

# The Sámi Languages: A Vibrant Yet Endangered Tradition

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# Introduction and thesis

The Sámi languages have been endangered for decades due to the language genocide policies of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. However, it is imperative that they survive and continue to be taught due to their grammatical uniqueness, cultural significance, and indigenous heritage.



# Linguistic history- brief timeline

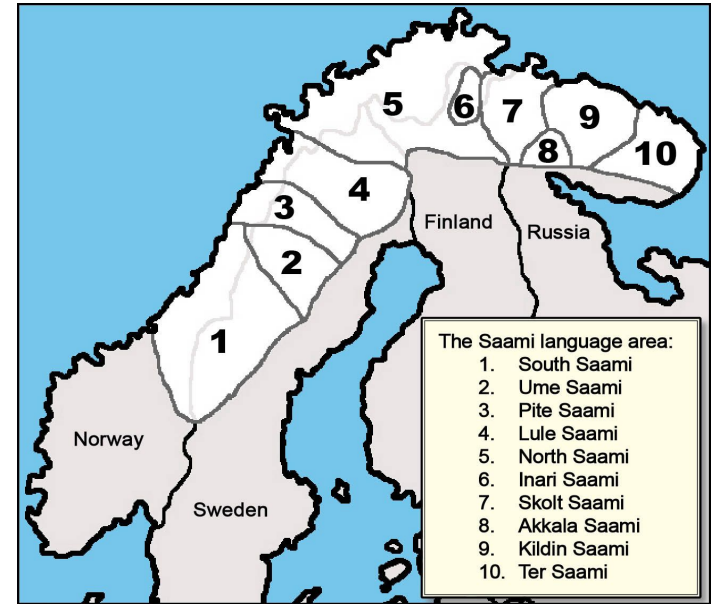
- Sámi were considered inferior- Norwegianization
- Rebuilding after WWII
- Primary School Act of 1969
- 1988- added to constitution
- 1992- Sámi giellaráddi, Sámi language planning agency

# Sami Language History

Uralic → Finno-Ugric → Finno-Baltic → Finnish, Estonian and Karelian

↓  
The Sámi Languages

- The Sámi languages are divided into Southern, Ume, Pite, Lule, **Northern**, Kemi, Inari, Skolt, Akkala, Kildin, and Ter Sámi.



From DOBES

# Comparisons

North Sámi	Finnish	Norwegian	English
Áhččámet, don guhte leat almmis! Basuhuvvos du namma.	Isä meidän, joka olet taivaissa! Pyhitetty olkoon sinun nimesi.	Vår Far, i himmelen! La navnet ditt helliges.	Our father in heaven! Let your name be holy.
Bohtos du rikka. Šaddos du dáhttu, mo almmis nu maiddái eatnama alde.	Tulkoon sinun valtakuntasi; tapahtukoon sinun tahtosi myös maan päällä niinkuin taivaassa;	La riket ditt komme. La viljen din skje på jorden slik som i himmelen.	Let your kingdom come. Let your will happen on the earth such as in heaven.
Atte midjiide odne min beaivválaš láibbi	Anna meille tänä päivänä meidän jokapäiväinen leipämme	Gi oss i dag vårt daglige brød	Give us today our daily bread

# Syllables and Stress

- Quality and quantity of syllables in a word are very important
- S\_
- S\_\_
- S\_S\_
- S\_S\_\_
- Words are sorted into vowel stem, consonant stem, and contracted stem groups



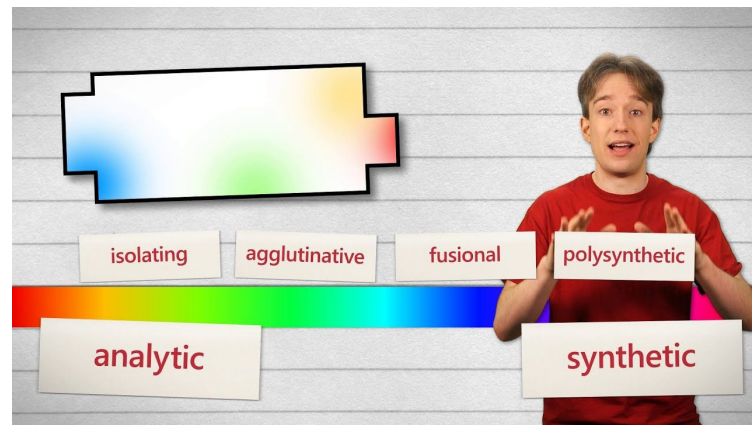
# Grammar

- The Sámi languages are all highly *Synthetic*

- Inflections

- Noun cases: nominative, accusative, genitive, illative, locative, comitatives, essive
- Compare with Norwegian: nominative, accusative, (dative), (genitive)
- Adjectives can perform as nouns in certain contexts!

- Verbs and adjectives\* must match their nouns in person, number and gender
- Verbs have two tenses and five moods
- Negation is expressed with a verb
- Free word order that defaults to SVO



From YouTube



From Prezi

# Vocabulary

- Multiple words for snow and reindeer
- Languages adapt to the needs of their speakers!

*Leamši: a short and fat doe*

*Snarri: a reindeer with especially branch-like antlers*

*Busat: a buck with only one -- but large -- testicle*



*From Ecowatch*



*From nkl.snl.no*



# Public perception- the Sámi

- Originally, many Sámi thought that Norwegian schooling distracted their children from traditional knowledge (Ricco)
- Many Sámi eventually began to feel the pressure of Norwegian and other Nordic languages as being necessary
- Speaking Sámi and standing up for Sámi language use can be seen as a demonstration or political statement
- Currently being transmitted at a much higher rate than before (Bull 2002)

# Public perception- Norwegian society

- Idea that languages “died of old age” rather than being killed by outside forces (Magga 2001)
- “Language genocide” carried out against the Sámi
- Until 1945, only reindeer Sámi considered “real” (Rasmussen 2011)
- Many Norwegians feel their rights are infringed upon if Sámi begin to exert their legal language rights

# Current status

- Around 150,000 Sámi people total, 35,000 speakers of Sámi languages, around 25-30% of the population speaks their respective Sámi language (Rasmussen 2011)
- All Sámi languages categorized as endangered, critically endangered, or nearly obsolete by UNESCO
- Smaller languages struggle to live on, language activism needed to continue



*Al Jazeera*

# Education

- The “dark century” from 1870-1970 rapidly decreased education of the Sámi languages (Magga 2001)
- Informant from Rasmussen, 2011: “If the school had offered this education, we would have without any doubt enrolled our children in it. But I didn’t know it was possible to request anything other than lessons in Sámi as a subject.”
- Education vital as next generation must carry language along

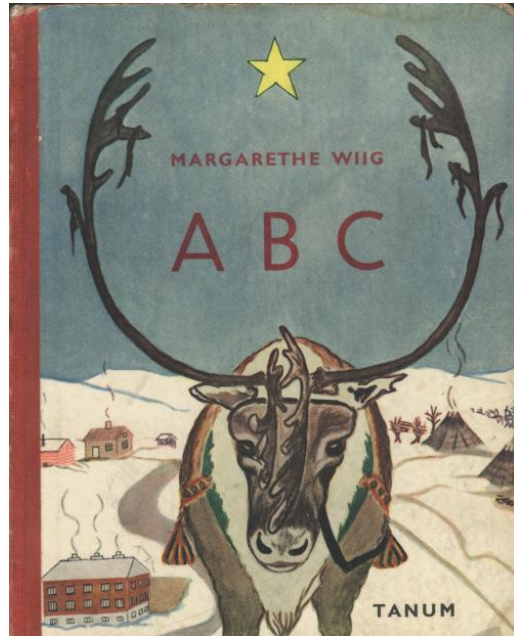


UArctic



UArctic

# Sámi languages in schools



<http://skuvla.info/sambok-n.htm>



- First major Sámi-Norwegian textbook - 1951
- While originally written for norwegian students learning Sámi, it was also used by Sámi students learning norwegian.
- Margarethe faced a large amount of resistance from the government before it was published.

# Sámi language instruction inside and outside of schools

- Every Sámi student has a right to receive school related information and documents in the Sámi language of their choice (Tests, report cards, etc)
- Every Sámi student has a right to learn Sámi in school
- Every non-Sámi student has the option to learn it in school, though instruction methods may differ depending on the area
  - Up until eighth grade, the students parents decide whether or not they will take Sámi
  - After eighth grade the student can decide to continue or start learning Sámi

# Three Contexts of Sámi Language Instruction

## 1) Sámi primary school

“To teach history or religion in Southern Sami, you have to translate texts yourself. Sometimes we try to compose texts. A Sami teacher should be a good writer, a good illustrator and know a lot about lay-out. “

## 2) Secondary school or upper secondary school

a) Majority of students learn Sámi in this context

## 3) Distance learning

a) Teachers are in short supply, especially in smaller communities

# How do they teach Sámi today?

## Children's Path:

- 1) Sounds, simple phrases (greetings, goodbyes, introductions), and Sami Alphabet.
- 2) Ability to understand simple instructions, ask/answer simple questions, read/write simple text.
- 3) Simple everyday conversations, ability to translate simple sentences, ability to use Sámi media/books in their study.

## Young Adult Path:

- 1) Ability to spell Sámi words, simple everyday phrases, read and understand simple instructions
- 2) Ability to understand simple conversations, use numbers to express dates, prices, etc, knowledge of Sámi spoken tradition.
- 3) Ability to express oneself with daily conversational phrases, write texts that tell, describe and inform.

## 4-9:

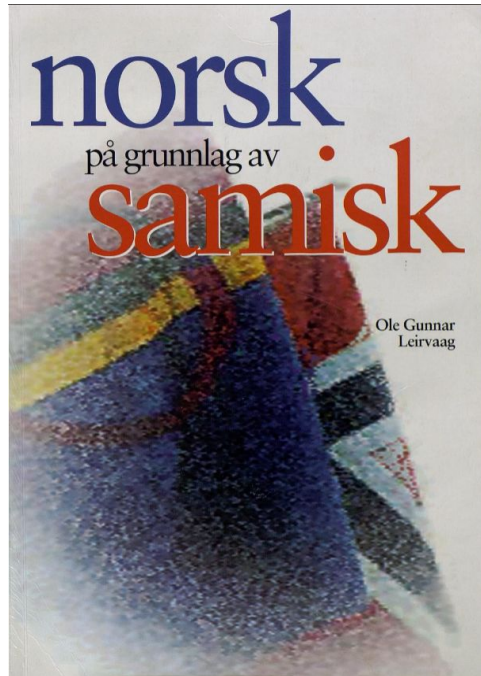
Ability to argue points in a written form, understanding of spontaneous conversation, variation in language when constructing sentences, use of language in spontaneous situations (school, work, grocery store, etc), ability to discuss news and events happening throughout Sápmi, ability to use correct terminology when discussing language.



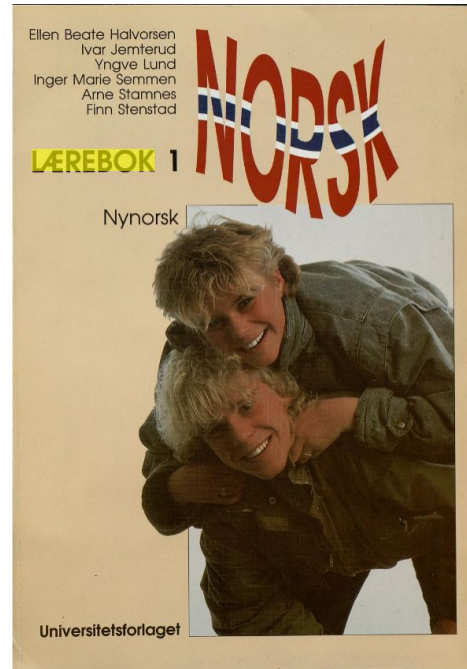
# Why should you learn Sámi?

- Endangered languages
- High demand for fluent speakers
- Opportunity to create learning resources to help other people learn Sámi
- Belongs to a family of languages that are quite unique compared to other, more widely spoken languages
- Access to cultural knowledge and understanding

# Sámi-Norwegian textbooks



nb.no



nb.no

# Oahpa.no

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Skolt Saami tools:

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## North Saami Grammar:

[Noun - intro](#)

[Noun inflection](#)

[Adjective - intro](#)

[Adjective inflection](#)

[Numerals - intro](#)

[Numerals](#)

[Pronouns](#)

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# OAHPA!

Bures boahтин!

MORFA-S



Hárjehala sojahit  
sániid

LEKSA



Sánit ja jorgalusat

MORFA-C



Hárjehala sojahit  
sániid cealkagis

NUMRA



Hárjehala loguid

KONTEAKSTA



Hárjehala  
teavsttaiguin

OAHPA lea interneahttaprogámma nuoraide ja rávesolbmuide geat leat oahpahallame davvisámegiela. Prográmma sáhtát heivehit fáttáid ja dási mielde, ja ođđa bargobihát ráhkaduvvojit automáhtalaččat.

Bagadus  
Davvisámegiella-dároggiella neahttasátnegirji  
Davvisámegiela grammatihkka  
Research papers

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