

Ph.D Cand. Annika Pasanen

Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies, Helsinki University. "Solving the problem of the lost generation: Inari Saami language education for adults"

Inari Saami is one of the nine currently spoken Saami languages in the North Calotte. It is spoken by approximately 350 individuals mainly in the municipality of Inari, which is located in the Saami region of Finland. Inari Saami has always been a small language. It became endangered during the first half of the 20th century but started to gain strength again at the end of the 1980s. The most remarkable factor of revitalization in the Inari context has been the so called language nest, thanks to which a whole new micro-generation of Saami speakers has been born after a break of many decades. Since the year 2000 Inari Saami has been the main language of school instruction for former language nest children. The Inari Saami language has also been revitalized in other domains: many adults have learnt it, it is nowadays used more at home than before, and it has gained a better status as a language of modern culture, sparetime activities and administration.

The rapid and rather efficient revitalization process created a new problem, however: the problem of the lost generation, a lack of speakers in the ages of 20-50 years. Because of this, there were constant difficulties to find competent Inari Saami speaking persons to work as teachers and in the language nest, to prepare new teaching materials, to develop children's and youngsters' cultural activities etc. The Inari Saami community did not have time to wait until the language nest children would become adults and possibly start working with and for the language. Something else had to be done to improve the situation.

To solve this problem a special language education for adults was planned. In practice it meant a one-year intensive course organised by the University of Oulu, the Inari Saami Language Association and the Education Center of the Saami region. The target group for the education were adults representing various professions essential to inter-generational language transmission, who were willing to spend a whole year studying Inari Saami and to start using it in their work. The contents of the education were based on the teaching program of Inari Saami by the University of Oulu. In addition to this, an extensive practically-oriented part was included in the program, covering courses in Inari Saami culture, internship in Inari Saami speaking work places and an application of the master-apprentice program – practicing with elder native language speakers.

The education was implemented during the academic year of 2009-2010. Among the 17 students there were, among other, teachers, daycare personnel, a priest and a radio journalist. Ethnically they represented both Inari Saami people and Finns. The education program turned out to be a great success. The students started speaking Inari Saami in the classroom after a couple of weeks of education. During that year, many of them became tightly integrated into the Inari Saami speaking community. Immediately after the education program about half of students were employed in Inari Saami speaking work places. The master-apprentice program seems to have had a strong positive effect on the whole Inari Saami community. For such a small language 17 new, highly educated speakers representing different professions is a big step forward.

Read more; http://www.valentin.uu.se/information/revitaliseringskonferensen_bilder_fran.html
<http://www.valentin.uu.se/information/revitaliseringskonferensen.html>