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Borderlands, minority language revitalization and resilience thinking

Juha Ridanpää

***Abstract**: This chapter discusses the revitalization of Meänkieli, a minority language spoken in the Torne Valley, the borderland of Finland and Sweden with a long history of marginalization and othering. The main research question concerns how cultural activists involved in Meänkieli language revitalization re-narrativize their shifting identities by connecting resilience thinking together with the practices of active socio-cultural resistance. The chapter illustrates how revitalizing endangered languages functions as a mechanism for strengthening fragile minority groups and communities, containing protective function as a "bounce back" from a disturbance of socio-cultural marginalization, thus conveying resilience where significant disparities otherwise exist. The study is based on group discussions conducted in northern Sweden during the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016 with Meänkieli-speaking cultural activists.*

The creation of modern nation-states and their borders has played a key role in the process through which Meänkieli, a language spoken in northern Sweden, has turned into and been acknowledged as a minority language. The history of Meänkieli as a borderland language goes back to the beginning of the 19th century when, in the aftermath of the war of 1808–1809, the territory of Finland was separated from Sweden and annexed to Russia as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland. As a result, the new border, a line drawn along the Torne River, divided the historically, linguistically, economically and culturally integrated region of the Torne Valley between two states. The condition of being a linguistic minority began to develop into an issue of social "othering" in the late 19th century when ruthless "Swedification" policies entailed the exercising of powerful political pressure on marginal groups in order to integrate them linguistically and culturally into the modern nation-state.

Today Meänkieli is classified as an endangered language, and there is a perception of the group of Meänkieli speakers as passive, oppressed and harshly treated by the majority population. As has been the case with several subaltern languages, the feelings of shame remain embedded in the self-perception of the speakers. In case of minority groups and languages, resilience thinking refers to an alternative to common top-down language policies, a bottom-up approach, in which the decision-making concerning the revitalization of endangered languages is given to local groups from the hands of state governments implementing their political and socially unifying purposes (Bradley 2019). To understand how language resilience works, it is essential to understand the context and theoretical framework of colonization, marginalization and trauma (Fitzgerald 2017, p. 281). In the case of Meänkieli, the question of linguistic sovereignty is inherently connected to the negative connotations of Finnishness within Swedish society and the sense of shame that Meänkieli-speaking people feel for having Finnish roots. On the other hand, there is an alternate perception of Meänkieli speakers as a group which is, in spite of oppression, actively involved in several cultural projects that aim to protect their language and increase the esteem of a cross-border identity. In the studies of resilience linguistics, it has been particularly underscored how work aiming to revitalize endangered languages can function as a mechanism for strengthening fragile minority groups and communities, a "bounce back" from a disturbance of socio-cultural marginalization.

This chapter discusses language resilience thinking with the focus on how the conflicting viewpoints over the socio-political status of minority languages may turn into simultaneous acceptance of uncertainty and hope for the better future. The specific attention is paid to the changing role of bordering, which in the case of the Meänkieli language and identity represents a symbolic marker for a shameful past. The main research question concerns how cultural activists involved in Meänkieli language revitalization re-narrativize their shifting identities by connecting resilience thinking together with the practices of active socio-cultural resistance. The study is based on group discussions conducted in northern Sweden during the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016 with Meänkieli-speaking cultural activists.

Borders and minority language revitalization

In minority language studies, language loss has often been linked with the context of globalization, along with arguments such as how globalization has brought along a so-called "reversing language shift" (Fishman 1991). The threat of globalization is in connection with a widely employed juxtaposition in which endangered languages are associated with conservatism, as they are assumed to be spoken by a soon-passing generation, while younger generations stand for the ideal and values of modernism, liberalism and globalization (see for example Dorian 1994). On the other hand, the loss in linguistic diversity has also been explained being an impact followed by the development of centralized nation-states (Bradley 2019, p. 509). The condition of being linguistically marginalized effectively means a reduced sense of belonging to the state (Valentine and Skelton 2007). Both these viewpoints are justified within their own contexts, but what is crucial to emphasize here is how major a role borders and b/ordering play in terms of how the rationalities and practices of language resilience are put into action.

With the concept of "cross-border language," it is typically referred to minority languages spoken by one ethnic group living across two or several state borders. According to Willemyns (2002), there are two different ways to understand the connections of changing borders and languages. First, when borders shift, languages shift. This refers to historical processes where places that used to be part of the transition zone between two nations have moved into the monolingual zone on one side of the state border (cf. Frandsen 2021). The second way of understanding the connection of borders and languages is associated with language shift resulting in "erosion," meaning that "the contact situation has decisively been changed in the course of history although the 'language border' (in the traditional sense) has not changed its course" (Willemyns 2002, p. 38). As Andersen and Prokkola (2021, p. 000) highlight, borderlands are ecological, political and social environments where local people have long histories of coping with and within the structures of two states. Shifting borders often leads into linguistic marginalization, and for minority languages to survive, local-level revitalization work is required.

"Language revitalization" refers to activity that has protective function for the indigenous communities and their members, conveying resilience where significant disparities otherwise exist (Fitzgerald 2017). There are several rationalities for why saving minority languages is important, such as questions concerning identity-formation, cultural diversity, educational principles and the sovereignty of minority groups (Ridanpää 2018). Along with arguments such as "cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" (Skutnabb-Kangas 2002, p. 2), many scholars across disciplinary boundaries have underscored how languages in themselves are to be considered cultural treasures. When languages diminish, part of human knowledge and cultural heterogeneity is lost with it. Within this context, the idea of resilience comes close to the questions

and definitions regarding sustainability (see Clark-Joseph and Joseph 2020, pp. 146–151). Correspondingly, the Canadian government, for instance, has recognized language revitalization being an issue of health and wellbeing of individuals and communities (Duff and Duanduan 2009).

Minority languages are ingredients in wider societal discussions about the confrontations between the ideology of nationalism and liberal democracy (May 2012). Language emancipation often requires linguistic standardization, which, instead of the needs of minority language speakers, serves the political interests of nation-states (see Lane 2011). Hence, from the viewpoint of nation-state ideologies the very idea of revitalizing borderland languages is problematic. On the other hand, a more predominant opinion is that language revitalization, first and foremost, can be utilized as a means by which it is possible to detach from past ideologies of colonialism (see Hermes 2012). For national minorities, language revitalization often works as a tool for rediscovering an othered identity and a sense of pride (Ridanpää 2017). In this way, the endeavors to "save the language" may gain a major symbolic value (Sallabank 2013).

Contextualizing the Meänkieli language

After the Grand Duchy of Finland had been separated from Sweden in the aftermath of the war of 1808–1809, the political movement of Fennomans started to work with intentions to raise the respect and social status of the Finnish language. Major changes in legislation, particularly the language manifesto in 1863, initiated increasing organizing and cultural-political activity in civil society that ultimately led the Grand Duchy of Finland to gain independence in 1917. At the same time, the Finnish-speaking population on the Swedish side of the Torne Valley region became a linguistic and national minority. Finland was understood to represent a threat to national security, and Finnish-speaking people living in northern Sweden were perceived as an ethnically inferior population, an internal "other" to the Swedish-speaking majority (Elenius 2002) – "a fact" that was ostensibly "proved" by the racial studies of Swedish anthropologists (Heith 2012). Through institutional control, particularly the school system, the marginalization of the Swedish Torne Valley became a concrete, everyday feature of people's lives in the area. During the first half of the 20th century, speaking Finnish at school was forbidden in northern Sweden (see Júlíusdóttir 2007, p. 41).

The hostility continued throughout the early 20th century until relations with an independent Finland improved (Hult 2004, p. 188). During the years of "Swedification," Finnish heritage became something to be ashamed of, something that needed to be hidden; for instance, exchanging Finnish surnames for Swedish ones became highly popular. At the same time, the number of Finnish speakers decreased remarkably (see Prokkola 2009, p. 28). Bilingualism was conceived as "halflingualism," an unsatisfactory proficiency in both languages and something to be ashamed of (Ahola 2006, p. 28). As the writer Mikael Niemi in his breakthrough novel Popularmusik från Vittula (Popular Music from Vittula), published in 2000, insightfully describes the regional history of linguistic otherness: "We spoke with a Finnish accent without being Finnish, and we spoke without a Swedish accent without being Swedish. We were nothing" (Niemi 2003, p. 49).

The "ethnic renaissance" of the late 20th century resulted in a major change in local social self-esteem in the region, and a new impetus to preserve the regional culture and language arose (see Winsa 2005). The organization Svenska Tornedalingars Riksförbund (STR-T) was established in 1981 for the revitalization of Tornedalian culture and language. In terms of rising regional awareness, the major role was played by culture activist/writer Bengt Pohjanen, who has worked in several ways towards language revitalization. As a symbolic marker for regional belonging, the

language spoken was not called Finnish anymore, but "Meänkieli," literally "our language," and quickly "meän," "our," evolved into a keyword around which all new cultural and social activity became entwined. Similar kind of ethnic revivals, as well as civil rights movements, took place all around the world during the late 20th century (Fishman 1985).

According to Ethnologue: Languages of the World (2018), there are approximately 30,000 Meänkieli speakers on the Swedish side of Torne River, but the exact number of speakers is highly difficult to estimate, as people are often uncertain whether the language they use can actually be defined Meänkieli or not. In addition, opinions vary on whether the dialect spoken on the Finnish side of Torne Valley should be also called Meänkieli or not. In Finland Meänkieli is often defined as a dialect of Finnish, characterized by the extensive use of h sounds, the loaning of Swedish words, and a certain form of regression compared with Finnish spoken in today's Finland (see Vaattovaara 2009). In addition, switching languages from Meänkieli/Finnish to Swedish and back again even during a single sentence is typical for Meänkieli speakers and can be considered a specific characteristic of the language. Although the distinct status of Meänkieli has often been questioned (Piasecki 2014, p. 13) and in Finland Meänkieli is defined as a dialect of Finnish, in 2000 Meänkieli was granted official status as a minority language in five municipalities in northern Sweden: Gällivare, Kiruna, Haparanda, Pajala and Övertorneå.

According to Prokkola (2009), the borderland identity of Torne Valley cannot be explained by any single attribute such as language or ethnicity. However, minority language work has been a symbolic cornerstone on which the cultural work striving for regional self-esteem has been based. After Mikael Niemi's novel Popularmusik från Vittula, mentioned earlier, became a bestseller, the history of the Meänkieli-speaking minority was acknowledged for the first time more widely in both Sweden and Finland. Although it was a coincidence that the book was published the same year when the Meänkieli language act came into force, for the language activists this coincidence was extremely important, no matter how negative the image of the region in this dark ironic novel was:

> As a citizen of Pajala, you were inferior – that was clear from the very beginning. Skåne, in the far south, came first in the atlas, printed on an extra-large scale, completely covered in red lines denoting main roads and black dots representing towns and villages. Then came the other provinces on a normal scale, moving farther north page by page. Last of all was Northern Norrland, on an extra-small scale in order to fit onto the page, but even so there were hardly any dots at all. Almost at the very top of the map was Pajala, surrounded by brown-colored tundra, and that was where we lived. If you turned back to the front you could see that the Skåne was in fact the same size as Northern Norrland, but colored green by all that confoundedly fertile farming land. It was many years before the penny dropped and I realized that Skåne, the whole of our most southerly province, would fit comfortably between Haparanda and Boden.
> (Niemi 2003, pp. 46–47)

At the same time, the success of the novel launched a new interpretative layer for how the theme of Meänkieli as a minority language and its connection to regional identity were to be approached (see more in Ridanpää 2019).

As Andersen and Prokkola (2021, pp. 000) bring forward, the cultural resilience of minority groups is inherently entangled with the question of how the groups manage to survive as a distinct cultural community, thus implying how the identity-formation, a certain form of "construction of

distinctiveness," works for the benefit of language resilience. From the viewpoint of regional geography, one interesting reproduction of cultural heritage has been the concept of Meänmaa, "our land," launched by culture activist and writer Bengt Pohjanen. Along the increasing cross-border activism, the concept of Meänmaa, originally referring to the Swedish side of Torne Valley, started to refer to regions on both sides of the river. In prevailing cartographic illustrations, territorial shape for the map of Meänmaa borderland is taken from the map drawn by Finnish linguist Martti Airila back in 1912 in his historical study of the dialect of Torne (Prokkola and Ridanpää 2011, pp. 781–782). Meänmaa has not been recognized on any governmental level, but it is nevertheless possible to get granted a (symbolic) passport of Meänmaa, whose sole practical purpose is that locals can get a discount from local shops. According to Heith (2018, p. 105), Pohjanen has used naming, mapping and symbolic elements connoting Tornedalian culture to decolonize Meänmaa.

Although several local culture activists consider Pohjanen's borderland brand of Meänmaa artificial and unnecessary, and rather prefer using the traditional names of Torne Valley or Torne River Valley (Ridanpää 2018, p. 194), by scripting local stories and documenting folklore Pohjanen has created an archive of borderland heritage, which provides a resource for regional culture industries (Prokkola and Ridanpää 2011, p. 782). Pohjanen's work is a good of people's resilience, a social impact that starts from the grassroots, from bottom up all the way to the higher institutional levels (see Andersen and Prokkola 2021, p. 6). Pohjanen's writings on the borderland culture and heritage have provided material that has been commercialized in EU-funded cross-border projects, such as INTERREG III A North, at the same time offering both resources and symbolic legitimation for language revitalization work. The implementation of the School of Language and Culture, established alongside the elementary school in Pello during the program period of 2000–2006, has been one of the most long-standing cross-border cooperation initiatives conducted with the help of INTERREG funding. From the local point of view, the establishment of a cross-border language school was important, since at the same time the maintenance of basic communal infrastructures and services was enabled (Prokkola et al. 2015, p. 111). One of the central goals of the school initiative was to raise regional consciousness and identity, teaching pupils alternative regional histographies and cultures.

Methodology for hearing stories

As Andersen and Prokkola (2021, p. 6) underscore, the study of borderland resilience includes questions concerning the experiences and narratives of borders, social relations and belongings. People make sense of spatial belonging, of who they are, what kinds of communities they belong to, through telling stories based on their experiences; stories may also be used to narrativize their position in relation to others, that is, for assembling people's spatial bearings and identities into a narrative with a plot (see Rycroft and Jenness 2012; Rose 2016). Along with its instrumental and communicative roles, a key function of language is to maintain group identity and shared feelings of belonging, and thus language has a key role in the process of how spatial identities are constructed (Edwards 2010), while identity narratives function as performances of spatial belonging.

Here it is essential to separate the concepts of "identity narrative" and "narrative identity." While the term "identity narrative" refers to the stories of peoples' self-conceptions (Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000), the term "narrative identity" is commonly used to refer to the ways that individuals construct their personal stories in certain social circumstances, as well as to the ways in which communities construct their spatial identities through stories (Somers 1994). In the case of language revitalization, the essential question concerns how it is enabled that the voices and stories of minority groups

become heard, the identity narratives rooted in the heritage of marginalization and othering, today being characterized by simultaneous acceptance of uncertainty and hope for the better future. In this research, "hearing stories" is implemented using a group discussion method. In minority studies, group discussions have been considered a unique methodological route through which oppressed minorities are offered a possibility to make their voices heard (Booth and Booth 1996), a method through which the multiplicity of shared as well as contested narratives can be discovered (Price 2010).

The following analysis bases on eight group discussions, conducted on the Swedish side of the Torne Valley between September 2015 and February 2016. The participants were people who are (inter-)actively working – some directly, some less directly – with the revitalization of Meänkieli, such as members of village associations and cultural associations, teachers from different levels of education, local radio reporters, choir members and musicians. Methodologically speaking, the groups and interviewed persons were not treated as key informants, but rather as community members who have formal or informal personal experiences from language revitalization work. The groups and interviewed persons are unnamed for confidentiality. For each discussion, a separate thematic framework was prepared, containing questions relating to the specific activities of the interviewed group (music, radio broadcasting, teaching, religion and so on). In addition, there were some highly general questions that were directed to all interviewed groups concerning the local languages and identity. The key questions of this kind were: (1) How do you see the work on Meänkieli language revitalization, and (2) how does the issue of minority language come up or need to be acknowledged in your work? All discussions were conducted in Meänkieli, although there were natural alterations in language use depending on the backgrounds of different discussants.

Revitalizing the Meänkieli language

How to revitalize minority languages?

During the group discussions, it quickly became clear that there were two approaches to the most crucial question in language revitalization – that is, how to do it? Some discussants started their argumentation from the premise of how necessary it is to institutionalize the language, while others considered the most relevant issue is an increasing positive attitude towards the language among the local people. As Meänkieli has been a colloquial language with no institutional status, used only in daily conversations, seeing Meänkieli in printed form has a major symbolic value in terms of how the social status of Meänkieli becomes legitimized:

> Woman 1: Nobody demands anything in Meänkieli because Meänkieli speakers cannot necessarily read Meänkieli. All the Meänkieli speakers can read Swedish, so there hasn't been any need for it. Only so, as we have spoken, that in symbolic manner it is nice that we can see Meänkieli, like for example in municipality webpages there can be something in Meänkieli. So, it's important that it's visible, but there has never been a situation in which someone insisted that things must be written also in Meänkieli.
> (Group 6)

With a history of being treated as an uncivilized people with an uncivilized language, spoken at the "wrong" side of the border, the (symbolic) institutionalization of Meänkieli is considered highly important. In similar fashion, having church services in Meänkieli was considered not only homely and cozy, but also important as such. The other argument underscores how Meänkieli, both as a skill

and a part of identity, should be made attractive to the local people. It is relatively common that minority languages are, especially among youth, considered a skill to be ashamed of (McCarty et al. 2009, pp. 300–302). As is widely recognized, this is also one of the key reasons why several minority languages are vanishing in the first place. However, it is axiomatic that revitalizing endangered languages require having and teaching a positive attitude no matter how demanding or desperate the work itself feels. A Meänkieli language teacher commented:

> Woman 1: When you're working with Meänkieli it is important that you give a positive image of it, like it's fun and whatever you do with Meänkieli, should somehow be fun so that you get a feeling like: "Wow, I wanna learn that too." A kind of interest and fascination rises, which helps the language survive and children are seriously willing to learn it and try to find those friends whom with it is possible to speak the language. So, for the sake of revitalization it is extremely important that it is made somehow interesting. And whatever you do with Meänkieli, it must be fun.
> (Group 6)

Keeping language teaching entertaining is in connection with another interesting question about how humor has been used in the revitalization of Meänkieli, for example when Bengt Pohjanen's grammar education was broadcasted in local radio (see Ridanpää 2018, p. 195). On the other hand, the interconnections between humor, identity, minority languages and also otherness often relate to the question of whether the language can be comical in itself. For example, speaking English with a Scottish accent has in some contexts been used as a rhetorical vehicle to provoke laughter, by using the dialect as if it were humorous in itself. Does Meänkieli sound "funny" in a way that it is easy to mock or whether listeners may hear some heart-warming tone in it? According to discussants, both reactions have been noticed (see more in Ridanpää 2017). This illustrates how emotionally loaded topics Meänkieli language and revitalization are. In the 1960s, basically all the children on the Swedish side of Torne Valley spoke Finnish/Meänkieli, but after that the decline in the number of Meänkieli-speaking children declined dramatically:

> Man 2: In regrettable manner all those who speak and have roots here say that "dear me, for why we did not teach our children."
> Man 1: Yes, that's the way how it is and so say the children too, blame their parents.
> Man 3: Yes, I've heard hundreds and hundreds who say so.
> (Group 3)

The case of Meänkieli illustrates how "we-feelings," as spatially embedded emotions, are not only about the feelings of belonging, but also about the feelings of being different (see Richter 2015). One generation skipped learning the language because their parents were ashamed of their historical background. In trans-national families, different languages are used for different purposes (Soler and Zabrodskaja 2017), but in case of Finnish/Meänkieli, avoiding speaking the language to your children was axiomatic, an in-built norm: speaking Finnish was not an option.

Rivalry of belonging

The geography of "linguistic differentiation," a concept referring to how languages are conceived as discrete, bounded entities, embedded in the politics of a region and its observers (Irvine and Gal 2000), plays an essential role in case of Meänkieli. Meänkieli is considered a language spoken only in the Tornio Valley, while the Tornio Valley is geographically defined as a river basin of the Torne

river. This has caused conflicting opinions about who should be entitled as genuine Meänkieli speakers, and who should not. As one woman exemplified: "These people from ore-mining fields, they think that they are from the Torne Valley." According to topographical definitions, the ore-mining fields of northern Sweden are not a part of the Torne Valley. The headwaters of a border river between Sweden and Finland do not come from ore-mining fields, so despite the fact that the historical background of the people living there is connected to Finland, in terms of language politics, they are considered "outsiders." In this "rivalry of belonging," Meänkieli becomes in a symbolic way defined as "a border river language," an argument that some people find essential to keep up, while other discussants, in contrast, considered a substantially annoying feature of Meänkieli language preservation work:

> Woman 1: What has bothered me a bit is that people are terribly restricted. Like if you belong to this group, you cannot belong to that group, because you are for example from Finland.
> . . .
> It shouldn't matter. The main thing is that we speak something. It's not relevant whether we speak more Finnish words or more Swedish words.
> (Group 7)

As Prokkola (2009) argues, in the case of the Torne Valley the borderland identity becomes composed of various overlapping and contradictory voices and narrations that people have. The geographical definition of the Torne Valley is inseparably attached to the definition of Meänkieli and how the connection between the language and identity is understood. However, according to Bradley (2019, p. 511), one problem in minority language resilience thinking is that people conceive that some territories were designated belonging to some specific minority groups as "natural order." For Bengt Pohjanen establishing and promoting the territorial shape of Meänmaa borderland has been a part of revitalization work, but there still are a variety of contradictory narrations over how the history of Meänkieli should be comprehended. In one group discussion, the societal status of Meänkieli was defended by re-narrating the history of the Finnish language:

> Man 1: It has been acknowledged that, ever since the Torne Valley has been populated, say back to the 10th–11th century, the language spoken here was Meänkieli. . . . Finnish, the national language of Finland, it was not before the 16th century when Mikael Agricola started mucking around with it. It was not until the middle of 19th century when Finnish became a public, national language. It is so that if you take a more in-depth look, the national language of Finland is a dialect of Meänkieli, if you may, not the other way around.
> (Group 8)

Promoting Meänkieli as an endangered cross-border language is also a rivalry between various aspects of understanding the history of the Torne Valley and the role of Finland and Finnish language within it. Whether the discussant in the previous example is serious or merely telling a story in jest is irrelevant here. According to discussants, Meänkieli contains something pure and original that other, officially acknowledged state languages do not have. The modern nation-state system, along with redefined state borders, is understood as breaking the "natural order" and by that means establishing the incorrect narratives of linguistic history (see also Andersen 2021). The feeling of being othered is constantly embedded and self-imposed when discussing the societal position of Meänkieli, and, interestingly, as a border language, this bitterness is simultaneously directed both at the history of Swedification as well as at the history of Finnish society.

Critique of revitalization

What came out as a surprise during the group discussions was that several people who were actively involved in language revitalization work still considered Meänkieli as "an invented language": "I have always said that I speak Finnish, but it was before that, when Meänkieli was invented." On the other hand, it is important to underscore that the many issues that were figured out along the ethnic renaissance in the 1980s were cultural inventions of a certain kind. Culture workers acknowledge that "meän," "our," has turned into a borderland brand that is used in several fields of cultural and communal activities, and according to some discussants, no matter how important they consider the value of minority language work, the identity branding has simply gone too far:

> Woman 1: Some say that it's too much, like in all occasions it is Meänkieli, Meänkieli.
> (Group 5)
> Woman 1: I am not sure whether I'm a right person to say, since I'm a little bit like a Finn and I speak Finnish and try to teach Finnish. Sometimes it feels like it has turned into a kind of myth, that municipalities must have Meänkieli and it must be used.
> (Group 2)

Calling "Tornedalian Svenska" Meänkieli has been a strategic move towards more vivid borderland identity, and it is understandable that for some, even those being actively involved in revitalization work, the artificiality may feel irritating. As mentioned, whereas in Finland Meänkieli is understood as a dialect of Finnish, in Sweden the categorical division between Finnish and Meänkieli language is important, or to be precise, this difference is a fundamental basis of the whole minority language and identity revitalization work. In a similar way, some level of institutionalization of Meänkieli is crucial, and as underscored in this chapter, in the case of minority language work the role of key regional activists is essential. In case of the Torne Valley, Bengt Pohjanen has been a key person in the mobilization of borderland culture, language and identity work. One of the most important symbolic signposts in his language revitalization work was when he published the grammar for Meänkieli in 1996. Yet, although Pohjanen's active language work has led into the legitimation of Meänkieli's official status as a minority language, people also talk about how standardizing everyday language may actually hinder its survival:

> Man 1: When that grammar came, when they started working with that book, . . . I have sometimes pondered it like by that means it is made more difficult than it actually is. When you start phrasing like, "this must be in that form, this is correct, this is wrong," then you prevent the language from developing, I think.
> Woman 1: Yes, then the interest stops.
> . . .
> Man 1: I believe that if language must survive, it must be . . .
> Man 2: Free.
> Man 1: Yes, free. And it isn't that serious if something is said wrong.
> (Group 6)

It is presumable that the speaker in the previous example does not think that "let it be" is the best method of saving the language, but what it illustrates is that opinions about how seriously the language work should be taken or forced into action vary. Meänkieli is a cornerstone of the Torne Valley's borderland identity, but although the revitalization of Meänkieli has been recognized as a

matter of regional pride, the language revitalization work can also be interpreted, in contradictory manner, happening at the cost of the appreciation of Finnish identity and roots:

> Man 1: Linguistically it seems like that Meänkieli, as a name, has gained a kind of monopoly here in Swedish side, on the western side of the border. Nobody speaks about Finnish. . . . As a name, Meänkieli has then overtook . . . that what language is spoken here, at this side of the border. Haparanda is actually that island, in where we still say, that we speak Finnish, but in other municipalities up north, the title is Meänkieli. . . .
> It is something that enables to deny own roots, when being Meänkieli speakers. On no account being Finnish. Not even from our roots. It is the same thing there in Finnmark, Norway. It is only talked about Kven people, . . . not anymore about Finnmark people or the Finns. They are Kvens nowadays. No matter whether they wanted it or not.
> (Group 1)

Whereas Pohjanen's borderland regionalism has contested hegemonic nationalistic narratives, the discussant here emphasizes how Meänkieli, as an INTERREG-funded identity brand, has turned into a hegemonic discourse at the local level, and the narrations of "who we are" (sense of pride) and "where we come from" (sense of shame) are not in harmony. This resonates with a development what Liebich (2019) terms a "boomerang effect," how kin-state cross-border activism may divide the regional communities it seeks to unite. The language revitalization work obviously serves to benefit identity work, but as a discussant conceives here, in a slightly contradicting manner, with the cost of the decreasing appreciation of Finnish identity and roots, that is, part of the history of Meänkieli.

Conclusions

In the case of minority languages, resilience thinking refers to recognizing and accepting the irreversible development of language loss and still being able to live with it. In most cases, globalization is considered the biggest threat for the survival of minority languages, which has also been noticed in the Torne Valley. According to discussants, the language typically used in cross-border cultural cooperation is not Meänkieli, nor Swedish, nor Finnish, but English. Some people consider this a threat to minority language revitalizing, while for others this kind of conservation feels unnecessary and hypocritical. However, in the case of border languages the main challenges still come from the state-centric ideologies and practices. As Prokkola (2009, p. 24) formulates this, in the case of a political boundary being drawn through a culturally and linguistically coherent region, as with the Finnish-Swedish border, the border region becomes a transition zone where state institutions and the practices of spatial socialization collide with the local cultures.

As the scholars in minority language studies argue, language revitalization is valuable in itself, but in case of Meänkieli, language revitalization is interconnected, partly directly, partly indirectly, with several other cross-border activities, such as tourism development (see Prokkola 2007). For many people involved in language revitalization work and other cross-border cultural activities, the fundamental issue has been the symbolic acknowledgement of Meänkieli as an integral part of how borderland identity is understood. However, it is important to emphasize that the histories of Meänkieli and Meänmaa borderland are identity narratives based purely on regionalist activism and not shared by all the inhabitants living across the border, nor even by the activists involved in revitalization work. As shown here, there are multiple understandings about the nature of local heritage and recognizable disharmonies between different conceptions of how and why Meänkieli

should be revitalized. One important aspect to these questions is to acknowledge that while recent "fast stress events" have disrupted social and cultural activities in borderlands in multiple ways (Andersen and Prokkola 2021, p. 000), revitalizing minority languages is one of the best examples of what resilience thinking means in practice and how cultural resilience is enforced into action.

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