

The situation of Kven language

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Kven language is a Finno-Ugric language spoken in Northern Norway. It is linguistically a dialect of Finnish, but for cultural, historical and political reasons it is nowadays considered as a language of its own. Even if the language is mutually intelligible Finnish dialect, it differs from the standard Finnish language more than most of the Finnish dialects spoken in Finland, because of the influence of Norwegian and Saami languages.

During the last forty years, new ethnic movements, revitalization processes and anticolonial fights have started worldwide. This movement also resulted in several activities among the Kven minority and Finnish immigrants in the 1970s and the 1980s. Since then, the population in Northern Norway has had a huge debate about the origin of the language spoken by the minority, and the most important linguistic topic in the discussions has been the status of the language and its relationship to Finnish.

In this presentation I will focus on these conflicting views and ideas of identifying Kvens language. The Kvens themselves have various interpretations about their own language. In the western part of Northern Norway, the Kvens regard their language as an independent language. It is called either *kveenin kieli* (the Kven language; in Norwegian, the language is called *kvensk*) or *kainun kieli* (the Kainu language). Some of the Kven ethnic activists are developing a standard written language and a Kven grammar. The Kven language also received an official minority language status in Norway two years ago. Despite of the official status of the language, the Kvens in the Eastern part of Northern Norway regard it as a dialect of the Finnish language. “Modern Finnish” is actually spoken in these parts of Norway by people who immigrated to Norway between the 1960s and the 1980s. Consequently, the status of languages is still debated by the Finnish-speaking immigrants and the Kvens; either it is regarded as one language with its dialects or, alternatively, two different languages with their own varieties and dialects.