This talk presents the results of diachronic, qualitative research on teachers’ socio-cultural understanding of language policy and their role(s) in language revitalization. As Menken and García (2010) posit, educators are “policymakers,” but what does this mean in practice particularly when considering the increasingly prominent role of schools and teachers in language revitalization around the world? To answer this question and to probe the ways that time and space shape teachers’ understandings of their professional roles and local identities, I examined the role of teachers in a school-based revitalization of a regional language in southeastern Estonia across two points in time: 2001-2002 and 2013-2014. This is a period marked by significant political and economic shifts with Estonia joining the European Union in 2004.

The research presented in this session is grounded in critical ethnographic approaches to language planning and policy (McCarty, 2011). I incorporated data for this talk from a yearlong, school-based ethnography in southeastern Estonia in 2001-2002 and follow-up qualitative research in the same region in 2013-2014. In particular, I consider the ways the space created in post-Soviet, increasingly internationalizing Estonian schools creates conditions that limit teachers’ options to use their classrooms as a base for language revitalization. In particular, I propose the ways—across these two points over more than a decade in time—that a highly decentralized and voluntary regional-language policy allows for teachers to reincorporate the regional language in site-specific ways. I conclude with reflections on the challenges and possibilities of longitudinal, ethnographic research on language policy, schooling, and teachers’ understandings of policy.

References


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