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Multilingual encounters in Northern Norway

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Norway has always been a multilingual society; Sámi languages have been spoken in vast geographical areas since prehistoric times, the Kven and other historical minority groups settled in the country, the Norwegian language has a great variety of dialects and the long coastline has eased mobility and enabled multiple multilingual encounters lasting short or long periods of time. In recent years, migrants from all over the world have become part of Norwegian society (Bull and Lindgren 2009). The practice and evaluation of multilingualism in its broadest sense have changed over the years, and new arenas in which multilingual encounters take place have emerged. The articles in this issue of *Acta Borealia* highlight a handful of aspects of these developments, as seen from the point of view of contemporary Northern Norway. The articles are written by members of the *Multilingual North: Diversity, Education and Revitalization (MultiNor)* research group at UiT The Arctic University of Norway.

Although the articles in this special issue primarily concern multilingualism in contemporary settings, they are all rooted in the historical contexts of the northernmost region of Norway. Here, colonization and Norwegianization politics (from approximately 1860–1950) have immensely influenced people's multilingual lives, and the consequences are still highly present. Norwegianization promoted the use of the Norwegian language and stigmatized the use of the Sámi and Kven languages. This delegitimization had severe consequences. In many communities, there were language shifts from Sámi and Kven to Norwegian, and these languages are today considered endangered or severely endangered. However, since the Sámi and Kven languages were used privately and hidden from public arenas, they were not completely erased, and there is still a basis for their (re)vitalization and reclamation. These processes are now supported in the very same arenas where these languages were sanctioned, namely educational institutions, workplaces and public arenas (e.g. Huss 2008; Huss and Lindgren 2010; Pietikäinen et al. 2010). Historically, transnational migration to Northern Norway (e.g. Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2014; Hiss 2017) contributed to linguistic diversity though not to the extent that can be seen in the twenty-first century.

The Norwegian minority policy and the development of linguistic diversity in Northern Norway have been described in three main historical phases (e.g. Niemi 1995; Huss and Lindgren 2010). In the first phase, which lasted until the 1860s, the policy was described

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as integration without assimilation. The politics of the second phase was characterized as an assimilation policy. Official assimilation policies were abandoned after World War II. In the third phase, non-policy gradually turned into integrated pluralism and ethnic revival. Nowadays, we can witness developments that provide new contexts for multilingualism. Currently, two processes, which can be observed worldwide, intertwine: On the one hand indigenous people and national minorities (Sámi and Kven) are, to a greater extent than before, the subject of positive juridical and political attention (cf. Pietikäinen et al. 2010). On the basis of an agentive grassroots movement, we see that Sámi and Kven people are reclaiming their minoritized languages and cultures (e.g. Niiranen 2011; Rasmussen and Nolan 2011; Johansen 2013; Sollid 2020). On the other hand, linguistic diversity is increasing through transnational migration and global communication. For example, in Tromsø, the largest city in the region, 14,7% of the population are immigrants or Norwegian citizens born to immigrant parents (Kommuneprofilen 2019), and around 130 different languages are spoken (Sollid 2019). Rural municipalities may have a less diverse group of migrants, such as Skjervøy, where 42% of all migrants originate from Romania (Kommuneprofilen 2019). Historical and recent transnational diversity are intertwined in various ways in educational institutions, workplaces and public arenas, and the recent increase in diversity has consequences for the very same arenas where Sámi, Kven and Norwegian are used. Moreover, cities, such as Tromsø, attract people from different areas of Norway, who move for work, study or other reasons and bring a variety of Norwegian dialects with them (Jorung 2018). Understanding the dynamics that arise in such encounters requires the study of linguistic and metalinguistic practices as they intersect with other practices and processes of social life (Pesch 2017; Hiss 2019; Johnsen 2020).

The four articles in this special issue of *Acta Borealia* explore multilingualism in different parts of these intertwined linguistic, social and policy changes in the spaces of higher education, work, kindergarten and urbanization. The articles are different in terms of their empirical focus, methodology and theory. What unites them is an interest in diversity and mobility as well as that they highlight empirical matters that have rarely been researched in the northern context.

The first article, “Minority Language Learning in Kven Through Conversation,” is by Leena Niiranen. Niiranen analyzes an initiative to (re)vitalize Kven through higher education using the master-apprentice method. Niiranen shows how this method allowed students to improve their oral proficiency in Kven while using the language with mentors in informal conversations. The master-apprentice method also increased learner autonomy, helped students overcome negative feelings related to learning Kven and helped students lower their anxiety. In addition, positive feedback helped students take the initiative to independently use the Kven language after practising with their mentor. However, Niiranen also shows that the choice of learning activities seemed to be guided by fixed beliefs about language learning.

Second, Anja Pesch discusses the concept of translanguaging in her article “‘They Call Me Anneanne!’ Translanguaging as a Theoretical and Pedagogical Challenge and Opportunity in the Kindergarten Context in Norway”. Many studies on translanguaging have been carried out in specific bilingual classrooms; however, it has not been discussed much in the mainstream kindergarten context of Norway. In these kindergartens, Norwegian is usually the common and majority language, whilst a growing number of children attending kindergarten are multilingual and have diverse linguistic backgrounds. Kindergarten teachers often have limited knowledge of the children’s languages. The article

elaborates on the concept of translanguaging from educational and linguistic perspectives and uses it as a theoretical lens through which to discuss kindergarten teachers' pedagogical practice with multilingual children and parents as well as discourses in the kindergarten curriculum. Pesch argues that, whilst translanguaging may challenge existing views on language and multilingualism and create heteroglossic linguistic spaces for communication with children and their parents, the concept is also challenged by the complex communication reality in kindergartens in Norway.

In the third article, Florian Hiss and Anna Loppacher investigate linguistic diversity in working life in their article "The Working Language is Norwegian. Not that this Means Anything, it Seems': When Expectations meet the New Multilingual Reality." Based on a series of telephone interviews with company representatives, Hiss and Loppacher present an overview of the new multilingual reality in many workplaces and analyze how managers and administrators position their expectations and experiences of this reality. The data suggest that many workplaces are linguistically segregated. Though most participants said that their companies did not have explicit workplace language policies, they expressed clear perceptions of how things should be in their workplaces, which were often in conflict with their descriptions of the status quo. The authors also show how multiple contextual conditions in and out of workplaces, both ideological and practical, informed participants' accounts of multilingual practices in their workplaces. Static and normative ideological positions are challenged by employees' language choices and practices and developments on a societal level, particularly those of the labour market, which regulates companies' access to workers. The study reveals the need for applicable knowledge about multilingual practices and sociolinguistic relations in workplaces.

Finally, in the fourth article, "Reported Language Attitudes by Norwegian Speaking In-Migrants in Tromsø", Monica Sætermo and Hilde Sollid investigate the reported language attitudes of people who have moved to Tromsø from other parts of Norway. Their study explores in-migrants' attitudes towards various forms of dialect use, including dialect maintenance, shifts and changes, as well as their perceptions of attitudes in Tromsø towards various forms of dialect use. The study shows that the participants viewed maintaining their dialect as an ideal and regarded making changes to their initial dialect as a tolerable sociolinguistic strategy, especially when used in order to ease communication. Many participants reported such changes in their initial dialect. Regarding attitudes of the inhabitants of Tromsø towards other Norwegian dialects, the participants reported general acceptance but with variations with regard to the areas of Norway to which they and their initial dialect belonged.

The four articles in this issue of *Acta Borealia*, different as they are, are all significant contributions to multilingualism as a research field and the advances of theoretical perspectives. Even though the articles are mainly empirically placed in the Northern Norwegian context, their findings and discussions are relevant and applicable beyond this limited geographical area.

Disclosure statement

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