Challenges of the test construct: Testing Sámí as L2 in Finland

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Presentation outline

- Sámi in Finland
  - Some facts about the Sámi languages
  - North Sámi in the Finnish National Certificates
- Study: Sámi item writers and
  - test framework and specifications
  - topic areas and language functions
  - the definition of language

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1. Southern Sami
2. Ume Sami
3. Pite Sami
4. Lule Sami
5. Northern Sami
6. Skolt Sami
7. Inari Sami
8. Kildin Sami
9. Ter Sami

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Lammervo, Tossavainen, Ahola 2016
Sámi Languages in Finland

- In English: Sámi, Same, Saami, Sáme
- Sápmi
- 3 official languages:
  - Northern/North Sámi, at least 2000 speakers
  - Inari Sámi, approx. 600 speakers
  - Skolt Sámi, approx. 600 speakers
- North Sámi spoken by 75 per cent of Sámi speakers (in Norway, Sweden and Finland) (www.kotus.fi)
- Sámi is spoken by no more than half the Sámi population
- Sámi officially the native language of 0.04 % of the approx. 5.4 million population in Finland (Statistics Finland 2013)
- Sámi Language Act 1086/2003: self-regulation concerning Sámi language and culture in the Sámi region

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the constitutional right of the Sámi to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

the right of the Sámi to use their own language before the courts and other public authorities, as well as on the duty of the authorities to enforce and promote the linguistic rights of the Sámi.

the right of the Sámi to a fair trial and good administration irrespective of language and to secure the linguistic rights of the Sámi without them needing specifically to refer to these rights.
The Finnish National Certificates of Language Proficiency

- Since 1994
- CEFR scale since 2002
- Second and foreign language proficiency of adults
- Finnish, Swedish, Northern Sámi, English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, (Finnish sign language 2016)
- Based on legislation (Act 964/2004; Decrees 1163/2004 and 1109/2011)

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National Certificates Administrative Model

Ministry of Education

Finnish National Board of Education

Centre for Applied Language Studies
University of Jyväskylä

Test centres

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Northern Sámi in the National Certificates

- Arranged once a year since 1998
- In four test centres in Finland
- L2 or foreign language test?
- No L1 test available for Sámi adults
- Rater qualifications (NBE, official register)
- Sámi natives as item writers / raters
- Operations administered by CALS / University of Jyväskylä

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The Finnish National Certificates of Language Proficiency  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Intermediate</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1 620</td>
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<td>4 493</td>
<td>20 089</td>
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<td>4 024</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>5 594</td>
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<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>672</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>1 126</td>
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<tr>
<td>North Sámi</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>2 233</td>
<td>42 924</td>
<td>1 497</td>
<td>46 654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>1 270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5 936</td>
<td>63 267</td>
<td>7 311</td>
<td>76 514</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Number of North Sámi test-takers since 2003

N = 264

Test round

Basic
Intermediate
Advanced

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Typical North Sámi test taker

- Female (86.3%)
- Native language Finnish (84.7%)
- Native Sámi (12.2%)
- Motivation: work or study purposes
- Has vocational or university education
- Uses Sámi weekly, in some cases daily
- Works in public service, typically as a teacher in basic education
- Age group 39-45 (participant age range 16-71)

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Test requirements

- Test framework and specifications:
  - Theoretical basis: the communicative paradigm (C&S, B&P, CEFR)
  - Same requirements for all nine languages
  - A defined set of language functions and topic areas (revised 2011)
  - Item writer training offered by the National Certificates
The Finnish National Certificates of Language Proficiency

**SIX LEVELS OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**
- A1
- A2
- B1
- B2
- C1
- C2

**THREE TEST LEVELS**
- BASIC
- INTERMEDIATE
- ADVANCED

**FOUR SUBTESTS**
- reading
- writing
- listening
- speaking

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Study focus

Structured item writer interviews (4) 2012-2013

Interview questions relating to:
- test framework and specifications
- finding and producing valid test material
- the definition of language and language skills
- external item writers

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Test framework

- Strong focus on grammatical accuracy
- Correct pronunciation and mastery of consonant gradation promoted

- in finding test material
- with implications to assessment
Test framework

- Sámi course books used as a guide to levels
- Limited number of acceptable reference sources + need for such sources for checking
- Value of written language
- Even native language use doubted

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Finding valid test material

– Not enough ’every day’ material even for native speakers > teachers write their own material
– Literary tradition limited, not much written by men
– Material not updated, historical
– Translations from other languages
– Written material old, requires revision

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Framework: every day language?

- Perceived authenticity
  - Sámi from Norway – corrected & edited
  - Sámi from the radio – corrected & edited
  - Tabloid newspaper – corrected & edited
Following the requirements set in specs

- limited number of language functions
- limited number of topic areas
- limited selection of printed texts
- Sámi not used in all situations (Finnish instead)
Topic areas, functions

- Traditional Sámi culture included (reindeer husbandry, leather work etc.)
- Not possible to find original Sámi materials for all NCLP domains: about half of material translated from Finnish
- Topic suitability
- Invented words and contexts

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Language: Item writer views on "good Sámi"

- Influence from other languages (mainstream Finnish or Norwegian (Norwegian Sámi) is not acceptable
  - Loanwords or changes/errors in grammar
- Early archived recordings of Sámi referred to as "pure, beautiful & fine language".
- Who can speak proper Sámi?
- Who is a real Sámi expert?
- Role of dialects/accents

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Small community – when everyone knows everyone

- Rating students, relatives, people they know or know of and can place geographically or link to other people.
- Sámi teachers are few and in demand. Should not be teaching, item writing and rating -> hard to find experts for NCLP test
- Item writer team very critical of who is accepted to the team.
- Overall Sámi language planning in Finland is in the hands of a selected few

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Implications

- Do the tasks predict ability to use the language in every day situations?
- Do the tasks predict management in the language?
- Is testing factitious?
- Do the test takers’ language use needs correspond with the test construct?

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Language maintenance  Language beliefs  Test development

- Some conflict between language maintenance (preservation) motivations and requirements of the examination.
- Importance of considering the uniqueness of Sámi culture
- Difficulties in finding test materials
- Sámi language issues
- Difficulties in meeting test specifications (full range of topics and communication purposes)
Information about the National Certificates of Language Proficiency

University of Jyväskylä,
Centre for Applied Language Studies (CALS):
www.jyu.fi/hum/laitokset/solki/yki/

The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE):
www.oph.fi/yleiset_kielitutkinnnot
North Sámi in the National Certificates

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References and further information

- Institute for the Languages in Finland [http://www.kotus.fi](http://www.kotus.fi)
- Statistics Finland ([www.stat.fi](http://www.stat.fi))