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Language shift and language (re)vitalisation: the roles played by women and men in Northern Fenno-Scandia

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Abstract: The research question of the present paper is the following: to what degree (if any) is gender relevant as an explanatory factor in, firstly, the process of assimilation and later, the process of (re)vitalisation of indigenous and minority languages in northern Fenno-Scandia (the North Calotte)? The assimilation of the ethnic groups in question was a process initiated and led by the authorities in the three different countries. Finland, Sweden and Norway. Nevertheless, members of the indigenous and minority groups also took part in practicing, though, not necessarily promoting, the official assimilation politics, for different reasons. (Re)vitalisation, on the other hand, was initially – and still is – mostly a process stemming from the minority groups themselves, though the authorities to a certain extent have embraced it. The paper thus addresses the question of whether gender played a role in the two different processes, assimilation and (re)vitalisation, and if that was the case, how and why.

Keywords: assimilation; gender; indigenous; minority and majority languages; motherhood; (re)vitalisation

1 Background

The point of departure of the present paper is the language situation in Northern Fenno-Scandia where speakers of Sámi, Finnic and Scandinavian languages have shared their habitats for hundreds of years. However, while the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian speaking people have expanded their settlement areas the Sámi speaking people have been forced to reduce theirs, primarily due to colonisation as

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well as a harsh assimilation policy from the mid-1800s. A language shift has taken place in large parts of the area from Sámi to the official national languages, Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian, but also from the Finnic minority languages, Kven (to Norwegian) and Meänkieli (to Swedish). However, during the last decades a change in official language policy has taken place in all three countries, a change in which (re)vitalisation¹ of the threatened languages is high on the agenda. This change was initiated by the minority groups themselves; however, official policy has also gradually undergone significant changes and the assimilation strategy has been abandoned in all three countries.

It should be mentioned that none of the research projects included in this study initially had a specific gender perspective. In that sense, the gender aspect that we focus on here is a bi-product of other interests, in our case, a general focus on the sociolinguistic relations between majority and minority populations with a special interest in and concern for indigenous and minority language maintenance. However, given that the research that our conclusions are based upon has been carried out over a period of more than 50 years, it is thought-provoking that all the data we have considered seem to point in the same direction as far as gender involvement is concerned.

Gender-blindness in studies on bilingualism and multilingualism has been commented on and criticized by Piller and Pavlenko (2001: 3):

While language and gender studies have been characterized by a widespread monolingual bias, research in mainstream bilingualism and SLA² has suffered from just as widespread gender-blindness [...]. SLA, in particular, has been characterized by an almost ubiquitous gender-blindness due to the prevalence of psycholinguistic and Universal Grammar approaches in the field, which assume a generic language user and disregard inter-individual variation as ‘noise’

Completely in accordance with this, Feery (2008: 32) states that “...there is no singular distinct field of gender and SLA as yet”. This ubiquitous blindness might

1 Whether to use the concept “revitalisation” or “vitalisation” has been discussed, particularly in Norway. It has been argued that the term revitalisation is inadequate to characterise the processes that led to the empowerment of minority languages (e.g. Todal 2002). This term would indicate a return to the linguistic situation before the mid-eighteen-hundreds, while vitalisation in this connection means using and giving status to the minority languages in other and new societal domains, such as schools, media, administration and bureaucracy. Though the issue of terminology is not central here, we agree with Todal’s reasoning on this matter and have chosen to be consistent in using ‘(re)vitalisation’. Given that “revitalisation” still seems to be the most frequent overall term we have kept “re” in parenthesis, indicating the difference between the two terms. See also a more thorough discussion about the term language revitalisation and related terms in Hinton et al. (2018), Introduction, p. xxvi – xxvii.

2 SLA = Second Language Acquisition.

explain why hardly any of the studies included in this paper originally had an explicit gender-perspective.

2 Structure

The paper is organised in six numbered sections. Section 3 deals with explanations and includes a short discussion on the concept of gender. Section 4 is a presentation of relevant empirical research³ from the three countries, covering three chronological stages. At the end of this section, conclusions are drawn on the basis of the abovementioned descriptions. These contextualized conclusions take us to a more abstract and theoretical level that is dealt with in Section 5 which presents our methodology and theory. At last, in Section 6, our final conclusions are drawn.

3 The issue of explanation

An important point of departure is that gender is a salient and significant category in the processes we describe. Needless to say, the concept of gender is complex, though in the early phases of the period we cover, this was not problematised at all. From the 1990s onwards, however, particularly through Judith Butlers work (e.g. Butler 1990), the concept has been extensively discussed. Nevertheless, we have no other option than to use ‘gender’ as a binary category. Given that we deal with mostly historical data and also use a quantitative approach in large parts of the paper, we cannot avoid binarity. Moreover, we think that it would be inappropriate to force the gender discussions of the present upon the past, where these discussions never took place. Still, when it comes to the most recent period, the (re)vitalisation phase, we suggest that new and more dynamic concepts of gender are relevant. As mentioned above, most of the studies we have included were not undertaken within the language-and-gender tradition. They are written within the sociolinguistic tradition on bi- and multilingualism, with a special focus on the relation between majority and minority languages. The studies included here are partly quantitative in which standard statistical methods have been applied. Partly the analyses are based on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, often in small communities in which more or less all relevant persons within the community have participated as informants.

³ This research was carried out by the authors themselves as well as by other scholars.

It should be mentioned that we have not been able to find scholarly studies from recent years that give a theoretical rationale for and explain the allegedly different linguistic behaviours of women and men in language shift processes or in situations where a language shift process is reversed and (re)vitalisation occurs. Hence, we have been forced to abstract a theoretical rationale out of our data as well as that of other researchers. In doing so, William Labov's 2001 book has been of great inspiration. However, we use Labov's model for what it is: a model that we have modified to suit our specific purpose, and thus not as a complete theory involving the role of gender in language contact situations.

Joshua Fishman's (1967, 1971, and 1972) theory of diglossia has been important for the empirical research we will present in Section 4.2. Fishman's later work (1991) on reversing language shift gave inspiration to the research on (re)vitalisation of minority languages, systematically applied for example in Huss (1999). From the 1960s onwards, researchers doing fieldwork in the area encountered minority communities that were obviously undergoing a process of language shift. For this reason, we describe the structures of bilingualism in the region as changing, unstable and varied.

William Labov's sociolinguistic variationist research from the 1960s onwards has shown significant quantitative gender differences in micro-level linguistic variation and change. In 2001, Labov included results from several different investigations, representing the sociolinguistic traditions being initiated in the 1960s, i.e. variation between standard and non-standard oral varieties, and research on the use of majority and minority languages in bilingual communities. He generated a model in which he showed a pattern of gender differences that we will present in Section 5, where we, in addition, will compare his model with the research results from northern Fenno-Scandia which we present here.⁴

4 Presentation of relevant research

The following presentation is chronological. We divide the time line under investigation into three periods, referring to different stages in the development of the multilingual situations in the area, and also to developments in state policies that have had an impact on changes in local language situations. These changes have been gradual and have taken place during a long period of time. The pace has

⁴ Recent studies after Labov 2001 that discuss the issues we present here are for the most part non-existent, probably due to the shift in sociolinguistic orientation from larger survey studies and quantitative sociolinguistics to more qualitative ethnographic work, discourse analysis and conversational analysis (cf. Penny Eckert's 'three waves in sociolinguistics' in Eckert 2012).

varied among states, regions and ethnic groups. Thus, changes in state policies and changes in local communities do not appear simultaneously – there are gaps and overlaps between them. Therefore, it would be misleading to delimit the different periods by exact years or dates, given that the shift from one period to the next takes place at different times, which also indicates that in some regions e.g. language shift starts much earlier than in other places. We will also briefly describe the main tendencies in occupational structure and division of labour between women and men.

4.1 Multilingualism and a tolerant minority policy

The first period is the time of the agrarian society, which was relatively liberal when it came to official language policy. Governments in the three countries aimed primarily at integration without forcing any form of assimilation policy upon the ethnic minority groups. At the grass-root level, the ethnic minorities were able to live their local lives using their native languages without much interference from the authorities. There were no requirements for the minority language users to be competent in the majority language. The minority languages were the home languages as well as the languages at work in primary industries, such as reindeer herding, agriculture and fishing. Schooling was scarce; where schools existed, the home languages were not prohibited. The many skills needed in primary industries in the Arctic areas were taught to the children in their own language in the families, which in practice meant that formal schooling was less important to them. Bilingual homes existed due to interethnic marriages and bilingual or multilingual speech communities.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, governmental policy gradually changed, and authorities started forcing cultural and linguistic assimilation upon the minority groups. Nevertheless, this policy did not become particularly effective before everyday life in the local communities had gone through radical changes; these changes were gradual and became more strongly entrenched during the twentieth century.

In those days, combinations of various primary industries were typical for the North Calotte. The economy of natural households presupposed a lot of work to produce everything needed, such as buildings, tools, means of transport, food, clothes, shoes and so on. Parts of the Sámi population led a nomadic life with reindeer, which meant that families moved together with their reindeer herd and lived in turf huts or lavvus (Sámi tents).

Both men and women were fully engaged in these primary industries. Farming was to a large extent the responsibility of women, while occupations reserved for adult males required seasonal stays away from home, in mountains, woods and at sea. The care of small children, elderly and sick was women's tasks. Because adult women also had a lot of other duties, the elder sisters among siblings or grandmothers would share the care work. The boundaries between the tasks of women and men were not always clear. For example, women within nomadic Sámi communities also participated in reindeer herding to a lesser or greater extent, and both men and women owned reindeer. There were also a fair number of joint tasks among the other ethnic groups.

Of course, in order to uncover a potential distribution of linguistic roles between men and women in this period we have to rely on either contemporary written sources or recorded narratives by older informants who descend from generations who lived their adult lives and were caretakers during this period, i.e. informants who were interviewed during the second half of the twentieth century. Two literary sources, Friis (1871: 120) and Rosberg (1891: 45, Rosberg 1920: 183) state that minority women were monolingual in the minority language while minority men in general had more access to bi- or multilingualism. Friis confirms, for instance, that Kven women in Norway compared to Kven men were mostly monolingual. Rosberg writes about the language conditions of Sámi in Sodankylä, Northern Finland, and argues that due to their contacts outside their own community Sámi men were able to speak Finnish, whereas the women were monolingual Sámi speakers.

Another interesting source is a book from 1831 by the Norwegian geologist M. B. Keilhau. In the late 1820s he made a long journey through the northernmost county of Norway, Finnmark, and further on to Spitsbergen. Amongst his many descriptions of people and places, there is an account of his impressions from a journey starting in the city of Vardø, and going by sea through the Varanger fjord to Pasvik and the Russian border. He was ferried by three Kven men:

- of whom particularly one of them, in addition to his mother tongue, Finnish, understood and spoke perfect Lappish, Norwegian and Russian. He was a common man who had acquired all this linguistic knowledge just through contacts and dealings that take place between the four nations of this region (Keilhau 1831: 13, our translation from Norwegian).

Keilhau only mentions men; he describes no women. Still, his book is interesting also from our point of view, since it confirms the very high level of multilingualism at this period in time, at least among the male segment of the population.

This pattern is confirmed by Marjut Aikio (1988, 1992), whose doctoral thesis based on fieldwork in five villages in Vuotso, shows that during the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s, there was a more or less systematic distribution of language proficiency

between men who were bilingual in Sámi and Finnish, while women were still mostly monolingual Sámi speakers. This is in line with informant-narratives in Tove Bull's work (1994, 2009) in an originally trilingual village on the Norwegian side of Sápmi (fieldwork from the 1980s). At the early stage, Sámi was the primary language in most families. There were also some families in which Finnish or Kven was the home language, and in addition a few Norwegian speaking families. Generally, Sámi women were mostly monolingual in Sámi, while children from Kven and Norwegian speaking homes normally learned Sámi playing with Sámi children who were in the majority in the village. Apparently, a language shift must have taken place, from Finnish to Sámi in the first place, and then, subsequently, to Norwegian, because at the time of Bull's fieldwork there were hardly any Finnish or Kven speakers left, while during the period in question several men were actually reported to be trilingual.

The historian Lars Elenius (2001) carried out a large quantitative study on language shift among women and men in Tornedalen, Sweden, during the years 1850–1939, showing the same patterns. He did archival studies of cohorts of Tornedalians in Övertorneå and showed how bilingualism in Finnish and Swedish was mainly found among men born in the period 1873–1878 and between 1879 and 1884, while women in those two cohorts were monolingual in Finnish. He concluded that this was due to the fact that women after having attended primary school did not work outside the home to the same degree as did men. The expanding bilingualism at that time could therefore be attributed to men's broader contacts with the wider society which provided new possibilities to improve their Swedish (Elenius 2001: 353).

The pattern that emerges as far as bi- or multilingualism is concerned in this period is quite clear: Women were mostly monolingual in their first language (Sámi, Kven, Meänkieli) while men, who traditionally were more mobile, also mastered the majority language.

4.2 Assimilation policy and language shift

Although the national authorities introduced much stricter assimilatory policies towards the minorities during the second half of the nineteenth century, the assimilation endeavours did not result in serious language shift in local communities until the early twentieth century, and even then, only in parts of the region. After WWII, the policy that had been practiced for a century was somehow officially replaced, at first by ambivalence and silence. Still, the strong assimilatory practices continued for a couple of decades, and language shift to the majority language carried on. A belief that monolingualism in the majority language was

the right solution was ingrained in many local communities, persisting until the 1970s.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the school system improved significantly in the majority societies of the south, while in the peripheries of the Arctic areas, this development was slower. Before WWII, formal education in schools was often very modest.

Nevertheless, educational institutions gradually became more efficient and started to play a more significant role in the lives of children and young people. In the schools, the majority language prevailed, and the education system became the most important arena in which assimilation was practiced. School teachers were instructed to carry on the assimilation of the minority groups.

In Sweden, there was a segregated school system, with the so-called Nomad school targeting children in reindeer herding families. The school year was much shorter here than in other schools, and the number of subjects fewer and geared to what the children were supposed to need when living a reindeer herder's life. The aim was to "preserve" this part of the population "unspoiled" by modern comforts. Nevertheless, Sámi languages were banned, so the Nomad school also aimed at *linguistic* assimilation. Sámi children from non-reindeer herding families were placed in local Swedish schools with non-Sámi children.

The twentieth century is the period of industrialisation. New mass media and more efficient forms of transportation were gradually introduced, which meant that the Arctic areas became more closely integrated with the various nation states. The modernisation of trades and industries progressed faster in certain areas than in others. Inevitably, changes took place at a higher pace in urban and socially and geographically mobile societies and at a slower pace in scarcely populated and socially stable societies. Generally speaking, the inland localities were more stable and developed more slowly while the coastal communities were more mobile and prone to change at an earlier stage. In the peripheral areas, no significant changes took place prior to WWII, and often as late as during the 1960s and -70s.

However, the modernisation of the outside world gradually reached the most peripheral arctic areas. Electricity was introduced, roads and new means of transport were built, and dairies were established in farming societies. Fishing-boats were motorised along the North-Norwegian coast. Still, women continued to work for the most part in primary industries. No changes occurred in the distribution of labour between men and women. So, until WWII, new occupations that represented modernisation were mostly available for men (such as road building and other construction work, work in mines, etc.).

This form of modernisation rendered assimilation policies much more efficient than before and resulted in an extensive language shift in many areas. Even

members of the minority groups themselves came to consider their minority cultures as old-fashioned and associated with poverty and primitiveness, whereas modern life which was associated with the language and culture of the majority, caused many individuals from the ethnic minorities to undertake a language and culture shift. Many families decided to raise their children in the majority language, believing that this was best for the children. Thus, a language shift process began to take place, first in the southern parts of the Sámi language areas and among the Coast-Sámi in the northern areas, and all over the North Calotte among the Tornedalians and Kvens. In the northernmost Sámi regions in Sweden and Finland, however, and in the regions in the interior of Finnmark in Norway, these processes were much weaker and did not result in language shift at the community level. These are the areas furthest away from the national centres, all three of which are situated in the southern or central parts of the countries where industrialisation and modernization was introduced and then gradually expanded, only slowly spreading to the northern areas.

During this period of language shift, monolingualism in the minority languages decreased and disappeared in many communities. At first, this process led to increasing multilingualism since every minority language user was supposed to learn the majority language. This again led to attrition of the minority languages, paving the way for increased monolingualism, but at this stage in the majority language.

The amount of data that covers this period is substantial. As in Section 4.1. which deals with the early period, research data was collected in the countryside. Here we can just mention a few examples. Magdalena Jaakkola (1969, 1973) investigated the bilingual Torne valley, the speakers of Tornedalian Finnish, later called Meänkieli, and introduced Fishman's theory of functional differentiation of languages into Fenno-Scandinavian research. Her results showed an ongoing language shift in which women were favouring the majority language more than men, especially young women (Jaakkola 1969: 47–53). In addition to her quantitative data she mentions a heading in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* Aug 20, 1968: "Stora pojkar pratar finska, fina flickor talar svenska" ["Big boys talk in Finnish, nice girls speak Swedish"]. She also mentions a discussion with an informant who told her that in schools, girls often functioned as translators for the boys, and that girls often spoke Swedish and boys Finnish in the breaks.

Birger Winsa (1993: 10) argues that Finnish and Meänkieli in Tornedalen had covert prestige among men. Both languages have traditionally been regarded as more masculine than Swedish and more connected to male occupations. Winsa mentions that boys have greater contact with older men, in work, hunting, fishing and playing football. In many occupations Finnish is indispensable and not easily

replaced, as in reindeer-herding. If a young man wants to follow his father and the other highly esteemed men in their work, Finnish is an important language to learn. In elk-hunting, the walkie-talkie is used a lot and all information about the whereabouts of the elks is given in Finnish, not to mention all stories, jokes and celebrations. The Finnish language does not seem to be as important in the spheres of life that usually interest girls, and according to Winsa, Tornedalians themselves explain that girls prefer Swedish because it is considered more refined. According to local recollection, boys court the girls in Swedish, but switch to Finnish when they get married (Winsa 1993: 9–10). It has also been observed that a gradual language shift from Swedish to Finnish has taken place among the young men remaining in their home villages, quite contrary to earlier expectations (Winsa 1993: 12).

A language being considered more masculine and more tied to male occupations could be seen as hindering women to embrace it and participate in language revitalisation efforts. Likewise, traditional culture including traditional gender roles could stand against younger generations' beliefs about gender equity (Leonard 2012: 341). However, the latter issue has not been raised in the contexts of the present article.

There are also studies showing that Tornedalian boys have been more inclined than girls to speak Finnish in the school-yard and among themselves in their free time (e.g. Wande 1984: 167). Erling Wande, a professor of Finnish, grew up in Tornedalen in the 1950s and 60s and was himself a native speaker of Meänkieli. Wande states that in his school, boys tended to speak Finnish or Meänkieli, in spite of it being forbidden even in the school yard. It was regarded as “manly” or cool. Girls tended to speak Swedish which was interpreted by the boys as an attempt to appear “finare”, more sophisticated. In that way, Swedish was considered a feminine language. Wande also comments that girls sometimes acted as language police in the school yard: “A slightly older cousin of mine (...) once had to stand in the corner because the girls – always more obedient than the boys – had told on him and betrayed that he had said something in Finnish during a break” (Erling Wande, discussions and email correspondence Oct 9, 2017). Similarly, a female informant of Heikki Paunonen told that in the school yard, the boys spoke Finnish, while the girls never did (Paunonen 2018: 43). According to Paunonen, the influence of the mothers was very important for the language shift. Even the Finnish women who had moved from Finland to Sweden because they had married a Tornedalian were eager to learn Swedish and learned it rapidly in order to be able to speak it with their children (Paunonen 2018: 45–46).

The development of Kven in Norway is thoroughly studied by Marjut Aikio and Anna-Riitta Lindgren (Aikio and Lindgren 1982; Lindgren 1974, 1984, 1993, 2009). Their methodology is eclectic and includes quantitative methods. Thus, their

statistics cover the whole Kven population in three different communities around 1980. At that time the language shift had taken place in the younger generations, but there were no signs of (re)vitalisation yet. The statistical results show clearly that the majority of those who still used Kven were older men. When communicating with other people from the local community, 45% of the men and 32% of the women used Kven (Lindgren 1993: 262–265). The fact that more men than women spoke Kven was also commented on by the informants (especially by men). They argued that one reason was that many girls started as domestic servants while they were still very young, often in wealthy Norwegian families, and after that they only wanted to speak Norwegian. They made themselves so sophisticated (“fiinistelivä”), the men said. This shows that attitudes among young women and men were different. It was common among all ethnic groups before the time of assimilation (described in Section 4.1) to work as a maid or a farm hand in other families. If these families belonged to a different ethnic group with another language, the result was that the hired person became bi- or multilingual. If the girl shifted language and after that chose to speak only Norwegian with her own brothers, this was considered a sign of a new attitude and a new choice. This kind of shift hardly happened among boys. Normally, young boys started to work with adult Kven men in fishing boats and with tar-burning where the language was Kven. One informant in a fishing village called Kven “the boat language”.

In contrast to the male language strategy, Kven women who worked in traditional primary occupations during this period started to speak Norwegian with their children. In interviews, both women and men stated that school teachers required that the women speak Norwegian to their children and that women were responsible for shifting their language because they were in charge of child-care at home. Norwegian teachers were recruited to Kven regions to make northern Norway monolingual. «Finnish destroys Norwegian» was a common dogma most people believed in.

Many of the generations of Kven who were raised in Norwegian by their mothers acquired an excellent receptive competence in Kven because their parents spoke Kven with each other and with their neighbours. Some fathers spoke Kven with their children, while the children answered in Norwegian. Later on, when the children became teenagers or adults, many boys and young men also started to speak Kven. In contrast, many women retained passive competence in Kven, which they had acquired as children. They understood conversations in Kven in great detail, but used Norwegian themselves when speaking.

Thus, Aikio’s and Lindgren’s material contains information about the influence within different work settings, but primarily, about different attitudes among the locals. It points to an attitude in favour of shifting language among women. On the other hand, it indicates that covert prestige helped to maintain the minority

language among men during the period of assimilation policy (Lindgren 1984); cf. Trudgill (1972) on covert prestige among men using non-standard language. This is similar to the research on Tornedalians by Jaakkola, Winsa and Wande.

Marjut Aikio (1988, 1992) has documented the process of language shift from Sámi to Finnish in villages living from reindeer herding during several decades up to the 1970s. Similarly, Bull (e.g. 1994, 2009) and Johansen (2009) have shown the same pattern in the shift from Sámi to Norwegian in Sea-Sámi villages in Northern Norway, i.e. villages where the sources of income came from fishing and small-scale agriculture. The same gendered pattern of language shift is documented in all the studies we know of. We have never come across any research that contradicts this pattern. Thus, within the Sámi, Kven and Tornedalian societies, women have been the initiators of language shift in their homes. Adult married women promoted the shift, particularly after their children had reached school age, insisting that the children speak the majority language. This involved their own switch to the majority idiom when talking to their children. Among women, this phenomenon had nothing to do with their own occupational situation. That situation remained the same. Their motivation was triggered by strong political pressure from the majority society and not least from the school system. Still, without the compliance of the mothers in the families, the assimilation process probably would not have been as “successful” as it was.

The results of our and others’ fieldwork have given us a substantial amount of data on language choices within the families. The ways in which the shift of languages was carried out seem to vary. Many children who lived in remote places had to go to boarding schools where they were taught the majority language, and only that, since their home languages were forbidden. Coming back home, many of them tended to speak only the majority language. Thus, in these cases dormitory life introduced the language shift into the families by way of the children. So, the mothers were not always the ones who brought the majority language into the homes. What seemed to motivate the mothers, however, was the wish to save their children from the bad experiences they themselves had had in school and in the school dormitory. During interviews in the 1970s and -80s, this motivation was repeated again and again by the oldest females, who themselves, or their mothers, had introduced the majority language into the home. Lane 2010 tells the same story. Her title speaks for itself: “We did what we thought was best for our children”.

To do “what is best for our children” thus seems to have been an essential motive behind the language choices of the mothers. During the assimilation period as well as the later (re)vitalisation phase (see Section 4.3), the concern for the future of the next generation was a very strong motivating factor, though it led to different results in the two periods.

A radical change took place toward the end of World War II, as the population in Northern Norway and Northern Finland were forced to evacuate and move further south. The withdrawing German army burnt down and destroyed all houses, bridges, roads and all infrastructure. The result was devastating. All material man-made installations were destroyed, and the old material culture was wiped out of the regions' history. After the war, a new and different world was constructed out of the ruins of the past. The pace and strength of modernisation solidified the assimilation effect, which lasted well into the 1960s and 1970s, and in some areas even longer. Minority children and young people still had to attend national majority-language schools where compulsory school attendance was reinforced and the school year was prolonged.

4.3 Ethnic renaissance and pluralist policies

Officially, in the early post-war-period, the authorities in all three countries showed a strong ambivalence towards the harsh assimilation policy that had been taken for granted until then. There was a competition between a wish to continue the assimilation policy and a demand for a more pluralistic policy. Among the minority groups themselves, a gradual change from passive acceptance of the assimilation policy to ethnic mobilisation and renaissance was taking place. Thus, the ethno-political situation changed from the 1970s onward. According to the assimilation ideology, monolingualism in either the majority or the minority language was seen as the only alternative for the groups in question. Bi- or multilingualism was considered unrealistic and suspect. However, gradually people began viewing multilingualism as something positive. At the beginning of the 1970s, a Kven interviewee among Lindgren's informants commented on this, saying that he did not believe in the idea that the Finnish/Kven language destroys the Norwegian language. This was what most local people in the peripheral area in question still believed. It is not true that a language destroys another language, he said, nowadays they even teach English to schoolchildren! (From Lindgren's fieldwork notes), in the three countries in question, generations born after 1940 received more years of schooling than prior generations. Although school attendance had been required by law several decades earlier, it was not fully implemented everywhere in these remote areas. But from the 1950s, all children from all ethnic groups received primary education seven to nine years, even in the most far-away locations. Thus, better educational possibilities were established, and later on it became quite customary to continue to secondary school after completing primary education, and after that, for some to choose higher education. Never

before had there been so many Sámi, Kven and Tornedalians with academic education, and this became crucial for the development of multilingualism.

Among the generations who received their education during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, a new ethnic movement was born, starting in the 1960s (the Sámi), 1970s and 1980s (the Tornedalians) and 1980s (the Kvens). From the 1970s, minority languages have been accepted to a varying degree, also as a medium and subject in schools. Today, the minority languages are used in several domains that are important in modern life e.g., day-care centres, schools and universities, in the mass media and on the internet, by minority associations and in cultural life, and in addition in various official domains. Standardising the languages and developing them as written codes have played an important role. The Sámi languages acquired legal and official status in Norway and Finland in the 1990s. International conventions at the end of the twentieth century have been of great importance in leading to legal status as national minority languages for Sámi and Meänkieli in Sweden and Sámi and Kven in Norway.⁵ Minority languages are now being reintroduced as home languages by families in the areas that were subjected to strong assimilation. There is almost nobody left who is monolingual in the minority languages, but many adults who belong to the ethnic minority groups are monolingual in the majority language (or, of course, bilingual in the majority language and English). Among younger generations, being proficient in the minority language has gained prestige and is, more or less, supported within the school system. In short, an ethnic renaissance among the minority groups has resulted in a wealth of cultural activities. Most importantly, though, a (re)vitalisation of the minority languages has occurred, and is still taking place.

Socio-economic life after WWII was characterized by great and rapid changes. Primary industries such as the traditional combination of fishing and agriculture developed into specialized occupations based on intensive farming with the help of efficient and constantly improved technology. Reindeer herding was motorized through snow mobiles in the 1960s and four-wheelers in the 1980s, and the nomadic form of life in which the whole family moved together with their reindeer herd changed when families began to live in permanent houses.⁶ Given the technological development, costs within the traditional industries grew substantially and made it necessary to operate in larger units. This, in turn, meant that there was not a need within these traditional industries for the same amount of people as before.

⁵ It should be noted that all the Sámi languages in Norway, Sweden and Finland have the formal status of indigenous languages in the respective countries.

⁶ In some districts, so-called semi-nomadism is practiced, with one house near the winter pasture and another near the summer pasture.

In the countryside where the three ethnic minority groups had lived their traditional lives, many new occupations became available for both women and men. For instance, new businesses, a growing tourist industry, different forms of work, such as road-building, work at construction sites and within industry and transport grew in numbers and outnumbered the workplaces in traditional industries. Administration, health care and social services, schools and kindergartens also offered work to many people.

These structural changes in the economic life as well as newer educational possibilities for young people led to a large migration to the centres of the respective countries and to subsequent urbanization. This movement from the traditional peripheral areas to the cities, in particular the capitals, took place as early as in the 1950s and had its strongest influence on the generations born from the 1940s on. This development is still going on.

In Finland, the Sámi Parliament keeps records of Finnish Sámi of all ages. These records document that nowadays a majority of the Sámi live outside the traditional Sámi homeland. The same is probably also true for the other minority groups. Even if some of the urbanised individuals feel at home and are completely integrated in city life, urbanised ethnic minority groups still maintain their own spaces with their own, multifaceted cultural and societal activities. The efforts and work of the urbanised members of the ethnic groups are of great importance and are perhaps even a prerequisite for the development of linguistic rights and the practice of using the minority languages in important domains of modern society. Research on the ethnic renaissance we refer to here took place both in the traditional countryside and in cities and suburbs, in the North Calotte as well as in the capitals.

Changes in occupational structures have also influenced the division of labour between women and men. Traditional living where the families were larger than today and the areas of responsibilities in the household were distinct and separated has been replaced by a life in nuclear families where both parents go to work and have their own individual occupations while their small children are in day-care in kindergartens. The situation is more or less the same everywhere in the three countries.⁷ While we are reluctant to try to impose a non-binary, non-essentialist view on gender on the generations who never contested gender dichotomy, it seems evident that members of today's ethnic minorities might well consider gender differently than their ancestors, e.g. as more mouldable and flexible. However, none of the informants that the three of us have interviewed discussed such issues with us. Nor is there any indication of such discussions in the sources that we base our analysis upon.

7 For Nordic females of the post-war generations, working as a housewife is extremely rare.

Though both men and women have participated in the activist movements in general, there is reason to argue that as far as language (re)vitalisation is concerned, so far, women have played a much more active role than men. For instance, Marjut Aikio's fieldwork in the Sámi village Lisma in Inari municipality (1994) documents that in 1975, Sámi was no longer transferred intergenerationally, with the result that at that time the language was in use only by and among elderly people. However, around 10 years later, a reversal of the language shift seemed to be developing, as women in the village had changed their linguistic practice and started to speak Sámi to their children (Aikio 1994: 14–15). Another source is Åse Mette Johansen (2009) who states that there is no doubt about the essential role of women in the process of language shift from North Sámi to Norwegian. However, when it comes to the later (re)vitalisation period, this is harder to document, given that at the time of her fieldwork, this process was just beginning. However, generally speaking, her informants, both male and female, referred to their great grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters and other women in this context much more frequently than to men. In a somewhat different study, Rasmussen (2005) also documents gender differences as to intergenerational language transfer in Sámi families. In his study, there was also a predominance of women who had chosen Sámi as a language of communication with their children, which confirms Johansen's suggestions.

From Tornedalen, Cullblom reports that there were more girls than boys in her secondary school study in the mid-1980s who chose to use Finnish, and their attitudes towards using Finnish were more favourable than the attitudes of the boys (Cullblom 1994: 55, 76–77). The reason for these results, contrasting with the earlier results of Jaakkola and Winsa, might have been that an overall shift in attitudes was occurring in Tornedalen during the first half of the 1990s, and Cullblom asks if the change in the attitudes of the women might have been a result of women's greater consciousness of current trends. Similar patterns like those described above are also present in a chapter by Erling (Wande 2021) about Meänkieli. He writes:

In certain respects, there are clear differences in the use of Meänkieli among men and women. Swedification has been quicker among younger women than younger men who still retain their use of Meänkieli in several domains. On the other hand, we can observe a greater interest in reclaiming the language of the parent generation among younger women and we can see that Meänkieli in different ways is also entering youth culture.

(Re)vitalisation of South Sámi is attested by Inger Johansen (2006), Huss (2017) and Huss and Gröndahl (forthcoming). In Johansen (2006) parenthood is a critical factor for her informants to take up Sámi in a serious way, and in all her examples, parenthood is identical with motherhood. Huss (2017) and Huss and Gröndahl

(forthcoming) found in their study of parents, teachers and cultural workers that age and gender were significant as regards interest and engagement in language (re)vitalisation. Generally, younger informants were more positive and interested than older ones, and female informants more positive and interested than male informants. More women answered questionnaires, and more women than men confirmed that they spoke Sámi at home (although part of the explanation was the generally low proportion of men filling in the questionnaires). A frequent topic in the interviews they conducted was the question of how to involve more men in language (re)vitalisation. Furthermore, Lindgren (2000: 179–182, 2015) has documented similar patterns among Sámi living in Helsinki. These are Sámi who have moved to the capital or descend from parents or grand-parents who had moved there. Lindgren found that more women than men used Sámi and more women than men had (re)vitalised their Sámi competence and also expanded their oral proficiency to become literate in Sámi.

Huss (2017) evaluated (re)vitalisation efforts at the Sámi Language Centre in Sweden, based on interviews, questionnaires and annual reports. It was obvious from the very beginning of the work of the Centre that there was an asymmetrical relation between women and men engaged in these activities. In the first annual report from 2010, it was stated that most of those who were active in (re)vitalisation were women, which meant that there was a risk that (re)vitalisation could be considered a “women’s issue”. Therefore, it was considered important to reach young men with activities especially designed for them.

The situation has more or less remained the same, as confirmed in an interview almost a decade later, with Ingegerd Vannar, a long-time teacher of Lule Sámi and an employee at the Centre. She states that there is a clear dominance of women in language work, language education efforts, language seminars and so forth. She commented that the Centre regularly analyses the degree of gender equality in its activities and tries to attract more men, for instance by hiring male lecturers and panel participants. In 2018, the Centre started a Master-Apprentice programme for language (re)vitalisation among members of a Sámi village with many participating men, and Vannar mentioned that the high level of male participation might be due to many meetings being focused on reindeer-herding vocabulary. She also commented that an earlier youth project at the Centre tried to attract young boys and men with the help of sports activities. Reflecting on the issue, she adds that the gender question reminds her of similar cases in majority societies where language is counted among the so called “soft issues” favoured by women more than by men, and where women teachers dominate (Ingegerd Vannar, email correspondence, 14 February 2019).

In a recent article, Fjellgren and Huss (2019) directly address the scarcity of men taking part in Sámi language (re)vitalisation efforts. The data consisted of

interviews Fjellgren conducted with speakers of South, Lule and Ume Sámi, both women and men, who had participated in various kinds of Sámi language projects. All their results confirmed that the majority of those who are occupied with Sámi language (re)vitalisation and as teachers of Sámi are women. Some men have also been involved, but they have not been very active. In connection with participation in projects, a majority of women have applied voluntarily. There are, however, exceptions to this rather strong tendency of female dominance. In the small speech communities of Inari Sámi and Ume Sámi, (re)vitalisation was initiated by men. Also, in the cases of Kven and Meänkieli the most visible leading language activists have been men. However, several attempts to attract more men have turned out to be less successful, and Fjellgren and Huss speculate that in order to succeed it might be a good idea to co-arrange gatherings in connection with events that men usually attend, for example the annual national Sámi reindeer-herders' meeting or the local Sámi village meetings. When asked why men were less interested than women in (re)vitalisation efforts, an interviewee referred to the work situation of reindeer-herders and the traditional role of Sámi women as bearers of the culture: "It is women who have been responsible for transmitting the Sámi culture to the children. Men have been working with reindeer herding and have spent a lot of time away from home. That is why there are more women working with language and transmitting the core values of the Sámi culture." (Fjellgren and Huss 2019).

Fjellgren and Huss also discuss the commonly noticed phenomenon that men often find it more difficult to talk about their sorrows and other emotions than women. It is possible that this in parts explains why there are so few men engaged in language (re)vitalisation projects in which processing emotions and traumas from the past is often part of the work and, indeed, the core of healing and a prerequisite for a successful (re)vitalisation. This is in line with the findings of Satu Gröndahl (forthcoming) who discusses the noticeable fact that those in Sweden who address issues of modern Sámi identity from the perspective of young Sámi are Sámi female writers. They construct a Sámi women's history covering several generations, a history often laden with painful memories and earlier stigmatisation.

However, the results (Fjellgren and Huss 2019) also show that there seems to be a change under way. They conclude that more men have become more visible and active in using and working with language in society over the last couple of years. Moreover, they have observed examples of young men choosing to transmit the Sámi language to their children. Young men are using Sámi in the social media, sharing their dedication to the language with others. *Sáminuorra*, the national Sámi youth association in Sweden, have together with the gender equality project *Mannen myten* [The man the myth] been arranging meetings in which young Sámi

men gather together and discuss the masculine role of Sámi men. The authors (Fjellgren and Huss 2019) suggest that collaborating with projects like this might be a good way to engage more men in language (re)vitalisation. They also claim that one of the reasons men are becoming more visible in this context might be that there has been a status change regarding language skills. The Sámi language in Sweden is now increasingly seen as something valuable and is associated with status. Moreover, in the Swedish Sámi communities, there are signs of traditional gender boundaries becoming increasingly blurred, for instance when Sámi men engage in sewing Sámi traditional clothing, or when South Sámi women are active in reindeer herding on the same level as men. Snowmobiles and other modern equipment have helped to speed up this process. Nevertheless, in Sámi language (re)vitalisation, the imbalance between the sexes is still apparent (Fjellgren and Huss 2019).

Thus, our conclusions, which we base on the empirical studies and other data referred to above, are fairly straight-forward. Women were the promoters of the majority languages in Sámi, Kven and Meänkieli homes during the assimilation period, and in recent times, perhaps paradoxically, women have taken the leading role in taking the minority languages back to the indigenous and minority families during the period of (re)vitalisation. Given that the political and societal context changed radically from assimilation to (re)vitalisation, explanations as to the change of attitudes from one generation of women to the next might be found in the changing context. Explanations might also be formulated from a theoretical perspective.

5 Labov (2001) revisited

5.1 Labov's model

Generally speaking, and briefly, according to William Labov (1978) there are two more or less contradictory hypotheses regarding gendered behaviour in language shift situations in bi- and multilingual settings:

1. Due to women's lesser mobility they learn L2 (a second language) later and to a lesser extent than men. Thus, they tend to be more traditional or conservative in their language choice than men.
2. Due to their suppressed position in society women tend to behave in a way that contributes to their upward mobility in the social hierarchy. In a process of language shift they learn L2 faster than men, if L2 corresponds with the prestige language. Thus, they are greater innovators than men.

These two opposing views are united in an analysis by Labov himself. In his paper from 1978, he claimed that women are linguistically more conservative than men in societies with a stable situation of linguistic variation, while they are more innovative in societies characterized by linguistic instability and great linguistic change (Labov 1978). What he calls “the gender paradox” is formulated in the following way: “Women conform more closely than men to sociolinguistic norms that are overtly prescribed, but conform less than men when they are not” (here cited from Labov 2001: 293).

In Labov 2001 this notion is developed further. Here, he distinguishes between ‘changes from above’ and ‘changes from below’. When defining ‘changes from above’ he says that they may take the form of import of new prestige features from outside the speech community, or the re-distribution of forms with known prestige values within the community. He goes on to say that it is not surprising that women are in the vanguard of the acquisition of new prestige patterns and the elimination of stigmatized forms. On the basis of this reasoning he formulates a general principle: “In linguistic change from above, women adopt prestige forms at a higher rate than men” (Labov 2001: 273–274). As for changes from below, women are also innovators, according to Labov.

He includes two different language change processes in his model, both cases where contact between dialects and standard languages leads to linguistic changes and cases in which majority and minority languages are in contact and might influence on one another. When it comes to terminology, he does not distinguish between language change and language shift, using ‘change’ in both cases. We concentrate on the relation between majority and minority languages and have thus modified the original Labovian model to serve our purpose.

So, summing up the gender paradox, we can present it schematically in the following way, modifying the Labovian model (Table 1).

Table 1: Modified Labovian model.

	Women	Men
stable sociolinguistic situation	conservative (monolingual)	innovative (bilingual)
changes from above (e.g. language shift)	innovative, change-oriented	conservative, less oriented towards language change and shift
changes from below (e.g. (re)vitalisation)	innovative, oriented towards (re)vitalisation	conservative, less preoccupied with (re)vitalisation

As a consequence of his reasoning, Labov concludes rather strongly that women have been found to be ahead of men in most of the linguistic changes in progress studied by quantitative means within the past several decades (Labov 2001: 280). There may be different factors that account for this rather strongly documented differentiation. First of all, language shifts, like dialect redistribution, are often tightly tied to socioeconomic factors. Since power and status are not equally distributed between women and men, and women in our societies normally have less economic power than men they rely more on symbolic capital. Language as a resource might be characterised as a very strong symbol in this respect. Women in general may be more aware of this than men, and therefore more aware of potential consequences of language choices, also language choices with relevance for the next generation.

Despite radical changes in the economic position of women in western societies, particularly in the Nordic countries, females remain the major caretakers of children. According to Brouwer (1989) the differentiation of the genders appears to be the result of pervasive social factors that alter more slowly than other social relations. It follows that gender differentiation, as a social factor must enter into the explanation of ongoing linguistic change as a continuous process.

Other linguists have found the same gender patterns as Labov described in his 2001 study. Women being more innovative than men in changes from below is documented by e.g. Cedergren (1973), Trudgill (1974) and Eckert (1989), to mention but a few, while women's more conservative language choices in more stable linguistic societies still find support in several somewhat more recent investigations, e.g. Eriksson (2001), Sundgren (2002) and Gunnarsdotter Grönberg (2004), all of them from Sweden. Precisely the same gendered patterns are found in Smeby (2017). Mothers even in families where there is a high degree of gender equality, still have greater responsibility and spend more time with their children than do men (Smeby 2017).

Another social factor that Labov includes in his overview in 2001 is ethnicity. He explicitly compares linguistic impact caused by ethnicity with that caused by gender:⁸

We should exercise considerable caution in formulating any general principles on the relation of ethnicity to language change. [—] [G]ender differentiation follows principles of extraordinary generality, based on certain constancies in the relation of men and women across societies. But though the population of most complex societies is differentiated by ethnicity, the relation among these ethnic groups, and their use of language, shows little uniformity throughout the world (Labov 2001: 246–247).

8 Our findings cannot be used to confirm or reject Labov's affirmations about ethnicity. However, the general patterns these findings document might lend support to a claim stating the gender outweighs ethnicity.

5.2 Labov's modified model applied to the historical development on the North Calotte

If we add the three stages with which we have structured this paper to Labov's model, an interesting pattern becomes visible (Table 2).

Table 2: Modified Labovian model periodised.

	Women	Men	Period of time
stable sociolinguistic varieties	conservative (monolingual)	innovative (bilingual)	multilingualism, tolerant policy
changes from above (e.g. language shift)	innovative, change-oriented	less oriented towards language change and shift	assimilation policy, language shift
changes from below (e.g. (re)vitalisation)	innovative, oriented towards (re)vitalisation	conservative, less preoccupied with (re)vitalisation	ethnic renaissance, pluralistic policy

As we have shown, Labov's model has proved to be very useful. The material we have analysed gives sufficient documentation to support the Labovian model. So far then, Labov's generalisations are supported by what we know about the linguistic situation in all three stages, from the first relatively stable non-assimilation period, through the assimilation period and also now during the (re)vitalisation period where a reversal of the previous language shifts takes place, at least to a certain degree.

6 Conclusions

In this paper, we have been more preoccupied with *describing* the linguistic situation in these three periods of time, than with *explaining* the findings. We have, however, suggested that parenthood or motherhood is a critical explanatory factor. New ways of distributing tasks of parenthood, new and not so strictly separated gender roles, in short new ways of living, influence the linguistic choices of individuals. Nonetheless, it seems as if, at least during the first decade of the twenty-first century, intergenerational transfer of language still belongs to the domain of women (although there are also some small signs of

change in this respect). In general, gender patterns still seem to repeat themselves.⁹

Developing our own explanation further, we would like to keep in mind that the language choices made by the women during the assimilation period as well as during (re)vitalisation have been motivated by a conscious responsibility for the well-being of their children. Even though their role as assimilation agents has been criticised by later generations, such criticism is in most cases unjust. In the situation in which the women found themselves they did what they thought was the right thing, even though it meant a lot of hard work. Shifting languages is hard work! Being convinced that they had a responsibility to speak the majority language to their children must have been difficult and stressful for them. They abandoned their own mother-tongue, which most of them knew and mastered much better than their second language, the majority language being merely a school language for them. As adults they brought the majority language into their own homes, believing that this shift would help their children to a better life than they themselves had experienced.

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⁹ It is appropriate to make a necessary reservation which is not always made in sociolinguistics. One should, of course, question strong generalisations, not only because balancing generalisations and individual cases is a challenge, but also because one apparent counter argument to our findings is that our generalisations are solely based on empirical studies in Western societies. Nevertheless, as long as we keep in mind that the results seem to hold for – first of all, Nordic societies – and secondly, perhaps Western societies in general, it should imply that there are certain political, societal or cultural factors behind these findings, factors that are characteristic of Nordic – and Western – societies. Results, embedded in specific cultures at specific periods in history, are after all valid for the contexts from which they are drawn.

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