

A Prognosis for Sámi in Norway: Schools as Key to Revitalization

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Abstract

The paper presents three different prognoses for the future number of Sámi language users in Norway based on the contemporary number of children receiving instruction in Sámi in the Norwegian school system, either North, Lule or South Sámi. There exist three different curricula for the subject Sámi, one for first language pupils (Sámi 1), one for second language pupils (Sámi 2), and one for foreign language pupils (Sámi 3). Depending on whether only Sámi pupils become future language users, or also Sámi 2 or even Sámi 3 pupils do so, a sober, moderate, and optimistic prognosis, respectively, can be made. The sober prognosis predicts a dramatic decrease in North Sámi and slight decrease in the other two varieties, whereas the moderate prognosis predicts stability for North Sámi and increase for Lule and South Sámi, and the optimistic prognosis predicts an increase for all three varieties. A number of factors that are likely to modulate the prognoses are brought to attention and discussed, unveiling that more information is needed on several issues relating to the future of the Sámi languages in Norway.

Introduction

In this paper estimates of the future population of the Sámi languages in Norway are made on the basis of the contemporary number of pupils receiving instruction in them. This is rooted in the assumption that literacy is one of the most powerful factors in the language ecology of contemporary Sámi and that the school system is a very efficient tool for advancing literacy in the Sámi languages. Other factors are also important to take into consideration when assessing the vitality of a language, and the school-based prognoses must inevitably be integrated in a broader model where a range of factors modulate the total number of language users.

The Sámi languages are indigenous to the High North of Europe. The traditional homelands of the Sámi are the central and northern parts of Norway and Sweden, the northern part of Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. The North Sámi autonym for this area is Sám̄i, and variants of this name are used in other Sámi languages.¹ This paper will be confined to an assessment of Sámi in Norway for which we have exact figures regarding the number of pupils with Sámi language instruction and furthermore where we also have adequate knowledge about the curricula used. Whether the method can be extended to other areas of Sám̄i remains to be seen.

¹ The spelling ‘Saami’ is frequently encountered in English texts and used for instance by both Ethnologue and the Endangered Languages Project. In the present text we use ‘Sámi’ with accent aigu on the root vowel which reflects the spelling used in the Sámi languages themselves.

The structure of the paper is as follows. We start by presenting some figures regarding the present-day number of speakers/users of the Sámi languages in general. We then hone in on the three varieties currently in use in Norway and their status in the Norwegian educational system. On the basis of the numbers presented a set of prognoses is put forth and discussed before aspects of a broader model to assess the future of the Sámi languages in Norway are taken into consideration.

The Sámi languages and number of users

The Sámi languages constitute a separate group within the Uralic language family. The language group make up a dialect continuum in which nine different main varieties are recognized as living languages today. Table 1 lists them from northeast to southwest with number of speakers as currently given by Ethnologue and the Endangered Languages Project (ELP), respectively.

Language	# speakers Ethnologue	# speakers ELP
Ter Sámi (RU)	2	30
Kildin Sámi (RU)	600	~300
Skolt Sámi (RU, FI)	320	~300
Inari Sámi (FI)	300	~300
North Sámi (FI, NO, SE)	25,700	16,500
Lule Sámi (NO, SE)	2,000	1-2,000
Pite Sámi (SE)	20	~42
Ume Sámi (SE)	20	<20
South Sámi (NO, SE)	600	600

Table 1: Number of speakers of Sámi languages according to Ethnologue and the Endangered Languages Project

There are some obvious discrepancies between the figures in the two databases which in turn follow from the use of different sources. The definition of ‘speaker of language x’ may vary considerably across sources and researchers, from counting just native, first language users to also including individuals with only partial knowledge of the language. Official registers of language users do not exist in all of the four countries, and notably not in Norway which hosts the highest number of ethnic Sámi.

What is nevertheless unquestionable is the following: North Sámi has far more speakers/users than all of the other varieties combined with about 85-90% of the total speaker/user population. Whereas North Sámi is considered *vulnerable* by the ELP, all the other varieties are considered *endangered* to varying degrees. As a whole the Sámi languages are presumably the most threatened historical minority *language group* in all of Europe with its total number of speakers at best being about 30,000, possibly just about 20,000.

Crucially, due to a long period of explicit assimilation policies in all four nation states that divide up Sápmi, there has been a breach in inter-generational transmission of the language in many local communities (see e.g. Minde 2003, Trosterud 2008, Albury 2016 and references cited there). A consequence of this is that there are currently many people with a Sámi ethnic identity and/or ancestry who have little or no command of one of the Sámi languages. Pietikäinen, Huss, Laihiala-Kankainen, Aikio-Puoskari, & Lane (2010: 4) estimate the total Sámi population to be between 140,000 and 200,000. In other words, only some 10-20% of the ethnic Sámi are active users of a Sámi language.

The Sámi languages in Norway

The Norwegian state has ratified the ILO 169 convention and recognizes the Sámi as an indigenous historical minority of the country. Furthermore, by §108 of the Norwegian constitution, Norwegian authorities are obliged to facilitate the development of Sámi language, culture, and way of life.

Skolt, North, Lule and South Sámi are recognized as indigenous languages of Norway by the Norwegian State under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Whereas few if any of the ethnic Skolt Sámi population in Norway command the language², the figures for the latter three in Norway given in Ethnologue are as follows: North Sámi, 20,000; Lule Sámi, 1,000; South Sámi, 300.

² For Skolt Sámi there has been a breach in transmission of the language from generations to the next, and there are currently few if any speakers born and raised in Norway. Both Pite and Ume Sámi have also been spoken earlier by families and groups residing on Norwegian territory, but these varieties have not yet been officially recognized under the charter.

The Ethnologue figures for North and Lule Sámi are most likely too high. The lowest estimate for North Sámi in the ELP is based on Salminen (2007: 262) who says that “[i]n Norway, the number of speakers is above 10,000, in Sweden perhaps 5,000, and in Finland approximately 1,500.” About Lule Sámi Salminen (op. cit.: 257) says that “[t]he number of speakers lies somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000” in Norway and Sweden, but Morén-Duolljá (2010: 58), based on sources in the Lule Sámi communities, estimates the number to be just around 650 altogether in the two countries. In personal communication Morén-Duolljá says that a good 400 appears to be a fairly good estimate of the number of active and proficient Lule Sámi speakers in Norway.

The Ethnologue figure for South Sámi appears more accurate. Citing several recent sources NOU (2016: 298) states that in Norway at least 270 individuals speak the language well and at least 340 individuals understand the language well. For the purpose of the present paper, we will assume that the figures are approximately 15,000, 400 and 300 active users of North, Lule, and South Sámi, respectively, in Norway.³

To put these figures in perspective, the total Norwegian population is 5.3 million. The regions in Norway that are part of the traditional homelands of the Sámi (from north to south: Finnmark, Troms, Nordland, and Trøndelag counties plus Nord-Østerdalen in Hedmark) have about 958,000 inhabitants. In other words, the speakers of the Sámi languages make up a small minority, and Norwegian is the dominant language throughout the regions.

A few local communities in the northernmost county Finnmark have a majority of Sámi speakers (Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Kárášjohka/Karasjok) and altogether 12 municipalities throughout the area (4 for South, 1 for Lule, and 7 for North Sámi) as well as the four counties are part of the Sámi Language Administrative Area (SLAA). This is a governmental installment which grants Sámi the same judicial status as Norwegian in the area and which commits the local/regional authorities to facilitate the use and development of Sámi.

In contrast to the highly uncertain numbers of speakers/users of Sámi overall, there exist very exact figures for the number of pupils that receive instruction in the Sámi languages in Norway, and these figures are publically available from the online database skoleporten.no run by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. We will shortly return to these figures.

³ A thorough discussion of various sources for the number of Sámi language users in Norway is found in Todal (2013). The discussion does however not end in a firm conclusion regarding the numbers.

Sámi language curricula and number of pupils in Norway

The Norwegian school system is highly centralized with nationally defined curricula. Municipalities are in charge of organizing grades 1-10 (ages 6-16), which are the obligatory school years. The municipalities within the SLAA are obliged to follow a variant of the national curricula which to a greater extent emphasizes Sámi matters. Furthermore, municipalities in the SLAA may decide to make Sámi obligatory for all pupils, and according to Rasmussen (2015:18) that has been enforced in three municipalities in Finnmark county. In other municipalities in the SLAA all pupils, regardless of ethnicity, have the right to learn Sámi. Outside the SLAA, only pupils with a Sámi ethnic background have the explicit right to receive instruction in Sámi language as a school subject.

As for the curricula for the Sámi language subject in grades 1-10, there are three variants, which are the same across the three linguistic varieties. These curricula are generally referred to as Sámi 1, Sámi 2, and Sámi 3.⁴

The Sámi 1 curriculum entails that the main literacy training is done through Sámi, and the pupils following it receive five hours of instruction per week in the subject throughout the school years. Sámi 2 is a curriculum for pupils who have some knowledge of the language but which otherwise receive their main literacy training through the subject Norwegian. They receive 3-4 hours of instruction in Sámi per week, varying somewhat with grade level. Sámi 3 is a curriculum that requires no prior knowledge of Sámi, and which is offered two hours per week throughout grades 1-10. Although one may in fact be a first language speaker of Sámi and follow either Sámi 2 and Sámi 3, in many respects the three curricula quite closely match the well-known linguistic categories L1, L2 and L3 (i.e. first, second, and third language speakers/learners).

	Sámi 1	Sámi 2	Sámi 3	Total
North Sámi	892	733	543	2,168
Lule Sámi	34	50	31	115
South Sámi	26	69	16	111
Total	952	852	590	2,394

Table 2: Number of pupils following different curricula for the three Sámi languages in use in Norway in the school year 2018/2019

Table 2 presents the number of pupils who followed the different curricula in the school year 2018/2019. The total number of pupils has not changed much over the last decade. In 2009 it was 2,336 decreasing down to

⁴ Technically speaking, Sámi 2 and 3 are part of the same curriculum—Sámi as a second language—which in practice specifies two different programs. For further details, see <https://www.udir.no/laring-og-trivsel/lareplanverket/kunn-skapsloftet-samisk/>

2,116 in 2014 before increasing again. Figure 1 shows the development graphically. The numbers furthermore show that North Sámi is by far the biggest of the Sámi languages also in the context of education in Norway.

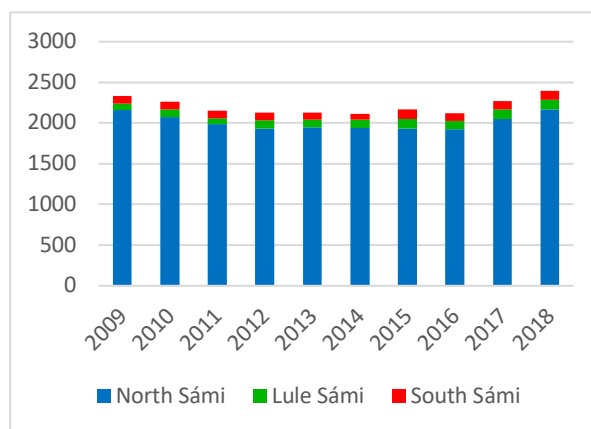


Figure 1: The total number of pupils receiving instruction in Sámi grades 1-10 from 2009 to 2018

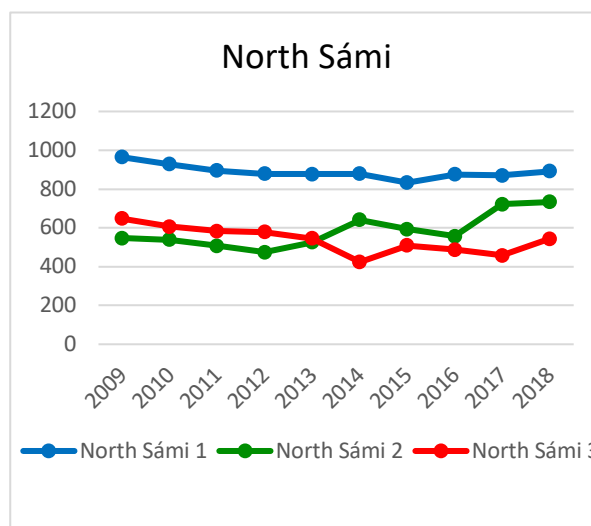


Fig. 2: Development of number of pupils in grades 1-10 receiving instruction in North Sámi in Norwegian schools between 2009 and 2018

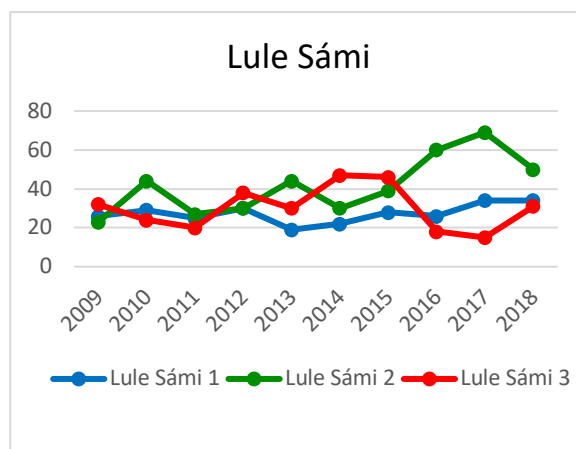


Fig. 3: Development of number of pupils in grades 1-10 receiving instruction in Lule Sámi in Norwegian schools between 2009 and 2018

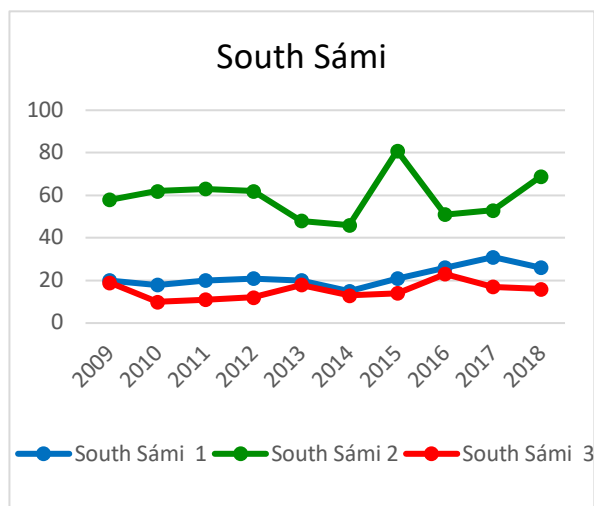


Fig. 4: Development of number of pupils in grades 1-10 receiving instruction in South Sámi in Norwegian schools between 2009 and 2018

Figure 2 illustrates the development for North Sámi, Figure 3 for Lule Sámi, and Figure 4 for South Sámi, each figure distinguishing between the three kinds of curricula. What is particularly noticeable for North Sámi is that there is a growing number of pupils following Sámi 2 at the expense of both Sámi 1 and Sámi 3 although the largest group still follow Sámi 1. For both Lule and South Sámi the majority of pupils follow the Sámi 2 curriculum.

In 2018/2019, the total number of pupils in grades 1-10 in Norwegian schools was 636,350. That means that the 2,394 pupils who receive some form of instruction in one of the three “Norwegian” Sámi languages make up 0.38% of the total pupil population. The 952 Sámi 1 pupils make up 0.15% of all Norwegian pupils. This is worth keeping in mind as a token of how minoritized the Sámi languages are in the Norwegian society.

The school data just presented will form the basis for the prognoses to be developed in the next section. As mentioned in the introduction, a full model for estimating the future of a language population must also take into account recruitment of individuals who learn the language without receiving formal instruction in it in the school system. Nevertheless, basing the prognoses on the population of Sámi pupils relies on the assumption that this group will constitute the core of the future population of Sámi language users. The assumption may be scrutinized, and ultimately an empirical question, in support for it we may take the following characterization of the contemporary situation for Sámi language and culture by Ulla Aikio-Puoskari (2009):

The present situation is characterised by an intensive struggle between a language and cultural shift on the one hand, and revitalisation and cultural survival on the other. The school and the teaching of and through the native languages are of great significance for the outcome of this competition. (Aikio-Puoskari 2009: 218)

Prognosis: The method

The total population of Norway is 5.3 million. Given that there were 636,350 pupils in grades 1-10 in 2018/2019, the pupils make up 11.8% of the total population. That gives a ratio for pupils to the rest of population of 1:7.4.

We will now make the following assumptions: (i) the children receiving instruction in a Sámi language will be the main base of the future active speakers and bearers of the language, (ii) this number will remain at the same level as today, and (iii) the basic birth rate is more or less the same among the Sámi as in the rest of the Norwegian population. None of these assumptions are a natural given, but if we make them, we can estimate the future number of active users by the following method:

(1) *Multiply the pupil figures by 7.4 and add the resulting sum the pupil figures, i.e. $(n * 7.4) + n = x$.*

In the following we will let n be the figures for the school year 2018/2019. An alternative using the average of the ten-year period 2009-2018 would have given slightly smaller numbers, and since the fluctuation in Table 2 may signal a rising trend, we choose the last year as the basis for the projections. Furthermore, depending on whether we think that only Sámi 1 pupils, both Sámi 1 and 2 pupils, or Sámi 1, 2 as well as Sámi 3 pupils all will become future users and bearers of the languages, we get three different prognoses which we may term ‘sober’, ‘moderate’, and ‘optimistic’, respectively. Only incremental combinations of Sámi 1 to 3 are worth considering, i.e. we exclude the combinations Sámi 2+3 and Sámi 1+3.

Table 3 gives the prognoses for North Sámi, and we use the figures for the school year 2018/2019. The individual projections from Sámi 2 and Sámi 3 are given for transparency only.

	n	n * 7.4	(n * 7.4) + n
North Sámi 1	892	6,601	7,493
North Sámi 2	733	5,424	6,157
North Sámi 3	543	4,018	4,561
North Sámi 1+2	1,625	12,025	13,650
North Sámi 1+2+3	2,168	16,043	18,211

Table 3: Prognoses for North Sámi based on number of pupils (n) and pupils to rest of population ratio (7.4)

On the estimate given in the previous section that there are about 15,000 proficient users of North Sámi in Norway today, the sober prognosis for North Sámi is that the number will be reduced by about 50%, whereas by the moderate prognosis there will be a slight decrease, and by the optimistic one there will be a slight increase.

Table 4 gives the prognoses for Lule Sámi. Again Sámi 2 and 3 are given for transparency only. Given the estimate that there are about 400 active users of Lule Sámi in Norway, the sober prognosis indicates a reduction in

number of users to about $\frac{3}{4}$ of today's number. By the moderate prognosis, however, there will be an increase by over 75%, and by the optimistic prognosis the number will be more than doubled. In other words, the situation looks better for Lule than for North Sámi.

	n	n * 7.4	(n * 7.4) + n
Lule Sámi 1	34	252	286
Lule Sámi 2	50	370	420
Lule Sámi 3	31	229	260
Lule Sámi 1+2	84	622	706
Lule Sámi 1+2+3	115	851	966

Table 4: Prognoses for Lule Sámi based on number of pupils (n) and pupils to rest of population ratio (7.4)

Table 5 gives the prognoses for South Sámi. The current number of active users of the language in Norway is about 300. By the sober prognosis the number of future users will thus be reduced to about 2/3 of what it is today. By the moderate prognosis, however, the number will go from 300 to almost 800, and by the optimistic prognosis the number will be more than tripled.

	n	n * 7.4	+ n
South Sámi 1	26	192	218
South Sámi 2	69	511	580
South Sámi 3	16	118	134
South Sámi 1+2	95	703	798
South Sámi 1+2+3	111	821	932

Table 5: Prognoses for South Sámi based on number of pupils (n) and pupils to rest of population ratio (7.4)

The prognoses are shown graphically for North Sámi in Figure 5 and for Lule and South Sámi in Figure 6. They can be summarized as follows:

- (i) *Sober prognosis*: If the Sámi 1 curriculum is the only one which by and large is successful in producing future active users and language bearers there will be a decrease in the numbers compared to today. The decrease will be most dramatic for North Sámi and less so for the other two varieties.
- (ii) *Moderate prognosis*: If both the Sámi 1 and Sámi 2 curriculum prove to produce future active users and language bearers the situation for North Sámi will be quite stable, whereas for Lule and South Sámi there will be a noticeable increase in the numbers.
- (iii) *Optimistic prognosis*: If all three curricula serve to produce future active users and language bearers, all three linguistic varieties will experience an increase in numbers, and this increase will be especially pronounced for Lule and South Sámi.

The obvious conclusion to draw from this, is that in order for the educational system to serve as a vitalizer of the Sámi languages in Norway, more than just the Sámi 1 pupils need to develop an active competence in the languages. Ensuring a good development also for the Sámi 2 pupils will give stability when we view the three

languages as a whole—the significant increase for Lule and South Sámi will be subsumed by the numerical dominance of North Sámi. If also all Sámi 3 pupils obtain an active competence in the languages there will be an overall increase.

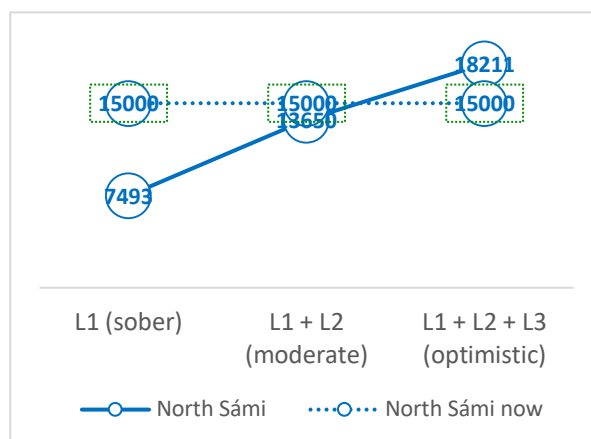


Figure 5: Future users of North Sámi in Norway projected from current number of pupils in grades 1-10

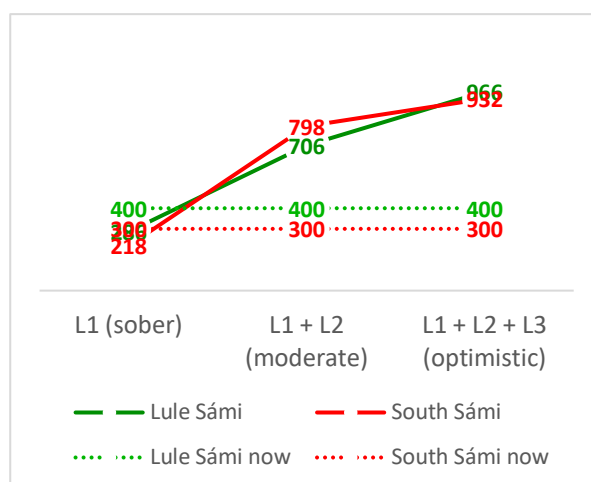


Figure 6: Future users of Lule and South Sámi in Norway projected from current number of pupils in grades 1-10

The question is which of the three scenarios—the sober, moderate or optimistic prognosis—is the most realistic one, or even whether any of them are in fact adequate. A variety of factors concerning acquisition in childhood and adolescence as well as opportunities to use and develop the language in adulthood must also be considered regarding which pupils and how many of them remain active language users also later in life. Such factors must be part of a broader model for assessing the vitality and future of the languages. In the next section we will discuss the prognoses further and also sketch key properties of a broader model for projections of the future number of users.

Discussion: towards a broader model

We may start by considering four issues pertaining to the school-based prognoses as such. First, the optimistic

prognosis may be deemed quite unlikely. The two hours of Sámi language instruction per week provided for the Sámi 3 pupils are not sufficient to make a substantial portion of them active and proficient users of the language. Many of these pupils have little or no prior knowledge of Sámi beforehand as many of them come from homes and families where Sámi is not spoken. Unless they are exposed to Sámi in other ways and from other contexts, they are thus not likely to develop their proficiency to an advanced level. Still, one should not underestimate the role of the Sámi 3 curriculum as one providing a useful base to support exposure from extra-curricular sources and/or a base which the individual pupil later may develop further by self-driven interest.

Second, it is an open question whether all Sámi 2 pupils will remain active users of Sámi later in life. Sámi 2 pupils receive 3-4 hours of Sámi instruction per week and will have some prior knowledge of the language when entering school, but Norwegian will all the same be the main medium of literacy training for them. We may assume that for many of these pupils Norwegian is likely to play an increasingly dominant role in their lives as they mature.

Third, the sober prognosis could have been made more fine-grained by distinguishing between those Sámi 1 pupils that follow Sámi medium education (SME) and those who do not. Roughly 90% of the Sámi 1 pupils follow SME (see Rasmussen, 2015: 21). The roughly 10% non-SME pupils have most of their teaching in Norwegian and is thus in a more vulnerable situation than the SME pupils.

Fourth, and furthermore, an additional complication represented by using the 2018/2019 sum of all pupils is that when one looks closer at individual cohorts, there is a net “loss” of pupils over time. Figure 7 illustrates this for North Sámi. It shows the average development for the seven cohorts that started first grade between 2003 and 2009 aligned by grade/year.

For all three curricula we see that the numbers decrease as the pupils become older. Whereas the peak in 2nd grade is an average 282 for all three curricula combined the low in 10th grade is 157. That amounts to a loss of 44%. (The loss for North Sámi 1 is 32%, for North Sámi 2 is 36%, and for North Sámi it is 65%.) To what extent the “leavers” also stop using and developing their competence in Sámi, we do not know. If they do, the n used in the above prognoses is too high and must be adjusted accordingly.

The main loss seems to take place by 5th grade, a fact which brings to attention the so-called “4th grade slump” which refers to the observation initially made by Chall & Jacobs (1983) that some children tend to fall behind in reading skills around the age of 9-10 when the language used in the classroom starts to become more academically advanced. (See also McNamara, Ozuru & Floyd, 2011, and references cited there.) Although the

Sámi “5th grade slump” deserves a thorough investigation of its own, it may be a reflex of the same phenomenon if it turns out that many children leave Sámi instruction at a point where the demands for comprehension and use of the language become more challenging.

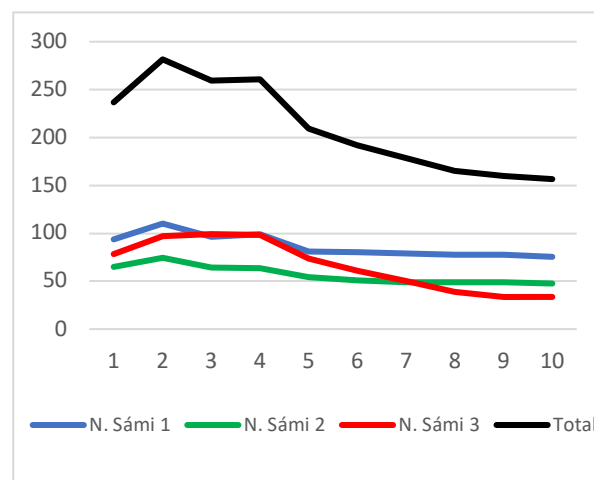


Figure 7: Average development of cohort size grades 1-10 for the North Sámi cohorts starting school in years 2003-2009. (North Sámi 3 was introduced in 2006 and grades 1-3 are therefore weighted for this curriculum.)

In addition to the four issues we now have pointed out pertaining to the school-based prognoses *per se*, a more accurate prognosis must include groups of active language users who have acquired a functional competence in Sámi without formal instruction in the educational system. Two such categories appear especially relevant: (i) L1 users who grow up using Sámi in the home environment but without learning it at school, (ii) L2 users who have acquired the language in adulthood, i.e. the category increasingly referred to as ‘New Speakers’ (see e.g. the papers in Soler & Darquennes, 2019, and references provided there; see also Rasmus, 2019, for a qualitative study of Sámi New Speakers). In the advent of more thorough surveys we can only guess how big these groups of users may be in the Sámi context.

Regarding the first category, given that Norwegian Sámi L1 children are entitled to instruction in Sámi no matter where in the country they live, there are reasons to expect that rather few Sámi L1 children are not subsumed by the official school figures provided here.

On the other hand, adult L2 learners may represent a significant contribution to the population of speakers/users. In Norway, there are currently 19 Sámi language centers (see Sametinget, 2019) that organize different kinds of Sámi language courses (Nygaard et al., 2012). The courses are organized at varying intervals and they target different age groups and existing competence levels. In addition to this, both the Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino and UiT The Arctic University of Norway from time to time organize courses in North Sámi as a foreign language. Some courses are completed with an exam that give uni-

versity level credits and which state particular competence levels. Other courses do not.

Antonsen (2015) provides an overview of how many students have taken exams and obtained credits in the years 2009-2014 from the Sámi as foreign language courses. According to her overview (op. cit.: 76ff), which involves courses provided at eight locations, 189 students completed an introductory level course, 130 students a second level introductory course, whereas 11 students completed a one semester course at the subsequent level. However, what is not known is how many of these students are adult L2 learners with no or little knowledge of Sámi from childhood. Some of the students are likely to have had some Sámi background and they may even have had formal instruction in Sámi in school and hence be subsumed by the school statistics discussed above.

Still, given that the number of proficient Sámi users is so low in the first place, even a small number of proficient adult L2 learners each year would make a significant contribution. If we for the sake of the argument say that the 19 centers and two universities on average annually produce three proficient New Speakers each, over a time span of 50 years that would make up ($21 \times 3 \times 50 =$) 3,150. 15 of the institutions focus on North Sámi, and adding 2,250 to the estimates above would make both the sober and the moderate prognosis less grim.

The bottom line is nevertheless that more research is needed to establish a better estimate of how many adult L2 learners obtain an active competence in Sámi outside of the regular school system. At the same time, such investigations should also seek to establish in what way, and by what numbers, the course activities serve to complement Sámi language instruction in school and thereby how they support pupils in both becoming and remaining active language users also in their adult lives.

The latter point brings us to the topic of ‘language vitality’. Bodies like Ethnologue, UNESCO and the Endangered Languages Project all list factors to assess language vitality which, although varying in number (from 12 to 4), largely overlap and converge. The nine factors given in UNESCO (2003) are the following.

1. Intergenerational language transmission
2. Absolute number of speakers
3. Proportion of speakers within the total population
4. Trends in existing language domains
5. Response to new domains and media
6. Materials for language education and literacy
7. Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use
8. Community members’ attitudes toward their own language
9. Amount and quality of documentation

For each of these factors, UNESCO provides a scale from 0 to 5 to assess the vitality of a given language: the closer to 5, the more vital. In effect, a qualitative judg-

ment of each factor can then be turned into a number which can be used to do a quantitative assessment.

It is outside the scope of the present paper to review the UNESCO assessment for the Sámi languages and/or the similar ones found in Ethnologue and the ELP. We may note that according to the UNESCO scheme North Sámi is currently classified as a *definitely endangered* language whereas both Lule and South Sámi are classified as *severely endangered* languages. What may be worth pointing out regarding this classification is that the prognoses provided in this paper signal more positive trends for both Lule and South Sámi than for North Sámi in the area of education.

Placing education at the center of the model, we can regard the recruitment of future active language users as a function of the number of pupils obtaining a strong productive competence in the language minus the number of such individuals leaving the language on their way into adulthood plus adult L2 learners, schematically represented as follows:

$$\{n \text{ child learners}\} - \{n \text{ leavers}\} + \{n \text{ New Speakers}\} \\ = \{n \text{ future language users}\}$$

Vitality factors like the UNESCO ones play into this calculation either by supporting acquisition and use or by contributing to (or preventing) language shift and loss in individuals.

Returning to the Norwegian specific school system one may safely say that in order to increase the number of child learners the focus should be on the following: (i) the number of Sámi 1 pupils—preferably in Sámi medium education—should be increased as this is the group which is most likely to become and remain active future users of a Sámi language, (ii) the 4th grade slump should be given special attention as this is where most pupils leave the formal instruction in Sámi, (iii) the Sámi 2 and Sámi 3 curricula should be made as good as possible so as to provide good opportunities for individual pupils to strengthen their competence in Sámi outside the school system now or later in life. A fourth recommendation could be to formulate an ambition that the Sámi 3 and Sámi 2 curricula should facilitate pupils to “step up” to the more comprehensive curriculum (i.e. Sámi 3 → Sámi 2 → Sámi 1).

Conclusion

It should be clear from the discussion above that a number of factors need to be investigated further before more reliable projections of future numbers of Sámi language users (in Norway) can be made. We are currently not in a position to make projections like the one for example done for Welsh in Jones (2012:116).

Still, in a country like Norway it seems justifiable to assume that the number of students that receive literacy training in Sámi through the school system will make up a substantial core of the future population of language

users. Two arguments are central for underscoring this: (i) The Norwegian educational system is highly centralized and the teaching of Sámi is systematized in the form of three different curricula that target different groups of pupils, (ii) all ethnic Sámi children have a right to receive instruction in Sámi independently of where they live, and many make use of this right.

Based on this key presumption we can make three different projections—a sober, a moderate, and an optimistic prognosis—depending on whether just the first language pupils (Sámi 1) or also the second language pupils (Sámi 2) or even the foreign language pupils (Sámi 3) become future language users. By the sober prognosis North Sámi will experience a dramatic decrease in numbers whereas Lule and South Sámi will see just a slight decrease. By the moderate analysis the future number of North Sámi language users will be more stable whereas the other two varieties will have a noticeable increase. By the optimistic prognosis even North Sámi will have an increase in number of users whereas Lule and South Sámi will have very high increase.

A number of issues that may modulate the prognoses have been discussed, and although there is a high degree of uncertainty associated with the prognoses, at least one may hope that the paper on the one hand has served to point at some topics that need further investigation and on the other hand that it has highlighted some aspects of how the Norwegian school system deals with instruction in the Sámi languages and in turn what assets and possibilities it provides.

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