This paper examines how Elfdalian, a minoritized language primarily spoken in Älvdalen in central Sweden, is enregistered, authenticated and spatiotemporally fixed through the practices of a study group concerned with maintaining and preserving the language. Drawing upon multimodal ethnographic data, the paper investigates how a particular register is established and enregistered as authentic. As noted by Agha (2011:98), a language which forms part of a composite emblem of group distinction is often represented by an unspeakable or widely unavailable “authentic” register. This is the case with the authenticated Elfdalian register, which the group indexically frames as circulating in a distant and largely inaccessible space-time configuration. The importance of identifying the content and boundaries of this register results in a reflexive concern over linguistic authenticity and legitimacy. In this paper I argue that linguistic authenticity is an outcome of social practice rather than an inherent quality in objects subjectable to sociolinguistic inquiry. From this vantage point the paper proceeds to clarify how the authenticity of Elfdalian is interactionally produced and why its reproduction is immensely important to the participants in the group. Thus, while struggling to learn authentic Elfdalian, the members of the group are likewise obliged to navigate around polarities of stability and flux, standard and substandard, and uniformity and variability. Playing with such contrasts, these ideologically and metalinguistically reflexive practices enregister authentic Elfdalian as allochronic and constant. Furthermore, they regiment the constituent features of the register, such as its design and its location in space and time. Consequently, these enregisterment practices unfold as a means of imposing a degree of order on the sociolinguistic present.


Keywords: language ideologies, authenticity, enregisterment.