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## Meaning-making across languages: a case study of three multilingual writers in Sápmi<sup>†</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Sápmi is a geographical area that runs across the Kola Peninsula in Russia to northern Finland, Norway and Sweden. All Sami languages have been going through a rapid language change process and many of the traditional language domains have disappeared during the last decades due to previous national and local language policies. Nevertheless, recent growth of positive attitudes towards Sami languages and culture both within and outside the Sami group has given new momentum to the language revitalisation process. At the same time, English is becoming more present in the Sami context through tourism, media and popular culture. This study investigates 15-year-old writers' meaning-making in three languages they meet on a daily basis: North Sami, the majority language Finnish/Norwegian/Swedish and English. Data were collected in schools where writers wrote two texts in each language, one argumentative and one descriptive. Using a functional approach, we analyse how three writers make meaning across three languages and two genres. Results show that writers made use of similar ways of expressing meaning on the three levels we investigated: ideational, interpersonal and textual, but also how the production differed between the texts, and how context and content interacted with writers' meaning-making in the three languages.

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## Introduction

Literacy, the ability to read and write, is recognised not only as a right per se but also as a mechanism for the pursuit of other human rights and participation. In January 2011, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people recommended, 'that the Nordic States and the Sami parliaments cooperate to redouble efforts to revitalize Sami languages and strengthen programmes for education in Sami languages and culture' (Anaya, 2011, p. 21).

To date, few studies have focused on multilingual literacy among young writers of Sami languages (see Outakoski, 2015 for an overview). In a recent study, though, Pietikäinen and

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Pitkänen-Huhta (2013) investigated how multilingual children expressed their meanings through the creation of picture books during Sami language classes. The children in their study used different resources, such as personal choice and individual creativity in the development of the picture books. Pietikäinen and Pitkänen-Huhta conclude that the children in their study possessed 'rich multilingual repertoires' (p. 244) and that the children's literacy practices were 'bound to the surrounding multilingual context in complex and multilayered ways' (p. 244).

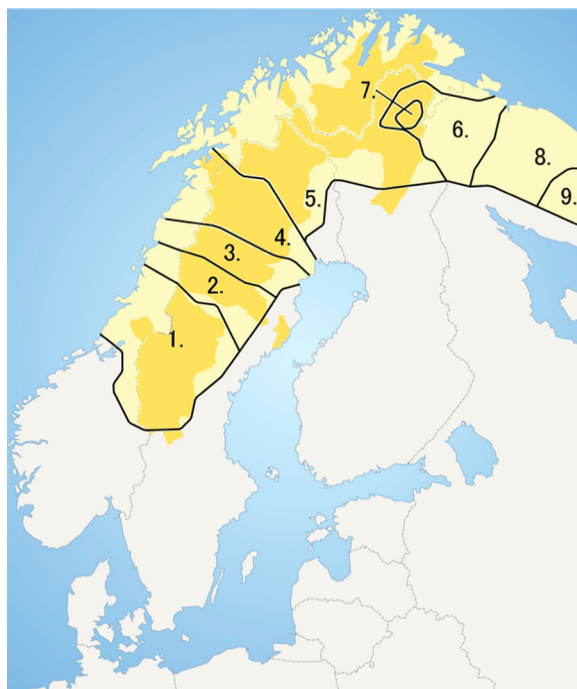
Multilingual writers seem to be able to draw on all their languages and linguistic resources in order to compose a coherent text (Van Weijen, van den Bergh, Rijlaarsdam, & Sanders, 2009; Wang & Wen, 2002). In a qualitative study of five young writers' texts, Velasco and García (2014) found a number of different ways in which writers use their languages for planning, drafting and for communicating rhetorically with an intended reader in the final text. Kobayashi and Rinnert (2013) concluded that: 'Writers choose from among the possibilities in their own repertoire of knowledge depending on such individual factors as language proficiency, perceptions, and values, and such contextual factors as audience, task, and topic' (p. 7). They drew this conclusion based on the writing of a university-level student in Japan. They noted that this student was able to choose which features to use across her languages, Japanese, Chinese and English, and which features should be kept uniquely in one in order to adjust the text to the context and the readers of that particular language.

Even at an early age writers are able use linguistic resources for different purposes. Drawing on the analysis of an interview with one Sami boy in Finland and his multimodal composition, Pietikäinen et al. (2008) found a complex relationship between the boy's use of linguistic resources and their 'different roles and meanings in his life' (p. 96). Lindgren and Stevenson (2013) found that 11-year-old writers expressed interpersonal meaning in different languages using a plenitude of creative resources both of linguistic and non-linguistic characters. As they gradually develop general knowledge about writing, writers also become increasingly able to make use of aspects like rhetorical structure across languages and rely less on their strongest language while writing in a foreign language (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2012; Wang & Wen, 2002).

Our case study of three writers is based in the area of Sápmi (see Figure 1) where indigenous minority and national majority languages meet and interact with English. We focus on the communicative repertoire, rhetorical devices and strategies of tri-lingual 15-year-old writers' argumentative and descriptive texts, and consider what meaning-making strategies these pupils use, and how they move them between and across languages.

As the context, including the linguistic context, in which our writers live and are growing up is crucial to the understanding of our study, we begin this paper by describing Sápmi, the traditional settlement area of the indigenous Sami people, and multilingualism in this region. Sápmi, as shows in Figure 1, runs from the Kola Peninsula in Russia to northern Finland, and continues to the mountain regions and coastal areas of Mid-Norway and Mid-Sweden. Across Sápmi, 10 Sami languages have until recently been spoken. Today, two of the eastern varieties (Ter Sami and Akkala Sami) and one southern variety (Ume Sami) are under serious threat of disappearing.

All Sami languages are currently threatened. Partly because before the 1960s (and later in some countries), national and local language policies did not permit the use of the Sami languages in school, nor acknowledged the right to use Sami in contact with officials.



**Figure 1.** Current and corrected map over geographic distribution of Sámi languages: 1. Southern Sámi, 2. Ume Sámi, 3. Pite Sámi, 4. Lule Sámi, 5. Northern Sámi, 6. Skolt Sámi, 7. Inari Sámi, 8. Kildin Sámi and 9. Ter Sámi. (Ningyou, 2009).

Consequences of those policies have led to a rapid and sudden language shift process in many areas of Sápmi. At present, North Sami that is spoken by many of the Sami living in the northernmost municipalities of Finland, Norway and Sweden is the most vital of Sami languages. It is speakers and learners of this Sami language who are the writers in our study.

North Sami is the Sami language most widely used in local and national media, in social media, and in research and educational contexts. It is difficult to estimate how many people currently speak North Sami. It has been suggested that there are between 15,000 and 30,000 speakers with varying levels of competence of North Sami (Rasmussen, 2013; Samiskt informationscentrum, 2014; Seurujärvi-Kari, 2011, p. 40).

This number of speakers in a wide geographic area with strong majority languages means that North Sami survival is uncertain and that there is a need for extensive language revitalisation efforts if the language is to survive. Luckily, a recent positive shift in attitude towards the Sami language and culture, both within and outside the Sami group, is giving new momentum to the language through revitalisation and reclamation (Rasmussen, 2013; Skum, 2013; cf. Outakoski, 2015, p. 9).

At the same time, English has become omnipresent for the Sami. Popular culture, the Internet and travel have made English a part of everyday life for most people living in Sápmi. Young people growing up in Sápmi use English daily to take part in contemporary global youth culture, to watch movies, listen to music, use YouTube, play games, and communicate and chat on the Internet.

Contemporary Sápmi is a multilingual environment and it is in this environment that our writers live. People use North Sami (or other Sami languages) alongside the majority languages of Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish on a daily basis together with English with its base in the media, tourism, trade and education.<sup>1</sup> Thus, according to Kemp (2009), most people living in Sápmi today should be considered as multilingual as they understand and use more than two languages, productively and/or perceptively. The multilingual situation in Sápmi resembles what Blommaert and Backus (2013) describe as multilingualism taking different shapes including the use and understanding of languages to different degrees.

Sámi language users of today have varying degrees of competencies in the majority and the minority languages due to the impact of the majority language on Sami languages, historical restrictions on the domains in which Sami languages could be used, and the far advanced language loss in the minority community. Valdes (2005) described the relationship between competencies in majority and minority languages along a continuum with one end representing strong competence in the majority language and a weaker competence in the minority language, and the other end representing the minority language as the stronger language and the majority language as the weaker. For the tri- or multilingual individual, further axes or dimensions need to be added to this first continuum. This varying degree of competence also applies to English; some speakers have stronger competence in North Sámi than in English, and some stronger competence in English than in North Sámi on one additional continuum, and some stronger competence in the majority language than in English, and (at least theoretically) some stronger competence in English than in the majority language.

As Valdes (2005) pointed out minority language users ‘will fluctuate in their preference or perceived strengths in each language, depending on the nature of the interaction, the topic of discussion, the domain of activity, and the formality or the informality of the situation’ (p. 414). This results in every language user having a unique language-user profile, and one that as Blommaert and Backus (2013) argued can be seen as a dynamic system that changes over time to form complex patterns, in which certain languages are used in certain domains, with certain people, and at certain times across a life span.

For our writers, the contemporary context is one that includes the use of English, at least one majority language (Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish), and the indigenous minority language North Sami. For some young people growing up in Sápmi even other languages are included, for different purposes, at different levels, in school and at home, with family, friends and teachers, and in various digital media. Depending on the situation, they use and develop ways of communicating and meaning-making that are suitable for that particular context.

Our writers are at various stages of developing their literacy skills, formally in at least three languages, Finnish, Norwegian or Swedish, North Sami, and English. Hornberger’s (2003/2008) continua model of biliteracy captures how the contexts, content, and media of particular reading and writing tasks and activities interact in fluid and dynamic ways to shape and be shaped by the individual’s developing literacy across languages. Dynamic and fluid levels and practices of multilingualism and literacy in pupils’ home, class, school, community, region and nation (contexts) work to shape what the pupils write about (content), in what language or with what linguistic resources (media), and which (developmental) writing strategies they choose. Their writing strategies in turn

shape and are shaped by the writing task – here defined by topics and text types we assigned the writers.

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of multilingual writers' meaning-making in three languages. In particular, we focus on the interaction between ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning, language and text type, and how this interaction can be understood in the context of a minority language.

## **Method**

This study is part of the project Literacy in Sápmi where a total of 12 schools in the Sápmi region participated (see Outakoski, Lindgren, Westum, & Sullivan, *in press*, for a full description of the methodology).

### ***Language educational context***

Provision of Sami language in compulsory education varies across the Sápmi region. In Finland and Norway, school children can receive their entire compulsory education through the medium of Sami. In Sweden, school children only have the right to receive their education through the medium of Sami up to school year 6. From year 7 onwards, these pupils receive their education through the medium of Swedish with Sami language being taught as a mother tongue or as a foreign language.

In all three countries, English as a school subject is introduced in the second or in the third grade, when children are 8 or 9 years old, or at the latest in grade 5, 11 years old. For many pupils, English is a popular school subject and English is present on an everyday basis outside school through music, TV and the Internet. Although Sami languages have some media presence, the media domain is predominantly in the majority language and English.

### ***General procedure and ethical considerations***

Schools were contacted five months prior to the data collection both to inform about the project and to establish contacts with schools and school districts that were interested in participating in the project. All schools and school districts that offered North Sami as the language subject in the chosen geographical area were asked to participate in the study. School principals were given the opportunity to consult the teachers in the first place and together with the teachers (and pupils in case of secondary schools) decide whether to participate in the study or not.

Two weeks before the writing sessions, detailed information about the project was sent out to the participating schools together with the questionnaires for parents and pupils. Teachers were asked to inform the pupils about the study and to hand out the written information, questionnaires for pupils and parents and consent forms. Consent from parents was not necessary for the pupils who were 15 years old or older at the time of data collection, but information about the project, and that the pupils could withdraw from the study at any time was provided in writing to the parents of the older pupils. Parents were also asked to answer the parent questionnaires. All information to the schools, pupils and parents was written in North Sami as well as in one of the majority

languages, and the participants chose which language to use to fill in the questionnaires. During our visits at the schools, all participants could choose to speak North Sami and/or the majority language to the research team. The team informed classes orally about the project and those who were interested in participating received a schedule for the writing sessions.

All the data collection was undertaken in schools. The team set up temporary writing studios with 13" laptops. The pupils were individually assigned six writing topics, and they were instructed by the research team what language to use for each topic. They wrote one or two texts during each writing session, a descriptive and an argumentative text in each language; the pupils came to the writing studios between three or six times depending on how quickly they had written their texts. The word processing software for Microsoft Office Word was used, as this is a tool that the pupils would be familiar with. We used a Latin square design to control for genre and language and the students were assigned a writing topic for each session. Since the North Sami characters differ slightly from the Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish and English characters, we used a Sami keyboard provided by the Centre for Saami language technology, Sámi Giellatekno at Tromsø University. The Sami keyboard is by now well established and widely used at Sami schools and therefore familiar to most pupils. The missing characters on our laptops were painted on those computers that were used for the North Sami writing sessions. Spell checkers and other proofing tools for all languages were turned off during the writing sessions. After the writing session pupils could choose a couple of stickers, fruits and juice.

### **Questionnaires**

The questionnaires distributed to the pupils were based on the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2006). Some questions were adapted and some were added to fit the focus on writing and multilingualism in our study. The areas covered by the questionnaire are type and duration of language and literacy practices including (digital) media in and outside school, mother tongue/s and attitudes towards the minority and majority languages and English. We have used data from the questionnaires to provide a general language background for our three writers.

### **The writers**

In this case study, one randomly selected pupil from each country was chosen for an in-depth linguistic analysis of their text production. The writers are Freddi from Finland, Nikki from Norway and Sammi from Sweden, all pseudonyms for their real names. In this article, *she* and *her* are gender-neutral pronouns and do not necessarily reflect the gender of the author. They were all 15 years old and in the final year of compulsory schooling at the time of the data collection during the winter 2012 and early spring 2013. In Finland and Sweden, final school year means school year 9 and in Norway school year 10. At the time of the study, the primary medium of instruction for Nikki was North Sami, for Freddi both North Sami and Finnish depending on the subjects taught, and for Sammi it was Swedish with the exception of mother tongue lessons in North Sami. In all three contexts, English was taught from around the age of 10 starting with 30 minutes per week increasing to 80–180 minutes per week in secondary school.

All three writers consider Sami as their sole mother tongue or as one of their mother tongues. They are all proud of their language skills and proud of knowing Sami.

Freddi's mother tongues are Finnish, Norwegian and North Sami. Freddi moves between these languages as well as English in almost every aspect of her life, at home, in school, with friends, when using media, doing homework or reading for fun. Even though Finnish, the majority language, is the language that is mostly used around her, the other languages are also used in different domains, such as family, school and media. She writes every day both in school and at home mainly in Finnish but also in North Sami, English, Norwegian, Swedish and occasionally also in German.

Nikki's mother tongues are North Sami and Norwegian. Nikki moves between Sami, Norwegian and English on a daily basis, although Sami is the language that is most frequently used for communication both in and outside school. Nikki seems to connect some activities to some languages; she does not text in English and does not listen to music in North Sami. She finds writing all right but does not spend so much time on writing activities outside school. When she does, they can be performed in North Sami, Norwegian or English.

Sammi's mother tongue is North Sami, which she speaks with her parents, with siblings, relatives and friends outside school. When communicating with friends she also uses Swedish. In school, she uses North Sami, Swedish and English in class and she says that it depends on the subject whether she can use her mother tongue Sami or not. During breaks, depending on activities, she uses Swedish or North Sami. Outside school it also depends on the activity which language she uses. She watches TV and listens to music in all three languages, but her reading is mainly done in Swedish. She writes on a daily basis in both Swedish (diary, stories, homework, text messages and chat) and North Sami (text messages and stories). She perceives of herself as a good writer in Swedish and English and as a decent writer of North Sami. She likes writing and believes writing to be an important skill for the future.

### ***Writing tasks***

In order to obtain a broad picture of these pupils' writing and how that might be influenced by their use of languages, we asked them to compose texts in two genres: descriptive and argumentative, and in three languages: North Sami, the majority language Finnish/Norwegian/Swedish and English. The topics for the descriptive writing task were carefully designed as to give the pupils the possibility to look at their lives from different perspectives. The three topics of the argumentative texts were also carefully chosen so that they would not only illuminate the writing phases of the genre, but would, in addition, offer valuable information about attitudes and opinions that the children have on matters that are debated daily in the media in their local contexts. The intended readership, the purposes of the texts and the general procedures were the same throughout the six writing tasks and described to the students as:

A school in a large city in the south is running a project in which they are learning about different parts of the country. This school has asked you and your classmates to write some texts for



their project's home page. Write around half a page (a full window on the computer). You can write for 45 minutes, but you decide when your text is ready. Let me know when you are finished.

Following on this general description, the specific tasks were presented. In the three descriptive tasks, pupils were asked to describe what they usually do when they are alone, with their family or with friends:

The three argumentative tasks similarly followed upon the same general description presented above and read:

Tell the class in the large city why you think it is important to think about the environment.  
 Tell the class in the large city why it is important to have access to computers and modern technology (such as vehicles and mobile phones).  
 Tell the class in the large city why it is important that people live in the countryside.

### ***Text analysis***

As mentioned above, the school systems in Finland, Norway and Sweden differ regarding the possibilities to study all subjects in Sami as well as regarding the age of introduction to the majority language. In all countries, however, English as a foreign language is introduced in primary school, typically between the ages of 7 and 9. Taken together, these factors imply that, Nikki's, Sammi's and Freddi's linguistic skills in the three languages will differ. For this reason, this study will not focus on grammar, vocabulary, etc., but on communicative abilities, that is, how the three writers are able to convey their ideas to the intended audience. Drawing on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL), we have analysed Nikki's, Sammi's and Freddi's writing strategies in their three different languages (Halliday, 1994; Matthiessen & Halliday, 2014).

The SFL system recognises three interrelated metafunctions of language. First, there is the ideational function that relates to experiences of the real world. Second, there is the interpersonal function that helps us interact with other people and expresses attitudes. These are the basic metafunctions. The lexicogrammatical metafunction, finally, organises chunks of information and thereby underpins the other two metafunctions and creates discourse (Halliday, 1994; Matthiessen & Halliday, 2014). In SFL, language is viewed as a system that provides a network of options – the lexicogrammatical system – from which language users can choose when creating texts, either written or spoken. The chosen options will in turn be decisive to the meaning of what is conveyed. Thus, the meaning of a text is the result of choices made by the language user from options provided by the lexicogrammatical system of the specific language (Halliday, 1994; Matthiessen & Halliday, 2014).

In our analysis, we draw on some aspects of SFL to illustrate how writers make meaning across languages on ideational, interpersonal and lexicogrammatical levels. In the analysis of ideational structure, each text is presented as a summary of the content that reveals the idea(s) conveyed by the writer. For argumentative texts, this means that we have extracted the statements, arguments and conclusions put forward. From the descriptive texts, we have extracted the different themes and sub-themes presented by the writers. The interpersonal metafunction of language is brought to mind already in the task formulation where the writers are introduced to their intended readers: a school class in a big city. For the purpose of showing what Nikki, Sammi and Freddi can do across languages, we

have analysed if and how the intended readers are reflected in their texts, and by which means content is conveyed, whether argumentative or descriptive. At the lexicogrammatical level, we have focused on rhetorical devices, number of words and structure of paragraphs.

Freddi, Nikki and Sammi are all young people and still learners of each of their languages, especially English. They cannot be expected to have the stylistic skills and vocabulary that allow them to choose as freely from the lexicogrammatical system as, for instance, adult professional writers who write in their native language. For this reason, we have chosen to restrict the analysis of the writers' lexicogrammatical choices to how many words they use for each text, how they make use of paragraphs to structure their texts and what rhetorical devices they apply when writing argumentative and descriptive text types in their different languages.

## Findings

### *Freddi*

Life in the North is good, according to Freddi's argumentative text in Sami. The nature there is beautiful, the food is good and people have a positive attitude. Other people should move to the countryside to learn more about it, and help schools survive. The other text in Sami describes her activities with friends, such as sports and fishing. It is important that they can be together. They also tie fishing flies and make wooden anglers. If they run into problems, they ask each other for help. When at school, they will often go to the library.

The majority language for Freddi is Finnish. In this language, she discusses the importance of modern technology in the form of vehicles and phones, since these inventions are very important in the North with the long distances between places. Almost everybody owns a moped and a snowmobile, because all men and women are involved in reindeer herding. Mobile phones are also important from a social point of view and in cases of emergency, but the substandard connections often drive people crazy. Luckily, there are radiophones to ensure that people can reach each other anywhere. According to Freddi, writing about family activities, there seems to be more differences than similarities in the ways families live in the South and the North. People in the South tend to do more indoor activities, such as bowling and eating in restaurants, whereas people in the North prefer outdoor activities such as fishing and snowmobile rides. Although Freddi respects people in the South, she finds them less knowledgeable when it comes to matters concerning weather and nature.

In her first English text, Freddi says it is a good thing that some people care for the environment. She likes to think that her lifestyle benefits the environment, but sometimes this is not true. She likes fishing, but she is annoyed when people throw litter in the river and contaminate nature. Her father, who also likes fishing and moose hunting, agrees with her and tells her not to litter. In her second text in English, Freddi describes what she will do when she is alone at home. Usually, she will cook pasta or pizza, watch TV, do her homework or – if she is bored – go to sleep. If there is snow outside, she will go for snowmobile rides, which she likes a lot. If the river is free of ice, she will go fishing for salmon, which she also enjoys.

**Table 1.** Number of words (*W*) and paragraphs (*P*) in Freddi's texts.

	North Sami		National Language		English	
	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>
Argumentative	54	1	139	1	136	2
Descriptive	102	1	186	1	94	1

As is shown in Table 1, Freddi's texts are all quite short. There are some differences between text types and languages in this respect with the longest text being written in Finnish and the shortest one in Sami. This could, however, depend on the writer's interest in the topics she was assigned. All but one text contains only one paragraph, which might be due to the limited number of words. The texts with one paragraph are loosely bound thematically, while the two paragraphs of the argumentative text in English are clearly separated as regards content. The first paragraph of this text where Freddi argues for the importance of a clean environment, states that environmentalists are good people, whereas in the second paragraphs Freddi discusses her own lifestyle relative to environmental issues.

Freddi's main theme throughout her writings is life in the North as opposed to life in the South, and she vividly advocates the former. Neither topic nor text type seems to be decisive for her choice of rhetorical devices. She makes use of contrast for showing the differences in ways of living, thinking and behaving in the rural North and the urban South. Even the descriptive topics evoke argumentative responses from her. This is the case, for instance, when the task formulation asks what people of her age usually do with their family. In Finnish, she writes that people in the South *complain about everything*, while people in the North *don't complain about anything*. Further, people from her part of the world are all included in a collective *we* in all languages, whereas her readers from the city in the South are sometimes addressed directly as *you*.

When describing different activities, Freddi, like the other writers, will turn to listing, as in the following text in Sami where she tells her readers what she does with her friends: *reáigespáppa, doaškunspáppa, ja mii sihkelaštit, guoláštít* [floorball, volleyball, and we bike, fish]. This is a strategy she makes use of for detailed explanations, which seems to be the case when she in English states that it is *great* that environmentalists protect *nature, animals, flowers and sightseeing places*.

Further, Freddi makes use of emotional evaluation as a reoccurring strategy in all languages. This rhetorical device is definitely used to underpin differences between North and South. Positive evaluations are frequent as comments to her own life and activities and her own people, while negative evaluations are connected with the urban South. This strategy is used in the argumentative text in Sami:

Davvin lea hui buorre ássat go dáppe lea hui fiidna luondu ja hui buorre borramušat ja olbmot liikojit ássat dáppe go lea hui buorre vuoigŋa. [It is very good to live in the North since nature here is very beautiful and the food is very good and people like to live here since people have a good attitude].

Freddi enjoys her way of life, which is evident not least from one of her English texts where she evaluates snowmobile driving as *daamn it's fun*, followed by *I love it!*<3. She concludes her text by saying: *But this is what I do and all what I do I love it most*. The way Freddi uses English rather freely (*daamn* and the heart symbol <3) shows that social media is a

common source of input for her writing. This is, however, beyond the scope of this study but has been discussed elsewhere (Lindgren, Sullivan, Outakoski, & Westum, 2016).

Freddi's sympathies are clearly with people in the North. Finally, she shares some evaluative reflections on the topic of people from the South. Commenting on the alleged fact that people from the South cannot recognise different mushrooms, she admits

Ja se on vähän noloa näin lappilaisen näkökulmasta ... . Mutta ihmisiä ne on nekin ja niitäkin täytyy kunnioittaa samalla lailla kun itseämme. [And that is a bit embarrassing from a Laplander's point of view ... . But they are people too and one must respect them in the same way as we respect ourselves].

## Nikki

Nikki's assigned topic for the argumentative text in Sami is the importance of modern technology. She discusses the topic from a personal and societal point of view. She has an overall positive attitude towards technology and sees it as a prerequisite for societal development. Further, she assumes that owning a car is more important to people in the sparsely populated North than in cities where public transportation is available. Her descriptive text in Sami deals with family activities, most of which are outdoor activities. She says she is not really sure what other young people do with their families, but she believes that they too spend a lot of time outdoors, since nature in the North offers a lot of opportunities for activities such as cloudberry gathering and hunting.

The majority language in question is Norwegian, and in one of her texts Nikki argues for the importance of taking care of the environment. Humans are part of nature, she says, not the masters of it, even if this is what we like to believe. The rich world is responsible for pollution, while poor countries pay the price. Also, we have to take care of the environment for future generations, and the good thing is that everybody can help save the planet. In her descriptive text in Norwegian, Nikki says being alone is something she will avoid, since it is very boring. Inevitably such situations will arise, and then she will do what other young people do: read magazines, listen to music, surf on the Internet or watch TV.

In English, Nikki argues that small communities are bound to disappear, even though they are good places to live in since they offer safety and a peaceful life, and beautiful scenery. Further, such places are essential for our food supply. On the other hand, cities offer opportunities, which is what attracts young people and the reason why they want to move away. She herself will do this, even though she realizes that small communities would not have to die if only the young would stay there. Her other text in English is an account of what she does with her friends. She starts off by saying that it takes a creative person to have fun in a small place. Here, she presents different organised activities, such as sports and theatre, and unorganised activities such as biking and watching films. Her community is a good place to grow in up, she says.

**Table 2.** Number of words (*W*) and paragraphs (*P*) in Nikki's texts.

	North Sami		National Language		English	
	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>
Argumentative	220	4	284	4	252	4
Descriptive	124	4	170	4	248	5

As is shown in Table 2, some features that are present, no matter what language the texts are written in, are paragraph planning and general production. Five out of six texts consist of four paragraphs, only one has five. This indicates that paragraph planning is an important part of her writing strategy. The content of the paragraphs can, however, be diverse and broad-ranging. This is also true for all languages. Her paragraphs are definitely thematically or logically connected, but she does not show the relationships between them through transition techniques. This applies also to the sentences within each paragraph.

As is evident from Table 2, the argumentative texts are longer in each language than the descriptive ones, even if the difference is marginal between the two texts in English. The descriptive text in English where Nikki describes what she does with her friends does however contain argumentative elements. Even though the task calls for a descriptive text, she argues for the benefits of the rural Northern lifestyle in comparison to an urban culture characterised by big parties and alcohol.

The argumentative texts also have a more complex rhetorical structure than the descriptive ones, the only exception being the descriptive text in English where she describes what she usually does with her friends, where she also argues for her own lifestyle. Nikki's preferred rhetorical device throughout the argumentations is contrast: the *peace*, *quiet* and *safety* of the countryside are in one of her texts set against the *opportunities* of the cities, and the countryside is associated with *old people* who *stay* in contrast to *young people* who *move away*. In another text, she uses the contrasts of *man* versus *nature*, and *rich countries* versus *poor countries*. Based on such pairs of fundamental contrasts she will discuss the pros and cons of the topic in question in all three languages.

Using questions – sometimes rhetorical questions – Nikki addresses her audience:

We can have fun without alcohol, right?; Men er vi så smarte, når vi ikke vet bedre enn å ødelegge naturen og miljøet? [But are we so smart, when we don't know better than to destroy the nature and the environment?]

She will also make use of including pronouns: *we've got to remember* that all big cities started out as small communities. Another indication that Nikki is aware of her readers is certain explanatory passages where she accounts for perceived differences between the rural North and the urban South.

Explanatory passages are also present in Nikki's descriptive texts, but to a lesser extent, the topic of the accounts being what it is like to live in the sparsely populated North with the cold and dark winters. The most prominent rhetorical device in all her descriptive texts is listing the different kinds of activities she will do when she is alone, with her friends or with her family:

... så pleier jeg å se på tv, surfe på internet, lese magasiner, høre på musikk, rydde rommet, gjøre lekser og mange andre normale ting [ ... then I use to watch TV, surf on the internet, read magazines, listen to music, clean my room, do school homework and lots of other normal things].

The listing can also be based on what she will do in different seasons of the year:

Mun ja mu bearáš, mii lávet dálvit mannat Supmi; Geassit mii lávet mannat lieggariiki; Go lea čakča, mii lávet siste [I and my family, in the winter we use to go to Finland; In the summer we use to go abroad; When it is autumn we use to stay indoors].

It is text type and content rather than language that decides what writing strategies Nikki will make use of. Seemingly, Nikki prefers writing about argumentative topics related to societal or political issues rather than writing about descriptive topics related to her personal life, which might explain why her argumentative texts are longer and more rhetorically elaborate than the descriptive ones.

### **Sammi**

According to Sammi's argumentative text in Sami, it is useful to know how to handle technical devices so one can master things such as computers and mobile phones. At school, there is a lot of technology, which might be a good thing, but in today's society there is almost too much technology. From her descriptive text in Sami, it is clear that family is what matters the most in her life: *Mon lean fuobmán ahte min veahka lea ollu ovttas* [I have noticed that our family spends a lot of time together]. Friends, she says, come second to family. Accordingly, she will spend most of her free time with family members. Seasonal outdoor activities characterise their life, as well as family gatherings at Christmas and other feasts. Her family will, however, not engage in specific activities all the time, because it is enough for her if they stay in the same room, doing their own things like using the computer, watching TV or talking on the phone as long as they are together.

The majority language for Sammi is Swedish, in which she argues that people in big cities might not realize how important it is to take care of nature, since they spend too little time there. To the Sami, nature means life because the reindeers' lives depend on good pasture. In Sammi's view, we are on the verge of transforming nature into a trash bin, but this can be prevented if people would change their ways. The assigned topic for Sammi's second text in Swedish is what people of her age usually do when they are alone. She describes her home activities, like surfing on the Internet and watching TV, but what she particularly enjoys is singing really loud when she is alone in the house. Further, she walks her dog and does her school homework, of which there is a lot.

In one of her English texts, Sammi argues that it is important that people live in the countryside, her main arguments being that, first, cities would be overcrowded if everybody were to live in such places, and, second, that the countryside is important for food supply and hence must remain populated. Everybody profits from the fact that the countryside is inhabited. In her second text in English, Sammi holds the view that she and her friends do typical things for their age and gender when they meet. They might talk, go for walks or go to the youth club. In winter, they often drive their snowmobiles, in summer they will ride their bicycles, swim or have picnics. At rainy summer days and cold winter days, they will stay indoors.

As [Table 3](#) shows, Sammi's argumentative texts are all shorter than the descriptive ones. The assigned topic seems to be very decisive for how much she will write. The two longest texts, one in Sami (238 words) and one in Swedish (283 words), both describe aspects of her personal life, whereas the shortest by far is the argumentative text in Sami about the importance of modern technology (43 words), which seems to be a topic that Sammi takes no real interest in or lacks vocabulary for. Her English texts, however, are quite short (150 words and 124 words, respectively), which might indicate that she is less comfortable writing in English than in the two other languages. Even in English, though, she writes

**Table 3.** Number of words (*W*) and paragraphs (*P*) in Sammi's texts.

	North Sami		National Language		English	
	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>P</i>
Argumentative	43	1	197	3	124	1
Descriptive	238	5	283	3	150	3

the longer text about her activities with friends, and the shorter about the importance of people living in the countryside.

With the exception of the two shortest texts, Sammi divides her texts into paragraphs, so this is apparently part of her writing strategies in all languages and both text types. Her paragraphs are fairly thematically coherent, which can be illustrated by the English text in which she tells what she does with her friends. In this case, the paragraph structure is based on season and place: the first paragraph deals with summer activities, the second with winter activities, whereas the third one describes how she and her friends will spend their time between lessons at school.

The two texts that are not divided into paragraphs, on the other hand, do not have thematic coherence. The reason for this could probably be attributed to the fact that both these texts are very short (Table 3).

Rural and environmental affairs appear to be important to Sammi, which is indicated by her emotional approach to the topics. Her preferred rhetorical device is addressing her readers in the big city. Already in her first sentences she initiates a dialogue with her readers and activates them by means of an amplification followed by a question:

Miljön är jorden vi går på, det är träden vi ser, det är blommorna som växer på marken, det är allting vi har runt om oss. Varför borde man inte ta hand om den? [The environment is the earth we walk on, the trees we see, it is the flowers that grow in the ground, it is everything we have around us. Why should we not take care of that?]

With questions urging readers to think and act, no matter if she writes in English or in Swedish, she argues for the importance of nature and a rural lifestyle:

So who is gonna produce the food?/ ... then what could we eat? Fish from the sea?; Det här var min synvinkel, vad är eran? [This is my opinion, what is yours?]. Some of her questions are even more provocative: Vill ni att det [naturen] ska försvinna? [Do you want this [nature] to disappear?]/ ... / Tänk om det plötsligt påverkades av våra sopor eller nedskräpningar, eller för att ni inte sorterar sopor? [What if things suddenly got worse because of our trash or littering, or because you didn't separate your waste?].

Throughout her texts Sammi establishes a strong pathos by separating *we* from *you*, and by challenging her readers by calling upon them to take action:

Men det är viktigt att ni förändrar erat perspektiv [But it's important that you change your perspectives.]/ ... / Åk till norrland, till fjälls, vart som helst för att få se natur. [Go to Northern Sweden, to the mountains, anywhere to experience nature.]

Sammi's response to the argumentative topic in Sami is quite different. Here, there is no sign that she writes for a specific audience. As mentioned before, the topic of technology seems to be of little interest to her, and she starts off by repeating the words of the task formulation, continuing by agreeing that technology is useful on the one hand, but, on the other hand, saying that there is too much of it today: *Lea deaálaš geavahit tekhnika* [It



is important to use technology]; *Mu mielas dán áiggi lea measta ila ollu tekhnika juohke sajis* [I think that there is almost too much technology around everywhere nowadays].

In the descriptive texts about what she will do when she is alone, with family or with friends, Sammi's strategy is to always write about her own situation, not about other people of her age. Even this strategy transfers between languages. Self-reflection is an important element in her texts, as for instance one of the passages where she in Sami explains what her family means to her:

De mus hál lea buorre oktavuohhta juohkehaččain mu veagas. Go sii eai leat ruovvtus de mun láven čállit sinnesiigun, vai ságastit telefuvnna bakto [And I have actually a good relationship with everyone in my family. And when they are not home, I use to write to them or talk to them on the phone].

Likewise, listing is a reoccurring rhetorical device when it comes to the descriptive text type. Departing from season or holidays and feasts she will list different summer and winter activities that she will do with her family, when she is with friends or alone. By this means, she displays all the different activities going on in her life: 'When it's winter we usually do that [drive snow mobile]. When it's summer we ride our bicycles. We swim in the lake, we picnic.'

Emotional evaluations are present in all descriptive texts: *Láve nu vuogas leahkit* [That is usually very nice]. *Lea nu soma* [That is so fun] *Lea somá* [That is nice]. Another example of this is when Sammi describes her habit of singing very loudly when she is alone at home, and other home activities: *Det är kul! Det spelar ingen roll om du sjunger fint eller fult.* [That's fun! It doesn't matter if you sing well or poorly]. In her English texts, the word *fun* is frequent: she has *fun at the breaks* and *it's much more fun when it's summer*.

## Summary of findings

In the analysis, we looked at how three writers expressed ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning across languages and genres. The analysis of ideational meaning showed how writers came across similarly across languages and tasks. Freddi wrote about the positive aspects of the North, how it was important to be together, help each other, be outdoors and take care of the environment (the outdoors). Throughout all her texts, Freddi's main ideas related to her immediate environment and the importance of caring for it. In Nikki's texts, ideas about herself as a part of the bigger world appeared more clearly. She wrote about personal versus society, saving the planet together and being bored when alone. Even though she felt that the local place where she lived was a good place to grow up in, she wanted to move away to explore other opportunities. Sammi's texts reflected a young person who cared about and took pride in the immediate context, the family and traditions. She wrote about nature and the reindeer, how she took part in seasonal outdoor activities often related to the reindeers, and how she could enjoy and make use of being alone.

The analysis of interpersonal meaning illustrated how the three writers employed similar devices across languages to get their opinions and feelings across. Further, text type and interest in the assigned topic, rather than language, seemed to decide how they interacted with the reader. Freddie used emotional evaluation, exclamation marks and symbols to convey her meaning. She also used the pronouns 'we' and 'you' to



address the reader but also to show distance. Nikki used the inclusive pronoun 'we' to include the reader and she also included the reader by explaining issues in the North that may not be obvious for someone from the South. Sammi had a strong attachment to her immediate context, which was expressed through emotive language. She included the reader by asking questions, sometimes even urging the reader to take action.

Textual meaning was conveyed differently between the writers and for the three writers' language and text type seemed to interact differently. Freddie wrote the longest texts in the descriptive text type, except when she wrote in English, where the argumentative text was longer. Her Sami texts differed more in length than the Finnish and English texts. Freddie used contrast and listing across languages as well as text types to convey her ideas about the North versus the South, we versus you. Nikki wrote consistently longer texts in the argumentative genre and used paragraph planning to structure her themes in all the texts. She used one device, explanatory passages, across all three languages and the two text types, while other rhetorical devices were decided by text type (e.g. contrast and questions in the argumentative texts and listing in the descriptive texts), all in order to position herself as a global citizen. Sammi seemed to use different devices depending on text type and language. Her descriptive texts were longer than the argumentative, with the Sami texts showing the greatest difference (43 vs. 238 words). She divided all her descriptive texts into thematic paragraphs, but only one of the argumentative texts, the one in Swedish. In the argumentative tasks she addressed the reader by, sometimes, provocative questions and prompts to take action. In the descriptive tasks, she mainly used self-reflection and listing to express feelings towards her immediate context.

## Discussion

The results indicate that the three writers presented themselves similarly in terms of ideas and interpersonal meaning regardless of which language they were using for the writing task and also used some textual meaning similarly across languages. From the perspective of multi-competence (Cook, 1992; Cook & Singleton, 2014), multilingual language users are fundamentally different from monolinguals in that they encompass several languages in 'one mind'. In our study, the three writers indeed presented themselves and their ideas consistently across languages reflecting the fact that their multilingualism is intertwined with their 'minds', their knowledge, interests and motivation. They also used some rhetorical devices, such as listing and contrast, in similar ways across languages confirming results by Kobayashi and Rinnert (2012), showing that rhetorical structure was one aspect of writing that writers employed similarly when writing different languages.

The language contexts of the writers in our study provide good opportunities for them to develop multi-competence in writing. All languages are literate, there is a focus on production mainly orally but also in writing, there is a multilingual school environment and the writers also feel multilingual. The writers used all their languages, more or less in parallel and they used and learnt the majority language, North Sami and English in the same academic discourse, that is, in the same school building, with teachers from the same collegial group. The ideas about written texts that teachers transmit to the pupils would then be grounded in the same cultural context, that is a group of teachers that are likely to employ similar views on text regardless of language. In a situation where writers'

languages would be used separated in time or space, the conceptualisation of text types may not move so easily between languages.

Although we found many similarities in how the writers in this study constructed meaning across languages, there was one difference in textual meaning that needs some particular attention, namely production. The writers employed similar writing strategies in all three languages and similar meaning came across but why did the length of the texts vary so much between and within writers? All Freddie's descriptive texts are longer than the argumentative ones while all Sammi's texts are longer in the argumentative text type. Sammi's descriptive text in North Sami is longer than the argumentative one in the majority language. Nikki's longest text is in the majority language, but the argumentative text in North Sámi is longer than the descriptive text in the majority language Norwegian.

From these results, we see that there is a complex interaction between context, content, media and development (c.f. Hornberger, 2008) where issues such as interest, exposure and language use seem to interact. Writers pick up different pieces of knowledge in different linguistic contexts in and outside school, which they then can apply to their writing. However, if some content is not present in children's context in some languages, development of literacy in that domain will be restricted. In our study, it is possible that some tasks were more challenging to write about because the children had not been exposed to a linguistic situation in that particular language. For example, Sammi's short argumentative text in Sami, about technology, and Freddie's short argumentative text in Sami about people living in the countryside could be a result of the context not providing content about technology or the environment, or about the argumentative genre, in the medium of Sami. In the case of Nikki, though, writing an argumentative text about technology in Sami did not seem to be an obstacle. Nikki differed from the other writers in that she employed the argumentative style in all her texts, even the descriptive ones.

Content is crucial for writing, and one of the main challenges in writing research. Topics are constructed to be as similar as possible across genres and similarly available across the writers. Even though the topics in our study were designed so that the content would be close to, and relevant for, the writers, focussing on the writers' immediate contexts, the North, the environment and technology, it seems some tasks awoke more, or less, interest, and were more or less challenging for the writers. Sammi's argumentative text about technology in Sami was shorter than her other texts and included much less interpersonal meaning than the argumentative texts in Swedish and English. In contrast, Freddie's argumentative text about the environment in English, was, compared with her other texts, longer than what would have been expected. In contrast, her argumentative text in Sami about people in the countryside was short. Nikki's descriptive text in English was long and included elements of argumentation, while her descriptive texts in Norwegian and North Sami were shorter and more in tune with the descriptive text type. As the other texts illustrate that the three writers can make meaning in all three languages, we believe that Sammi's lack of interest in technology, Freddie's interest in the environment, and Nikki's argumentative strategies, rather than language competences, attribute to some of the differences between the texts. How writers developed their interests in some topics or rhetorical strategies was beyond the scope of this study but should be put into focus in future studies.

## Conclusions

This study investigated how young writers constructed meaning across languages and text types in a multilingual indigenous language context. It seems that the three writers we worked with had come to a position in their language development in the national majority language, the indigenous minority language North Sami and English where they were able to convey their ideas in writing in both descriptive and argumentative text types. It seemed that interest in the assigned topics and rhetorical preferences guided the way they presented their ideas and themselves. From a multi-competence perspective, writers made use of similar ways of expressing meaning on the three levels we investigated: ideational, interpersonal and textual. However, we also found differences, in particular in production that may be a result of the complex relationship between context, content, media and development in a minority language context. Future studies should look more closely into meaning-making in relation to aspects of fluency, accuracy and complexity in order to reveal more detail as to how languages interact with writing and with writers' opportunities to express themselves in a variety of ways.

The results show that development of multilingual writing competencies move across languages at least if the languages are taught and learnt in a formal academic school context. From an educational perspective, these results may be understood so that what is taught about writing in one language may also be used in another one and conscious collaboration between teachers and subjects may boost development in writing. At the same time, a discussion should be initiated about what may constitute differences between text and writing in a majority, minority or other language, in order for minority context and content to interact to support children's language and writing development in all their languages.

## Note

1. Tourism and trade bring further languages into Sápmi, but on a less frequent basis.

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