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Emotions towards two national minority languages in Sweden

Insights from language heritage communities

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Abstract: This article explores the lived experiences of participants with heritage language background in Norrbotten County, Northern Sweden, with regard to two national minority languages – Finnish and Meänkieli. In the study, explanations of participants' visualised and multicoloured language portraits were analysed to gain insight into the how the participants have experienced these languages and the emotions these experiences have evoked. Participants valued these languages, but felt excluded in their relationship to them, because only previous generations have had natural access to them. The loss of the language and attitudes about this loss were explained through both individual and collective experiences, such as Swedification and inadequate support. Participants expressed a vision of the future in which they could become part of the minority language community. To achieve such a future, education is essential. It can maintain and strengthen language skills and foster cooperation between informal environments and formal educational spheres. Our findings indicate that through collective action, more positive attitudes towards minority languages and fruitful education could be achieved.

Keywords: minority language, Sweden, language biography, experiences, Finnish, Meänkieli

Resumen: Este artículo explora las experiencias vividas por participantes con una lengua de herencia de trasfondo en el condado de Norrbotten, al norte de Suecia, con dos lenguas minoritarias nacionales: el finés y el meänkieli. En el estudio, se analizaron las explicaciones de los retratos lingüísticos visuales y multicolores de los participantes para comprender mejor sus emociones y experiencias con estos idiomas. Los participantes valoraban estos idiomas pero se sentían excluidos ya que solo las generaciones anteriores hacían uso de ellos de forma natural. La pérdida

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del idioma y las actitudes hacia él se explicaban a través de experiencias individuales y colectivas, como la «suedificación» y el apoyo insuficiente. Los participantes expresaron una visión futura respecto a pasar a formar parte de la comunidad de lenguas minoritarias. En el futuro, para lograrlo, la educación es fundamental si se desean mantener y fortalecer las competencias lingüísticas y fomentar la cooperación entre los entornos informales y la educación formal. Nuestros hallazgos indican que, tomando acciones conjuntas, se podrían fortalecer las actitudes positivas hacia las lenguas minoritarias y una educación fructífera.

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel untersucht die Erfahrungen von Personen mit herkunftssprachlichem Hintergrund in der nordschwedischen Provinz Norrbotten, wo zwei nationale Minderheitensprachen – Finnisch und Meänkieli – gesprochen werden. Zweck der Studie war es, Einblicke in die Erfahrungen der Personen mit diesen Sprachen zu gewinnen und zu untersuchen, welche Emotionen sie ihnen gegenüber empfinden. Zu diesem Zweck wurden die Erläuterungen der Personen zu ihren mehrfarbigen visuellen Sprachporträts analysiert. Die Personen schätzten diese Sprachen, fühlten sich aber von ihrem Gebrauch ausgeschlossen, da nur ältere Generationen einen natürlichen Zugang zu ihnen haben. Der Sprachverlust und die damit einhergehenden Einstellungen und Gefühle wurden anhand von individuellen und kollektiven Erfahrungen erklärt, wie z.B. Schwedifizierung und unzureichende Unterstützung. Die Teilnehmenden äußerten die Zukunftsvision, Teil der Minderheitensprachgemeinschaft zu werden. Die Umsetzung dieser Vision erfordert bildungspolitische Initiativen zum Erhalt und zur Stärkung der sprachlichen Fähigkeiten und zur Förderung des Zusammenwirkens von informellen Lernumgebungen und formaler Bildung. Unsere Ergebnisse zeigen, dass gemeinsame Maßnahmen eine positive Einstellung gegenüber Minderheitensprachen und eine fruchtbare Bildung fördern können.

1 Introduction

This article delves into language biographies, specifically examining the relationship and experiences of the Finnish and Meänkieli languages among participants of Finnish and Meänkieli heritage in Sweden's Norrbotten County (Swe. *län*). In this context, "language biography" refers to a personal and subjective account of the participants' lives with a focus on language (Melo-Pfeifer and Chik 2020).

According to the Language Act (SFS 2009:600) and the Minority Act (SFS 2009:724), both adopted in 2009, Swedish is the main language in Sweden, and Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, Romani Chib, and Sámi have been recognised as national

minority languages. Furthermore, these laws enshrine national minorities' right to learn, develop, and use their minority language.

The Finnish and Meänkieli have historical and geographical ties to Norrbotten County. When the national border between Finland and Sweden was established in 1809, it divided the previously continuous Finnish language region with its local varieties into two national states (e.g. Elenius 2001; Laakso 2022). Over time, on the Finnish side of the border, the variety was influenced by standardized Finnish, while on the Swedish side, it was shaped by Swedish. Meänkieli is a relatively recent name for the language and variety of Finnish used in the area, and it has also been called Tornedal Finnish or simply Finnish (Salö 2023; Laakso 2022). Linguistically, Meänkieli is still considered a dialect/variety of Finnish, which makes it difficult to distinguish between them (e.g. Arola et al. 2014; Lindgren and Niiranen 2018; Laakso 2022; Kolu 2023).

Since the shift in Sweden's language policy in 2009, Finnish and Meänkieli have officially been recognised as two distinct languages in Sweden, even though their similarities have facilitated linguistic exchange between them (Huss 2001; Lainio and Pesonen 2020). Yet the Finnish language also remains vibrant on the Swedish side, influenced by cross-border migration and connections to Finland. This can blur distinctions between the two languages, and not all speakers acknowledge the separation (Lainio and Wande 2015; Ridanpää 2018 and 2021). This article will refer to Finnish and Meänkieli, and the terms used by study participants.

From an individual perspective, it can be stated that Finnish and Meänkieli are heritage languages and that the studied heritage community's language skills vary widely, from first language (L1) skills to non-speakers (cf. Van Deusen-Scholl 2003). There may be individuals whose connection to the languages has weakened over several generations. In present-day Sweden, Meänkieli can be conceptualised as an endangered heritage language (Pasanen et al. 2022; Ridanpää 2021) and classified as endangered by Ethnologue (Eberhard et al. 2024). Moreover, the harassment of minority language speakers persists in Sweden, and minority languages remain at risk of disappearing (Lainio and Pesonen 2020). Neither Finnish nor Meänkieli is dominant in the surrounding society or formal education environment of Norrbotten County, making it a challenge for speakers to develop L1 skills. How individuals use language is influenced by their environment, its values, and the visibility of languages within it (e.g. Brännmark, 2024; Toropainen & Inga, 2024). Research highlights that a positive attitude towards languages and support for language learning, coupled with formal education, are important to create an environment that values languages and promotes their use (Pietikäinen et al. 2010; Lainio and Pesonen 2020). Overall, the education system plays a crucial role in shaping young people's attitudes and values regarding language and identity (Ridanpää 2018).

In this study, we aim to develop knowledge about how participants with a heritage language background in present-day Norrbotten County experience Finnish

and Meänkieli as national minority languages. Our research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What is the participants' relationship to the two national minority languages?
RQ2: How can the participants' perceived experiences of Finnish and Meänkieli be explained in the context of their social environment?

The research results contribute knowledge about the status of these national minority languages, the emotions they evoke, and the norms and values surrounding them. The study includes both children and adults, providing an opportunity to observe language-related experiences over time, thereby gaining a more comprehensive picture.

2 Background

This study focuses on Norrbotten County, a geographical area including 14 municipalities in the north of Sweden where Finnish and Meänkieli, which belong to the Finno-Ugric language group (e.g. Hyltenstam 1999; Laakso 2022), are minority languages. During the process of Swedification, which occurred from the late 19th century until just after the World War II, the Swedish government utilised the country's education system to introduce Swedish language and culture to the region's inhabitants (Elenius 2001). Monolingual Swedish schools were established, while other languages were marginalised. Knowing Swedish therefore became a social necessity as the language was associated with education, employment, and modernity. Developing Swedish language skills was seen as a way to secure a better future (Lainio and Wande 2015), and as a result, Meänkieli and Finnish speakers had fewer opportunities to use these languages in public. Consequently, families became less motivated to pass these languages on to the next generation (Hyltenstam 1999; Pasanen 2010), leading to internalisation, marginalisation, and a resulting decline in language skills.

Losing access to one's language can be emotionally difficult and lead to trauma, affecting a person's willingness to learn, use, and maintain their language (Busch and McNamara 2020). Busch (2015) highlights the emotions of desire and shame that arise when someone realises that their language skills no longer align with social practices in the minority or heritage language community. Desire in this context refers to a longing to reconnect with the lost language and to re-establish a sense of belonging through language use. McNamara (2020) also discusses a type of self-silencing in which individuals deliberately choose not to use a language they know to avoid being deemed outsiders and to prevent negative consequences in the mainstream community.

Studies show that (young) people from minority and indigenous communities may also feel ashamed of their family and cultural languages when interacting with society at large (Aikio-Puoskari 1997; Hornberger 2006; McCarty et al. 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Sumida Huaman 2014). During the Swedification process, Finnish heritage and language skills became a source of shame and something that needed to be hidden (Ridanpää 2021; Winsa 1998), and this feeling of shame may also drive minority language speakers to choose not to pass down their language to future generations, allowing the majority language to take over. Discussing language-related experiences can be challenging, especially when it comes to languages the government has deemed a threat (Busch 2020; Hornberger 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Sumida Huaman 2014).

In a heritage and minority language community, criticism of inauthentic language use, such as not using a known local dialect, may also influence language choice, leading to negative experiences and gaps within the language group. This can in turn cause the individual to remain silent and feel shame (Lane 2010 and 2023; Leonard 2012; McCarty et al. 2009; Todal 2007; O'Rourke, 2011). According to Ackermann-Boström (2021), recent studies have revealed that young Meänkieli users face criticism from older users, which evokes feelings of shame and insecurity, as the young users fear they may express themselves incorrectly. As a result, they often choose to remain silent rather than risk criticism. Young Meänkieli users therefore feel stressed about the responsibility of preserving their language, and their linguistic ideologies and negative experiences impact their use of the language and how they learn it.

As for the relevance of educational contexts, Valdés (2001) observed that minority languages can disappear within a few generations if they are not actively used in various contexts or supported through formal education. In Sweden, compulsory education is provided for children aged 6–16, and national minorities have the right to receive education in their respective minority languages (SFS 2009:600). Until 2011, all national minority languages could be studied as an elective subject called "Mother Tongue". With the implementation of the school reform the same year, Sami received its own curriculum (Skolverket, 2011a), and in 2015, education was further strengthened when Yiddish, Finnish, Meänkieli, and Romani Chib also received their own curricula (Skolverket, 2011b; SOU 2017:91). Where instruction is available, pupils typically receive one hour of education per week, despite the ongoing shortage of teachers and adequate teaching materials for both Finnish and Meänkieli (Lainio and Pesonen 2020). Pupils may choose to study Finnish rather than Meänkieli, for example, because they perceive Finnish as having a higher status or being more prestigious (cf. Ackerman-Boström 2021; Winsa 2007). These choices might also be affected by the fact that Meänkieli does not have, for example, approved orthography, implicitly suggesting that it is, more or less, a spoken language.

The Meänkieli and Finnish languages do not appear to be explicitly used or represented in formal classroom instruction in Torne Valley schools in Sweden, where students perceive education as being conducted monolingually in Swedish (Kolu 2020 and 2023; Poromaa Isling 2020). Although Meänkieli is used in informal contexts, teachers tend to refrain from using it in formal settings, where Swedish language and culture take precedence, yet students desire to learn more about Meänkieli and Tornedalian culture (Poromaa Isling 2020). Learners' attitudes and perceptions of Meänkieli are nevertheless contradictory; some pupils view it as an ancient language, while others attribute higher status to Finnish (Niva 2011).

In conclusion, previous research has revealed the prevalence of emotional aspects of language learning, such as shame and self-silencing, especially among new speakers in minority and indigenous contexts. These emotions can be explained by the sense of responsibility and burden the learners feel to secure the future of their minority language, as well as insecurity about who has the right to claim the role of authentic speaker (cf. Kwiatkowski, 2024). These feelings are not only individual but also collective, passed down generation after generation via family, community, and institutional structures.

3 Theoretical framework of the study

In this study, Busch's (2015) concept of linguistic repertoire as lived experience is used to gain insight into the emotional relationship participants with a heritage language background in Norrbotten County have to Finnish and Meänkieli, including their experiences of these minority languages. The biographical approach focuses on subjective experiences to better understand social phenomena and highlight the stories of individuals. Moreover, biographical research is valuable to the exploration of issues related to language ideologies, linguistic attitudes, and emotions (Busch 2016; Kramsch 2009). By starting with the individual perspective, biographical studies in the phenomenological tradition allow for a deep exploration of experience, thoughts, and feelings. Busch's (2015) linguistic biographical approach highlights the importance of lived experience, emphasising how lived body and language play a crucial role in connecting with others and understanding the world.

According to Gumperz (1964), the concept of linguistic repertoire encompasses the full range of codes or modes of speaking used in a particular speech community. Busch (2015) builds on this by noting that the linguistic repertoire is more than a set of competencies. It also includes experiences and emotions related to language. An individual's linguistic repertoire is subjective and relational, encompassing their lived experiences of language, including emotional and bodily dimensions such as feelings of belonging or exclusion, as well as attitudes and perceptions of them-

selves and others as language users (Busch 2015). Linguistic repertoire is thus not static but rather progressively shaped and reshaped by social, interactional, historical, and political processes throughout a person's life (Blommaert 2012; Busch 2021). Ultimately, lived experience plays a significant role in shaping an individual's linguistic repertoire over time (Busch 2015).

A linguistic repertoire can change through formal and informal learning and experiences of the past, present, and future. Further, the ways in which individuals view and value their communicative resources are influenced by surrounding ideologies about language and language use (Busch 2015). One's linguistic repertoire thus comprises emotional experiences, feelings, and attitudes shaped by the individual's particular socio-cultural context and is developed and utilised through intersubjective processes that occur between the self and others (Busch 2015). Based on an individual's subjective experiences and their multi-layered linguistic repertoire, Busch's (2015) linguistic biographical approach is, in this study, used as a theoretical foundation for examining participants' relationship to and understanding of Finnish and Meänkieli as lived experiences and as a part of their linguistic repertoire.

To investigate participants' relationship to their minority/heritage language, this study uses Ahmed's (2004 and 2014) concepts of affect and affective economies, which highlight that the emotions people associate with different languages are relational, meaning that they are shaped by interactions between individuals and their social environment. Ahmed (2004) describes emotions as circulating in affective economies, drawing a parallel to an economic system where assets are distributed and accumulated. Similarly, affects can spread between individuals and groups, influencing social dynamics. Affects leave traces in individuals' historical bodies. Hence, these affects are not merely a private internal affair; rather, they are historically informed and inseparable from social and political processes. Affects circulate between people and objects and shape social relations and perceptions, where emotions arise from societal influences and are tied to issues of power, politics, and social order. They move inward and are thus socially constructed.

In this sense, Ahmed (2004) focuses more on what emotions *do* than what they *are*. Emotions make impressions, create affective value, and affect us collectively, whereas affects circulate and stick to objects, individuals and groups within a society and create value. Such objects become "sticky", i.e. imbued with affects that stick to them as sites of personal and social tensions that may be conflictual or controversial. For example, a place can become sticky if it is associated with both joy and trauma, evoking strong and conflicting emotional reactions to the same object (Ahmed 2014). Emotion influences how people act and shapes different actions and orientations.

An affective dimension becomes social when it is shared and spreads within a group or society. For example, pride or shame associated with a minority language

may depend on how society values and treats minority languages. Ahmed (2014) describes shame as an intense and painful feeling connected to how the individual feels about herself/himself, a self-esteem experienced by and in the body. An individual who feels shame does not consider themselves to have succeeded in living up to a presented or desired ideal, namely the expectations imposed by society or some other group.

Experiences of shame can become part of an individual's identity. This means that affect and affective economies are central to how belonging and identity are formed and experienced. Emotions such as pride or shame affect how an individual relates to others and experiences their place in the world. By analysing affect and affective economies, we can highlight the emotions that impact how a minority language is learned and preserved.

4 Data, ethics, and methods

In this study, the biographical approach is realised through visualised language portraits (abbreviated LP, see Busch 2016 and 2018) in which the participants described their linguistic repertoire and perceived language experiences.

We used LPs for data generation because they are a simple and effective method that can be used with diverse participant groups. Obtaining subjective information about participants' linguistic experiences and social information about language use can be challenging when using methods such as ethnographic observation or interviews alone. This is because the processes by which individuals use language are often unconscious and difficult to articulate, especially when there is potential for a forced or involuntary language shift (Busch 2018 and 2020). LPs thus encourage reflection and enable individuals to express their thoughts and feelings about various language experiences (Busch 2018; Melo-Pfeifer 2021; Tabaro Soares et al. 2021).

LPs are colour-coded body silhouettes that help us to understand a participant's perceived linguistic experiences, the languages they know or are exposed to, and how they position themselves with regard to these languages. Drawing LPs is especially useful for young participants who might struggle to express their reflections in writing. This exercise allowed participants to freely express themselves and think about their language skills without an instant need for verbalisation (Busch 2010 and 2018; Chik 2019).

4.1 Data

Our research data were collected independently by us, with participants initially reflecting on their linguistic repertoire. We used their individual, colour-coded LPs as a reference point for further reflection (Busch 2018). The study involves two distinct participant groups: pupils and student teachers, all studying in Norrbotten County. The pupils were interviewed in pairs using a semi-structured format, while the student teachers provided an in-depth written reflection on their complex linguistic repertoires and lived experiences. These reflections were communicated in Swedish. Table 1 summarises the included data.

Table 1: Overview of the data

Participants	Age	Corpus	Sample for this study
		LP	Reflection with reference to Finnish and Meänkieli.
Pupils	5^{th}–8^{th} graders, aged 11 to 14.	19	8 semi-structured, 20-minute pair interviews (on average 3001 words per transcription).
Student teachers	Adults, 3rd-year students.	58	21 written reflections of 1 to 2 pages each (on average 956 words per text).
In total		77	29

Table 1 shows that the analysed data in this study consists of a sample of 29 reflections on individual LPs, 21 made by student teachers and eight by compulsory school pupils (aged 11 to 14). These 29 reflections were selected for the study due to the explicit presence of Finnish and Meänkieli in the LP and the corresponding reflections. Furthermore, the total corpus consists of 77 LPs. Although data were gathered separately for each group, they were finally analysed collectively to explore overarching themes in the participants' experiences and perspectives.

For the collection of data from different age groups, the methods were adapted. We conducted semi-structured interviews with the pupils in a quiet environment. These interviews lasted about 20 minutes and were audio recorded using a high-quality mobile phone recorder. They could, therefore, be transcribed reliably by the interviewer according to orthographic principles. The student teachers also wrote a reflective text of 1–2 pages, on average 956 words per text, about their language portraits. During data collection, we asked the participants to explain the meaning of the languages included in their LP, their choice of colours, and the position of the languages.

We did not conduct any test of participants' language proficiencies. The individual LPs also include languages that participants claim to have mastered.

4.2 Ethical considerations

The study was planned and implemented based on the Swedish Research Council's (2017) research ethical principles. All participants, including guardians of minors, gave informed consent for the material to be used for scientific purposes. Consent forms were provided to both participant groups. For the compulsory school pupils, forms were given to the pupils and their guardians containing information about the study's purpose, the fact that interviews would be audio recorded, how the data would be managed, and how confidentiality would be maintained. When drawing their language portraits and during the interviews, pupils were reminded of their right to discontinue their participation without explanation. The student teachers gave written permission for their language portrait to be used for scientific purposes, and each one had the option to block the use of their LP. All this research material is stored securely on the university's internal server. No personal data, such as names, schools, municipalities, places of residence, or year of collection, have been included, ensuring confidentiality throughout the research process. Any information that might identify an individual has thus been excluded and replaced with a code or removed from the stored and analysed data. The coding system for the two participant groups varies because the data do not form one unified corpus, but no sensitive personal data that would require ethical review (SFS 2003:460) was collected.

4.3 Analysis process

Through reflexive thematic analysis, we analysed 29 reflections on the participants' LPs in order to identify recurring patterns in the content (Braun and Clarke 2022). Our goal was to identify commonalities in the lived experiences of Finnish and Meänkieli speakers, particularly in terms of participants' emotional relationship to the languages and the importance of the environment in shaping these experiences. Using Busch's (2015) conceptualisation of linguistic repertoire as lived experience, we constructed themes that shed light on these research questions.

Initially, the two samples of LP data were analysed separately in accordance with the research questions posed in the respective article. We discussed our analyses and findings on multiple occasions to reach a consensus. Ultimately, the thematic categories could be constructed (Table 2). In our analysis, we focused only on

excerpts related to Finnish and Meänkieli, where through a recursive process, we reread and recoded to sort and interpret the codes and themes (Braun and Clarke 2019 and 2020).

Table 2: Examples of coding and thematisation (our translations appear first, followed by the originals in Swedish in parentheses)

Excerpt	Code	Theme
When Finnish was used around us children, you knew people were talking about secrets. Sometimes I really wished I knew this secret language, so I could know what the grownups were saying. (När finskan har använts runt oss barn vet man att det är hemligheter i görningen. Vad jag ibland hade önskat att jag kunde detta hemliga språk så jag kunnat veta vad dem vuxna säger!) 4009	Finnish has been used as a secret language among the adults in the participants' social environment. Their lack of language skills excluded the participant from the conversation.	*Feelings of exclusion*
Almost everyone in my family speaks it [Finnish] and I want to learn too so I can understand what they're saying. (Nästan hela min familj pratar det [finska] och jag vill lära mig också så jag fattar vad de pratar.) Pupil10	The Finnish language has a presence in the participant's family and is a language the participant wants to learn in order to be included in the conversation.	

The established themes (Table 2) are interpreted based on how the participants express their relationship to Finnish and Meänkieli. To reveal underlying patterns and deepen our understanding of the themes, we used the concept of linguistic repertoire.

5 Results

The presentation of the results is categorised according to the main themes constructed during the analysis: (i) Feelings of shame, (ii) Feelings of exclusion, and (iii) The future of the languages.

The analysis is presented using excerpts from participants' descriptions. Our own translations of the excerpts are provided in parentheses. When the excerpts

are presented in running text in English, the original Swedish texts are included in the footnotes. Compulsory school pupils are referred to as "Pupil" followed by a number, while student teachers were assigned a four-digit code (e.g. 4003). Any irrelevant information unrelated to the study has been omitted and indicated with [...]. This information may include the interviewer's agreement with a statement or sensitive information explicitly tied to the participant. Furthermore, we have used square brackets such as [place name] to maintain integrity of the content while protecting the participants' privacy. This approach ensures that essential context is preserved while maintaining strict confidentiality and protecting participants' identities in accordance with ethical guidelines. Accordingly, in some cases, we used placeholders like [Meänkieli] to represent necessary but unavailable information.

5.1 Feelings of shame

In the analysed data, participants described how the Finnish language is a part of their family and relatives' identities. They mentioned grandparents, parents, stepparents, and siblings who speak the language. Even if they have little or no knowledge of Finnish, they still acknowledge its importance as a heritage language. At the same time, they do not describe themselves as Finnish. The distancing from one's heritage can be seen as a strategy for managing a sense of exclusion in relation to the majority society, which is described by McNamara (2020) as the phenomenon of self-silencing. The participants also noted that their Finnish language heritage comes from previous generations who still use it (1).

(1) Pupil 5: Och sen finska min morfar är halvfinsk min mamma är lite finsk och jag är typ inge finsk alls så våran släkt har finska i sig

(And then Finnish; my grandfather is half Finnish, my mother is a bit Finnish, and I'm not Finnish at all, so our family has some Finnish in it.)

Pupil 2: Finska min farmor är halvfinsk så hon snackar och hon bodde i [platsnamn] så att hon snackar en liten blandning av finska och svenska

(Finnish; my grandmother is half Finnish, so she speaks it, and she lived in [place name], so she speaks a bit of a mix of Finnish and Swedish.)

The study found that the participants mostly inherited their language rather than learned it from, for example, stepparents or through formal education. In parallel with their feeling of belonging as individuals of Finnish descent, participants expressed a lack of language skills that could confirm this belonging, and comparing themselves to older generations who still speak the language can reinforce feelings

of incompleteness. This perceived lack can lead to a feeling of shame when individuals realise their language skills are insufficient to participate in the minority language community (Busch 2020). In the data there is repeated reference to the desire of participants to recover lost language skills, which they wish to do, in part, through their own children. The perception of bilingualism and multilingualism is also changing, and the participants have a growing interest in reviving lost languages (2).

(2) 4007: För det första är min mormor helfinsk så ett av min mammas modersmål var finska upp till det att hon fyllde 4, efter det mer eller mindre övergavs finska språket. [...] Den andra anledning är att min sambo och mamman till min [barn] är helfinsk så [hen] kommer att få lära sig flera språk samtidigt.

(Firstly, my grandmother is fully Finnish, so one of my mother's native languages was Finnish, until she turned 4, after that, the Finnish language was more or less abandoned. [...] The second reason is that my partner and the mother of my child are fully Finnish, so (s)he will learn several languages simultaneously.)

Excerpt 2 highlights the importance of seeking help with language transfer and revival. Without external support, even if one is proficient in a language, one can still risk being lost: "Unfortunately, I haven't been able to pass it [Finnish] on to my children, and growing up, it was a part of me that I tried to push away."[1] (4012). Participant 4012 expresses a sense of responsibility and inadequacy, along with feelings of shame for not being able to pass on their language. There could be several reasons for these thoughts, but the impact of Swedification, which lasted for decades, is one cause and may still be felt for generations to come (Busch and McNamara 2020; Ridanpää 2018).

Feelings of language shame may also stem from environmental expectations and attitudes, not because someone knows a language, but rather when they do not know it (4004): "[...] I also experienced language shame when I became an adult and entered working life. Then it was suddenly the other way around, and I would feel ashamed because I didn't know Meänkieli or Finnish."[2] Participant 4004 shared that their parents experienced language shame during their upbringing because they were not as proficient in Swedish as their Swedish peers. Despite this, shame still lingers, but the reason for it has changed. The participant explained that their parents believed that knowing Swedish was important, that they thought "that they

1 Jag har tyvärr inte haft förmågan att ge den vidare till barnen och under uppväxten var de en del av mig som jag försökt tränga bort.

2 [...] även jag fick känna språkskam då jag blev vuxen och tog mig ut i arbetslivet. Då var det plötsligt tvärtom och jag skulle skämmas för att jag inte kunde meänkieli eller finska.

were doing us a favour by excluding other languages."[3] (cf. Johansen 2013; Lane 2010). However, when the community values positive attitudes and proficiency in Finnish and Meänkieli, individuals may feel insecure and shy if their linguistic abilities do not align with those expectations. This can happen when a person's linguistic repertoire does not match what their community expects (cf. Ahmed 2014; Busch 2015).

The study's participants have mixed feelings about the loss of Finnish and their relationship with the language (cf. Ahmed 2014). They recognise that it is significant because their family members speak it, but also express negative attitudes towards it, possibly influenced by societal and educational attitudes (cf. Busch 2010). These experiences shape participants' individual language experiences, as evidenced in excerpt 3.

(3) Elev10: Finska låtar fattar man ju ingenting av
Elev8: Mamma lyssnar hela tiden på finska låtar
Elev10: Min pappa också
Elev8: Och jag ba kan vi inte byta kanal när vi sitter i bilen jag blir typ irriterad jag vill inte höra det jag fattar ju ingenting och så är det lite störande ljud

(Pupil10: You can't understand Finnish songs at all.
Pupil8: Mom listens to Finnish songs all the time.
Pupil10: My dad too.
Pupil8: And I said, can't we change the station when we're in the car? I get kind of annoyed. I don't want to hear it. I can't understand anything, and the sound is kind of annoying.)

Excerpt 3 reveals that the music was rejected because the participant did not comprehend the Finnish language. However, other participants expressed interest in discovering lost or environmental languages. Excerpt 4 demonstrates the way some participants identified themselves as learners of a national minority language.

(4) Elev10: Nej men jag ska kanske börja med finska när jag börjar på [skolans namn] jag ska ta det som förstahandsval
Elev8: Annars finns det på skolan så man kan gå i det
Elev10: Men det vill jag inte göra
Elev8: Jag har gått i det men sen ville jag inte gå i det

3 […] att de gjorde oss en tjänst genom att utesluta andra språk.

Elev10: Och så brukar jag lära mig finska hemma min mamma brukar lära mig eller mormor

(Pupil10: No, but I might start Finnish when I start at [name of the school]. I'll put it as my first choice.
Pupil8: Otherwise, it's available at the school, so you can participate in it.
Pupil10: But I don't want to do that.
Pupil8: I studied it, but then I didn't want to continue.
Pupil10: And I usually learn Finnish at home; my mother helps me, or my grandmother.)

The participants rely on their mothers and grandmothers (i.e. the women in their families) to pass on and help them to learn Finnish rather than formal education. One participant, Pupil8, attempted to learn through formal instruction at compulsory school but stopped after a few years. Another participant, Pupil10, views language studies as a future priority (cf. Poromaa Isling 2020). However, the reinforcement of language skills demands more than informal support, and Participant 1010 shares that even a childhood aspiration can be lost because of this: "[...] I still remember telling family members that when I grew up and started school, I would learn Finnish. But that was never something I was given the opportunity to do."[4] The participant's plan, idea, and desire to learn the language her grandmother lost has yet to materialise, ye there can be many reasons for the deferment of childhood dreams that go beyond an individual's immediate environment, family, and relatives.

The data include information about participation in formal Finnish and Meänkieli language education. However, it appears that compulsory school or university studies have failed to provide enough knowledge for individuals to feel confident or comfortable with the language, as evidenced by the following excerpts (5).

(5) 4002:
Jag har lärt mig mycket enbart på att lyssna på samtal, spenderat mycket fritid i Finland och i kombination att vi fick undervisning i skolan.

(I've learned a lot just from listening to conversations and spending a lot of free time in Finland, combined with being taught at school.)

1008:
Mina finskkunskaper är idag långt ifrån perfekt.

(My skills in Finnish today are far from perfect.)

4 [...] jag minns än i dag att jag pratade till familjemedlemmar att "när jag blir stor och börjar skolan ska jag lära mig finska". Detta var dock aldrig någonting som jag fick möjligheten till.

Pupil8:
[...] jag känner ändå att det [finska] är en del i mitt huvud fast jag inte kan prata det.

([...] I still feel that it [Finnish] is part of my head, even though I can't speak it.)

Here the data indicate a desire for perfect language skills. However, it is important to consider the question of what constitutes "perfect" language skills in Meänkieli (Ackermann-Boström 2021). The participants' lack of confidence in their language proficiency may stem from various factors. For instance, the presence of especially spoken Finnish can make it challenging to differentiate between the two languages, and Meänkieli's linguistic structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation can differ depending on where the speakers of it are. Additionally, the absence of standardisation and Meänkieli's status as a primarily spoken language may contribute to these feelings of insecurity.

The environment in which we find ourselves can influence our perception of how we should use authentic language (Leonard 2012). Unfortunately, this can sometimes lead to a lack of confidence in one's own linguistic abilities. In certain situations where a language has been marginalised, some individuals may present themselves as non-language users to avoid being labelled as "other" (McNamara 2020). Based on the participants' accounts, there appears to be a discrepancy between their formal education and their family's efforts to preserve Finnish or Meänkieli. As a result, language skills have not been successfully passed down (6).

(6) 4008:
När jag var liten förstod jag mycket av språket men när jag började skolan blev jag fast beslutsam att inte lära mig meänkieli och svarade inte när min familj och släkt talade med mig om det inte var på svenska. Detta har gjort att jag idag har ytterst begränsade kunskaper i språket, vilket är en stor sorg för mig.

(When I was little, I understood a lot of the language, but when I started school, I became determined not to learn Meänkieli and didn't respond when my family and relatives spoke to me, unless it was in Swedish. As a result, today I have limited knowledge of the language, which makes me really sad.)

4004:
[...] min mormor bara kunde finska och pratade finska med mig då jag var liten. Hon pratade finska och jag pratade svenska men vi förstod varandra ändå på något sätt.

([...] my grandmother only knew Finnish and spoke Finnish to me when I was little. She spoke Finnish and I spoke Swedish, but we still understood each other somehow.)

> 4006:
> Jag lärde mig att förstå meänkieli ganska snabbt men kunde inte prata och än i dag pratar jag inte meänkieli.
>
> (I learned to understand Meänkieli quite quickly, but couldn't speak it, and to this day I don't speak Meänkieli.)

Based on the participants' descriptions, it appears that their grandparents' generation attempted to pass on their language to their grandchildren, with varying degrees of language skills. The excerpt (6) suggests that while children could understand the language, they were less proficient in speaking and writing it.

5.2 Feelings of exclusion

Throughout the collected research materials, participants frequently express a lack of knowledge of Finnish and Meänkieli and do not consider themselves proficient language users. They attribute this to a multi-generational loss of language acquisition opportunities. At the same time, they express a desire to become part of the language community. Pupil17 describes knowing the language as meaningful, to know the language, saying that "it would be fun to learn it when you live so close to your grandparents."[5] Exclusion from the language community leads to a more general sense of being excluded. Pupil10 repeatedly refers to what it means not to know Finnish when adults and siblings at home speak the language: "Almost everyone in my family speaks it [Finnish], and I want to learn too so I can understand what they're saying."[6] Participant 4009 also describes the significance of involuntary linguistic exclusion: "When Finnish was used around us children, you knew people were talking about secrets. Sometimes I really wished I had known this secret language, so I could know what the grownups were saying!"[7]

When adults keep Meänkieli and/or Finnish as a secret language rather than as a common form of communication that binds together different generations, the language itself creates a sense of separation, as noted by participants. This highlights the fact that the importance of heritage language was not a value passed down by the older generation to the younger, as evidenced in a real-life example shared by Participant 1006: "My mother and father always used Finnish as a secret

5 "det hade väl varit kul att lära sig när man bor så nära [morföräldrarna]"

6 Nästan hela min familj pratar det och jag vill lära mig också så jag fattar vad de pratar.

7 När finskan har använts runt oss barn vet man att det är hemligheter i görningen. Vad jag ibland hade önskat att jag kunde detta hemliga språk så jag kunnat veta vad dem vuxna säger!

language when my siblings and I were little, so we wouldn't understand what they were saying.[8]"

In addition to its not being valued, negative experiences of language learning can also create a lasting negative association with the language. This can be especially harmful when the it has not yet been fully learned, as it becomes an obstacle to the acquisition of language skills. Such adverse experiences can also lead to language loss on an individual and societal level. These experiences have been observed in the case of Finnish in Sweden, where it was seen as a threat by the Swedish state, according to Elenius (2001). This language loss may have begun a few generations earlier when the grandparents of the participants in the study moved to Sweden from Finland (7).

(7) 1002:
Mormor flyttade till Sverige för att arbeta år 1968 med målet att lära sig det svenska språket.

(Grandma moved to Sweden for work in 1968, to learn the Swedish language.)

1006:
[...] då min morfar är flyktingbarn från [platsnamn i Finland] och min farfar och farmor talar Meänkieli.

([...] my grandfather was a child refugee from [place name in Finland], and my Grandma and Grandpa speak Meänkieli.)

1010:
Min farmor var ett krigsbarn och adopterades till Sverige under det finska vinterkriget som utlöstes under andra världskriget.

(My grandmother was a child of war and was adopted by a family in Sweden during the Finnish Winter War, which was triggered during World War II.)

Data show that the effects of migration or relocation and its aftermath are passed down to future generations. This results in a double loss: the loss of a connection to Finland and the disappearance of the Finnish language. Despite this, individuals still choose to acknowledge their Finnish roots due to their knowledge of their family history and origin. The impact of these histories is evident in the following generations and highlights a unique aspect of family history in Sweden.

8 Min mamma och pappa har alltid använt finskan som ett hemligt språk när jag och mina syskon var små så att vi inte skulle förstå vad de sa.

Decades ago, many individuals dreamt of a better life in Sweden and saw learning Swedish as part of the path to a better future. However, fulfilling this dream came at the cost of losing their native language. This is illustrated by 1010: "Because my grandmother was so young when she came to Sweden and never returned to Finland, she lost her Finnish very quickly."[9].

5.3 The future of the languages

The reason why the participants feel a connection to Finnish and Meänkieli could be because they have been exposed to these languages in their environment. It could also be because they know their family has Finnish and Tornedalian roots, although this does not appear to be necessarily meaningful at the moment: "I feel no emotional attachment to my Sámi, Finnish or Tornedalian roots. I don't know whether that will change [...]."[10] (1004). This participant highlights the importance of reclaiming one's language. This may be necessary in the future, especially if an individual wants to reconnect with their family's language and cultural heritage later in life.

As someone who lives near areas where the presence of the Finnish language is strong, Pupil2 expresses an understanding of Finnish as a living language (s)he may need in the future: "It's used quite a lot in everyday life, like if you go to [place name], there are a lot of Finnish people there, and so on."[11] To Pupil2, Finnish is more than just her grandmother's language; it is a thriving language in the border municipality, where simultaneous use of several languages is prevalent. Hearing Finnish or Meänkieli in their surroundings can help participants connect with the language (8).

(8) Pupil7:
Och så finns det några personer i [platsnamn] där jag bor som pratar finska.

(And there are some people in [place name], where I live, who speak Finnish.)

9 Eftersom farmor var så liten när hon kom till Sverige och aldrig återvände till Finland tappade hon det finska språket väldigt fort.

10 Jag upplever inga känslomässiga anknytningar till varken mina samiska, finska eller tornedalska rötter. Om det ändras i framtiden vet jag inte, [...]

11 [...] så är det ju ganska mycket i vardagen typ om man åker till [platsnamn] så är det ganska många finska och så ja

1009:
Jag talar det [meänkieli] inte, och förstår heller inte mycket men det har alltid funnits i min omgivning [...]

(I don't speak it [Meänkieli], nor do I understand much, but it's always been part of my environment [...])

It appears that simply hearing Finnish and Meänkieli can result in a sense of identification with these languages. This means that one does not necessarily need to have a background in the language or live in an area where the language is spoken to identify with it (Busch 2015). Furthermore, for some participants, Finnish has become a part of their lives through new family relationships. For example, a child may have gained a stepparent and new siblings who introduce a new language that becomes a part of their daily life (9).

(9) Pupil9:
Jag kan bara [personnamn1] och [personnamn2] har lärt mig så här lite lätta så här sol, hej då, tack och sådant när de ska ha välling [syftar på syskonen] så eh inte välling men när de de brukar säga lampa på engelska för det är nästan samma lamppu så det har jag hört ganska mycket så jag lär mig

(I can only say that I have learned by [person name1] and [person name2] some easy stuff, like how to say sun, goodbye, thank you, and when they want
porridge [referring to their siblings], or, like, how they usually say "lamp" in English, because it's almost the same, lamppu, so I've heard quite a lot, so I'm learning)

Learning a new language often starts with small steps and individual words in informal settings, and individuals with a national minority language may have dual feelings towards it, both positive and negative. These conflicting emotions indicate the complexity that underpins language identity and the process of language reclamation.

6 Discussion

This study aimed to develop knowledge about the perceived experiences of Finnish and Meänkieli as national minority languages among a sample of participants with a heritage language background from Norrbotten County. In our reflective thematic analysis of 29 reflections, we were inspired by Ahmed's (2004 and 2014) concepts of affect and affective economies as a way to elucidate the emotions that shape the learning and preservation of a minority language. Our analysis revealed a range of

emotions associated with Finnish and Meänkieli. These emotions are present in the family, yet the participants themselves suggested they had little to no knowledge of their heritage language. Nevertheless, their reflections suggested the important existential and emotional significance of languages for an individual within a society (cf. Ahmed 2014). Awareness of a common linguistic origin and the proximity of one's family to these language roots creates feelings of affinity with relatives despite one's heritage language skills. Family history also becomes the individual's history and part of their lived experience (cf. Busch 2015). The appeal of a sense of belonging may explain participants' strong connection to the languages despite their self-professed limited language skills. Nonetheless, the participants may retain a cultural affinity to their heritage language and express an interest in learning it.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that the loss of Finnish and Meänkieli is a reality, even though the Swedish Language Act (SFS 2009:600) and the Minority Act (SFS 2009:724) enshrine language preservation and the individual's right to learn, use, and develop a national minority language. According to the results, the use of these languages was limited to the participants' families, relatives, and grandparents, but the addition of new family members opened up fresh opportunities to learn the Finnish language. The study participants expressed a willingness to become part of the group of people who speak the language and to learn a language that has been lost, but at the same time, they showed little interest in the formal teaching of these languages. Finnish and Meänkieli are recognised in Swedish society, as they are taught in compulsory school. However, there is a gap between the participants' personal experiences of their minority languages and formal education. A sense of belonging and community with other young Meänkieli users is crucial for learning the language, according to Ackermann-Boström (2021). For many young people, a single weekly lesson may be the only context in which they get to encounter their heritage language. The participants' descriptions suggested that Finnish and Meänkieli were less important in the context of education (cf. Poromaa Isling 2020). Without formal studies, the language may become a highly personal concern. Taking responsibility for their language learning can become an excessive burden for children and school-going young adults.

The analysis also revealed that when people lose their heritage language, they feel excluded from their language-speaking community. The results thus point to the need for a social environment that prevents the development of negative emotions and feelings of rejection by supporting the use, maintenance, and development of a minority language. Some participants in the study expressed a lack of interest in their minority language or felt it was unimportant. This may discourage them from endeavouring to maintain or reclaim it, which in turn can reinforce their sense of exclusion. These lived experiences reflect affects related to individual experiences and thus impact the individual's sense of belonging and identity. In the

past, Meänkieli was undervalued as a language and even seen as a threat (Elenius 2001). As a result, it came to be considered abnormal compared to the societal norm. This viewpoint has been passed down through generations, affecting those who speak the language today. None of the participants suggested that they would use Finnish or Meänkieli with their generational peers. That indicates that this is an intergenerational issue. It raises the question of whether negative feelings towards the languages as part of the participants' lived experience reflect the attitudes towards Finnish and Meänkieli that emerged in the previous generation's assimilation process.

Past research in minority and indigenous contexts has shown that feelings of shame about the family language are common in interactions with the majority society (Hornberger 2006; McCarty et al. 2009; Sumida Huaman 2014). This study builds on that knowledge and shows that self-perceived insufficient knowledge of the minority language, difficulty passing it down to the next generation, and encounters with heritage language speakers can also cause shame. Feelings of shame "stick" to the language and relate to individual experiences and surrounding historical society (cf. Ahmed 2004). Insecurity about one's language skills due to shifting positive expectations can also contribute to silencing potential speakers (cf. Ackermann-Boström 2021; McNamara 2020). Their self-perceived lack of proficiency in Finnish and Meänkieli puts participants on an unequal footing within the group of language speakers (cf. McNamara 2020), in which insufficient knowledge of the minority language is indicative of the ongoing consequences of the Swedification policy (cf. Poromaa Isling 2020). For participants whose families have ties to Finland, both elective migration and forced flight from their country of origin have resulted in language loss and severed their connection to their roots. This double exclusion risks hindering identity development and creates gaps in the community.

Despite some cause for hope regarding the use of Finnish among the study participants, the prognosis for the recovery of Meänkieli is not optimistic, based on the data examined. The participants in our study do not use Meänkieli, and the lack of formal language learning may reduce the possibility of developing active bilingualism and multilingualism. As a result, the use of the language may become limited to private spheres. Moreover, the explicit dearth of social networks and language skills may prove to be an obstacle to the transfer and preservation of the language. The fact that participants express a future interest in their minority language can be seen as a sign of a need to increase their language skills. For language reclamation, the analysis highlights the importance of educating children and young people in order to strengthen their language learning, as well as the need for new forms of cooperation between home and school to change prevailing affective relationships to the minority language and create positive attitudes towards language, language use, and education (cf. Ahmed 2014).

This study focused on a group of participants with Finnish and Meänkieli as heritage languages, both of which are spoken in Norrbotten county. However, a larger sample size could provide greater insight into the experiences of the two languages. To deepen the discussion, it has been noted that research methods that enable reflection across generations are needed; it is not only essential to utilise the experiences and linguistic resources of minority language users but also to draw attention to the structures in which different languages and power dynamics intersect. For this reason, the inclusion of education professionals (from preschool to upper secondary school) would provide more comprehensive information about minority languages in formal contexts. All informal structures should be continuously discussed and highlighted from a democratic and social perspective.

Through thematic analysis, this study revealed that an individual's relationship with their minority language(s) was impacted by their past experiences, attitudes in their environment, assimilation processes, family history, and lack of education. The results contribute to understanding participants' experiences of the languages in question and their surrounding conditions. Furthermore, the study showed that using a specific method could highlight the subjective experiences and surrounding conditions of Finnish and Meänkieli participants.

Despite a change in language policy, the study's results indicate that language loss is ongoing in modern Sweden, decades after the abolition of the Swedification policy. However, as society becomes more linguistically diverse and globalised, it will be relevant for further research to include experiences of various languages and both social and educational contexts.

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