

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

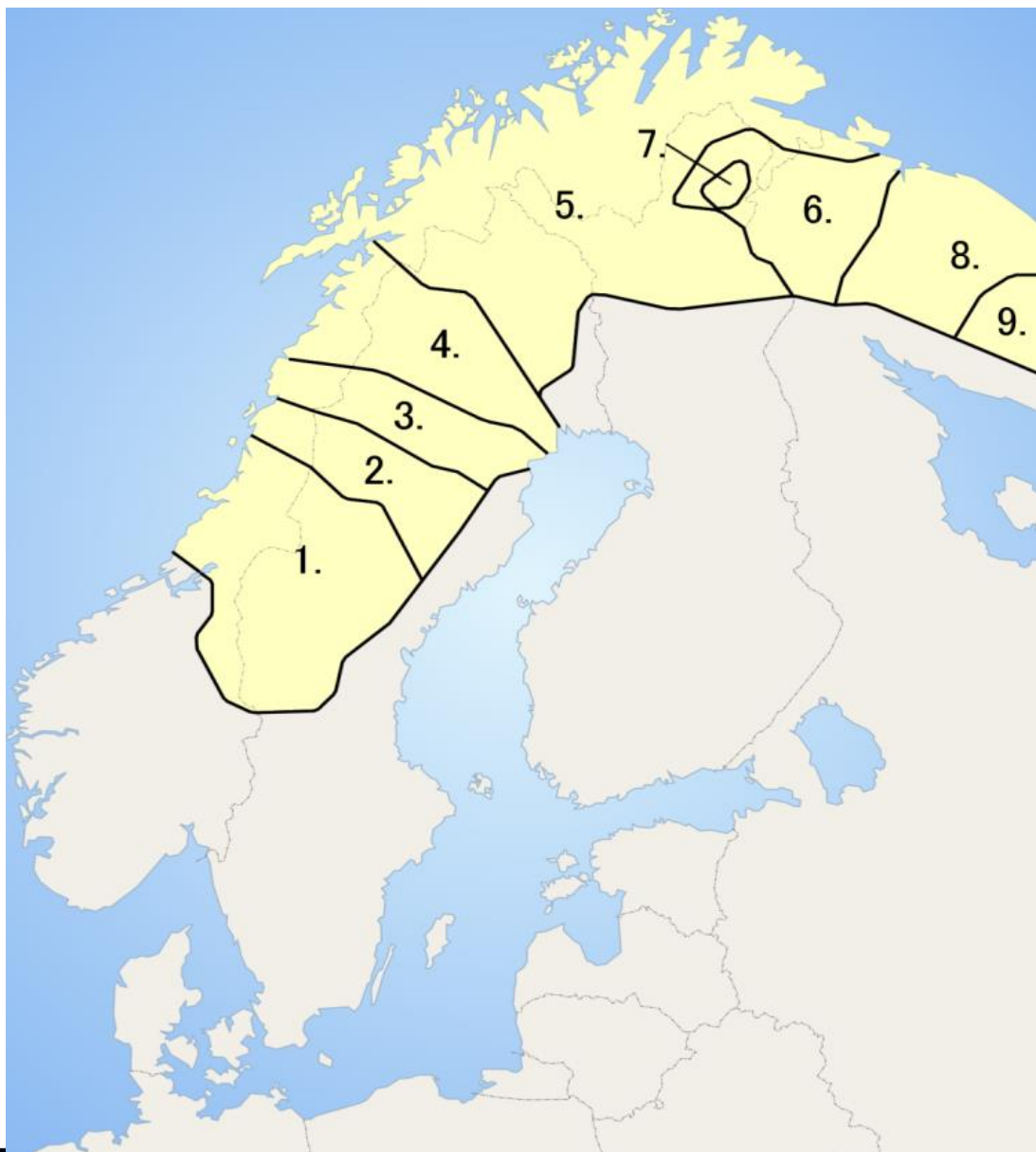
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Presentation outline

- 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





- 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



Sámi Languages in Finland

- In English: Sámi, Same, Saami, Sáme
- Sám̄mi
- 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



Sámi Language Act of 2003

- 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.

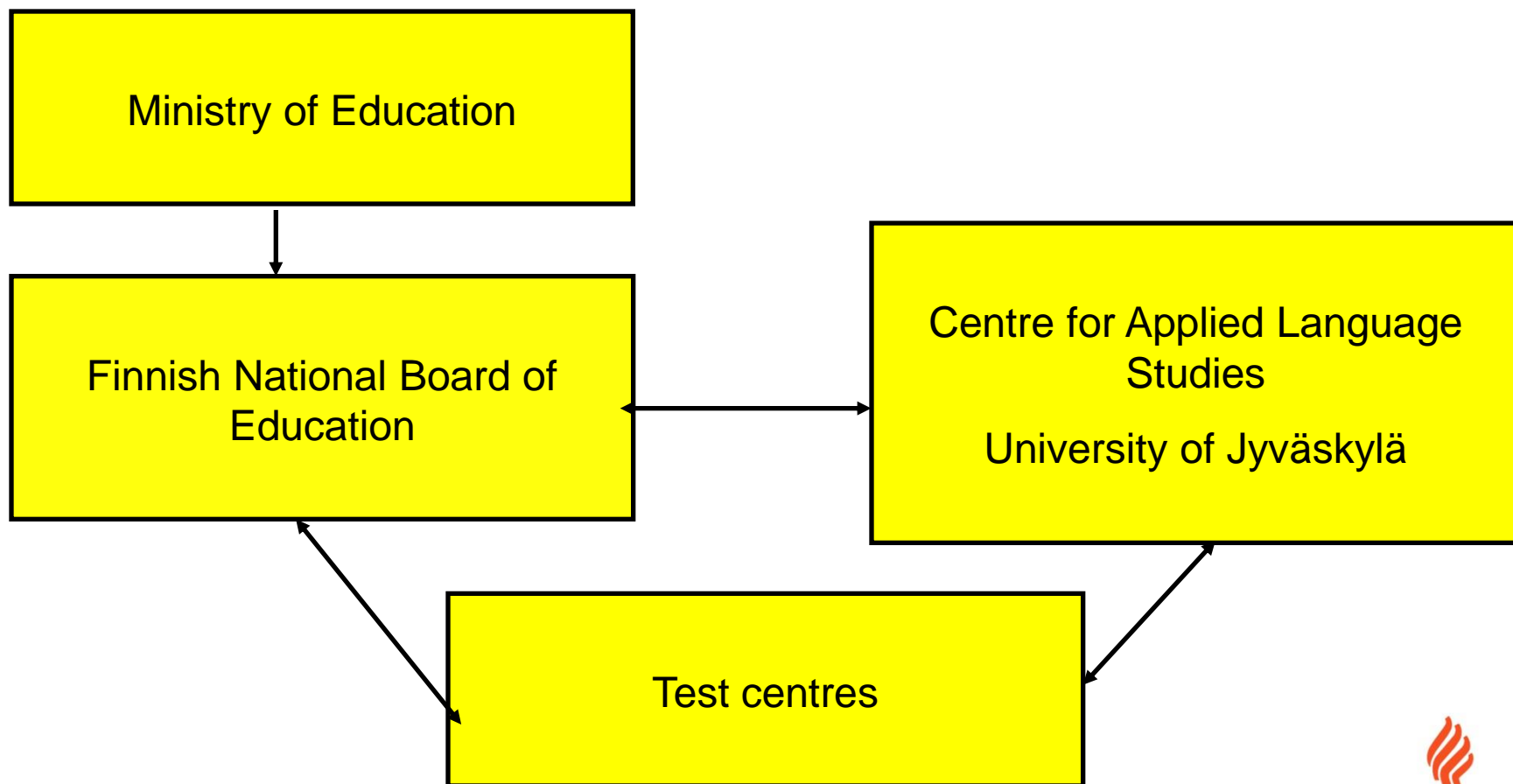


The Finnish National Certificates of Language Proficiency

- 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)



National Certificates Administrative Model



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

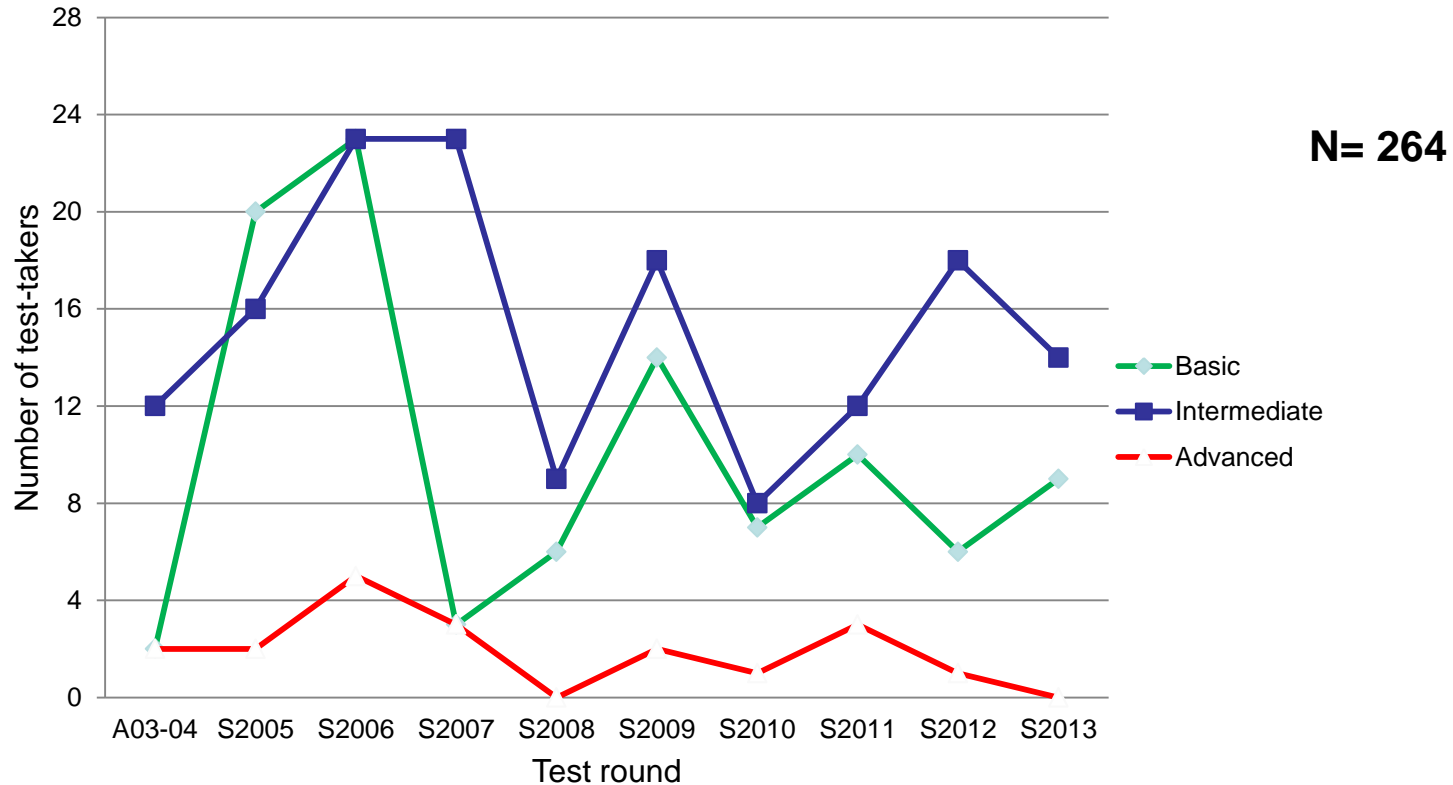


The Finnish National Certificates of Language Proficiency

1.1.1994 – 31.1.2014

	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced	Total
English	1 620	13 976	4 493	20 089
Spanish	111	253	61	425
Italian	51	132	-	183
French	193	535	149	877
Swedish	921	4 024	649	5 594
German	145	672	309	1 126
North Sámi	103	176	17	296
Finnish	2 233	42 924	1 497	46 654
Russian	559	575	136	1 270
Total	5 936	63 267	7 311	76 514

Number of North Sámi test-takers since 2003



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)



Test requirements

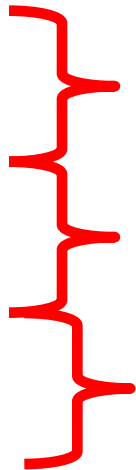
- Test framework and specifications:
 - Theoretical basis: the communicative paradigm (C&S, B&P, CEFR)
- Same requirements for all nine languages
- A defined set of language functions and topic areas (revised 2011)
- Item writer training offered by the National Certificates



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

CEFR



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



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



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



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



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



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



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?



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_kielitutkinnot



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References and further information

- Sámi Parliament, Sámediggi-Saamelaiskäräjät www.samediggi.fi
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