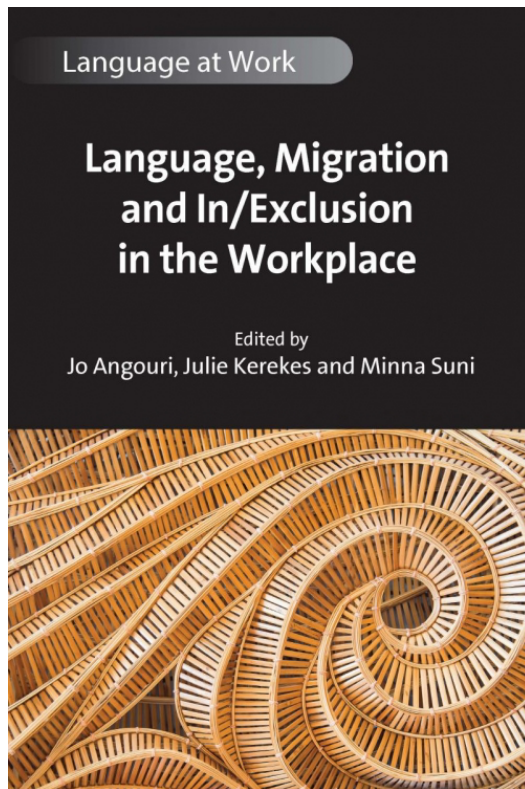


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Contextualising Diversity, Work and Mobility across Time: Cases from Norway's 'High North'

Florian Hiss

Introduction

Research into language, work, and migration has evolved rapidly during the past decade. The majority of studies focus on contemporary cases. However, work migration and linguistic diversity in the workplace are not phenomena solely of the early 21st century; many workplaces have been sites of multilingual encounters throughout history. While this has been acknowledged in contemporary studies (e.g., Duchêne & Heller, 2012), there exist only a few studies on language and diversity in historical workplaces (e.g., Boutet, 2001; Hewitt, 2012; Hiss, 2017). Considering the major effects of globalisation on communication and mobility, when we look at longer timescales, we see that history has shaped the current conditions. A consideration of the temporal dimensions of work and mobility as well as surrounding contexts and conditions can help make sense of present and future changes.

Connections between contemporary and historical working life can be established in at least three different but intertwining ways. Firstly, past conditions and developments can tell something about the emergence of contemporary conditions over time. Secondly, when challenges are similar, experiences from earlier times can provide valuable knowledge applicable to contemporary challenges, e.g., the management of diversity in the workplace. Thirdly, the past can be mobilised and explored discursively to make sense of the present or recontextualised as an added value within the contemporary context. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to demonstrate that the relationship between a multilingual past and contemporary working life encompasses more than a chronological development. This study

examines the interplay of these aspects as displayed in the case of multilingual Northern Norway.

Norway's High North – more precisely, its two northernmost counties, Troms and Finnmark¹ – hosts a growing economy as well as a multilingual history. The exploitation of natural resources, ranging from fish to natural gas and ore, as well as tourism, play a central role in the contemporary development of the area. This development has drawn national and global attention to the region (Jensen & Hønneland, 2011; Røvik et al., 2011); its economic growth has also increased the need for a broad and flexible workforce in both its urban centres and its rural periphery. While work migration makes many contemporary workplaces linguistically and culturally diverse, the diversity of Northern Norway is not a new phenomenon; it has been linguistically and culturally diverse for centuries. The country is the home of Sámi, Kven, and Norwegians, and there are traditionally strong contacts with neighbours in Russia, Finland, and Sweden. The coast, providing food, work, and easy transportation, has continuously attracted people from abroad.

Sámi and Kven, both Finno-Ugric languages, have been in use in the region for centuries. Today, the Sámi are recognised as indigenous people of Norway, and the Kven as national minority. The majority language is Norwegian. Norwegian itself has a vast range of dialects, which are used actively in all social domains, marking local and regional identity, for individuals as well as corporations. Norwegian also has two official written varieties, Bokmål and Nynorsk. In the north, the majority uses the former. In brief, we encounter a linguistic diversity with actively used dialectal variation, two heritage minority languages, and a broad variety of new minority languages spoken by immigrants. As in many western countries, English functions as a lingua franca in many work settings.

Regional history encompasses many examples of workplaces as arenas of multilingual encounters and negotiation of language policies. Here, I present two cases from the 19th century in more detail: a copper mine run by British industrialists, which employed almost exclusively migrant workers, many of them Kven from Finland and Sweden; and the so-called Pomor Trade between the inhabitants of the Norwegian coast and Russian merchants, who came during the summer season to exchange flour, corn, and other products in exchange for fish. I juxtapose these historical cases with instances of their contemporary contextualisation, arguing that communication and multicultural encounters are a continuous thread in Northern Norwegian history. Scrutinising such threads and investigating the interplay of different ways in which history becomes meaningful requires an understanding of how time affects the making of meaning in different and intertwining ways. I therefore begin with a theoretical overview of time and temporal diversity surrounding language use, followed by two brief sections on methodological implications and the data which inform this study. Then, I present a broad overview of languages and diversity in Northern Norway, its contemporary situation and historical development. In the core part of the article, I present and compare historical cases and instances of contemporary contextualisation. Finally, I attempt to gather patterns emerging from the data and discuss the interplay of different ways of temporal sensemaking.

Time and temporal diversity

Language, mobility and work patterns are intertwined and time sensitive. However, scholars have repeatedly pointed out that time and temporality are too often neglected in the study of language and social life, criticising the detemporalisation of language in linguistic research (Auer et al., 1999) and a preference for synchronicity (Blommaert, 2018). Historical

sociolinguistics has highlighted the importance of studying ‘layered simultaneity in diachrony’ (Nevalainen, 2015), i.e., to include multiple levels of context and social relations in the study of historical language use and language change. Such a perspective is indispensable to a proper understanding of language use in historical contexts. Here, I want to go one step further. Temporal experience and the ways in which we understand, interpret, and appropriate time are multi-layered and complex. They affect the ways in which we make sense of the past, present, and future.

Time can be understood as a continuum measurable in seconds, hours, years, centuries etc. Any event can be placed on a timeline of chronological order. But chronological order tells little about social meaning (Blommaert, 2018: 65). Ideas of absolute, measurable clock- and calendar-time are radically different from the ways in which we experience the relations between past, present, and future. In discursive practice, the past is continuously reconstituted with reference to the present and future. The experience of time is context-sensitive, relational, and constructive: ‘past and future change with each new present, and each present is defined with reference to a particular event, system, biography or person’ (Adam, 2004: 69). In this sense, historical contextualisation contributes to the emergence of something new. Sherover (1991: 43) puts it this way:

We cannot authentically escape the varied aspects of our heritage, but we are continually compelled to appropriate it selectively. By selecting some possibilities it offers rather than others, we are continually reshaping and remolding it into the legacy we will be passing on.

Simultaneously, any social action in the present (including its social and material contexts and the experiences of all participants) is affected by historical processes of becoming (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

Every action or event of whatever duration, in the present, past, or future, takes time and unfolds in time. This aspect of past events is easily erased in the retrospective: Historical processes appear synchronic, e.g., when summarised in a single word such as *industrialisation, assimilation, or migration*. But the time during which processes unfold in different historical settings gives meaning to the overall process, including some of the most central concerns of this article. The temporal aspect of mobility has changed radically over time. People have migrated throughout human history, but technologies such as airplanes and the internet allow us to move back and forth much faster and to communicate with other people anywhere in the world without losing time. Time is also central to the organisation and valuing of labour in industrial and capitalist economies. In Marx's (1867) view, time has become an abstract exchange value that enables the transformation of labour into capital in capitalist economies. This marks an essential difference between pre-industrial and capitalist, industrial economies.

Adam (2004) speaks of 'temporal diversity'. The same applies to the interplay of processes on radically different timescales (Lemke, 2000): developments on long, historical timescales can be equally relevant to the making of meaning in a here-and-now setting (e.g., interactional processes on much shorter timescales). The parallel and intertwining use of different timescales and radically different and seemingly contradictory perceptions of time in everyday social practice is enabled by the means of language – while language itself is deeply embedded in time. When comparing historical cases of multilingual work practices with

instances of modern contextualisation, it is important to keep in mind the temporality of language and social life and methodological implications in the way in which realities are represented. As Fabian (1971) pointed out, language use was a central means of social organisation and articulation in historical settings; but it is also the channel through which researchers engage with historical conditions.

Methodological implications

Methodological approaches to studying the dynamic interplay of such diverse understandings of time should encompass several different perspectives. It is useful, firstly, to integrate emic and etic perspectives on time and history, as both can be selective in different ways; and, secondly, to pursue a broad overview of relevant historical developments and temporal relations while, at the same time, acknowledging the importance of small fragments of history and single instances of communication, especially in discursive contextualisation. Thirdly, it is necessary to map relevant contextual relations, roles, and voices surrounding historical cases (e.g., Meeuwis, 2011; Nevalainen, 2015; Thomas, 1994) and the present contexts and discursive means of dealing with the past (e.g., Bamberg et al., 2011; Scollon, 2008). Fourthly, combining and juxtaposing these perspectives allow us to view the interplay of processes on different timescales and the emergence of meaning in time.

The challenge arising from the combination of such different perspectives is a potentially unlimited amount of information. Provided that we are compelled to appropriate the past selectively (Sherover, 1991), one is obliged to work with comparably small fragments of language use in time. Selectivity not only applies to language users producing discourse about the past in any temporal context, but also to us as researchers. The combination of different

perspectives will help to develop a critical awareness concerning researcher positionality and the selections we make (cf. Hiss, 2022).

Data

I am interested in instances and processes on radically different timescales, which are difficult to capture within a homogeneous dataset. Accordingly, this study is informed by and synthesises research data and findings from previous research which were collected and produced at different times and through different methods. This study is built around three instances of contemporary communication and the ways in which they contextualise the region's multilingual history. I encountered these instances when working on my postdoctoral research project on *Linguistic and Cultural Diversity at Work* (2014-2018). In the project, I followed up on early findings in two ways: I decided to investigate some of the historical cases economic agents refer to today, and I included questions about the region's historical diversity in a telephone survey consisting of short interviews with 140 company representatives. Here, I expand on the findings from these studies.

Altogether, I draw on four sources of data and scientific knowledge surrounding contemporary and historical workplace multilingualism in Northern Norway. First, my main focus is on the cases of contemporary contextualisation. Second, I compare these with two cases from the 19th century: the Pomor Trade and its linguistic practice, *Russenorsk*, which have been studied extensively by several generations of linguists (e.g., Broch, 1927; Broch & Jahr, 1984); and the *Alten Copper Works*, which I studied based on the company's archived correspondence (Hiss, 2017). Third, for background information on diversity in contemporary working life, I draw on findings from the survey study (Hiss, 2019; Hiss & Loppacher, 2021). Fourth, I draw on previous research by sociolinguists and historians surrounding the

sociolinguistic conditions of the region. In the following sections, I will first present a broad sketch of the contemporary situation and historical development, before I focus on contemporary contextualisation.

Languages and diversity in Northern Norway

Work migration and the recruitment of workers from abroad are among those factors that make many contemporary workplaces linguistically diverse (see also Chapters 5, 6 and 8). Approximately 13 percent of the population of Troms and Finnmark (ca. 243,000 inhabitants in total) have an immigrant background² (Statistics Norway, 2022). The statistics count persons from 147 different countries. The ten largest groups (which account for over 50% of all persons with immigrant background) come from Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Syria, Somalia, Finland, Sweden, Thailand, Eritrea, and Germany, thus exhibiting highly heterogeneous linguistic, cultural, and social backgrounds. Job opportunities have caused a strong increase of migration to the region during the last two decades (Aure, 2012). The increasing number of immigrants is a vital, stabilising force in small communities. De-industrialisation of rural communities and educational institutions in the cities have caused many young people to move to urban centres. As a consequence, ‘to the extent that manufacturing industries survive, they are likely to be operated by immigrant labour rather than locals’ (Aarsæther, 2015: 66).

Historically, most inhabitants in many parts of the region spoke Sámi or Kven, both Finno-Ugric languages. Today, Ethnologue (Simons & Fennig, 2017) estimates 1,500 speakers of Kven and 20,000 speakers of North Sámi in Norway (though the validity and reliability of such numbers can be questioned). Sámi languages are spoken in a large geographical area covering parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. In Norway, the Sámi are recognised

as an indigenous people who have their own political and educational institutions which also provide job opportunities for Sámi speakers (Rasmussen & Nolan, 2011). The Kven population has its geographical roots in northern Sweden and Finland. In several waves, they settled at the North Norwegian coast from the 16th century onwards (Niemi, 2003). The Kven are recognised as a national minority, with limited institutional support. The Kven language is largely mutually intelligible with Finnish. Today, it is mainly used in private homes among the elderly, and revitalisation attempts are ongoing (Lane & Räisänen, 2017). Beyond those who speak or understand Sámi and/or Kven, many have Sámi and/or Kven backgrounds without speaking their ethnic heritage languages; some show their ethnic belonging overtly, while others remain silent or even reject it (Johansen, 2013; Lane, 2015; Olsen, 2007).

I next turn to an overview of linguistic diversity in contemporary workplaces, examining how historical diversity entangles with contemporary working life as well as the role of labour and economy during three phases of historical development.

Linguistic and cultural diversity in contemporary working life

Hiss and Loppacher (2021) analyse telephone interviews with 140 company representatives, to sketch the use, management and sociolinguistic contextualisation of linguistic diversity in contemporary working life in the region. A multitude of ‘immigrant’ languages are used among migrant workers not only in the fishing industry, which is important for the region, but also in other industries such as manufacturing and construction. This diversity is largest at the lower end of organisational hierarchies (on linguistic diversity and workplace hierarchy, see also Chapter 10 in this volume). While many workers have migrated to Northern Norway, most managers and administrators have a local or regional background. Practically none of

them reports knowledge of the language(s) of their employees. Though they express a preference for workers competent in Norwegian, the job market does not allow companies to employ solely Norwegian-speaking workforces.

Many companies lack proper strategies for handling linguistically diverse workforces, or they let language ideological principles rule rather than practical considerations. For example, Norwegian is usually treated as an undisputed linguistic norm to which many workers are required to adapt, even if the majority of employees speak other languages. English is used whenever competences in Norwegian do not suffice. Some companies use language brokers (e.g., Lønnsmann & Kraft, 2018) – multilingual employees in key positions – to mediate between leaders and employees and between workers with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Concerning the position of the region's historical minority languages (i.e. Kven and Sámi) in contemporary working life, the survey findings reveal two significant aspects. First, both minority languages are used in work contexts, albeit to a limited extent (Hiss & Loppacher, 2021). Aside from traditional professions such as reindeer herding and handicraft (for which Sámi terminology comprises expert knowledge), we encountered several examples, within limited geographical areas, where Sámi is used first and foremost orally among colleagues and in contact with customers. The cases where Kven is used in work contexts are typically found at the intersection between professional and private spheres, e.g., in elderly care or in situations where individual employees speak Kven with individual customers.

Second, based on the same dataset, I show in Hiss (2019) that many company representatives explicitly and implicitly position themselves vis-à-vis language ideologies and societal

expectations when asked about the role of Kven and Sámi in their workplace. Such reactions can only be understood against the backdrop of the shifting social evaluation of linguistic diversity throughout history. It was a common ideology that using minority languages was connected with social and economic disadvantages. This view is challenged by the currently ongoing ethnic emancipation, as discussed below.

Three historical phases of diversity politics

Multilingual and multicultural development in northern Scandinavia has been described in three historical phases (Huss & Lindgren, 2010; Niemi, 2008): an era of varying multilingualism, lasting until the mid-19th century; a period of linguistic and cultural assimilation from the 1860s until after World War II; and a period of ethnic revival, which gained momentum in the 1980s. Despite this chronological segmentation, the political, cultural, and sociolinguistic processes of each phase overlap.

The era of varying multilingualism was also an era of pre-industrial economy. Many families made their living through a combination of fishery and farming or reindeer herding (especially parts of the Sámi population) (e.g., Blom, 1830). Harbours and trading posts along the coast were meeting points for fishermen, merchants, and sailors from the greater region, Southern Norway, and other parts of Europe. The combined fishing and farming livelihood had an immediate impact on multilingual development and language choices. Friis (1871: 102-103) reports that many Sámi and Kven men were mobile along the coast, as fishermen, or selling and buying products. Many of these men showed a good command of Norwegian in work and trading contexts. Friis mentions also that many Norwegians could speak Sámi or Kven in these encounters. At the same time, very few Sámi or Kven women and children (running the farms) in their remote home villages spoke or understood Norwegian. Thus,

many multilingual practices were connected to work and mobility. From the harbour town of Vadsø, Friis (1871) reports his impression of multilingual practices:

Wherever one walks around in Vadsø itself, the Norwegian centre between the eastern and western Kven town, in the streets, wharfs, and stores one hears more often Kven than Norwegian. Of course, virtually all merchants could speak Kven, just as well as many of them could speak Russian. Many could also speak Lappish [Sámi]. (Friis, 1871: 105, author's translation from Norwegian)

During his visit to Hammerfest, Janson (1874: 21-22) described his impression of being in another country because Kven, Sámi and Russian were spoken everywhere. Though he did not understand most of these languages, Janson reported that most of the talk he heard was connected to work activities. Friis's (1871) observations in particular suggest that communication did not rely on one common lingua franca but on the ability to make oneself understood in several languages and to accommodate to other interlocutors.

Both Friis and Janson mentioned the use of Russian. Throughout the 19th century, during the summer season, merchants from northwest Russia visited harbours and villages along the coast. The linguistic practice of the so-called Pomor Trade between the Russians and the local population was called *Russenorsk* ('Russian-Norwegian'), or *moja på tvoja* ('me to you/I (speak) like you'). It received great scientific and public attention and was subsequently described as a pidgin (Broch & Jahr, 1984). Friis (1891) described it as follows:

So, during this trading, a kind of lingua franca is spoken, which is called *Russenorsk* and which consists of a roughly equal mixture of both languages. The Russian believes, by the way, that he speaks pure Norwegian, and the Fisherman, for his part, is

convinced that he speaks perfect Russian. But they do not come to an understanding, and after some shouting and gesticulation, they agree about the deal. It is quite amusing to see these people and listen to their strange gibberish. (Friis, 1891: 27, author's translation from Norwegian)

These linguistic practices remained for a long time, when most people earned their primary livelihood in traditional, pre-industrial and pre-capitalist economies. The use of Russenorsk ceased when the barter trade was replaced by a monetary economy (Broch & Jahr, 1984). Sámi and Kven came under pressure from the middle of the 19th century onwards, when the government launched assimilation (i.e. Norwegian-only) policies, aiming to strengthen the nation on its periphery and exclude outside influences (Huss & Lindgren, 2010; Pietikäinen et al., 2010). These policies went hand-in-hand with the impact of modernisation on public and professional domains. Professional education was moved from the communities to the school system (Huss & Lindgren, 2010: 261). As a result, Kven and Sámi identity was stigmatised, and many speakers abandoned their heritage languages in favour of Norwegian.

Economic measures were used to implement assimilation policies. Speaking Norwegian became a necessary precondition to accessing all areas of economic life (Eriksen & Niemi, 1981; Huss & Lindgren, 2010; Lane, 2010). Eriksen and Niemi (1981) report several cases in which construction workers and miners were recruited from among ethnic Norwegians rather than local Kven and Sámi. In this way, more ethnic Norwegians could be brought to the North, and the state could exert assimilation pressure on the Sámi and Kven: The language of modern economy and working-life was Norwegian. The decision of many Kven and Sámi to abandon their mother tongues and shift to Norwegian was connected to a wish for an economically better life (Huss & Lindgren, 2010). Sámi was so stigmatised by the 1960s, for

example, that Sámi men travelling on coastal boats would switch to Norwegian whenever others could hear them talking (Eidheim, 1969).

Today, the workplace is considered an important domain for preserving and revitalising minority languages (Fishman, 1991; Rasmussen & Nolan, 2011; on workplace as a politicised site, see also Chapter 10 in this volume). Numerous revitalisation activities have been undertaken during the last decades. Some Sámi communities have succeeded relatively well in maintaining and reclaiming language and identity. The Kven are no longer considered foreigners in Norway, but a part of Norway's cultural heritage.

Contemporary contextualisation and historical cases compared

The historical overview has revealed multiple connections between the development of linguistic diversity and labour, mobility, and economic development in the region throughout the last 300 years. I will now turn to instances of contemporary recontextualisation of this multilingual history and, in the light of the interplay of temporal understandings outlined above, I will compare these with two historical cases.

Instances of contemporary contextualisation

Example 1 is an extract from the 2013 annual report of High North Petroleum³, a company specialising in the search for offshore resources of natural oil and gas. In addition to the statutory annual account, annual reports usually contain statistics or descriptive information on the company's activities and, quite often, statements about social and environmental responsibility. Annual reports are publicly accessible and provide information to anyone interested in the company's activities. High North Petroleum presented the following account of its corporate social responsibility:

Example 1

High North Petroleum is a multicultural workplace with nine nationalities represented among the company's employees. High North Petroleum's identity will always be shaped by the region we come from. Communication and multicultural encounters run like a red thread through Northern Norwegian history. The trading connections between Northwest Russia and Northern Norway relate back to the Viking age. The Pomor Trade in the 19th century took place during summer along major parts of the coastal and fjord areas in Northern Norway, between the local population and Russians from the White Sea region. During the union with Denmark, the official class and the bourgeoisie were recruited to the north from Denmark and Northern Germany. From Finland, the ancestors of today's Kven population immigrated over the border to Finnmark. High North Petroleum as a multicultural workplace represents a continuation of this tradition.
(author's translation from Norwegian)

The text is accompanied by a picture of three employees in front of a poster about the arctic wilderness. The persons in the picture have different skin- and hair-colours, a prototypical symbol of cultural diversity. Sámi culture is also discussed in the report.

Example 1 establishes links between the company as a contemporary, multicultural workplace and historical cases of multilingual and multicultural encounters in the region. By explicitly embedding itself in the described historical context, the company constructs a regional identity. Accounting for corporate social responsibility, the text uses the means of narrative (e.g., Bamberg et al., 2011) to merge historical past with present conditions and to shape an impression of responsible future actions. In addition, the accompanying picture suggests a

relationship between cultural and natural diversity. It is a known fact that activities of the oil and gas industry can affect the vulnerable natural environment. Corporate social responsibility is simultaneously about 'doing good' for society and 'doing well' economically (Aguinis, 2011). Thus, one aim of the account is to present the company in a good light vis-à-vis social and environmental interests. The presentation of historical examples is highly selective; a critical view of the text reveals a number of contrasts hidden behind the construction of historical continuity. Can we really compare the company's employees (highly educated experts in geology and engineering) with the fishermen, farmers, tradesmen, miners, and officials from earlier times?

High North Petroleum is not the only contemporary actor using the region's history for communications. Similar elements of the linguistic and cultural diversity and historical processes are foregrounded in Example 2, a blogpost about a new international cooperation posted by the rector of UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, on the university's news blog (Husebekk, 2016). The blog text opens with the following:

Example 2

Collaboration has shaped the history of people who have lived and made a living in Arctic areas. The Sámi culture does not know any national borders in the north. The Kven population moved across the borders, and the Pomor trade is an example of borderless collaboration.

The text concludes:

Challenges and opportunities in the Arctic do not know any borders. Therefore, we intensify our collaboration in important areas such as research, education and

innovation across the national borders, through the Joint Arctic Agenda. (author's translation from Norwegian)

While Example 1 uses the past to underscore the company's regional embeddedness, Example 2 highlights the context of international collaboration. In both examples, the authors present diversity and historical examples as special and unique to the High North and as a strength of their own activities.

Example 3 (Figure 2.1) is a historical photograph from 1902, showing workers bringing fish ashore at a fish reception facility on Sørøya island in Finnmark. The large photograph (ca. 6 square meters) is installed in a restaurant in *Kystens hus* (the 'House of the Coast'), a futuristic building by the harbour of Tromsø, the location of various facilities in the seafood and fishery sector, as well as restaurants and shops. The picture shows one of the historical, multilingual meeting points (e.g., Friis, 1871, see section on the three historical phases of diversity politics). Neither the historical diversity nor the fact that most contemporary fish reception facilities are operated by migrant labour are made explicit in the contemporary presentation. However, the photograph explicitly addresses a linguistically diverse audience: tourists and international customers. In the upper left corner, it includes a description in Norwegian, English, German, and Japanese. A box contains leaflets in the same languages, linking traditional fish production to present products. The focus is, thus, on the products and not on the workers or their communication. The website of *Kystens hus* (www.kystenshus.no) advertises a future-oriented focus on the coast as well as a 'manifestation of the new centrality of the coast and an active driving force for increased value creation' (author's translation from Norwegian). The leaflet and photograph transmit a sense of regional and historical rootedness of this future-orientation. Thus, the creation of something new ('the new centrality of the

coast' and the advertisement of current products) is linked to the past – but in a highly selective manner.

Figure 2.1, Example 3: Photograph titled 'Bringing fish ashore on Sørøya, Finnmark (1902)', inside the 'House of the Coast'



The Pomor Trade

The Pomor Trade is mentioned explicitly in Examples 1 and 2 to establish a sense of historical continuity in 'communication and multicultural encounters' (Example 1) and in 'borderless collaboration' (Example 2). Historically, the trade developed between the local population and merchants from White Sea Russia, who brought timber, corn, flour, and other goods in exchange for fish. For the local population, this trade was much more advantageous than buying the same products from southern Norway. A common code of communication

was essential for both parts to negotiate a fair deal. This linguistic practice was called Russenorsk. Most likely, it emerged in the late 18th century and was used until the early 20th century when the barter trade was replaced by a monetary economy (Broch & Jahr, 1984). Interestingly, witnesses have recounted some of the oral practices such as what we see in Example 4.

Example 4: Dialogue excerpt in Russenorsk

Fisherman: kaptein! moja har fiska selle.

Captain! I have fish for sale.

Russian: kak sort fiska på tvoja båt?

What kind of fish do you have on your boat?

Fisherman: paltuska, tresska, sika, piksja

Halibut, cod, coley, haddock.

Russian: kak pris på tvoja fisk? moja lita penga.

What is the price for your fish? I don't have much money.

(Broch, 1930: 119, author's translation)

Kommentert [A1]: To be precise, I translated the Norwegian translations into English. I did not make changes to the text in Russenorsk.

Russenorsk had a simple grammar and a limited lexicon specific to trading, and consisting of elements from Norwegian and Russian, but also Sámi and international sailors' languages such as English and Dutch.

The case of the Pomor Trade is an interesting historical example of how a multilingual practice emerged and finally ceased because of mobility and economic conditions. But it is also a story of attention and contextualisation. Some contemporary witnesses documented

examples in Russenorsk because it was extraordinary and exotic to them. Later, the reported materials were valued as important artefacts for research on language contact and pidgin languages (Broch & Jahr, 1984). In the process of passing on knowledge over time, Russenorsk and the Pomor Trade have been recontextualised and reinterpreted several times (Hiss, 2022). Examples 1 and 2 show how the historical Pomor Trade is used to add meaning to 21st century working life and economy. Though the temporal contexts are radically different, the red threads constructed at different points of time build on the same aspects: diversity, work, and regional peculiarities.

Kven migration and industrialisation

The ancestors of today's Kven population lived and travelled in northern Scandinavia for centuries. One reason they settled at the coast was to have better chances of survival through access to fish, when the harvest from agriculture was poor. Through their labour to cultivate the land, the Kven established themselves as industrious and persistent workers. The immigration of the Kven is mentioned in Examples 1 and 2, likely because of obvious parallels with contemporary work migration. Here, I want to sketch the case of the Kven miners at the Alten Copper Works, in order to show how selective contemporary contextualisation is. The case is historically and sociolinguistically interesting not only because the mine employed many Kven workers, but also because it was in operation just at the time when the Norwegian state introduced assimilation policies.

The mine was in operation from 1826 to 1878, owned and managed by British industrialists and the first large industrial enterprise in a society that had made its living in traditional economies. During its first years, the directors had major difficulties to recruit and secure a sufficient, stable, and at the same time cheap and flexible workforce in the sparsely populated

periphery. Therefore, they saw great economic value in the Kven, who had escaped from misfortune in their home villages in Finland and Sweden and were willing to accept work for low wages. This is revealed in the directors' reports to their investors in London. Example 5 is an extract from a letter sent by the local directors of the Alten Copper Works to A.F. Nellen in London on 21 April 1834.

Example 5

[...] I have engaged and shall continue to engage as many Quans as we can advantageously employ, the difficulty we have hitherto laboured under, and which is inseparably connected with any Enterprise of magnitude in Districts so scantily populated as this but more particularly in an undertaking foreign to the habits of the inhabitants is now fast weaving away, and the probability of our succeeding in creating a mining population in a great measure from among our Quans is placed beyond a doubt [...]

In the mid-1800s, the mining population grew to over 1,000 persons. Nearly all of them were migrants, and more than half of them Kven. Language management in the workplace itself was not addressed in the original correspondence, probably because work in the mine was mainly physical. However, the company explicitly supported the use of Kven in the community. They offered school education in Kven to the workers' children (Nielsen, 1995), and argued politically against the linguistic and cultural assimilation policies of the Norwegian state (Hiss, 2017). The Kven were needed as workers, and the company would not risk anything that could cause them to leave the mine. The Kven workers were treated as a constitutive part of the mining population and a valuable economic resource. Simultaneously, the company had an interest in promoting the maintenance of the Kven's connections to their

home villages (thus treating them as foreigners), in order to remain flexible when fewer workers were needed and to avoid being responsible for workers without employment (Hiss, 2017).

This treatment of the Kven workers as locals and foreigners at the same time only becomes visible when mapping the interplay of different relations and positions in the historical context. None of the examples of modern contextualisation includes such a nuanced perspective. The case of the Alten Copper Works and its Kven employees reveals more parallels with today's settings: When the Kven migrated to Norway in historical times, they were looking for better living conditions, just like many immigrants today; and just like today, migrants were needed as workers, and simultaneously considered a threat to national homogeneity.

Discussion: 'Red threads' and the contextualisation of the past

In Example 1, High North Petroleum's account stated that 'communication and multicultural encounters run like a red thread through Northern Norwegian history'. I have pointed out that temporal contextualisation is diverse and multifaceted and that the ways in which we deal with the past in the present are necessarily selective. At the same time, any new present is an outcome of complex historical processes. The historical overview in the section 'Languages and diversity in Northern Norway' showed close connections between multilingual and economic development in all historical phases. This relationship is, however, not constant but characterised by radical changes in the economic development, the languages and varieties used, and the valuation of linguistic diversity. This arouses questions about the construction of 'red threads' such as suggested in Example 1.

From all contemporary examples, it is clear that the past is mobilised in a here-and-now situation with a view to the present and future. The past is easily perceived as something fixed. But, as Blommaert (2018: 67) notes,

... even if the discourse itself remains apparently stable and unaltered, the material, social and cultural conditions under which it is produced and under which it emerges can change and affect what the discourse is and what it does.

This means that history does not merely exhibit continuity and changes; the past receives new meanings each time it is recontextualised in a new present and re-entextualised (Silverstein & Urban, 1996) in a new text. The result is an interplay between a perception of fixity and 'textual newness' (Silverstein & Urban, 1996: 13). Historical processes such as the Pomor Trade and Kven migration appear as fixed texts and serve as building blocks in the narrative construction of temporal continuity. However, both cases reveal a more multifaceted interplay of roles, relations, and conditions than the contemporary examples suggest. Narration is an ideal tool to construct a sense of continuity and constancy in the face of change, but the one who narrates plays a critical role in the shape and content of the narrative (e.g., Bamberg et al., 2011). The historical overview shows that linguistic diversity has been repeatedly reframed, valued, and devalued in new political and economic discourses. A continual recontextualisation and re-entextualisation of the past is part of the historical process. A central motive in the present is the perception of a new centrality of the periphery (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013) and regional belonging. All historical examples exhibit aspects of being located in the periphery. This renewed focus on the periphery might explain why these particular aspects of history are foregrounded.

Contextualising the past is selective. While foregrounded in Examples 1 and 2, linguistic and cultural diversity is backgrounded in Example 3. In none of the examples are the history of linguistic assimilation and the resulting discontinuities included in the construction of continuity; in other contexts, however, they are central to the narrative construction of community identities (Hiss, 2012). One explanation is that Norwegianisation policies are evaluated negatively today, which does not suit the positive messages of the examples. At the same time, new aspects of meaning are added in contemporary contextualisation, including future-orientation, corporate social responsibility, international collaboration, and contemporary work migration. As a result, heritage becomes a commodity (e.g., Heller, 2010), which can be traded against other values.

To complete the picture, it is important to compare the examples with other contemporary perspectives on multilingual heritage. In Hiss (2019), I show that being confronted with the region's multilingual heritage arouses defensive reactions in many representatives of contemporary companies. Their explicit and implicit positioning vis-à-vis language ideologies and perceived societal expectations can only be understood in light of the historical development outlined here. The impact of the past is, thus, not only found in its creative use and recontextualisation, but likely more often in underlying experiences, ideologies, and expectations, which can form a more complicated picture.

Conclusions

The past is interesting because it interacts with the present and future in many ways. Northern Norway hosts multiple examples of linguistic diversity, work, and migration in historical time, which deserve more thorough investigation and can provide valuable insights when addressing contemporary diversity. But the past is not fixed. Understanding the role of the

past in the present requires a view to past and present contexts and the multiple ways in which language builds connections over and across time. Unpacking the contemporary and historical contexts surrounding diversity, work, and mobility reveals a high complexity of relations beyond contemporary and synchronic perspectives. The historical overview in this article has shown both continuities and radical changes across time, as well as recurrent motives at different points of time. Today, the past is mobilised creatively and selectively with a view to the present and future, but it also has a more implicit impact on decisions and reactions. The most important insight is that none of these perspectives stands alone. It is the interplay of different temporal perspectives that makes temporal contextualisation complex.

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Notes

1. Both counties have been merged from 1 January 2020. National and regional authorities have started a process to re-establish Troms and Finnmark as separate counties from 2024.
2. Statistics Norway counted persons who immigrated to Norway and persons born in Norway to parents, both of whom had immigrated to Norway (Dzamarija, 2008).
3. The name of the company has been changed.