’Arctic Childhoods’ and mobilized differences – the mattering of skis and skates

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Children inhabiting Finland inevitably live through cold and snowy winters. Accordingly, winter sports, like skating and skiing, are a standard or national component of curriculum in Finnish schools as well as an expected part of children’s leisure time. All this is often new to children who arrive to live in Finland from warm countries. In this paper, we dive into the worlds of new coming children as they come across the national sports of skating and skiing and, through the materiality of skates and skis, negotiate the socio-material and cultural world of Finland. To bring out how objects, such as skis and skates matter to children as they encounter the ‘nation-ed environment’, we apply the idea of ethnopoetry. By constructing poems from our data, produced in two research projects with recently arrived children in Finland, and placing those in dialogue with quotes from a Finnish storybook, we show how skis and skates in symmetrical interaction with children and adults mobilize difference and challenge the stereotypes of a nation. Hence the nation, Finnishness, and the Arctic become perceived as ongoing everyday processes where newly arrived as well as Finnish-born children and adults coordinate, sustain, tolerate, reject, and naturalize particular notions and experiences of the world.

Keywords: nationalism, migrant children, ethnopoetry, biography of objects, school