

Multilingual literacy among young learners of North Sámi:

Contexts, complexity and writing in Sápmi

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Abstract

The main aim of this thesis is to investigate the complexities of the immediate, ideological, educational, and societal contexts for literacy development among North Sámi learners between the ages of 9 and 15 who live in Northern Finland, Norway and Sweden in the central regions of Sápmi. Further, this thesis focuses on one area of literacy, namely writing. It examines these children's writing, its phases and peculiarities, writing strategies, and the characteristics of the transitions that these multilingual writers experience in switching between North Sámi, the national majority language, and the foreign language English, that due to globalization has become compulsory element of the school curriculum.

The main body of the collected and analyzed materials consists of computer mediated pupil texts that the author gathered at 10 schools that arranged compulsory schooling in Central Sápmi during the school year 2012-2013. The texts were collected using keytroke logging methodology that not only records the final written product but also keeps track of changes and other writing activity during the writing session. Other materials collected and analyzed in this study include questionnaires addressed to the pupils, their parents, and to their language teachers, as well as detailed teacher interviews with 24 language teachers from the participating schools.

This study consists of six individual papers that focus at 1) research methodological aspects that concern studying Indigenous populations, 2) language attitudes, ideologies and available language arenas that have an impact on biliteracy emergence in North Sámi speaking Sápmi, and 3) the qualities and characteristics of multilingual pupil's writing and texts. The findings of these papers are analyzed using the Hornbergian Continua of Biliteracy as the overarching theoretical framework of the study.

North Sámi, English and the national majority languages in the respective countries are constantly present in the lives of Sámi learners. Through this extensive exposure to many languages and cultures from multiple sources such as popular culture, literature, media, community, tourism, and school, young Sámi learners grow up to be multilingual citizens of the global north. In their writing, multilingual Sámi learners show wide spectrum of strategies and knowledge that carries over from one language to another. Nevertheless, most young Sámi learners cannot draw on equally many points on their Continua of Biliteracy in all their languages. Due to factors such as scarcity of adequate teaching materials, lack of popular culture and media content in Sámi languages, and language compartmentalizing language ideologies, the scales on the continua of biliteracy are in severe imbalance for many Sámi learners. Many Sámi learners risk losing their Indigenous heritage language when language content in other languages than North Sámi dominates in the school as well out of school contexts.

Keywords

bilingualism, complexity, Continua of Biliteracy, diversity, global North, keytroke logging, learners, literacy, Nordic Countries, North Sámi, Sápmi, school, writing

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