

A schoolscape in the north of Sweden. Visual representations of the national minority languages Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami

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This study investigates how a compulsory school, catering for students from the preschool class to year nine in the north of Sweden, visually opens spaces in the schoolscape for multilingualism involving the national minority languages, Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. The analysed material consists of photographs of language-related images, objects, symbols, and written texts in the school's common spaces such as entrances, corridors, and stairwells. Geosemiotics is used to analyse discourses and representations of languages in the school environment. Furthermore, the connections between discourses in the schoolscape and the larger context of national policy are explored. The analysis reveals that there is a complete absence of representations of multilingualism in significant parts of the examined schoolscape, and that Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami are treated as temporary elements with the representations tending to become a museum exhibition, despite the school's ambition to recognise and value the three languages. The study thus demonstrates the complexity of the issue and that the renegotiation of national ideology in a local setting is problematic.

Keywords: schoolscape, compulsory school, multilingualism, Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, policy-practice gap, northern Sweden

1 Introduction

The compulsory school as a social institution represents a planned environment where students are confronted with perceptions and values concerning language that emanate from local and national authorities (Brown, 2012). The ten-year compulsory school in Sweden, covering preschool class to year nine (henceforth p-9), is designed for students aged 6–16 and constitutes a significant part of their daily lives. In Sweden, Swedish is the legal main language. Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, Sami, and Romani Chib have legal status as national minority languages (Language Act SFS 2009:600, henceforth Language Act). Swedish is the language of instruction in regular compulsory education. The general part of the compulsory school curriculum (Skolverket, 2019) contains few statements and guidelines on how national minority languages should be treated and

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taught. The responsibility for the detailed design and implementation of this rests with those responsible for school operations.

This study investigates how a compulsory school visually creates space for Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. Tallskolan – the name is fictitious – is in a municipality in the north of Sweden that forms part of a so-called administrative area with special responsibility to promote Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami (Act on National Minorities and Minority Languages SFS 2009:724, henceforth Minority Act). This means that users of these languages have the right to use their language in communications with the authorities. The Minority Act emphasises the promotion of young people’s development of a cultural identity and the use of their own minority language. Romani Chib and Yiddish are not included in the administrative area, thus excluded from this study.

In the Swedish education system, preschool for children aged 0–5 is voluntary. Since 2019, national minorities within a minority language administrative area have the right to choose preschool in Finnish, Meänkieli, or Sami, and examples of such schools can be found in the municipality in question. When children then transfer from preschool in one of these languages to compulsory school, Tallskolan could be an obvious choice for their guardians. Compared to other schools in the municipality, Tallskolan gives higher priority to teaching in Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. Given Tallskolan’s location within a minority language administrative area and its focus on Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami, it is reasonable to expect visual traces of these languages, such as written texts, in the schoolscape (Brown, 2012). In this study, the term *schoolscape* is used for the signs of physical visual communication through language-related images, objects, symbols, and written texts (cf. Biró, 2016; Szabó, 2015).

Representation of a language in the schoolscape communicates the value of the language (cf. Brown, 2012) and its relevance to the activities of the school (Dressler, 2015). It can also be an effective strategy for promoting (language) learning, students' social development and language identity, and developing cultural understanding in schools (cf. Gorter & Cenoz, 2015; Szabó, 2015). Communicated perceptions of a language can influence its use, while the language of a communication also shows who is included or excluded in its message and thus who gets to make their voice heard (cf. Pennycook & Otsuji, 2014). The schoolscape can therefore be a way of communicating one's position and stance in relation to current educational discourses and frameworks (cf. Szabó, 2015). Investigating the visual representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in Tallskolan thus provides an opportunity to reflect on the visual and material aspects of the hidden curriculum, i.e., the institution’s attitude and values regarding language (Biró, 2016; Brown, 2012).

Schoolscapes are created through the interplay of laws and regulations concerning language and their implementation by actors in a specific context (Szabó, 2015). Research on language policy and planning has highlighted a potential disparity between language planning initiatives at the national level and their actual implementation within institutions, what has become known as the “policy-practice gap” (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007). The present study illustrates this policy-practice gap in a school for years p–9. The study aims to generate knowledge about how a schoolscape in the north of Sweden visually supports multilingualism using Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. The research questions are:

- 1) How does the schoolscape visually represent the Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami languages?

- 2) What are the connections between official language policy and planning and the visual representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in the schoolscape?

The study starts with an overview of how current language legislation and the compulsory school curriculum frame language policy in Swedish society and the compulsory school. This is followed by an account of previous research on schoolscales which also presents the study's theoretical framework. Next, the method section describes the research context of the study in greater detail and discusses its selection and analysis methodology. This is followed by an account of the analysis process and the results of the study, which then concludes with a discussion of the results.

2 Overview of the context

The following section discusses language planning and policy according to the law and the compulsory school curriculum, situating Tallskolan's schoolscale in a historical and social context.

2.1 Official support for Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami and Swedish in Sweden

The Language Act recognises in principle that all languages may be mother tongues. Everyone in Sweden has the right to learn, develop and use Swedish, the official main language. Individuals belonging to a national minority, or those who use sign language, should be given the opportunity to learn, develop and use their respective languages. The law also permits the use and development of other mother tongues. This creates a hierarchy where Swedish is given status as the norm, while (national) minority languages are subordinated (see also Landqvist & Spetz, 2020). In minority language administrative areas, the authorities must adhere to the Minority Act and safeguard the rights of minority language users. Unlike the requirement to provide preschool in Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami, the Minority Act does not stipulate the same for the compulsory school.

Sweden ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (SÖ 2000:3) in 2000, but compliance has been challenging. Following criticism from the Council of Europe, the government's action plan (Ministry of Culture, 2022) identified implementation gaps, with a focus on comprehensively enhancing education for all national minority languages. Given the education system's broad coverage of children and young people, it plays a pivotal role in sustaining and enhancing national minority languages. Therefore, it is essential to foster interest in these languages and enhance their status, visibility, and usability, which involves measures such as remote education, public support, access to teaching materials, and implementation of a new teacher training programme.

2.2 Languages for compulsory school education

Compulsory school follows the compulsory school curriculum, which is a legally binding policy document for school professionals (see Education Act 2010:800). While a new curriculum came into force in 2022, this article references the overall, subject-independent parts of the previous curriculum (Skolverket, 2019), which was in use at the time of data collection for this article.

Since 2015, each national minority language has had its own curriculum (Skolverket, 2019). The optional course is aimed at national minority language students

with or without knowledge of the language and provides an opportunity to reconnect with their linguistic heritage. This contrasts with the history of official marginalisation of the Finnish and Sami languages in school and society (e.g., Elenius, 2001; Nordblad, 2015) – a policy that officially ended shortly after the Second World War. The curriculum conceptualises multilingualism as limited to minority language students who opt to study their minority language (cf. Paulsrud et al., 2020). The overall part of the compulsory school curriculum (Skolverket, 2019) states that all students should learn about national minority languages and cultures. Further, education should be based on the student's background and experiences, including language, aiming to foster a strong identity with emphasis on both uniqueness and participation in the community. It is the school's responsibility to interpret this (Hornberger & Jonson, 2007).

In the past two decades, Sweden has witnessed a realignment of language policy towards the national minority languages (Lainio & Pesonen, 2020). For the compulsory school, this means strengthening the position of the national minority languages and increasing knowledge of them. However, variations in local implementation can impact students' linguistic and cultural development. To understand how language planning and policy is implemented and embedded in practice, research is needed to provide insight into the actual work of schools.

2.3 The historical continuum of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in the north of Sweden

Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami as first languages in the north of Sweden have a centuries-long history. The Torne Valley, a region spanning north-eastern Sweden and north-western Finland, has historically been dominated by Finnish-speaking communities. When Sweden lost Finland to Russia in 1809, the border with was drawn straight through the Torne Valley, and Finnish became a minority language on the Swedish side. In the late 19th century, nationalistic and foreign policies in Sweden were aimed at establishing a unified Swedish linguistic and cultural environment, and Finnish was perceived as a threat (Elenius, 2001). The state education system initiated a process of assimilation of the Finnish-speaking minority in the Torne Valley, marginalising Finnish. This left the students to maintain and develop the language within their private sphere. Although Finnish was reintroduced by changes to education policy in the 1960s and 1970s, there were problems for speakers of Tornedalian Finnish, which is significantly different from standard Finnish, (Winsa, 1996), hindering students' ability to access the instruction.

Eventually, Tornedalian Finnish was officially recognised as a separate language, now commonly known as Meänkieli, which is used alongside modern standardised Finnish in the north of Sweden. The historical and continued migration between Finland and Sweden has influenced the use and spread of Finnish as a national minority language. Support for Finnish as a L1 and the provision of bilingual education has decreased since the 1990s (Lainio, 2017, Vuorsola, 2019). In northern Sweden, the city of Haparanda has had a bilingual Swedish-Finnish school since 1989, while Pajala municipality has an independent school that offers some instruction in Meänkieli.

The Sami languages, totalling nine, are spoken by the Sami indigenous population, historically linked to the transnational area of Sápmi. This region spans the northern regions of Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden, the ancestral homeland of the Sami people. In the Swedish part of Sápmi, it is primarily South, North, Lule, Ume and Pite Sami that are spoken. Early in the 20th century, the Swedish state extended its educational authority to the Sami-speaking regions in Sweden. The policy of "Lapp ska

vara lapp" (Lapp shall be Lapp)¹ aimed to preserve the culture of nomadic reindeer herding among the Sami. Non-nomadic Sami, like Finnish speakers, attended regular schools in order to assimilate into mainstream society, while nomadic schools were established for Sami children of families engaged in reindeer herding (Elenius, 2006). Nomadic Sami children were expected to acquire the identity of being Sami through guidelines, set and overseen by Swedish authorities (Kortenkangas, 2023), ensuring the continuation of traditional reindeer herding. From authority perspective, Swedish was considered the language of instruction in the nomadic school, but there was no principled reason against teaching in Sami (Nordblad, 2015, s. 222). Consequently, language was not as crucial in the nomadic school as it was in the education of the Tornedalians. Optional Sami nomadic schools were established in 1962, incorporating Sami language as a compulsory subject. At present, Sami language instruction is compulsory for years 1-6 in the five state Sami schools in northern Sweden, with a dedicated curriculum introduced in 2011. In addition, there are municipal schools integrating Sami culture and language in the cities of Kiruna and Jokkmokk. Moreover, Jokkmokk has the only high school program with a Sami focus in the country.

The role of education in the marginalisation of Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami has been significant. Since the Second World War, Swedish has become the majority language in northern Sweden. The transmission of the minority languages to younger generations has faced challenges. Despite improved legal opportunities, the lack of formal instruction is still evident (Lainio & Pesonen 2020). In mainstream education, L1 instruction is conducted for just one hour per week, when implemented.

3. Previous Research

Research on the inclusion of historical minority languages in formal education in the Nordic context, has highlighted how political decisions and pedagogical strategies affect the degree of support for minority languages (cf. From, 2020; Vuorsola, 2022; Poromaa Isling, 2020a). In a bilingual Swedish-Finnish comprehensive independent school in Sweden, visual representations promoting bilingualism were evident (From, 2020; see also From & Holm, 2019), with Finnish spoken by both students and teachers. In contrast, Swedish dominated the informal language environment for the older pupils. This suggests an acceptance of linguistic diversity among the younger students and indicates a decline in support for minority languages over time. Efforts to preserve Finnish were integrated into daily spatial practices rather than explicitly stated as ideology, actively shaping the physical space and routines of the school. Teachers considered the visibility of Finnish in the physical space vital for protecting a minority language and challenge linguistic power relations locally. Expanding on this notion, in a bilingual Sweden-Finnish independent primary school, students needed to adapt to each other's language abilities to effectively cooperate in the classroom (Vuorsola, 2022). This reflects that the historical and political context continues to shape interactions and communication among individuals within this minority group in educational settings.

In northern Sweden, in the Torne Valley, language separation within upper-secondary school was evident, with active use of Meänkieli by students, teachers and principals in hallways, corridors and staff rooms during breaks (Poromaa Isling, 2020a). In contrast, formal education was predominantly in Swedish, and students perceived it as monolingual Swedish, despite their interest in learning Meänkieli, reflecting an ongoing Swedification (Poromaa Isling, 2020b). Similarly, students with Finnish backgrounds in the Torne Valley experienced schooling as monolingual Swedish (Kolu, 2020).

Language representations in educational settings can both homogenise and differentiate groups. In a Norwegian preschool, stereotypical depictions tended to confirm Sami-Norwegian cultural disparities (Pesch et al., 2021). The exclusion of the historical Kven minority further simplifies these differences and is echoed in Norwegian teacher training (Sollid et al., 2023). Within education, the depiction of diversity visually favoured Sami identity over Kven identity. Within a preschool in northern Sweden, symbolic inclusion of visual Sami representations was implemented, but Swedish dominated in daily teacher-child communication (Straszer & Kroik, 2021).

These studies provide insights into the implementation of historical minority languages in Nordic schools. Despite a stated openness to linguistic diversity, the findings indicate that spatial separation of languages impacts interaction and inclusivity, and that this is rooted in historical and political factors. In the educational environments, disparities emerge between national languages and minority languages, while distinctions are also made among different historical minority languages. This study aims to shed light on the connection between overarching language policy decisions and the visual representation of Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami in a compulsory schoolscape.

4. Theoretical Framework

The concept of the schoolscape forms a theoretical foundation for this study. It refers to school environments where space, text, and other semiotic resources shape language ideologies (Brown, 2012; Szabó, 2015), including views on monolingualism, multilingualism and minority languages. Brown (2012) has argued that oral language should be included as part of the schoolscape. However, this study focuses on the visual aspects of schoolscales and how these works together communicate messages and values in the school environment. The study adds to our understanding of how public discourse is shaped in the school environment (Wedin, 2021).

The schoolscape is part of the broader field of the linguistic landscape (LL) in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. Early LL research mapped the visibility of language as a single neutral entity and argued for the connection between the visibility of language on public signs and linguistic justice (cf. Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Research has emphasised the importance of evaluating the role of the specific language in a LL. It has emerged that visual and multimodal analysis along with questions of authorship, function and materiality are also important (cf. e.g., Gorter, 2018b). The preface to *Linguistic Landscape. An International Journal* (2015) presents a current definition of LL as an attempt to understand: "the motives, uses, ideologies, language varieties and contestations of multiple forms of 'languages' as they are displayed in public spaces" (see also Gorter, 2018a, p. 81). What sociolinguistic insights can be developed from this approach becomes important.

Scollon and Scollon (2003) argue that visual representations gain social meaning within broader societal discourses, emphasising the significance of contextual factors in the field of geosemiotics. This approach views discourses in place as encompassing material as well as linguistic practices, norms and values associated with specific environments. Analysing visual representations within specific places can therefore identify discourses in place.

Within schoolscales specific languages and identities may be encouraged or restricted. The impact of language policy ranges from individual to national, regional, and institutional levels (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) involving complex interactions and mutual influences (Hornberger & Jonson (2007). Language policy is changeable and requires local examination, allowing for reinterpretation and reconstruction at each

institutional level. Hornberger and Jonson (2007) stress how educational settings construct and negotiate the space for multilingualism and its ideological impact. Ideological spaces guide language policy, thus influencing multilingualism in education. Implementational spaces put policy into practice, such as curriculum interpretations by teachers. These spaces do not always align. For instance, national policies restricting multilingualism can still lead to new implementational spaces, opening ideological possibilities. Teachers, students, and school actors can shape and create new spaces for language use.

To investigate language policy, it is important to analyse policy texts. Using ethnographic methods, it is also possible to locally examine how language policies are interpreted and implemented. Hornberger et al. (2018) point out that an ethnographic perspective can provide a nuanced understanding of the policy-practice gap by highlighting complex relationships and interactions at different levels, e.g., national and institutional. These are shaped not only by the intentions of the policy, but also by the interpretative and action space of the actors, their daily language practices, and strategic communicative choices, as well as the broader historical societal discourses and ideologies of which they form part.

There are different approaches to schoolscape research. Previous research has been criticised for the creation of static images of linguistic landscapes (Blommaert, 2013; Brown, 2012) and for not taking account of emic perspectives (e.g., Szabó, 2015). A schoolscape is the result of actions in the past (cf. Pietikäinen et al., 2010), and simultaneously future-orientated. Observing a schoolscape during a day is essential as missing language-related visuals suggest that their presence is temporary. The use of an outsider's perspective helps avoid influencing the interpretations of teachers and students, allowing for observation within their daily routine (cf. Szabó, 2015). In this way, the study may discover hidden or unintentional patterns that internal actors are not aware of. Moreover, it may shed light on how the schoolscape interacts with the surrounding context, including overall language policy. Schoolscape and geosemiotics thus provide a theoretical basis for investigating visual representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in the school. The analysis of discourses in place contributes to an understanding of how these function in the specific context. Relating discourses in place to the larger surrounding context opens a discussion of the policy-practice gap.

5. Methods and materials

This section describes the method of data production, the material on which the analysis is based and the method of analysis.

5.1 Data collection

In order to answer the research questions, observations were conducted and documented by using photographs to capture language-related images, objects, symbols, and written texts within the school building, in the form of visual ethnography (Pink, 2021; Rose, 2012). The photographs serve as the primary material in the study, highlighting the significance of contextualisation for interpreting visual material within a broader cultural, historical, and social context (Pink, 2021). The material was generated during a one-day school tour, at the end of the school year, using a mobile phone camera to document visible language-related materials across different spaces, akin to visual field notes (Bäckström & Fors, 2015).

The data collection aimed to document materials accessible to visitors. Therefore, not all visual language-related objects in the school have been photographed, but the focus has been on capturing different visual objects (Rose, 2012) for further, more detailed analyses. Focusing on visual objects means that spoken texts are excluded. Tallskolan's digital environment and the teachers' workspaces were also excluded, and no individuals were photographed, to protect their identities. Texts related to commercial information from third parties, such as logos, also contribute to the visual schoolscape. However, they have been excluded since they have not been consciously chosen by the school, rather, they are likely part of standard procurement agreements or personal belongings of students and staff.

The data collected reflects the researcher's interests and attention, limiting its scope (Pink, 2021). The researcher's professional background in education has provided experience of interpreting policy documents and understanding their impact on teaching and learning. Having grown up and currently residing in the north of Sweden, surrounded by Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, and Swedish, the researcher has insights into the linguistic and cultural diversity in the region, although Tallskolan was not familiar. The researcher's multilingual family history, including Meänkieli, extends through previous generation. This personal experience has provided and raised awareness of the importance of language for the community, the consequences of lack of communication, and the importance of valuing and preserving linguistic diversity and identifying situations that can lead to marginalisation. These lived experiences help the researcher to understand and interpret the results in a more nuanced and in-depth way, but may also generate bias. If another researcher had conducted the study, they might have employed different methods, sampling strategies, or interpretations of the results.

Informed consent was obtained from the principals of the school before data collection was carried out (Swedish Research Council, 2017). To ensure that the school remained anonymous it is referred to by a pseudonym, and in the presentation of results only a limited number of images are used to avoid recognition. In cases where the images contain signs that could reveal the identity of individuals or the school, these have been edited out. The digital photographs are stored on local servers at Luleå University of Technology and are password protected. Data collection and results reporting thus observe the EU's General Data Protection Regulation GDPR (EU 2016/679) and the principles of research ethics (Swedish Research Council, 2017).

5.2 *Sampling*

Tallskolan was chosen because it is in northern Sweden, in a municipality with special responsibility for Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami, which makes it different from other schools with linguistic diversity, for example in urban areas. At the time, the number of students was 300–400, according to the principal, who also reported that up to thirty different first languages (L1) were used among the students.

The raw material comprises 850 images, initially containing duplicates and close-ups, which were excluded during initial data processing. The study focuses on photographs from shared spaces, such as entrances, corridors, and stairwells, and excludes photographs from classrooms. Of the total material, 108 photographs have been included and analysed in this study.

5.3 Method of Analysis

The analysis has been carried out as follows. The representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami were analysed based on interpretation of the photographs collected in the schoolscape. The analysis applies the methods of geosemiotics, i.e., "the study of the material placement of signs in the world" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 110). The qualitative software NVivo has been used to sort the material. Initially, the material was organised and analysed by broadly classifying it according to the location of the photographs with text-based descriptors, (e.g. canteen), added to each image. In geosemiotics, a visual object's significance is tied to its location, hence each photograph was classified accordingly (see Table 1). To recognise the interplay between Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, and Swedish in the schoolscape, the photographs were classified according to language representation (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of the material according to location and language representation

Room	Number of photos	Language representations in photographs			
		Swedish	Finnish	Meänkieli	Sami
Entrances	13	13	4	4	4
Cafeteria	10	10	0	0	0
Corridors and stairwells	61	61	1	0	0
Library	14	14	0	0	0
Canteen	10	10	0	0	0
Total	108	108	4	4	4

The overall presentation (Table 1) is a starting point for the qualitative analysis of the visual communication of the languages (cf. Laihonen & Szabó, 2017). The unit of analysis is each individual photograph. A single photo may contain multiple instances of a language. The photographs were also analysed with consideration of representation and materiality (Table 2). The physical aspects of signs, including their material and graphic quality, contribute to their meaning (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). Materials like plastic, wood, and metal permanently fixed to a building suggest durability, while representations on paper are more temporary. Graphic quality is influenced by handwritten or professional fonts, size, and colour choices made to convey meanings.

Table 2. Examples of analysing language representations and materiality

Example	Room	Language	Representation	Type of representation and materiality.
1	Entrance 1	Finnish and Meänkieli	Written text: "Tervetuloa" (Welcome).	Locally produced handwritten text on laminated paper, temporarily fixed.
2	Entrance 4	Swedish	Written text: Årskurs 5 (Year 5).	Professional printed metal sign, permanently fixed.

The first stage of the analysis of the photographs makes visible the positioning of discourses in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) in the schoolscape, i.e., materialised cultural beliefs and norms. At the next stage the visual objects are linked to overall language policy decisions, such as legislation and the compulsory school curriculum at national level, to create an understanding of their social meaning.

6. Results

First, the analysis of the representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami is presented (research question 1). The analysis is then related to language policy at the national level, thus answering the second research question. The images shown have been selected as examples of what is being discussed. The textual examples provided in this article have been translated by the author.

6.1 Representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in the school's common spaces

Tallskolan has four entrances: two for years p–6 (entrances 1 and 2) and two for years 7–9 (entrances 3 and 4). In entrances 1 and 2, students are welcomed by a collection of locally produced written texts (see Figure 1) that begin with the heading *Välkommen på olika språk* (Welcome in different languages) in blue and yellow, followed by translations into several different languages. The heading in Swedish can be interpreted as a potential common language or as an expression of a value hierarchy (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The blue and yellow colour can be associated with the colours of the Swedish flag and therefore ignores that Swedish is also an official language in Finland. Implicitly it relates to Swedish-ness, nationality, and the maintenance of borders (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2003). *Välkommen* represents Swedish, *Tervetuloa* both Finnish and Meänkieli and *Buorisboahthem* Lule Sami. The visualisations of the word for welcome in these languages are standardised in that each text is laminated, handwritten on a white background surrounded by a black frame and of identical size. The font-colour for Finnish/Meänkieli and Lule Sami is black. In the Swedish text, the dots above the letter 'ä' are coloured yellow and blue and can thus be linked to the Swedish flag. The Sami translation uses the Sami style of writing and contributes to the knowledge of various writing systems. The texts are set up separately and can therefore easily be taken down or more languages added, which signals their temporary character (cf. Scollon & Scollon, 2003).

There is no clear visual hierarchy between the translations of Welcome. In this sense, the languages are equal. Including Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami signals the presence of language users and the school's ambition to represent the languages. Simultaneously, it implicitly indicates that the languages are not shared. For students who pass the entrances several times a day, such as upon arrival and departure, and during outdoor breaks, the texts can serve as reminders of the languages present among students and others in the school (cf. Gorter & Cenoz, 2015). This may raise tolerance for and promote different languages. It signals language values and may positively influence language choices and usage (cf. Gorter, 2013). It contributes to promoting multilingualism (Brown, 2012) and multilingual literacy (Cummins & Early, 2010).



Figure 1: a collection of written texts making Finnish and/or Meänkieli, and Sami visible among several other languages.

Figure 2: a glass cabinet containing texts and artefacts representing Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami.

Figure 3: the Finnish, Sami, Tornedalian, and Swedish flags together with a reindeer horn.

In entrance 2 there are two glass cabinets. One is labelled *Månadens yrke* (Profession of the month), which informs about the content of the exhibition and signals that it is temporary. It contains artefacts that can occur in healthcare settings. A printed brochure provides information about the upper-secondary school's healthcare programme in the municipality. The future-orientated content is aimed at students. Another text provides information about the nursing profession and its required personal qualities such as accuracy and communication skills. Swedish texts emphasise the importance of knowing Swedish for education and future careers. This could create the perception that Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami may not be as valuable, despite their significance in the municipality and in Region Norrbotten, which are potential employers.

In the second glass cabinet (see Figure 2) are the Swedish labels “Finska” (Finnish), and “Samiska” (Sami), and Meänkieli indicating the theme of the exhibition. Finnish and Meänkieli are represented by the Tornedalian flag and the Swedish-Finnish flag, expressing the intention to include and recognise linguistic diversity. The flags can also be understood as cultural references. In addition, the Tornedalian flag is associated with the Torne Valley region. The flags are elaborate due to their wooden construction. Finnish is also represented by the book title *Koirien Kalevala*, intended for children 3–6 years old as described by the publisher. Meänkieli is exemplified by books. *Marja ja Pohjoistuuli* is, according to the publisher, in Meänkieli and for children aged 6–9. The fact that *Plyppi aarnimettässä* is in Meänkieli is indicated by a handwritten label at the top right of the book cover. The handwritten label of the book may be since it is not always straightforward to distinguish between Finnish and Meänkieli, especially if one does not have a command of either language. The bilingual *Kaksosten touhuja Toivillingarna busar* is, according to the publisher, in Meänkieli and Swedish and for children aged 3–6.

On the shelf representing Sami, the Sami flag is displayed, also in wood. There is a series of images from a memory game entitled *Ett år med en renskötarfamilj* (A year with a reindeer herding family). The text is in Swedish, and the game, according to the Swedish Agency for Special Needs Education, is designed to allow students with intellectual disabilities to learn about the way of life of the reindeer-herding Sami people. Cartoons provide various examples of life as reindeer herders, including a woman baking what might be the Sami bread *gahkku*, a man crafting a brushwood bed on the

floor of a hut around a central stone hearth. There is an open book with Pedar Jalvi's poem about snowflakes, in Swedish and North Sami. Jalvi was the first to publish a collection of poems in North Sami in the early 1900s (Tjällegoahte - Författarcentrum Sápmi, n.d.). There is Sami handicraft in the form of a reindeer skin bag with woven ribbons. An ice fishing rod and an ice shovel that can be used for ice fishing are displayed. Next to the Sami flag are the Roma and Swedish flags, also in wood. The Sami and Roma flags carry linguistic and cultural references where, for example, the colours of the Sami flag can be linked to the traditional Sami costume, and the Roma flag contains symbols that are important within Roma culture, while the Swedish flag does not contain linguistic or cultural references that are as clear. The inclusion of the flags can be interpreted as Finnish, Meänkieli, Sami, and Romani having similarities in that they are a natural part of Swedish society. Simultaneously, given that four of the five national minority languages are represented, it raises questions about the absence of Yiddish. And sign language is nowhere to be seen.

A notice board in entrance 2 displays the Swedish, Finnish, Sami and Tornedalian flags on paper and as laminated versions (see Figure 3). The notice board is decorated with a reindeer horn, a cultural symbol linked to reindeer husbandry, Sami handicrafts and Sami identity. A laminated sign from Sámediggi (Sami Parliament) shows images of domestic and wild animals linked to the Arctic region. The text translates the names of the animals into North, Lule, Pite, Ume and South Sami and Swedish. The order of the Sami languages reflects their traditional geographical distribution, from north to south.

The entrances for years 7–9 differ from entrances 1 and 2 in that they do not include any signs in Finnish, Meänkieli, or Sami. Entrance 3 has no language-related images at all. Entrance 4 displays the school's Swedish-sounding name, painted in large letters, which is linked to the area where the school is located. A professionally produced metal sign provides information of the school's spatial arrangement (see Figure 4). The linguistics signal the permanent presence of Swedish, while Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami are rendered invisible.



Figure 4: A permanent sign in Swedish identifying locations within the year 7–9 premises.

Figure 5: On the left a standardised permanent sign naming the classroom and, on the right, a standardised temporary weekly schedule, both in Swedish.

Figure 6: A printed paper note indicating in Swedish the time and place of Finnish language instruction.

In the p-6 corridors, more elaborate standardised signs in Swedish are used to identify each classroom (see Figure 5). There are also temporary texts such as printed weekly paper schedules for each year (see Figure 5), but they do not include Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami instruction, which seems to be organised individually. The Finnish-language classroom is marked by a printed paper-note taped to the door (see Figure 6), conveying a sense of temporariness (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). It indicates that the space is used for Finnish, regularly, at stated times. Although the text refers to teaching Finnish, the note is in Swedish. This suggests that students leave their regular classroom to study Finnish in a separate room. There are no texts identifying separate classrooms for Meänkieli and Sami.

Given the literature in entrance 2, it might be expected that the bookshelves in the corridor for years 4 and 5 (see Figure 7) would include literature in Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. However, there are only Swedish-language titles. There is also an absence of literature in the three languages in the school library. Books on display are mainly in Swedish, with the occasional title in English (see Figure 8). Posters showing the arrangement of books in the library provide no specific information on the presence of items in the three minority languages (see Figure 9). The abbreviation “UTL” (see Figure 9) refers to books in *andra språk än svenska* (languages other than Swedish), including English language titles, and an occasional title in French. The Swedish abbreviation “UTL” can be interpreted as: *utländska böcker* (foreign books), implying that there are no books in Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami published in Sweden. However, there could be Finnish-language books from Finland, or Sami books published in Finland, Norway, or Russia, as the languages extend across national borders. It is not as easy to draw similar conclusions for Meänkieli. Meänkieli is also used in Finland, where it is regarded as a Finnish dialect that over time has become more influenced by standard Finnish. Absence of books in these languages is due to limited children’s literature availability in Meänkieli and Sami, and the identified lack of access to learning materials (Ministry of Culture, 2022). However, given Tallskolan’s commitment to the national minority languages, the absence of books raises questions.

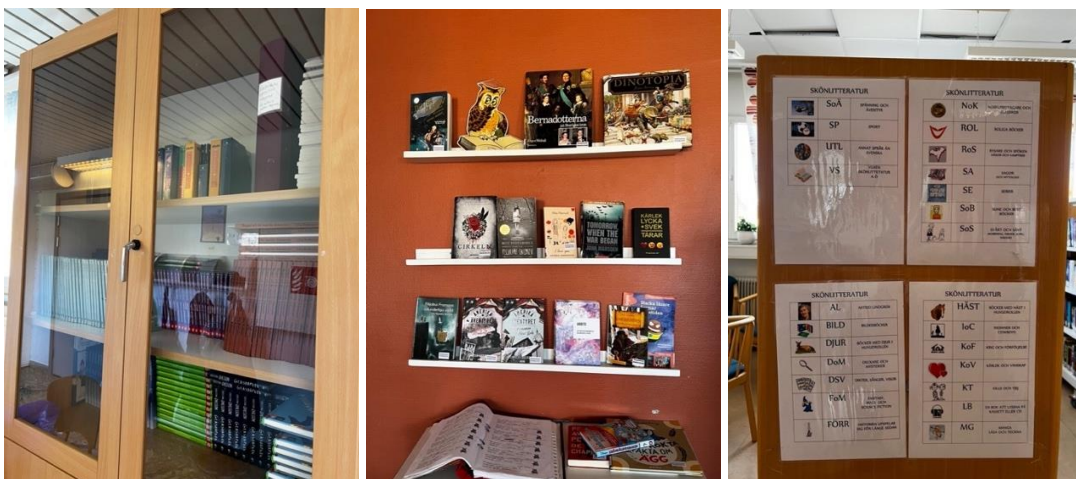


Figure 7: A bookshelf in the corridor for years 4–6 that only includes book titles in Swedish.

Figure 8: Books displayed in the school library are mainly in Swedish, but English is also present.

Figure 9: An overview of the arrangement of books in the school library where the abbreviation UTL stands for books in languages other than Swedish.

Representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami are absent in the corridors and stairwells used by years 7–9, which indicates the marginal position of these languages (cf. Brown, 2005). One example is several professionally printed posters with information from *Rädda barnen* (Swedish Save the Children), the local Culture School, and the leisure centre, with information in Swedish about their activities. A poster from Länsstyrelserna, a state authority that represents the government at county level, is part of a national campaign on forced marriage. The text includes eleven different languages, including Arabic, Swedish, and Turkish. It is possible that Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami have been excluded because those who use these languages are expected to be Swedish speakers as well (cf. Språkrådet, 2011). This indicates a lack of state support for these languages. Swedish also dominates in the school canteen.

6.2 Connections between policy documents and visual representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in the schoolscape.

Visual representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami are concentrated to the two entrances for years p–6. The locally designed welcome display (Figure 1) resembles those in other Swedish schools with multilingual students (e.g., Nuottaniemi, 2023), but also includes Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. The representations affirm a multilingual identity and belonging in the school community (Straszer & Kroik, 2021). The intended equality between the languages and thus between linguistic belonging and background is a discourse in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The emphasis on Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami, especially in entrance 2, may be due to the official status of these languages in Sweden and in the municipality in question and is also in line with Tallskolan's prioritisation of the languages. While the overall part of the compulsory school curriculum closes the space for multilingualism (cf. Paulsrud et al., 2020), the representation in the entrances enables a reinterpretation where multilingualism is valued and made visible. The representations change the ideological space of the national discourse (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007).

The representations in the schoolscape signal a discourse in place that emphasises that Sami is used by Sami, Finnish by Swedish Finns and Meänkieli by Tornedalians, while the curriculum does not link a specific national minority to a specific minority language. Nor does it provide guidance on what method or content should be used to install knowledge of national minorities and their languages. Linking Sami to crafts, reindeer and other animals, small-scale farming, fishing, huts, and a nature-oriented lifestyle (see Figures 2 and 3) is entirely based on decisions taken by those responsible for the schoolscape, thus creating a new ideological space (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007).

Representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in the entrances indicate their symbolic value (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Strazer & Kroik, 2021). The representations may contribute knowledge of the languages, make possible the use of the languages in Tallskolan, and help create positive attitudes to the languages and a willingness to develop them. The representations constitute information sources and point to a discourse in place where written language and literature are regarded as central to Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. The schoolscape facilitates multilingual learning and language use with the help of single words. The implementation renegotiates the national discourse as expressed in the curriculum, which does not accept languages other than Swedish as vehicles for the acquisition and development of knowledge and values (cf. Author, 2022). The space is also filled with representations of the diversity of Sami languages (see Figure 3), potentially contributing to knowledge both in and about Sami regardless of the students' language background and facilitating mutual

integration. Again, the curriculum does not determine how teaching about these languages is to be implemented, nor does it specify which national minority languages students should learn about.

The analysis shows that continuous presence of the languages in the schoolscape is limited to the entrances. Finnish has its dedicated room for a specific time (see Figure 6), indicating it is taught as a subject, not used as a primary language of instruction, and is the concern of the individual. With the absence of representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in entrances, corridors, and stairwells for years 7–9, a picture of the temporary nature of the presence of these languages emerges. The analysis points to a discourse in place that suggests that Swedish is the dominant language and that Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami are subordinate. The absence of representations in other shared school spaces contributes to the maintenance of the majority language (cf. Brown, 2005). The Swedish texts in these spaces indicate that this is intended to be a Swedish-speaking environment, with the use of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami relegated to the younger students and separated in time and space (From, 2020). This can be traced to the curriculum discourse, which emphasises the importance of Swedish and in doing so risks reducing the use of the three minority languages. They are not given equal status with Swedish and are therefore not equally encouraged. The benefits provided by the representations are limited, even for potential future language users. Moreover, the prominence of the languages in the p–6 entrances and their absence in the entrances, corridors, and stairwells for years 7–9 might signal an expectation that students enter the first years of school as multilinguals but leave compulsory education as monolinguals, which, in line with the curriculum, closes the space for multilingualism.

7. Discussion

The aim of this study has been to generate knowledge about how a schoolscape in the north of Sweden visually encourages multilingualism involving Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. The analysis shows that a discourse in place (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) is that the three languages are recognised and displayed. They are represented in two of Tallskolan's entrances used by students in years p–6. This implementation is not a direct application of the official ideology, as expressed in the overall part of the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2019), which lacks the intention to support multilingual competence (Author, 2022). There is a fundamental difference between ideological space and implementational space (Hornberger & Jonson, 2007), in this case the schoolscape. The latter goes beyond the curriculum requirements and shows that there is room for change and reformulation at the local level. This implementation can be seen as a policy-practice-gap (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007) in that it supports and recognises Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami multilingualism and multilingual identity.

The implementation of knowledge about Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami in the schoolscape, as shown in the analysis, contradicts repeated reports on the lack of knowledge about national minorities and national minority languages (Salö & Milani, 2023; Spetz, 2021). Awareness of the existence of the languages can help understanding their role and situation (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015). At the same time, the analysis shows that the selection of representations in the schoolscape is problematic. Finnish and Meänkieli are associated with flags and literature. Sami representations become stereotypical and predictable through the selective choice of linguistic and cultural attributes and the exclusion of variants (cf. Pesch et al., 2021). The presentation of Sami in images depicting reindeer and other animals reflects an imagined community and a limited context in which the languages can be useful. The selection provides an image of Sami linked to a

discourse of the Sami living and working close to nature, as a local intact passive culture separate from modern global ideas and technologies. This runs the risk of Sami culture being interpreted as homogenous and static (Pesch et al., 2021). The emphasis on differences, which Sollid et al., (2023) found in their study, together with stereotypical representations, risks establishing a dichotomy between what is considered normal and what is considered exotic and different (cf. Coupland, 2010). From an ethical and critical perspective, the representations seem to turn Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami into museum exhibits (cf. Duchêne & Heller, 2008), backward-looking and with the languages belonging to the realm of history, rather than being used and embedded in contemporary people's lives and useful for learning, for communication in different future contexts, and for identity development. This impression is reinforced when languages are marginalised in other spaces. The decision about which images, objects, symbols, and written texts are to be used to represent languages in the schoolscape is influenced by the perceptions, beliefs, and opinions of those responsible for designing the schoolscape (cf. Hornberger et al., 2018).

The analysis shows that the representations (see Figure 2) convey a link between national minorities and minority languages. This is an interpretation produced by those responsible for the representations. Equating Sami people with Sami language does not adequately problematise the complex relationship that can exist between national minorities and national minority languages. A nuanced understanding might consider that Sami people in Torne Valley might have Meänkieli as their language (cf. SOU 2017:60), and that reindeer husbandry can be carried out in Meänkieli. The representations seem shaped by an external perspective. To overcome the prevailing rhetoric, it is important to start from an emic perspective, which can provide a deeper insight into the experiences, perspectives and wishes of minority language users (cf. Minority Act). One aspect that may explain the imbalance between representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami, as well as the lack of an in-depth perspective, is the shortage of teachers and the lack of teaching materials (cf. Ministry of Culture, 2022). Minority languages may be taught through distance learning, and in addition teachers of national minority languages are often itinerant, with teaching assignments in several schools, thus reducing their presence in any individual school. There may be uncertainty, among those responsible, about how to incorporate these languages and cultures into the schoolscape, potentially hindering their introduction (Shohamy & Waksman, 2009).

The analysis highlights that students entering and leaving through entrance 2 are particularly exposed to representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. These representations are intentionally positioned to engage a wide student audience, promoting various languages and cultures. However, as students progress to higher grades, the visual promotion of multilingualism diminishes, ultimately limiting the space for linguistic diversity. This reflects a dynamic and inclusive language environment within premises for younger years (From, 2020). The unequal treatment of languages in the schoolscape may reflect an ongoing Swedification process (cf. Poromaa Isling, 2020b), and be considered a result of historical political forces that continue to influence communication and interaction (cf. Vuorsola, 2022). When the promotion of multilingualism is replaced by a discourse in which Swedish appears as the norm, several consequences arise. Firstly, it can affect students' perception of the status and relevance of the minority languages in education (cf. Brown, 2012; Dressler, 2015). Secondly, it creates a dichotomy between Swedish as something desirable for the future, and Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami as static background knowledge (Author, 2022) and as less important than the language of instruction, Swedish. Thirdly, representations can have significant consequences for students and affect their cultural understanding,

language use, language identity and belonging (cf. Gorter & Cenoz, 2015; Strazser & Kroik, 2021). They can lead to students implicitly having to adapt to a linguistic norm that does not necessarily reflect their own multilingual reality. Surrounding values and the visibility of a language are important influences on an individual's language choice and willingness to use a language (Pietikäinen et al., 2010). The silencing of languages can therefore have a significant impact on multilingual sustainability.

It is important to note that the results of this study do not necessarily reflect actual teaching. Representations and encouragement of language use may be expressed in other ways and balanced in daily activities that the data collection method did not capture. A schoolscape may change with changing political and social circumstances (cf. Laihonen & Tódor, 2015). Since the collection of material for this study, a new curriculum has come into force that may affect the schoolscape. Tallskolan now offers more teaching hours in Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. Further research is needed to identify whether similar trends exist in other schoolsapes in the north of Sweden and to develop knowledge about variations in the transition to years 7–9 as identified in this study. Although representations of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami can be interpreted as the school's ambition to recognise, value, and cherish the languages, it seems that it is not easy to balance representations of similarities and differences without the risk of exoticification and othering (Coupland, 2010). Therefore, there is a need for further research that generates knowledge about emic perspectives, such as students' and teachers' experiences of Finnish, Meänkieli, and Sami. Exploring language users' interpretations and perspectives would contribute to understanding the complexity of how languages are used, interpreted, and experienced from their point of view. It could also help challenge and counter stereotypes.

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Endnote(s)

¹ Lapp is an outdated term for Sami people and is now considered pejorative.

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