

First I would like to thank the Centre for Sámi Studies that they have provided me with the opportunity to give a presentation here at the Forum.

My name is Erika Satta and I am from the Finnish side of Sápmi, the Sámi country. I am a student in the Indigenous Studies Master Programme here at the University of Tromsø, but I am presently working at the Sámi University College in Kautokeino. I will look at a few aspects of my thesis and my own background. I have a Sámi background, but I was not taught Sámi at home when I was growing up. Nevertheless I have reclaimed the language of my ancestors. I have a 3 year old son with whom I speak Sámi in order that he may learn our own language from the very beginning. This means that Sámi again has become a living language in my family, but every day I have to work consciously with the Sámi language so that we don't lose it again.

My Master thesis was relative to threatened languages. A language is threatened when people no longer speak their mother tongue but rather switch to another language. For instance, my ancestors substituted Sámi with Finnish. They did not transfer Sámi language to the coming generation and this led to an everlasting diminishing number of speakers and leading to the majority language winning over the minority. And, in a cultural perspective, the minority language is substituted by the majority language.

My research also looks into education. And school, of course, is a very important aspect in the revitalization of the Sámi language. In the world today, more than 6,000 languages are in use and research shows that something like 20-50% out of these languages are on the brink of extinction in the near future. Languages are, of course, something very special, in that the more they are used, the stronger they get. In my research I have chosen to look at two indigenous languages, these being the Rama language of Nicaragua and the Inari Sámi language of Finland. Finland is Norway's neighboring country and not far from here. Both the Rama and the Inari Sámi of Finland have to a large extent stopped using their indigenous languages because they have been assimilated. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Finns and Northern Sámi moved into the Inari Sámi area and from then on the Inari Sámi language started giving away. The Rama language also found itself in a threatened situation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the Moravian Church people were moved to the Rama Island. They brought their language, their way of life and their culture with them. In this picture you see a girl of the Rama nation who has dressed up for a celebration and in this photography we see the result of the Moravian peoples' influx into these areas. People have adopted new ways of dress. We see in this picture how the girl is not wearing traditional dress.

Both these two peoples are now working hard to make sure that their languages do not die out all together and that is what I call revitalization. I look at that and I compare these two processes within the two language groups. The two groups live in two quite different countries and this point of departure is of significance for the situation in which these two different peoples are. Nicaragua is a poor country and the Rama people is among the poorest of peoples, whereas Finland is a rich, industrialized country. The Rama are about 1,200 in number, but the Rama language is spoken by less than 40 individuals.

The Inari Sámi are about 900 all together, out of which about approximately 350 speak the Inari Sámi language, so in that respect they are stronger than the Rama. Both these peoples belong to a minority within a minority. That is, the Rama are the smallest group and live between the Miskitos and Sumo peoples. And the Inari Sámi live between the Skolt Sámi and the North Sámi. The indigenous languages in Nicaragua have been given an official status like Arja just told us about. This happened in 1993. The Sámi language was given an official status in Finland towards the end of the 1990s. These two different points of departure give interesting aspects to research: for these two groups from two quite different situations, how do they revitalize their own languages and cultures?

As one theoretical basis for my research I have looked at the language emancipation or the freedom of the language. The emancipation of the language means that different languages are given a democratic space in the society. A process of revitalization of a language requires the emancipation of a language, since a threatened language needs an official space in the society. For instance, a space in the media, with an individual status.

Renewal is also important in this research, i.e. an updating renewal of the society in all aspects and how does this renewal influence the linguistic revitalization. The world is constantly being renewed and this, of course, influences indigenous peoples and their life situations. So what do I do research on? I ask the question of whether the culture is reflected in the linguistic revitalization process and if it is not, why is it not? To what extent is culture reflected in school curriculums?

I am still working on my Master thesis so these are all temporary results that I am presenting to you, but I wish to present you with the results I have so far, for instance, looking at this situation of education and teaching in Rama Cay, in Nicaragua. Rama children have about 2 hours of Rama language in the pre-school age and up, including the 4<sup>th</sup> year of primary school. As far as I know, there are no children in Rama Cay who learn the Rama language at home. They grow up with Creole English as their first language.

Let me say a little about the situation in Finland for the Inari Sámi. The Inari Sámi children start out with language nest. This is a form of kindergarden where only the threatened language is used. It is like a total emersion programme for the language. And in this case the children actually learn their threatened language as well as any other native tongue on mother tongue level. The basic concept is that none of the teachers/adults participating speak anything but the native language. And after having spent time in this total emersion programme, the children do start using their mother tongue in general in life and are actually prepared for being taught in school, when they start school in their own mother tongue. Therefore these total emersion programmes are extremely efficient.

Now we see clearly that there are two very different approaches to revitalization of languages. In Nicaragua, they have only had 2 hours per week of mother tongue teaching whereas in Finland, the Inari Sámi have been given total emersion programmes. We must, of course, bear in mind that the Inari Sámi people has been in the same situation the Rama people is in at present, but for the Inari Sámi this was back in the 1970s when they also had 2 hours per week of mother tongue training, but only after the late 90s it has been possible for them to go on to a total emersion programme and were enabled to start school in their own tongue.

Normally there are several stages in language revitalization that you develop the language by. You cannot jump directly to a very high level. The language needs to be matured and this other process takes time. An informant from the Inari Sámi population told me that the time would not have been right for the total emersion concept back in the 1970s because then people would not have been ready to take in such a huge reform and that much information. At that time 2 hours a week was a good thing, a big progress. These two peoples are at different levels in the revitalization process. The situation is more dramatic for the Rama language and the Rama language is considerably more threatened because there are so few language users of the Rama language. And the children are not taught the language as efficiently as it is the case in Inari. But what is important is that the Rama are working towards revitalizing the language.

I did fieldwork the autumn of 2004 in Nicaragua, in Rama Cay where most of the Rama live. Rama Cay is in the eastern part of Nicaragua, on the Caribbean coast in a lagoon close to a city called Bluefields. In Rama Cay there is one single person who has the Rama language as a mother tongue. That single person who has the Rama language as a mother tongue is Mr. Walter. He moved to Rama Cay; he was not born there. Mr Walter is a very central and important person in the community because he has the responsibility for teaching the Rama language in the school. In the autumn of 2004, a year ago, when I was on the Rama Island, a course of Rama language was given for adults and the aim was to educate new Rama language teachers. A Sámi woman called Haldis Juliana Balto was at that time working for the Sámi Council on linguistic revitalization. Together with Mr. Walter she organized this language course, but she also worked in developing text books for Rama language teaching in schools. This is the primary school in Rama Cay (see photo). The children are outside during a break. They are playing football. The children start school quite young in Nicaragua, so when I was there during my fieldwork, I observed children down to the age of four attending school. They learn the Rama language through song and games, and they meet a couple of times a week. The 4 year olds had Miss Agnes as a teacher – she was working, on a voluntary basis, as a Rama language teacher. Miss Agnes had herself learnt the Rama language not having grown up with it.

I wanted to find out what parents and teachers' thoughts were about the Rama culture and language, whether they thought of the Rama culture as significant and if so why, and if not, why not. In this context, in this particular case, language teaching was dependant on a person who had a lot of hours per week in the school for each pupil. Therefore it was of an utmost importance to develop, to educate more language teachers in Rama Cay, to increase the educational practice. So the question remains: is it important to teach children Rama culture? The reply I got from most informants was that they wished that the Rama children should learn their traditional culture in school. It was said that in order for children to be able to succeed in life, they need to know their traditional way of life. They should learn how the Rama built their houses. This is of practical importance because when you build a house according to the Rama tradition, you don't need to spend money to buy materials in a shop, which you would have had to do if you built a house the same way the majority population does. The Rama people collect all their construction material from the nature and do not need to spend money on it. This reflects the fact that traditional Rama culture conservation will help the children to survive in poverty and with meager economic means. If you compare with the Inari Sámi in Finland, the Rama are living in a traditional way and most of these children live their lives in extreme poverty. Maintenance of cultural identity is of utmost importance for their possibilities in life for a good livelihood. In my research, it also became apparent that it is a huge challenge to teach these traditional ways to the Rama children and to teach the Rama language because the children did not appear to be very interested be it in the ancient cultures or in the language. Ordinarily children want to follow new trends and take in to use contemporary or modern things, and new trends are important to them. Children and adolescents have their own culture which is constantly changing, constantly searching for new impulses.

How about the language and culture of the Inari Sámi? The Inari Municipality is to be found in the northern part of Finland, next to the Inari Lake. There are four language groups living closely: the Finns, the Inari Sámi, the Skolt Sámi and the North Sámi. The Inari Sámi are living in different towns within the municipality and they had these language camps with Inari Sámi for 7 years now. The Inari Sámi live modern lives just like other Finns, the other members of the Finnish population. They have also gone from traditional ways of life to modern professions. After I have been to Nicaragua, I also did fieldwork and interviews with teachers at the language nest. I wanted to hear from them to what extent this education was important for the cultural identity, their different use and the significance that they gave to this teaching. Some of them didn't find it necessary to emphasize culture in the teaching because they felt that culture automatically goes with language. According to this point of view, the language contains their culture and therefore it is not necessary to separately and explicitly teach culture. They felt that Sámi culture was something that belonged to the past and no longer fits in the modern contemporary life. In their point of view, the language itself carries the culture. It could be mentioned that there are different ways of defining indigenous culture. But what is part of indigenous culture? Is it only old traditions that comprise culture? Do indigenous peoples also have a right to change their cultures and still be able to claim that they are indigenous?

In conclusion, I will look at what I saw from the Inari and the Rama cultures. There are big contrasts between the two groups. This far I have arrived at the conclusion that the significance of culture in the linguistic revitalization process is different in the two instances. The Rama emphasize traditional Rama culture in their language education because teaching the traditional culture also provides a way of surviving in a situation of scarce financial means and gives them means of surviving in the future. The Rama's situation was tough. They daily strive to be able to feed themselves, but nevertheless they are able to use resources for their culture and language. The Inari Sámi emphasize language first and foremost because they, to a large extent, feel that their language actually automatically gives the culture and the culture does not need to be taught separately. Many find that Sámi culture is something old fashioned to a certain extent. And that they should adapt to modern living. But what is common to the informants from both the Rama and the Sámi peoples is that they love their language and that they really wish to work for the survival of their languages.

I would like to add that it is important that in revitalizing languages you find new arenas for the ways in which the languages can be used, and new ways of using the language. It must be appropriate and adapted to the new ways of the children's lives. We have an example from the Inari Sámi: an artist whose name is Amoc. He

started producing rap music in Inari Sámi and he is extremely popular. And this is absolutely a new approach to revitalizing the language. Could anyone rap in Rama I wonder?

Thank you very much!