

Documenting the Endangered Kola Saami Languages

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The four languages Akkala, Skolt, Ter and Kildin are all spoken in the northwestern-most region of Russia (Murmanskaja oblast') on the Kola Peninsula. The four languages belong to the group of eastern Saami languages. Saami itself makes up the westernmost branch of the Uralic language family.

All Saami languages on the Kola Peninsula are seriously endangered due to the language shift to Russian. The Kola Saami languages are hardly ever spoken in public life today.

Akkala is moribund. Ter is on its way to full extinction with probably less than 20 speakers; the mean age of the youngest speakers of Ter is over 50. The same is true for the Notozero-dialect of Skolt; Skolt, however, is still spoken by several hundred Saami in Finland. The number of speakers of Kildin likely amounts to 300. Several older and even some younger Kildin Saami still use their mother tongue in conversation with family members, relatives and friends. However, the number of Kildin speakers is decreasing rapidly from year to year. Especially among the younger generation, there is a strong decline in active language competence due to the lack of a vibrant speech community and the lack of social motivations for learning and using Saami.

The aim of the Kola Saami Documentation Project is to provide comprehensive linguistic, sociolinguistic and ethnographic documentation of the endangered Saami languages of Russia. The linguistic documentation is focused on Kildin but includes work with the small number of speakers of the other Kola Saami languages in order to produce as complete a survey as possible.

It is the primary goal of the project to systematically record, transcribe, translate and archive the broadest possible variety of spoken language data from the Kola Saami languages. Linguistic documentation, provided with linguistic and ethnographic annotations, is expected to reflect active and passive native-speaker competence, situational and social structuring and the geographical distribution of the Kola Saami languages according to their current patterns of use.

The data will be saved at and made available through the digital DoBeS archive at the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen (The Netherlands).

My presentation will give an overview of the actual language situation on the Kola Peninsula. I will further address some ethical, methodological and technical issues connected with our documentation work. Finally, I am going to present some preliminary results of our grammatical analyses of Kildin.

References

Dokumentation bedrohter Sprachen (DoBeS) <http://www.mpi.nl/dobes>

Kola Saami Documentation Project (KSDP) <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/ksdp/>