo taken of him, he refused to appear in the photo in what he called “Finnish clothes”, i.e. a T-shirt, but insisted on being photographed in his Sámi costume. Thus, although he identifies the least among the other participants with his Sámi ancestry, his current way of living is based upon appreciating Sámi culture, especially the non-linguistic elements of it.

To be able to interpret participants’ linguistic identity, it is also important to consider what other languages participants can speak. Participants’ self-assessment of proficiency in foreign languages yields that firstly: all of the participants are proficient speakers of Finnish, the language spoken by the

majority community and all of them rely on is Finnish in most or all of the domains of language use. Secondly, in addition to Finnish, participants' linguistic repertoire includes English, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Russian, Skolt Sámi, and Inari Sámi, Sámi languages also spoken in Finnish Lapland. Most of the participants can communicate in Norwegian and Swedish, the official languages of nearby Sweden and Norway, Sámi being the means of communication with Sámi relatives in Norway. Five of the participants can speak some English, one of them only understands it. Participants claim to have only some listening skills in the other foreign languages mentioned above.

#### **4.2. Language proficiency in Sámi and its interrelationship with the variables of ancestry, language of upbringing, and education**

During the interview participants were also asked to assess their language proficiency in Sámi. While eight of them believe to be able to speak fluent Sámi, two of them cannot speak it at all. One of those two people, 2/M/1970s, is a craftsman who was brought up in Finnish by Finnish parents in the 1970s, and the other one, 10/M/1950s, is a reindeer herder who was also brought up in Finnish by Sámi parents during the harshly assimilationist era of the 1950s.

Not all of the eight fluent Sámi speakers were brought up exclusively in Sámi. All of these fluent speakers, however, have Sámi mothers who must have played a key role in transmitting the Sámi language, and three of them have Finnish fathers. All of them have Sámi grandparents, thus, most of their family members are of Sámi origin, undoubtedly contributing to the development of participants' speaking skills in Sámi.

Although the ethnic affiliation of family members is, for the most part, Sámi, only two of the participants were brought up solely in Sámi. Both of them, 8/F/1950s and 4/F/1960s, are women who spent their childhoods during the 1960s and 1970s at the dawn of the revitalization movement in entirely Sámi families. Both of them are today advocates of Sámi language and culture, one of them being a Sámi language teacher at Hetta primary school, and the other one working as a Sámi-speaking social worker at the municipality. I regard both of them to be local Sámi activists as they have been my key participants who wholeheartedly assisted me in recruiting local Sámis for the interviews.

Three of the participants, two sisters (9/F/1950s, 3/F/1960s) and their brother (6/M/1950s), belong to the same Sámi family where their Sámi mother had decided to speak Finnish and their Sámi father to speak Sámi during their childhood during the 1950s to 1970s. This can be considered to be an unusual choice which can be explained by the fact that the first child was born in the 1950s when Sámi people used to be ashamed of their mother tongue and had been discouraged of using it by the majority Finnish community. Despite the political background which favoured the assimilation of the Sámi and despite



the fact that, thus, the mother accordingly shifted to Finnish, the eldest sibling can today speak good Sámi, while the other two speak fluent Sámi. As for their occupations, the brother is a reindeer herder and had not received any secondary education and only learned to speak Sámi but cannot write it. He is the interviewee who has his own project of writing about the history of reindeer herding in Sámi. The two sisters are also active in promoting the Sámi language and culture. One of them, 9/F/1950s, trained as a nurse, is concerned about reintroducing the Sámi language nest in Hetta in order to help Sámi children to acquire their heritage language. The other sister, 3/F/1960s, is not only a reindeer herder but also an internationally renowned craftswoman of Sámi textiles and a teacher of Sámi in Hetta primary school, who can definitely be regarded as an advocate of Sámi culture.

The youngest Sámi participant, 1/F/1980s, of Sámi ancestry and with a Finnish father, was brought up in Finnish in the 1980s. Due to Sámi education supported by the Finnish state and to majority attitudes becoming favourable towards the Sámi language at the time, this youngest participant was educated to become a fluent Sámi speaker and a nurse at the local Health Centre taking care of Sámi speaking patients. However, another participant, 5/M/1960s, brought up in the 1960s in a Sámi family in Finnish, learned to speak fluent Sámi. The heritage language in his case could have been successfully transmitted and maintained by the reindeer herding community he has been a member of all throughout his life.

In addition to Sámi reindeer herder communities contributing to the maintenance of Sámi, the linguistic profiles of participants reveal that Sámi education has played a significant role in strengthening their linguistic identity. A payroll secretary of Sámi ancestry, 7/F/1950s, for example, was brought up as the child of a mixed marriage in both Sámi and Finnish in the 1960s, when education in Sámi used to be a new phenomenon, and later in her life she decided to attend Sámi courses to develop her Sámi speaking and especially her Sámi writing skills. Similarly, all of the eight fluent speakers, including herself, had taken part in some sort of institutional education in Sámi.

Consequently, in case of the ten participants I have interviewed, proficiency in Sámi today seems to be affected not only by the language of upbringing and by ancestry but also equally significantly by education or by the lack of it in Sámi. The total or partial lack of writing skills in Sámi is evidenced in case of reindeer herders in my sample who report having been involved in only a little education in Sámi or not at all. Luckily, though they refer to their own local Sámi reindeer herder community as a domain where the Sámi language is still spoken, strengthening thus, similarly to Sámi education, linguistic and cultural identity alike.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. The linguistic aspects of Sáminess

#### 5.1.1. Individual Sámi language use in informal domains (past and present) and at school: norms and attitudes

At the beginning of the interview each participant was asked to talk about his or her childhood, most specifically about norms of language use in the family and in the school domain. The aim here, on the one hand, was to see how significant the linguistic aspect of Sáminess used to be in the early years of participants' lives versus today, especially in informal domains of language use. On the other hand, I was also interested to map out the participants', their parents' and/or their grandparents' attitudes to transferring Sámi to the young generations.

The youngest participant, 1/F/1980s was born in a Sámi family with a Sámi mother and a Finnish father who did not live with the family. She explains that although her grandparents acquired Sámi as their L1, her mother could not speak it and did not consider it important to speak Sámi with her daughter and son at home. Consequently, both of them spoke Finnish with other family members as well, and both of them acquired Sámi as L2 at school. Despite the negative attitude in the family towards speaking Sámi at home, 1/F/1980s was eager to study it and to choose a job where she could eventually use Sámi. As a result of her positive attitudes, she had become a nurse at the local Health Centre especially taking care of Sámi patients. Her brother, however, gave up using the Sámi he had learnt at school, although he understands his heritage language.

*“My mother thought that in this world you better manage your life with Finnish than with Sámi ... but she wanted us children to learn Sámi at least at school, which was not possible for her then.” 1/F/1980s*

1/F/1980s considers it important to teach her 3-year-old son Sámi and, with her Finnish spouse, is happy to have the opportunity to take her son to the Sámi group at kindergarten *Riekkö*. At the same time, she hesitates to enrol her son in the Sámi class at the primary school as she is not sure about the advantages and is afraid of difficulties that might arise due to bilingual education. She claims that today she uses Sámi in about the same proportion as Finnish, i.e. today she speaks more Sámi than she used to in her childhood.

2/M/1970s, a craftsman working in the centre of Hetta, is proud of his Sámi ancestry but does not use the Sámi he had learnt at school. He notes that his parents do not consider themselves “officially Sámi” but have been involved in Sámi crafts all their lives. Although his parents spoke some Sámi to him in his childhood and encouraged him to learn Sámi, he was not very much interested, so the main language of communication remained Finnish within

the family and outside it as well. Similarly, both of his sons acquired Sámi as L2 at school. 2/M/1970s notes that although they did not use Sámi at home, it was important for him to have his sons learn Sámi at school. They learned it for nine and five years, respectively, but they still do not speak Sámi in their everyday lives. This participant claims that today he listens to Sámi but has always been reluctant to speak it as he only knows Sámi words related to Sámi handicrafts. Yet, he tries to encourage his sons to use Sámi.

*“... I haven't heard my sons utter one Sámi word [he laughs] ... my son is so shy that he doesn't want to try and speak Sámi, although I tell him it doesn't matter at all how much you know.” 2/M/1970s*

3/F/1960s, a Sámi teacher and a craftswoman, claims her mother tongue to be Finnish but considers herself to be a Sámi person who has heard and spoken Sámi in the family. She is committed to teaching Sámi to students at the local primary school and to express her Sáminess in designing Sámi clothes and artwork in textiles. She promotes Sámi arts through national and international exhibitions what she is very proud of. As for her family background, her parents are Sámi people who decided to speak Finnish with their children so that they could manage better in the Finnish majority community. Her mother died early, and she claims that it was her father who was more conscious about the Sámi language, as she recalls, and of having his children learn Sámi at school. She attended a Finnish school and from 2<sup>nd</sup> grade learnt Sámi a couple of hours a week as L2. She claims that teaching Sámi at home happened the other way around, i.e. it was the children who encouraged their father to speak Sámi. She notes that, in contrast to her parents, it was important for her to teach both of her children Sámi as their mother tongue and to have them already at the age of two at the Sámi group of kindergarten *Riekkö*. It seems equally significant for her to teach Sámi to Finnish students so that they would not have prejudice against Sámi when they grow up.

Today, she uses mostly Finnish with her family members, except for her children, although her husband understands Sámi, as well. Her children consider Sámi as their mother tongue. She admits that today she speaks more Sámi in her daily life than she used to in her childhood, when she basically heard Sámi in about the same proportion as Finnish.

3/F/1960s told me about a researcher who asked one of her children about norms of language use in the family and she in her reply drew attention to the fact that Sámi acquired as L1 is a salient aspect of the language situation in her family.

*"What is the language situation like in your family?"*

*"What can I say? I can only say that my mother tongue is Sámi." 3/F/1960s*

4/F/1960s recounts that she used to speak Sámi most of the time at home since, except for her father's ancestors, all of her relatives learnt Sámi as their mother tongue. At school in the 1970s she learned Finnish and used to have Sámi classes once a week in the beginning and later the number of Sámi classes increased. In her response to the question 'Did your parents encourage you to speak Sámi?' this interviewee claimed the following.

*"Well, I did not have to be encouraged, but it was like a natural thing to speak Sámi and to speak Sámi with people who also spoke Sámi." 4/F/1960s*

She furthermore explained that her parents did not consider it important to pass Sámi on to the children in the family. She commented on the reason for that as follows.

*"No, our language did not mean that much, it was not in the focus then, especially if you think about my parents who used to be punished if they did not speak Finnish correctly at school ... as I told you they surely thought that it was also important for me to learn to speak Finnish." 4/F/1960s*

This participant attended school in the 1970s when the assimilation period was soon to be relieved by more favourable majority attitudes also in the sphere of education. But reported on her cousins' experiences as follows.

*"... when my cousins were born at the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s, they say that they were not allowed to speak Sámi for example at school ... the nails were hit with a pointer or at the dormitory they were punished, but I did not have any of that." 4/F/1960s*

As for language transmission she claims that it is very important that children learn Sámi as their mother tongue, despite the fact that she herself is single and does not have any children. Still, she speaks Sámi with her mother and her Sámi friends, relatives and neighbours. The interview took place at the interviewee's home, and I could hear her Sámi interactions with her mother myself. She claims that today she speaks Sámi about 1-5 hours a day, i.e. about the same amount of time as she used to in her childhood.

5/M/1960s was born into a big reindeer herder family and became a reindeer herder himself, presently working with his own herd, own *siida*,<sup>8</sup> and as the chairman of the reindeer herding cooperative of Näkkälä village. His mother and her ancestry regard themselves Sámi, and his father was of Finnish origin. Due to similar experiences of assimilation and negative majority attitudes, the interviewee's family decided to teach Finnish as L1 to this participant and to his four siblings. He reported on the periods of assimilation and revitalization as follows.

*“it was a time, the time when ... somehow I experienced it as negative towards Sámi people living here ... but today Sámi culture and language are somehow on the rise, I can say that frankly ... Sámi people have more courage.”* 5/M/1960s

Sámi culture, however, was maintained in the family excluding the language, but including reindeer herding. Thus, this participant did not study Sámi at school, nor did his siblings, the common language of interaction was Finnish. Yet, he notes that his attitude towards Sámi has changed considerably and although his wife is Finnish, she learned some Sámi and had their children learn Sámi as well. He proudly explains that one of his sons, 17 years old, is also a reindeer herder who also uses some Sámi, similarly to the interviewee in the local Sámi community of reindeer herders. In fact, it was the interviewee's son who helped his Finnish mother learn Sámi. Interestingly, the interviewee admits that he can only speak Sámi, while his wife can also write 'good Sámi'. He also makes mention of his sister's son, a man in his 20s, who learned Finnish as L1 but today can speak Sámi as well. Otherwise, Finnish is the dominant language both in the *siida* and in his everyday life. In the following excerpt the participant reflects on the role of reindeer herding in Sámi culture and notes that he has encouraged young reindeer herders to join the *siida* and speak Sámi as their common language.

*“Sámi culture has reindeer herding as its base ... a very strong base, without reindeer herding it would be very weak I think.”* 5/M/1960s

Although he uses mostly Finnish in his everyday life, he claims that today he speaks Sámi more often than he used to in his childhood, mainly with Sámi people from Norway.

<sup>8</sup> The *siida* originally denoted a local Sámi community which today comprises Sámi reindeer herders who work for the benefit of its members.

6/M/1950s has two sisters and a Sámi reindeer herding ancestry.<sup>9</sup> Both of his parents were reindeer herders who wanted their only son to continue their traditional way of living. Thus, the participant became a reindeer herder, as he reports, against his will. He did not like reindeer herding and was much more interested in making Sámi woodwork. At the time of the interview he was retired, spending his time with woodworking projects and writing the history of local reindeer herding, as mentioned above. This participant claims his mother tongue to be Finnish but considers himself a Sámi person who heard and spoke Sámi in the family, mostly during reindeer herding in his childhood. Otherwise, he attended Finnish ‘folk school’ only a couple of years before engaging in reindeer herding activities in the family. A single man with no children, he has a quite limited social life, meeting Sámi relatives at weddings and funerals, where he claims to speak Finnish as a rule. He has a positive attitude to the Sámi language, but he is of the strong opinion that Sámi reindeer herding is regrettably not subsidized just as sufficiently as the teaching of Sámi.

*“It is important to teach Sámi, but today they teach too much Sámi to every outsider ... to Finnish people ... nowadays anyone can say I am a Sámi, I want to study Sámi ... some of them [teachers] even proudly say that they have this and that many students ... it’s not OK like that, they [Finnish people] have to just get out of this business [Sámi language teaching]” 6/M/1950s*

7/F/1950s was also born into a reindeer herding family. She recalls that although her Sámi mother could speak Sámi and her father was a Finnish reindeer herder who learnt Sámi in the *siida*, the home language was mostly Finnish. Yet, she claims that her mother tongue is Sámi and she can speak it fluently. This interviewee has two sisters and three brothers, two of them acquired proficient Sámi, the others only understand it, as she notes. At school she did not have the possibility in the 1960s to study Sámi, nor did her parents encourage her to speak Sámi for the reasons mentioned above. She reports, however, that in some situations there was no other choice but to speak Sámi.

*“... when those Norwegian ... from Kautokeino those relatives came to visit us ... they couldn’t speak Finnish ... with the children we used Sámi and we managed quite well.” 7/F/1950s*

This participant does not express positive or negative attitudes towards the transmission of Sámi to children. She does not have a child of her own, but reports that, in her siblings’ families, attitudes to language transfer have

<sup>9</sup> For his family background, patterns of language use and attitudes to Sámi and its transmission at home, see the description of participant M/F/1960s.

changed. Accordingly, the children in her siblings' families can all speak fluent Sámi, and the wife of one of her brothers learned to speak Sámi despite being Finnish. This interviewee claims that today she speaks more Sámi than she used to in her childhood.

Although 8/F/1950s was born during the period of assimilationist policy, she and her seven siblings were raised solely in Sámi and heard the first Finnish words only at school. In the interview this participant emphasises that Sámi used to be the natural means of communication in her family and in her neighbourhood, no matter how borders had been settled during the history of Finland, Sweden and Norway affecting traditional Sámi livelihoods.

*"My mother was born in Norway, and we had Sámi as our home language as mother couldn't speak any other language but Sámi, because she was born and raised in the mountains, and her father and mother couldn't speak any other language but Sámi ... my father learned to speak Finnish only when he got into the army and during the war ... his mother was from Norway and his father from Finland, neither of them could speak Finnish ... so I had no other choice but to learn Sámi [laughing] ... and then as we lived in a kind of small village with only four houses, so we all obviously spoke only Sámi."* 8/F/1950s

She reports that she did not have the possibility to study Sámi at school, only after 1978. In the following excerpt she recalls memories of being immersed into a Finnish-speaking school community.

*"... I started Finnish education as an 'ummikko' [Finnish: a person who speaks only his/her own mother tongue] and then there we ... we were like language-wise immersed in that class."* 8/F/1950s

As this participant acquired the Sámi language as L1 and because it used to be the means of communication both at home and outside home, she regards it as of utmost importance to teach Sámi to her three children as their mother tongue. Her husband is a Finnish reindeer herder who, due to being married into a Sámi family as well as to being involved in reindeer herding and in Sámi politics, was taught Sámi both by his family and by teachers in L2 classes. Although he can speak Sámi well, she admits using less Sámi than in her childhood, describing the norms of language use in his family today as follows.

*"Well, no, I don't speak Sámi to my husband, we speak Finnish, because it's easier for him and we're used to speaking Sámi to each other and ... and with the children I speak Sámi and they speak Finnish with their father."* 8/F/1950s



9/F/1950s (sister of 6/M/1950s and 3/F/1960s), similarly to her siblings, was raised close to nature in a Sámi reindeer herding family<sup>10</sup> acquiring Finnish as her mother tongue but still speaking Sámi with her grandparents, who did not speak Finnish at all, and with her father as well. She recalls her childhood language use as follows.

*“Father spoke Sámi, mother spoke Finnish to us ... it’s always like I’d hear my father’s words in Sámi, the grammar is somewhere in the subconscious mind, after all ... it just went through me and it seems it went through me right [sounds proud].”* 9/F/1950s

This participant sadly admits, however, that she almost lost Sámi completely when she attended Finnish school in Rovaniemi.

*“When I returned from Rovaniemi I had to ... so to say learn the Sámi language again, I have writing skills, I have listening skills, but my speaking skills got worse ... but I can speak Sámi, I can make do with what I know [sounds proud].”* 9/F/1950s

Although her parents had not considered it important to teach Sámi to their children for the reasons mentioned above, her attitude to Sámi language transfer turned more positive in her adulthood, and she enrolled her children in a Sámi class. This participant has a Finnish husband, and they speak Finnish to each other and to their three children. Yet, she is very proud of her children being able to speak Sámi today, especially her daughter, whom she claims to be talented with languages. Accordingly, she emphasizes the significance of passing on Sámi to the younger generations. Similarly to her sister, 3/F/1960s, she only listened to Sámi in her childhood, but today she uses it a couple of hours a day on the average at the Old People’ Home with Sámi-speaking elderly people and with Sámi relatives living in Finland and in Norway.

10/M/1950s is a reindeer herder who lives alone a dozen kilometres away from the centre of Hetta. His parents were Sámi reindeer herders who, during the assimilationist period of the 1950s, decided to use Finnish at home with their children. This participant is the oldest in the sample and recalls the times of assimilation in great detail. In his description he expresses the positive attitudes his family and he himself had always had towards Sámi, despite punishment at school if they spoke Sámi.

*“Those times Sámi was a hated language ... I left it behind ... it’s very bad that it was left behind and didn’t learn it when I was a child ... my parents even spoke*

<sup>10</sup> For her family background, patterns of language use and attitudes to Sámi and its transmission at home see the description of participant M/F/1960s.

*Sámi to each other; you see ... children now learn it at school ... in this respect it's better now." 10/M/1950s*

This participant admits that as his parents did not encourage him in any particular way to speak Sámi, today he relies mostly on Finnish in interactions in the family and in the reindeer herding community as well. However, he speaks Sámi with his Sámi relatives living in Norway. Although he does not have children, he is of the opinion that Sámi language teaching is very important, especially teaching young children their heritage language and familiarizing the Sámi youth with reindeer herding in order to maintain the traditional ways of living. He admits that he used to speak more Sámi in his childhood than today.

None of the participants were forced in any way to use Finnish outside the family, but 4/F/1960s recalls interactions with doctors, teachers and administrative staff when she felt she had had no other choice but speak Finnish although it would have been more convenient for her to speak Sámi. 6/M/1950s seems equally frustrated about having been forced to leave his Sámi costume at home when he was eight and put on "Finnish clothes", i.e. any kind of clothes not resembling the Sámi costume. Nevertheless, participants note that their parents used to be punished at school if they spoke Sámi.

*"If you think about my parents who were punished for speaking Finnish, you can understand that it was not important for them that you learned to speak Sámi ... those times, language was not in the centre of attention." 4/F/1960s*

*"Then we were not allowed to speak Sámi at school, at the Finnish boarding schools I went to ... the teacher said: 'go to the corner if you speak Sámi to each other', you know ... this Sámi language is something I understand, I can make do with it, of course, but it's not something I'm good at." 10/M/1950s*

### **5.1.2. Individual Sámi language use in formal domains (at present): norms and attitudes**

In the previous section I have demonstrated how salient the linguistic aspect of Sáminess has been in each participant's childhood and family. In this section I focus on showing how the linguistic aspect of Sáminess is manifested in our discussions about norms of language use outside the family domain and about attitudes to language use in daily life.

As regards labour market in Finnish Lapland, most of the participants are of the opinion that everyone who can speak Sámi is welcome at the labour market, especially qualified workforce. At present there seem to be more opportunities for Sámi speaking people than there are qualified applicants for locally available jobs such as teachers and assistant teachers of Sámi, nurses

and social workers. Although the state pays a language allowance for those who use Sámi in their jobs at educational, social and administrative institutions, participants complain that the amount is quite small. Participants agree that it is extremely hard to find a job in Enontekiö or Hetta if one is unqualified. Reindeer herding and forestry are both considered to be hard work which is not suitable for everyone, nor do they pay well. With respect to the sample, it is only women who use Sámi at work, i.e. as teachers, social workers and administrative staff at the municipality.

There are hardly any other domains outside home and some workplaces where Sámi would be frequently used. Sámi language use with friends and other Sámi people varies, but it can be inferred from the interviews that although participants do use some Sámi with some Sámi speaking friends and in the *siida* with Sámi reindeer herders, they generally choose Finnish in those interactions.

*“It is like a natural choice that in situations where I have the possibility to speak Sámi, where I know that I have friends who speak Sámi ... and when I am with Sámi friends, of course, I speak Sámi, and when I go to a place where the majority can speak Sámi, I always speak Sámi ... but if someone speaks poor Sámi I just can't bear listening, so it's easier then to speak Finnish.” 4/F/1960s*

Seven participants, i.e. the ones who can speak Sámi fluently, regard it very important to use Sámi in their everyday lives, exhibiting positive, either instrumental or integral attitudes towards speaking Sámi.

*“... it IS very important to speak Sámi, because this way you can learn, and the language develops well if you speak it all the time” 5/M/1960s*

*“... it IS very important for me to speak Sámi, because it's the language of my heart” 9/F/1950s*

Rarely do they regularly attend occasions, apart from family ones, where Sámi could be used. Recently a Sámi-language service has been introduced at the church of Hetta, but participants rarely take part in it, according to 9/F/1950s, due to the long journey one needs to take from villages in Enontekiö and to bad weather. The reasons are, yet, mostly personal, one of the participants referred to religion as something strange and fearsome.

*“ ... well, I very rarely go to the church, very very rarely to the Sámi service ... maybe perhaps it has remained as a bad memory when I was a child ... I didn't like it. We had religious discussions with other people at home, but as a I child I wasn't*

*allowed to leave the room, I had to sit and listen ... it was frightening for me to listen to these sermons ... it was loud, I remember very well.*” 5/M/1960s

As far as the Sámi language and its use is concerned, it is worth noting here the local availability and use of media, including the digital use of Sámi by the participants. The newspaper *Ávvir* is published in Sámi in Norway and is also delivered to Enontekiö. None of the participants subscribe to this newspaper, but they claim that they sometimes read their neighbour’s copy or follow the news in Sámi on the internet and on TV. Only 2/M/1970s has poor Sámi language skills and, thus, does not read anything in Sámi. Four of the participants with qualifications note that they frequently read Sámi books in their leisure time or because of their work. The rest of them are not interested in Sámi books or mention time constraints when it comes to reading in Sámi. Watching news in Sámi on television and listening to Sámi programmes on radio are a lot more popular with the participants. Except for 2/M/1970s, everyone claims to listen to the news in Sámi at least once a day, mainly in the evening, while following the news in and on Sámi is also favoured by most participants.

*“... of course I’m interested in listening to the news about the Sámi or reading about the Sámi in Sámi ... this whole thing is in my heart”* 9/F/1950s

While following Sámi internet sites is also a norm for most of the participants, only four of them visit social media sites in Sámi.

*“I’m not on Facebook, no, I’m the type of person who meets people, we are the people here in the ‘Käsivarsi’<sup>11</sup> who talk to each other at the shop”* 7/F/1950s

Most of the participants write text messages in Sámi and often listen to music performed by Sámi artists or to audiobooks in Sámi. Some of them, e.g. 10/M/1950s, has a relative who is a Sámi singer. 4/F/1960s notes that she would listen to more if she had the time, and 7/F/1950s admits that she regularly listens to Sámi *joiks* while doing housework. At the end of the interview 6/M/1950s insisted on showing me Sámi *joik* music. While listening to the music he drew my attention to the originality of Sámi words and commented on the music as follows.

*“I think it’s really weird when today you can sometimes hear Finnish people joiking.”* 6/M/1950s

<sup>11</sup> Finnish: “arm”, from the human-figure shape of Finland designating the area of Enontekiö municipality between Norway and Sweden.

### 5.1.3. Attitudes to language and culture maintenance efforts

Some of the responses to interview questions on formal and informal language use I presented above also reflected participants' attitudes to language maintenance and language transfer. Together with participants' perceptions of the beauty, difficulty and usefulness of the Sámi language itself, these results offer deeper insight into interviewees' attitudes to the Sámi language as a whole.

In the section about the research site above I have listed and described the communities where local Sámi people gather to engage either in formal or in informal activities such as Sámi language learning, making Sámi handicrafts, or in other activities of social and political institutions with the aim of maintaining the Sámi language and culture, as well as strengthening the local Sámi community in Enontekiö. All participants mention the only event in Hetta, St. Mary's Days, which attract not only tourists, but local Sámi people as well. Men in the sample cannot recall any other event or community which Sámi people tend to attend. It is only women, all of them educated, who are aware of a wider range of local Sámi communities, due to the fact that most of them are also involved in their activities.

As for attitudes, all of the participants agree that it is important to sustain and promote the Sámi language and culture. Only one of them is satisfied with Finnish state support, the rest of the participants note that it is never enough when it comes to revitalization. 6/M/1950s is of the opinion that Sámi language teaching is paid more attention than to reindeer herding, similarly, the rest of the reindeer herders agree that reindeer herding being a Sámi privilege is not recognized by the state at all. Participants involved in language teaching, however, advocate even more financial support for teaching the ancestral language. 9/F/1950s and 1/F/1980s, representing an older and a younger generation, respectively, would like to see the revival of the language nest that ceased to exist at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both of them have already proposed the idea at the municipality where, as has been mentioned above, currently plans are being made to reintroduce the Sámi language nest project locally. 3/F/1960s is one of the most active Sámi teachers and advocates of the heritage language of the region. Her positive attitude towards revitalizing Sámi is evident from the following excerpt:

*“Financial support is not everything, but personal support is very important and that the school also has a supportive attitude ... we all have these, a lot of support like that, we need it if we want to be motivated ... we have all kinds of ideas with the other Sámi teachers, projects going on all the time [laughs] ... even international ones with Norwegian schools ... one of our main purposes is to strengthen our language.”* 3/F/1960s

All of the participants claim to be interested in Sámi politics, most of them are even involved in political activities either at the municipality or as a member of one of the boards at the Sámi Parliament, e.g. the electoral, cultural or environmental board, or as an expert on reindeer herding at various boards. 8/F/1950s recalls the times when, as a Sámi student, she used to be a Sámi activist visiting Brussels to foster Sámi issues. Long distances or hard work in the *siida* does not prevent 5/M/1960s to be involved in Sámi politics either. Online board meetings are the alternative way today to represent the interests of the Sámi reindeer herders.

Inquiring about attitudes to the Sámi language required a whole section. Participants were asked here to answer the following questions:

1. In which language can you express yourself more freely: Sámi or Finnish?
2. Which language do you like better: Sámi or Finnish?
3. Which language sounds more beautiful: Sámi or Finnish?
4. Which language is more useful in Lapland: Sámi or Finnish?
5. Which language is more difficult: Sámi or Finnish?
6. Are there things that sound nicer in Sámi? If yes, what are they?

The majority of the participants claim that it is easier to express themselves in Finnish, three of them cannot decide and state that they can equally easily express their thoughts in both languages. As one would expect, two of the latter are teachers of Sámi and one of them is a Sámi activist. Discussing this question, 4/F/1960s commented:

*“Both languages are just as strong for me, you have to know that I have taken all my studies in Finnish ... that is, education forced me into Finnish, and, on the other hand, I have always been good at languages ... but when I am with Sámi people, this Sámi language is a kind of natural choice, naturally easier to interact in those situations.”* 4/F/1960s

Although the majority of the participants are fluent or very good speakers of Sámi, due most probably to education in the majority language and to the restricted use of Sámi in daily life, it is more convenient for them to use Finnish in their interactions. Similarly, some of the participants note that they are a little bit afraid to use Sámi as they often lack the vocabulary they can use.

In response to the question ‘Which language do you like better: Sámi or Finnish?’, most of the participants, i.e. eight of them, indicate that it is difficult to decide but eventually claim that they like both Sámi and Finnish. 4/F/1960s and 7/F/1950s note that they like Sámi better than Finnish, 7/F/1950s adding

that it is important to speak Sámi with those who know Sámi. 9/F/1950s comments her choice of preferring both languages as follows:

*“We used to prepare something Sámi at home. Sámi handicrafts was always in our focus when I was a child ... it was my mother who taught us how to prepare Sámi clothes ... it seems that somehow Sámi handicrafts were more important than speaking Sámi, but of course we used the Sámi words for Sámi handicrafts.”* 9/F/1950s

Two discrete reasons emerge from these responses for participants' strong attachment to both Sámi and Finnish. On the one hand, participants are proud of their Sámi ancestry and heritage language, but on the other hand, their dominant language in most of the domains of language use is Finnish, resulting in a positive attitude to Finnish.

As for the sound of Sámi, five of the participants consider Sámi to sound nicer than Finnish. The rest of them are unsure, the reasons for this also possibly emerging from participants' equal attachment to both Sámi and Finnish. Those who mention that Sámi sounds nicer also note that it is because Sámi is their mother tongue or the language closest to their hearts. 4/F/1960s has made a reference to the richness of Sámi in the following excerpt, commenting on the way Sámi sounds.

*“well ... both of them [sound nice], of course ... I think both of them are nice languages, but Sámi is maybe richer than Finnish and in this respect Sámi sounds nicer, I think.”* 4/F/1960s

A variety of perspectives were expressed in the response to the question ‘Which language is more useful in Lapland: Sámi or Finnish?’ Participants agree that Finnish is more useful than Sámi in everyday interactions and that Sámi is more useful than Finnish when talking about certain issues that require a broader range of vocabulary, e.g. nature, weather, handicrafts and reindeer herding, as well as occasionally in interactions across the Swedish, Norwegian or Russian border.

A common view among the interviewees is that it is very difficult to say which language is more difficult, Sámi or Finnish. Five of the participants cannot decide at all or note that both of them are equally difficult or easy for them. They are the ones who can speak Sámi well. The other five participants regard at least one or more of their skills, mainly writing skills, as poor, thus, they claim that Sámi is more difficult for them. Two participants' comments show linguistic considerations in their following responses.

*“Well, I can't tell [which is more difficult] ... but in Sámi there are only six cases, while in Finnish there are sixteen.”* 3/F/1960s



*“Well, I can’t see the difference, because Sámi is not far from Finnish, they resemble each other ... and the Sámi language is getting enriched with words from Finnish or Norwegian all the time.” 5/M/1960s*

The response to the question ‘Are there things that sound nicer in Sámi? If yes, what are they?’ depends on participants’ proficiency in Sámi. Four of the participants, including the two youngest ones and those who lack certain skills in Sámi, cannot answer the question. The rest of the interviewees note that the vocabulary related to traditional Sámi culture is nicer, e.g. the lexicon of Sámi handicrafts, reindeer herding, *joiks* and especially of nature. 3/F/1960s also recalls Sámi tales and cultural history as follows.

*“I’m interested in the history of Sámi culture ... religion, for example, and Sámi tales ... they sound nicer in Sámi, I think.” 3/F/1960s*

## **5.2. The language–identity link**

Central to this paper is the investigation of the link between identity and language. As I mentioned above, the Sámi language is presumed by several authors to play a major role in the construction of Sámi identity. The question of how important the linguistic aspect is in Sáminess today has been raised with regard to notable recent debates e.g. on the definition of a Sámi person in the Finnish Constitution or the rights to own land for reindeer herding in Finnish Lapland. Such discussions touch upon the notion of ethnic identity and what elements it is composed of in case of the Sámi people in Finland. Thus, a deeper understanding of what exactly the linguistic and non-linguistic markers of this Sámi identity mean for the Sámi people would inevitably contribute important data to these increasingly significant debates.

In the next section of the interview my aim, therefore, was to grasp how salient the Sámi language really was in today’s Sámi identity according to participants’ perceptions. First, I will show how interviewees perceive the importance of the Sámi language in Sáminess in general, and then I will present findings on their perceptions of the non-linguistic aspects of their own Sáminess. My intention here is to see how the Sámi language relates to other identity markers in case of each interviewee.

Participants were asked to answer the following questions: ‘Do you belong to the Sámi community if you cannot speak Sámi?’, ‘Can Sámi culture be preserved if no one else speaks Sámi anymore?’ and ‘Do you belong to the Sámi community if you cannot speak Sámi, but you are ready to learn and maintain the Sámi language as well as Sámi traditions?’

The youngest interviewee, 1/F/1980s claims that you do not need to be able to speak Sámi to belong to the Sámi community, but you need to have Sámi relatives and maintain some of the Sámi traditions. She interprets her feelings about the issue as follows:

*“I myself have contradictory feelings ... whether you can say that he or she is a Sámi only on the basis of the language he or she speaks, I don't think so... For example, there are people, not here, but ... they moved to Inari, there's a documentary on it, that a Finnish person moved to Inari, learnt Sámi and brought up the children to be Sámi-speaking, declaring themselves to be Sámi people ... I don't think it's that simple ... I think the priority is that the life you live should be Sámi, I mean spiritually and traditionally.” 1/F/1980s*

She goes on in the interview to maintain that language is not the first and foremost in today's Sámi identity and that thus Sámi culture can still be preserved if no one else speaks the minority language.

2/M/1970s cannot speak Sámi and is of the opinion that you can surely be considered a Sámi even if you cannot speak the language. He also notes that if you have Sámi roots, you are a Sámi person. Similarly to 1/F/1980s, he claims that it is very difficult to say where you draw a so-called limit, i.e. what the criteria are for defining a Sámi person.

According to 3/F/1960s, Sámi culture can be preserved without speakers of Sámi, because besides the ancestral language there are other important elements of Sámi identity. She also regards Sámi those people who are eager to maintain the traditions and intend to learn Sámi. She explains Sáminess as follows:

*“Someone once asked me what it is to be a Sámi. What can I answer? What is it? Well, I think my life is Sámi ... it is not something like an article at the shop, that you take off the shelf [laughs] ... language is important but your Sámi values are more important, living and thinking Sámi.” 3/F/1960s*

On the one hand, 4/F/1960s also believes that you can be a member of the Sámi community even if you do not speak Sámi and if you intend to preserve the Sámi traditions somehow. On the other hand, she claims that the Sámi language is essential for the Sámi culture to survive, and she believes that it will not disappear as there are a lot of speakers of Sámi in the youngest generations, both in the Sámi and in the Finnish communities. She notes that it seems to be a trend today to learn Sámi.

*“There are a lot of Sámi people here in Enontekiö whose language competence in Sámi is poor, but they ARE Sámi people ... I'm not so crazy, strict about this*

*language, perhaps it is because in this area of Lapland one generation or at least a large part of it has lost its language in the Finnish school system, in the Finnish boarding school system. But still it belongs to Sámi culture and you can always learn it again and through language revitalise Sámi culture and traditions.” 4/F/1960s*

All three reindeer herders in the sample, 5/M/1960s, 6/M/1950s and 10/M/1950s, agree that the Sámi language cannot be a prerequisite for someone to belong to the community of Sámi people, and also claim that Sámi traditions, including especially reindeer herding, may survive no matter if the Sámi language is lost. 10/M/1950s emphasizes the importance of the knowledge of the Sámi language and goes on to consider the definition of a Sámi person as follows:

*“In my opinion it is a good thing if someone learns to speak Sámi, but you don't become a Sámi just because you learn the language, in this case he or she learns to be a Sámi and was not born into it ... it's another thing, you have to be born into a Sámi family to be a Sámi person.” 10/M/1950s*

7/F/1950s similarly believes that you cannot be considered to be a Sámi person just because you start learning the Sámi language. On the contrary, the most important criterion is to be born into or belong to a Sámi family. She notes furthermore that Sámi language skills cannot be expected of someone who was born and raised during the times of assimilatory policy, when Sámi was prohibited:

*“In my opinion family is the most important, that your ancestry is composed of Sámi people ... at least for me it is very important ... In my family some of my cousins cannot speak Sámi but they are Sámi people ... but I don't think that the language will disappear as long as there are young people interested in learning it, today there are many and as I see the number of Sámi speakers has increased.” 7/F/1950s*

9/F/1950s also agrees with the rest of the participants that you can belong to the Sámi community without being able to speak Sámi. She also thinks that the Sámi culture can survive without the language spoken, e.g. through wearing Sámi costumes and making Sámi handicrafts. Similarly, she is of the same opinion that you need to be born a Sámi to be considered a Sámi. 8/F/1950s, a teacher of Sámi is the only one in the sample who is hesitant about including someone in the Sámi community if he or she cannot speak Sámi. Thus, speaking Sámi is of importance when defining someone a Sámi, and it is even more important than learning to speak it at home:

*“When Finnish people want to become Sámi ... although they have studied the Sámi language, the Sámi people don’t want them to belong to the Sámi people, because they didn’t learn the language from their own parents. Only this way can one feel that he or she is a Sámi person.” 8/F/1950s*

8/F/1950s cites her Finnish husband’s perception of the significance of speaking Sámi and belonging to the Sámi community:

*“My husband said that when he couldn’t speak the Sámi language he felt like an outsider in the Sámi community. Even if he understood the language, he couldn’t manage in that community” 8/F/1950s*

### **5.3. The non-linguistic aspects of Sáminess**

I have demonstrated above how interviewees relate to the Sámi language as an important element of today’s Sáminess. Although interviewees have undoubtedly identified themselves as Sámi people and shown an altogether positive attitude towards the Sámi language, they do not require the knowledge of the Sámi language to be the most significant criterion when identifying someone as a member of the Sámi community. It is apparent from the interviews that participants perceive principally Sámi ancestry and also the Sámi way of living and thinking as the most salient aspects of their own Sáminess, i.e. non-linguistic elements are generally ranked in front of the linguistic one. Despite the fact that the aim of this paper is to identify how participants perceive the salience of the linguistic element of Sáminess in general and of their own Sáminess, this paper would not be complete without considering the non-linguistic aspects as well. This provides a more complete and insightful profile of participants’ perception of their own Sámi identity. Accordingly, in the next section I will discuss the variation depicted in individual perceptions of the importance of non-linguistic aspects, making reference to the salience of language as well.

The ‘identity game’ was designed to conclude the interview in order to provide opportunity for the participants to reflect more freely on their own Sáminess and on its constituents. I have drawn up categories involved in the construction of Sámi identity and which I believe participants can relate to either because they characterize their life as a Sámi today or used to do so in the past. These categories are (1) keeping contact with the Sámi people (marked as **C**), (2) Sámi traditions, traditional ways of living, traditional territory of living (marked as **T**), and (3) the Sámi language (marked as **L**). The items related to each category were printed on pieces of paper, and participants were asked to arrange them in order of importance, i.e. to put the item that describes their Sáminess the best in the first place and the one that describes it the least

in the last place (see Appendix). Table 2 illustrates the relative importance of each item as each participant perceives them.

Table 2. Results of the ‘identity game’

Sáminess (N=10)	1/F/ 1980s	2/M/ 1970s	3/F/ 1960s	4/F/ 1960s	5/M/ 1960s	6/M/ 1950s	7/F/ 1950s	8/F/ 1950s	9/F/ 1950s	10/M/ 1950s
Close Sámi relatives <b>C</b>	1	3	1	1	2	7	1	1	1	7
<i>The Sámi language</i> <b>L</b>	5	8	1	5	2	1	4	3	4	1
Reindeer herding and related activities <b>T</b>	6	11	1	2	1	1	2	2	8	3
Traditional Sámi costumes <b>T</b>	2	6	1	4	4	1	8	10	2	6
Keeping contacts with the Sámi community <b>C</b>	7	1	1	6	10	1	5	4	7	10
Sámi handicrafts <b>T</b>	7	8	6	7	6	7	2	5	4	2
Fishing <b>T</b>	6	4	12	3	8	11	6	8	8	8
Living in Lapland <b>T</b>	3	1	11	13	13	13	11	6	2	4
Sámi indigenous religion <b>T</b>	10	8	8	10	8	7	13	7	4	9
Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations <b>C</b>	3	6	8	12	12	1	7	11	13	12

Sáminess (N=10)	1/F/ 1980s	2/M/ 1970s	3/F/ 1960s	4/F/ 1960s	5/M/ 1960s	6/M/ 1950s	7/F/ 1950s	8/F/ 1950s	9/F/ 1950s	10/M/ 1950s
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament <b>C</b>	10	11	8	9	4	7	10	12	12	5
The Sámi joiks/Joiking <b>T</b>	12	11	6	8	6	11	9	13	8	11
Staying in a Sámi tent <b>T</b> <sup>12</sup>	12	4	13	11	10	1	12	9	11	13

Keeping in mind participants’ perceptions as regards the importance of language in their own Sáminess and in Sáminess in general, the results summarized in Table 2 are quite revealing in several ways. First, it is apparent that participants instinctively feel a strong attachment to the Sámi language as part of their Sáminess. On an average, the heritage language (**L**) is thus the 2<sup>nd</sup> most important constituent of their individual Sámi identities. Second, the ‘identity game’ confirmed what the interviews analysed above have suggested, i.e. keeping contacts with the Sámi (**C**), whether they are family or friends, is the 1<sup>st</sup> most important category when identifying oneself as a Sámi. Third, Sámi traditions and traditional ways of living (**T**) are also important constituents of today’s Sámi identity. As most of the interviewees are involved in reindeer herding, this particular traditional occupation is paramount in their Sáminess. Although it is ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important identity element, it is indeed identified as the most important one of the traditional constituents, followed by Sámi handicrafts in the 5<sup>th</sup> and Sámi costumes in the 6<sup>th</sup> place. In sum, the results of the ‘identity game’ suggest that participants’ identity construction focuses on blending certain elements of all of the three categories as the most important building blocks of their Sámi identity, i.e. contact with the family (**C**), the Sámi language (**L**), and reindeer herding (**T**), the latter specific to the region.

Turning now to the individual differences in ranking the identity elements, the following variables mentioned above (see the chapter on participant profiles) are considered during the analysis: (1) ethnic identification, (2) self-assessed

<sup>12</sup> Although living in a Sámi tent is not ordinary today, I included this element in the ‘identity game’ because it belongs to the traditions of the Sámi. As such I was interested to see how participants relate to it today.

proficiency in Sámi, (3) the language of upbringing, (4) ancestry, and (5) type of occupation, i.e. whether it is related to traditional Sámi culture or not. During the presentation of the findings I focus on showing (1) which category, i.e. the category of language (L), contact (C) or tradition (T), is perceived by the participant as the most important constituent of his or her Sámi identity, and/or (2) how participants reflect on the arrangement of these categories.

The youngest Sámi participant, 1/F/1980s has Sámi ancestry and is a fluent speaker of Sámi despite the fact that her L1 is Finnish. She consciously searched for a job in Lapland where she could use and maintain her proficiency in Sámi and for a kindergarten where her son is immersed in a group of Sámi speaking children. Yet, as it is revealed in the table above, she ranks the Sámi language as only the 5<sup>th</sup> most important constituent of her identity, preceded by contact-related constituents, i.e. keeping contacts with her Sámi relatives, the Sámi community and being in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament. Except for her strong attachment to the traditional indigenous territory, the tradition related elements of Sámi identity seem to be less salient aspects in her Sáminess. Among them, however, reindeer herding as a traditional occupation still pursued by the Sámi people of the region is considered as a quite significant aspect of her identity compared to the other tradition related elements. Unlike most of the participants, 1/F/1980s she emphasizes that it is of utmost importance to her that Sámi issues are being taken care of at the Sámi Parliament. Thus, as she explains, it is an important way for her to maintain contacts with other Sámi people.

*“... there is so much controversy about this electoral register, how it is done and ... language ... on the one hand I think language is important, but on the other I don't think it's so fundamental for me... well, I don't really like the name Saamelaiskäräjät [‘the Sámi court’=the Sámi Parliament], it comes from Norwegian and in Finnish when you go to court, you quarrel, it has a negative connotation, but still I think it is very important that someone speaks for the Sámi people, I'm happy to be a part of it.” 1/F/1980s*

Table 3. Identity construction for 1/F/1980s

Close Sámi relatives		C
Keeping contacts with the Sámi community		C
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament	Living in Lapland	C+T
The Sámi language		L
Fishing	Reindeer herding and related activities	T+T



Sámi handicrafts	Traditional Sámi costumes	T+T
Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations	Sámi indigenous religion	C+T
The Sámi joiks/Joiking	Staying in a Sámi tent	T+T

2/M/1970s, a silversmith with Sámi ancestry, is involved in designing Sámi handicrafts but has left the Sámi language entirely behind. As expected, he builds up his own Sáminess prioritizing its traditional constituents, i.e. Sámi handicrafts, living in Lapland, staying in a Sámi tent, and fishing. Keeping contact with Sámi relatives is also a fundamental element of his identity. The rest of the contact-related elements are less salient than traditional ones. Unlike the other participants, he ranks the Sámi language as a constituent which bears hardly any importance in his Sáminess.

*“... as I don't have reindeer it's not important for me personally, but otherwise it's very important ... the same thing with the Sámi language, it could be ranked higher if I could speak Sámi, but at the moment it's not really important for me.”* 2/M/1970s

Nevertheless, he goes on to show all the Sámi books in his shop explaining that it is time that does not allow for him to learn Sámi. Seemingly, thus, the Sámi language is indeed important for him, but unfortunately today it is not part of his Sáminess. Consequently, other constituents, i.e. Sámi traditions he maintain today, occupy the place of the Sámi language in his identity.

Table 4. Identity construction for 2/M/1970s

Living in Lapland	Sámi handicrafts		T+T
Close Sámi relatives			C
Fishing	Staying in a Sámi tent		T+T
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament	Keeping contacts with the Sámi community		C+C
Sámi indigenous religion			T
Traditional Sámi costumes	The Sámi language		T+L
Reindeer herding and related activities	The Sámi joiks/Joiking	Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations	T+T+C

The teacher, craftswoman and reindeer herder, 3/F/1960s, found it quite difficult to find the elements most characteristic of her identity today. Therefore, she decided to put the elements she is most attached to beside one another noting that five of the constituents describe her Sáminess the best, namely, the Sámi language, keeping contact with Sámi relatives, the Sámi community, Sámi handicrafts and reindeer herding. All of these elements are in line with the occupations she pursues. Living in Lapland or in a Sámi tent, both of them related to the traditional Sámi place and way of living does not seem to constitute a salient element of her Sáminess today. The reason for this can lie in this participant's modern way of living exhibiting and lecturing, i.e. representing the Sámi people all around the world. It is also a recent phenomenon that indigenous peoples have strong attachment to their roots even if they are in a flow of migration away and back to their indigenous territories. According to 3/F/1960s the most important element of her identity is her Sámi value system, her set of values as a Sámi person, and all the other elements come after that.

Table 5. Identity construction for 3/F/1960s

Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	The Sámi language	Close Sámi relatives	Sámi handicrafts	Reindeer herding and related activities	C+L+C +T+T
Traditional Sámi costumes			The Sámi joiks/Joiking		T+T
Sámi indigenous religion	Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations		Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament		T+C+C
Living in Lapland					T
Fishing					T
Staying in a Sámi tent					T

One of my key participants, 4/F/1960s a social worker with Sámi ancestry brought up entirely in Sámi, concludes that her Sámi family and reindeer herding are the most important elements with regard to her Sáminess. Although she is a strong advocate of the Sámi language, it took quite some time for her to decide where to place it.

*“Well, relatives are the most important and then reindeer herding ... then fishing ... contacts with the community and language [the Sámi language] ... comes after those.” 4/F/1960s*

Similarly to four other participants, 4/F/1960s does not include the Sámi language in the group of the three most important constituents of her Sáminess. Accordingly, the other half of the sample, i.e. five other participants mark the Sámi language as one of the three most salient constituents, which thus correspond to the three categories identity elements fall into, namely, contacts, language, and tradition. Instead, this participant's Sáminess is formed mostly by Sámi traditions she keeps, especially reindeer herding and fishing, as well as by keeping contact with Sámi people. Interestingly, unlike the youngest participants, but like four other participants born between the end of the 1950s–1960s, she considers living in Lapland as one of the least important elements of her identity. It is somewhat surprising that the two youngest interviewees are the least inclined to move away from Lapland, maybe for fear of losing one of the most salient aspects of their Sáminess.

Table 6. Identity construction for 4/F/1960s

Close Sámi relatives	C
Reindeer herding and related activities	T
Fishing	T
Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	C
The Sámi language	L
Sámi handicrafts	T
Traditional Sámi costumes	T
The Sámi joiks/Joiking	T
Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations	C
Sámi indigenous religion	T
Staying in a Sámi tent	T
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament	C
Living in Lapland	T

During the ‘identity game’ the reindeer herder, 5/M/1960s, who was brought up in Finnish in a Sámi–Finnish bilingual family, regards reindeer herding as the main building block of his Sáminess, followed by the Sámi language and keeping contacts with Sámi relatives, which are equally important elements of his identity. The other identity elements related to traditions and contacts are intermingled in the rest of the list, which concludes with living in Lapland as the least salient aspect of his Sáminess. During the interview he reflects long on the role of reindeer herding in the construction of his Sámi identity.

*“Well, reindeer herding ... I believe that through reindeer herding I have come to know a lot of Sámi people in the Sámi community ... I don't think our Sáminess is*

*up to the Sámi Parliament or MPs ... they don't play a significant role, rather it is reindeer herding that today is something that keeps us together everywhere in Lapland ... it is reindeer herding from which other traditions stem from, like fishing, handicrafts ... in this border region it is especially important."* 5/M/1960s

This excerpt reveals that this participant perceives reindeer herding not only as a Sámi tradition, but also as the best way of getting to know Sámi people and keeping in touch with the Sámi community. In this respect, thus, reindeer herding for him combines the categories of tradition and contacts. He also seems to link tradition and contacts by actively representing the interests of reindeer herders at the reindeer herders' cooperative and at the Sámi Parliament.

Table 7. Identity construction for 5/M/1960s

Reindeer herding and related activities		T
Close Sámi relatives	The Sámi language	C+L
Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations	C+C
The Sámi joiks/Joiking	Traditional Sámi costumes	T+T
Sámi indigenous religion	Fishing	T+T
Staying in a Sámi tent	Sámi handicrafts	T+T
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament		C
Living in Lapland		T

In case of 6/M/1950s all the identity elements were ranked as belonging to the first three most important elements of his Sáminess. The first most important constituents are, thus, the Sámi language, handicrafts, staying in a Sámi tent, reindeer herding, keeping contact with the Sámi community, and being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament. This participant reveals that traditional elements dominate his Sámi identity, which could be anticipated bearing in mind that he grew up in a Sámi tent mastering Sámi handicrafts and a way of living in the 'siida'. 6/M/1950s includes the Sámi language in this first group of the most salient aspects of his Sáminess contrary to his comments previously on the Sámi language being in the focus of revitalization efforts instead of reindeer herding. A single man, in the following excerpt he explains why contact with relatives is not as important as the first five elements in his Sámi identity.

*"I place all these six things beside one another, for me they're equally important ... well then, costumes and relatives ... I should have relatives, but I don't have them today, they all live dispersed and with Finnish people."* 6/M/1950s

Table 8. Identity construction for 6/M/1950s

The Sámi language	Sámi handicrafts	Staying in a Sámi tent	Reindeer herding and related activities	Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament	L+T +T+T +C+C
Sámi indigenous religion	Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations		Close Sámi relatives	Traditional Sámi costumes		T+C +C+T
The Sámi joiks/Joiking			Fishing			T+T
Living in Lapland						T

7/F/1950s was brought up both in Sámi and in Finnish in her bilingual family. Although, similarly to the majority of participants, close Sámi relatives constitute the most significant element of her identity, the linguistic element is not much less important, being ranked in the third place. Identity elements related to tradition and contact, however, are prioritized in her Sáminess confirming her ranking in her comments during the game. Accordingly, the themes of reindeer herding, fishing and wearing Sámi costumes are discussed in detail.

*“I’m into reindeer herding, especially during the rounding up of reindeer; we used to collect lichen ourselves in the autumn, nowadays we buy them in this area, because there is just not enough. We used to carry the firewood ourselves on skis, used to ski with the reindeer; used to have dogs, today there are snowmobiles, things have changed a lot. You have to have another job beside reindeer herding to feed your family from ... Fishing is still important today ... we still go out even in winter for winter fishing ... Costumes ... are of course important just as much as putting those Sámi costumes nicely on.” 7/F/1950s*

7/F/1950s also notes that living in Lapland is not important at all in her Sáminess, agreeing with five other participants in the study.

Table 9. Identity construction for 7/F/1950s

Close Sámi relatives		C
Reindeer herding and related activities	Traditional Sámi costumes	T+T
The Sámi language		L
Sámi handicrafts		T
Fishing		T

Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament	C
Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	C
The Sámi joiks/Joiking	T
Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations	C
Living in Lapland	T
Staying in a Sámi tent	T
Sámi indigenous religion	T

8/F/1950s is a teacher of Sámi who was born into a monolingual Sámi family and, accordingly, was raised in Sámi. During the interview I had the impression that she had a very strong Sámi identity, possibly the strongest of all participants. Although she seems to be an advocate of the Sámi language, she perceives it as the third most salient constituent of her identity, preceded in importance by contact- and tradition-related elements that characterize the majority of participants in this study. Nevertheless, the data implies that, unlike most participants, 8/F/1950s builds her Sáminess specifically around Sámi traditions and is apparently concerned less with being in touch with the Sámi community itself. Instead, she suggests quite a strong attachment to residing in Lapland as a salient constituent of her Sámi identity.

Table 10. Identity construction for 8/F/1950s

Close Sámi relatives	C
Reindeer herding and related activities	T
The Sámi language	L
Sámi handicrafts	T
Traditional Sámi costumes	T
Living in Lapland	T
Sámi indigenous religion	T
Fishing	T
Staying in a Sámi tent	T
Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	C
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament	C
Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations	C
The Sámi joiks/Joiking	T

As for 9/F/1950s and her Sáminess today, the constituents of contact, tradition and language are perceived as the most salient in her Sámi identity. Although she was raised and has been living in an interethnic family and uses mostly Finnish in her daily life, she is a fluent speaker of Sámi, exhibiting positive

attitudes towards the use and transmission of her heritage language. Still, as Table 11 shows, she ranks the Sámi language in the third place, preceded by two contact related identity elements. Interestingly, this particular participant, unlike any of the other participants, lists living in Lapland as the second most important building block of her Sáminess. As I noted above only the youngest and oldest participants, i.e. five of them consider the Sámi homeland as an important element of their Sáminess. Participants in this sample born between the end of the 1950s–1960s, however, do not seem to relate to the traditional territory as much, regarding it as one of the least important elements in their identity.

Not surprisingly, 9/F/1950s perceives close Sámi relatives as the most significant element in her Sáminess today, recalling her memories about the importance of family in her childhood as follows:

*“I put this [Close Sámi relatives] first, it is very important for me ... everything started from this ... when I was a child uncles and aunts were very important, and the place I lived was the place we all got together, it was a place we left, but also the place we all returned to ... and we used to listen to Sámi-speaking relatives all the time, for example my grandparents, who used to be very important, especially on my mother’s side.” 9/F/1950s*

As this excerpt illustrates although language is the third most important element, she links family and the Sámi language, showing a positive attitude towards her heritage language. Besides family and language, Sámi traditions and being involved especially in Sámi handicrafts, reindeer herding and fishing, are major elements of her Sámi identity today.

Table 11. Identity construction for 9/F/1950s

Close Sámi relatives			C
Living in Lapland		Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	T+C
The Sámi language	Traditional Sámi costumes	Sámi indigenous religion	L+T+T
Sámi handicrafts			T
Fishing	Reindeer herding and related activities	The Sámi joiks/ Joiking	T+T+T
Staying in a Sámi tent			T
Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations			C
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament			C

The oldest participant in the sample, 10/M/1950s decided to put the Sámi language first as the most salient aspect of her Sámi identity despite the fact that he hardly uses Sámi in his everyday life and was brought up in Finnish. This participant is the only one in the sample who does not seem to consider contact with family and the Sámi community to be a very important part of her Sáminess today, the reason for which could be related to living alone, his family dispersed outside Lapland. Nevertheless, as a reindeer herder he has been involved in Sámi politics for twenty years, thus, he notes that actively representing Sámi reindeer herders in Sámi organizations is very important for him today as well. Accordingly, the Sámi way of living, namely, reindeer herding and the Sámi homeland that he has never left, equally bear significance in his identity construction.

Table 12. Identity construction for 10/M/1950s

The Sámi language	L
Traditional Sámi costumes	T
Reindeer herding and related activities	T
Living in Lapland	T
Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations	C
Keeping contacts with the Sámi community	C
Close Sámi relatives	C
Fishing	T
Sámi indigenous religion	T
Sámi handicrafts	T
The Sámi joiks/Joiking	T
Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament	C
Staying in a Sámi tent	T

## 6. Summary

By investigating each participant's personal linguistic and non-linguistic profile I have intended to demonstrate the wide range of views and attitudes regarding language and identity. In this final section I aim to summarize the findings and then return to the questions posed at the beginning of this study.

1. How is the perceived importance of the Sámi language in personal identity constructions reflected (1) in the role Sámi has played in the lives of the participants and (2) in the attitudes of the participants and their parents to language use and language transfer?
2. To what extent is language perceived by the participants as a prominent aspect of their Sáminess with regard to non-linguistic expressions of Sáminess when they include traditional ways of life, traditional territory and contacts with the Sámi?



The ten participants who volunteered to take part in this study can be defined as Sámi people with Sámi ancestry who belong to the bilingual community of Sámi–Finnish speakers in Enontekiö, Finland. They are all proud of their Sámi ancestry and exhibit positive attitudes towards the Sámi language itself. However, due to the various contexts of upbringing and of adult life, including the norms of language use and the attitudes towards the transmission of Sámi, participants' perceptions suggest some similarities but mainly show individual differences concerning the language and identity link. In this investigation I have focused on these differences and on presenting participants' varied histories, insights and attitudes.

As has been manifested in the interviews, participants' proficiency in Sámi today depends not only on their first language or on their ancestry, but also on the availability of Sámi education during their childhoods and later in life. Accordingly, participants born during the assimilationist period of the 1950–1960s did not receive Sámi education, thus, their Sámi language competence could only develop in case parents or one of the parents felt it important to transmit the heritage language. Often, though, parents turned more positively towards the use of Finnish at home, as they considered it more useful than Sámi in the community at the time. Individual differences in language proficiency, however, are also influenced by participants' attitudes and willingness to learn Sámi later in life.

Due to the lack of Sámi education and education as such, reindeer herders seem more reluctant to write in Sámi, but they all refer to the Sámi reindeer herding community, the *siida*, as one which still helps maintain the Sámi language and also the culture. As for attitudes, all of the participants agree that it is important to sustain and promote the Sámi language and culture. The findings also suggest that it is also the reindeer herding community which is the most important domain outside the family that brings the most Sámi people together and where most of the participants tend to use some Sámi, mostly with Sámi-speaking family members, Sámi reindeer herders from Finland and from the neighbouring countries.

However, apart from the domains of the family and education, the participants find it easier and prefer to use Finnish in interactions with Finnish-speaking people, whether their partner can speak Sámi to a certain extent or not. It must also be noted that though the number of workplaces where Sámi is used is restricted to education and social services, they are regarded as valuable opportunities for the local Sámi people to maintain and develop Sámi.

While most of the participants agree on Finnish being a more useful language in the community than Sámi, their perceptions vary with respect to the beauty and difficulty of the Sámi language. Although these perceptions do not allow for a generalization, they reveal positive attitudes and strong attachment

towards both Sámi and Finnish. They perceive Sámi to be a difficult language depending on their perceived proficiency in Sámi and on the lack of certain language skills, mainly writing.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that although the participants are generally very positive about Sámi language use notwithstanding their language competence, they do not consider the knowledge of Sámi as the most important criterion for including someone in the local Sámi community, nor is the linguistic element of their own Sáminess the most salient one. Rather, their Sámi ancestry, more specifically maintaining contact with their Sámi relatives, is found to be more important than the Sámi language itself. The salience of non-linguistic elements varies according to the recent lifestyle of the participants, whether they are involved in the traditional Sámi way of living, mainly reindeer herding and Sámi handicrafts, and/or are interested in building or being a member of the wider Sámi community, whether they are politically active or can be considered as advocates of the Sámi language and culture in the wider Sámi community.

Throughout the analysis of the identity–language link I have investigated the combinations of three categories identity elements fall into, i.e. the Sámi language, contact with the Sámi community, and keeping Sámi traditions. In sum, half of the sample lists the Sámi language in the group of the three most important constituents of their Sáminess, including also keeping contacts, mostly with Sámi relatives, and one of the Sámi traditions. The other five participants place the linguistic element to be in one of the places between four and six in the ranking order of altogether thirteen identity markers. Another issue that emerges from these findings is participants' ambivalence towards the salience of their homeland in their identity construction. Five of the participants, born between the end of the 1950s and 1960s, think of Finnish Lapland as one of the least important elements in their Sáminess. Interestingly, the five youngest and oldest participants show stronger attachment to their heritage land.

## **7. Conclusion and avenues of further research**

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that, on the one hand, participants perceive the linguistic element, i.e. the Sámi language, as one of the key elements of their own identity notwithstanding their perceived Sámi language competence or the use of Sámi language in their everyday lives. On the other hand, knowledge of Sámi is not a prerequisite for Sámi community membership. Rather, the non-linguistic elements, most characteristically Sámi ancestry and nourishing contacts with close Sámi relatives, as well as the tradition of reindeer herding and related activities are believed by participants to play a major role in the construction of their own Sáminess and of Sáminess in general today.

Although the current study is based on a small sample of participants and hence has certain limitations, the results are significant in at least two major respects. First, they show that leaving traditional practices, mainly reindeer herding, would likely lead to an erosion of both linguistic and cultural identity. Second, the positive attitudes of the local Sámi community and also the majority community towards the maintenance of the heritage language and of Sámi traditions may slow down this process and help build up a modern Sámi community which is constituted of new speakers, young and elderly alike, and/or of non-speakers who keep up their kinship system and Sámi traditions no matter whether they live in Finnish Lapland or outside Lapland in more urbanized contexts.

The results confirm what a bulk of previous studies (cf. Lindgren 2010, Seurujärvi-Kari 2011, 2012, Olthuis et al. 2013, Pasanen 2018) have shown, i.e. the role of the heritage language, although somewhat symbolical for many, is still very important for the Sámis in the whole of Finland in maintaining and construct their communities, as well as in the construction of their Sáminess today. Nevertheless, more research is needed to better understand the ways community members construct their identities in today's Enontekiö. These multilingual and multicultural identities, influenced by e.g. the increasing number of mixed marriages, the continuous flow of Sámis in and out of their traditional area, globalization and also by the revitalization efforts of the minority and the majority, are so complex that it is worth looking at the endangered language community of the Sámis under study with a broader definition (see Sallabank 2013) and, thus, including anyone in the wider community who may have Finnish or mixed heritage but likes to be associated with the endangered language and its community, i.e. learners, teachers, language activists and also those who interact with speakers and are affected by policies directed at the language, e.g. paying taxes to fund policy measures directed at the endangered language community.

Future research, therefore, should focus on investigating the identity constructions of the wider community in Enontekiö and, thus, also on the attitudes of non-speakers. Another area of research, the study of inter-group attitudes, i.e. of the attitudes of both the minority and the majority community would also produce interesting findings.

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## Appendix

### Interview structure

Personal background (e.g. age, place(s) of birth and upbringing, L1/L2, ancestry, educational background, present education/employment, language use/preferences in informal and formal domains, in the domains of digital communication, Sámi language skills)

Personal attitudes towards Sámi, Sámi language use and usefulness, the transmission of Sámi to younger generations

Advantages/disadvantages of Sámi language proficiency in the labour market  
Availability/use of media in Sámi

Communities/institutions in Enontekiö where Sámi gather, where Sámi is used, where Sámi is being taught or developed

### Sample questions on the relationship of language and culture

Do you identify as a Sámi? If yes, in what way?

Do you believe that you belong to the Sámi community if you cannot speak Sámi?

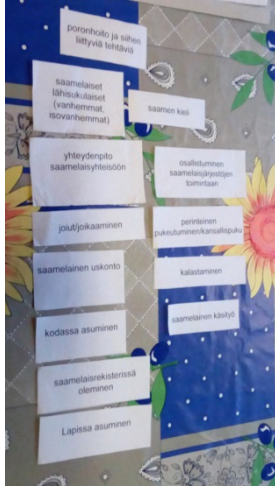
Do you believe that you belong to the Sámi community if you cannot speak Sámi, but you preserve Sámi culture?

Do you believe that Sámi culture can be preserved if no one speaks Sámi anymore?

### Additional task

What do you believe the most important elements of your Sáminess are? Put the following categories into order of importance: Close Sámi relatives, The Sámi language, Reindeer herding and related activities, Keeping contacts with the Sámi community, Sámi handicrafts, Traditional Sámi costumes, Fishing, Living in Lapland, Sámi indigenous religion, Being listed in the electoral register of the Sámi Parliament, Taking part in the activities of Sámi organizations, The Sámi joiks/Joiking, Staying in a Sámi tent

Methodology: Participants are asked to put the name tags with the categories of Sáminess into order of importance.



Sample arrangement of categories of Sáminess

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