



Modernization and Language Loss in the Meänkieli Community

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Abstract

The Finns living in the Torne/ Tornio Valley were cut off from the Finns in Finland in 1809, when Sweden lost the territory of Finland in favor of Russia. Since then, the Tornedalian Finns have become the victims of a definite assimilation policy. Today their language, Meänkieli, is a minority language officially acknowledged in Sweden, but it is an endangered language nowadays, as well.

One of the most important factors which led to the endangered status of Meänkieli was the systematic assimilation policy of the 19th and the 20th century Sweden. One of the main aims of its representatives was to lead language minorities to the path of modernization, offering them the acquisition of majority languages instead of their minority mother tongues.

In my study, I am looking for an answer to the question of how modernization affected the Tornedalian Meänkieli-speaking community in Northern Sweden during the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, as reflected in some feuilletons written by the well-known Meänkieli writer Bengt Pohjanen. My research is based on the relational interpretation of history, culture, literature, and language identity.

Rezumat

Finlandezii din valea râului Torne/ Tornio au fost separați de finlandezii din Finlanda în anul 1809, când, în urma războiului de cucerire a Finlandei de către Imperiul Rus, Suedia a fost nevoită să cedeze teritoriul Finlandei în favoarea Rusiei. Începând de atunci, finlandezii din valea râului Torne/ Tornio au fost victimele unei puternice politici de asimilare. Limba lor, numită meänkieli, este oficial recunoscută ca limbă minoritară în Suedia, dar a rămas și astăzi o limbă periclitată.

Unul din factorii cei mai importanți care au dus la statutul de limbă periclitată a limbii meänkieli este politica sistematică de asimilare practică de Suedia în secolele al XIX-lea și XX-lea. Unul din obiectivele adepților acestei politici a fost conducerea minorităților lingvistice spre calea modernizării, oferindu-le însușirea limbii majoritare în loc de limbile lor minoritare.

Autoarea acestui studiu își propune să găsească răspuns la următoarea întrebare: ce efecte a avut modernizarea din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea și prima parte a secolului al XX-lea asupra populației vorbitoare de limbă meänkieli din nordul Suediei, așa cum este reprezentată de foiletoanele faimosului scriitor în meänkieli Bengt Pohjanen?

Studiul este bazat pe o interpretare relațională a istoriei, culturii, literaturii și identității lingvistice.

Keywords: modernization; assimilation policy; nationalism; social Darwinism; discrimination; loss of mother tongue

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I. Introduction

Modernization is generally considered a positive phenomenon. However, as the topic of my research will attest, the modernization of society can change the linguistic environment at the cost of minority language speakers. In my study, I am looking for an answer to the question of how modernization affected the Meänkieli¹-speaking community in Northern Sweden during the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, as reflected in some works of the well-known Meänkieli writer Bengt Pohjanen.

Meänkieli is one of the thirteen endangered Finnic minority languages spoken in the Baltic area.² One of the most important factors which led to the endangered status of Meänkieli was the systematic assimilation policy of the 19th and 20th century Sweden. In the background of this policy lay the ideology of nationalism and social Darwinism which came into being in the 19th century. One of the main aims of the representatives of these ideologies was to lead language minorities to the path of modernization, offering them the acquisition of majority languages instead of their minority mother tongues, being in each case considered primitive and underdeveloped. Members of minority language communities were taught that their mother tongue was useless, and they were discriminated also from a cultural and economic point of view. Language stigma has persisted in some respects even until today.

In my study, I analyze some feuilletons written by Bengt Pohjanen in Meänkieli, from the perspective of the insight it gives into the social, mental and historical context of the modernization process in the Meänkieli community during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. My research is thus based on the relational interpretation of history, culture, literature and language identity.

¹ Meänkieli was acknowledged as an independent minority language in Sweden only in 2000. Before that, it was considered a group of dialects of the Finnish language spoken in the Torne Valley.

² Helena Sulkala, "Introduction. Revitalisation of the Finnic minority languages", in *Planning a new standard language. Finnic minority languages meet the new millennium*, Studica Fennica Linguistica, ed. Helena Sulkala and Harri Mantila (Helsinki: SKS, 2010), 8.

II. Mono- and multilingualism in the light of modernization

Multilingualism has always been a normal phenomenon in the lives of the people's majority. Promoting monolingualism in the public sphere started to emerge in Europe only during the 18th century. Later, after the development of the national states, it has become a principle in the hands of the political leadership to strengthen their own power.

Language has been an important feature in modern nation-building processes; education and literature on the other hand, have also served the goal of monolingualism. It has prevailed until the near past that a nation's literature and culture is best written and represented in one language, namely the majority language or the language of those in power.

In her study about the relationship between modernization and the situation of small languages in the North Calotte region, Anna-Riitta Lindgren defines modernization primarily as "the adoption of new technologies and the resulting specific changes, i.e. the extensive changes in production, transport, communications, educational system, economic and social structures, and governmental structures".³ Modernization also includes changes in ways of living and in attitudes, as well as a gradual change of human identity. Modernization in the North Calotte region has marked the conditions of the ethnic and language minority groups and caused changes in the linguistic and cultural diversity. Minority languages have been labeled as relics of a passed world. "In the course of the fastest periods of transition during modernization, the minority languages of the northern regions have often been associated with the pre-modern world, whether it has been seen as backward, romantic, or exotic."⁴

III. Theoretical background, research questions and method

As I have earlier mentioned, modernization implies changes in identity. Identity is a dynamic phenomenon, which is continuously shaped during the communication between different groups of people, in our case

³ Anna-Riitta Lindgren "Modernization and small languages – fatal language sociological delay?", in *Planning a new standard language. Finnic minority languages meet the new millennium*, Studica Fennica Linguistica, ed. Helena Sulkala and Harri Mantila (Helsinki: SKS, 2010), 75.

⁴ Ibid. 75.

different nations and ethnic groups.⁵ In this study, by communication I primarily mean language communication and I analyze identity from a discursive perspective. When people describe themselves and others, they create an imagined sense of belonging together with the members of their inner group. I consider that the Andersonian definition of nation as an imagined community is also applicable to the case of the ethnic minority, in our case the Meänkieli-speaking one, in the sense that its members, while they are never likely to come to know most of their fellow-members personally, or to meet or even hear about them, they imagine that there is a defined and finite community to which they belong.⁶ However, we should not forget that there are no homogeneous communities.⁷

As the method of my research, I have chosen discourse analysis. The term 'discourse' is used and defined in various ways in different human and social studies. My own operational definition of this term is close to the idea of Jaworski and Coupland⁸, namely that discourse is language used in social, political and cultural context. In this study, the discourse I will analyze consists of written texts.

In order to render them meaningful, people use discourse concerning every aspect of their social, cultural and political environment. "In short, discourse is what transforms our environment into a socially and culturally meaningful one."⁹ For example, *power* or *modernization* might become 'problems' when they are recognized as such by the people.

⁵ Fredrik Barth "Introduction", in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Oslo: Universitetsförlaget, 1969).

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

⁷ Stuart Hall "Who needs identity?", in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 5.

⁸ Adam Jaworski – Nicolas Coupland, "Introduction: Perspectives on discourse analysis", in *The discourse reader*, ed. Adam Jaworsky and Nicolas Coupland (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

⁹ Jan Blommaert, "Introduction", in: *Discourse. A Critical Introduction*, by Jan Blommaert (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

In my study, I will treat discourse as “meaningful symbolic behavior” or “a general mode of semiosis”¹⁰ and I will also detect some political, emotional, and affective dimensions of modernization.

My corpus consists exclusively of written literature. I will focus on how beliefs and values concerning modernization in Sweden are communicated by the Meänkieli writer Bengt Pohjanen in one of his volumes of feuilletons¹¹, especially in the chapter consisting of seventeen feuilletons entitled *Kieli – sielun sormenjäljet* (*Language – The Fingerprint of the Soul*).

The reader can notice also in Pohjanen’s feuilletons what Anne Heith points out, namely the fact that he deconstructs in his works the boundaries of the imagined communities imposed by the Swedish majority discourse. “One aim of Pohjanen’s text is to provide a critical examination of the construction of a national culture and identity and of the history of the colonization of Norrland. This is performed by a presentation of an alternative history through a deconstruction and negotiation of the boundaries of imagined communities which have shaped historiography based on homogenizing nationalism.”¹²

My present analysis is structured in parallel along two research questions: 1. How are modernization and the necessity of learning Swedish worded in the Swedish power discourse quoted by Pohjanen? 2. What words and expressions – connected to modernization and abuse of power in constructing the national state – appear in Pohjanen’s texts and what is their emotional message? Since I am analyzing a writer’s texts, I am also going to highlight those tropes that occur in them.

IV. Modernization in 19th century Sweden

Before the middle of the 19th century, it was natural that there were many languages used in the kingdom of Sweden, and language was not assigned symbolic or ideological meanings. Although Swedish was the

¹⁰ Ibid. 2.

¹¹ Bengt Pohjanen, *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria* (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019).

¹² Anne Heith, “Nils Holgersson never saw us”, in *Cold Matters. Cultural Perceptions of Snow, Ice and Cold*, ed. Heidi Hansson and Cathrine Norberg (Umeå: Umeå University and the Royal Skyttean Society, 2009), 216.

primary and official language for example in administration, the authorities made efforts to provide interpreters and translators, e.g. in courts and supported the translation of religious texts into Finnish and Sami. In schools, the use of minority languages was considered natural.¹³

In the second half of the 19th century, nationalistic ideology emerged in the Nordic countries, bringing along nationalistic minority policies. Besides this, the doctrine of Social Darwinism which was developing from the 1870s onwards, asserted the existence of human races as well as their unequal status.¹⁴ Finns and Sami people, for example, were considered of lower status than Germanic people both in Sweden and Norway. This period lasting from the middle of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century was the time of the assimilation policy. Besides Social Darwinism, the assimilation policy was also justified by the so-called “finske fare”¹⁵ (Finnish fear), which meant the fear that the “alien” populations of the North Calotte, speaking Finnish and Sami, might not be loyal to the national states in a war situation. In Sweden, the assimilation policy was also applied in connection with the people of the Torne Valley Finnish speaking inhabitants¹⁶, while the Sami people were segregated in cultural and political matters. The assimilation policy was exercised on both of these groups and between 1925 and 1950 only Swedish was used in schools.¹⁷

In the second half of the 20th century, the Swedish policy was characterized by a more pluralistic principle concerning language minorities on the one hand, while on the other hand, by the continuation of the assimilation in more subtle forms of encouraging people to use the majority language instead of their minority mother tongues. Beginning with the 1970s, the emancipation of ethnic groups and minority languages started. Alongside this emancipation, minorities started to develop a new ideology

¹³ Maria Wingstedt, *Language ideologies and minority language policies in Sweden: historical and contemporary perspectives*, Centre for research on bilingualism (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 1998), 75.

¹⁴ Lindgren 2010, 77.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 78.

¹⁶ Paula Andersson and Raija Kangassalo, “Suomi ja meänkieli Ruotsissa”, in: *Monena suomi maailmalla. Suomalaisperäisiä kielivähemmistöjä*, ed. Hannele Jönsson-Korhola and Anna-Riitta Lindgren (Helsinki: SKS, 2009), 105.

¹⁷ Lindgren 2010, 78.

of the Nordic democracy, with a special focus on the right to their own language, culture and identity as equal citizens.¹⁸

V. Parallel discourses of the dominant and of the dominated

V.1. The second half of the 19th century

In the following, along my research questions, I am going to examine modernization as it unfolded during the second half of the 19th century. As the examination of the primary material is concerned, I have found much less material quoting the Swedish power discourse than the author's own discourse about it. This phenomenon is characteristic of the whole corpus gathered by me, irrespective of the modernization period we are dealing with.

V.1.1. Politics as devil of society

Pohjanen writes about the era preceding modernization as if it were a paradisiacal state:

"We have lived here for tens of thousands of years. [...] The land was peaceful, the waters rich in fish and the woods rich in birds and beasts. It was good to live here."¹⁹

As opposed to it, he speaks about modernization as the deed of the devil. Several times the author uses the *devil* symbol as the embodiment of every thought and deed against the Meänkieli. He is able to even connect a date and a name to the beginning of Swedishization: 1860 and governor P. H. Widmark, who wrote a letter to the king, according to which Swedish should be taught in primary schools to the Finnish speaking children.

"However, before that, the devil had arrived to Meänmaa. It brought politics in. It was 1860."²⁰

The majority discourse directly formulates the necessity and usefulness for the Finnish speaking people to know Swedish at a certain level. In this quotation, it is important to notice the use of the adverb *beside*;

¹⁸ Ibid. 79, 82–83.

¹⁹ Bengt Pohjanen, "Ruottalaistaminen", in *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria*, by Bengt Pohjanen (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019), 79. All of the quotations in this study have been translated from Meänkieli into English by Molnár Bodrogi Enikő.

²⁰ Ibid.

it means that in the first period of modernization there was no mentioning of replacing mother tongue with the language of the majority:

“it is definitely useful and necessary for those congregations where – for the time being – they do not speak Swedish to have access to it. That is why within the primary schools belonging to them, they should organize – beside the Finnish language – also the teaching of Swedish, so that it would become, even if not a spoken, but at least a known language among the Finnish people.”²¹

On the other hand, analyzing the above mentioned orders from the minority point of view, as well as retrospectively, at the same time examining the consequences, Pohjanen identifies this language assimilation policy with the *devil's* deed. He calls the devil hypocrite because it brings out its ideas indirectly. It is characteristic of Pohjanen's style to use old proverbs in order to better express his thoughts and feelings. Also the following quotation contains a proverb:

“And the devil is certainly insidious. In 1860 it came to save us, so to say. It said that it would be good if you learned a little Swedish. You may keep your Finnish but you need a little Swedish, as well. If the devil is given a little finger, it will take the whole man.”²²

V.1.2. “Finnish fear”

The idea of the “Finnish fear” has also been formulated in Pohjanen's texts. Let us first see the way it appears in the discourse of those in power. It is worth noticing words that directly refer to the danger, such as *the most dangerous, immediately, dread*, as well as the identification of the Finns with the Russians. In the following, Pohjanen quotes Oscar II, king of Norway and Sweden:

“The borders of Norway are the most dangerous. I ordered the school personnel to immediately start guarding our Germanic language, since the Norwegians dread the Russians. And those who speak Finnish there, are Russians.”²³

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Pohjanen has an ironical attitude towards the fear from the Finns and expresses hyperbolically the anxiety of those in power. The Finnish speaking Russian also refers to the absurdity of the political situation, since it places the sign of equality between citizenship and mother tongue affiliation.

“The whole Sweden is under menace now. The Russians come and this time they are Finnish-speakers. Can’t you see that the Russians change even the Swedish Torne Valley into Finnish?”²⁴

In the quotation bellow, Pohjanen also refers to the representatives of power with the word *devil*. He uses again irony and hyperbola as means of expressing that fear from the Russians had produced monsters:

“The devil was threatening with the Russians. It kept telling that they had tails. That they were not even human.”²⁵

The writer formulates the direct connection between the home security policy and integration in the following lines. At the same time, he also speaks about the fact that one of the fuels of fear from the Finns was the media:

“The devil was also threatening with those Finns who had moved to Norway. Through the journalists, it kept saying that the Russians were going to occupy Norway with the help of the Finns, since they were Russian subjects. And that was why Oscar II, king of Sweden and Norway had abolished the Finnish language in Norway.”²⁶

Politics also had an impact upon the academic circles. Karl Bernhard Wiklund, former professor of the Uppsala University, who dealt mainly with Sami research, also supported language assimilation out of fear from the betrayal of the non-Swedish speaking inhabitants.

“They were dreading the Russians so much that even K. B. Wiklund suggested completing »Swedishization« before the inhabitants of Meänmaa would betray Sweden.”²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bengt Pohjanen, “Fiilarit”, in *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria*, by Bengt Pohjanen (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019), 81.

The fact that one was a Finnish language researcher was reason for suspicion in itself; the priests were also inciting against the Russians (and implicitly against the Finns):

“Finnish language researchers were considered spies and priests were preaching against the Russians from the pulpit.”²⁸

V.1.3. “Saviors” of Northern Sweden

At the turn of the century, 19th and 20th centuries, language assimilation continued on the pretence of modernization and civilizing the non-Swedish mother tongued people. Several times we meet the words *savior/redeemer* as well as *man of ideology* in the analyzed texts, as ironical symbols of the Swedish integration politics implementers.

“On October 15, 1899, saviors arrived to Meänmaa from the south. They were adepts of an ideology and came »to conquer the border region for Sweden”.²⁹

The word “*Swedishiser*” also refers to the representatives of power and points out the fact that they have their places in education. It is well known that school education has probably always been the most efficient political means of language assimilation. In order to fulfill this target, determined defenders of the Swedish language and national ideology were appointed – and not by mere chance. A rod that was practically used as a means of discipline in the schools of the period gains a larger connotation here, becoming the symbol of forced language assimilation:

“The ‘Swedishisers’ were nominated superintendents of the people’s school. There were the Meänmaa teachers who had to carry out punishment, the »Swedishization’s« rod in hand.”³⁰

Pohjanen also mentions by name some of those who – thank to their status – were able to form that distorted image about the minority, image adopted, after a while, by the minority itself. Bishops, priests, teachers – like Bergvist and his daughter, Stina Aronsson and Johansson i Backet and

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bengt Pohjanen, “Pelastaja”, in *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria*, by Bengt Pohjanen (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019), 83.

³⁰ Ibid.

Karnell, for instance. The metaphor *ummikko* which occurs in the following quotation is difficult to be translated in any other language because of the multiple connotations it bears. It denotes the person who only speaks one language – Swedish; but, as its etymology is concerned, it comes from the words meaning *clogged, closed*. Symbolically, it refers to a person who being inside the limits of their own language, cannot open towards those speaking another language.

“Bishop Bergqvist hated our language and his daughter, Stina Aronsson, who was a refined lady, went on with her obloquy in her books, the way Johansson i Backet and other *ummikos* have done up to nowadays.”³¹

As I have already mentioned, after a while, the Meänkieli identified themselves with the distorted image created about them and, as a result, they wanted to become Swedish, in order to get rid of their language and ethnic stigma. We can find references in Pohjanen’s texts to the present situation, as well:

“According to Karnell and the chapter there, Finns were retarded. This was taught in schools and books. No wonder that people didn’t want to be Finnish. This image has been propagated up to nowadays.”³²

It was an honor to be Swedish in the Torne Valley and this was what they taught the children in schools. It is only understandable that being Finnish meant a stigma both for the majority and for the minority groups.

“They don’t want to be Finnish here. [...] Here, it is an honor to be Swedish.”³³

Pohjanen also gives specific examples about the way humiliating minorities practically works in the name of modernization. Let us see one of these examples. In October 1899, a “Swedish feast” was organized in Matarinki to celebrate a *savior* coming from South-Sweden. Special stress was laid upon the idea that – were not for the Swedish – Meänmaa would have remained an unknown place.

“On the occasion of this celebration speeches were held and Swedish men and women were praised. Allegedly, there were no outstanding

³¹ Bengt Pohjanen, “Fiilarit”, 82.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Meänkieli personalities. All of them were *ummikos*, they were the ones 'who made Meänmaa be noted upon the map'".³⁴

In the quotation bellow, the writer also highlights the fact that Swedish speaking people coming from the outside were not able to – and didn't even want to – get acquainted with the culture of the area, on the contrary, they related to it from the point of view of their own preconceptions.

"Being outsiders, the saviors couldn't understand the people at all. They were living with and in their own conviction which they were spreading. According to it, the people were retarded, lacking culture and plough. [...] Nobody knew anything here and there was nothing before the *ummikos* created it."³⁵

Bitterly, Pohjanen also words the fact that the situation has not changed much since the 19th century: "The same preconception for one hundred years, for the last one hundred years."³⁶

V.2. The first half of the 20th century

Still along my research questions, in this subchapter, I am going to examine modernization as it continued during the first half of the 20th century. I will focus on two topics which are mostly discussed in Pohjanen's feuilletons, namely the institution of *arbetsstuga*, the image constructed by the majority about the Meänkieli minority and, connected to it, the presumed discrepancy between language and national feelings.

V.2.1. Arbetsstuga/ Työtuvat

At the beginning of the 1900s, for the children living in the North-Sweden Finnish Diaspora areas boarding schools were built. One type of these schools was called *arbetsstuga*³⁷ in Swedish and *työtupa* in Finnish. For convenience, let's call them workhouses. The first workhouses in Norrbotten

³⁴ Bengt Pohjanen, "Pelastajia", 83.

³⁵ Ibid. 84.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Andersson and Kangassalo 2009, 106.

county were built in January 1903.³⁸ A workhouse was a kind of practical school, where poor children were taught different handicrafts for the purpose of counteracting unemployment, poverty and begging. In these institutions the children also received a meal after work. In the Norrbotten county's workhouses the use of Finnish was forbidden, thus they were of great importance for the spread of the Swedish language. This is why Pohjanen quotes a passage from the resolution concerning the use of language:

"In 1924, a decision was taken according to which it was »strängeligen förbjuden« (strictly forbidden) to use the Finnish language in the workhouses."³⁹

While the majority discourse pretended to only be of help, the minority discourse interpreted this decision quite in the opposite way: the Finnish speaking parents remonstrated to have their children forced into workhouses. They were against their children to be deprived of their mother tongue and – by this – be estranged from their families. On the other hand, the operators of these institutions were trying to "convince" the parents by withdrawing financial support:

"Parents didn't want to send their children to workhouses to be tortured there. There were children who ran away, still – until children could travel home every Saturday – they were going to school anyhow. But later the authority started to constrain them to go to these institutions, the way they had done with those who had to perform military service.

In Matarinki, those in power decided to withdraw all kinds of educational support from those who didn't want to attend these institutions."⁴⁰

In the following quotation, Pohjanen phrases the minority view-point even more decisively, more explicitly, in a militant rhetoric. He uses words like *masters*, *force*, *demand*, *carve* suggesting application of constraint:

³⁸ Bengt Pohjanen, "Työtuvat tuleva Meänmaahan 1", in *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria*, by Bengt Pohjanen (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019), 89.

³⁹ Bengt Pohjanen, "Työtuvat tuleva Meänmaahan 3", in *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria*, by Bengt Pohjanen (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019), 93.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

“The »Swedishiser masters« claimed for force in order to take the children to compulsory education and »carve« them Swedish.”⁴¹

As I have already mentioned when examining the second half of the 19th century, the Church had a very important role in the process of Swedishization. The following quotation also proves that it was primarily from the point of view of spreading the Swedish language that the ministers considered the functioning of workhouses successful:

“The workhouses were successfully functioning. The assistant pastor from Junosuanto reported on the occasion of the episcopal visitation that the workhouses had played an exceptionally outstanding role in Swedishization (Episcopal visitation protocol in Pajala, 1916)”⁴²

From the point of view of the minority, this didn’t seem that successful, either, since learning Swedish didn’t mean a complementation of the mother tongue, much more its replacement reshaping at the same time minority identity from its very roots:

“The bishop did not care about the children. The most important thing for him was the spreading of the Swedish language and spirit. And that meant expunging of a language, of a whole culture and nation.”⁴³

As shown above, Finns and Sami people were considered as having a lower status in Sweden than Germanic people. Moreover, the Sami people were classified as having an even lower status, and were segregated both in cultural and political matters. In the following, Pohjanen indirectly quotes Berqvist, the bishop of Luleå. According to him, the Sami people cannot be integrated into a modern society since they cannot be “developed”. But the Finnish speaking inhabitants still have a chance to be elevated: “The bishop said that the Lapps didn’t want any kind of change. They should be forgotten. Their culture had no value at all [...] According to the bishop, the Lapps did not correspond to the Swedes. As for the Finns – there can be hope for them. After all, they are »bildbara«, that is they still can be developed.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid. 94.

⁴² Ibid. 93.

⁴³ Ibid. 94.

⁴⁴ Bengt Pohjanen, “Jumalanmiehet Meänmaassa”, in *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria*, by Bengt Pohjanen (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019), 95.

So then, the institution of workhouses effectively and quickly helped Swedishizing the Finnish speaking children. In the discourse of the authorities, this meant civilization and education to become good patriots, while for those oppressed it meant deprivation from their mother tongue.

V.2.2. Who should speak about the minority?

In her study about people's rights to their own mother tongue, Lindgren notes that the balance or the lack of balance in identity forming might have a strong influence upon the social, economic and spiritual welfare of the people.⁴⁵ A dynamic balance can be achieved when the individual or the community itself defines the main features and the borders of their identity.

Viinikka-Kallinen analyzes in some of her articles the role of the minorities' narratives in supporting their ethnic and linguistic identity.⁴⁶ She also emphasizes the importance of psychical needs in shaping our identity, and draws attention upon the difference between the effects of the minorities' own narratives and the narratives created by others about them.⁴⁷

In his feuilletons Pohjanen presents the equivocal picture drawn by the Swedish majority about the Finnish speaking minority. The children are presented as poor and miserable and piteous. The negative advertisement of their status was even meant to be embodied in a statue:

"They were advertising us, too: from the Chapter in Luleå they asked for a statue representing two miserable children dressed in rags, by which

⁴⁵ Anna-Riitta Lindgren, 'Oikeus omaan kieleen', *Virittäjä* 2 (2001): 247.

⁴⁶ Anitta Viinikka-Kallinen, "Kuka kertoo meikäläisistä? Tekstit ja tarinat vähemmistöidentiteetin kantajana", in *Tutkielmia vähemmistökielistä Jäämereltä Liivinvantaan. Vähemmistökielten tutkimus- ja kouluverkoston raportti II*, ed. Miia Mikkonen, Helena Sulkala and Harri Mantila (Oulu: Suomen ja saamen kielen ja logopedian laitoksen julkaisuja, 2001); Anitta Viinikka-Kallinen, "Taistelu sieluista – Identiteetin rakentajat ristiretkellä alueitten Euroopassa", in *Tutkielmia vähemmistökielistä Jäämereltä Liivinvantaan. Vähemmistökielten tutkimus- ja koulutusverkoston raportti III. N:o 20*, ed. Niina Määttä and Helena Sulkala (Oulu: Oulun yliopisto, 2001); Anitta Viinikka-Kallinen, "While the wings grow – Finnic minorities writing their existence onto the world map", in *Planning a new standard language. Finnic minority languages meet the new millennium*, Studica Fennica Linguistica, ed. Helena Sulkala and Harri Mantila (Helsinki: SKS, 2010).

⁴⁷ Anitta Viinikka-Kallinen 2001, 275.

even the ragged devil of Laestadius seemed to be an angel. [meaning that] There was nothing else here, except misery."⁴⁸

They also issued postcards illustrating the godforsaken environment where these people lived in the Torne Valley. Pohjanen contradicts this information making reference to the experience of those who travelled in the region and saw big houses, buildings and stables everywhere:

"In 1933, they were still sending pictures which showed miserable little rustling houses and ramshackle stables. Although the valley was full of big stables, houses and buildings. And all who travelled by knew it."⁴⁹

In her above mentioned article, Viinikka-Kallinen speaks about the majority mentally taking over of the minority and defines it as it follows: "someone else defines the group or the individual and takes over their imagination, narratives and experiences."⁵⁰

It is only natural that people and cultures meet. But what a problem really means is the fact that the political and economic "taking over" affects the relationship between cultures, as well, meaning that the dominant part determines the minority culture from its own point of view, a priori marginalizing it. The cultural hegemony underestimated the minority language and culture from the very beginning, influencing at the same time the whole minority to accept an extrinsic picture of them created by the majority.⁵¹ The Meänkieli minority identified themselves with this distorted external image created about them:

"The worst thing in all this is the fact that people have believed all these things about themselves. They still do." (Työtuvat tuleva Meänmaahan 1 90)

This identification with a negative self-image has had serious consequences even up to nowadays, such as chronic identity problems or ethnostress (associated with the weakening of in-group loyalty, the questioning of belonging together with those who speak the same minority language and even estrangement).

⁴⁸ Bengt Pohjanen, "Työtuvat tuleva Meänmaahan 1", 89.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 90.

⁵⁰ Anitta Viinikka-Kallinen 2001, 277.

⁵¹ Ibid. 276.

I have mentioned that the Finnish speaking community was depicted as poor, piteous, uncivilized still capable of development. On the other hand, they were assigned an identity that was characterized by the contradiction between Swedish heart and non-Swedish mother tongue as well as the eager desire to learn the majority language. Let us see how Pohjanen mediates upon the discourse of the dominant on this topic:

“Those living on these banks are Swedish in their spirit and do not desire anything else but to learn the language of the Swedish kingdom.”⁵²

The perspective of the dominated is quite opposite in this respect, as well; their experience was that the discourse of those in power was aimed against them:

“The lords came and talked – against us. The great fatherland movement was started in the 1920s, by Tenerz. One of its spokesmen was bishop Bergqvist: »The tongue talks another language but the heart is Swedish.«”⁵³

Pohjanen quotes bishop Bergqvist who urged on the young generation to learn the language of the country, because it was beautiful (implying that the minority language was not), and to be proud of it. He also emphasized the exclusive relationship between Christian faith and the Swedish language in Sweden:

“»The young must learn to love the Swedish homeland and the Swedish language. They must be proud that they have the opportunity to learn this beautiful language, spoken by the whole country.« In 1912 [bishop Bergqvist] said that both our spiritual heritage and Christian faith are Swedish.”⁵⁴

We can sum up this subchapter by drawing attention to the fact that depending on who is speaking about the minority, contradictory pictures are given about them: what seems a natural necessity from the point of view of those in power (presenting the underdevelopment of those belonging to the minority and the need to civilize them also by all means, including language

⁵² Bengt Pohjanen, “Työtuvat tuleva Meänmaahan 3”, 94.

⁵³ Bengt Pohjanen, “Ummikot räkättävvä Särkivaaran laiassa”, in *Vaihettaa kieltä, vaihettaa naamaria*, by Bengt Pohjanen (Överkalix: Barents Publisher, 2019), 105.

⁵⁴ Bengt Pohjanen, “Jumalanmiehet Meänmaassa”, 96.

assimilation), is experienced by the minority as a distorted and obtrusive picture. Unfortunately, these two perspectives never meet.

Conclusions

In my study, I was looking for an answer to the question of how modernization affected the Meänkieli-speaking community in Northern Sweden during the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, as reflected in some feuilletons written by Bengt Pohjanen. While analyzing the corpus, I aimed at a relational interpretation of history, culture, literature and identity.

My study is built up along two parallel research questions and in the following I am going to sum up the answers I have found to them.

The first question was how modernization and the necessity of learning Swedish were phrased in the Swedish power discourse quoted by Pohjanen. In these discourses, it is formulated as natural requirement that the language assimilation of non-Swedish speaking people is necessary both from home security considerations, as well as to develop and modernize the Torne Valley, converting by this the inhabitants into reliable Swedish citizens. By the middle of the 19th century they were only offered the possibility of learning Swedish, while at the end of the century the inhabitants were indirectly forced to do that placing them under psychic pressure by propagating a distorted image created about them. According to this image, minority language speakers were poor, miserable and piteous. In the eyes of those in power, it was an obvious necessity to elevate these people by offering them a valuable language and culture instead of their own. As “meaningful symbolic behavior”, the majority discourse expresses the ideology of political, social and language superiority.

The second research question was what words and expressions – connected to modernization and abuse of power in constructing the national state – appear in Pohjanen’s texts and what is their emotional message. Pohjanen examines the dominant discourses both from his own and his community point of view and shows how deteriorative their effect was upon the Finnish-speaking community’s self-esteem, their language and ethnic identity, as well as what were the long-term effects upon their minority state. Taking into account the penman’s means, Pohjanen mainly uses irony,

hyperboles, metaphors and symbols to make his message even more expressive.

As “meaningful symbolic behavior”, the minority discourse expresses, on the one hand, the feeling of inferiority of the Meänkieli speakers compared to those who speak Swedish as their mother tongue and – as such – having a favored social and cultural position. On the other hand, it represents revolt and standing up against the indignity they had to experience.

Although, according to Karvonen⁵⁵, it is not possible to catch the intention of a writer, in the case of Bengt Pohjanen it is quite easy to do so. The clear intention of Pohjanen is to show the less known side of modernization, which is missing from the discourse of the Swedish majority history writing.

⁵⁵ Pirjo Karvonen, *Oppikirjateksti toimintana* (Helsinki: SKS, 1995), 46.

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