Sámi language teachers' professional identities explained through narratives about language acquisition

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Abstract

Conducted in northern Finland, this study examines Sámi language teachers' professional identities through their narratives of language acquisition. We focus on how teachers' professional identities are shaped by their language acquisition process. The results are based on the narratives of nine North, Inari and Skolt Sámi language teachers. Two aspects of teachers' narratives were significantly linked to their identities as Sámi language teachers: (1) their backgrounds (indigenous/non-indigenous) and (2) their language acquisition experiences (acquired Sámi language in childhood/adulthood). Indigenous teachers appeared to express their professional identities strongly despite their challenging acquisition experiences and were inclined to work towards the future of Sámi languages. In addition, non-indigenous teachers were willing to further the development of Sámi languages although they are not indigenous, which perhaps contributes towards the future of Sámi languages. Teachers narrated complex thoughts about language acquisition and their professional identity and helped develop indigenous language education in their respective indigenous communities. We recommend that teachers' in pre-service and service education should prepare and support indigenous language teachers by sharing knowledge about multilingual education practices and coping skills, particularly to help the latter manage varied tasks and heterogeneous contexts. Thus, this research study shows that both teachers' language acquisition experiences and their current work situations shape their professional identity.

Introduction

This study attempts to examine how Sámi language teachers' professional identities are influenced by their experiences of language acquisition. Language acquisition is the process of acquiring the ability to comprehend and produce words and sentences. It is an interdisciplinary field comprising linguistics, psychology and education. Although this discipline developed through the study of major and dominant languages globally, language acquisition research has recently focused on lesser-used, minority, indigenous languages (e.g. Kelly *et al.*, 2015; Morcom and Roy, 2017). Immersion programmes for indigenous languages are emerging in different indigenous-language communities, such as in New Zealand, California and Hawaii. Earlier research describes both the successes and challenges of such immersion programmes (e.g. McCarty, 2003; Yamauchi and Ceppi, 2006; Hinton, 2013; Morcom and Ray, 2017). Benefits of such programmes include the cognitive and developmental advantages of bilingualism (Costa *et al.*, 2009; Hermanto *et al.*, 2012) as well as increased psychological and spiritual well-being (Hinton, 2002; see also Ratima and May, 2011). Despite this change in focus, however, there is a lack of research on acquisition of indigenous languages, particularly among adult learners (Ratima and May, 2011).

This study focuses on three Sámi languages spoken in northern Finland: North Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi. Of the three, North Sámi has the widest use, it is spoken across national borders in Norway and Sweden and constitutes a kind of de facto standard variety and lingua franca in the region. It is spoken in the Sámi homeland area, Utsjoki, Inari, Enontekiö and Sodankylä communes. Inari and Skolt Sámi are used in the Inari commune and are minority languages within these Sámi languages. Nonetheless, all Sámi languages are considered seriously endangered (see Svonni, 2008; Moseley, 2010). Sámi languages have been revitalised in the past decade in various decrees (Pietikäinen, 2008*a*; Olthuis *et al.*, 2013; Tanhua, 2014; Pasanen, 2015; Äärelä, 2016).

The Sámi people traditionally live in central and northern Norway, Sweden, northern Finland and in the Kola Peninsula, Russia. Sápmi is the area where Sámi people lived before national borders were established (Kulonen *et al.*, 2005). It is estimated that there are 80,000–100,000 Sámi across the four countries intersecting their homelands (Joona, 2012). The Sámi languages are Finno-Ugric languages spoken in the Sámi region (Sápmi) in Norway, Sweden,

Finland and Russia. Around 50,000 Sámi people speak one of the Sámi languages (see Kulonen *et al.*, 2005; Pietikäinen, 2008*b*). Currently, nine to 10 different Sámi languages are spoken in Sápmi. However, all the Sámi languages are endangered because of centuries-long assimilation policies and varying degrees of legal protection for languages, depending on the country (Seitamo, 1991; Pietikäinen *et al.*, 2010; Keskitalo *et al.*, 2013*a*). Sámi speakers differ in proficiency in Sámi languages, varying from fluent speakers to knowledge holders of only a few words (Pietikäinen, 2014). In fact, assimilation has led to passive learning or even the inability to speak Sámi (Sarivaara, 2012). As an indigenous minority population, the Sámi have a right to learn their own language, considering that linguistic rights—in particular, the right to learn one's own language—is a component of human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas *et al.*, 1994). To ensure language vitality, the number of minority language speakers should increase (Olthuis *et al.*, 2013; Rasmussen, 2015).

Sámi language teachers and teachers instructing in Sámi languages can be indigenous and non-indigenous. Previous studies have found that the conceptualisation of indigeneity often occurs through dichotomous definitions of who is indigenous/non-indigenous (Sarivaara *et al.*, 2013). Hence, the discourse of *indigeneity* and *being indigenous* appears fluid, diverse and highly politicised. Although research conducted in other indigenous contexts emphasises the importance of understanding how one becomes an indigenous language teacher (Selby, 2007; Hornberger, 2014), research on Sámi language teachers' background and experiences is very limited.

Previous studies conducted in Finland have focused on only one of the three Sámi languages (Keskitalo *et al.*, 2013*b*; Pasanen, 2015; Äärelä, 2016; Rahko-Ravantti, 2016). Moreover, research suggests that there is a lack of support for Sámi language teaching, mainly because of the state-based school curriculum and a majority-centred education system (Keskitalo *et al.*, 2013*a*; Rahko-Ravantti, 2016). This study examines different Sámi language teachers' narratives. To examine teachers' professional identities, we explore the following research questions:

(1) How do Sámi language teachers narrate their experience of Sámi language acquisition?
(2) How do these teachers construct their professional identities in various school contexts?

We investigate Sámi teachers' language acquisition experiences and explore their identity as Sámi language teaching professionals. This study attempts to understand Sámi language teachers' everyday circumstances in order to improve the environment for Sámi language acquisition, and ultimately the students' future prospects

Theoretical background

Sámi as a minority language in education and symbolic domination

The Sámi people, as minority indigenous group, have previously struggled with power relations and continue to experience challenges in various aspects of their lives (Sarivaara, 2012; Lehtola, 2015; Huuki and Juutilainen, 2016; Valkonen and Wallenius-Korkalo, 2016). Sámi languages are indigenous languages spoken by the Sámi people who comprise a small minority in their respective countries (Sarivaara, 2012; Keskitalo *et al.*, 2013*b*; Linkola, 2014).

Our theoretical understanding of power relations within society is based on Bourdieu's (1991) definition of symbolic domination: the process through which certain social groups convince themselves and others that the existing social hierarchy is justified on the basis of inherent properties of people or knowledge. Since Sámi languages fit a minority-language context where the usage of language is limited (e.g. Pietikäinen, 2008*b*), Sámi language communities exist within a setting of symbolic domination. Heller (1995) examines how language plays a central role in the institutional process of symbolic domination: language practices at the institutional level create norms for a particular language being spoken, thus contributing to symbolic domination and the creation of unequal power relations between the majority and the minority (Heller, 1995, p. 373). Heller (1995) also argues that language choice allows speakers to do both, wield power and resist it. Language choice refers to the selection of a language or a language variety from one's repertoire. It needs to be stressed that individuals do not make their language choices in a social vacuum. Buda (1991) points out a continuous gradation between positive forces that direct choice towards a specific language and negative forces that direct choice away from that language. A number of factors influence language choices, and many may work either with or against each other, which makes describing the dynamics of language choice complicated (Buda, 1991; Piller, 2000).

Indigenous language teachers' professional identities

This study focuses on Sámi language teachers. According to Lasky (2005), sociocultural circumstances affect how teachers report experiencing professional vulnerability, particularly in terms of their abilities to achieve their primary purpose in teaching students. Two mediational systems that shape teachers' professional vulnerability are early influences on teacher identities and the current reform context. Teachers' professional identity and sense of purpose are shaped by the political and social context and early teacher development. Today, there is a disconnect between teacher identities and expectations of the new reform mandates. Teacher agency is constrained in the new reform context. Teachers struggle to remain openly vulnerable with their students and create trusting learning environments in what they describe as a managerial profession with increasing accountability pressures (Lasky, 2005).

Our study adopts the position that teacher identity is not unified but fragmented, and not singular but multiple (Kumaravadivelu, 2012); thus, identity construction is influenced not only 'by inherited traditions such as culture, or by external exigencies such as history, or by ideological constructs such as power, but by the individual's ability and willingness to exercise agency' (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 10). We view identities as dynamic perspectives of oneself, not only negotiated in specific social contexts but also informed by history, events, personal experiences and routines (Bishop, 2012). Teacher identity has also been studied from sociocultural and sociopolitical perspectives (e.g. Pennycook, 1994, 2001; Norton, 1997; Kubota, 2001). Additionally, Canagarajah (1999) and Phillipson (1992) have argued that a *native speaker fallacy* exists, wherein the bilingual and intercultural skills of non-native teachers have been marginalised by notions of *idealised* native speakers (e.g. Braine, 1999*a*, 1999*b*; Liu, 1999). That is, non-native speakers' teaching ability is sometimes underestimated on the ground that they are *non-native* speakers, regardless of their teaching qualifications. This fallacy reflects a gap in research, especially since native speaker

fallacy has been developed in the field of teaching major languages such as English rather than smaller, lesser-used languages.

According to Santoro and Reid (2006), indigenous teachers fulfil a number of complex and sometimes conflicting roles within and beyond classrooms. They claim that the construction of teacher identity at home and in communities intersects with and can counteract the adoption of a preferred identity in the workplace (Santoro and Reid, 2006). Moreover, Liu and Xu (2011) argue that teachers negotiate their identities to adapt to the *new work order* where indigenous and modern pedagogies intersect, highlighting the complexity of teacher identity that involves reconciling conflicting selves in a workplace with coexisting modern and traditional pedagogies. Teachers need to develop a robust understanding of bilingualism and the interactional dynamics of bilingual classroom context. This will better position teachers to manage their classrooms for equity and learning for all (Palmer and Martínez, 2013). It is significant to discuss the formation and transformation of the pedagogical cultural identity of the teaching professions within which indigenous and non-indigenous pre-service teachers are employed (Hart *et al.*, 2012).

Teachers need to shift their identities to cope with changes (Santoro and Reid, 2006; Liu and Xu, 2011). In this regard, Steward (2005) explored personal and professional identities among nine indigenous teachers in the lower mainland of British Columbia in Canada to understand their views of *who they are* and the impacts of family, community and educational experiences. While her study found great diversity among individual teachers, several common themes relating to marginalisation and a passionate commitment to change also emerged. Similarly, previous studies in Sámi schools have shown that Sámi language teachers constantly seek culturally relevant ways to work in demanding contexts (Keskitalo, 2010; Rahko-Ravantti, 2016). By focusing on language teachers' narratives in Sápmi, Outakoski and Hornberger (2015, p. 29) have further emphasised the language teachers' struggles with the lack of well-developed Sámi language materials, language changes amongst Sámi speakers. As highlighted by Burgess (2012, 2016), the extent to which indigeneity plays a role in enacting agency depends on individual lived experiences and personal responses to school contexts. Therefore, we consider the agency of each teacher to be a key factor in the development of indigenous language teachers' identities. We therefore used broad perspectives to include North, Inari and Skolt Sámi language teachers from various backgrounds.

Methodology

This paper is a part of the first author's doctoral thesis. Having lived in northern Finland for two years, the researcher knows Finnish language and is studying the North Sámi language. The second author is a Sámi education specialist, working as an associate professor of teacher education at Sámi University of Applied Sciences, Norway. She is also a part-time researcher and supervisor at the faculty of education at the University of Lapland. The third author has expertise in Sámi education, sociolinguistics and indigeneity, and is currently working as university lecturer in teacher education at the University of Lapland. We have collaborated to make a culturally, analytically and theoretically relevant contribution to research on Sámi education (see Guttorm *et al.*, 2016).

We use narrative research, which belongs to the field of social constructionism. The narrative paradigm has been used particularly for research where stories work as intermediaries and construction of knowledge, such that stories give meaning to experiences and furthers narrative thinking (MacIntyre, 1981; Bruner, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993; Potter, 1996; Sarivaara, 2012). The first author conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews (e.g. Spradley, 1979; Harrell and Bradley 2009; Busch *et al.*, 2015) at schools in northern Finland. Interview can make practices embedded in complex unequal power relations visible (Gordon *et al.*, 2005). All interviews were initially conducted using both Finnish and English. For this paper in English, all Finnish interviews were translated into English.

We employed linguistic biography (Busch *et al.*, 2015) as the main method for conducting interviews, focusing on teachers' language-learning and teaching experiences related to their professional agency. Interviews were conducted with 10 indigenous and non-indigenous teachers, of which nine interviews have been used in this study. The 10th interview was excluded because the participant was the head of the school, who had more focus on administrative work. Participants' were aged between 25 and 60 years and both male and female teachers were included. The participants had attended folk and primary schools in their childhood. Each interview lasted 1–4 h. Some interviews were conducted at the schools where teachers worked, and others were conducted outside the school context. Open-ended questions were created before the interview period, employing standard semi-structured interview methodology (Kvale, 2007; Wei and Moyer, 2008). All participants were Sámi language teachers in various educational institutions, including local compulsory schools, local kindergartens, kindergartens and a vocational school. The students' ages varied: some participants taught very young children in kindergartens or compulsory schools and others instructed adults in the vocational school. Most taught the North Sámi language, while a smaller number taught the Inari and Skolt Sámi languages. To ensure anonymity, no detailed information is provided about teachers. Participants had different Sámi language acquisition backgrounds; some spoke the language as their first language since their childhood and were considered native speakers, while others learned the language as an adult as a second language, and both as native and non-native speakers. However, language acquisition may be more diverse than the binary native/non-native distinction.

Previous research suggests that there is considerable variation in language acquisition, as one's experiences are extremely diverse and variable (see Clahsen and Felser, 2006). Further, Davies (2004) points out the following key principles of *nativeness*: (a) childhood acquisition of the language, (b) comprehension and production of idiomatic forms of the language, (c) understanding of regional and social variations within the language and (d) competent production and comprehension of fluent, spontaneous discourse. Given that all these principles but the first may be acquired or learned later, one could argue that the only difference between a native speaker and a non-native speaker of a language is childhood acquisition. Yet, here we use the native/non-native distinction to examine differences in participants' backgrounds. For example, an individual may grow up in an environment where Sámi language was mainly used at home but may have only begun speaking the language in adulthood. A few participants were non-indigenous teachers, while most were indigenous teachers.

Within the general framework of positioning theory (Davies, and Harré, 1990), we used Bamberg's (2000) three-stage process to analyse how interviewees position themselves in their interviews. We paid special attention to how Sámi language teachers

remembered their experiences (see also Keskitalo *et al.*, 2016). During coding, all interviews were replayed several times for in-depth analysis. Following Steward (2005), Selby (2007) and Rahko-Ravantti (2016), we examined the following themes: (1) the impact of the official discourse of identity, (2) experiences of power relations within the community, in teacher education and in the workplace, (3) devaluation of indigenous programmes and curricula, (4) being a language resource of Sámi languages for their students, (5) obligation to their communities and (6) participants' complex role as language teachers.

This research was conducted according to the ethical principles described by Barron (2002) and Linkola and Keskitalo (2016), including acquisition of communities' knowledge, connection to communities and anonymisation of research partners. Positive researcher–community relationships were created, as it is crucial to the indigenous research method (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2001; Barron, 2002). After consulting with the participating schools, research permits were obtained to conduct interviews. We intend to make the results accessible to these schools so that they may be useful to the community (see Barron, 2002; Linkola and Keskitalo, 2016).

Reflection on the researcher's position is meaningful for the reliability of research (e.g. Bull, 2002; Drugge, 2016). In this research, the first author who conducted the interviews is not Sámi but is indigenous in her home country. During her visits to schools, she often held presentations about her language and culture, which made her research process interactive. The second author is an indigenous scholar who is Sámi, from the Utsjoki village. The third author is also a Sámi scholar who has reclaimed her heritage language. As indigenous scholars, we are aware of our insider position in our respective communities but are also aware of our research position that enables us as educators to visit the schools from the university. We therefore write this research study from this starting point. Figure 1 explains the transcription conventions used in the following section).

Results

The following section contains narratives of the participants' professional identity, focusing on language acquisition, and how they position themselves in their narratives. We divided this section into two main parts; the first part addresses teachers' language acquisition experiences and the second illustrates their experience as language teachers.

Language acquisition experiences

Sámi languages played an important role in each participant's decision to become a teacher, further influenced by the social or cultural contexts of language acquisition (e.g. Pennington and Richards, 2016). Narratives are presented through Sámi language teachers' Sámi language acquisition paths, that is, whether they learned the language at home but not at school, learned the language at school but not at home, learned the language as an adult and learned the language as a non-native adult. However, these data do not represent the variety of language-learning backgrounds, as the narrative method can only represent some individual voices. Moreover, since our data are small, we cannot make generalisations but can instead present cases as represented in the data. We are aware of limitations of data (see also Hindle, 2015).

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R:   Researcher
T:   Teacher
=ABC =:  names, locations, organizations, etc.
(2):  approximate length of pause in seconds
@:   laughter
Bold:  shows emphasis
···:  pause of less than a second
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Fig. 1. Transcription conventions.

Sámi language at home but not at school

One teacher grew up in a family where both parents spoke North Sámi at home. This teacher could not learn Sámi at school, because Sámi language as a medium of education was not available during their childhood. Students attending folk schools could not study Sámi in the 1960s. The option of studying Sámi at school was introduced in 1970s (see Aikio-Puoskari, 2014). This teacher describes their own childhood experience of speaking North Sámi at school:

> When I was a child, when I was a teenager, Sámi culture was nothing. Sámi people were considered very negatively. We were *nothing*, we were not appreciated at school… many people did not speak Sámi… *Now it has changed, of course. Many people want to speak Sámi.* (Participant 3)

This illustrates the struggles that such teachers faced during language acquisition, prior to the 1980s when societal attitudes were not generally in favour of Sámi languages. Teachers had an externally imposed identity in their childhood, often one that they did not want (e.g. Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). They were not proactive agents who could affect their situation; rather, teachers and parents were decision makers. Participants' Sámi language acquisition depended on their linguistic environments: whether they could study it in school or speak it at home, both of which were—in principle—not in their control. This feeling of obscurity is common amongst minorities- and indigenous-language-speaking children. As there was very little awareness about multilingualism, individuals' language choices tended towards monolingualism until the 1980s, influencing their attitudes towards the indigenous Sámi language mother tongue and their daily language practices. The effect seems to be far-reaching, though general conclusions cannot be made and appear to be individual- and area-specific.

Notably, this participant's feelings during childhood are connected to the experiences of being oppressed and labelled as Sámi. The Sámi language and culture were not recognised as relevant and was considered low status, which caused the teacher to experience shame and even anger. This account exposes the power relations such teachers experienced at school. This teacher remembers the struggles to express Sámi identity at school because Sámi culture was not appreciated. As it is mentioned, during their own childhood, it was difficult to speak Sámi language in school because Sámi 'were nothing, and not appreciated at school, but the teacher acknowledges that societal attitudes have changed, that 'now it has changed, of course. Many people want to speak Sámi.'

This suggests that—compared to before—Sámi languages are perceived positively by society. Currently, the Sámi language is legally protected and has prestige; thus, attitudes towards it are more favourable than before (see Sarivaara, 2012; Linkola, 2014;

Äärelä, 2016). Moreover, state schooling systems have implemented positive measures to support Sámi languages in the Nordic region (see Huss, 2008).

Sámi language at school but not at home

Other teachers described their experience of being the only child in the Sámi language class, while their peers studied in Finnish. For instance, one participant was required to study in Sámi by guardians, which conflicted with the teacher's own desire to study in Finnish like their peers. The conflict for this teacher was related to the low value attributed to Sámi language and to the fact that its use was socially censured at school, even though it was learned in school. This teacher learned North Sámi at school and the medium of instruction was Sámi, even though Finnish was spoken with their parents at home. In retrospect, this participant appreciated the parents for choosing Sámi as a primary schooling language. Notably, such teachers represent a generation that was allowed to study Sámi language at school (see also Outakoski and Hornberger, 2015). Due to the existing assimilation policies and the lack of language support, their parents did not converse with this teacher in Sámi but wanted the language to be learnt:

> I was maybe around 10 years old, I would feel sad because all my friends were studying in Finnish class and I told my parents *that I want to go to Finnish class as well...*and...I remember my father told me...'No, you will not, and that's the end of the discussion.' And...I knew my father...when he says something like that... there is no use trying to convince him. *And I was so sad and so mad and I couldn't do anything...*but later I was so grateful that they did not let me choose, because I would have chosen poorly. (Participant 1)

This participant's narrative describes the experience of negotiating identities as a Sámi speaker as the teacher grew older. The parents' language choice was not easy to reconcile in the participant's childhood, but it benefitted this teacher later. This teacher also experienced otherness, a feeling of being different from the majority of the classmates (e.g. Rahko-Ravantti, 2016). Although it was possible from the early 1970s to study in the Sámi language, it was more common to choose it as a language course. Thus, the parents must have made a very conscious decision to choose Sámi language as a medium for their children. The participant's description of asking parents to let this teacher study in Finnish shows the struggles with forced otherness. Although the participant processed this experience negatively as a child, this teacher perceived parents' choice more positively as an adult now, recognising the valuable experiences gained from learning Sámi (e.g. Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004). Similarly, for some participants, the language choice *imposed* by their parents became a beneficial and powerful tool in their adulthood. This narrative highlights the parent's significance in making choices regarding the child's language of instruction. Further, learning in a language other than the one spoken at home increases the likelihood of being multilingual (e.g. Hornberger, 2008). Increasing access, inclusion and general enrolment in minority-language education can improve bilingualism and multilingualism (Slavkov, 2016).

Sámi language acquisition as an adult

The context of language acquisition differs for teachers of Inari Sámi. The historical status of the Inari Sámi language differs largely from North Sámi because it is a language spoken by a smaller population in a limited area. Moreover, historical and sociological causes led to the near extinction of Inari Sámi. A vigorous revitalisation process has led to increased practice of the language and an inclusive and sensitive attitude towards new speakers of the language. This resulted in successful and exponential revitalisation of Inari Sámi (see Olthuis et al., 2013; Pasanen, 2015). Thus, new Inari Sámi speakers have experienced greater acceptance and inclusion in the language-speaking community.

Our data show that most Inari Sámi language teachers in this research decided to learn the Sámi language as adults. The following is from an Inari Sámi language teacher who is not indigenous Sámi, but has learned the language as an adult:

> … you may have heard that the Inari Sámi people are very open minded… they want to welcome everybody to learn Inari Sámi. I have never heard comments like… *you shouldn't learn the Sámi language because you are not Sámi*. It's not like that… and my pupils here… they appreciate that I can speak very good Sámi nowadays, and they say that that's enough… I don't need to be Sámi because, well… they accept me. (Participant 4)

Unlike the previous two participants, this teacher learned Inari Sámi as an adult and is not of Sámi ethnicity. The narrative suggests that such teachers may have developed an identity as an Inari Sámi language teacher through interactions with others when learning and teaching Sámi. For instance, the community's and their student's positive attitudes toward the teachers appear to bolster their self-esteem. Such narratives suggest that the Inari Sámi-speaking community supported teachers' goals, creating a safe place for such teachers to express an identity as a Sámi language teacher. Through such experiences at school, this teacher negotiated professional identity as an Inari Sámi language teacher, ultimately gaining confidence in teaching Sámi. In addition, it seems that being a non-native speaker of Sámi influences teachers' identity construction. Although the participant is not indigenous, the teacher obtained great satisfaction from working as an Inari Sámi specialist and experienced acceptance in the indigenous community (see Pasanen, 2015). It shows that one does not need to be Sámi to be accepted and work as a teacher. This kind of language attitude seems to be very pragmatic in a small language context as that of Inari Sámi.

The following participant's narrative shows how acquiring Sámi as an adult influences a teacher's professional identity. This participant acquired Skolt Sámi—their grandparents' language—as an adult. Although their grandparents were native speakers of Skolt Sámi, they did not speak the language to their children or to their grandchildren. This teacher belongs to the generation who lost the language, but decided to study it later. Being indigenous, for such teachers Sámi is their heritage language. The teacher discussed what it was like to learn the language:

> [Learning the language was]… somewhat, difficult yes. It was a very intensive experience… you need to keep on studying… and gaining information about the language from different sources, like the media… and… so I have to improve my language skills all the time… I am still not as fluent as older people who have spoken it since they were children… So I still need to study. I am studying, but… as far as I know, I can only teach the basics and *so… I am not a real teacher… as a profession, yeah*. (Participant 6)

This participant's narrative reveals certain frustration of having studied the language in their adulthood, which made the participant feel like an imposter, not a *real teacher*, suggesting that these teachers did not perceive themselves to be fluent in Skolt Sámi.

The example describing how this teacher could only teach the basics suggests that the teacher themselves believed that he/she lacked knowledge in Sámi. Pennington and Richards (2016) have also observed similar findings for teachers' language-related identities; they argue, that '[bilingual] teachers who compensate for their own less than full proficiency or lack of confidence in the second language may feel that their performance as a teacher does not match up to their ideal image of a language teacher, so they may be judged—by themselves or others (e.g. school authorities and parents)—as 'deficient' (2016, p. 11).

Diverse roles of indigenous teachers

This section explores how teaching at schools has also shaped participants' identities as Sámi language teachers. Teacher identity is constructed mainly through teaching experiences (Santoro and Reid, 2006; Liu and Xu, 2011), and by teaching indigenous languages, they seem to become more aware of their identities as indigenous teachers (Hornberger, 2014). Some (or perhaps most) Sámi language teachers see their job as not only as a way to teach languages, but also as a way to help students return to their mother tongue. This is illustrated by the following narrative by a participant who struggled to strengthen students' knowledge about Sámi:

> I have seen that people have got their *identity back*. All of these students now understand her or his background, and get some closure, their peace. *They get their home back. Home, person, people*, because they have the language…Some people say that they have become more Sámi than they have ever been…I really like to know this. (Participant 2)

This participant perceived that their students negotiated and reconstructed their identities in the process of acquiring their mother tongue. There are two important aspects to consider. First, the participant perceived that for students with a Sámi background, acquiring Sámi meant getting back *home*. The students did not typically study Sámi language or Sámi culture in compulsory schools due to the lack of enough opportunities, but by studying Sámi language with this teacher, they reclaimed their identities. The history of assimilation in Finnish schools has made it difficult for students to learn in their mother tongue in their childhood (Keskitalo *et al.*, 2016). By acquiring Sámi languages as adults, students have access to express an identity as Sámi. According to Lilja (2012), the Sámi language is a key determinant of one's *Sáminess*. Her study shows that language is the most characteristic feature that differentiates between categorisations of Sámi. The category of *real Sámi* refers to native speakers of the Sámi languages while Sámi who do not know Sámi languages are less valued in the community. Nonetheless, she also states that contemporary Sámi identities emphasise diversity (Lilja, 2012). In this context, Sámi language is not only a language, but also is inextricably linked to both students' and teachers' identities. This narrative demonstrates the teacher's tolerance, acceptance and support for diverse Sámi. This narrative suggests that teachers of indigenous languages can influence their students' identity constructions by providing access to their mother tongue. Second, by teaching a Sámi language, the participant perceived themselves not only as a teacher, but also as a mentor for the students. This aligns with previous research wherein indigenous language teachers served as counsellors and role models, shifting their identities to meet the needs of different teaching contexts (Liu and Xu, 2011). This participant explained teacher's role further:

> …. If you go to general school in Finland, you get very little information about Sámi culture, even though there are Sámi students. So when they come to our school, I tell them why, I give them the reasons, 'Okay, that's the reason why you don't speak Sámi.' *It's not your fault. It's not your parents' fault, not your grandparents fault. This is what happened. This is why you didn't learn. They then think, 'Okay, now I understand.' And it opens their eyes.* (Participant 2)

Students who study Sámi languages as adults usually have little knowledge of their Sámi culture because of the lack of opportunities to learn about their culture in compulsory schools. General school refers to preschool, primary and secondary school education in Finland. Students who could not choose Sámi in their childhood did not have the opportunity to negotiate these identities. This participant stated that the school encourages students to recognise the importance of learning about their culture, languages and identities. The teacher further stressed the importance of teachers' role in challenging the monolingual and monocultural ideology of compulsory schooling in Finland. In this sense, by learning and teaching a Sámi language, they can challenge unequal power relations within society. Students who could not choose Sámi in their childhood did not have the opportunity to negotiate these identities. Further, for this participant, providing students with this access strengthened their identity as a Sámi person.

Becoming an indigenous language teacher

One participant described how their role as a teacher was influenced by Sámi society. This teacher has a Sámi-speaking grandparent but did not speak Sámi at home and learned Skolt Sámi as an adult. On discussing the motivations for becoming a Sámi language teacher, this teacher stated that there was pressure from Sámi community:

> Researcher (R): What made you decide on becoming a language teacher?
>
> T: Um… I don't know… I would say that probably, *the pressure of society*, of the Skolt Sámi society and the…
>
> R: Really?
>
> T: No… but people started asking me, 'would you… start now… ?' And I would say, 'I don't know'… then they'd ask again, 'would you start now… because there is no one else'… and I'd reply, 'I don't know.' (Participant 6)

This narrative shows that initially, the participant's identity as a language teacher was at least partly shaped by expectations of the Sámi community. The fact that people repeatedly asked this teacher to teach implies that such identity as a Sámi language teacher was partly *imposed* by the Sámi community. In such cases, teachers perceived their decisions to become a Sámi language teacher as influenced by their respective Sámi communities. The Skolt Sámi have the smallest population in Inari and Utsjoki that also face a dearth of language teachers. Consequently, this teacher experienced the unequal power relations within the Sámi community in addition to Finnish–Sámi power relations. Due to the lack of qualified Skolt Sámi teachers, teachers may feel obligated to meet the Skolt Sámi community's expectations.

Conclusion

This paper has its own limitations. Focusing on nine teachers who teach different Sámi language, the data are rather small. Therefore, narratives should not be categorised according to their differences. It is difficult to generalise, and further investigation is necessary.

However, the results suggest that Sámi language teachers have a range of professional identities. In this paper, we highlight how Sámi language teachers perceive their background (indigenous/non-indigenous) and their language acquisition experiences (acquired Sámi in childhood/adulthood) to influence their professional identities. Despite the small data set, there were differences between teachers of the three Sámi languages. Further, their experiences could be classified as positive and negative, both of which influenced their identities, in addition to current reforms.

Symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1991) constantly appears in teachers' narratives. For instance, some teachers described how Finnish was considered the norm in society: it was the primary—if not only—language of instruction in school and some stated that they did not speak Sámi at home. Such teachers grew up in a society in which Finnish was considered *better* to use at home. In this case of symbolic domination, both minority and majority groups believed that the majority language and culture was stronger, which was considered normal.

The choice to speak a particular language, whether freely chosen or imposed, seemed to play an important role for all participating teachers. For some, the language choice was made by their parents who used it at home or encouraged learning it in school, while others took the decision to learn Sámi later, as adults. This choice to study in indigenous languages, speak them and/or teach them is a way to resist symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 1995). Heller (1995) argues that using minority languages at school and in professional environments serves to contest unequal power relations between the majority and minority. Yet, some indigenous teachers became language teachers, at least in part, to try to meet the expectations of their indigenous communities, particularly those of small communities trying to preserve their languages.

Non-indigenous teachers who have learned Sámi languages as adults actively link their roles as language teachers to the language revitalisation project. Sámi language revitalisation has been active since the 1990s. Many teachers, including non-indigenous teachers, have learned Sámi languages as adults. In particular, the Inari Sámi community has revitalised their language with the cooperation of non-indigenous language teachers (Olthuis *et al.*, 2013; Pasanen, 2015). To ensure its survival, the community has strategically recruited and welcomed non-indigenous people to learn and transmit the language to children and others who want to learn Inari Sámi as a second language (Pasanen, 2015). In this study, non-Sámi teachers who learned Inari Sámi as adults perceived themselves to be accepted in indigenous communities and in schools, despite being non-native speakers and non-indigenous. This reveals the community's pragmatic attitude aimed at maintaining and revitalising their language.

To produce good Sámi language teachers, it is important to empower student teachers to cultivate positive self-images as teachers of indigenous languages. Sámi teacher training that considers the multiracial, multilingual and multicultural backgrounds of pre-service and in-service teachers can facilitate teachers' self-belief, which furthers indigenous languages, contributing to richer identities for both, Sámi teachers and learners. Our research highlights the need for supportive, individualised training to respond to the student's language acquisition experiences, language ability and ethnic backgrounds.

Theories on teacher identity in the field of second language teaching tend to focus on dominant languages, especially English. This research underscores the importance of carefully examining smaller and endangered languages as the results suggest that teachers who learned Sámi languages as adults do not have distinctly negative self-images and tend to have positive attitudes towards themselves and their roles as teachers. Thus, it would seem that the Sámi community has largely avoided the non-native fallacy, that is, idea that only native speakers can be good language teachers (Phillipson, 1992). However, during interviews some teachers mentioned that their *non-nativeness* sometimes reduced their confidence in teaching even though the communities seemed to accept teachers who acquired Sámi as adults. For such teachers, further support and validation of their professional identities is necessary. This is an important factor to remember, because research on indigenous education should be aimed at empowering the weak and less powerful and not discouraging them from challenging the existing symbolic power in society.

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