



Linguistic documentation and description

Sámi Languages

The Saami languages are spoken across an area covering parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. This territory has little to do with the modern international boundaries found there; indeed, all Sámi individuals share both the Sámi ethnicity and the citizenship of the respective countries in which they live.



The Sámi languages form a branch of the Uralic language family and are related to Finnish and Hungarian, as well as many other languages mostly spoken in Siberia. While the North Sámi language has around 30,000 native speakers, its own orthography, TV and radio programming as well as newspapers and educational institutions, all of the smaller Sámi languages are particularly endangered today due to the dominance of the respective national languages and cultures. As a result, they are frequently not passed on to children as a first language and are in acute danger of disappearing forever.



The city of Kirovsk at the foothills of Khibiny mountain range (March 2004, Photo: Michael Rießler)

Kola Sámi

The four easternmost Sámi languages Ter, Kildin, Akkala and Skolt are spoken on the Kola Peninsula in northwestern Russia. However, the absence of a language environment in which the native Kola Saami varieties are spoken by most people regularly as well as a lack of social motivation for language vitality and development pose a threat to the survival of these languages. In fact only a small fraction of the approximately 1800 ethnic Sámi of Russia fluently speak and understand their mother tongue.



View of the river Virma in the outskirts of Lovozero, in the background the mountain range Lovozerskie Tundry (July 2006, Photo: Michael Rießler)



Efim Galkin looking over the fieldworkers equipment (Murmansk; March 2004, Photo: Michael Rießler)

Language Documentation

The archived recordings reflect language practices in the social lives and social interactions of Kola Sámi speakers of different generations. Language data were recorded during various field trips to the Kola Peninsula where we worked with speakers in both rural and urban environments. Reoccurring topics of recorded narratives are fishing, hunting, reindeer herding and other aspects of traditional Sámi life, but the archive also includes data relevant to current society (e.g. discussions on political issues). We have even recorded spontaneous communications among groups of speakers during work or social gatherings.



Yard in the town of Lovozero (March 2004, Photo: Michael Rießler)

The original Kola Sámi Documentation Project, led by Jurij Kusmenko and Michael Rießler, was carried out between 2005 and 2011 by the Department for Northern European Studies, Humboldt University of Berlin.

A follow-up project aiming at a corpus-based descriptive grammar for Kola Sámi is currently being funded by the DFG at the Scandinavian Department, University of Freiburg. The principal investigator of this project and curator of the Kola Sámi language archive is Michael Rießler.

Other people who have contributed to the Kola Sámi language documentation include Elisabeth Scheller, Kristina Kotcheva, Svetlana Danilova, Nina Sharshina, Ganna Vinogradova, Nadezhda Zolotuhina, Elena Karvovskaya, Evgeniya Zhivotova, Anja Behnke, Joshua Wilbur and Jurij Kusmenko.



Transcribing at the field office in Lovozero; Anastasiya Mozolevskaya, Nadezhda Zolotuhina, Elisabeth Scheller (left to right; February 2006, Photo: Michael Rießler)

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