Resisting and rejecting minority language standardisation: representation and ideologies of Meänkieli in Sweden

Elina Kangas
University of Oslo, Norway

In this presentation I examine issues connected with resisting and rejecting minority language standardisation. I focus on non-users – a category further divided into resisters, rejecters, excluded and expelled (categories developed in the field of STS by Wyatt, Thomas and Terranova 2002). When developing a language standard, the role of language users is central: there is always an intended user, and the crucial question is whether users will accept the created standard or not (Lane 2011). Among non-users, I analyse specifically resisters and rejecters, drawing on interview and observation data generated in Northern Sweden among speakers of Meänkieli, a recognised minority language in Sweden since 2000.

Academics, writers and associations have been writing and publishing in Meänkieli since the early 1980s, after ethnic revival movements emerged among the North Calotte minorities. There are small theme dictionaries and few grammar booklets, but no extensive descriptive grammar of Meänkieli. Several types of social actors are involved in the standardisation process of Meänkieli, and for different reasons not all favour standardisation. Resisters might believe that there is no point in writing the language; or they do not favour the language maintenance in the first place. Another reason for resisting might be favouring a closely related standard language in the neighbouring country, standard Finnish in Finland. Who then are the people resisting and rejecting standardisation, and what do they have in common? Which arguments they will present, and further: what kind of representations and ideologies are displayed?


Keywords: minority languages, language standardisation, Meänkieli.