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Language proficiency, education, and language attitudes in Skolt Sami communities between the 1850s and 2020s

Abstract In this article, we describe the changes in language skills, education, and language attitudes of the Skolt Sami between the 1850s and 2020s and analyze the reasons for these changes. The description and analysis are based on an in-depth reading and interpretation of existing older sources and present-day interviews. The Skolt Sami territories are divided between three countries: Russia, Norway, and Finland. Since the nineteenth century these territories have been increasingly colonized by members of the majority cultures, but also by several linguistic and cultural minorities. Due to this, the Skolt Sami have been a highly multilingual people and have known, in addition to their own language, one or more often several languages. Their language proficiency has varied according to their language contacts. For a long time, the Skolt Sami communities saw multilingualism as a positive value, as it helped individuals to cope in varying situations and contexts. The same ideology was dominant in connection to the value given to schooling and education in general, even though this was only available in majority languages. However, practical obstacles to education during and after elementary education were often perceived. From World War II, and in Norway even before, language attitudes began to change rapidly and the nationalistic ideal of monolingualism started to gain ground. To learn other, larger languages was viewed as more important than knowing Skolt Sami. This was caused by forced assimilation, which was practiced especially in schools from the early twentieth century

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Readjustment: reactions to societal change in Finno-Ugric minority language communities. 95–146.
Uralica Helsingiensia 16. Helsinki 2025. <https://doi.org/10.33341/uh.148676>

on, and by negative attitudes of the majority populations, especially peer groups. Since the late twentieth and early twenty-first century language attitudes have started to change yet again, and an active language revitalization process has started. At present, schools and other educational institutions have become one of the most important actors in processes of language revitalization.

0. Introduction

The Skolt Sami (sg. *sä'mmlaž*, pl. *sä'mmla*) are an indigenous people living in the northernmost parts of Fennoscandia: on the southern coast of Va′rjjelvuõnn (No. Varangerfjorden) in Norway, in the northwestern parts of Murmansk region (Ru. Мурманская область) in Russia, and in the municipality of Aanar (Fi. Inari) in Finland. At present the estimated number of ethnic Skolt Sami is 400 in Norway, 600–700 in Finland, and 500 in Russia,[3] i.e. approximately 1500–1600 persons (Rasmussen 2021: 22). The Skolt Sami language (*sää'mǩiõll*) is a severely endangered language with only approximately 200–300 native speakers, of whom the majority live in Finland, some also in Russia. Most of the native speakers are middle-aged or older, but there are also children who have Skolt Sami as one of their native languages. At present, the number of speakers who have learned the language as adults is significant and continues to grow. All speakers are at least bilingual, some multilingual. The Skolt Sami dialect that was originally spoken in Norway has become extinct, but some Skolt Sami speaking other dialects have moved to Norway. The present-day Skolt Sami orthography has been in use since the 1970s, but only a small portion of the speakers know how to write the language (Koponen et al. 2022: 196). The most important public language domains are the Skolt Sami radio programs, podcasts, and internet texts produced by the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle, as well as some social-media forums.

3. It is difficult to estimate the number of the Skolt Sami in Russia because the authorities, unlike the peoples themselves, do not distinguish between the different Sami peoples, but count Skolt, Kildin and Ter Sami as one people (see e.g. Lallukka in this volume). On the other hand, in Norway and Finland, it is forbidden to create registries based on ethnic background. The same problem applies to the estimation of the number of speakers. There have been no attempts to study the number of the speakers in recent decades.

The Skolt Sami language and culture have some legal recognition in all countries where the language is spoken, either as one of the minority languages of the country (Russia) or more explicitly as one of the Sami languages that are protected by the country's constitution (Norway, Finland). Only in Finland's legislation are the Skolt Sami language and Skolt Sami people specifically mentioned, and there is also legislation that applies only to the Skolt Sami. In addition to national legislation, the Skolt Sami language and culture are protected by, for instance, the ILO convention 169, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989 (Norway), and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Norway, Finland) (Rasmussen 2021: 25–33).

In this article we will describe the history of education and language proficiency among the Skolt Sami between the 1850s and 2020s. As there is very little contemporary knowledge of and evidence for the language attitudes of Skolt Sami communities before the 1970s, and scarcely even after, we will use the obtained information to reconstruct the major changes in language attitudes. As we know that the changes were often connected to changes in national-level language management, these will be described as well.

Our starting point is to describe the Skolt Sami, like they themselves do, as a people who have been fated to be divided into citizens of three countries. Because of this, it would be wrong to describe only the progression of the state of the language of the Skolt Sami living in one of these countries. Instead, we have chosen to describe how the fates of the Skolt Sami speech communities began to diverge from one another during the studied period in each of these countries. This differentiation process was caused by decisions made by states and by local authorities, e.g. in the implementation and content of education, but also because of changes in the linguistic and cultural contexts due to the increased settlement. The comprehensive approach that we have chosen, can also illustrate how different outcomes can be for similar speech communities that speak the same language when they are placed in different contexts.

In the first section we will describe the chosen theoretical framework and in the second section the data and method. Section 3 gives a brief account of the areal and historical context of the Skolt Sami.

Sections 4, 5, and 6 include the actual analysis, and Section 7 sums up the whole article.

1. Theoretical framework

In this article we approach our theme with the help of the theoretical framework of language policy. Language policy is by definition "*an officially mandated set of rules for language use and form within a nation-state*" according to Spolsky (2012: 3, 5), who divides the language policy of a speech community further into three interrelated but at the same time independent components: language practices; language attitudes or ideology (about language and language use); and actual language policy or language management, i.e. all efforts that modify or influence the language use. Following Spolsky's model, we divide our article into three main analysis sections, each of which deals with one of the three themes but in a different order.

The first component, language practices, includes the actual choices that members of a speech community make when using language and the rules of communication that they follow. Such choices and rules are often studied in sociolinguistics and other adjacent fields (Spolsky 2021: 5). This very wide aspect of language policy is discussed in Section 4 from the perspective of language proficiency. However, other sociolinguistic themes, such as language domains, are dealt with in other sections as well.

In Section 5, we describe the history and evolution of Skolt Sami education. This is connected to Spolsky's third component, language management. It includes the efforts that are directed by powerful or authoritative members of the speech community to modify the language practices of the whole speech community. Language management also includes efforts that are directed from the outside toward the speech community, e.g. national or regional legislation or forced language practices put into effect by national or regional officials (Spolsky 2012: 5). Education is the most important aspect of national language management that has had an impact on all Skolt Sami speech communities in all countries. Schooling is an effective way, for better or worse, to modify and influence the language use of a speech

community and its language attitudes that will easily be passed on to the following generations. Schooling has been considered as one of the most important outside influences on multilingual children. This is connected to the peer-group influence from other pupils and to the authoritative position that teachers have in the communities (Caldas 2012: 357–359, 360–362, 366–367).

Spolsky's second component, language attitudes, and their development and effects are described in Section 6. Language attitudes are made up of the values of the speech community and are connected to several emotionally powerful factors such as identity, ethnicity, power, status, communicative strength, and linguistic and cultural self-esteem. Language attitudes guide the members of a speech community in what variant of their language they should use and in what way, or whether they choose to stop speaking it in some contexts or altogether (Spolsky 2012: 4–5). Especially speakers of a minority language, such as Skolt Sami, who belong to a clearly distinguishable ethnic minority, to lower socioeconomic groups than majority peoples, and who have suffered from forced migrations, are at high risk of developing low cultural and linguistic self-esteem that can lead to language loss in some families, or even to the extinction of a language (see Fishman 1991: 43–45, 55–65).

Language attitudes are also tightly interwoven with language practices and language management, the latter also with the language attitudes of national and regional language policy makers. These attitudes can be understood as an unofficial or hidden language-management agenda (Spolsky 2012: 4–5).

2. Data and method

Our analysis is based mainly on written sources. We have used, in addition to scientific descriptions and studies, also travel reports, memoirs, and newspaper articles. Since the sources are scarce and incomplete, also oral-history sources, old recordings, and present-day interviews have been used to fill in the gaps. The people who have been interviewed during the twentieth and twenty-first century belong mainly to the Skolt Sami community in Finland, but some more or

less formal interviews have also been carried out with members of the Skolt Sami communities in Norway and Russia.

Especially the oral materials connected to language attitudes are sensitive in nature. They reach over a long period of time and include personal opinions which seemed right at the time and in that situation, but may now feel embarrassing or wrong and bring a sense of guilt. Because the Skolt Sami community is very small, it would be easy to determine who the informants are if normal reference practices were followed. As it is completely unnecessary, even unethical, to increase the burden on members of the speech community in this context, we have decided to anonymize the oral sources completely. When using oral sources, we refer to the Corpus of Spoken Skolt Sami (CSS), which is stored at the Saami Culture Archive of the University of Oulu, or the Archive of Skolt Sami Radio Broadcasts (ASRB) published online by the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle, and give the year when this information was recorded.

The most important method that we use in our analysis consists of in-depth reading and listening to sources, piecing together the existing scattered pieces of evidence, and creating an overview based on hermeneutical accumulation of knowledge. The hermeneutic process also included a phase where we have discussed the validity of our interpretations with members of the speech community. This method is time-consuming and requires sharp source criticism based on a wide prior knowledge of the theme. Such an approach and method are often used in Sami Studies and otherwise when studying oral or minorities' histories. (See e.g. Jouste et al. 2022; Lehtola 2022; Tanhua 2023: 51–57, 65–72.)

It is much easier to describe the history of education and language proficiency than the development of language attitudes. As mentioned before, language attitudes are a very difficult topic to describe in detail, especially during bygone times, due to lack of sources and because they are so personal in nature. For this reason, we can provide only the clearest changes in attitudes, which even then can sometimes be reconstructed only based on attested changes in the official language policy and following changes in language practices. Also from this point of view, it is important that we have shared our interpretations with members of the speech community, because they

can often provide crucial additional information that either supports or refutes our understanding.

There have been no previous studies that could provide a full picture of the historical and language-policy developments that we describe in this article from the Skolt Sami point of view. There are several sources that describe these themes, but they are from a narrower perspective, while our idea is to provide a synthesis of this scattered information that covers all Skolt Sami speech communities. The history of the Skolt Sami in Russia and the Soviet Union is often merged with the history of the Akkala, Kildin, and Ter Sami into a general Kola Sami history, even though the histories of these peoples differ from each another. Each of these peoples have a right to be recognized as an independent people with an individual history of their own. In Norway and Finland, the right of the Skolt Sami to own history has been recognized earlier, but so far only a handful of studies have been made from solely a Skolt Sami perspective. (See e.g. Lehtola 2004; Porsanger 2007; Moshnikoff, So. 2023; Tanhua 2023.)

3. Areal and historical context

3.1. The Skolt Sami territories

The Skolt Sami are an indigenous people whose native lands are situated in the border region of present-day Russia, Finland, and Norway. The area had been divided from time immemorial until the Soviet period into seven indigenous regional and administrative units called *sijdd*: Njauddâm (Fi. Näätämö, No. Neiden, Ru. Нявдема), Paččjokk (Fi. Paatsjoki, No. Pasvikelva, Ru. Пазрека (Борис-Глеб)), Peäccam (Fi. Petsamo, Ru. Печенга), Mueʹtǩǩ (Fi. Muotka, Ru. Мотовский) Suõʹnn'jel (Fi. Suonikylä, Ru. Сонгельск), Njuõttjäuʹrr (Fi. Nuortijärvi, Ru. Нотозеро), and Sââʹrvesjäuʹrr (Fi. Hirvasjärvi, Ru. Гирвасозеро).[4] Most of these sijdds' lands are situated in the present-day Murmansk region in Northwest Russia, but many parts

4. For a broader description of the sijdd system and its history and connections to neighboring cultures, see e.g. Tanner 1929; Nickul 1948; Sverloff 2003; Kuoljok 2011.

of the western sijdds are at the present divided by state borders. The northern part of Njauddâm sijdd is situated in Vaʹrjjelvuõnn in present-day Norway, and the southern part of the sijdd is in present-day Finland in the north of the Aanar municipality. The westernmost parts of Paččjokk belong today also to Norway while the eastern parts are situated in present-day Russia. The westernmost parts of the Suõʹnn'jel sijdd are situated in the eastern part of present-day Finland (Tanner 1929: 87–102; Itkonen 1948: II: 246–253; 1965: 156–158; Aikio 2013). See Map 1.

For historical, geographical, and ecological reasons, the sijdds can be divided into two groups, namely coastal and inland sijdds, and these also belong to different dialect groups (see Map 1). Sââʹrvesjäuʹrr is sometimes counted as belonging to the Akkala Sami, as the members of the sijdd started to adopt linguistic innovations from Akkala Sami especially after they were relocated to the same kolkhoz in the 1920s (e.g. Zaikov 1996; Sammallahti 1998: 29–31).

Map 1. The Skolt Sami native lands and sijdds before the twentieth century: 1) Njauddâm (Fi. Näätämö, No. Neiden, Ru. Нявдема), 2) Paččjokk (Fi. Paatsjoki, No. Pasvikelva, Ru. Пазрека (Борис-Глеб)), 3) Peäccam (Fi. Petsamo, Ru. Печенга), 4) Mue'tǩǩ (Fi. Muotka, Ru. Мотовский) 5) Suõ'nn'jel (Fi. Suonikylä, Ru. Сонгельск), 6) Njuõttjäu'rr (Fi. Nuortijärvi, Ru. Нотозеро), and 7) Sââ'rvesjäu'rr (Fi. Hirvasjärvi, Ru. Гирвасозеро). The northern dialects were spoken in the coastal sijdds (1–4) and the southern dialects in the inland sijdds (5–7). (Map by Rantanen et al. 2023a, modified by Ali Ylikoski, see also Rantanen et al. 2021; 2022. CC 4.0.)

3.2. History of the Skolt Sami communities

Since at least the late Iron Age, the Skolt Sami territories have been used as a resource reserve by the Nordic kingdoms of Sweden (including Finland), Denmark, and Norway as well as Novgorod, later the Tsardom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation. The oldest known treaty that describes the areal division of the taxation rights in northern Fennoscandia between Novgorod and Sweden–Norway dates to 1251. The area taxed by both kingdoms included the Skolt Sami territories. In the Teusina peace treaty between Sweden and Muscovite Russia in 1595, all the Skolt Sami territories became part of Russia and as a result fell also under the rule of the Orthodox Church. However, Norway, which had become part of Denmark, retained the right to tax the coastal sijdds in exchange for Russia's right to tax the coastal area of northern Norway. This condominium (No. *Fellesdistrikt*, Ru. *Общий район*) was in effect between 1612 and 1826, but it was based on a much older practice (Linkola & Sammallahti 1995: 48–49; Porsanger 2007: 111, 113–114; Aikio 2016: 12–13; Rasmussen 2021: 7).

Even after 1595, the western and especially the northwestern sijdds maintained active contacts with the neighboring North and Aanaar (Inari) Sami communities. However, due to different interpretations in Western Christianity and Eastern Christianity, marriages were not officially accepted between these groups. From the sixteenth century the interest of the western and eastern regimes in the resources of the north increased even further and resulted in the establishment of many new trading sites, with also monasteries being founded in the east. The most important monastery and trading site in the Skolt Sami area was the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Peäccam, which was established in the 1530s. The monastery was destroyed already in 1589 by Finnish guerrillas who were sent by the Swedish crown. After this, the monastery moved to the Kola Fortress. It was reestablished in Peäccam in 1886–1944, and again in 1997. As the connections with different majority cultures became more distinct, the cultural influences that the neighboring Sami cultures received started to differentiate as well. This led to gradual cultural and linguistic separation of the western and eastern Sami communities, the border being formed

between the Aanaar and the Skolt Sami communities (Nickul 1964: 219; Linkola & Sammallahti 1995: 47–49; Porsanger 2007: 111–114).

The division of the Skolt Sami territories between the regimes was permanently established and the sijdds splintered when the border was drawn between Norway and the Russian Empire in 1826–1827. As a result, the northern half of Njauddâm sijdd became part of Norway and the southern half part of the grand duchy of Finland, which was an autonomous part of the Russian Empire. The Skolt Sami chose to become subjects of Norway, but they were allowed to use the southern part of their sijdd as well. After the border between Norway and the grand duchy of Finland was closed in 1852, the Skolt Sami were forbidden from taking their reindeer over to the Finnish side. However, as the borders were mostly unguarded, they continued to use their lands until the early twentieth century when reindeer husbandry was taken over by the North Sami and the Kvens (Tanner 1929: 214–217; Linkola & Sammallahti 1995: 50–51; Wikan 1995: 37–38, 65–67; Andresen et al. 2021: 125–126, 138–139; Rasmussen 2021: 12–13).

In 1826 the Paččjokk sijdd, too, was divided in half: the western part fell to Norway and the eastern part to the Russian Empire. Most of the Skolt Sami decided to become Russian citizens, because the most important family areas were located east of the border. Initially this sijdd's Skolt Sami were allowed to use their inherited rights to herd reindeer, hunt, and fish in the sijdd's areas that had become part of Norway, but this right was soon withdrawn based on a treaty between the Russian Empire and Norway. In 1920, soon after Finland became independent, Soviet Russia ceded to Finland the province of Petsamo that included three sijdds: the eastern half of Paččjokk, Peäccam, and Suõʹnn'jel as well as small parts of the Mueʹtǩǩ and Njuõttjäuʹrr sijdds. The new border cut off the easternmost parts of Suõʹnn'jel that became part of Soviet Russia (Tanner 1929: 101–102; Linkola & Sammallahti 1995: 50–52; Andresen et al. 2021: 125–126).

It is hard to tell how many Skolt Sami there were during the studied period due to a lack of reliable information. According to Väinö Tanner (1928: 301–314), in 1926 the number of Skolt Sami in Paččjokk, Peäccam, and Suõʹnn'jel was all together 413 persons. This was 22.1% of the whole population of the province of Petsamo. The number of Finnish settlers grew rapidly during the 1920s and 1930s,

and by 1939 only 10.5% of the residents were Skolt Sami (Lehtola 1999: 155). During the late nineteenth century in Njâuddam there lived five Skolt Sami families, which means approximately 30 persons. In 1889, they represented only 11–12% of the population (Rasmussen 2021: 9). In the Russian Empire and in the Soviet Union, the number of representatives of the Sami peoples living in the Kola Peninsula (i.e. the Skolt, Akkala, Kildin, and Ter Sami) were most often given as one joint figure. For this reason, there is only scattered information on the number of Skolt Sami in that region. To give some idea of the figures: in 1914 there were 274 persons in Njuõttjäuʹrr sijdd, which is said to have been the largest of the sijdds, while in the much smaller Mueʹtǩǩ sijdd there were 52 Skolt Sami in 1867 (Tanner 1928: 305–306). We have not been able to find the exact number of residents of Sââʹrvesjäuʹrr, but their number is estimated to have been a few dozen (Rantala & Sergina 2009: 17).

Even though their lands were divided, the Skolt Sami could continue their indigenous way of life, at least in a limited format, until the 1920s in all countries. However, from the late nineteenth century onward, the Skolt Sami had to share their lands with an ever-increasing number of settlers. The Russian Empire began in the 1860s to actively encourage immigration into the Kola Peninsula. Mainly Finns but also some Norwegians seized on this opportunity, especially from the 1870s. Most of the settlers moved to the coast and lived by fishing. They lived year-round in places that were often Skolt Sami sijdds' summer fishing places. This had a negative impact on the economy of the coastal sijdds. The favorable ecological conditions for agriculture by the Tuållâm River (Fi. Tuuloma, Ru. Тулома) and Paččjokk River attracted settlers from their homesteads in Finnish Lapland to the region. The settlers did not acknowledge the rights of the Skolt Sami to land and water (Lehtola 1999: 149; Lokka 1999: 23–27; Lappalainen & Turtola 2019: 23–26, 80–83, 89–91: 235–237). In addition to Finnish and Norwegian fishers and farmers, several North Sami families that lived by large-scale reindeer-herding or fishing moved from Norway and Finland to the coastal sijdds during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see e.g. Leinonen 2009).

In addition to unprompted settlement, people were actively relocated to the Kola Peninsula, especially during the Soviet era. As the

population of all Sami peoples in the Kola Peninsula had been slightly less than 2000 persons since the beginning of the nineteenth century (Tanner 1929: 296–301), the Sami soon became a minority in their own lands. In Table 1 the huge changes in the population of the Murmansk region between 1895 and 2010 can be seen.

Year	Non-Sami residents	Sami residents	Sami residents (%)
1895	8 690	1 940	22.3%
1926	23 006	1 708	7.4%
1939	291 178	1 755	0.6%
1959	567 672	1 687	0.3%
1989	1 146 589	1 615	0.15%
2010	795 409	1 599	0.2%

Table 1. Non-Sami and Sami populations of the Murmansk region between 1895 and 2010 based on Allemann (2020: 117).

In Norway and Finland, the living conditions of the Skolt Sami continued to gradually change, but in the Soviet Union the period between the 1920s and 1960s was turbulent. From 1929 onward, the Skolt Sami were expected to move from their families' lands in order to live year-round in villages and join the multiethnic kolkhozes with e.g. Finns, Karelians, Russians, and Norwegians. The first kolkhozes were, however, typically established somewhere in the old sijdd regions. A reindeer-herding and fishing kolkhoz called Tundra was established in the Mueʹtǩǩ sijdd area and a similar kolkhoz called Vosmus in the Njuõtjäuʹrr sijdd region, where also the more agriculturally oriented kolkhozes Lutto and Nivankylä existed. The Skolt Sami of Sââʹrvesjäuʹrr were united with the Akkala Sami and moved to the Jona kolkhoz situated in the village of Juõnn (Fi. Juonni, Ru. Ёна). In the kolkhozes, Skolt Sami men most often worked as reindeer herders or fishermen, women also in cattle breeding. At the same time, the militarization of the Kola Peninsula and intensive industrial exploitation of all local natural resources began, and this started to replace traditional livelihoods and resource use (Tjernjakov 2006: 48–49; Porsanger 2007: 124; Mustonen & Mustonen 2011: 35, 87–89,

91–92; Kotljarchuk 2012: 72; Afanasyeva 2013: 19–24, 29–30; Sárá & Afanasjeva 2017: 57–59; Lappalainen & Turtola 2019: 91–92).

Even bigger changes came in August 1937 when Stalin's Great Terror started in the Skolt Sami region. During the years 1937 and 1938, most of the educated Sami, such as teachers and community leaders, were killed or sentenced to prison camps where most of them perished. Stalin's Great Terror was targeted mainly at non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union and peoples living in border regions (cf. Martin 1998). The Skolt Sami belonged to both categories and were allegedly spying for Finland and cooperating with the Finns (e.g. Kahla 2020: 84). During this era or soon after, the Skolt Sami were forced to relocate again, now most often away from their sijdd territories to more distant and larger multiethnic central villages in the Murmansk region. These new dwelling places, such as Titovka, Laččjokk (Fi. Läätsi, Läntinen Litsa, Ru. Западная Лица), Tuållâm, and Šongui (Ru. Шонгуй) were situated farther away from the border and, except for Laččjokk, inland. The Tundra kolkhoz was closed permanently, and its residents combined with the members of the Vosmos kolkhoz, which had lost many members due to executions and the forced migrations of the Finns to Karelia and Siberia in 1940 (Rantala 1994: 201; Kiselëv 1999; Lokka 1999: 150–152; Dasjtjinskij 2006; Porsanger 2007: 124; Rantala & Sergina 2009: 27; Mustonen & Mustonen 2011: 91–92; Kotljarchuk 2012; Sárá & Afanasjeva 2017: 35–46; Lappalainen & Turtola 2019: 91, 111, 115, 120–121; Kahla 2020: 83–84).

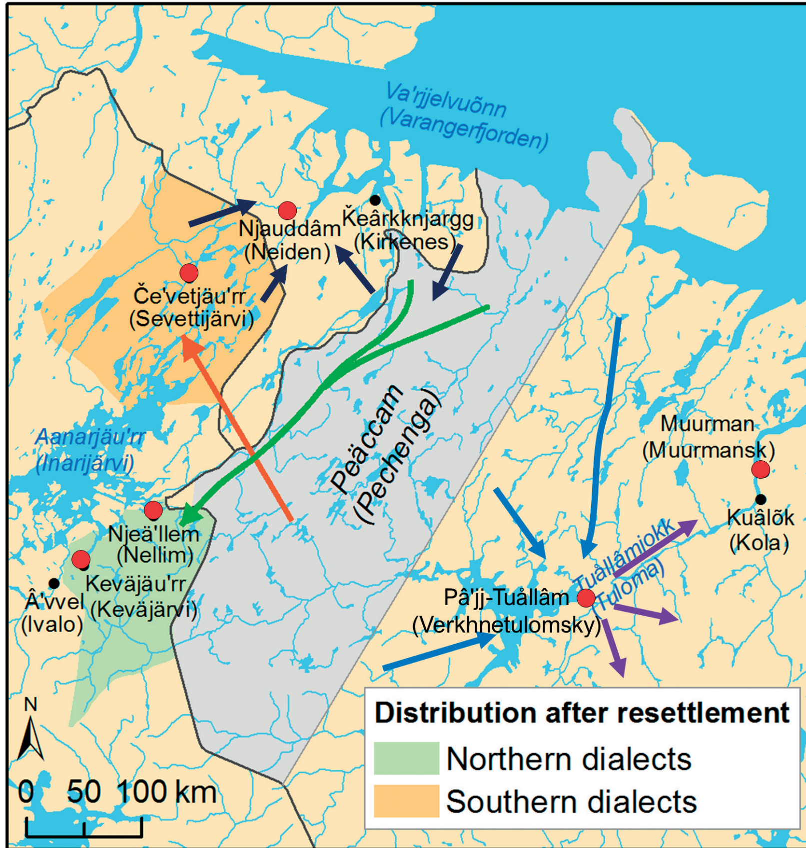
Under the Soviet Union, seventy to eighty percent of the Kola Sami were forced to move at least once, the Skolt Sami typically at least twice, during their lifetime. Before World War II the forced migrations were connected to collectivization and the general ideology of sedentarization. After the war, the most important reason was centralization. During both periods, forced migrations were also a consequence of the construction of hydroelectric plants and reservoirs. For instance, the villages by the Tuållâm River were submerged first in 1934 and on an even larger scale in 1962. More electricity was needed for the growing industry and mining that also demanded more space. By the 1940s the whole western part of Murmansk region was reserved for industrial and resource utilization only and all rural or indigenous economies had been cleared away. The relocation policy was also connected to the militarization of the border regions, especially

near the Barents Sea coast. For instance, Laččjokk was in 1958 turned into a military area and people were forced to move again (Allemann 2013: 83–86; 2020: 117, 121–126; Kotljarchuk 2019: 72–73, 76; Lappalainen & Turtola 2019: 93).

As a result of World War II, the province of Petsamo was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1944. The Skolt Sami living in the province were evacuated, as they collectively decided, to Finland and there they had settled in the northern and eastern parts of the municipality of Aanar in northern Finland by 1952. The residents of the coastal sijdds of the province of Petsamo settled in the villages of U′cc-Peäccam (Fi. Pikku-Petsamo), Keväjäu′rr (Fi. Keväjärvi), and Njeä′llem (Fi. Nellim) in southern and southeastern Aanar. The residents of Suõ′nn’jel sijdd settled in the Če′vetjäu′rr (Fi. Sevettijärvi) region in northern Aanar (Linkola & Linkola 2000: 15–19; Lehtola 2003: 382, 386; Sverloff 2003: 126–136).

During the Soviet era, and especially after World War II, the contacts between the Skolt Sami living in the west, i.e. in Finland and Norway, and in the Soviet Union were minimal. Some Skolt Sami participated in the construction of hydroelectric plants and dams during the 1950s and 1960s in their old family territories in the Soviet Union, but contacts with the local people were not permitted. Moreover, the Skolt Sami that used to live there had been relocated to other regions and not allowed to move back. Only some short formal meetings were arranged from the 1970s onward. After the Soviet era, especially in the 1990s, contacts were reestablished (e.g. ASRB 1976; 1977; Rantala 1994: 203–204; Sverloff 2003: 140–159; Kahla 2020: 238; CSS 2023).

After World War II, the status of Skolt Sami was low in all countries. This resulted in a general decline in the culture and traditional livelihoods. This was further promoted by the general trend of depopulation of remote areas. In Norway and Finland, the migration of young people to more populated regions started in the 1960s and 1970s. In the Soviet Union this trend coincided with perestroika in 1980s and the later dissolution of the USSR in the 1990s. (See e.g. Jefremoff 2005: 55–57, 67–68; Lund 2013; Hallamaa 2020: 153.) Map 2 summarizes how the Skolt Sami have been forced to move from their native lands to new areas and where their current most central places of residence are.



Map 2. The Skolt Sami have been forced to move away from their native lands as described by the arrows in the map. In Russia the forced migrations took place in two main phases in the 1920s and 1930s (blue arrows) and in the 1950s and 1960s (purple arrows). The Skolt Sami that used to live in the province of Petsamo have at present a home region in the northern and eastern parts of Aanar, where the central places are the villages of Če'vetjäu'rr, Njeä'llem, and Â'vvel. In Norway the Skolt Sami of Njauddâm sijdd live in the village of Njauddâm, as well as scattered on the southern coast of Va'rjjelvuõnn. In Russia the Skolt Sami population is even more scattered than in Norway; they live in several multiethnic villages and cities in the Murmansk region and in the Kola Peninsula. The village of Pâ'jj-Tuållâm (Ru. Верхнетуломский) and the city of Murmansk can be given as examples. In all countries a major part of the younger generations have moved to big cities outside the traditional areas of residence. (Original map by Rantanen et al. 2023b, modified by the authors and Ali Ylikoski, see also Rantanen et al. 2021; 2022. CC 4.0.)

4. Language proficiency of the Skolt Sami between the 1850s and 2020s

The language proficiency of the Skolt Sami has varied over time and across regions and genders. The Skolt Sami of the coastal sijdds had the most contact with people who spoke other languages and therefore had more versatile language proficiency. The inland sijdds, on the contrary, were almost monocultural, at least until the twentieth century, due to their remote location.

Norway

Njauddâm sijdd, in the west, was an extremely multilingual and multicultural area. The Skolt Sami knew in addition to their native language also the local variant of North Sami (Sea Sami) as well as Finnish or the Kven language that became the local majority language during the 1860s. Their Russian skills were maintained by contacts with relatives living in the neighboring sijdds in the Russian Empire, due to Pomor trade, and because the Orthodox priest and teacher who visited the village across the border from Russia were Russian. Adult men also knew some Norwegian, a language that they needed during common fishing trips and in connection with trading (Friis 1861; Wikan 1995: 278–280, 282–283; Lund 2013; Juutinen 2019; Rasmussen 2021: 34–35).

From the beginning of the twentieth century the role of the Norwegian language began to grow due to aggressive assimilatory policies of Norwegianization that included monolingual boarding schools and the establishment of Norwegian colonies in the border region. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Skolt Sami first changed their everyday language to Finnish or Kven, then to Norwegian. The effect was intensified by the international politics that ended almost all contact across the border with the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Thus, the Russian skills of the Skolt Sami were gradually lost (Wikan 1995: 280–285; Lund 2013; Rasmussen 2021: 12, 14, 34–35).

After World War II the status of the Skolt Sami language was very poor and children no longer learned it. The last speaker of the Njauddâm dialect of Skolt Sami died in 1981 and the last speaker of the Paččjokk dialect in 2016 (Lund 2013; Rasmussen 2021).

The coastal sijdds

In the coastal sijdds east of Njauddâm, Russian was the most dominant non-native language. In the Paččjokk sijdd, adult Skolt Sami also knew Aanaar and North Sami, Finnish or Kven, and Norwegian (Tanner 1929: 70–82, 199; Vartiainen 1929: 181, 183; Ravila 1931: IV; Juutinen 2023: 38). In the coastal sijdds further to the east, Peäccam and Mue′tǩǩ, Russian was the second language and known by most of the adults. In Peäccam sijdd Russian had a special role because, from 1886, many of the Skolt Sami worked at the reestablished monastery with the Russian monks. In Mue′tǩǩ many Skolt Sami also knew some Finnish due to contacts with settlers (Tanner 1929: 194; Lumisalmi 1980: 115; Kahla 2020: 81–82, 198). When the border separated the two easternmost sijdds in 1920 the situation began to change rapidly in different directions. In Peäccam people started to learn Finnish but maintained their native language and Russian. The Skolt Sami of Mue′tǩǩ sijdd were forced to move away from their traditional homesteads. This led to a process of rapid language change in favor of Russian (Lumisalmi 1980: 115; Kotljarchuk 2019).

The inland sijdds

From the 1850s to 1880s in the inland sijdds most adult male Skolt Sami knew, in addition to their native language, also Russian. Even adult women knew some Russian. (See e.g. Ivaniševa 2016: 9; Lönnrot 2018a: 222, 300; 2018b: 70, 94.) The difference in the language proficiency between men and women was directly related to how much they moved outside the home. Men regularly visited the coast to participate in fishing and to trade and buy goods in the town of Kola and other marketplaces. It was almost solely in the winter village that women had contact with Russian-speaking settlers, travelers, priests, and civil servants. The situation changed radically during the late 1880s, when regular school education started. From that time, also girls and women learned to speak Russian well (Paulaharju 1921: 190–192; Tanner 1929: 198, 204; Nickul 1964: 219; 1970: 57–58).

Only a few families living in the western parts of Suõ′nn’jel sijdd knew some Finnish, a language they had learned through contacts with

the Aanaar Sami and Finnish settlers living by the Paččjokk River. The Njuõttjäu′rr and Sââ′rvesjäu′rr Skolt Sami had contacts with the Finnish and Karelian settlers who started to move into the Kola Peninsula from the 1860s and thus at least some members of these sijdds learned the basics of the languages. Karelian fishermen also traveled regularly through the sijdds from the White Sea to the Barents Sea coast (Paulaharju 1921: 18–22; Muilu 1966: 11–26; Itkonen 1991: 95; Sorokazjerdjev 2006: 39). As the neighboring areal variants of Aanaar Sami, Kildin Sami and Akkala Sami share many features with Skolt Sami, people were able to communicate quite fluently across the sijdd borders with other Sami peoples when needed (ASRB 1977; Jefremoff 2001: 86; Sorokazjerdjev 2006: 39).

After 1920, when the Skolt Sami of Suõ′nn'jel sijdd became Finnish citizens, they started to learn Finnish. Children learned the language at school, adults through contact with the new administrators and shopkeepers. Some adults studied the language actively at home. Initially, the Skolt Sami who knew Finnish acted as interpreters when needed. By World War II the adult generations, especially men, had learned basic Finnish. Only the oldest generations never learned the language. Russian was used with the bilingual Finnish- and Russian-speaking Orthodox priest Yrjö Räme (born Georgi Radolitski) who held services three times a year in the winter village, and sometimes Russian was used just for fun in order to maintain one's language skills (Tanner 1929: 199; Vartiainen 1929: 53, 58, 68, 381, 88–90, 93, 96; Nickul 1948: 23, 57, 78–79; 1970: 60; Lehtola 2012: 278; Kahla 2020: 108, 114). In Njuõttjäu′rr and Sââ′rvesjäu′rr that became part of the Soviet Union, people started to use Russian more than before, as it was the Soviet lingua franca, but they maintained their native language as well.

Post-World War II resettlement areas in Finland

World War II marked a watershed in the status of the Skolt Sami language. After the war, the residents of the coastal sijdds of the province of Petsamo were settled among Finns and Aanaar Sami. This new context, working with members of other ethnic groups, and mixed marriages increased the need to use Finnish and it soon became a daily

language in many families, especially among the younger generations that had learned Finnish already in the old sijdds. This led to rapid language change starting from the first postwar generations. Čeʹvetjäuʹrr region, where the residents of Suõʹnn'jel moved, was a sparsely populated and roadless area where Skolt Sami became a local majority language. The Skolt Sami language was widely used, but Finnish had become much more familiar to the men through military service during the war and to the women during the evacuation to the Finnish-speaking regions. In the 1960s all Skolt Sami, except some elderly individuals, knew Finnish, which was the only language that could be used with authorities and in jobs outside the home village (ASRB 1985; Linkola 1996: 73; Lehtola 1999: 169; Linkola & Linkola 2000: 166; 2012: 392–393; Feodoroff 2017; Hallamaa 2020: 141, 143–157; CSS 2023). In both regions older Skolt Sami kept speaking Russian to maintain their language skills. It also served as a secret language that children could not understand (CSS 2023).

The rapid change and regional differences can be seen in the very comprehensive report based on materials collected in 2002 and 2003 and published in 2005 by Irja Jefremoff. According to the findings of this report, 90% of adult Skolt Sami of the Čeʹvetjäuʹrr region spoke the language and 26% could write it, while 10% did not know the language at all. In the Njeäʹllem region 48% could speak the language, 2% could write it, and 52% did not know the language. Of the Keväjäuʹrr Skolt Sami adults 30% knew the language, 8% could write it, and 72% did not know the language. The Skolt Sami language was mainly used in private language domains: at home, with relatives and other close persons, but only rarely outside the home or at work. Reindeer herding was the only language domain outside the home where Skolt Sami was used daily. More than half of the respondents did not follow any Sami-language media (Jefremoff 2005: 40–43). The report does not distinguish between active and passive language skills, but it is known that passive language skills are much more common than active skills (cf. e.g. Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 15). Thus, even today, it can sometimes be attested that in a conversation one party speaks Skolt Sami while the other answers in Finnish.

Since the generations born in the 1970s, ever fewer children have learned the language at home also in Čeʹvetjäuʹrr region. The situation

quickly turned very bad. Still at the beginning of the 1970s there were children in Čeʹvetjäuʹrr, who did not know Finnish when they started school. However, already at the end of the 1970s many children did not even want to speak Skolt Sami. At the end of the twentieth century the number of Skolt Sami-speaking children was very marginal. In the late 1990s the first language revitalization projects started, such as language nests (for a definition see Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 25–32), but they have progressed slowly. However, at present there is reason for optimism, because many Skolt Sami have learned their native language at an adult age and more and more children are learning the language at home again. The language is also used daily in several public language domains, for instance on the radio and in television news, internet, and social media (ASRB 1977; 1985; CSS 2007; 2023; Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 28, 83–85; Hallamaa 2020: 141–157).

Post-World War II in the Soviet Union

In the Soviet Union, after the brief sunny period of the early 1930s, the status of Skolt Sami plummeted. There is no information on the number of speakers for Skolt Sami only, but the joint figures for all Kola Sami languages reflect the general tendency well. In 1926 97.4% of Kola Sami said that Sami language was their native language. In 1959 the number was 70%, and in 1979 53%. In 2010 only 15.7% of the Sami living in the Murmansk region spoke some Sami language (Ivaniŝeva 2016: 7).

This change has been partly caused by the forced migrations within the region that broke the old language domains and scattered the speakers over a wide area. Partly it is connected to the new inhabitants sent from other parts of the country into the region to new centralized multilingual settlements. In these multiethnic settlements, kolkhozes, and sovkhozes, Russian became the lingua franca that everybody was expected to use. In addition, after World War II, 80% of the children were born and raised in multiethnic families where Russian was the common language. The Skolt Sami language has never had much official space and it has survived until our time only in the most remote small villages and in private language domains. Only reindeer herders and fishermen could use Skolt Sami daily, but the increased use of

local natural resources has meant the end of traditional livelihoods in many areas. At present only a few old people speak Skolt Sami in Russia, and children are not learning the language at home nor in school (Endjukovskij 2006: 55–56; Scheller 2011: 86, 90; Ivaniŝeva 2016: 43–44; Sárá & Afanasjeva 2017: 79, 85; Kotljarchuk 2019: 76–77; Rasmussen 2021: 12–14, 22, 35).

5. Education of the Skolt Sami between the 1850s and 2020s

The history of education of Skolt Sami was initially closely connected with the Orthodox Church and was similar in all the sijdds. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the teaching responsibility shifted to the secular authorities. Since then, the development has been very different across the different countries. Different developments have also led to different results.

Norway

The Skolt Sami who became subjects of Norway after 1827 belonged still officially to the Russian Orthodox church and schooling systems. They should have traveled to Paččjokk to attend school, but because this was impossible for most of the residents, a teacher from the Russian Empire visited them in Njauddâm. However, it is known that some individuals did travel to Paččjokk to attend the Russian school. The visiting teacher was first a monk from the monastery of Kola or later Pechenga and subsequently the Orthodox priest living in Boris Gleb (Fi. Kolttaköngäs) in Paččjokk sijdd. Teaching in Njauddâm was organized approximately twice a year for a week. It mainly included the basic elements of Christian doctrine and was in Russian. This was against the existing Norwegian legislation and official syllabus. It was justified by explaining that to educate Skolt Sami in a Norwegian school would compromise diplomatic relations with the Russian Empire (Lagercrantz 1961:172; Andresen 1989: 101; Wikan 1995: 198, 276, 281–283; Lund 2013).

From 1905 onward the Skolt Sami children were expected to attend a Norwegian school. At that time the political situation was changing, as the Russian Empire had become a potential enemy nation. It was seen as important to integrate all the children of the border regions into the broader Norwegian society. After some resistance from the families, the first two Skolt Sami children started to go to school. Schooling lasted eight years and all teaching was in Norwegian, even though Skolt Sami children did not understand it. Some learned the language during school, some did not. Children who lived far away from the school were expected to remain at the school as boarders during the school year. Speaking Sami was not outright forbidden, but it was not looked upon favorably and some Sami children were bullied due to their origin (Andresen 1989: 99–101, 110–112, 130–131; Wikan 1995: 276, 282–284; Lund 2013).

Although the Skolt Sami could have been, at least according to school authorities, exempted from teaching of the Lutheran religion, they did not apply for this right. As a result, all the Skolt Sami children later attended the Lutheran confirmation "of their own accord". It is true that the region was strongly influenced by the Laestadian Lutheran Christian movement which might have influenced the Skolt Sami families, but the authorities no doubt also exerted pressure against the Orthodox Christian religion because it was so closely associated with Russia. Later, at least some of these children returned to the Orthodox Church (Wikan 1995: 283–284). Since the early 1900s, the Skolt Sami children have gone to school like any ethnically Norwegian children and did not receive any teaching about their culture or language before the twenty-first century (Lund 2013).

The Russian Empire

In the Russian Empire, the Orthodox Church was responsible for organizing the primary education of the Skolt Sami. Many chapels served also as school buildings. Schooling was not obligatory, but the priests tried to make sure that children went to school. It is estimated that 30–35% of children went to school between 1888 and 1914. Although the teachers were often priests or monks, the syllabus was mostly secular and included reading, writing, and arithmetic. School

lasted three or four months a year over three to five years, depending on the learning results. Teaching was only in Russian, but at the end of the nineteenth century, there were some attempts to develop teaching also in Skolt Sami, e.g. some schoolbooks and liturgical texts were translated. Schooling was organized in periods when most of the residents of a sijdd gathered in a certain place, typically the winter village or the summer fishing place (Tanner 1929: 108–109, 140–141, 167, 198; Itkonen 1948: I, 85; Alymov 2006: 23; Allemann 2013: 35; Lund 2013; see also Juutinen 2017).

Chapel-schools were organized in Paččjokk sijdd’s winter village Koolâsjokksijdd and later in the new winter village Čueʹnjokksijdd, in Suõʹnn’jel sijdd’s winter village Potkklasijdd, and in Njuõttjäuʹrr sijdd’s salmon-fishing place Ǩeeuʹŋes (Fi. Patuna, Ru. Падун). These schools started operating in 1888 in Paččjokk and Suõʹnn’jel, and in 1889 in Njuõttjäuʹrr. In Suõʹnn’jel sijdd the priest was not responsible for teaching, but rather teaching was conducted by a qualified teacher from Kola, Archangel, or even Saint Petersburg. The teaching is said to have been of highest quality (Granö & Itkonen 1918: 74; Tanner 1929: 108–109, 140–141, 167, 198–199; Vartiainen 1929: 181; Alymov 2006: 23). In the Peäccam sijdd the teaching was conducted at the monastery from 1886 onward when the monastery was rebuilt. The monastery also offered supplementary education in reading and writing as well as general enlightening education to its lay workers. The teaching was in Russian (Tanner 1929: 167; Rahkola 1999: 373; Kahla 2020: 51–52).

The province of Petsamo 1920–1944

After the new border was drawn in 1920, it took several years for the Finnish authorities to organize the education of the Skolt Sami children, even though it had taken only a month to launch the first schools for Finnish children. The only school that was meant for the Skolt Sami children was built in the new winter village of Suõʹnn’jel sijdd. The school started during the late winter of 1928 and was first organized as an ambulatory school: the teacher spent the four winter months in Suõʹnn’jel sijdd and spring and early autumn in Boris Gleb in Paččjokk sijdd, and according to the plan the teacher should

have continued to Peäccam sijdd during late autumn. The last stop was erased from the plan before it was realized, because the Finnish authorities saw that in the border area it was necessary to organize primary education that had a stronger acculturating effect. This decision was connected also to the existence of the Orthodox monastery that was seen as spreading Russian influence, even though the monastery had withdrawn from teaching activities after 1920 (Tanner 1929: 167; Vartiainen 1929; Nickul 1948: 54, 57–59; Lehtola 1999: 157; 2012: 278; Rahkola 1999: 373, 388; Nyyssönen 2014: 69).

In 1932 the Suõʹnn'jel school was officially changed to a primary school that ran for the entire school year. The teaching followed a shortened common Finnish syllabus and lasted six years. Since then, there was school for small children from August to Christmas and for older children during the spring semester until June. When families lived in autumn and spring places, children stayed at the boarding house by the school. The boarding house was run by either a local Skolt Sami or an outsider Finn. Teaching was conducted in Finnish by a Finnish teacher even though, according to the law, children's own native language should have been used in addition. The language used was decided by the Skolt Sami themselves (Vartiainen 1929; Nickul 1948: 57–59; Lehtola 1999: 157; 2012: 278; Nyyssönen 2014: 69).

In Peäccam sijdd children were expected to go to the boarding school in Parkkina already from 1928 onward. The children of Paččjokk sijdd were transferred to the Salmijärvi boarding school in 1932 when the ambulatory school system ended. These schools were meant for children from all ethnic groups, but in practice the teaching was planned with the Finnish children in mind. The pedagogical ideology was strongly assimilative and nationalistic and very anti-Russian. Children were punished for speaking Skolt Sami. The Skolt Sami of the coastal sijdds were seen as culturally weakened and mixed. According to Finnish authorities, their destiny was to become assimilated into the Finns. Going to school was difficult for practical reasons, as the journeys were long. There was too little space in the boarding houses and Sami children's needs were considered secondary in relation to the needs of Finnish children. Due to this it is roughly estimated that in the coastal sijdds, less than half of the Skolt Sami children went to school. Girls did not get to go to school as often as the boys

(Vartiainen 1929: 182; Pelto 1962: 114; Lehtola 1999: 157; Rahkola 1999: 381, 384–385, 387–390, 393; CSS 2017).

The Soviet Union and Russian Federation

The educational history of the Soviet Union has not been adequately studied from a Skolt Sami perspective, and often only a general description of developments in the Murmansk region can be given. The organizing of teaching in the newly established Soviet Union took some time due to the general turbulence in the country. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the authorities' attitudes toward ethnic and linguistic minorities and their education were positive, and the promotion of their languages was seen as important. A short-lived common Kola Sami orthography based on the Latin alphabet was created and used in new Sami schoolbooks and other informational texts (for a detailed description see e.g. Ivaniŝeva 2016). From 1925 several Sami individuals studied at the highest level at the Institute for Peoples of the North in Leningrad. At least two of them were Skolt Sami: Nikon Gerasimov and Ivan (Evvan) Osipov. A Sami department was founded at the Murmansk Pedagogical College in 1931, and Osipov worked there as a teacher of Sami language. However, the administration's positive support was short-lived and ended suddenly in 1938. Gerasimov fell victim to Stalin's Great Terror and Osipov, who also was interrogated by the security police in 1938, died in 1939 in World War II (Alymov 2006: 24–26; Dasjtjinskij 2006: 69–70, 73; Endjukovskij 2006: 58; Sorokazjerdjev 2006: 30–32; Tjernjakov 2006: 45–46; Sárá & Afanasjeva 2017: 51–53; Kotljarchuk 2019: 64–72).

At the beginning of the Soviet era, as during the Russian Empire, school lasted the four to five months that the families spent in the winter village. In the late 1920s and early 1930s the first boarding schools were built, which made it possible to organize entire semesters. In 1931 Skolt Sami children in the Soviet Union were mainly taught in the boarding schools of Njuõttjäu′rr and Ä′ǩǩel (Fi. Akkala, Ru. Бабинск), of which the latter hosted Sââ′rvesjäu′rr sijdd's Skolt Sami, Akkala Sami, and local Finns. Between 1934 and 1937 teaching was solely in Sami at the school in Njuõttjäu′rr and half in Sami and half in Russian in Ä′ǩǩel. There were also some Skolt Sami children

at least in the multiethnic school of Titovka and in Finnish schools of Laččjokk and Tuållâm. Their parents worked and lived in the nearby kolkhozes. In these schools teaching was in Russian or in Finnish, but there were plans for a separate Sami syllabus and classes. These schools lasted four years, and after that it was possible to continue to a seven-year secondary school in Murmansk or in Polarnyj. Secondary schooling was in Russian (CSS 1993; Lokka 1999: 74, 139; Alymov 2006: 24; Endjukovskij 2006: 58–59; Sorokazjerdjev 2006: 30–31; Tjernjakov 2006: 45, 47–48; Kotljarchuk 2019: 70).

When Stalin's Great Terror began in 1937, all teaching in the Sami languages ended and all schools were expected to now follow the same general Soviet syllabus. The Sami schoolbooks were confiscated and destroyed. From that time on, teaching was conducted only in Russian. The teachers who were sent to the remote area's schools were often young, newly graduated teachers who were not familiar with Sami cultures. At least during the 1970s, some teachers campaigned actively against the use of Sami languages at home as well. In the late 1970s and during the 1980s, a Sami language revitalization project was initiated, but it was focused on the Kildin Sami language only. However, a Skolt Sami living in Lujäuʹrr (Ru. Ловозеро) participated in the project, and some Skolt Sami texts were published using the new Cyrillic Kildin Sami orthography of 1982. Skolt Sami has not been taught in schools in the Soviet Union or Russian Federation since the 1930s, but language courses have been organized irregularly by volunteers since the beginning of the twenty-first century (Rantala 1994: 202; Sárá & Afanasjeva 2017: 79–81, 85; Kotljarchuk 2019: 73–75, 77; Oktavuohta 2023).

Post-World War II resettlement areas in Finland

After World War II and the relocation period, the Skolt Sami of Suõʹnn'jel sijdd moved to Čeʹvetjäuʹrr, where in 1949 a school and in 1950 a boarding house were built. The children who lived far away stayed in the boarding house during school semesters. Children were expected to use Finnish in school and boarding houses until the 1970s, since the teachers and other adults did not know Skolt Sami. Sometimes children were punished for using the language by being made

to do additional household chores or by isolating them, but physical violence was also used. In the 1970s the situation changed. This has been interpreted by the Skolt Sami to be a consequence of some of the teachers marrying Skolt Sami and learning the language and culture. In 1972 the teaching of Skolt Sami began in the Če′vetjäu′rr school as an unofficial experiment. As the results were good, the teaching started officially in 1973, and in 1981 it became a permanent part of the school's syllabus. Between 1986 and 1990 the teaching was discontinued due to lack of a competent teacher, but since then it has been taught continuously. Some subjects have also been taught in Skolt Sami from time to time (ASRB 1985; Kelemeny 2023; Linkola & Linkola 2000: 166; Lehtola 2003: 386, 441, 466; Moshnikoff, Sa. 2014: 271; Nyyssönen 2014: 79; CSS 2017; 2023; Hallamaa 2020: 140).

Since the late 1940s, the children of the relocated Paččjokk and Peäccam sijdds participated in teaching at the multiethnic schools of Njeä′llem and Akujäu′rr (Fi. Akujärvi). The Skolt Sami children used during the 1950s the Sami language with the Aanaar Sami children, but later only Finnish because the teachers forbade the use of Sami languages, and because other ethnic groups were more numerous than the Skolt Sami. At first, all the teaching was in Finnish, but since the 1980s, the Skolt Sami language was taught in Njeä′llem and Akujäu′rr. Both schools were closed at the beginning of the twenty-first century due to the small number of children. Since then, the language has been taught in the school and high school in Â′vvel (Fi. Ivalo) when needed. Since the 2000s there has been online teaching only (ASRB 1985; Linkola 1996: 73; Moshnikoff, Sa. 2014: 271; Paksuniemi & Keskitalo 2014: 274; CSS 2023).

Since the early 1970s, after the introduction of the new extended elementary school system, the Skolt Sami children were forced to continue their studies from the age of 12 or 13 in the new secondary schools located far away: in Aanar, 115 km away from Če′vetjäu′rr, or in Â′vvel, 40 km away from Njeä′llem. The secondary schools of Aanar and Â′vvel were multiethnic boarding schools where all the Sami preferred to speak Finnish because they were afraid of bullying. However, Sami languages were sometimes used in private contexts. Until the twenty-first century, racist bullying was common in

schools where Skolt Sami were a minority. The bullies were not only ethnic Finns; other Sami groups had negative attitudes towards the Skolt Sami as well. The Skolt Sami language was taught as a separate discipline also in the Aanar secondary school for some years during the 1970s, but there were no ready-made teaching materials. Since the year 1990 the Če′vetjäu′rr school has been allowed to organize the whole elementary school. This meant the end of boarding schools and a culturally safer context for the local Skolt Sami children (ASRB 1976; Semenoja 1995: 84; Moshnikoff, Sa. 2014: 271).

High-school education and other possibilities for further education, starting at the age of 16–17, have been and are still organized only in Â′vvel, 150 km from Če′vetjäu′rr, or even farther away. The only local educational institution has been the Sami Christian Folk High School (Fi. Saamelaisten kristillinen kansanopisto) in Aanar that was founded in 1953. Back then, it organized some vocational and preparatory high-school courses that were intended mainly for the Sami population. The institution changed into an ideologically uncommitted folk high school in 1978 and in 1993 into a vocational college called the Sámi Education Institute (Fi. Saamelaisalueen koulutuskeskus). Since 2012, the institute has been providing a yearlong, full-time Skolt Sami intensive course. These courses have provided an opportunity to learn the language or to revitalize the lost or weakened language skills within one's family. This is important because in 2002–2003, only 21% of the Skolt Sami had been taught Skolt Sami at the elementary school (Jefremoff 2005: 42). Dozens of new Skolt Sami speakers have learned their language through these courses, and some have also started to use it as their home language. In addition, many shorter courses, especially online courses, have been organized by several actors.

The status of Skolt Sami as a language of education has slowly risen. This development has had positive feedback on the status of the language in general. It has been possible to complete the national matriculation exam in Skolt Sami since 2005, even though there are still serious difficulties in organizing high-school education. Since 2015, the University of Oulu has provided for Skolt Sami language studies at the university level all the way to a master's degree. It is the only university where Skolt Sami can be studied as a major. The studies are

designed to fulfill the needs of the speech community, e.g. by training much needed teachers and language professionals. An important part of this is also the fact that the teaching is mainly organized remotely, so that the students can at the same time work in their expert positions in the Skolt Sami communities (Jomppanen 2019; 2023). In addition, Skolt Sami courses that are mainly intended for linguists are irregularly organized at the universities of Helsinki and Turku.

The lack of teaching materials and qualified teachers has been a severe problem throughout the decades and at all levels of education. This has meant that many of the teachers have been unqualified, and lately often also language revitalizers who have learned the language as adults (Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 28–29). At present, online teaching is used to teach Skolt Sami to children who cannot study the language in their own school, as well as to university students who study and work at the same time.

6. Language attitudes in Skolt Sami communities

The language attitudes of all the studied Skolt Sami communities have changed dramatically during the time period studied. At the beginning, during the nineteenth century, when national language policies had little impact on local life, Skolt Sami was without question the most important language in all the sijdds and the most natural means of communication between community members. At the same time, most of the adults knew at least one other language in addition to their native language. In the coastal sijdds it was common to know up to four languages. However, multilingualism followed practical needs: people learned only those languages that they needed in everyday life. In all Skolt Sami communities, extensive language skills were seen as a positive quality that helped to cope with life in a multiethnic area. Multilingualism can be interpreted as being a choice that the speech communities made and maintained for their own good (e.g. Nickul 1948: 79; Lehtola 2012: 277–278).

There is contradictory information about the attitudes towards school education during the nineteenth century and early twentieth

century. Alymov (2006: 23) wrote in 1932 that the Skolt Sami did not value school education, while Tanner (1929: 214, later also e.g. Nickul 1948: 79) writes that the Skolt Sami were eager to develop themselves and learn more. It is possible that the attitudes differed between the sijdds, but these statements might also project the different positions of the writers: Alymov represented the new Soviet authorities that saw the small northern peoples as underdeveloped (see e.g. Kuoljok 1985: 50–51, 154), while Tanner and Nickul were outsider geographers that might have compared the situation with that in Finland. Regional differences would seem to be the more plausible explanation for the following statistics: the literacy of the Kola Sami in general was in 1926 only 16.5% of Sami over the age of 8 (Alymov 2006: 23), but of the Suõʹnn'jel sijdd's Skolt Sami who went to Russian schools before 1920, 55% of men and 21% of women knew how to write (in addition to reading). Most of these Skolt Sami of the Suõʹnn'jel sijdd had also independently learned to write Finnish by 1938 (Nickul 1948: 23, 78–79). It is also good to keep in mind that during this period, Skolt Sami rarely had the means and opportunity for further education, even if they were talented. The obstacles were often connected to their livelihoods and way of life. (See e.g. Jouste et al. 2022: 99.)

During the first half of the twentieth century, language attitudes started to change at different times in different regions, but for the same reasons: the majority cultures and national authorities adopted a strong nationalistic stance that did not tolerate minority languages and cultures or even considered them as a threat. Another recurring phenomenon has been bullying based on ethnic background by other children or even adults at schools. Such attitudes from a child's peer group have a poisonous effect on language learning, language attitudes, and cultural self-esteem (see Caldas 2012; 356–357, 363).

We have little direct evidence and only incomplete circumstantial or general evidence for the changes in the language attitudes of the Skolt Sami in Norway and the Soviet Union. Often, we can only describe the changes in the context of the majority culture's language attitudes or policies which we think influenced the Skolt Samis' language attitudes. In Finland we have been able to collect fairly continuous material from the early twentieth century onward, but individual Skolt Sami voices are more prominent since the 1970s onward.

Norway

The turmoil of language attitudes started first in Norway, where at the turn of the twentieth century the close contacts of the Njâuddam Skolt Sami with neighboring Russia were considered problematic. The same suspicion was directed at the Finnish-speaking minority, the Kvens. The Norwegian authorities' solution was to settle ethnic Norwegians in the border regions and beginning Norwegianization, an active project of assimilation that was carried out in all possible sections of society. One of the main aims of Norwegianization was to create a monolingual Norwegian society. This aim was achieved by forcing the children to speak Norwegian at boarding schools, by racist legislation that forced people to adopt Norwegian ethnicity, and by creating an atmosphere of cultural intolerance and nationalism. This led to ethnically motivated bullying. All this and the disconnection with the Russian and later with the Finnish Skolt Sami communities created a very fast spiral of lowered cultural self-esteem and language change. This was accelerated further by multiethnic marriages and total loss of Skolt Sami language domains. To become, at least publicly, monolingual Norwegian was also a way to conceal an ethnic background that carried a negative load and hindered, for instance, employment (Wikan 1995: 280–285; Lund 2013; Rasmussen 2021: 12, 14, 34–35).

The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union

Under the Russian Empire the authorities exerted a soft, passive pressure towards Russification. The Skolt Sami were allowed to use their own language, and even some efforts, albeit mostly symbolic, were made to provide schoolbooks and some short Christian religious texts in Skolt Sami. The situation changed after the Revolution and the turbulence of the early 1920s. The new Soviet state was a strong supporter of ethnic minorities and indigenous languages. However, the active measures that were taken were based on an outsider understanding of what needed to be changed. As a result, the school syllabus changed, teaching in the Skolt Sami teaching started, and the first Skolt Sami received higher education and official roles in the new Soviet nation. A new common Kola Sami orthography was created, which meant that

Skolt Sami became a written and printed language. All this meant that several new language domains were created. This boosted the cultural and linguistic self-esteem of the Skolt Sami. However, collectivization also sparked inner tensions within Skolt Sami speech communities. For instance, the smaller areal variants of Skolt Sami, such as the Mueʹtǩǩ dialect, became silenced due to the negative attitudes held by speakers of the more widely spoken variants (CSS 1993). (See Allemann 2013: 35; 2020: 121; Kotljarchuk 2019: 77–78).

All this positive impetus melted away between 1937 and 1938, as almost all the educated and active Skolt Sami were executed in Stalin's Great Terror and all newly created language domains, and even some old ones, were actively destroyed. This also marked the beginning of a policy of active assimilation that lasted until the 1980s. People were scared, and if possible, they tried to hide that they were Sami. In the new multiethnic villages Russian was the lingua franca and the value of multilingualism started to dwindle fast. The Skolt Sami language was used only at home, and mostly only in rural communities. As higher education and good jobs required a good knowledge of Russian, the younger Sami did not see any value in their native language. Sami children were also bullied at school and, even though the language was not officially forbidden, some teachers told them not to use Sami. The peer-group influence in multiethnic boarding schools was strong and negative. Only some speakers survived through this period of assimilation, but they were unable to pass the language on to their children (Kotljarchuk 2012: 69–73; 2019: 77–78; Allemann 2013: 105–110; 2020: 172–173).

Finland: The province of Petsamo (1920–1944) and post-World War II resettlement areas

Finland's official language policies started to influence the Skolt Sami immediately after the 1920 ceding happened. Finland had gained independence in 1917, and after the civil war of 1918, the political atmosphere was strongly nationalistic and right-wing, including strong anti-communist, anti-Russian, and Social Darwinist ideologies. As a result, the authorities' attitude towards Skolt Sami was condescending, and only a few were interested in knowing what the Skolt Sami

wanted. The most important goal was to make sure that the Skolt Sami were loyal to Finland. The Skolt Sami were seen by authorities as belonging to two categories: the coastal, culturally “mixed” Skolt Sami, on the one hand, and the Suõʹnn’jel Skolt Sami that represented old “authentic” Skolt Sami culture, on the other. The former was, in their opinion, condemned to assimilation into the Finnish ethnicity, because they had already had a lot of contacts with outsiders before. The latter needed to be protected against “corrupting” outside influences. This meant that the Skolt Sami in the coastal sijdds did not receive any kind of positive special treatment but were left to survive on the crumbs that Finland deigned to give them, at the same time as their lands and natural resources were confiscated. Suõʹnn’jel sijdd, on the other hand, was treated as an open-air museum and no modernization of it was permitted (Vartiainen 1929: 181; Rahkola 1999: 389–390, 393, 398; Lehtola 2012: 277–279).

In the Peäccam sijdd the Skolt Sami had lived in close contact with the Orthodox monks that were mainly Russian. This raised suspicions in Finnish authorities’ minds. Peäccam sijdd’s Skolt Sami can be seen to have applied passive resistance against these prejudices. They continued to speak Russian, also with each other and with the local Karelians, and actively participated in the activities of the monastery. Finnish was said to be too difficult to learn (Lumisalmi 1980: 113–116; CSS 2017). For the Skolt Sami of Paččjokk sijdd, the change was smaller since they had become acquainted with Finnish language and culture already from the late nineteenth century.

In 1931 the building of a road from Âʹvvel to the coast of the Arctic Ocean was completed. This meant that the number of Finnish tourists in the Peäccam and Paččjokk sijdds rose (see e.g. Hirvelä 1999), the process of industrialization started (see e.g. Taskila 1999), but also opportunities to obtain work outside the home improved significantly. As at the same time it became harder and harder to practice the traditional livelihoods, paid work outside the home was the only solution for many families. This brought both sijdds closer to Finnish society and forced working-age people to learn Finnish (Lehtola 1999: 151, 153). This reduced the minority language domains even further. However, the adult Skolt Sami of the Peäccam and Paččjokk sijdds

mostly maintained a positive cultural self-image and the language was passed on to the next generations like before.

The Skolt Sami of Suõʹnn'jel sijdd were more concerned that they would not be able to communicate successfully with the Finnish-speaking authorities than that their own language would be threatened. Because of this, the elders of the sijdd were unanimous that school teaching should be in Finnish, so that their children would learn the language and get along easily with the authorities. However, the Finnish authorities had conflicting views on the implementation of education. Some were worried that the Finnish syllabus would prevent the Skolt Sami children from learning the skills that were needed to survive in the arctic natural environment. Some, on the other hand, saw it as more important to plant in the minds of the Skolt Sami the basic Finnish values, norms, and customs. The willingness of the Skolt Sami to learn Finnish was used to support the latter ideology (Lehtola 1999: 157; 2012: 277–279). On the other hand, the overprotective isolating attitudes toward the Sami of Suõʹnn'jel sijdd as well as its remote location probably did delay the beginning of language change.

While the Skolt Sami of Suõʹnn'jel sijdd received all positive attention, the Finnish schools did their best to alienate the coastal sijdd's Skolt Sami children from their language and culture by xenophobic bullying, ridiculing, and demeaning. The rapid language change of the Skolt Sami of the Peäccam and Paččjokk sijdds after World War II tells that the Finnish school system and changing contexts began to influence the language attitudes of the youngest generations already during the 1920s and 1930s. There is no documentation that indicates that the Skolt Sami parents would have demanded teaching in their own language or in Russian (Johannes 1980: 15; Rahkola 1999: 389–390, 393, 398). We do not know whether this was an expression of willingness to learn Finnish or whether the Skolt Sami even considered opposing the authorities to be a real possibility. There are some documented examples (e.g. Kahla 2020: 84) of situations in which the Skolt Sami had decided to obey the authorities even though they disagreed on the matter. According to their experience, it just was easier that way.

The most important triggering factor for language change was World War II and relocation to Aanar, which shook the foundations of the entire culture. The period from 1940 to 1960 was very turbulent

and traumatic for all Skolt Sami: young men died in the war, everything familiar was lost forever and the new regions, neighbors, and administration were unknown and even hostile or xenophobic. The socioeconomic situation was extremely challenging, and the new scattered settlement pattern and boarding schools broke many former social networks. Under such hard conditions, one's own language and culture seemed less important than day-to-day survival. This period has been described by many as a period of general depression and lack of prospects (Holsti 1990: 47–48). In southern Aanar, the situation was further complicated by multilingual contexts and an almost total lack of language domains outside the home. In northern Aanar, the speech community was scattered over a wide area, but at least speakers' closest relatives often lived in the nearby areas. As almost all households possessed reindeer, reindeer husbandry also provided an important language domain. The Če′vetjäu′rr Orthodox chapel (later church) was one meeting place where the Skolt Sami language could be used (see e.g. Kosner 2016).

During the 1970s, endorsed by the rise of the international indigenous movement in the Nordic countries, a revival of the Skolt Sami language and culture began, and many new language domains were born. Almost forgotten traditions, such as music and dance, were revitalized. Linguists started to actively document and study the language, and an orthography based on the Latin alphabet was created. Consequently, e.g. schoolbooks and translations of Christian texts were published, and liturgical texts translated (for a detailed analysis of the role of the Orthodox Church, see Kosner 2023). A short-lived Skolt Sami magazine with the title *Sää'mođđâz* began to appear. Teaching of Skolt Sami at school began. The Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle started to provide a weekly program in Skolt Sami. (See e.g. Petsalo 1980.) This positive development also inspired some Skolt Sami of the Njâuddam sijdd in Norway to openly identify as Skolt Sami and Orthodox again.

During the 1970s, the process of creating a new orthography caused tensions in the speech community. The orthography created by outsider linguists met with some resistance, and another orthography (see e.g. Sverloff 1989) was created individually by the Skolt Sami trustee Matti Sverloff, who thought that the linguists' orthography

was too complicated. The proposed orthographies were based on the Čeʹvetjäuʹrr (former Suõʹnn’jel) dialect, and because of this, speakers of the Njeäʹllem-Keväjäuʹrr (former Paččjokk and Peäccam) dialect criticized it strongly. This led to discussions about the limits of correct language. The linguists’ more systematic orthography proved ultimately the most popular, but many resources had been wasted and many prolonged intra-group conflicts arose during this process (ASRB 1976; 1984).

At the same time as several middle-aged or older Skolt Sami were inspired to work for their language, the language attitudes of the young Skolt Sami took a completely opposite turn. At the beginning of the 1970s there were children in Čeʹvetjäuʹrr who did not know Finnish when they first went to school, and most of the families used only Skolt Sami at home. Suddenly, in the middle of the 1970s, Finnish became almost the only language spoken to Skolt Sami children (Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 28). Several parents also decided to forbid their children from participating in Skolt Sami lessons. The reasons for this sudden change are not well known, but one possibility is that the local counseling authorities started to spread false information that children could only learn one language at a time, and that studying Skolt Sami could hinder them from learning Finnish (see e.g. Skutnabb Kangas 1996 and for a similar case with Kildin Sami, Allemann 2020: 173). At least the themes of bilingualism and bilingual school were actively discussed during the late 1970s and 1980s. The old fear of not surviving in Finnish-speaking society raised its head. There were even more radical opinions according to which the language was no longer needed (ASRB 1977).

Many negative language attitudes had roots in the difficult decades after the war. The teenagers of the 1970s were the children of those Skolt Sami who were kids during the worst period of assimilation and depression straight after the war. They were very critical towards Skolt Sami and did not want to speak it, even though they had learned the language at home. In a Skolt Sami-language radio interview they said that the language was useless, since it was not used outside Čeʹvetjäuʹrr, and to study it in school meant extra lessons that could have been used to study “more important languages”. To write Skolt Sami was also felt to be difficult (ASRB 1977; CSS 2007; 2023;

cf. also Hallamaa 2020: 148–149). Most of these young Skolt Sami did not teach their native language to their children. It was reported later that one of the main reasons why this generation did not use Skolt Sami with their children, was to prevent their children from being bullied at school (Semenoja 1995: 84). None of the interviewed teenagers mentioned this. It was probably too painful and shameful a thing to be mentioned. The poisonous attitudes of negative peer groups in the multiethnic schools and boarding schools had left their mark. At the same time, as in the Soviet Union, young people were aware of the low status of their native language: it could not be used in higher education, nor did it enable good job opportunities. (See Caldas 2012.)

Some of the elders were worried when they noted that the young had forgotten the language or did not want to use it and did not teach it to their children. However, elders also criticized youngsters' language: it was not as correct and good as back in Petsamo (CSS 1975). This insider criticism within the speech community discouraged many young Skolt Sami who had passive language skills (cf. Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 15–18). From the late 1970s to the 1990s, many Skolt Sami used only Sami with older persons and at the same time only Finnish with the younger persons who never had learned Skolt Sami (ASRB 1979). This description follows the classical model of rapid language change, over just one to two generations.

At the beginning of the 1990s, language attitudes were again changing and the need to stop the negative spiral of language loss was understood. This coincides with a period of positive development in the status of the Sami in Finland, something that was also reflected in legislation. For example, in 1992 the first Sami Language Act took effect and in 1995 the Act on the Sami Parliament. This change is attested by the survey of 2002–2003: 95% of the Skolt Sami were proud of their origins and knowledge of Skolt Sami culture and history was actively passed on to younger generations (Jefremoff 2005: 44–46).

The first concrete step taken to reverse language shift was to establish a Skolt Sami language nest in Če′vetjäu′rr in 1993. This language nest, the first in Finland, lasted only 6 months due to lack of funding. In 1997, the Če′vetjäu′rr language nest reopened, but it was suspended in 2001 because there were too few children. In 2008 a new language nest was founded in Â′vvel, and in 2010 again in Če′vetjäu′rr.

The nests have been open ever since, and at present the municipality of Aanar is the organizer responsible for them (Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 28–29, 93–94; Laihi 2017: 8).

Today the language nest of Â′vvel is full to the max, but there has always been a shortage of either children or employees at the Če′vetjäu′rr language nest. In the beginning, the children of the language nests did not use Skolt Sami at home, but during the twenty-first century several families have started to use the language at home as well. The members of these extended families are the most important language revitalizers in the Skolt Sami speech communities. An example of the wider social influence of the language nests, is the clearly favorable effect on Skolt Sami school education (Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 28–29; Laihi 2017: 8; CSS 2023).

Even though there are no exact numbers, it is well known that the new speakers, who have learned the language at language courses, make up a significant percentage of the Skolt Sami speech community of today. The native speakers think in general that it is important that young Skolt Sami and people outside the Skolt Sami community learn the language and culture, but the situation remains complicated. Many native speakers refuse to speak Skolt Sami with the new speakers, because the latter speak in a different way that is harder to understand than the language that they are used to hearing in their speech community. For instance, new speakers tend to use neologisms that are unfamiliar to the native speakers. Because of this, they often prefer using Finnish with them. Some native speakers also find it difficult to start to speak Skolt Sami with the new speakers if they are used to speaking Finnish with them. The new speakers, on the other hand, are afraid of the criticism that they might draw from native speakers. Only a few harsh comments from an elder might be enough to silence a new speaker, especially an ethnic Skolt Sami. This is connected to the intergenerational trauma of language loss and its historical context, the fragile sociocultural situation, and general ethnostress. To take back one’s lost native language is an emotionally loaded process (CSS 2017; 2023; Fofonoff 2023; Jomppanen 2023; cf. Aikio-Puoskari 2016: 15–18).

7. Conclusions

Since the 1850s the Skolt Sami speech communities have changed from strong cultural and linguistic groups to endangered minorities, forced to move away from the territories that they have claimed as theirs from time immemorial. Initially the situation in all Skolt Sami speech communities was quite similar: they were part of the school system of the Russian Empire and maintained stable controlled multilingualism. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Norway, the state's nationalist policy of Norwegianization changed the situation and this led to the collapse of the language situation in half a century.

In 1920, most of the members of the Skolt Sami speech communities became Finnish subjects living in Petsamo province. A smaller portion of them became Soviet citizens. In Finland, there was first an ambulatory school, later a boarding school, both following the nationalistically flavored Finnish syllabus. In the Soviet Union, collectivization led to a radical change in lifestyle, but at the same time the status of the language and the level of education temporarily rose. In the late 1930s, when Stalin's Great Terror began, an assimilation policy was introduced. In addition, most of the Skolt Sami had to move again, now often away from their own lands and to even larger multiethnic villages than before. This led to a rapid collapse of the language situation. After World War II the Skolt Sami of the Petsamo province were evacuated to Finland, where they were exposed to strong assimilation in boarding schools and their social status was poor. Because of this, young people sought to hide their origin and no longer wished to use their native language. However, the ever-decreasing chain of language speakers managed to stay unbroken until the 1990s, when active language revitalization began.

Each of these histories includes forced assimilation that was based on more or less public nationalistic ideology and political suspicion, even paranoia, against peoples living in the border region. As Terry Martin (1998) and Yuri Slezkine (1994) have analyzed, even in the Soviet Union the minority policy was based on the opposition between the Russian ethnos and the others, i.e. on true nationalism. Each of these histories also include xenophobia and cruel degradation of human dignity, including genocide. Even during the brief positive

periods, the motive for supporting the Skolt Sami language and culture was to serve the executor's own interest, e.g. to spread Christianity or Communist ideology. Each of these histories include also in one way or another forced migration. In the list by Fishman (1991: 55–65) of the most important background factors leading to language change, physical, demographic, social, and cultural dislocation are mentioned. All these dislocations have happened to all the Skolt Sami speech communities in all the countries in which they have lived. The most important changes in the sociolinguistic situation and the most important dislocation points of the Skolt Sami people between the 1850s and the 2020s are summarized in Figure 1.

However, the Skolt Sami have not disappeared nor is their language lost. In two countries out of the three, Norway and Finland, active measures have been taken by the Skolt Sami to revitalize their own language. In Norway, after almost a century of nationally led assimilation, the Norwegian government is finally acknowledging its responsibility for past actions and has started to support the Skolt Sami community. There has also been a change in the activities and attitudes of the Sami Parliament that has long neglected the work with other Sami languages than North Sami. The state-funded Skolt Sami museum and cultural center Ä′vv opened its doors in 2017, and a comprehensive survey of the current situation of the language and culture has been carried out (Rasmussen 2021). The teaching of Skolt Sami is being planned, and for the first time ever, the language has been used in official public contexts, such as on signposts. The Skolt Sami community of Norway has also founded a common society named Norrõs ('General Meeting of the Sijdd'). The community is rediscovering itself.

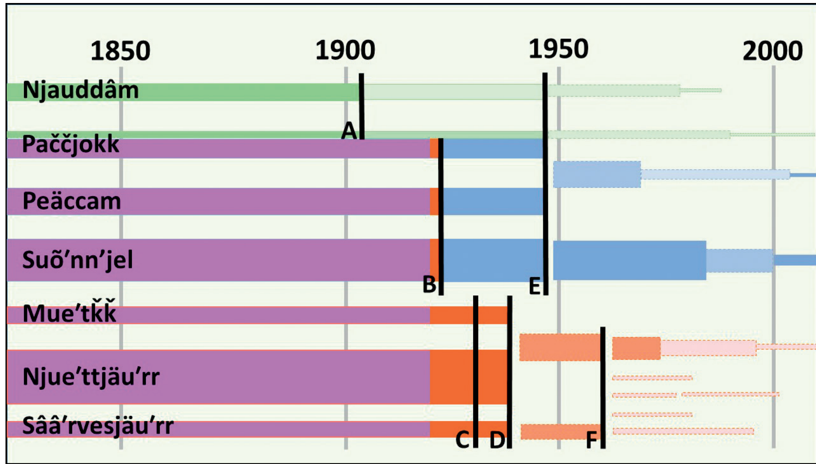


Figure 1. A schematic diagram describing the changes in the sociolinguistic situation and the most important dislocation points of the Skolt Sami people between the 1850s and the 2020s. Each Skolt Sami sijdd is represented by one bar. In some cases bars split or merge together, since some of the sijdd split and some merged with other sijdds during this time. The color of the bar indicates which country the sijdd belonged to at a given time: green = Norway, purple = Russian Empire, blue = Finland, orange = Soviet Russia, Soviet Union, and Russian Federation. The size of the bar reflects the number of the speakers. The intensity of the coloring reflects the sociolinguistic situation of the speech community: a darker color reflects a stronger and a lighter color a weaker situation. The black vertical bars (A–F) represent the most significant points in time during which the speech community suffered the most dramatic physical, demographic, social, and cultural dislocations. A: In 1905, the Skolt Sami of Njauddâm were forced to start attending a Norwegian school, where a harsh policy of Norwegianization was practiced. B: In 1920, Soviet Russia ceded to Finland the province of Petsamo. As a result, most Skolt Sami of the Paččjokk, Peäccam, and Suõ'nn'jel sijdds became Finnish citizens and were subjected to nationalistic Finnish language policies. C: From 1929 onward, the Skolt Sami were expected to move from their families' lands to live year-round in villages and join the multiethnic kolkhozes.
D: In 1937, Stalin's Great Terror started. The most prominent members of the Skolt Sami communities were executed, and all the work done to improve the status of the language and culture was stopped. E: In 1939, World War II started in the Skolt Sami territories. At the end of the war, in 1944, the Skolt Sami living in the province of Petsamo were evacuated to Finland and lost their families' lands forever. They were settled in Aanar by 1952. F: From the late 1950s onward, the building of hydroelectric power plants, militarization of the border region, and the policy of villages without prospects dispersed the Skolt Sami communities over an even wider area.

In Finland, partly because of the example the Aanaar Sami have set, the Skolt Sami have found a new drive in the revitalization of their language. The positive processes that were started in the 1970s faded during the 1980s, but a new start was made during the 1990s. However, in Finland, the Skolt Sami community, especially enthusiastic Skolt Sami individuals and families, supported by private foundations have borne the main responsibility for the language revitalization. The Finnish government has done little to support it. The Skolt Sami speech community is also facing new challenges as the number of new speakers is rising. There is still a need to recalibrate language attitudes, especially to raise tolerance towards the language of the new speakers. The need for psychosocial professional help to deal with the traumatic experiences of the past has finally been understood, and in 2022 a Sami unit for psychosocial help called Uvjj began its work. This is essential, since otherwise the new generations of language speakers do not dare to start to speak the language or take back their lost native language.

The most pessimistic prospects for the Skolt Sami are in Russia, where the socioeconomic situation has long been challenging and the community is geographically scattered. Lately, the forced recruitment of Sami during the Ukrainian war has been especially heavy in the Murmansk region and the Kola Peninsula, like among many other ethnic minorities in the rural regions of Russia.

The history and present situation of the Skolt Sami are still poorly known and further documentation and analysis is needed. Many events of the past are known only to the elderly members of the communities, and it is important that they be documented now. At the same time, to maintain the current positive development, constant monitoring and practical work in and with the speech communities is required. However, a knowledge of history is often needed to understand the processes of the present day, as traumatic events that happened generations ago still have an impact on current Skolt Sami communities and their sociolinguistic processes. To describe, analyze, and explain these phenomena to speech communities and language activists is an important task for a conscious researcher.

Acknowledgments

We are in great debt to those Skolt Sami who have been willing to share their experiences and knowledge with us and thereby helped us to write this article.

Abbreviations

Fi. Finnish
No. Norwegian
Ru. Russian

Maps

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