"We did what we thought was best for our children": a nexus analysis of language shift in a Kven community

PIA LANE

Abstract

The loss of intergenerational language transmission can be seen, in part, as a choice parents make, but in reality they do not always have a choice. Their actions are influenced by large-scale social factors such as language policies and attitudes toward minority languages. Issues related to these factors are addressed by an analysis of language shift in Bugøynes, a Kven community in Northern Norway. Data come from recordings of conversations and sociolinguistic interviews addressing language choice. Fifteen hours were recorded and transcribed. In order to analyze language shift a theoretical and methodological framework which allows for a historical perspective is essential since people, objects, mediational means, and discourses are seen as having a history and projecting a future (de Saint Georges 2005). The framework used here is nexus analysis, which emphasizes that discourses and individual social actors have a history and therefore cannot be analyzed without reference to the past (Scollon and Scollon 2004). Findings about language shift in Bugøynes illustrate how large-scale discourses such as the language policies become internalized and later materialized in action through language choice.

Keywords: Kven; Norway; language shift; language policy; history; social factors; nexus analysis.

1. Introduction

In bilingual communities the two languages rarely meet on an equal footing: one of the languages tends to have a more dominant position, higher status, greater degree of linguistic infrastructure, etc. The survival of a minority language has been seen to depend on its intergenerational transmission (Fishman 1991). The disruption of this transmission can be
presented as a choice speakers make, but in reality they do not always have a choice. The action of not passing on their mother tongue does not happen in a vacuum and therefore the speaker’s choices have to be analyzed with reference to the sociopolitical context. Social factors on the macro level influence the maintenance and loss of minority languages, but analyzing how this affects the individual’s choices is difficult. The analysis is further complicated because it sometimes takes time before policies have an impact on the actions of individuals. Therefore, the time dimension is crucial for investigating language shift.

The aim of this article is to shed further light on these macro–micro connections by analyzing language shift in Bugøynes, a bilingual community in Northern Norway. Bugøynes was predominantly Kven speaking until approximately 1970 when all the adults in the village started speaking only Norwegian to the children. The Kven went through a period of oppression, but the onset of language shift happened after the oppressive policies had been lifted. Thus, there is a time lag between the policy implementation on the macro level and the actions of the individuals on the micro level, and in this article I will argue that in order to address this time lag a theoretical and methodological framework which incorporates a historical dimension is essential.

In the following, I will give an outline of the history of the Kven people and the Norwegian policies of assimilation, then the historical aspect of language shift and the problem of time lag will be analyzed from the perspective of nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004), and finally, the prospects of maintaining Kven will be discussed.

2. Historical background

The Kven are a Finnic-speaking minority group traditionally living in the two northernmost areas of Norway. Large parts of Northern Norway are bi- or trilingual, and the languages in contact are Norwegian, Northern Sámi, and Kven. The Arctic areas have been multilingual for centuries, and people have made seasonal migrations between the inland and the coast for fishing, trading, etc. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, migrants from Northern Finland settled along the coasts of Northern Norway; some of them settled before the national frontiers were drawn (Sundelin 1998). This group of people and their descendants are called the Kven.

The Kven, like many other minorities in the northern circumpolar region, went through a period of substantial linguistic oppression. Before the period of national romanticism during the last part of the nineteenth
century, the Kven were regarded as a valuable contribution to the economy of Northern Norway as they were experienced farmers and worked in the mines. This attitude changed when the idea of Norway as an independent nation emerged in the nineteenth century at the height of European national romanticism. Norway was in a union with Denmark until 1814, and then with Sweden from 1814 until independence in 1905, and thus, Norway is a fairly young nation-state.

As was the case in other European countries, nationalism in Norway is influenced by German romantic nationalism: the nation was defined in terms of ethnicity and language was the outward sign of ethnicity (cf. Cabanel 1997), and thus language became the defining criterion of the nation. The last part of the Finnish settlement coincided with the emergence of Norway as a nation-state. The ideology of “one nation—one language” was a key element in this process, and in the period from 1840 to 1960, the official political goal was to “Norwegianize” the minorities in the north (Saressalo 1998; Seppola 1996). Norwegian authorities also feared that Russia–Finland would use the Kven minority to lay claims on the northernmost region which was rich in natural resources (Eriksen and Niemi 1981).

The Kven were not allowed to use their language at school, and in extreme cases children were beaten if they used their mother tongue. Parents were encouraged to speak Norwegian to their children, and teachers would visit parents and advise them not to speak Kven to their children. Until 1959 the use of Kven and Sámi in the schools was forbidden, and until 1964 people had to speak Norwegian to buy land in the Northern area. Churches were built in traditional Norwegian style, and boarding schools where the use of Kven and Sámi was strictly forbidden, were built. The consequences of this oppression were a feeling of shame and a devaluing of the Kven culture and language. Many Kven speakers have expressed that they did not wish to place the same burden on their children as the one they had to carry, and therefore they chose to speak only Norwegian to their children (Lane 2003, 2006). We find similar processes in other Nordic areas; Pietikäinen (in this issue) describes how the establishment of the educational system served as one of the main instruments of “Finlandization” in the Sámi community.

The situation of the Kven was further aggravated at the end of WWII when the German Army used the scorched earth tactics as they retreated from Northern Norway; in the northernmost part a total of 11,000 homes were burned, and most of the Kven material culture disappeared. After the war the Norwegian state provided money for rebuilding the region, and in order to receive money people had to apply in Norwegian. Prefabricated houses designed by architects from southern Norway were
constructed, and most visible signs of the previous building style and the material aspects of the Kven culture were gone. The region now looked Norwegian. Thus, the post-war period was characterized by both the loss of the Kven material culture and language shift, as the language was not passed on to the children.

Today, there is a process of revitalization among the Kven people (Megard 1999). Being of Finnish decent is no longer stigmatized, and there is a growing interest in the Kven language. In 1992 Norway signed the European Charter for the Protection of Regional or Minority Languages, and Kven, though it at that stage was regarded as a dialect of Finnish, was granted protection by the Charter. In April 2005 Kven got recognition as a language in its own right, covered by Part II of the Charter. Part II of the Charter outlines a minimum level of protection. These are measures such as ensuring that there is some teaching of minority languages, media broadcasts in the minority languages, provision of facilities enabling nonspeakers of a minority language living in the area where it is used to learn it, etc. The Charter is a result of an international focus on linguistic human rights and one of its goals is to contribute to peace and stability across Europe and to mutual understanding and peaceful relations within states.

3. Methodology and data

The data have been gathered during an 11-year period, from 1996 until 2007. The main corpus has been gathered by the author, a Kven speaker from Bugøynes, and amounts to a total of 15 hours of recordings which have been transcribed and coded. The secondary source of data comes from field work conducted during August 2007 by Anna-Kaisa Räisanen, the field assistant of the project “The Linguistic and Cultural Heritage Electronic Network,”1 a project funded by the Research Council of Norway through the International Polar Year program. The aim of the project is to contribute to the documentation of the Kven language and to gather and disseminate information about Kven language and culture. At the time of writing, this data set has not been fully analyzed and is therefore used as a secondary source of data.

The principle source of data for the analysis presented in this article is recordings of conversations and sociolinguistic interviews, supplemented by data gathered through other methods, such as participant observation and feedback sessions where the contents and preliminary analysis based on my data were discussed with ten people from Bugøynes (August 2005). The aim has been to analyze multiple sources of data in order to achieve
a more complete understanding, often referred to as triangulation or “diversity of method” (Johnstone 2000), and described by Scollon and Scollon (2004) as the foundation of ethnographic work.

4. Nexus analysis

This article presents a nexus analysis of language shift in a bilingual community. Nexus analysis is a form of historical ethnographic discourse analysis which draws on many different linguistic and anthropological fields: Ethnography of communication, linguistic anthropology, interactional sociolinguistics, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). In contrast to a lot of research within the CDA framework which focuses on large-scale social discourses, the starting point for a nexus analysis is always on the micro level. CDA has sometimes been criticized for focusing solely on power structures and large macro-level discourses, and nexus analysis shifts the focus from these large-scale discourses to social actions (Scollon 2001). The starting point of a nexus analysis is to identify a crucial social action, and then to map the cycles of the people, places, discourses, objects, and concepts which circulate through the moment when the social action takes place (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 159).

A recurring challenge for most sociolinguistic research is to bridge the micro–macro-level gap by answering the question of how we can provide evidence for a connection between an action on the micro level and large-scale social factors. One can identify actions ranging from phonological variables to language attitudes on the one hand and potential “causes” on the macro level, but the task is to identify possible connections. Nexus analysis shifts the focus from large-scale discourses to concrete actions performed, and thus nexus analysis broadens the scope of discourse analysis and can be a tool for addressing the macro–micro-level connections.

Discourses and the individual social actors involved in these discourses have a history and therefore cannot be analyzed without reference to the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sociolinguistic interviews</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Male/Female</th>
<th>Age span (approx.)</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7M/13F</td>
<td>20–85</td>
<td>10 h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field assistant</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2M/9F</td>
<td>60–85</td>
<td>11 h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversations</th>
<th>Speakers</th>
<th>Male/Female</th>
<th>Age span (approx.)</th>
<th>Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buggynes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8M/6F</td>
<td>50–85</td>
<td>5 h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. *Overview of data*
past. A social action takes place at a moment in time and space, and the actor has a life history that this person carries within her/him, and thus our bodies are lifetime accumulations of our actions, memories, and experiences. Thus the historical perspective of a nexus analysis is crucial: people, objects, mediational means (or cultural tools), and discourses are seen as having a history and projecting a future (de Saint Georges 2005) which makes this framework ideally suited for analyzing language shift, which is the social issue addressed in this article.

The initial part of a nexus analysis consists of mapping the cycles of people, places, discourses, objects, and concepts circulating through this micro-semiotic ecosystem (Scollon and Scollon 2004), and identifying some of the relevant social actions. In order to achieve this, the researcher must be recognized by the other participants as part of the nexus of practice. This initial step lays the ground work for the main part of the nexus analysis: navigating the nexus of practice, which is when the bulk of data gathering and analysis takes place. Through engaging the nexus of practice, the researcher has identified and selected relevant social issues which will be the focus of the analysis, and now the task is to map the relevant cycles circulating through the moment when the social action takes place (Scollon and Scollon 2004: 159).

Nexus analysis takes an inductive approach and starts out with specific observations and moves on to generalizations or “the larger picture” in contrast to deductive reasoning, which takes a hypothesis as a starting point and employs observations to strengthen or falsify the initial hypothesis. Nexus analysis is hermeneutic as the analysis of the parts, in this case social actions, helps the analyst to understand the large-scale discourses, which in turn makes us understand the social action better, and thereby opens up a new dimension for the analysis of the broad picture.

The social issue addressed in this article is the language shift which is well underway in Bugøynes. The factual content of the interviews and conversations will be analyzed by focusing on what the interviewees explicitly say about the Norwegianization process and language shift, and further by identifying some of the relevant discourses. The following analysis will exemplify the methodology of nexus analysis.

5. Language shift—the problem of time lag

A historical perspective is essential for an analysis of language shift. The moment in time and space when a particular action occurs is the bridge between the past and the future; therefore, this is the focal point of the analysis. The key issue to be addressed is the time lag between the policy
implementation on the macro level and the actions of the individuals on
the micro level, as illustrated in Figure 2.

When investigating the process of language shift, we usually do not
have access to data from the moment in time when the shift started and
as a result we are faced with a two-fold problem: firstly, we are analyzing
retrospective data as the people who are interviewed reflect on choices
made in the past, and secondly, this makes it even more challenging to
deal successfully with the time lag between policy implementation the ac-
tions of the individuals, as illustrated in Figure 3.

The language shift from Kven to Norwegian in Bugøynes provides an
illustrative example. The official policies of Norwegianization were aban-
doned in the 1950s, but in Bugøynes, the onset of the language shift hap-
pened approximately 10 years after the change in policies. The language
shift has been abrupt, probably as a result of the Norwegianization pro-
cess (Lane 2006). In the early 1960s everybody stopped speaking Kven to
the children, and the outcome of this is illustrated in Figure 4. One of
those interviewed said that encountering the Norwegian school without a
language was a burden they did not wish to place on their children, and
therefore they decided to speak only Norwegian to them. Those who are
older than 50 speak Kven, whereas the younger generation does not.
Those who grew up speaking Kven with each other still speak Kven to-
gether, and those who spoke Kven with their parents’ generation still
speak Kven with them. Those who were born after 1965 are monolingual
Norwegian speakers, even though many have a passive knowledge of Kven.

When asked why they chose to speak only Norwegian to their children, many refer directly to the Norwegianization process or their encounter with the Norwegian school, as in the following examples:

(1)
Rita: æ tror foreldran har (.) æ tror det var sånn der fornorskning (.) [sant]² I think the parents have (.) I think it was this Norwegianization process (.) [right]
Pia: [mmmm]
Rita: foreldran prata norsk hjemme til ungan (.) liksom æ har prata norsk mine unga the parents spoke Norwegian at home to the children (.) like I spoke Norwegian to my children

Rita told me hat she regrets this decision, but like so many others in Bugøynes, she says that they did what they thought was best for their children. Some also told me that they have been criticized by their children for not having taught them Finnish.³ During a late evening conversation, an elderly lady told me that being without a language when encountering the Norwegian school was a burden she did not wish to force her children to carry, and therefore she spoke only Norwegian to them. This thought is also expressed by Eva, a young woman who, like many others of her generation, does not speak Kven even though she understands the language. Eva and her mother are talking about why her parents’ generation did not pass their mother tongue on to their children.

(2)
Ida: det var uviten[het]
it was ignorance
Eva: [ja] (.) også vil noen si det var for det beste (.) sånn vil det bli (.) med det friskt i minne det var jo det de hadde opplevd sjøl yeah (.) and somebody would say that it was for the best (.) that’s what happens (.) with this fresh in their minds it was of course what they’d experienced themselves

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Older generation</th>
<th>Middle generation</th>
<th>Younger generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Older gen</td>
<td>Kven</td>
<td>Norwegian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle gen</td>
<td>Kven (Norwegian)</td>
<td>Norwegian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger gen</td>
<td>Norwegian</td>
<td>Norwegian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Language shift in Bugøynes—language of communication between generations
Eva’s comment fits the explanations given by so many in Bugøynes: *we did what we thought was best for our children*. As outlined above, the school was the major arena for bringing in the Norwegian culture and language as the use of Kven was forbidden by law. Elderly people in Bugøynes told me that it was shameful to speak Kven at school, so they tried to speak Norwegian as best they could, but their Norwegian was not “proper” Norwegian. Thus they were in a position of double shame: their mother tongue was worthless, and they could only try to replace it with a foreign language they did not master, expressed by Ida in the following manner:

(3)

Ida: *for sa vi at (.) ja mamma og pappa sa ikke kan du norsk og ikke kan du finsk (.) du e sånn [5 second pause] du kan ingen ting du (.) kan ingenting ordentlig (.) språkfordervav*

we used to say that (.) yeah Mum and Dad said you can’t speak Norwegian, nor can you speak Finnish (.) you’re like [pause] you don’t know anything (.) don’t know anything properly (.)

linguistically ruined

This illustrates how the feeling of shame and inferiority has been passed on to the extent that it became part of people’s historical bodies. Through their encounter with the Norwegian officialdom mainly through the educational system, their mother tongue was devalued and this was one of the reasons that they did not pass it on to their children. Some also said that the use of Finnish declined when Bugøynes got a road connection, and that to “get places” one had to speak Norwegian, and Finnish was of no use in the modern world. Social actions do not happen in a vacuum; they are influenced by the historical bodies of the social actors in the site of engagement. Scollon and Scollon (2004: 164) point out that it is difficult to see “invisible” discourses in an event in the present. Instead, these discourses tend to be visible only by mapping discourse cycles backward (or forward) around the arc of their circumference away from the event one is analyzing. When mapping the cycles backward we see how the oppression and devaluation of the Kven language led to a feeling of inferiority and stigmatization for those who lived through these policies. These attitudes and world views in turn became internalized and passed on to their children and grandchildren, believing that they acted in their children’s best interests as knowledge of Norwegian was the key to success. In Fairclough’s (2001) terms, the comments of basing the decision on what was seen as “best for the children” indicates that their choice was influenced by the ideology of Norwegianization. This ideology was not necessarily made explicit, but it is an example of ideological power exercised
through consent. Fairclough (2001: 27) describes ideological power as the power to project one’s practices as “common sense.” Those who have power can exercise and keep it through coercing (by exercising power overtly) or through consent (by convincing others to go along with them). The Norwegianization policies were carried out both through coercing and consent and the practice of speaking only Norwegian to the children became naturalized. A discourse type can become so dominant that it is seen as natural and legitimate “because it is simply the way of conducting oneself” (Fairclough 2001: 76).

6. Language shift—multiple causation

The relationship between factors on the macro and micro levels is not a one-to-one connection. When analyzing language shift and oppressive minority language policies, it is important to keep in mind that such policies are rarely the only factor explaining language shift; other factors also should be taken into account. One of the other central factors affecting language shift in Bugøynes as is the case also in many other Kven communities is the general process of modernization. Prior to the 1970s there where no factories in Bugøynes, and when the fish processing factory was established in 1972, this was the first large-scale employer in Bugøynes. The manager was Norwegian and did not speak Kven, so this became another arena where knowledge of Norwegian was an advantage. Also, the new factory symbolized the new era of industrialization on the local level where one could remain in Bugøynes to work and earn an income. This was another key factor fuelling and in many ways also initiating the process of modernization in Finnmark. This might not have been the intention of the Norwegian authorities who provided reasonable loans for rebuilding. After the war, the Norwegian state provided money for rebuilding the region, and to receive money one had to apply in Norwegian, and knowledge of Norwegian was the key factor for success as forms and applications had to be completed in Norwegian, and a successful application brought privileges. The period after WWII was characterized by the ideas of Scandinavian social democracy: the Norwegian welfare state was founded on the idea of equality and homogeneity, and for the first time the inhabitants of the North had to relate to the Norwegian authorities in most areas of their lives: schooling, taxes, and social welfare, and knowledge of the Norwegian language was the key factor for success. Thus, the Norwegian language became linked not only to success, but also to privileges and modernity.
A fruitful analysis of language shift and language maintenance should address all these various threads of explanations. In the data from Bugøynes, several discourses have been identified, as shown in Figure 5.

Another way of describing this could be to compare the analysis to an attempt to identify various threads in a ball of yarn/wool. When addressing social issues such as language shift, there is a temptation to focus solely on the results and outcomes of oppressive policies, but the picture is more complex. Therefore using methodological tools which encourage and emphasize the need to look for a wider range of factors and thereby broaden the scope of discourse analysis (cf. Scollon and Scollon 2004) provides a more in-depth analysis of the interconnectedness of large-scale social phenomena and the actions of social actors. “Modernity” used to be synonymous with the devaluation of the Kven language, as knowledge of Norwegian was seen as essential for going places in the modern world. Bourdieu (2000 [1982]: 471) uses the notion of “the linguistic marketplace,” where only one kind of language is permissible and others are of no value, and he describes how this becomes internalized as practice to the extent that one does not question the role and dominance of the official language.

As a consequence of the Norwegianization process, the Kven language came to be associated with the past and not an asset in the modern world. Thus, the Kven language had no place in modern society and basically only Norwegian carried prestige and value. Today, however, as
the pressure to Norwegianize the minorities in the North has lessened, a knowledge of Kven is becoming an asset again, mainly because it opens up for communication with Finland for business purposes. Thus, while Kven used to be of little value on the linguistic marketplace, lately its importance has increased.

While the people in Bugøynes experienced that their Kven language was stigmatized, they have still taken a pride in their language, referring to it as old Finnish, and thereby perhaps implying that it is more genuine and original than the modern Finnish spoken in Finland. In example (3) there is another interesting element as Ida situates her statement in the past: we used to say that. This introduction implies that the speaker establishes a contrast between what used to be and the way things are now: we used to think that our Finnish wasn’t good enough, but now we know that we have reason to be proud of “our Finnish”. This contrast is evident in many of the recording sessions from Bugøynes: the stigmatization of their Kven language was something of the past, but a devaluation of their Kven as “not proper Finnish” is still evident, as in Mari’s comment in the following example:

(4)
Mari: se tulle nii sekasin norja ja suo[me]
it gets so mixed up our Norwegian and Finnish
Rita: [sil]lähän se pitta olla (.) se on ko meijän suomi
that’s the way it has to be (. ) it is like our Finnish
Mari: ja
yeah

Mari says that “it gets so mixed up” but this attitude is quickly corrected by Rita who points out that this is “our Finnish”. These examples show that the discourse of the Kven language is in the process of being transformed and should be analyzed in the light of a larger timescale, cf. the notion of opening up the circumference of the analysis.

The Kven have often been described as the silent minority group in several recent newspaper articles in Norway, and in 2004 a documentary with the telling title Det tause folkets stille død ‘The Quiet Death of the Silent People’ was released by Siivet-Grenselose Bilder. Bugøyenes used to be characterized in this way, as people did not put a lot of overt emphasis on their Finnish background. Storaas (2001) describes the focus and attachment to the local, not their Finnish roots in her study on Bugøyenes. However, now this seems to be in the process of changing. The most illustrative example occurred in a conversation with a 60-year-old lady, who said that they used to think that they were alone, but had discovered that there were others like them as they had realized that there
are many other Finnish-speaking communities in Northern Norway that had similar histories to that of Bugøynes. Tore, like many others, compares this to the situation of the Sámi, who after a long period of linguistic and cultural oppression experienced a revitalization in the 1970s. The following examples illustrate this:

(5) Tore: *det e jo akkurat sånn sånn som med saman*
   it is exactly like like the Sámi

(6) Tom: *forskjellen er jo egentlig at det blir jo akseptert nu (.) når det kommer det der samiske og så kommer den der kvensken (.) snart (.) dem har jo kvensk forening og dem har jo Kventunet*\(^4\) *og ka dem ikke har nu*
   the difference is really that it is accepted now (.) when it comes this Sámi and then comes the Kven (.) soon (.) they have a Kven association and they have Kventunet and what not

Tom’s comment contains some very interesting elements: being of Finnish descent is accepted now (implicit that this has not always been the case). Then there is a reference to the revitalization of the Sámi language which preceded that of Kven, and finally he mentions a Kven cultural institution. Tom, as many other Kven, explicitly referred to the Sámi revitalization process and how this has influenced the way many Kven see their own situation today.

### 7. Language shift—future trajectories

There are many indications of transformation, and the references to the Norwegianization process show how this was internalized and passed on to the following generations, as illustrated in Rita’s statement in example (1) when she says that they did what they thought was best for their children. Today, however, there are indications that this discourse is in the process of being replaced by a realization that there are other minorities in similar situations, and to some extent an orientation toward the modern Finland. The Kven have also been recognized as a national minority and thus a part of the Norwegian cultural heritage.

Parallel with this locally grounded cultural “reawakening” there is also a renewed orientation toward Finland. In the past few years Finland’s national day has been celebrated in Bugøynes with Finnish food and songs. Finland became an independent nation in 1917 long after the Kven had
settled in Northern Norway. Therefore this tradition used to be unknown in Bugøynes, as Tine, a young woman points out:

(7)
Tine: æ sammenligner stadig det der i forhold til det med samene (.) at vi har opplevd æ synes vi har opplevd akkurat det samme de samme tingan som saman (.) de er idag et mye mer stolt folkeslag (.) og vi også er mye mer stolt i dag over den finsken (.) vi har Pentikkopper vi har Iittala glass (.) æ tenke mye på den der biten (.) også de der tingan du snakke om (.) plutselig i fjor så feira vi finsk nasjonaldag (.) aldri hort om det før ikke sant
I keep comparing this to this with the Sámi (.) that we have experienced I think we have experienced exactly the same the same things as the Saamis (.) they are today a much prouder group of people (.) and now we’re also prouder of this Finnish (.) we have Pentik cups we have Iittala glasses (.) I think about this a lot (.) also the things you were talking about5 (.) all of a sudden last year we celebrated Finnish national day (.) never heard about this before right

People have become more aware of their Finnish background (Lane 2006; Storaas 2007) and there are also signs that there is an emerging ethnic identification. Many Kven use the term *Kven* about themselves, though this is less common in Eastern Finnmark. Whereas people in Bugøynes generally do not use the term Kven about themselves, they seem to focus more on their Finnish background.6 Also many refer specifically to the situation of the Sámis and contrast and compare their situation with their own, underlining the similarities, a process which could be seen as a sign of an emerging Kven identity.

Another central factor is Norway’s ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which changed the status of Kven as it got recognized as a language and not just a dialect of Finnish. This has been a fundamental part of the process of revaluing the Kven language, whereby the language has been recognized as a part of Norway’s cultural heritage which in turn can give the Kven a sense of belonging to the national culture. As all these discourses have emerged, people have started to question and challenge the previous policies of assimilation, not only the minorities themselves but also society at large.

8. Conclusion

This article has addressed the interrelatedness between micro- and macro-level phenomena by analyzing language shift in a bilingual community.
Social factors on the macro level, like language policies and attitudes toward minorities, influence the maintenance and loss of minority languages; however, analyzing how this affects the individual’s choices poses a methodological challenge.

As we have seen in the data from the process of language shift in a Kven-speaking community, there is a time lag between policy implementation on the macro level and the actions of the individuals on the micro level. In order to analyze language shift, a theoretical and methodological framework which allows for a historical perspective is essential. The case presented in this article underlines the need for methodological approaches that include this perspective, as time scales are crucial for the analysis of language shift because it takes time for large-scale discourses such as the language policies to be internalized and later materialized in action through language choice.

Language shift is the long-term outcome of many decisions and actions performed by individual social actors. In addition to incorporating this historical perspective, nexus analysis opens up the circumference of discourse analysis by also providing means for analyzing how different trajectories, discourses, and life histories intersect in a nexus of practice, which in turns helps us to see that language shift is much more complex than simply cause and effect. The shift comes about as a result of actions and processes with different time scales and on many different levels, ranging from large-scale policies to the actions of individuals.

University of Oslo

Correspondence address: p.m.j.lane@iln.uio.no

Notes

2. Transcription key:
   (.) pause
   [] overlapping speech
3. Not all Kven speakers refer to Kven as Finnish, though often this is modified by the use of terms like our Finnish, old Finnish, etc.
4. Kventunet is a Kven cultural center in Pyssjoki/Børselv, near Lakselv.
5. This example comes from one of the feedback sessions conducted after the main fieldwork period in Bugøynes. I had done a comparative study of Bugøynes and a Finnish-speaking community in Canada where those of Finnish descent placed a lot of emphasis on their Finnish background, both through linguistic means and through Finnish objects, such as Iittala glassware.
6. Based on fieldwork and observations since 1996.
References


