

Language teacher identity and language acquisition in a South Saami preschool: A narrative inquiry

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This paper explores language teacher identity (LTI) among three preschool teachers. The focus lies on the preschool teachers' identities as linguistic role models by means of analysing their own descriptions of language learning, that is, their personal experiences of and reflections on language acquisition. Three interviews were made with different in-service preschool teachers. The interviews were analysed by means of narrative inquiry and thematic analysis and guided by literature on LTI, as well as the researcher's previous experience and knowledge of the current field. The findings illustrate how the teachers assumed a leading position in the South Saami language revitalisation project and cope with the responsibility tied to that position. The discussion of the narratives revolves around language teaching and learning made salient in the narrative process. The study provides a hopeful view of language revitalisation by showcasing that it is not only the expected first-language native speakers that are driving forces in the process of restoring a broken chain of intergenerational language transmission. It further illustrates a way for an Indigenous academic to investigate settings within their own community and collaborate with other stakeholders in a language revitalisation project to generate new insights on language revitalisation.

Keywords: Indigenous language teachers, narratives, Saami language, Saami preschool teachers, narrative inquiry, language acquisition

Introduction

The current study focuses on spaces for language revitalisation, particularly linguistic role models in the form of preschool teachers. The importance of preschool teachers in spaces for early education, which are referred to in the literature as, e.g., language nests or preschools, cannot be overestimated (Todal, 2018). It is therefore of considerable importance to explore this role to understand the nature of the profession in projects with high stakes, such as the revitalisation of the South Saami language in a preschool context. The purpose of the study is thus to explore how Saami preschool teachers construct their language teacher identity (LTI) and what was important in that the process. These three questions are predominant: What experiences from their lives form their identity as teachers? What motivates them to learn and teach South Saami? How do they describe their role and the role of their preschool?

Research in the area is scarce. The study is novel by focusing on preschool teachers' experiences of language acquisition in the southern Saami area of Saepmie. There are studies focusing on Saami identity

in this region, but, to the best of my knowledge, the use of the LTI concept has not been applied to explore these issues.

Background – context of the study

The languages of Saepmie

The Saami languages form a continuum of varieties spoken in the areas of Nordland, Trøndelag and Hedmark counties in the south of Saepmie and neighbouring areas in Sweden, to the Kola peninsula in Russia. South Saami is smaller in terms of the total number of speakers and language domains compared to North Saami. The language is on par with Lule and Inari Saami. The different Saami languages are generally not mutually intelligible, and speakers of different Saami languages resort to other shared languages for communication with each other. See Sammalahiti (1998) for a closer description of these languages.

Decolonisation, assimilation and revitalisation

After centuries of colonisation in all of Saepmie and decades of heavy assimilatory policies—referred to in the country specific context as Norwegianisation (Minde, 2005)—South Saami, like the other Saami languages, was found in a position of decline (Magga, 2000). By the early 2000s it was spoken by more old people than young people. Consequently, the intergenerational transmission was broken (Johansen, 2019). However, the Saami have strived to revive what was lost and revitalise their languages (Albury, 2019; Huss, 1999). In recent years, a growing interest in preschools has developed, where children learn South Saami at a very young age (Todal, 2018).

Language use in the south of Saepmie

South Saami is traditionally spoken in the southernmost parts of Saepmie that overlaps the border areas between Sweden and Norway. The language is minoritised in this entire region, and there are no functioning communities in South Saami, as a contrast the North Saami communities in, e.g., Guovdageidnu and Kárášjohka, where North Saami is the majority language in society and at school, as well as in family life.

Reflexivity and researcher's positioning

I hold several positions that make me a stakeholder in the language revitalisation project. Firstly, I am a learner of South Saami. I grew up speaking only Swedish intertwined with a few South Saami words such as *åabpa* (sister), *bearkoe* (meat) and *bovtsh* (reindeer). My own language revitalisation journey started in early adult age as I learnt both to speak South Saami and the grammar of the language in a more formalised way during my years as an undergraduate student. This experience of language acquisition in adult age has shaped me and my understanding of what it means to be a speaker and learner of South Saami.

Secondly, I am a parent of Saami children and concerned about securing the intergenerational transmission of our language. This involves both my own children, their peers and, in the long run, the speaker community. I was acquainted with the teachers during visits at the preschool together with my children. We regularly travelled there to participate in the everyday activities of the preschool and to

speak South Saami. I thereby came to establish relations with the preschool teachers. We discovered that we share an interest in developing our Saami language as well as Saami pedagogy. I asked them to formally participate in a study for my ongoing doctoral project, to which they agreed. They were all quite eager to discuss issues of language revitalisation, language pedagogy, etcetera, with me.

Thirdly, I am a teacher educator and an Indigenous Saami researcher. Therefore, I have a professional need to build and uphold relations with educational practitioners. Research, like many other parts of society, participated in Norwegianisation by framing the research subjects as inferior, both in Saepmie and elsewhere. The most clear example comes from race biology and the scientific view upon the Saami as an inferior race (Schanche, 2002). Therefore, the way a researcher conducts and collects data in cooperation with the participants should be informed and stand in contrast to these historical injustices and also ongoing injustices (Smith, 2012). I firmly believe researchers and practitioners must collaborate to achieve language revitalisation.

Theoretical point of departure and previous research

The concept of teacher identity is widely explored and has been discussed from a multitude of theoretical positions. Varghese et al. (2005) discuss how social identity theory, situated learning and the concept of image-text, can provide different perspectives on LTI. They conclude that “multiple theoretical approaches are absolutely essential if we are not to lose sight of the real-world complexity of our subject” (p. 40) and find that “the teacher’s whole identity was at play in the classroom” (p. 22), and, therefore, that classroom activities depend on how teachers construct their identity; in other words, LTIs impact classroom practices. Therefore, several studies argue that teacher identity has implications for the training of pre-service teachers (see, for instance, Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009, for an overview of the field). They elaborate that teacher identity is also a tool for professional development “in terms of the constant ‘reinventing’ of themselves that teachers undergo” and “in terms of the narratives that teachers create to explain themselves and their teaching lives” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 175). Barkhuizen (2016) followed a student teacher over her early years of service, focusing on the shifts in imagined identity that take place at this early point of her career. Liu and Xu (2011) also claim that professional identity changes, especially over the first years of service (depending on the conditions and community). They followed a university teacher of English at a Chinese university, who narrated her developments in professional identity early in her service during a change of teaching philosophy at her department. In light of this, for the purposes of the current study, we anticipate a definition of LTI in particular, and such is provided by Barkhuizen (2017, p. 4):

Language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical – they are both inside the teacher and outside in the social, material and technological world. LTIs are being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying. They are struggle and harmony: they are contested and resisted, by self and others, and they are also accepted, acknowledged and valued, by self and others. They are core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and backgrounded. And LTIs change, short-term and over time – discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, teachers, administrators, and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places and objects in classrooms, institutions, and online.

Few studies have discussed LTI in Saepmie, and none in the South Saami part of Saepmie. For instance, Hammime et al. (2020) explore Saami language teachers’ professional identity, interviewing Skolt, Inari

and North Saami teachers, many of them second-language learners, in the part of Saepmie overlapping Finland. They found that “non-indigenous teachers who have learned Sámi languages as adults actively link their roles as language teachers to the language revitalisation project” (p. 7). Furthermore, Indigenous teachers assume the role of teacher to “meet the expectations of their indigenous communities” (p. 7). Although non-Indigenous teachers were accepted, they reported a reduced confidence when serving as teachers, due to their being non-native. Such native-centrism has been debated outside the sphere of Indigenous communities and languages. The identity of being insufficient as a non-native speaker of any language can be negative for teachers (Ellis, 2016; Moussu & Llorca, 2008; Pavlenko, 2003). Therefore, it is important in language revitalisation endeavours, which boil down to a question of social justice, to include and support teachers from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous descent. In fact, a perspective involving social justice and teachers of diverse language backgrounds has been called for in the theorisation of LTI (Varghese, 2017).

The current study was carried out in an Indigenous environment. Therefore, I draw upon another theory from an Indigenous setting. Nakata (2002) describes the cultural interface as:

The place where we live and learn, the place that conditions our lives, the place that shapes our futures and more to the point the place where we are active agents in our own lives – where we make decisions – our lifeworld. (p. 28)

He further clarifies the discursive space of the interface, stating that “we don’t go to work or school, enter another domain, interact and leave there when we come home again”, but rather “we live at the interface of both, and home life is in part circumscribed by the fact that we do. Social and family organization has to and does to varying degrees orient itself to that reality” (Nakata, 2002, p. 5).

Barkhuizen’s work on LTI, conjoined with Nakata’s cultural interface, is drawn upon in the analysis of the narratives herein. Therefore, I follow Varghese et al. (2005) and use a multitude of theoretical approaches to understand the concept of LTI. I attempt to bring an Indigenous perspective to the theoretical lens to better account for the specific concerns of Indigenous peoples and the revitalisation of their languages. I propose that Nakata’s cultural interface dances well together with Barkhuizen and others’ work on LTI and that Nakata’s theory is plausible in Saepmie.

Methodology

The study relies on interview data (Kvale, 2007), and the analytical method is narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen et al., 2013a). As LTI is storying, I conducted three semi-structured interviews and asked open-ended questions, mostly focusing on the teachers’ own stories of how they came to learn South Saami and work with transmitting the language to children. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted with one participant at a time. The third interview with a language specialist teacher was conducted online during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Culturally responsive interviewing

I let the interviewee decide the interview language, mainly a Scandinavian language (Swedish/Norwegian), although the language specialist spoke in South Saami. The interviews included words and phrases from other languages as well, mainly South Saami but also Swedish, English and North Saami, which I encouraged. This mirrors the way the teachers use their linguistic repertoire; the teachers all demonstrate a vast array of language skills, which they spontaneously employ to express themselves and

adapt their message to their recipient. Since there is a considerable overlap between my own linguistic repertoire and that of the teachers, I was able to be culturally responsive and adapt the use of language in the interview situation to accommodate what was natural to the interviewees.

Apart from language, the interviewees and I also overlap in a cultural frame of reference. A clear example of this is our mutual understanding of how a family organisation is adapted to reindeer herding and its migration. I, just like all the teachers, live and have lived in families that are in one way or another part of a reindeer herding community.

Ethics underpinning the study

The choice of methods rests on the notion that research should be empowering for those who participate. Therefore, ethics was a guiding factor throughout the entire study. As Barkhuizen et al. (2013b) proclaim, “research should both involve and empower the groups and individuals whose behaviors are the subject of research” (p. 3). Furthermore, I place Indigenous values, culture and norms at the centre of research that involves them, as argued by Smith (2012). In the current study, I listen to the voice of the teachers I interview, communicate their narratives and, in the long run, make their stories heard in settings where I am active, for instance, in courses I teach for pre-service teachers. I also iteratively report the interviewees’ narratives back to them for reflection; for ethical reasons, it is important that the interviewees are comfortable with the steps I take to shape their narratives.

The focused life story interview (Edwards et al., 2005) was chosen early in the project as an overarching structure for the interviews, for two main reasons. Firstly, it allows for a very centred focus on the participant themselves, their experiences and their stories. As Atkinson (1998) states: “If we want to know the unique perspective of an individual, there is no better way to get this than in that person’s own voice” (p. 5). Therefore, I was concerned with allowing the teachers to speak for themselves and narrate their own story; my role was to listen, encourage, ask questions and validate what they were telling me.

Secondly, the focused life story interview has a clear empowering end for the interviewee. Reflecting on one’s own choices, experiences and practices has positive pedagogical implications; it aids the teacher in the process of inventing and reinventing oneself. Atkinson (1998) further elaborates that “the win-win situation of a life story interview, and the primary concern, is to help others tell their life stories in new, clearer, or more complete ways that enable them to see their own lives a bit differently than before and in ways that they can be pleased with” (p. 62). For instance, Ellis argues for viewing teachers’ language learning experiences as a pedagogical resource (Ellis, 2016).

Collaborative storytelling

Although I took the role of the listener during the interview, we must be aware that the teachers’ stories were not created in a void of isolation. As stated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), interviewers “are never there as disembodied recorders of someone else’s experience. They too have an experience, the experience of the inquiry that entails the experience they set out to explore” (p. 81). Ray Cashman (2012) further elaborates that the “interviewer acts not as extractor of unmediated narrative but as collaborator, even co-author, in the production of discourse” (p. 197). By bringing my own experiences into the interviews, for instance by being a South Saami parent and linguistic role model, I also affected the interviews. The teachers were very open and honest about their thoughts and choices in this role, which they might not have been towards someone from outside the community who does not share this experience. This carries over to the results that eventually emerged out of the interviews and thus affected

the outcomes of the research. I view this as one of the qualities of my method, since we thereby gain very deep insights from within the community regarding, for instance, the position of a Saami parent and teacher, framed in the words of both preschool teachers and a researcher.

Nevertheless, the analysis was not solely carried out by myself; the narratives were discussed at several points during the process with two researchers of non-Indigenous descent, but with expertise within the scholarly fields of narrative research and language teaching and learning research, respectively. They have added to the critical analysis of the narratives from a perspective different than my own. The analysis was also discussed at a seminar with peers within the narrative research field, who furthermore scrutinised my role, as well as other parts of the study.

Narrative inquiry

The study relies on narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen et al., 2013b; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to tell and retell, live and relive stories, and thereby investigate how the LTIs of the teachers were and are being formed. I listened to the stories many times over when transcribing and summarising the interviews. In this manner, I was familiarised with the material that instigated the analysis. As Klein (1990) puts it, “transcription is an analytical act” (p. 66). I thereafter summarised their life stories in Swedish, both for reasons of validity and since it is my mother tongue in which I am most comfortable expressing myself. The teachers were sent the summaries and asked to reflect and comment on them as a “subjective reaction or substantive interpretation or analysis” (Atkinson, 1998, p. 26) and review whether the narratives exhibit internal consistency. After I had transcribed the interviews for the first time, I also reformulated and renarrated them, staying closer to the actual words spoken during the interview, that is, I made minimal adjustments to the transcription protocols. The interviews were restructured with an emphasis on creating a coherent life story rather than an interview transcript. This version was also sent to the interviewees with which they were content. The version told their story in a way they could be pleased with. This resulted in two versions of the life story interview, one reported by the researchers and one told by the researcher, with the interviewees’ own words expressed in the language selected by them.

Finally, I made a thematic analysis of the narratives, guided by the research questions as I attempted to discern salient themes within and across the narratives. The themes arose out of the narratives, as I did not work with predefined themes. Rather, I iteratively revisited the research questions and theory as I discerned the themes that kept reoccurring throughout and across the interviews. In this way, I found similarities in their narratives. Since the narrative inquiry required many readings and listenings of the interviews and even renarration, I was very well acquainted with the material at this point. Some of the sections marked thematically are presented below as excerpts, translated into English; other parts of the narratives remained unmarked since they are related to other topics.

Teachers’ narratives

In this section, I provide a brief account of each teacher’s narrative. I thereafter present a thematic analysis of the narratives before comparing the different accounts that emerge from the three voices.

Teacher 1 (T1)

T1 grew up in a Norwegian village and attended a school system based on Norwegian language, culture and traditions. He narrates how he found himself at a crossroads upon being summoned for military duty. He rejected carrying arms and was therefore obliged with civil duty at a preschool. There he

discovered his interest in working with children and subsequently enrolled in a preschool teacher training program. His first personal encounter with the Saami community was meeting his spouse. However, the turning point that made him start learning South Saami was becoming a father. The knowledge of Saami-Norwegian history that he had then acquired made him sense a responsibility to raise the child, not exclusively, but partly, with the presence of Saami culture, traditions and livelihood. He took Saami language courses and learned grammar and spelling before starting work at the Saami preschool.

Teacher 2 (T2)

T2 grew up in a Norwegian family in a small village with Saami neighbours. The reindeer herding Saami culture and South Saami language was always present in her community. She is married to a Saami person and a parent of now grown-up Saami children who received Saami education. She started working at this school in different roles over a decade before the interview, first as a substitute teacher. During this time, she studied to become a care worker and took South Saami language courses, from the beginner's level up to the university level. She started speaking South Saami when her children were small, but she did not know the language very well at that time and speaks it much better now. However, she claims that there is always more to learn, and thus she takes a course organised by the local language centre in order to freshen up her skills and learn new things.

Teacher 3 (T3)

T3 grew up in a North Saami society, geographically far from the South Saami area. Here North Saami language is dominant and Saami culture was the norm, although Norwegian was also present. She belongs to the first generation of Saami children who were allowed to be educated in Saami. Growing up in a Saami community, where speaking Saami was considered normal, shaped and grounded her relationship to Saami culture, language and philosophy. She has worked in other preschools where North Saami was the professional language, both in Saami majority and minority settings. Moving south to the South Saami area in Sweden some 20 years ago, upon meeting her husband, was her first experience of being minoritised. Almost a decade later she started to learn South Saami in an introductory course hosted by a university. She learned Swedish through incidental learning and received no formal instruction in Swedish for immigrants. At the time of the interview, she had commuted for a few years on weekly basis to Norway, both for her own sake and for her children to live in a community where Saami language and culture is valued. She has been a resource teacher of both North and South Saami during her years at the preschool.

Thematic analysis

Three themes emerged from the analysis. The first theme involves the teacher's own relation to what is Saami (language, culture, etcetera). The second theme revolves around responsibility, both as a feeling and how to act according to it. The third regards professional development and the role of education for in-practice teachers.

Theme 1: The teacher's background and relation to Saami culture and language

In this section, I explore each teacher's identity construction related to Saami language and culture from their personal narrative; that is, personal aspects of their LTI are foregrounded and discussed. First, I discuss their background, then their meeting with their respective partners.

Background – family life and early education

The teachers' different backgrounds give them different relations to Saami culture and language. T1 and T2 grew up in the same part of Saepmie, but whereas T2 grew up with a constant presence of Saami culture and language, T1 did not. T3's childhood contrasts even more, since Saami language, culture and philosophy was the norm, both at school and in society. T1 starts his story off with his own ignorance about Saami language and culture. In the beginning, he shared the views of his Norwegian peers, with an arctic, exotic picture of the Saami involving easily accessible and visual cultural markers, such as reindeer and *lávvu* (turf huts), placed geographically north, in this case in Finnmark.

1: I didn't know any more than the classic view: the Saami in Finnmark, reindeer and *lávvu*.

In this excerpt, T1 exemplifies a stereotypical view held by many majority Norwegians. T1 brings up a field trip to a Saami cultural centre as his sole encounter with the local Saami culture during his school years.

T2, on the other hand, did not share an outsider's view of the Saami in her childhood. In fact, she restates for her local context and local knowledge systems what Nakata (2007a) pointed out for a global academic context: "things are not clearly black or white, Indigenous or Western" (p. 9). To T2, in her childhood, Saami culture was nothing unfamiliar.

T2: It was nothing unfamiliar at that time because my older sister married a Saami person. We had Saami neighbours ... so I learned a little bit now and then. We saw their work with reindeer and participated in slaughtering and such.

To her, Saami culture and language were not exotic or belonging to the "other" (Nakata, 2007b), as it was for T1. On the other hand, during her school years Norwegian language dominated, and there was no clear Saami presence; rather, she underwent a Norwegian-centred monolingual and monocultural schooling. This school experience is shared with T1. T3's school experience stands in contrast to the other two, since her schooling was largely in Saami. However, she knew little about South Saami language and culture and its minority situation.

The three teachers all shared somewhat of an outsider's position growing up, with two having Norwegian as their home language and culture and one having North Saami. However, this came to change as they had to reorient themselves to a new circumstance in life: a spouse, and their South Saami language.

Meeting their spouses

All three teachers met spouses who belong to South Saami reindeer herding families. Both T1 and T2 caught a deeper and more personal interest in both South Saami culture and language when they met their respective spouses. T1 met a girl "who happened to be Saami" while T2 regards her husband as a reason for learning South Saami.

Both T1 and T2 express being accepted and valued by their new families. They learned crafts important for South Saami identity, such as reindeer herding and handicraft. T1 describes his gradual immersion

into the local Saami community as “a new world opened, just outside my front door” initially exotic, especially reindeer herding. T1 and T2 both elaborate that their South Saami language was restricted to terminology associated with these crafts, otherwise they spoke Norwegian; T1’s and T2’s linguistic practices were not challenged by their spouses’ families.

T3 faced an unfamiliar situation as she met her husband and resettled in the South Saami community. In contrast to the other two, she narrates a struggle; her linguistic practices were indeed challenged as she became minoritised. Recall that South Saami is a minoritised language here without dense speaker communities. This created conflict and struggle in her, as her norms and language were no longer accepted, acknowledged and valued by others, such as teachers, administrators and the wider community, but rather resisted and contested.

T3: Because when I live in [place] there aren’t many who speak Saami there.

North Saami language did not have the position it did in T3’s home community. Furthermore, even South Saami was not for everyday communication, but mostly used in reindeer herding work. Swedish dominated everyday life around her.

To summarise, all three teachers disclose only knowing some words and phrases in South Saami during their first years after meeting their respective spouses. T1 describes a change inside of him as he learned how interconnected the two peoples’ histories are regarding Norwegianisation and South Saami revitalisation. The understanding of Saami culture, philosophy and language keeps building up in them. For both shared and differing reasons, all three teachers took up learning South Saami from their respective starting points. We learn from the discussions in this section that certain passages of life, here meeting their spouses, shape their LTI.

Theme 2: Responsibility

In this section, I will delve into how the teachers’ LTIs were shaped, personally and discursively, in social interaction with others, such as their family, extended family, other teachers and the wider community. Although not always explicitly mentioned, the teachers emphasise their responsibility for others, especially their own children, as a driving force for them. This makes them active agents in their own lives and in their lifeworld, firstly by learning Saami and thereafter by teaching it. The language situation and the imperative for language revitalisation, that is, to repair the broken chain of language transmission from one generation to the next, provides room for learners of South Saami to become teachers. The pressure from society was brought up by Hammine et al. (2020) in a Skolt Saami context. One teacher was asked by community members over and over to become a teacher in the Indigenous language. Indeed, this shapes a person’s LTI, which brings us to the next theme that focuses more on the responsibility.

T3, just like the Skolt Saami teacher, narrates the expectations of others; her family and home community, as important since “if one is Saami one speaks Saami too”:

T3: They expect them [my children] to speak South Saami too.

She comes back to the feeling of loneliness and the loss of a speaker community. Living in a community in Sweden where South Saami is not widely spoken leaves her as the only source of the language for her children. With her husband, being a reindeer herder, comes a responsibility to migrate with the reindeer

and at times not live near the family. Therefore, the teacher is very clear that the responsibility for bringing up the children in Saami rests on her shoulders, which means learning the language is essential.

T3: If I want my children to grow up with both North and South Saami, I have to learn South Saami too.

This sense of responsibility served as a motivation to learn South Saami and become more immersed in her new local community, which is now her lifeworld. The sense of responsibility is accompanied by motivation and possibilities for taking up language learning.

T1 is also very clear about addressing his own responsibility for his children:

T1: I felt the responsibility I actually had as a parent to a Saami girl ... Then I felt I had to learn more Saami language.

Becoming a father, a very important life changing event, awakens the sense of responsibility for T1. Subsequently, he took South Saami language courses and eventually started speaking South Saami. However, as a teacher in a Saami preschool, the responsibility gradually grows to include children other than his own. Here I want to add a personal reflection as well. I recognise that becoming a father of a Saami child is associated with a sense of responsibility, especially regarding language.

T2 also addresses the responsibility for the preschool children. She reflects on her position as a linguistic role model for the children and expresses that it is indeed frightening to carry such a responsibility, but not something that is reflected upon every day. She emphasises how fulfilling it is to be involved with teaching the children. T1 introduces into the discussion the notion of a societal mandate, which includes providing the children's language environment and the language environment in the preschool.

T1: Now, I feel the responsibility for the children here, which makes me aware of this mandate; that you are a part of it. To create the language environment and ... to create the children's Saami identity.

T1 further elaborates that, to him, the responsibility stretches to being a professional centre for raising Saami children. The preschool, which has expertise in Saami pedagogy found in few other places, contributes to raising awareness in Norwegian society about the Saami culture and language. T1 carefully puts forth that his role is in part remedying damage done during Norwegianisation. The mandate he carries is associated to that of decolonisation, although he seems a bit hesitant towards using this term as such. T3 is also quite clear on how she interprets their mandate:

T3: I think you should speak Saami in a Saami preschool as much as you can.

They all articulate a responsibility, but in different ways. T1 and T2 discuss the responsibility for Saami language and culture; T3 expresses that they should all use Saami to the extent their proficiency allows, an imperative she felt was at one point placed upon her, both by herself and others.

This section has discussed the expectation, from oneself and others, to learn and speak Saami to children, both one's own children and the children in the preschool. In this way, one is mandated by the wider community and thus an active agent in one's own lifeworld, both as a parent and as a language teacher, contributing to the language revitalisation endeavour.

Theme 3: Professional development and a place for language use

In this section, the teachers' professional aspects of their LTIs are scrutinised. The three teachers share a long professional experience of children. They have for several years worked as a group. Thus, their LTIs are shaped over time in social interaction with each other and within shared spaces, places and objects in their own classroom and school. Finally, they have all been involved with professional development through education (both at university and elsewhere) in South Saami. They disclose that they took this education in order to meet the need to be linguistic role models for children.

T3, who had worked in Sweden, reports that when she started her work in the current preschool, she felt harmony. She was again connected to a community by means of language. She found a place to live and learn and her language skills improved in everyday social interaction with others. Her views were acknowledged and valued; the teachers speak Saami with the children and each other. Saami language could be used for communicative purposes and furthering the professional development of South Saami language was made possible.

T3: When I talked to adults, then I could speak about anything and therefore I learned more terms and worked with them. In the preschool I think it's the most important to work in Saami.

She explains how she could develop terminology suitable, not only to here and now, but to more abstract themes. These positive experiences of language learning are shared with T1, who also reports the positive effects on his own proficiency upon starting his work in the preschool:

T1: Everyone does not have such an arena for using the language as this preschool constitutes. And it was not until I begun working here that I started using the language that actively because you have to and then it builds up.

T1 explains how his oral language proficiency has grown during the years in the preschool. He stresses that he, together with the other teachers, are dedicated to speaking Saami among themselves whenever the children are present; this policy is also mentioned by the other two teachers.

The preschool has existed for a little over a decade. T2 has worked there for the longest period. She reflects upon their language policy, that is, to speak Saami whenever the children are present, comparing the situation now with the first years. She concludes that the children are immersed in the language more now than before. She uses the metaphor of language immersion, inspired by the bilingual school model (see, for instance, Keskitalo et al., 2014). She further evaluates their work in positive words; more school children enrol in the first-language strand of the curriculum (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020) rather than study South Saami as a second language, a long-term positive effect for South Saami language revitalisation. To conclude the section, I will discuss T3's own schooling, which included Saami in the curriculum. Schoolbooks were in Norwegian since schooling in Saami was new after the assimilatory policies of Norwegianisation were dismantled.

T3: I feel that is what I want to give to my pupils. They shall not feel like a minority, or I mean, they should feel their self-worth. It is important to know how language and culture are valued.

T3's background has an impact on her LTI in this excerpt. She expresses how she conveys the harmony she found in meeting a Saami school system, and that is what she wants to pass on to the children. Her

own experience of growing up in a society in which she and her language, culture and norms were accepted, acknowledged and valued by others illustrates how her own experiences constitute a pedagogical resource at her disposal. Recall that her whole identity was contested by herself and others over her first years after moving south. Barkhuizen (2016) argues that imagining one's identity is an important part of LTI. Now, rather than imagining her own identity, T3 explains how she, through her practice as a language teacher, is a co-creator of an imagined space in which the Saami language holds a prominent position.

In this section, I have discussed the professional aspects of development with the teachers themselves as well as the need to take education in Saami in order to improve. We have looked into and followed the policy that has taken form over the years, that all of them, irrespective of what the others say in their interviews, have mentioned: to speak Saami whenever the children are present, even though the speech is not child directed. Moreover, salient is the need to be accepted, acknowledged and valued in one's effort to speak South Saami imperfectly and develop it during and through the work with the children. Finally, learning in social interaction with others, mainly other teachers, plays an important role in all three narratives.

Discussion

In the beginning of this article, I set out to answer questions about the way teachers' upbringings shape their LTI: what instances in their lives have laid the foundation to ascend the path of learning South Saami and, finally, what the spaces in the preschool they work in mean to them in terms of developing a professional language. The questions all boil down to an investigation of how their LTIs were formed and keep developing. I employed the cultural interface as introduced by Martin Nakata to explore the not so black-or-white, Indigenous-or-non-Indigenous nature of language revitalisation. I did so in order to frame the study in an Indigenous theoretical context. Furthermore, I set out to evaluate the way these two theoretical approaches conjoin to succeed in analysing the narratives created for the purpose of the study.

They all express in some sense that "I contribute to the children's language environment by means of speaking Saami with them". I argue that this shows in my material that LTIs are "dynamic multiple and hybrid", as Barkhuizen (2017, p. 4) puts it. The narratives that served as the foundation of my study showcase the tension between different positions and ethnic subject positions. Although the current study does not comprise an in-depth analysis of the preschool as a language domain for the children attending it, the narratives make clear that the places and spaces are such where teachers can live and learn South Saami and develop a professional identity in which South Saami language plays a prominent role. The teachers' LTIs are shaped by the experiences of being a learner of Saami language, *duedtie* (Saami handicraft) or other crafts with a close association to Saami identity; language learning is a part of becoming a role model and is done in social interaction with learners, teachers and the wider community. An example is the active choice to keep searching for education in different forms, from beginner's courses to university courses, and complete them while working as a teacher. They shape their LTIs by negotiating with themselves, based on a responsibility for the continuity. These findings are in line with Johansen (2019) who reports similar findings for different types of speakers throughout the South Saami community (her investigation includes other community members besides teachers).

LTIs are being and doing. Being a Saami parent means that one has to act, which they all in some sense have. Acting, closely linked to agency, comes much from a sense of responsibility. Just as LTIs are

personal and professional, the responsibility the teachers express is also personal: stretching to being a linguistic role model for their own children, and professionally, stretching further to that of being a role model for a group of children and building the children's language environment. The responsibility connects with history – a history of attempts to wash away an Indigenous language and with it a whole identity as Saami. Moreover, it connects to early attempts at revitalisation, until today's strive to find a new preschool language to be used in play.

LTI is harmony and struggle. There is struggle to live in a place in which one is vulnerable to being minoritised, that is, places where Saami education is not offered. These are places in which one's Indigenous language is used, not only for reasons of identity formation, but also for communicative purposes, that is, where language revitalisation happens. This creates a language environment which is very hard to find in other preschool spaces in southern Saepmie.

The study highlights the need to dismantle the dichotomy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, which other studies also point out. Rather, a more nuanced approach to the dynamics of language revitalisation with respect to LTI and preschool pedagogy is necessary. The position of teacher, a form of language role model, is not exclusively held by South Saami native speakers that grew up in a reindeer herding family and society, who could serve as the idealised native speaker in this context. These findings are in line with Hammine et al. (2020), exploring Saami teachers' professional identity in the Inari, North and Skolt Saami areas, and with Pasanen (2018). They find that in the language revitalisation project of Inari Saami "some people working in professions essential for language transmission (like teachers) have no Inari Sámi background" (Pasanen, 2018, p. 370); the case of Inari Saami language revitalisation is viewed in the literature as a very good case of successful language revitalisation.

The two theoretical approaches are merged here into a theoretical lens whereby I have analysed the materials. They worked well together and foregrounded similar perspectives. By doing so, we learn that a theory initially used for teacher training purposes, LTI-theory, dances well together with a theory developed in the context of contesting the colonialisation of a people, namely the cultural interface. This provides us with a nuanced lens in which we can understand the realities experienced by teachers at Saami preschools.

Concluding remarks

None of the teachers have a background one might easily expect from preschool teachers in a South Saami preschool. They all in some sense have relocated to the Saami community that now constitutes their lifeworld. Thus, the active agents in this particular place for South Saami language revitalisation display a multitude of backgrounds in terms of geography, ethnicity and language. The narratives analysed differ somewhat, but some life-changing turning points are, in retrospect, crucial: meeting their spouse and becoming a parent. These are life events that are often narrated as significant for how life turns out. The narratives all convey positive experiences of language learning at the preschool and in its local community. The preschool support constitutes a place to learn South Saami, and professional language skills increase as they work with children learning the language, one of the few in the South Saami area. The study comprises a small sample of teacher narratives. However, for a language counting its speakers in the hundreds, and with few preschools like the present example, the modest number of narratives is nevertheless a substantial contribution to the reality of working with South Saami language revitalisation. I argue that the result from the study forms an imperative for developing more preschools in which Saami is used as a means of communication to support Saami language revitalisation.

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