

5 Quantitative changes in the status of the Sámi language in Norway

A summary of existing knowledge

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Statistics are a useful tool when devising policies to boost minority languages. In order to ensure adequate official language planning, it is important to know how many people understand a language, how many speak it, how many read and write it, how old these people are and where they live, how many families pass on the language informally from generation to generation, how many people encounter the language in kindergartens and schools, the degree to which the language is used in the most popular media, and the extent to which the language can be used when accessing public services.

However, obtaining figures on all these factors is not enough in itself. To be able to interpret the figures we need comparable data showing changes *over time*. We should also seek to establish *which direction* things are heading in before taking action.

Most past research into Sámi languages concerns grammar and language history. This research looks at the actual language, more or less independently of social factors. In recent years, however, some research has been conducted which looks at the Sámi languages in a contemporary social perspective. Most of these studies have raised issues concerning language shifts, revitalisation and ethnic identity, and the data sources have usually been in-depth interviews. Figures and statistics are therefore rather scarce elements in Sámi language research. We will be looking more closely at the published quantitative sources and research that do exist.

The reports and articles we will be examining contain more statistics and quantitative information than we will be discussing here. The objective for the selections has been to look for figures that can tell us something about *changes* in the status of the Sámi languages. We will be covering five different areas: (1) sources for the total number of Sámi-speaking people, (2) quantitative research that tells us something about the handing down of Sámi language in the home, (3) statistics on the choice of language in primary and lower secondary schools after 1990, (4) commissioned research on the use of Sámi in public services after the creation of the Sámi language administrative district, and (5) figures on the status of the written Sámi languages.

5.1 The number of Sámi-speaking people in Norway

5.1.1 UNESCO and Ethnologue

Scientific literature on endangered languages often provides figures on the number of speakers of various minority languages and on the proportion of such speakers amongst the entire ethnic group in question. The *UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages* and the website *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* are frequent sources of these figures. We will now be looking in more detail at what these two important international sources say about the number of Sámi speakers.

UNESCO figures

The *UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages*, now replaced by the website *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, is considered a reliable source of information about endangered languages. Authorities, media and experts often use figures from this source. The information that UNESCO provides about the Sámi languages is therefore important.

Table 5.1 below contains data taken from UNESCO on the number of speakers of six Sámi languages.

Table 5.1 Total number of speakers of six Sámi languages according to UNESCO¹

Sámi language	Total number of speakers
Skolt Sámi	300
North Sámi	30,000
Lule Sámi	2,000
Pite Sámi	50
Ume Sámi	20
South Sámi	500

The figures include speakers in all countries where the six Sámi languages are spoken. UNESCO refers to Tapani Salminen (a contributor to the UNESCO website) as the source of the figures on North Sámi and Skolt Sámi without giving further detail of where he has obtained the figures from. UNESCO cites the book *The Saami Languages. An introduction* by Pekka Sammallahti (Sammallahti 1998) as the source of the figures on Lule Sámi and Ume Sámi speakers. The source of the figure on South Sámi speakers is given as *risten.no*, a website run by the Sámi Parliament in Norway. In the case of Lule Sámi it refers to field work carried out by Joshua Wilbur for the *Saami Documentation Project* in the period 2008–2011.

We can examine the sources given by UNESCO further. Sammallahti is named as the UNESCO source stating that there are 20 speakers of Ume Sámi. However Sammallahti (1998) does not propose such a figure. With regard to the number of Ume Sámi speakers, all he says is that: “Ume, Pite, Akkala and Ter depend mainly on old speakers.” (Sammallahti 1998:1).

¹ The figures were retrieved on 31.01 2013 from <http://www.unesco.org/culture/languages-atlas/>

The website *risten.no* is given as the UNESCO source stating that there are 500 South Sámi speakers. When visiting the website we discover that *risten.no* estimates the total number of South Sámi people living in Norway and Sweden to be around 2,000. As regards the number of people who *speak* South Sámi, *risten.no* states:

“It is also difficult to produce an exact figure for the number of South Sámi speakers, but it can be assumed that fewer than half of all South Sámi are proficient in the language.”

UNESCO is correct that 500 South Sámi is indeed “fewer than half of” 2,000 South Sámi, but it remains unclear how UNESCO, using *risten.no* as its source, has reached the figure of 500. UNESCO asserts that there are 2,000 speakers of Lule Sámi, giving Sammallahti (1998) as its source. Sammallahti writes that “the number of Lule Saami speakers is between 2,000 and 3,000” (Sammallahti 1998:1). Sammallahti is primarily a linguist, and the book in question concerns grammar. He has not conducted his own investigations into the number of Lule Sámi speakers, nor would one expect him to in order to produce a book on grammar. Sammallahti does not provide sources for his figures or explain in other ways how he arrived at the figure of 2,000–3,000.

Of the sources cited by UNESCO, only Joshua Wilbur has conducted his own investigations. His figures on Pite Sámi speakers are recent (from the period 2008–2011), and they can be verified. On that basis we must conclude that many of the figures used by UNESCO concerning the number of speakers of Sámi languages are highly questionable.

Ethnologue figures

The *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* website contains figures on all the world's languages, not just endangered ones. However, this source, too, is often referred to in the context of endangered minority languages.

Ethnologue provides information about Sámi languages in Norway, as shown in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2 The number of speakers of four Sámi languages in Norway according to *Ethnologue*²

	Ethnicity	Total number of speakers
South Sámi	600	300
Pite Sámi	?	?
Lule Sámi	1,000–2,000	500
North Sámi	30,000–40,000	15,000

The figures in Table 5.2 from *Ethnologue* only cover Norway and are therefore not directly comparable with the UNESCO figures in Table 5.1, which include all four countries.

Ethnologue cites the American linguist Michael Krauss as the source of these figures. Krauss presented the figures in the article “*The indigenous languages of the North: a report on their*

² The figures were retrieved on 31.01.2013 from http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=no

present state”, which was based on a lecture he gave at a symposium in Japan in 1994, later published in Shoji (1997). In the printed article Krauss provides sources for each figure. In the case of North Sámi and Lule Sámi, the source is personal communication with Olavi Korhonen, and for South Sámi personal communication with Olavi Korhonen and Knut Bergsland. Korhonen was professor of Sámi languages at Umeå University and Bergsland professor of Finno-Ugric languages at the University of Oslo.

We can draw the conclusion that the *Ethnologue* figures are not based on actual counts but on estimates. However, these are estimates created by exceptionally competent people. We can also conclude that estimates from the mid 1990s are still being presented as up-to-date figures in 2013. The figures on the number of speakers of the various Sámi languages in Norway, as available to download from the *Ethnologue* website in January 2013, are therefore highly unreliable.

5.1.2 Norwegian censuses

Over a period of more than a century Norwegian census forms included questions designed to extract information about the use of Sámi and Kven languages. The first census to include such questions was held in 1845. Information about the use of Sámi and Kven languages was subsequently collected from each census up to and including the 1930 census. A census was usually held every ten years, and they were designed and conducted by Statistics Norway.

For every census between 1891 and 1930 Statistics Norway issued a separate pamphlet with figures and analyses on every group they deemed different from the norm. The Sámi people were one such group. The pamphlets with separate statistics on these groups and accompanying commentary provided an insight into how the questions and classifications used in the censuses were designed and how Statistics Norway interpreted the results. Thanks to these pamphlets, it was in principle possible to study changes amongst the groups in question over time. The definitions of the different categories changed during this period, however, and that makes it difficult in practice to directly compare the figures from each census. On the other hand, each pamphlet contains many interesting figures and information about aspects of Sámi language. This provides a quantitative source of data that can be utilised much better than it has been up until now.

The first census after World War II (in 1946) did not pose questions about affiliation with Sámi language and ethnicity. Such questions returned in the 1950 census and the 1970 census, however (but not in 1960). Censuses after 1970 have not contained questions about Sámi language or Sámi ethnicity.

Even after the 1950 and 1970 censuses Statistics Norway published a dedicated pamphlet with an analysis of the figures on Sámi affiliation and language (NOS XI 1956 and Aubert 1978). Figures on Sámi speakers in Norway obtained from the censuses are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 5.3³ Number of Sámi speakers in Norway according to censuses carried out in the period 1891–1970

Year	Sámi speakers	Norwegian population
1891	20,786	2,000,917
1900	19,677	2,240,032
1910	18,590	2,391,782
1920	20,735	2,649,775
1930	20,704	2,814,194
1950	8,778	3,156,950
1970	10,535	3,874,133

We see that the number of Sámi speakers according to the censuses remained stable at around 20,000 for most of the 40-year period between 1891 and 1930, and that the number then suddenly halved in the 20-year period between 1930 and 1950.

The data in Table 5.3 raises the question of why the number of Sámi speakers did not increase between 1891 and 1930, when the Norwegian population as a whole rose from 2 million to 2.8 million in the same period. This could be a reflection of a certain degree of linguistic assimilation amongst families, starting as early as the beginning of the 20th century. Another explanation may be the design of the questions and the categories used in the censuses. The registration of Sámi people was based on a highly complex set of criteria relating to heritage and language and on various combinations of these. As mentioned previously, the criteria could vary from census to census. It may therefore be that the figures in the table are not directly comparable, and that this is the reason why they do not mirror the changes in the wider population figures. The difficulties encountered by Statistics Norway in operationalising the criteria for “race” and language at the time are discussed in detail by Einar Lie and Hege Roll Hansen in the book *In Actual Fact. The History of Statistics in Norway* (Lie and Hansen 2001:123–153).

The most conspicuous fact in Table 5.3 is that the number of Sámi speakers was so low in the 1950 census compared with the 1930 census. Data collection methods may have played a part here. The 1930 census was the last to use “objective” criteria for language and heritage. In 1950 the census was based on the respondents' own answers and classifications. The geographical area in which these particular questions were asked was also smaller in 1950 than in 1930. Fewer people were therefore asked about their use of Sámi language in 1950.

Why would the number of Sámi speakers fall when switching from objective criteria to self-reporting in 1950? It may have happened if there was a stigma associated with being a Sámi speaker in 1950, preventing many from reporting that they were Sámi or spoke Sámi. This census took place during the restoration period after World War II, and many linked the Norwegian language to the modernisation process connected with this restoration, while the

³ The figures on Sámi speakers in Table 3 have been obtained from the Official Norwegian Report 1984: 18. *Sámi Legal Rights*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget pp. 83–87. The figures in the column showing the total population in Norway were obtained from Division Manager Paul Inge Severeide at Statistics Norway in April 2013.

Sámi language was associated with poverty and the past. This was in addition to the patronising attitudes towards the Sámi as a “race” that were commonplace as late as up until World War II. Statistics Norway was itself in doubt about whether the figures on Sámi speakers from the 1950 census could be correct. In its analysis of this census in 1956, the agency touches upon the possibility of respondents having refrained from reporting using Sámi language at home.

In many municipalities there is good reason to question the 1950 figures, including in Kåfjord, Kvænangen and Kistrand, where the number of Sámi speakers appears to have been on the low side. It is likely that some people who should probably have been registered as Sámi speakers have indicated that they speak Norwegian in daily life. (Norway's Official Statistics XI 236 1956:22)

A large proportion of people living in the traditional Sámi areas were multilingual. This could be difficult to deal with for those tasked with counting the number of people belonging to one linguistic group or another. Statistics Norway had a set of (complex) rules for how to categorise the various cases, but how did the census takers deal with multilingualism *in practice*? We can find out more about this by extracting samples from the censuses.

Many historical Norwegian censuses are available in digital format and published online (see *digitalarkivet.no*). This allows us to search the censuses for data samples. The most recent census available digitally is from 1910. I have looked at how the two well known Sámi politicians Daniel Mortensson and Isak Saba were registered in 1910. I have also examined how the census takers recorded language use amongst children at a boarding school in Neiden in Finnmark. A number of different languages were spoken in Neiden, and multilingualism was commonplace (Skolt Sámi, North Sámi, Kven, Norwegian and Russian).

Daniel Mortensson lived not far from Elgå in what is now the municipality of Engerdal in Hedmark. His mother tongue was South Sámi. He trained as a teacher and was an unusually eloquent speaker and writer of the Norwegian language. Mortensson chaired the first Nordic meeting on Sámi policy in 1917. In the census he is not listed as a Sámi speaker. Nor are there any remarks about him in the language column in his census entry. His family were not listed as Sámi speakers in 1910, either, although there is local knowledge confirming that his children did indeed speak Sámi.

While Daniel Mortensson was listed as being neither Sámi-speaking nor Norwegian-speaking in the 1910 census, another noted Sámi politician from this period was registered with an “N” for Norwegian speaker (and only as a Norwegian speaker) in this census. This was the parliamentarian Isak Saba, who in his day wrote the Sámi national anthem *Sámi soga lávlla*. Although Norwegian is listed as his only language, we know from elsewhere that his first language was North Sámi.

A third sample from the 1910 census shows that the children living at the boarding school in Neiden in Sør-Varanger in Finnmark were all listed as Norwegian speakers. This was because they spoke Norwegian while boarding at the school, according to the notes in the comments column. At home they may have been speaking other languages. But these languages were not recorded in the census⁴.

⁴ In the article “*Did the Sámi ever live in Tromsø? What censuses do and do not reveal*”, Lars Ivar Hansen uses examples from the censuses for the Tromsø region to show how unreliable the older censuses can be if we use them to try to identify Sámi people and Sámi speakers on the basis of the modern-day interpretation of ethnicity and native language. (Hansen 2013).

These samples from 1910 suggest that the number of Sámi speakers was generally too low even in the censuses *prior* to 1950. It could have been the widespread multilingualism that made registration difficult. Statistics Norway addressed this issue in 1956:

Classification according to both language and heritage became increasingly difficult as time passed. The Sámi and Kven populations gradually began to mix with the Norwegian population, and the Sámi and the Kven also mixed with each other. Society has also evolved, with growing numbers of Sámi and Kven people using Norwegian alongside their own language. (Norway's Official Statistics XI 236 1956:20)

The last Norwegian census to include questions about language was conducted in 1970. In 1978 Statistics Norway published its analysis of questions and answers about Sámi identity contained in the census. The analysis was carried out by Vilhelm Aubert. He argued convincingly that (severe) under-reporting of Sámi language and ethnicity was still taking place in the 1970 census, because the respondents themselves reported their Norwegian rather than their Sámi affiliation. The reason for this “erroneous reporting”, as he saw it, was that there was a stigma attached to being Sámi in large parts of Northern Norway. In 1970 the question about Sámi identity was asked only in Northern Norway.

Based on the figures from the 1970 census, Aubert estimated that there could be around 40,000 people in Norway “... whose lives are in some way influenced by a Sámi element in their background”. He gave a detailed account of how he arrived at this figure, but he also emphasised how dubious the figure actually was.

The data from 1970 is now so old that it cannot readily be used as a resource in official Sámi language planning. However, Aubert's estimate is still relevant for another reason. Many people have since referred to the figure of 40,000 when writing about the Sámi in Norway, and it is still being cited as if it were correct. For a commentary on the subsequent use of Aubert's figure, see Torunn Pettersen's critique “*The Sámi in Norway. 40,000 for 40 years?*” in *Sámi logut muitalit / Sámiske tall forteller 5*.

Questions about language have not formed part of Norwegian censuses after 1970. And no more censuses will be held. From now on they will be generated from administrative and statistical registers. It will therefore become impossible to use censuses in the future to find answers to questions such as how many people understand, read and write Sámi, where these people live, and how old they are.

5.1.3 Figures from other surveys

There may be other ways of estimating the number of Sámi speakers in Norway than using censuses. At the turn of the millennium the then Sámi Language Council commissioned a report on the use of Sámi language in Norway. The council sought to put a number on how many Sámi speakers there were. The final report (Ravna 2000) was based on questionnaires and telephone interviews. A geographical area was identified that included all municipalities in Finnmark county as well as Kvænangen, Nordreisa, Kåfjord, Lyngen, Storfjord, Sørreisa, Bardu, Salangen, Skånland and Lavangen in Troms county, Tjeldsund, Evenes, Tysfjord, Hamarøy, Hattfjelldal and Grane in Nordland county, Røyrvik, Lierne and Snåsa in Nord-Trøndelag county, Røros in Sør-Trøndelag county and Engerdal in Hedmark county.

A total of 11,523 telephone numbers in these municipalities were selected and called. The researchers were unable to establish contact with 1,480 of the numbers, despite placing six calls

in total. Of the remainder, 4,292 did not wish to answer questions about their language. This means that a total of 5,751 people participated and gave their answers to the survey.

The answers show that 4,797 of the 5,751 respondents did not understand Sámi. In-depth interviews about language proficiency were then conducted with the almost 1,000 Sámi speakers taking part in the survey. Amongst the non-Sámi speakers, a random selection of around 1,000 people were interviewed about their attitudes towards language.

Based on the information provided by the survey, Ravna (2000) estimated that more than 16,000 people over the age of 18 understood conversational Sámi in the areas included in the survey. By adding an estimated figure for Sámi speakers under the age of 18 along with an estimated number of people who understand Sámi outside the survey area, Ravna (2000) concluded that 25,000 people in Norway understand conversational Sámi. According to the survey, eight per cent of them only *understood* Sámi but could not speak it. On that basis the report suggested that 23,000 people were able to speak Sámi *at one level or another* in 2000.

There are problems associated with the methodology used in this research. In a separate booklet published as an appendix to Ravna (2000), the sociolinguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas gives an account of some of these problems (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). They were particularly problems surrounding the actual selection and, to a certain extent, the classifications. Despite the methodological issues, Ravna (2000) remains the most thorough account in our generation, and Skutnabb-Kangas was largely positive towards the research it contained.

According to its own statutes, the Sámi Language Council was to produce a status report every four years and submit it to the Sámi Parliament. But the council was closed down in 2002, and the Ravna study (2000) was not followed up with comparable studies at a later date. For that reason we know little about changes that have taken place after 2000.

Norway has signed up to the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, and the Council of Europe looks regularly at how the charter is being observed in the member countries. The Council of Europe has pointed out that the Norwegian government does not have *up-to-date* statistics on the number of Sámi speakers. As a response to this observation, the Norwegian Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs wrote in 2011 that it had commissioned a new report in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Research to “map language status at an individual level amongst the Sámi population”. The department wrote:

The purpose of the survey is to obtain an overview of how many people master each of the Sámi languages both in writing and speech, in which contexts they use the language, and the extent to which Sámi language is used as a language of interaction in kindergartens, schools, workplaces, education, leisure situations, local communities and in voluntary work or politics.

The results of the survey are intended to form a basis for language planning at all levels of society, including at government, regional and municipal levels. The results will be used to identify and implement measures to help preserve and develop the Sámi languages. (Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs 2011)

The planned survey was completed and the report published in 2012 (Solstad 2012). Which changes did they identify over the 12 years that had passed since the Ravna (2000) report was published?

On page 27 Solstad (2012) refers to that very Ravna (2000) report, describing a number of weaknesses relating to the selection methods used in the earlier report. Solstad (2012) also concluded that, on the basis of these weaknesses and “within the mandate of this study”, it would be more appropriate to select a different method for identifying informants than that employed by Ravna (2000). This different method was to issue questionnaires to those registered on the electoral roll for the Sámi Parliament in 2012. The justification was that “these are Sámi citizens who identify themselves as Sámi and who may be likely to respond to questionnaires of this type” (Solstad 2012:26)⁵.

Solstad made a selection of 5,000 informants from the 14,000 or so people registered on the electoral roll for the Sámi Parliament. *Everyone* registered in the Lule Sámi and South Sámi regions received a letter with a questionnaire. A selection was made in the North Sámi region. The proportion of people who responded was close to 40 per cent. The lowest response rate occurred in the South and Lule Sámi areas (Solstad 2012:11).

Solstad (2012) made a number of interesting findings. However, for reasons mentioned previously, this report did not link to previous research, and the results it identified could not be compared with those generated by Ravna (2000). The Solstad (2012) report thus became a status report in its own right about the use of language amongst the 14,000 or so people who in 2012 had voluntarily registered on the Sámi Parliament electoral roll.

Official language planning requires observations to be made over time of changes in the number of language users, just as the Council of Europe pointed out in 2011. But such changes are impossible to identify by comparing the research reports that have been published.

5.1.4 Concluding remarks on the number of Sámi speakers.

Just like everyone else, those working with endangered languages at UNESCO and *Ethnologue* depend on reliable sources in order to create statistics. When such sources are unavailable, they must use the best estimates they can, and that is how the *UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* and *Ethnologue* websites have obtained information for the statistics on Sámi languages. The figures on Sámi languages used by these prestigious sources are therefore neither more nor less reliable than figures from other sources. The problem is that these websites are so prestigious that for the reader their figures may come across as being authoritative, even when they are not.

The information about Sámi language in earlier censuses must be interpreted before it can be presented. But regardless of how we interpret the censuses between 1890 and 1970, they show a language shift from Sámi to Norwegian in many families and villages in Norway in this period. Vilhelm Aubert, who analysed the 1970 census, came to the same conclusion. Subsequent research reports do not dispute this either. This language shift is also corroborated by local anecdotal evidence. However, we do not have accurate figures on how extensive this language shift from Sámi to Norwegian has been. Nor do we know exactly when it began, except that it is likely to have started at different times in different regions.

The most thorough investigation into the total number of Sámi speakers in Norway after the 1970 census is Ravna (2000). This report concluded that at the turn of the millennium there

⁵ The methods are described and argued much more thoroughly in Solstad (2012) than what is being referred to here.

may have been around 23,000 people in Norway who could speak one of the Sámi languages at one level or another. No research has been carried out since 2000 that can be measured against this figure. We therefore do not know what changes have taken place since then.

Different definitions have often been applied to those being classed as Sámi speakers. The definition used by Ravna (2000) is that a person is a Sámi speaker if he or she is able to follow an everyday conversation in Sámi. This definition encompasses a much larger group than those classified as Sámi speakers in earlier censuses.

It is a problem that no regular and comparable surveys have been carried out to show where the number of Sámi speakers is heading. The Council of Europe has drawn the Norwegian authorities' attention to this as a shortcoming of Norwegian minority policy, and Norway needs to find a way of solving it.

5.2 Sámi language transfer in the home

It is a sign of vitality for a minority language when it is being handed down informally at home between generations. If a language is not being transferred within families, it is under serious threat, and efforts to strengthen the language will have less of an effect than when the language is in daily use amongst families. The issue of language transfer in the home is therefore crucial to all forms of official language planning.

When analysing the census from 1970 (referred to above), Aubert wrote the following about the handing down of Sámi in the home at the time:

From this material one can feasibly deduce that having two Sámi-speaking parents is by and large a necessary, albeit not sufficient, prerequisite for allowing children to grow up with Sámi as their mother tongue. (Aubert 1978:53)

In other words: the situation in Norway in 1970 was such that if only one of the parents was a Sámi speaker, the language would rarely be passed on to the children. If both parents were Sámi speakers, there was a greater chance that they spoke Sámi with the children, but even then it was not certain that they did.

Much time has passed since Aubert wrote this. A key question is whether the pattern of Sámi language transfer between generations has changed in the years that have followed. There is some research available on this issue.

5.2.1 Language transfer of North Sámi in Finnmark 1967–1985

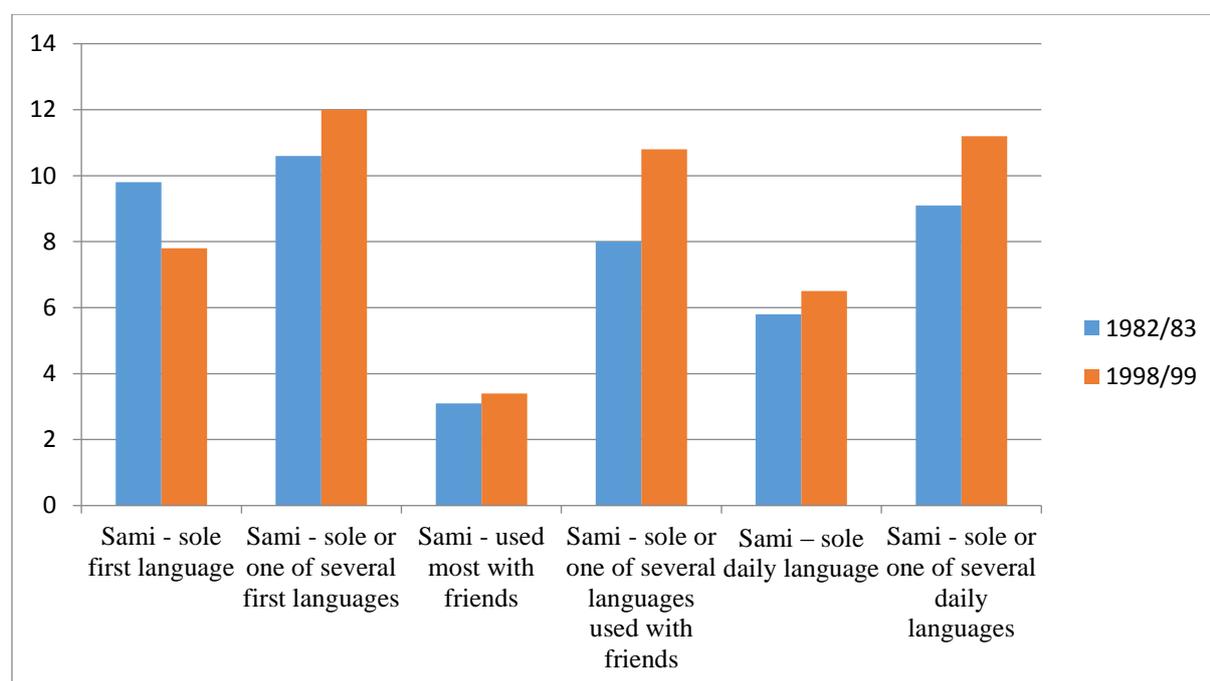
In the 1980s and 1990s Yngve Johansen carried out two extensive (and comparable) surveys amongst lower secondary pupils in Finnmark (Johansen 1986 and Johansen 1999). The surveys looked at physical education, motivation for study, and ethnicity. Language was thus not the *main theme* in either survey, but the forms issued by Johansen to 1,572 lower secondary pupils in Finnmark in 1983 and to 1,491 lower secondary pupils in the county in 1999 also asked questions about language skills and practical use of language with friends. Together with Nils Dannemark, Johansen published an article in 2001 in which he analyses and compares the answers to the language questions in the two surveys. The article was entitled “*Lower*

secondary pupils and language choices in Finnmark in 1982/83 and 1998/99” (Dannemark and Johansen 2001).⁶

The response rate for both surveys was around 80 per cent, and the figures should provide sufficient data to say something about changes in language use amongst young people in Finnmark during the 1980s and 1990s.

Figure 1 below contains a comparison of the answers given to questions about the language used at home and with friends in 1998/99 and answers to the same questions given in 1982/83.⁷

Figure 5.1 North Sámi as a first language and everyday language amongst lower secondary pupils in Finnmark in 1982/83 and 1998/99⁸



In 1982/83 a total of 9.8 per cent of pupils stated that Sámi was the only language spoken at home. This figure fell to 7.8 per cent in 1998/99. However, if we add together the figures for “Sámi as the only first language” and “Sámi as one of multiple first languages”, we find that the first language percentage increases from 10.6 per cent in 1982/83 to 12 per cent in 1998/99. Reported use of Sámi language with friends also rose correspondingly from 1982/83 to 1998/99, according to Dannemark and Johansen (2001).

Language skills and use amongst lower secondary pupils reflect which languages the pupils learnt at home when they were little. Those who attended lower secondary school in the 1982/83 academic year were born in the period 1967–1969, while those in lower secondary in the 1998/99 academic year were born in 1983–1985. Figure 2.1 may indicate that the decline in the use of Sámi language in the home stopped some time in the 1980s. The figures from Dannemark

⁶ See also Dannemark, Nils (2000). “Nuoraidskuvlaoahppit ja giellaválljen Finnmarkkus 1992/83 ja 1998/99”. In *Sámegiela dilli skuvllas ja lagasservodagas*. Kárášjohka: Sámediggi, pp. 45–57.

⁷ The figure has been obtained from Dannemark and Johansen (2001:45).

⁸ Pupils at Guovdageainnu nuoraidskuvla (Kautokeino primary school) are not included in the survey data.

and Johansen (2001) show a percentage *increase* in the reported use of Sámi in this period. The authors sum up the use of Sámi language amongst young people like this:

The figures appear to suggest that there has been a percentage increase. It would seem that more children learn two languages in bilingual families now than in 1982/83. In 1982/83 Norwegian was usually chosen as the only language in Sámi-Norwegian families, while informants in the second survey increasingly report that they are bilingual. A larger percentage of the informants in 1998/99 state that they use Sámi language actively. (Dannemark and Johansen 2001:41)

The increase in the use of Sámi amongst children of lower secondary school age combined with the fact that fewer of them spoke only Sámi at home could suggest that an important factor had changed since the 1970 census. As we have seen, Aubert wrote in 1978 that it would appear that speaking only Sámi at home was a “necessary prerequisite” if the language were to be transferred to the children. The figures proposed by Dannemark and Johansen (2001) could indicate that the Sámi language was more easily transferred within bilingual families in the 1980s than in the 1970s. Perhaps it had become more acceptable by then for each parent to speak their respective language with the children?

However, the difference in the figures from Dannemark and Johansen (2001) is small in percentage terms. The increase in the number of pupils who spoke Sámi at a first language level was 1.4 per cent, and this difference is too small to allow us to conclude whether there was indeed an increase. For that reason we will compare Dannemark and Johansen's data with a number of other quantitative surveys that may also provide information about Sámi language transfer amongst families.

5.2.2 A change in attitudes towards Sámi language transfer

In 1996 the then National Education Office in Nordland, Troms and Finnmark together with the Sámi Education Council took the initiative to conduct a study into the teaching of Sámi as a second language in Norwegian primary and lower secondary schools. The concluding report was published in 1998 and contained a large number of tables describing the language situation amongst the pupils in question (Todal 1998). Questionnaires were sent to *all* pupils studying Sámi as a second language in Norway from Year 4 to Year 9 (compulsory education lasted nine years at the time). Pupils, parents and teachers were all sent questionnaires. The response rate was 69 per cent amongst pupils and parents and 77 per cent amongst teachers.

The study asked parents how proficient they were in the Sámi language and the extent to which they transferred the language to their children at home. 48 per cent of the mothers and 43 per cent of the fathers of primary and lower secondary pupils learning Sámi as a second language stated that they themselves spoke Sámi either “quite well” or “very well”. But only 5 per cent of the same mothers and 4 per cent of the same fathers said they spoke “mostly Sámi” or “only Sámi” with their children at home (Todal 1998:62–66). The figures from Todal (1998) apply to North Sámi, Lule Sámi and South Sámi spoken on the Norwegian side of the border.

Around 40 per cent of pupils taking Sámi as a second language in primary or lower secondary school in Norway in 1996 thus had a mother or a father (or both) who claimed to speak Sámi well but who still did not speak the language with their children to any significant extent. These parents must still have wanted their children to learn Sámi, since they voluntarily chose the subject for their children at school. This seemingly inconsistent pattern of behaviour could be explained by the fact that multilingual parents choose a language for their children when the

children are very young. The language practices that were identified in the study of the last five cohorts in primary and lower secondary schools in 1996 therefore reflect choices that were made by the families between 1981 and 1986. The parents' attitudes towards the Sámi language may since have changed.

The figures from Todal (1998) therefore suggest that many Sámi-speaking parents in the 1980s refrained from transferring the Sámi language to their children, but also that some of these parents changed their attitude in the 1990s and chose Sámi as an academic subject for their children in order that they could learn the language.

Based on the figures provided by Todal (1998), it is not possible to say *how many* Sámi-speaking parents in Norway this applied to, since we do not know how many Sámi-speaking parents there were in total. The figures only provide information about the group that actively chose Sámi as a second language in school in 1996. The choice of language in school amongst these specific families suggests that there was a change in attitudes in favour of Sámi in the 15-year period between 1981 and 1996. Such a potential change in attitudes underpin the trends seen in the figures from Dannemark and Johansen (2001).

5.2.3 Sámi language transfer at the turn of the millennium

We have accounted above for the language survey conducted by Ravna (2000) and initiated by the Sámi Language Council. This survey also collected data on language transfer in the home. Ravna (2000) found that of the Sámi-speaking respondents with children, 34 per cent said their children did not speak Sámi. This was true for parents with children “of all ages”. This indicates a language shift from Sámi to Norwegian in a substantial number of homes.

An interesting finding in Ravna (2000) was that circumstances appeared to be changing in the period leading up to the new millennium. Of Sámi-speaking parents with children *under* the age of 18, 42 per cent said their children spoke Sámi “very well”. Of those who only had children *over* the age of 18, 28 per cent said their children spoke Sámi “very well” (Ravna 2000:33–36). These figures must be interpreted to mean that in 2000 there was a greater tendency than before amongst Sámi-speaking parents to pass on the language. The children who were under the age of 18 in 2000 were born between 1982 and 2000. The change must have taken place during this period.

The interpretation of the figures from Ravna (2000) depends on how representative the selection is, but as we can see, the tendencies in the figures correspond with those in the data provided by both Dannemark and Johansen (2001) and Todal (1998).

5.2.4 North Sámi language transfer amongst those registered on the Sámi Parliament electoral roll 2012

The researchers behind the Solstad (2012) report, described in more detail above, also asked their informants about language proficiency. This report included people who in 2012 were registered on the electoral roll for the Sámi Parliament. Only those eligible to vote are on the electoral roll, and there were therefore no informants under the age of 18.

Table 5.4 below shows the proportion of Solstad's (2012) informants able to understand North Sámi, listed by six different age groups.

Table 5.4 How well do you *understand* North Sámi? By percentage and according to age in 2012⁹.

	18+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+	Total
Yes, in all situations	41	35	34	43	44	61	41
Yes, a great deal (when it's about familiar topics)	12	18	16	16	15	21	16
Only a little in familiar situations	22	23	22	20	22	10	20
Hardly any, may recognise individual words	25	25	28	21	19	9	22
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Numbers	115	198	258	304	255	106	1,236

The table spells out a language shift from North Sámi to Norwegian amongst families. By far the highest percentage of people who understand North Sámi can be found amongst those aged over 70 in 2012 (61 per cent). This percentage is distinctly lower in the next generation, especially amongst those aged 30–50 in 2012. Then there is a higher percentage who understand Sámi “in all situations” amongst those aged between 18 and 30.

Table 5.4 is slightly awkwardly distributed into categories. It can be difficult to know the difference between those who said they understand Sámi “in all situations” and those who responded that they understand “a great deal of Sámi”. And what is the difference between those who say they understand “only a little” and those who understand “hardly any”? In order to make the categories clearer, we can reduce them from four to two. In the first category we place those who claim to understand Sámi well, and in the second those who say they understand little or nothing. This generates the result shown in Table 5.5 below:

Table 5.5 How well do you *understand* North Sámi? By percentage and according to age in 2012.

	18+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+
Well or quite well	53	53	50	59	59	82
Little or nothing	47	48	50	41	41	22
Total %	100	101	100	100	100	100
Numbers	115	198	258	304	255	106

Table 5.5 shows that there is still a significant language shift. Those who understand Sámi the best are aged over 70. Amongst them, 82 per cent say they understand Sámi “well”. The percentage amongst younger people is lower, and it is at its very lowest in the age group 40–50, where 50 per cent say they understand North Sámi well. This indicates a language shift. A slightly higher percentage of the under-40s understand Sámi compared with those aged between 40 and 50, but the difference is only 3 per cent. This suggests that the language shift has stopped.

Table 2.6 below shows the percentage distribution of people who said they could *speak* North Sámi in 2012.

⁹ The table has been obtained from Solstad (2012:130–132)

Table 5.6 How well do you *speak* North Sámi? By percentage and according to age in 2012.¹⁰

	18+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+	Total
Yes, it comes naturally to me	36	32	28	40	43	63	39
Yes, it's usually fine	7	6	9	10	13	15	10
Only a little in certain situations	23	29	20	21	20	9	21
No, perhaps individual words	34	33	43	29	24	12	30
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Numbers	115	198	258	304	255	106	1,236

The figures in Table 5.6 show the same tendencies for speaking proficiency in North Sámi as Table 5.4 did for comprehension. Informants over 70 years of age were far more likely to say they spoke the language. The percentage then dropped for the next age groups in the table, the lowest being amongst those between the ages of 40 and 50. Then there were slightly more people who spoke Sámi amongst the 18–40 age group.

If we reduce the four categories of answers in Table 5.6 to two and label them “speaks North Sámi well or quite well” and “speaks little or no North Sámi”, the percentage distribution between the categories will be as displayed in Table 5.7 below.

Table 5.7 How well do you *speak* North Sámi? By percentage and according to age in 2012.

	18+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+
Well or quite well	43	38	37	50	56	79
Little or nothing	57	62	63	50	44	31
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total figures	115	198	258	304	255	106

A comparison of Tables 5.6 and 5.7 shows that the tendency is the same, even with fewer and less ambiguous categories. The figures illustrate a language shift from the older generation to the middle generation, and then a tendency towards revitalisation of the language amongst the generation aged 18–30.

Those who were aged between 40 and 50 in 2012 were born in the period 1962–1972, while those aged 18–30 were born between 1982 and 1994. The trend in the figures from Solstad (2012), as shown here in Tables 5.4, 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7, is that language transfer amongst families increased in the 1980s and the early 1990s.

This mirrors the tendencies examined above in Todal (1998), Ravna (2000) and Dannemark and Johansen (2001).

¹⁰ The table has been obtained from Solstad (2012:130–132)

5.2.5 Concluding remarks

The figures quoted in this chapter suggest a language shift from Sámi to Norwegian up until the 1970s. In practice this means that a proportion of previously Sámi-speaking families switched from speaking Sámi with their children to speaking Norwegian. We do not have figures on how many families this involved.

When looking at the figures from Todal (1998), Ravna (2000), Dannemark and Johansen (2001) and Solstad (2002) in context, they indicate that a certain shift took place in families in the 1980s, whereby Sámi-speaking parents increasingly began to speak Sámi with their children. This trend has strengthened both the *knowledge* and *use* of the Sámi language.

Although the number of children able to speak Sámi has increased since the early 1980s, the total number of Sámi speakers did not necessarily increase over that same period. In many villages where the language shift was well advanced by around 1980 there were probably more old Sámi speakers dying than there were young Sámi speakers growing up. In this respect there have been two simultaneous and converse trends in the period after 1980. We could describe the situation as a race between the two trends. The result of this race is what will help us determine the number of people using Sámi as an active everyday language.

5.3 Sámi language as a subject in primary and lower secondary education 1990–2012

Schools are important institutions as regards language dissemination, language development and the efforts to give a language prestige. Most language minorities are therefore anxious to promote the use of their language in schools.

Sámi was used as a teaching language in both the 18th and 19th centuries. But tuition in Sámi gradually came to a halt as a consequence of the assimilation policies of the late 19th century. It only resumed in 1967, when a few parents in Inner Finnmark chose to have their children taught North Sámi reading and writing. The Sámi school in Snåsa began to teach South Sámi in 1968.

The new national curriculum of 1987 gave Sámi tuition a more formal status, including subject curricula for Sámi both as a first and second language and with an express aim of functional bilingualism for both pathways (Ministry of Church Affairs and Education 1987:148–180, 1988:7–8).

5.3.1 Sources of language statistics in compulsory education

There are reliable figures from 1990 and up until the present day on the number of pupils choosing Sámi as a first or second language in compulsory education in Norway. In his doctoral thesis *Jos fal gáhttet gollegielat* Jon Todal gave a detailed summary of pupils choosing to receive tuition in the Sámi language in primary and lower secondary school for every academic year in the 1990s. The figures used in his thesis were obtained from the annual reports published by the then Sámi Education Council and from letters from local councils. The data was also partly modified on the basis of local knowledge. The summary contained figures at a municipal

level and also specified which curriculum (First Language; Second Language; Sámi Language and Culture) the pupils had chosen in the different municipalities (Todal 2002:87–101).

The statistics from the 1990s have since been maintained, albeit in a less detailed format. The first edition of the *Sámi logut muitalit / Sámiske tall forteller* report was published in 2008. It has subsequently been updated and commented on annually in the form of articles. The figures used in the commentaries on language in schools have been produced by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, which receives annual reports from local councils.

Using the figures from Todal (2002) and from *Sámi logut muitalit / Sámiske tall forteller* 1–5, we can draw up a chart as shown in Table 5.6 below. The figures in the far-right column (the total number of primary / lower secondary pupils in Norway) have been obtained from personal communication with Division Manager Paul Inge Severeide from the Division for Population Statistics at Statistics Norway.

Table 5.8 The number of pupils receiving tuition in Sámi language in compulsory education in Norway 1990/91–2011/2012

Academic year	First language	Second language	Total number of pupils receiving Sámi tuition	Total number of pupils in Norway
1990/91	593	621	1,214	473,078
1991/92	626	736	1,362	467,501
1992/93	695	800	1,495	462,360
1993/94	743	937	1,680	468,061
1994/95	789	909	1,698	471,846
1995/96	791	964	1,755	478,540
1997/98	897	1,218	2,115	560,849*
1999/00	971	1,376	2,347	570,803
2005/06	998	2,057	3,055	622,031
2006/07	1,020	1,652	2,672	621,013
2007/08	1,027	1,515	2,542	618,589
2008/09	1,043	1,474	2,517	616,139
2009/10	1,010	1,336	2,346	615,927
2010/11	971	1,274	2,245	615,973
2011/12	940	1,213	2,153	614,413

*The 1997 education reform increased compulsory education from nine years to ten years. This means that the figures from after 1997 include one cohort more than the figures from before 1997.

In the table the figures on pupils pursuing the previous curriculum “Sámi Language and Culture” have been included in the figure for “Sámi as a Second Language” up until 2006 when the former subject was discontinued.

The figures for the 1996/97 and 1998/99 academic years are incomplete, and the figures for the 2000/01 and 2004/05 academic years are not comparable with other figures in the table. This is the reason why Table 6 does not contain figures for these academic years.

Not all the figures on Sámi as a Second Language for the period before 2000 correspond with the figures on Sámi as a Second Language in Todal (2002). The reason is that Todal (2002) looks individually at every curriculum that has been in use and that was not Sámi as a First

Language. In Table 2.6 above, every subject that was not Sámi as a First Language in the period 1990/91 to 1999/00 has been consolidated and labelled “Sámi as a Second Language”.

It would have been interesting to look at changes in the number of pupils studying Sámi compared with the number of potential Sámi students. However, this is not possible as we do not know how many people are entitled to Sámi tuition in Norway.

5.3.2 Changes in pupil numbers

Total number of Sámi pupils

When comparing the first year in the table (1990/91) with the last (2011/12), we see an overall increase of 912 Sámi pupils in compulsory education, equivalent to 75 per cent.

It is not the case that there has been a steady increase. Before 2005/06 the number rose year on year, and that year the number of pupils was 1,843 higher than in 1990/91 (that is +151 per cent over 15 years). The number of Sámi pupils fell every year after 2005/06, and half of the new pupil population had disappeared by 2011/12. Figures had fallen to around the same level as in 1997/98.

The table also shows that the changes in the number of first language pupils are not consistent with the changes in the number of second language pupils.

Number of pupils studying Sámi as a First Language

The number of pupils taking Sámi as a First Language was 58 per cent higher in 2011/12 than in 1990/91. This increase has been steadier than the increase in the total number of Sámi pupils. We can see from the table that the number of first language pupils rose steadily and peaked at 1,043 in the 2008/09 academic year before falling slightly in subsequent years.

The increase in the number of pupils with Sámi as a First Language throughout the 1990s and up until 2008/09 can perhaps be partly explained by the fact that there were more pupils with first language competence in Sámi in 2008/09 than there were eighteen years previously. The results from Todal (1998), Ravna (2000), Dannemark and Johansen (2001) and Solstad (2012), all addressed above, support this hypothesis.

However, it is probably also true that some pupils in the 1990s who in practice had first language competence in Sámi still chose Norwegian as their first language at school. This may have become less common in later years, and this shift may have led to an increase in the number of Sámi as a First Language pupils during the 2000s, even though the number of children with practical first language competence in the language did not increase as a result.

Number of pupils studying Sámi as a Second Language

From the table we can see that the number of pupils taking Sámi as a Second Language almost doubled between 1990/91 and 2011/12. There are still significant fluctuations within that period, from a peak of 2,057 pupils in the 2005/06 academic year down to 1,213 pupils in the 2011/12 academic year.

Possible reasons for the considerable decline in the years after 2005/06 are addressed in Todal (2011). The article discusses reasons such as a general decrease in the number of children in the traditional Sámi regions in the period in question, the discontinuation of the Sámi Language and Culture curriculum after the 2006 school reform, practical difficulties incorporating Sámi as a Second Language in areas outside the Sámi language administrative district, and the use of incorrect bilingual teaching models in schools providing tuition in Sámi as a Second Language both inside and outside the Sámi language administrative district.

5.1.3 Concluding remarks on the number of Sámi pupils

The choice of language at school is a key indicator of the position of the Sámi language in society. Unlike other areas of society, there are reliable figures on Sámi language in a school context. These figures show that there has been a sharp increase after 1990 in the number of pupils receiving Sámi tuition in primary and lower secondary school in Norway. This is true for both Sámi as a First Language and Sámi as a Second Language, although the number of pupils studying Sámi suddenly began to fall in 2006. The decline was great in the years that followed, even though the figure in 2011 still remained higher than in 1990.

The steady increase and subsequent stability in the number of pupils studying Sámi as a Second Language can have a multitude of explanations. One could be that informal Sámi language transfer at home has been rejuvenated over the last twenty-five years. Several research projects support the notion that such language transfer has indeed increased (see also Chapter 2 above).

5.4 A few figures on written North Sámi today

Very few Sámi speakers over the age of fifty were taught written Sámi at school (see the introduction to Chapter 2.3 above for more information). People can of course learn to read and write Sámi without having been taught the language at school, and that is probably what many of them have done. It is easier to learn how to read a language than how to write it.

Things have been easier for those who learnt the written language at school. We will now look at reading and writing skills in North Sámi on the Norwegian side of the border in 2012.

5.4.1 Reading and writing North Sámi

The Solstad (2012) report contains a table displaying North Sámi reading and writing skills amongst six different age groups. The informants have been selected from the Sámi Parliament electoral roll.

Table 5.7 below shows how well the different age groups claimed to be able to *read* North Sámi in 2012.

Table 5.9¹¹ How proficient are the North Sámi at *reading* Sámi? By percentage and according to age.

	18+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+	Total
Yes, I'm able to read all kinds of texts	34	31	26	27	20	21	26
Yes, as long as the text is about everyday topics	14	16	16	18	18	25	17
Yes, when the text is very basic	23	24	17	21	22	23	21
No, I'm unable to read Sámi	30	30	41	33	40	32	35
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Numbers	115	198	258	304	255	106	1,236

The table shows that in 2012 there were more people in the youngest age groups able to read “all kinds of texts” than in the oldest age groups. From the table we can see that 21 per cent of those aged over 70 said they could easily read all kinds of texts, while 34 per cent of those under 30 said the same. However, this interpretation of the table gives a misleading impression of the actual differences between the oldest and youngest informants.

Since the percentage of people who *spoke* Sámi in 2012 was much higher amongst the over-70s than the under-30s (see Table 5.5 above), the percentage of people who read Sámi with ease was therefore higher amongst the youngest Sámi *speakers* than amongst the oldest Sámi *speakers*. 36 per cent of young people in this selection (Table 5.5) spoke Sámi with ease, while 34 per cent could read it with ease (Table 5.7). This means that almost all North Sámi speakers under the age of 30 read Sámi with ease.

Of those over 70 years of age, 63 per cent spoke the language with ease (Table 5.5), while only 21 per cent could read it with ease (Table 5.7). This highlights a significant discrepancy in Sámi reading proficiency between Sámi *speakers* in the oldest and the youngest age groups.

Table 5.10 below shows how well the different age groups claimed to be able to *speak* North Sámi in 2012.

Table 5.10¹² How proficient are the North Sámi at *writing* Sámi? By percentage and according to age.

	18+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+	Total
Yes, it comes naturally to me	25	23	15	16	11	8	16
Yes, but I have to stop and think	15	16	18	17	13	15	16
Only a little, such as simple messages and expressions	24	25	16	20	20	24	21
No, I'm unable to write Sámi	36	36	51	47	47	53	47
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Numbers	115	198	258	304	255	106	1,236

This table shows even greater disparity between the oldest and youngest age groups than was the case with reading. While 63 per cent of the oldest informants spoke Sámi with ease (Table 5.5), only 8 per cent wrote the language with ease (Table 5.8). 36 per cent of the youngest

¹¹ The table has been obtained from Solstad (2012:132)

¹² The table has been obtained from Solstad (2012:132)

informants spoke Sámi with ease (Table 5.5), while 25 per cent could write it with ease (Table 5.8).

The trends that emerge when examining Tables 5.5, 5.6, 5.7 and 5.8 in the context of each other can only be interpreted as a very positive consequence of Sámi language provision and tuition in primary and lower secondary education. The oldest informants were never given instruction in how to write Sámi at school, while the youngest received such tuition throughout their schooling.

5.4.2 North Sámi newspapers

There is a correlation between the number of people who can read Sámi with ease and the potential circulation of Sámi language newspapers. In *Sámi logut muitalit / Sámiske tall forteller* 3 Johan Ailo Kalstad wrote an article entitled “*Sámi media – popularity, distribution and framework conditions*” (Kalstad 2010). In the article Kalstad defines “Sámi media” as something more than just “Sámi language media”. But he also created a table to illustrate subscription trends for newspapers in the North Sámi language in particular.

The two Sámi language newspapers *Áššu* and *Min Áigi* were in 2008 merged into one paper, *Ávvir*, published five days a week.

Table 5.11 below shows changes in circulation figures for these newspapers in the period 2000–2009.

Table 5.11 Circulation figures for newspapers in the North Sámi language 2000–2009¹³

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Áššu	969	1,003	1,129	1,117	1,084	1,021	975	1,008	-	-
Min áigi	964	1,142	1,197	1,072	1,211	1,179	1,177	1,104	-	-
Ávvir									1,204	1,204
Total	1,933	2,145	2,326	2,189	2,295	2,200	2,152	2,112	1,204	1,204

We can see that *Min Áigi* alone had a higher circulation in 2004 than the merged newspaper *Ávvir* had in 2009.

Kalstad offers several hypotheses as to why circulation figures changed in this way, but none of them has anything to do with language. And it is indeed difficult to infer any linguistic reasons for the changes. On the contrary, we have seen above how Sámi reading proficiency amongst North Sámi speakers is improving.

But the figures raise questions about how many potential subscribers a North Sámi language newspaper could potentially attract. What would the maximum number be? We know that the number of readers is always higher than the number of subscribers. And in this case we also know that a large number of *potential* Sámi-speaking subscribers and readers are “not able to read all kinds of texts in Sámi”. This is particularly true for many people who were aged over 50 in 2012 and who never learnt written Sámi at school. Sámi language radio broadcasts therefore reach out to many more people than a printed Sámi language medium would do.

¹³ The table has been obtained from Kalstad (2011:36)

There is a lack of research into how the written Sámi languages work in local communities. We also know little about the use of Sámi in social media. One interesting question would be whether the threshold for reading and writing Sámi is lower there than in “old media”.

5.4.3 Concluding remarks

Statistics from Solstad (2012) suggest a significant positive effect of Sámi tuition in compulsory education. Improving mother tongue literacy amongst Sámi speakers is evidently helping to boost the Sámi language in general.

More research is needed on the practical application of Sámi as a language of reading and writing amongst young people. Such research is not merely of linguistic interest; academics specialising in both education and the media will also be able to provide valuable approaches.

5.5 Sámi language in public services

Municipalities and other administrative bodies were not obliged to use Sámi until the language rules set out in the Sámi Act came into force in 1992. This does not mean that Sámi was not used in the public services sector in the past, but the systematic and statutory application of the language was something entirely new.

As a continuation of the language rules contained in the Sámi Act, a separate geographical administrative district for the Sámi language was established in 1992. In this district Sámi and Norwegian would be put on an equal footing in the public services sector, and Sámi was also granted especially robust legal protection. In 2013 the Sámi language administrative district (hereafter referred to as the administrative district) encompassed the ten municipalities of Kautokeino, Karasjok, Tana, Nesseby and Porsanger in Finnmark county, Kåfjord and Lavangen in Troms county, Tysfjord in Nordland county, and Snåsa and Røyrvik in Nord-Trøndelag county. The original administrative district comprised only the first six municipalities on this list. The four municipalities of Lavangen, Tysfjord, Snåsa and Røyrvik were included later after they requested it. In practice this means that these local councils resolved to apply to the government to be included.

In addition to the ten primary municipalities listed above, Norway's four northernmost county councils also have particular obligations as regards the Sámi language, and they are often deemed to be part of the administrative district. *Government* agencies, too, have certain obligations when communicating with the administrative district in particular.

People living in the administrative district are entitled to use Sámi when corresponding with public agencies and institutions. The Education Act, Kindergarten Act and the Place Names Act all set out certain requirements for municipalities in the administrative district. For example, everyone of compulsory school age living in the administrative district is automatically entitled to Sámi tuition – regardless of home language or ethnicity.

The administrative district is a tool designed to make it easier for the authorities to meet the obligations that Norway has under national legislation and international law in respect of the Sámi language. This arrangement means public initiatives better meet their target groups, because a very large proportion of Sámi speakers in Norway are likely to live within this geographical area.

After the administrative district was established in 1992 the Sámi parliament and Norwegian government have had to monitor the outcomes of the introduction of Sámi as an administrative language. In order to study the progress, they have commissioned research over the years with a quantitative approach to the issue. We will now be looking at the results of this research.

5.5.1 Research into Sámi language in public services in the 1990s

In 1996 the Sámi Language Council had a report produced entitled: Language revitalisation and Sámi-Norwegian bilingualism in public agencies. A study into the use of Sámi as an administrative language in municipalities in the Sámi language administrative district (Øzerk and Eira 1996). They collected information about language skills amongst municipal officials in the administrative district as well as information about the actual use of Sámi and Norwegian in the same administrations. Only six municipalities were part of the administrative district at the time.

Øzerk and Eira (1996) divided municipal staff into four categories, where category 1 was the strongest in terms of bilingualism. In this category they placed people who could understand, read, speak and write both Sámi and Norwegian. Employees in category 1 were capable of dealing with cases in both languages and at all levels. Category 4 was the weakest in terms of bilingualism. This category included staff who were monolingual Norwegian speakers and who were wholly reliant on interpreters and translators in situations where Sámi was being used, be it verbally or in writing. The majority of municipal staff in the administrative district belonged to categories 2 and 3, somewhere on the scale between the two extremes described above. There were significant differences between municipalities, however.

The largest percentage of category 1 staff was found amongst municipal officials in Nesseby, where 31 per cent of employees were in the strongest bilingual category. The municipality of Kåfjord had the lowest share, with only 5 per cent of employees in this category. Only 13 per cent of officials in Karasjok belonged to category 4, which was the weakest (monolingual) category, while as many as 78 per cent of staff in Kåfjord fell into this category.

The report also measured the actual use of Sámi in the municipal administrations. Kautokeino came out top, with the most frequent use of Sámi in meetings, letters, minutes etc. All in all, the figures from Øzerk and Eira confirm that there were considerable differences in language proficiency and language practices from municipality to municipality. These differences reflect circumstances outside the municipal administrations, since there were major differences between municipalities as to the position of Sámi as an everyday language amongst the population.

Øzerk and Eira (1996) advised local councils to make an effort to take employees in categories 2, 3 and 4 up one category. The easiest challenge would be to elevate category 2 staff to category 1. This could also have a major positive effect on the use of written Sámi in the municipalities. The system adopted by Øzerk and Eira (1996) with four categories according to passive language skills and active language proficiency was a simple one, and it would have provided a good basis for the continued work to boost the use of Sámi in the municipalities. The system gave the Sámi Language Council and Sámi Parliament a tool with which to perform quantitative measurements of future progress or decline in the use of Sámi in the various municipal administrations.

The Sámi Language Council continued to use this tool and publish data on progress in its annual reports until it was assimilated into the Sámi Parliament in 2002 and became the Sámi Parliament's Language Board.

5.5.2 Research into Sámi language in public services after 2000

Four years after the report from Øzerk and Eira (1996) two new reports were published that addressed the use of Sámi in the public services sector: *A survey into the use of the Sámi language*, commissioned by the Sámi Language Council (Ravna 2000) and *Bilingual public services provision. User survey in the administrative district for the language rules of the Sámi Act* (Skålnes and Gaski 2000).

Ravna (2000) does not adopt the system and categories used by Øzerk and Eira (1996) and does not use geographical categories to allow the reader to compare the survey with the previous report. However, the newer report contains a number of interesting facts about the situation in the municipalities in the period around 2000.

Skålnes and Gaski (2000) actively used both Øzerk and Eira (1996) and the annual reports from the Sámi Language Council to give a status report. The mandate of Skålnes and Gaski (2000) differed from the other two research projects. They were tasked with studying the administrative district through the eyes of the *users* and with establishing whether Sámi-speaking users were satisfied with the provision of bilingual public services. Although they identified variations within the administrative district, they concluded that the implementation of the language rules contained in the Sámi Act was working and that users were generally satisfied with the improved opportunities for using their mother tongue when accessing public services. The users were more dissatisfied with issues not relating to language use, such as long waiting times, for example. One conspicuous finding was that the opportunities for using Sámi when accessing public services in 2000 were fewest in arenas where the users most expected to be able to speak their mother tongue, namely at the doctor's and when dealing with social services.

The report from Skålnes and Gaski (2000) has not been followed up to identify any subsequent changes in the eyes of the users.

In the years that followed the closure of the Sámi Language Council the newly established Sámi Parliament's Language Board produced at least two brief reports that partly discussed the use of Sámi in the public services sector (The Sámi Parliament's Language Board 2004 and 2008). They, too, contain a reasonable amount of useful information, although they did not look at trends over time.

In 2012 the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs funded a report entitled *Mapping Sámi perspectives in the local government sector* (Angel et al. 2012), and in the same year the Sámi Parliament financed the report *A Sámi language survey* (Solstad et al. 2012). Both these reports from 2012 addressed the use of Sámi by the municipal administrations and provided new and important knowledge about the present situation. However, they did not seek to link to existing research in a way that allows us to examine tendencies over time.

On that basis it would appear that the Sámi Language Council was more systematic and resolute in its approach to Sámi status planning than the Sámi Parliament and the Ministry have been since the Sámi Language Council closed down in 2002. The contents of commissioned research

reports after 2002 have been divergent, and key aspects of the status planning have not been followed up.

5.5.3 Concluding remarks

The conclusion to this review of investigations and research reports into Sámi language use in public services from 1996 to 2012 would be that the data cannot be used to identify tendencies in the use of Sámi by municipal administrations in the Sámi language administrative district in the period. Although the reports are both interesting and solid as isolated pieces of research, they only provide empirical evidence for a certain point in time, each with their own underlying approaches, their own questions, their own topics, their own category definitions, and their own methods for selecting informants. It is therefore impossible to compare the findings and subsequently impossible to establish how things have changed.

On the basis of the reports we have examined here, it would appear that the erstwhile Sámi Language Council was more systematic and resolute in its approach to this aspect of Sámi status planning than the Sámi Parliament and the Ministry have been since the Sámi Language Council closed down in 2002. The contents of commissioned research reports after 2002 have been divergent, and key aspects of the status planning have not been followed up.

5.6 Summary and suggested action

5.6.1 Summary

Identifying the exact number of Sámi speakers is a big, daunting and costly task – a task that has yet to be completed. We can therefore not be certain about possible changes in the number of Sámi speakers, either.

What we do know is that over a long period of time a language shift must have taken place from Sámi to Norwegian in many families and villages, maybe especially during the first thirty years after World War II. There is much to suggest, however, that both attitudes and practices turned in the favour of Sámi at some point during the 1980s. This is a trend that we should have liked to know more about.

We have reliable figures on the choice of Sámi language in compulsory education, and we can therefore safely say that the biggest problem in schools today is the drop-out rates from tuition in Sámi as a Second Language. *Sámi logut muitalit / Sámiske tall forteller* identified this issue as early as in its first edition in 2008 in an article entitled “*Sámi language in compulsory education – steady growth and sudden decline*”. The article “*Severe decline for Sámi as a Second Language*” in *Sámi logut muitalit / Sámiske tall forteller 4* in 2011 pointed out that perhaps we did not primarily lack knowledge about the situation or about which steps *could* be taken. What is needed is action rather than further studies.

There is little quantitative research on the role of the written Sámi language in modern Sámi society. We need to know more. The use of language in social media is particularly important to young people. But the use of Sámi language in social media is something we do not have quantitative data on.

The use of Sámi language in the public services sector is poorly documented, despite there being numerous research reports on the topic. This does not mean that the individual reports are of a poor quality; rather that one report does not correlate with the next. The Norwegian government and Sámi Parliament should review the reports they have in their possession before commissioning further research in order to pursue key aspects in a way that identifies any *changes* over time. Only then is it possible to take concrete action.

5.6.2 Suggested action

1. Further work is required to obtain the best possible up-to-date figures on how many people are able to understand, speak, read and write Sámi. Changes must be monitored.
2. Up-to-date figures on the Sámi language must be published internationally.
3. Efforts must be made to obtain the best possible overview of Sámi language transfer in the home. Changes should be monitored and language transfer encouraged.
4. The position, and actual use, of the Sámi language in social media should be investigated.
5. A system must be created to measure and monitor progress or decline in the use of Sámi in the public services sector.
6. On the basis of factors borne out in official school statistics for some time, concrete measures must be taken to stop the decline in the number of primary and lower secondary pupils taking Sámi as a Second Language and to recruit new pupils (see also articles in *Sámiske tall forteller 1, 2, 3, 4* and *5* addressing this very issue).

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