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Holding them at arm's length: A critical review of Norway's policy on Sámi language maintenance

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Abstract

Norway's policy on its indigenous Sámi minority is oftentimes heralded as best practice in fostering self-determination and home language maintenance. Norway's policy rhetoric indeed promises that all Sámi have a right to develop their home language, and that all Norwegian children will become familiar with Sámi languages and culture. However, this paper takes a more critical perspective of Norway's policy. It argues that rhetoric has not been operationalised to benefit all Sámi nor promote Norwegian familiarity with the languages. Instead, the state appears to juggle its legislative obligations to promote the Sámi languages with an ongoing ideology in the community that the Sámi languages cannot be seen as contributing to the contemporary Norwegian nation. To make this argument, the paper firstly reviews the state's Sámi language policy to discuss fractures between rhetoric and policy. It then reports the findings of a case study whereby public online debates over the past five years about the Sámi languages in a national context were critically analysed. The case study indeed reveals a vigorous preference to hold the Sámi languages at arm's length, for reasons such as that the languages endanger Norwegian identity, that the Sámi do not deserve an indigenous status, that the Sámi are foreign to Norway and, conversely, that the Sámi do not fulfil their responsibilities as Norwegian citizens. The paper concludes that a potent Norwegian ideology against the Sámi languages may explain the state's reluctance to implement its high-level policy promises.

Introduction

After a history of oppressive assimilation policies that sought to eradicate indigenous languages from its sociolinguistic milieu, Norway now prides itself on its policies to promote the Sámi languages as part of a broader promise of Sámi self-determination. Rather than continuing to prohibit the use of Sámi in the public domain and punish children for using their home language at school, Norwegian law now codifies a right to Sámi language services and education within the *forvaltningsområdet* [Sámi language administrative area] (Jernsletten, 1993). This is a constellation of municipalities that broadly trace the ancestral Sámi homeland where they fall within today's Norwegian borders. Here, the Sámi languages are afforded equal legislative status with Norwegian and are subject to state-sponsored work for language revitalisation. This comes in addition to Norway's promises that the Sámi languages will be "cultivated in all areas

where Sámi people live and meet" (Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009, p. 10), that the languages are integral to contemporary Norway and, as such, all Norwegian students will become familiar with the languages (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). In an international context with comparisons to the situation for Indigenous peoples and languages elsewhere such as in Australia and North America, Norwegian policy to afford and promote Sámi language maintenance is even touted as international best practice or a guide for other situations of Indigenous language revitalisation (Corson, 1995, 1996; O'Brien & Bailey, 2014).

This paper, however, takes a more critical perspective on Norwegian language policy, and especially considers the implementation of ideologically promising rhetoric from the central government in Oslo. Recognising that home language development, maintenance, and transmission does not occur in isolation, but in a dynamic relationship to broader societal ideologies and policy frameworks, the paper places doubt on whether Norway's policy and legal infrastructure can be seen as best practice and supporting the revitalisation of the Sámi languages in homes and in Norway more broadly. These doubts especially arise when considering the impact of regionalising Sámi language rights and assurances of Sámi-medium education, and when considering the Sámi as a second language curriculum that seems to construct the languages as a matter for ethnic Sámi only. Instead, while Norway's policy rhetoric encourages Sámi as heritage languages, this rhetoric has not been fully operationalized. The paper argues that the languages are held at arm's length from most of Norway because of an ongoing ideology amongst many in the Norwegian majority that the Sámi languages, cannot, and should not, contribute to Norway's contemporary national character.

To make this argument, the paper draws on critical language policy theory (Pennycook, 2010; Shohamy, 2006; Tollefson, 2006) to review current Sámi language policies administered by the Norwegian state – including the content and objectives of policy – and suggest that they in large part only amount to lip service (Shohamy, 2006) to the Sámi cause. The paper also discusses the findings from a critical metalinguistic discourse analysis (Johnson, 2011; Verschueren, 2011; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) of recent online public debate about the Sámi languages in Norway's national context that seems to rationalise the state deciding to hold the Sámi languages at arm's length.

Background

The Sámi ancestral homeland stretches across modern national borders shared by Norway, Russia, Sweden and Finland in far northern Europe. The total Sámi population is estimated at between 140,000 and 200,000 (Pietikäinen, Huss, Laihiala-Kankainen, Aikio-Puoskari, & Lane, 2010, p. 4). Although census data is not collected by Norway on Sámi ethnic or cultural identity, it is guessed that around 100,000 people are Sámi in Norway's population of 5.1 million (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2014a). Nine identifiable but closely related Sámi languages exist, with South Sámi, Lule Sámi, Pite Sámi, and North Sámi falling within today's Norwegian borders. North Sámi is by far the largest group, with around 75% of Sámi speakers using that variety (Bull, 2002).

Holding them at arm's length

The encroachment of the Norwegian state into Sámi territory, and the consequent loss of Sámi culture and livelihoods, including the impact on the Sámi languages, has been well-traversed in academic literature. For full accounts, see for example Trosterud (2008), Bull (2002), Corson (1995), Henriksen (2008), Kvernmo and Heyerdahl (2004), and Minde (2005). These agree that the experience of the Sámi vis-à-vis the Norwegian state was one of annexation and colonisation. Under the state's *Fornorsking* (Norwegianisation) agenda that began around 1850, Norway sought to turn the Sámi into "Norwegian-speaking monolinguals" (Trosterud, 2008, p. 97). A primary domain of *fornorsking* was classrooms, whereby speaking a Sámi language on school property became punishable and Sámi children were instead sent to Norwegian boarding schools in the interests of their cultural and linguistic assimilation (Bucken-Knapp, 2003; Bull, 2002; Todal, 2003). *Fornorsking* even created economic sanctions against Sámi speakers, such that those who were not competent in Norwegian were excluded from purchasing or renting property (Salvesen, 1995). The policy was, in no uncertain terms, to stop the transmission of the Sámi languages.

Fornorsking is considered to have been less effective in inner Finnmark but harsher along the northern fjords, given Norwegian migrants from the south were more likely to settle with economic interests along the coasts (Nolan & Rasmussen, 2011). As a result, language shift has been higher amongst Sámi along the coast than in inner Finnmark where in some villages, the Sámi – and Sámi speakers – continue to constitute a majority. In any case, even in Finnmark the *fornorsking* policy reduced the number of Sámi speakers by around a third (Trosterud, 2008). What is more, the advent of Norwegian-led industrialisation, colonisation of the Sámi mind, and the imposition of Norwegian hegemony ultimately meant that Sámi languages were "downgraded to something shameful" (Huss, 1999, p. 127). In summary, Norway's historical relationship with the Sámi was oppressive.

However, like elsewhere in the colonised world, Norwegian politics were in part influenced by the civil rights movement that emerged from the United States in the second half of the 20th century. Indigenous peoples demanded attention to indigenous voices, and the politics of indigenous self-determination were born. Change was initially slow in Norway, but Sámi activism peaked in 1979-1981 when the state sought to build a dam and hydroelectric plant on the Alta-Guovdageiadnu River in the heart of the Sámi ancestral homeland. Known as the Alta Controversy, this activism continues to represent "the Sámi fight against cultural discrimination and for collective respect, for political autonomy and for material rights" (Minde, 2005, p. 7). The Alta Controversy served as pivotal point in Sámi rights discourses. By 1988, Norway's Sámi population was granted the right to a degree of self-determination and political enfranchisement, channelled primarily through the *Sámediggi* (Sámi Parliament) (Selle & Strømsnes, 2010). Today, the *Sámediggi* is funded by the Norwegian state to promote Sámi interests and the equal treatment of Sámi in Norwegian society (The Royal House of Norway, 2013).

In tandem with this interest in Sámi self-determination, policies of language revitalisation – operated at both the level of the *Sámediggi* and the Norwegian state – seek to address and reverse the impacts of previous policies of linguistic assimilation. The *Sámediggi* explains that,

> *det er en grunnleggende menneskerettighet å ha mulighet til å bruke sitt eget språk, og som urfolk har samer i tillegg rett til ytterligere beskyttelse av sitt språk* [It is a basic human right to have the opportunity to use one's own language, and as an indigenous people the Sámi have a right to the protection of their language] (Sámediggi, n.d.).

and that "*den samiske folkegruppen i Norge skal kunne sikre og utvikle sitt språk, kultur og sitt samfunnsliv"* [the Sámi people of Norway shall be able to secure and develop their language, culture and way of life] (Sámediggi, n.d.). Norway is also a party to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages for the protection and promotion of Sámi languages, whereby "within the territories in which such languages are used and according to the situation of each language", Norway will, among other things, "ensure that existing or new administrative divisions do not constitute an obstacle to the promotion of the regional or minority language in question", recognise the Sámi languages "as an expression of cultural wealth", facilitate and encourage the languages "in speech and writing, in public and private life", and provide "facilities enabling non-speakers of a regional or minority language living in the area where it is used to learn it if they so desire" (European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Part II, 1992). How well these specific provisions are enacted is, however, a matter for further research.

In response to its obligations under the Charter, the Norwegian government complements the work of the *Sámediggi* with its own plan of action on the Sámi languages. The core objective of the plan is to increase the number of speakers of the Sámi languages (Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009). The plan specifically states that "Sami languages must be cultivated in all areas where Sami people live and meet" (p. 10). While it emphasises the reinstatement of intergenerational language transmission, it also states that "one of the objectives is to make instruction available in the Sami languages – Northern Sami, Lule Sami and/or Southern Sami - to everyone who is interested" (p. 26). In addition to this focus on home language maintenance, the Ministry of Education even adds that "*det er et mål at samisk språk skal bevares, styrkes og videreutvikles som et helhetlig kommunikasjonsmiddel uavhengig av riksgrenser*" [It is a goal that the Sámi language will be preserved, strengthened and developed as a holistic mean of communication regardless of national borders] (Utdanningdirektoratet, n.d.-a). This seemingly dovetails the Ministry's inclusion of the Norwegian majority in the language revitalisation process, claiming that "the culture and traditions of the Sámi community are part of the common Norwegian and Nordic culture that both the national curriculum and the special Sámi curriculum require all pupils to be acquainted with" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). With the Sámi population being comparatively much smaller than that of the Norwegian majority, an ambitious education policy such as this, whereby Sámi languages are positioned as a matter of Norwegian citizenship, seemingly paves the way for a much greater growth in the Sámi language pool than a language policy focused exclusively in Sámi self-determination might ever achieve.

Theory and method

Having established this high-level policy background, this paper now moves on to consider Norwegian state policy on the Sámi languages in more critical terms. The paper's theoretical starting point is that the development, maintenance, and transmission of minority, home, and heritage languages do not occur in isolation. Instead, broader societal ideologies and policy frameworks may promote or inhibit the maintenance of non-majority languages and in turn affect their fate (King, 2013). In as far as language ideology can guide both the development of official language policies as well as serves as *de facto* policy to guide actual language behaviours, language attitudes and ideologies are pertinent influences on the development and maintenance of home languages (Schiffman, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). To begin, the paper offers a critical review of the core elements of Sámi language policy to show that the state's high-level policy rhetoric has in fact not followed through into operational policy, meaning this rhetoric amounts to what Shohamy (2006) would call lip service to the Sámi language cause. Instead, the state's decision not to action its high-level rhetoric means Norway cannot be seen as holistically supporting the development and maintenance of the Sámi languages amongst all Sámi across Norway, nor encouraging all Norwegians to become acquainted with Sámi languages and culture.

From here, the paper then proposes that the Norwegian state chooses to hold the Sámi languages at a maximum possible distance from Norwegian as allowed under current legislation because of an ongoing and potent ideology that the Sámi languages do not and will not contribute to *Norwegianness*. That is to say, I argue that the Norwegian language laws and policies vis-à-vis the Sámi languages are cognizant of, and respond to, widespread negative affect amongst the Norwegian majority against the Sámi languages. To evidence this argument, the paper presents the findings from a case study undertaken on the sociolinguistic opinions expressed by the Norwegian public. For this, a critical discourse analysis was undertaken (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) of comments made in the NRK, VG, and Dagbladet debate fora which, as national news websites, invite public commentary on featured stories and topical themes. A word search was performed on the terms *samisk* [Sámi] and *språk* [language] and then identified debate threads and individual comments over the last five years that in any way concerned the Sámi languages in a national context beyond the *forvaltningsområdet.* This includes responses to my own opinion piece in the Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet titled *Er Samisk Språklov Rettferdig?* [Is Sámi language policy fair?] (Albury, 2015). From here, a process of coding and categorising was undertaken to identify theme in public opinion. Not all debate threads focused primarily on Sámi languages in a national context per se, but some unrelated topics evolved and touched on language policy. For example, the corpus included six targeted debate threads as well as comments within other debate threads that then turned to matters concerning the Sámi languages, such as debates that firstly concerned Bokmål and Nynorsk as two written standards of Norwegian, identity and language, and language learning. It is also the case that some individuals commented repeatedly in particular threads and not all comments in a targeted thread related to Sámi languages. As such, it was not reliable to quantify a specific number of threads, commentators and comments, but instead to rely on the word search and to analyse discourses around the retrieved comments. In any case, some single

debates attracted more comments than others. For example, the thread on the NRK site titled *Nei takk – samer ingen adgang* [No thanks, no entry for the Sámi] – attracted 335 comments whereas the VG thread *Norge rundt på samisk språk* [Around Norway in Sámi language] attracted ten comments and the VG thread *Hvem er det som kan regnes som nordmenn og norske?* [Who counts as a Norwegian and as Norwegian?] attracted 404 comments. The small number of dedicated threads means it is also not possible to confidently identify whether the five year span saw any shifts in societal attitudes. Nonetheless, the data set serves a case study for recent debates. All comments within scope were analysed for ideological stance-taking (Jaffe, 2009). The findings from the case study show that that strong Norwegian sentiment exists against positioning the Sámi languages as a national Norwegian interest or a matter of a contemporary shared cultural identity.

Geographically restricting the Sámi languages

The crux of the Norwegian state's Sámi language policy lies in the territorialisation of language rights by way of the *forvaltningsområdet*. This is a collection of ten municipalities, primarily in far northern Norway, that are seen to broadly trace the parts of the ancestral Sámi homelands that today fall inside the Norwegian state. The Norwegian government explains that in these designated municipalities, Sámi people can enjoy Sámi language rights, including,

> the translation of regulations, announcements and forms into Sámi; as well as the right to receive replies from the authorities in Sámi; the extended right to use Sámi in contact with the legal system and health and welfare services; the right to individual church services; the right to take absence of leave to study; and the right to Sami education (Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009, p. 13).

Norwegian citizens who identify as Sámi but travel, work, and study beyond the *forvaltningsområdet* do not enjoy these same rights. Beyond a promise that important state regulations will be translated into Sámi, language rights outside the *forvaltningsområdet* are mostly restricted to children accessing Sámi-medium schooling if at least ten other children in the municipality request it, or children receiving distance education in Sámi as a subject (Bull, 2002; Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009). Evidently this is not simple, as the Norwegian government reports that in 2014, no students received education through Sámi in the capital, Oslo (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2014b). A financial perspective may argue that the cost of ensuring mother-tongue education in municipalities beyond the *forvaltningsområdet* is prohibitive where only few students seek it. This is hard to accept, however, considering that this cost will nonetheless be met if a quorum is achieved, meaning the state appears generally unwilling to see Sámi language education outside the *forvaltningsområdet* as a standard operational cost within the education budget.

From the perspective of critical language policy, this arrangement clearly advantages Sámi who remain in the rural ancestral homeland. The subtext to the policy is that if a family wishes to be guaranteed Sámi-medium education for its children, then that family should stay in, or relocate to, the rural ancestral homeland. This disadvantages the many Sámi who live or are

raised outside of the *forvaltningsområdet*, but nonetheless within their country of their citizenship, and seek to maintain and develop their heritage language (Albury, 2015). The government does not collect census data on where in Norway self-identifying Sámi live, but assumes that the Sámi primarily populate northern regions (Statistik Sentralbyrå, 2016), given that North Sámi is a majority language in some locations in Finnmark. However, as Norwegian citizens, Sámi and Sámi speakers have settled for various purposes across Norway, including in Oslo and Bergen as Norway's largest cities that lie far from the *forvaltningsområdet.* The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (2009) recognises this, as does the Church of Norway in planning its preaching activities (Sami Church Council, 2011). Oslo even has a *Samisk hus* [Sámi house] which serves as a meeting point for Sámi in Oslo, hosts Sámi cultural events, and provides news to Oslo's Sámi community (Samisk Hus i Oslo, 2016). Figures 1 and 2 visualise this concern between the territorialisation of Sámi language rights and the distribution of the Norwegian population more generally.

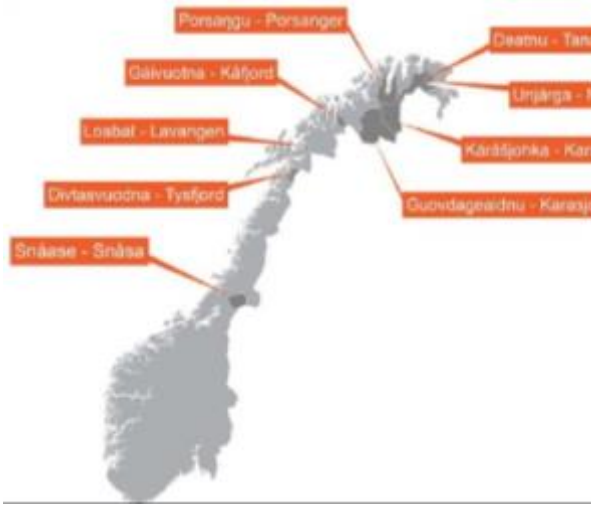

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Figure 1: Forvaltningsområdet

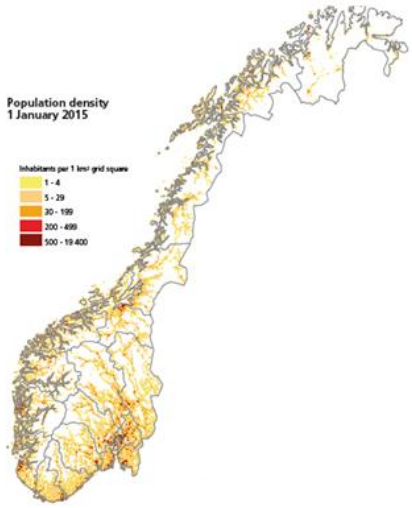

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Figure 2: Population density of Norway

Beyond the unequal distribution of Sámi language rights, Norway's language policy seems starkly at odds with its economic policy which aims to uphold "high employment and a fair distribution of privileges and duties" (Ministry of Finance, n.d., p. 3). The Norwegian state encourages and expects Norwegian citizens – regardless of their location or ethnic identity – to participate fully in the Norwegian economy because this "gives individuals financial independence" and "nothing is more effective in reducing poverty, raising living standards and improving quality of life" (p. 4). What is more, the labour force is expected to be "flexible" (p. 3) and enjoy "equal opportunity" (p. 16). It is entirely understandable that Sámi, as Norwegian citizens who are subject to the Norwegian economy, will pursue economic or career ambitions outside the *forvaltningsområdet.* Without a doubt, Norway's economic gravity is centred outside the *forvaltningsområdet*. For example, the oil and gas industries are Norway's largest economic producers and employers (Kristiansen, 2015), extending from offshore operations to onshore headquarters in Stavanger, Sandnes and Oslo in southern coastal Norway (Norsk Olje

& Gass, n.d.; Statoil, 2007). Norway's principal universities are in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim, and the transport sector is concentrated in areas of higher population density. In participating in the broader Norwegian economy as Norwegian citizens, the Sámi are however expected to forgo their language rights, including any assurance that their children can attend Sámi-medium education unless they can form a quorum. That is to say, while the state expects Sámi to participate in the Norwegian workforce, the policy framework jeopardises the maintenance of Sámi as heritage languages if Sámi have ambitions in urban Norway. It is, therefore, difficult to see Norway's political promise to cultivate the languages "where Sami people live and meet" (Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, 2009, p. 10) as more than rhetoric.

Sámi as a second language

It appears that the Norwegian education ministry's statements about Norwegian school students becoming familiar with Sámi languages and cultures are also just rhetoric. Sámi languages are offered as a second language outside the *forvaltningsområdet* to a limited degree, with only 1,210 students across Norway (Sámi or otherwise) having studied Sámi as a second language in 2013/14 (Kommunal- og Moderniseringsdepartementet, 2014). Upon closer inspection of the Sámi as a second language curriculum, however, a fracture arises between the government's claim of normalising Sámi languages and culture across the national curriculum and actual policy. Rather than encouraging and inviting Norwegian students to embark upon Sámi language study, the curriculum assumes that only Sámi children who did not learn their heritage language in the home will enrol. For example, the school curriculum explains that "*gode kunnskaper i samisk språk er en viktig forutsetning for deltakelse i samisk samfunnsliv og arbeidsliv*" [good knowledge of Sámi languages is an important prerequisite for participating in the Sámi society and work life] (Utdanningdirektoratet, n.d.-a). This possibly hints at Sámi languages being necessary for Sámi people in the *forvaltningsområdet*, given the government's broader perspective on Sámi affairs.

However, the national curriculum also seems to devalue Sámi as a second language. The primary and secondary school curricula list a range of core subjects for students across Norway and these include, for example, mathematics, Norwegian, English, social studies, mother tongue teaching for language minorities, and natural sciences. It goes so far as to list Finnish as a second language as a core subject area, but does not include Sámi as a second language (Utdanningdirektoratet, n.d.-b). Foreign languages are listed as another core subject area, which may include Sámi although no languages are specified. Sámi society and culture – without a language component – is included as a non-core subject area. All this corroborates with Huss' (2008) view that Sámi language education "is overly oriented towards meeting rights to first-language education and does not provide well for second-language learners" (p. 127). Ultimately, there is no further mention of any impetus for Norwegian school students becoming acquainted with Sámi languages and culture in the interests of a common Norwegian culture, as policy rhetoric proposed. Instead, Sámi as a second language and cultural studies are not mandatory, not all schools are required to offer these (Huss, 2008), and Norwegians

need not become acquainted with Sámi languages and culture. This raises the question of why this contradiction in policy, plus contradictions discussed earlier about developing Sámi languages where Sámi live and meet but then fencing off language rights to the *forvaltningsområdet*, have arisen.

A review of Norwegian perspectives on Sámi languages

These contradictions between rhetoric and policy may arise from the government seeking to appease a pervasive and deep-rooted ideology that exists in the Norwegian majority that the Sámi languages should remain ring-fenced. As the United Nations Regional Information Centre (2016) notes, "the Sámi experience ten times more discrimination than ethnic Norwegians". Literature on Sámi language policy has specifically explored Norwegian perspectives on the Sámi languages as they concern their status in Norway generally. Hiss (2013) especially qualified fervent opposition to the city of Tromsø debating its accession to the *forvaltningsområdet*. After analysing stance-taking in letters to the editor of the local newspaper, his study revealed the contextualisation of a language political issue into an "ideological meta-discourse about ethnic and linguistic boundaries" (p. 195) expressed through "intense affective reactions" (p. 178). These intense reactions included Norwegian comments such as that the proposal is "idiocy", "a disaster" (p. 178), "it is completely absurd that Sámi is to stand above Norwegian on road signs" (p. 186), and "I … won't accept this hidden introduction of Sámi in Norwegian society" (p. 178). Ultimately, Hiss found that the Sámi languages are perceived as a threat to Norwegian identity in Tromsø. This reflects previous work from Magga and Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) who explained that when the *forvaltningsområdet* was formed, towns outside the area often cancelled their Sámi-medium public services in the interests of enforcing Norwegian societal monolingualism. This paper, however, takes a broader national perspective and whereas Hiss concentrated on analysing stance-taking as a linguistic phenomenon. This paper analyses discourses.

The paper now turns to the findings from a critical discourse analysis undertaken on public debate over the five years from 2011 to 2016 on the NRK, Dagbladet and VG websites. It pays to note that those who share their views on the Sámi languages in public fora most likely have greater motivation to do so than most on the basis of the strength of their convictions vis-à-vis current discourses or news items. This means that the online commentary retrieved for analysis probably represents the extremes of public opinion and not public opinion more broadly. What is more, the commentators generally did not self-identify as Norwegian, Sámi or otherwise. For this reason, analysis is restricted to a qualitative discussion of the recurring ideological stances expressed on the news websites, rather than quantitative overview of opinions held by the Norwegian public.

In some cases, comments expressed strong support for the Sámi languages. This support especially centred in regret, seemingly expressed by Norwegians, that the Norwegian majority generally is unfamiliar with Sámi languages and culture. They called for greater respect for the languages given their official status in Norwegian law, explaining for example that "*Samisk og*

Norsk er jo likestilte språk i følge loven" [Sámi and Norwegian are after all equal languages according to the law], and that,

> *løsningen nå er respekt for … samisk spark … den løsningen her i landet bør det kreves av alle studenter at studentene mestrer minst to norske språknormaler for eksempel bokmål og samisk.* [The solution is respect for … Sámi languages … the solution in this country should be to require of all students that they master at least two Norwegian languages for example Bokmål and Sámi].
>
> *du tar helt feil, det er mange som du kaller "vanlige nordmenn" (som ikke snakker eller identifiserer seg samisk) som er veldig interessert i den samiske kulturen. Det er viktig … at samene også skal bruke sitt språk. På den måten så får alle lære mer både om samene og samisk språk.* [You are completely wrong, there are many who you call "normal Norwegians" (who do not speak or identify as Sámi) who are very interested in the Sámi culture. It is important … that the Sámi also use their language. This way we all get to learn more about the Sámi and Sámi language].

Views such as these sought to normalise the Sámi languages in the Norwegian sociolinguistic environment and rejected the notion that Norwegians are necessarily uninterested. However, not all comments were supportive, with the vast majority taking negative stances against the Sámi languages. In some cases, comments were blatantly prejudiced against the Sámi population in general or were blatantly offensive. These included, for example "*lærte vel lite om samer, og godt er det*" [learned little about Sámi, and that's a good thing], "Samene snakker rart" [The Sámi talk weird], and "*jeg driter egentlig i dem*" [I don't give a shit about them]." Others offered arguments against the Sámi languages in more ideological terms, which the paper now considers.

Preserving Norwegian identity

Just as Hiss (2013) found in his research, comments against the Sámi languages were often centred in a concern that affording the Sámi languages any greater role in Norway threatens the preservation of Norwegian identity. Some preferred to maintain a clear but peaceful distinction between the Norwegian and Sámi language communities, with views such "*la de være Samer de som ønsker"* [Let them be Sámi if they want]. Some were concerned that the Sámi are plotting a campaign to colonise greater Norway with the Sámi languages and culture, arguing "*respekter at vi andre ikke ønsker å være Samer*" [Respect that we do not want to be Sámi], and "*hva kalles identitestyveriet som er aktiv politikk fra Sametingets hold …?"* [What is the identity theft that is active politics in the Sámi parliament …?]. Comments such as these that opposed Sámi languages attaining a wider role in Norway may be epistemologically rooted in a modernist assumption that Sámi languages are synonymous with Sámi identity, and that this identity includes Sámi world views. This assumption may not be misguided, as it appears the Sámi languages, like Norwegian, can exist in a direct lineal relationship to ethnic identity (Bull, 2002). As a Sámi commentator argued, "*jeg er same, fordi jeg har samisk som morsmål*". [I am Sámi because I speak Sámi as my mother tongue]. This close correlation between

language and identity may, however, inhibit Norwegians developing an interest in the Sámi languages without creating what they see as implications for identity and cultural loyalty.

Sámi as foreigners

In many cases, comments constructed the Norwegian Sámi as foreigners. Here, the Sámi minority and their languages were seen as existing parallel to, and not part of, the Norwegian nation and Norwegian population. Their view of what constitutes contemporary Norway simply did not include Sámi languages and culture, rendering it confusing for the commentators as to why Norwegians would at all be concerned for or involved in the Sámi languages. They argued, for example, "*hvorfor burde jeg kunne snakke samisk? Jeg har like lite tilknytning til samisk som jeg har til Urdu*" [Why should I be able to speak Sámi? I have just as little connection to Sámi as I do to Urdu], "*Det er mer nærliggende å sette opp skilt med engelsk, arabisk eller spansk tekst enn samisk*" [It is more reasonable to put up signs in English, Arabic or Spanish text than Sámi], and,

> *den samiske kulturen er vel egentlig mer en egen kultur enn en norsk kultur. Den er norsk bare fordi den befinner seg innenfor de fysiske grensene til Norge* [The Sámi culture is probably more a separate culture than a Norwegian culture. It is only Norwegian because it is within the physical borders of Norway].

Arguments against affirmative action

More commonly, however, comments did position the Sámi as Norwegians but raised questions about their loyalty to Norway. In particular, as Norwegian citizens the Sámi were seen as not deserving any more affirmative action than the Norwegian majority. Sámi demands for affirmative action were therefore constructed as dissonance, even *unNorwegian*. This underscored arguments against the state administering special Sámi language provisions nationally. They argued for example,

> *Same i Norge er nordmann. Snart annekterer vel pakistanerne Grorudalen, og påberoper seg minoritetsrettighet på norsk territorium. Hvor langt skal galskapen trekkes?* [Sámi in Norway are Norwegians. Soon the Pakistani will annex Grorudalen (a location in Norway), and invoke minority rights on Norwegian territory. How long will this madness continue?].
>
> *De ble innlemmet mot sin vilje ja, men i dag har de ingen problemer med å ta for seg av offentlige velferdsgoder og subsidier, de har ingen problemer med å flytte til norske byer lengre sør og skaffe seg vanlig arbeid, og de har ingen problemer med å bruke snøscooter og andre moderne hjelpemidler i sin "kultur"*. [They were colonised against their will yes, but today they have no problem accepting welfare benefits and subsidies, they have no problem moving to Norwegian cities further south and getting normal

> jobs, and they have no problem using snow scooters and other modern aids in their "culture"].
>
> *Eg er i prinsippet uenig i at opphav, familie, rase o.l. skal brukes som begrunnelse for rettigheter på den måten samene skamløst tar seg til rette.* [I disagree in principle that ancestry, family, race, etc. is used as a justification for rights in the way the Sámi shamelessly do].

Other arguments connected language policy with environmental policy, arguing that Sámi simply wish to claim Norwegian land. This led to arguments that language maintenance is actually not a central concern for the Sámi, but a proxy for a broader Sámi political agenda to advance land rights. These comments included that, *"dette dreier seg lite om spark …. Det dreier seg om om tiltagende krav om forvaltningsrett av Norges landarealer"* [This has little to do with language …. It is about the increasing demand for the right to manage Norwegian land].

> *di har utnytta "ur-befolkning" statusen kynisk til å skaffe sæ makt over lokal-politikk & områda for jakt, fiske osv Snart har samiske landlords full kontroll over Finnmark.* [They have cynically exploited their "indigenous" status to obtain power over local politics and hunting and fishing areas etc. Soon the Sámi land owners will have full control over Finnmark].

Others even questioned the validity of positioning the Sámi as an indigenous minority. For this minority of commentators, their belief that the Sámi should not be seen as an indigenous minority meant they could not agree with affirmative action on language. They argued, for example, that "*de kom nå etter oss"* [they came after us],"*Samene er bare etterkommere av Djenghis Kahns horder, og ikke mer urfolk enn nordmenn generelt*" [The Sámi are just descendent of Genghis Khan's hordes, and not more indigenous than Norwegians in general] and,

> *er det ikke sånn at vi var her først, og de kom rekende etterpå, som da betyr at de okkuperte og koloniserte oss andre?* [Isn't it that we were here first, and they came around afterwards, meaning they occupied and colonised us?].

Norwegian as the national language

A final recurring theme in the online debates was that Norwegian is the logical and instrumental national language of all Norwegian citizens, detached from matters of ethnic identity. As such, the Sámi languages do not need a broader societal role outside the *forvaltningsområdet*. These arguments especially manifested in responses to the question of whether NRK–the national broadcaster–was justified in airing the *Norge Rundt* [Around Norway] programme in Sámi in 2013. Here, debate often relied on an epistemology that languages are primarily instruments of communication rather than bearers of culture, meaning the use of a Sámi language in a nation-wide broadcasting context does not make rational sense. In the fractures of the comments was the ideology that a single common language in public life is the natural condition for all of

Norway, and that language should be Norwegian to the exclusion of Sámi monolingualism or Norwegian/Sámi bilingualism. For example,

> *jeg synes vi skal holde oss med ett språk. Vi har mange minoritetsspråk, ikke bare ulike samiske språk og kvænsk, men etterhvert har vi også fått en stor andel nordmenn som f.eks. har urdu som sitt morsmål* [I think we should stick to one language. We have many minority languages, not just various Sámi languages and Kven, but gradually we have also got a large proportion of Norwegians who for example have Urdu as their native language].

> *når programlederen snakker flytende norsk er det vel ikke nødvendig å snakke samisk. Jeg synes det virker merkelig at et riksdekkende program sendes på et språk som kun beherskes av en brøkdel av befolkningen. Å tekste et riksdekkende program fra samisk til norsk virker bakvendt.* [When the host speaks fluent Norwegian it is not necessary to speak Sámi. I think it seems strange that a nationwide programme is broadcast in a language that is only mastered by a fraction of the population. Subtitling a nationwide programme from Sámi to Norwegian seems counter-intuitive].

Conclusion

The preceding case study of online debate over the last five years reminds us that the Norwegian community is by no means unanimously supportive of the Sámi languages, nor of the notion that they should attain a greater role in Norway outside the *forvaltningsområdet*. It also shows that Norwegian affect against the Sámi languages is centred in various concerns. In terms of the debates examined, this includes that the Sámi are foreign to Norwegian society, and conversely that the Sámi are not foreign to Norway or even colonised Norwegians, meaning they should not expect affirmative action. Other concerns included that the Sámi quest for language rights masks a more sinister agenda to claim more ancestral land or turn Norwegians into Sámi. The review of online commentary also substantiated other scholarship that argues that many Norwegians subscribe to an ideology that sees any expanding status of the Sámi languages as an assault of Norwegian identity (Hiss, 2013; Magga & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001). Collectively, these various reasons represent a preference held by some in the Norwegian community to hold the Sámi languages at arm's length within the *forvaltningsområdet* and not allow them to infiltrate Norwegian society more generally.

The strength and existence of this Norwegian affect against the Sámi languages may justify the Norwegian state's decision to operate a language policy that is in effect at odds with its high-level rhetoric. The state claims that the Sámi languages will be cultivated wherever Sámi live and meet. It also promises that all Norwegian school children will be familiar with Sámi languages and culture. Nonetheless, outside the *forvaltningsområdet* the Sámi languages do not enjoy official status; their speakers have significantly reduced language rights; Norwegian schools do not generally offer Sámi languages; and the second language curriculum seems to only target ethnic Sámi. This is despite Sámi Norwegians naturally gravitating towards Norway's economic centres, such as Oslo and Stavanger that lie far from the

forvaltningsområdet, as participants in the Norwegian labour force. Their participation in the Norwegian economy at large, however, comes at the price of less state assistance to develop and maintain the Sámi languages. This chasm between policy rhetoric and policy practice reminds us of Shohamy's (2006) concern that states are prone to only offering lip service to language minorities. In the case of Norway, this lip service may be an attempt to balance a pervasive ideology in the community to confine Sámi language matters to the ancestral Sámi homeland, with international obligations – and now domestic law – to protect and promote the Sámi languages. In any case, it is hoped this paper has shown that, far from being international best practice, Norway's policy on the Sámi languages and its speakers is inconsistent and in many cases hinders the maintenance of the Sámi languages amongst Sámi Norwegians.

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