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From Silence to Silencing? Contradictions and Tensions in Language Revitalization

*, PIA LANE

Centre for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan (MultiLing), Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
* E-mail: pia.lane@iln.uio.no

Language revitalization is imbued with tensions, and while it often is emancipatory, reclaiming a language can be a painful, silencing experience. Processes of colonization have led to epistemological absences (Santos 2012), which may be conceptualized as manifestations of silence. Understanding how and why silences come about and linger today is important for overcoming challenges those engaging in language reclamation may face. Therefore, paying attention to silences and emotional aspects of revitalization processes is important. In order to explore the inherent tensions of revitalization processes, I investigate lived experiences of language reclamation, focusing on emotions and silences in revitalization processes of Sámi in Northern Norway. European nation states colonized not only in the global South, but also 'at home'. Thus, the South, in the form of silenced and marginalized populations, also exists in the global North (Santos 2012). Drawing on perspectives from Southern Theory and Gordon's (2017) sociology of haunting, I investigate silences, emotions and tensions in language reclamation to shed light on how our colonial past may re-emerge in processes of language reclamation.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes the past resurfaces in the present, like whispers of ghosts from times gone by. For me, this happened when I found a pair of winter boots made of reindeer fur, shown in Figure 1. They evoked childhood memories of running in the snow with boots so light that it felt like flying through the snow and the blue light of the winter midday twilight in Northern Norway. Bare feet in the fragrant dried sennegrasses, the Carex vesicaria sedge, that kept my feet warm and dry, smooth reindeer fur, and colourful ribbons as decorations.

When I look at these boots now, they make me reflect on silences, things not talked about, and languages not passed on. My extended family is coastal Sámi and Kven, but this was a silent part of our lives; many of my cousins, like myself, until recently did not realize that our childhood homes were multilingual and

Figure 1: Sámi winter boots made of reindeer fur. Photo Copyright: Pia Lane. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

included Sámi in our linguistic repertoires. The question I now keep returning to is: How is it possible that we did not realize that we are Sámi? I grew up with Sámi traditions, such as these boots, a *goahti* (sod hut) in the mountains, reindeer meat brought home when my late stepfather assisted his reindeer herding friends during slaughter season, acquaintances who greeted us with *bures* or *päivä* when they dropped in, and family gatherings where Norwegian, Kven (a Finnic minoritized language) and Sámi were spoken. A few years ago, a historian told my mother that her maiden name is an old Sámi family name from Northern Finland. Yet, our background and languages were left to reside in silence. For me this was vividly brought back when I saw my Sámi winter boots anew, which became a material reminder of the silences of the past and made my perspectives shift, making me embark on a path to explore silences.

I suggest that silence is important for understanding language revitalization, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively because the goal of language revitalization is to pave the way for more speakers. While revitalization may be a process of healing, it is also imbued with emotional tensions, which I aim to explore in this article. After some remarks on methodology and data, I offer a short background section on the Sámi people in Norway. I then explore three aspects of silencing, which I see as lingering consequences of a colonial past: (1) silencing by the nation state through oppressive policies, (2) silencing as a response to discourses of purism and (3) self-silencing resulting from the long-term traumatic impact of past experiences of colonialism. In the discussion of silences, I draw on some aspects of decolonial and Southern Theory, particularly Santos' Epistemologies of absences and emergences, and Gordon's concept of haunting, thus emphasizing *epistemological aspects* of these approaches. In her argument for a Southern Theory, Connell (2007) discusses how knowledge production is connected to power hierarchies, which leads to global centres, 'metropoles',

producing knowledge which is seen as objective, neutral and universal. Such knowledge, therefore, becomes hegemonic and silences other forms of knowledge, not least Indigenous ones. In this article, I attempt to apply insights from Southern and Indigenous scholarship in order to shed light on how our colonial past may emerge in processes of Indigenous language reclamation.[1] One of Connell's arguments is that 'colonized and peripheral societies produce social thought *about the modern world* which has as much intellectual power as the metropolitan social thought, and more political relevance' (2007: xii), though their insights have been overlooked. Santos refers to such processes as (2016: 18) epistemicide—'the destruction of knowledge through colonial domination'. Processes of colonization have led to epistemological absences (Santos 2012), which I, in this article, conceptualize as different manifestations of silence. Understanding how and why such silences come about and linger today is important for overcoming challenges those engaging in language reclamation may face. I conclude by discussing why paying attention to silences and emotional aspects of revitalization processes is important.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Becoming or remaining multilingual can be a costly process for individuals, and language revitalization often is imbued with contradictions and paradoxes. In order to shed light on such inherent tensions, I will analyse the experiences of people who have reclaimed Sámi, drawing an online blog by Siri Gaski (real author name), perspectives from Jovnna (pseudonym) in a study published by Rasmus and Lane (2021), and most prominently an interview I conducted with Bjørn (pseudonym) in 2020 and also observations and interviews during fieldwork for two previous projects investigating language shift and language standardization. Both Jovnna and Bjørn grew up in families where Sámi was spoken, but they did not start speaking Sámi until they were adults. These data are supplemented by excerpts from other interviews and published research findings by other scholars on the reclamation of Indigenous languages. In line with Leonard (2017: 19), I see language reclamation as the 'right to speak a language and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives' and as a process of bringing the language forward to new uses and new users (Hornberger et al. 2016). I understand revitalization as a more abstract and generic term that privileges language, cf. the definition by Hinton, Huss and Roche (2018: xxi): 'Language revitalization is commonly understood as giving new life and vigor to a language that has been decreasing in use (or has ceased to be used altogether)'. In this article, I focus on experiences of taking back a language that was spoken in one's family, but a language one did not learn while growing up. Such processes often are anchored in community reclamation efforts, and my aim is to shed light on the complex experiences of individuals and the challenges they face, which often are 'silenced' in narratives of hope and healing. My reason for this is twofold: there is a need for more knowledge

of individual experiences in these processes, and a focus on how they make sense of these experiences contributes to 'speaking back', which gives space for other voices and knowledge and may contribute to healing (Mckenzie 2022). Language reclamation may, therefore, be understood as a type of decolonization because it takes communities and their histories and needs as a starting point (Leonard 2017), thereby opening up for more engagement with individual experiences. Such decolonization work can be challenging because this often entails facing consequences of colonial heritage still present today.

Reclamation of an Indigenous language in a European context is a reminder that European nation states colonized not only in the global South, but also 'at home'. Thus, the South is not a purely geographical concept (Guilherme and de Souza 2019); it also exists in the Global North in the form of silenced and marginalized populations (Santos 2012). European Indigenous groups were subject to stringent assimilation policies, which was the case of the Sámi in Norway. In keeping with Southern Theory and Indigenous research traditions, the locus of enunciation (Mignolo 1994), or the position from which researchers speak and write, is particularly important when analysing deeply personal issues, such as processes of silence and silencing in language revitalization. This article does not present an analysis of my own experiences of language reclamation, but I incorporate autobiographical perspectives as my own lived experiences of language form the backdrop of the analysis. Taking an auto-ethnographic approach may open up a wider lens on the world, producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience (Ellis and Bochner 2000) or what Bainbridge (2007: 2) calls an 'epistemology of insiderness', which is important in Indigenous settings (Chew et al. 2015) because it incorporates subjectivity and emotionality.

Indigenous research and Southern perspectives remind us that all knowledge is produced somewhere. Including these perspectives may lead to what Santos (2017: 258) calls 'ecology of knowledges', which implies 'bringing scientific knowledge and non-academic knowledge together'. In this sense, merging the personal with the academic is a form of intercultural translation or 'understood as a procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among the diverse experiences of the world' (Santos 2012: 58) and contributes to a decolonial perspective. Our subjectivity and personal experiences may help us ask new questions, which, in turn, leads to new insights and help us refine our analysis. As a researcher who has experienced the consequences of language shift and reclaimed a minoritized language (Kven) and who is in the process of reclaiming an Indigenous identity (Sámi), my lived experiences bring an extra dimension to the analysis.

THE SÁMI PEOPLE IN NORWAY: FROM OPPRESSION TO REVITALIZATION

The Sámi people are Indigenous people who traditionally live in the northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway and north-western Russia. The nine

Sámi languages belong to the Finno-Ugric language family and follow an East-West band, and the same Sámi languages are spoken in different countries. In Norway, three Sámi languages are spoken: North Sámi, Lule Sámi and South Sámi, and there are attempts to revitalize Skolt Sámi and Ume Sámi, spoken in Finland and Sweden, respectively. North Sámi is the largest language with approximately 25,000 speakers (Todal 2020).

A watershed in the history of the Sámi people in Norway occurred in 1979 when the Norwegian Parliament voted to allow for the construction of a hydro-electric power plant in Sámi reindeer herding areas. Though the power plant was constructed in spite of protests and demonstrations, these events in tandem with claims to linguistic, cultural and political rights by Indigenous communities internationally, spurred Sámi revitalization processes. Significant changes on the national level took place, including the Sámi Act of 1987, whose purpose is to enable the Sámi people in Norway to safeguard and develop their language, culture and way of life; the establishment of the Sámi Parliament in 1989; and Norway's ratification in 1990 of the *ILO Convention 169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries.*

The 'core' Sámi area is in the inland region, where the language shift happened last (Rasmussen and Nolan 2011; Johansen 2013) and also where the revitalization movements had a stronger foothold than in the coastal Sámi areas. Along the coast, the language shift had progressed further and the lifestyle of the coastal Sámi population did not differ significantly from that of other groups. There was also substantial intermarriage, as is the case in my family. During the last decade, there has been a new awareness of our Sámi background, but also a recognition of our multilingual and diverse region in the coastal Sámi areas, resulting in culture and language revitalization. Today, state policies on diversity and minority and Indigenous issues have been implemented in the educational system (Keskitalo and Olsen 2019), and within the Sámi language administrative district (where Sámi speakers have the right to use Sámi in most public domains), pupils have a right to education in Sámi. Both within this district and in the rest of Norway pupils have a right to study Sámi as the first language or the second language if certain conditions are met (Sámi as the second language is an option for pupils of Sámi background who have not acquired Sámi at home).

The educational system has been an important arena for the revitalization of Sámi, particularly in municipalities where pupils may get an education in Sámi. Schools are a place where one may choose Sámi as a subject, which has brought about a generation of new speakers—'individuals with little or no home or community exposure to a minority language but who instead acquire it through immersion or bilingual educational programs, revitalization projects or as adult language learners' (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2015: 1). In Indigenous settings, new speakers who acquire their language through education, often find it difficult to be recognized as legitimate and authentic speakers, and in this article, I will explore some of the challenges new speakers of Sámi face.

REVITALIZATION, RECLAMATION AND EMOTIONS

Numerous investigations of language shift, language maintenance and language reclamation have been conducted in sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and linguistics, focusing on language communities, intergenerational transmission of minority languages and language revitalization. Consequences of language shift have been addressed and analysed across geographical contexts (Fishman 1997, Kulick 1997, Hornberger 2002, Romero-Little et al. 2007, Johansen 2013, King and Hermes 2014, De Korne 2017). In contrast to language shift, language revitalization is often portrayed as an emancipatory process through which speakers find and develop their own voice, identity and belonging. Dorian (1987) points out that language maintenance efforts may provide some compensation for the pain of stigma and ridicule experienced by minority language speakers, mitigate negative family attitudes, and valorize traditional life ways and transmission of ethnic history; therefore, language reclamation constitutes a process of healing (also Hinton et al. 2018). For many, the process of taking the language of their parents and grandparents back is characterized by a strong investment, but also emotional tensions, and this process may be so demanding that they give up and reside in silence. Therefore, my aim is to shed light on how speakers experience language reclamation. As remarked by Hinton et al. (2018) revitalization can be a heavy burden to bear for those who were once forced to shift away from their first language because this rips open old wounds, while revitalization may make others feel empowered. Such tensions are found in many contexts, and often they are accompanied by deep emotional experiences. Speakers of Ojibwe in Minnesota may favour ritualized language use because this feels safer (King and Hermes 2014), fluent speakers of Isthmus Zapotec in Mexico express insecurity over the influence of Spanish in their spoken Zapotec (De Korne 2017), and younger speakers of many American Indigenous languages report having been criticized by elders when they made mistakes (Hinton and Ahlers 1999). Researchers investigating second language acquisition have also been interested in the role of emotions in the acquisition and learning of new languages (SLA), and there is an increased focus on social and interpersonal aspects of emotions (Block 2003, 2014; Busch 2017; Kramsch 2006; Ortega 2014). Lately, scholars drawing on SLA perspectives have examined heritage language anxiety (Sevinç and Backus 2017; Tallon 2011). Sevinç and Backus (2017) identified a vicious circle where language anxiety caused avoidance strategies. Such strategies are common in Indigenous contexts as well, leading to different types of silences.

Silences and emotional experiences are deeply embedded in revitalization processes. In the remainder of the article, I explore three types of silences. I first discuss silencing by the nation state to show how national policies silenced Sámi speakers. I then aim to show that the consequences of our colonial past may resurface in peoples' lived experiences of language as silencing by others and self-silencing.

SILENCING BY THE NATION STATE

Historically, Norway implemented systematic oppressive policies towards the Sámi and other minoritized groups, resulting in a language shift and a devaluation of local culture. During the enlightenment, similar to how Indigenous peoples in North America were romanticized by European intellectuals, the Sámi were perceived as living in harmony with nature, unspoiled by modern civilization. Initially, there was a focus on converting the Sámi to Christianity, a process in which the mother tongue was seen as essential, leading to the translation of the Bible and other religious texts into Sámi languages. During the nation-building process in the 19th century, this changed, and the goal of Norwegian policies became to Norwegianize the Northern minorities; boarding schools to promote the Norwegian language and culture were built, the use of Sámi as a supporting language in education became prohibited, and ownership of land was controlled by the authorities. Across the world, Indigenous people were subject to direct and indirect exertion of power and targeted by stringent linguistic assimilation policies, which in combination with processes of modernization and economic development led to widespread language shift.

Often the educational system is a key arena for assimilatory efforts (Ngũgĩ 1986), and in interviews I have conducted, my grandparents' and parents' generation talk about how attending school without speaking Norwegian was a burden they did not wish to place on their children (Lane 2010). Our languages and ways of speaking were allocated to the realm of non-languages, while Norwegian was the only proper language worth knowing and speaking. The educational system has the power to control perception and shape how its subjects see and understand the social world; therefore, education may be used as a means for authorities to achieve domination. In my case, previous generations were silenced by their experience of starting school 'without a language' and then later as adults they passed the heritage of silence on to us by using only the national language (Lane in press). Perhaps the greatest 'success' of the Norwegianization policy was that the Kven and Sámis Norwegianized ourselves. Ngũgĩ (1986: 16) points out 'economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others'. Such domination through control of people's culture and self-perception led to layers of silence, of which language shift is perhaps the most obvious, but there are other silences such as loss of ways of knowing and traditions. Another silencing deeply connected to language shift is the silencing of who we are, as illustrated by the story of my reindeer boots. Loss of language and culture are intertwined, as Brown and Deumert (2017) show for Khoisan heteroglossic revitalization in South Africa, which encompasses both language and cultural practices.

When outlining epistemologies of the South Santos (2012) mentions four steps, namely sociology of absences, sociology of emergences, ecology of knowledge and intercultural translation. A sociology of absences helps us uncover

ways of knowing that have been made invisible in modernist and universalist knowledge production: whatever does not exist in our society is often actively produced as non-existent (Santos 2016) and acknowledging this will allow us to expand the relevant experiences of the world. Non-existence is produced whenever a certain entity is discredited and considered invisible, non-intelligible or discardable (Santos 2012). Language revitalization, when rooted in local practices, may be a way to transcend invisibility and empower Indigenous peoples, as pointed out by Sehume (2019) in his discussion of Khoisan. Scholars such as Santos (2012), Connell (2007), and Guilherme and de Souza (2019) draw our attention to how the production of knowledge privileges certain types of knowledge and how other types of knowledge are marginalized or even silenced, including in the field of applied linguistics as discussed by Kubota (2020) and Pennycook and Makoni (2019). Many of these scholars focus on large-scale knowledge production. My focus is on how absences and silences may affect the life worlds of individuals, and my attempt is, as phrased by Gordon (2011: 1) about:

> how to understand and write evocatively about some of the ways that modern forms of dispossession, exploitation and repression concretely impact the lives of the people most affected by them and impact our shared conditions of living.

To me, this meant addressing different types of silences in revitalization processes. Gordon developed an evocative vocabulary to address the invisible but still present consequences of oppressive policies—they are haunting ghosts or spectres in our lives (2011: 2):

> haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with […] it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely.

During my childhood, the Norwegianization policies had been abandoned, but its ghosts were still present, my childhood boots were a very material reminder. To me, the act of picking up these boots and reflecting on the many silences they represent became the start of what Gordon (2017: 8) calls a transformative recognition:

> The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something is lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.

When people of Sámi background talk about why they did not speak their Indigenous language when growing up, such reflections illustrate that language practices can be internalized so subtly that one does not notice what is happening. This is expressed by Bjørn (pseudonym), whom I interviewed in 2020. We had never met before, but it turned out that we had spent most of our childhoods in neighbouring multilingual municipalities where Norwegian held a hegemonic position. I started the interview by explaining that I wanted to know more about how people experienced starting to speak Sámi as an adult and that at the end of the conversation, I would share some of my experiences with language reclamation.

Bjørn grew up in a Sámi-speaking family and remembers understanding Sámi as a child, but as was the case in my childhood as well, adults spoke Norwegian to him. His mother said that she did not speak Sámi to him, because 'æ ville deg ikke så ondt'—I didn't want to cause you any harm. Bjørn described a situation characterized by an unspoken practice that children did not speak Sámi:

> det var veldig hardt (.) sånn der implisitt (.) det var en sånn der veldig veldig veldig sterk sånn der (.) du prater ikke samisk der.h (.) og (.) æ vet ikke (.) da liksom (.) ja (.) æ prata ikke samisk
>
> it was very hard (.) like implicit (.) there was such a very very very strong implicit experience.. you don't speak Sámi there.h (.) I don't know (.) then like (.) yes (.) I didn't speak Sámi

This is underscored by the reiteration of *veldig* 'very', which is repeated three times with exaggerated stress on the first syllable. Later in the interview, Bjørn said that at the time he did not notice that the children spoke Norwegian, and only later did he reflect on this language practice with childhood friends, realizing that 85–90 per cent of the children should have spoken Sámi. Such unawareness of an ongoing language shift is not uncommon (Kulick 1997), and is made possible because families socialize each other into communication practices that silence certain languages and favour others. While the actions of individuals establish social practices that come to be seen as natural and unquestionable, when analysing language shift, as pointed out by Davis (2017), we should take care to not erase the role and agency of colonial powers. Meek (2012: 22) observes that while Indigenous people may 'refrain from using their heritage language out of shame, politeness, or shyness, the fact that they do so is resonant of their history', including oppression and derogatory ideologies. Actions and perceived choices leading to language shift are embedded in ideologies that the social actors themselves may not be aware of, and often only manage to articulate in retrospect, and this might be when ghosts resurface.

SILENCING BY OTHERS

During the time spent in the north, I started noticing that Kven and Sámi people used the word *språksperra* or 'the language barrier' when talking about their

challenges of speaking Kven or Sámi, in spite of their having studied Sámi in school. They also talked about *språkpoliti* or 'the language police'—more proficient speakers who would correct the way they spoke Sámi, a form of linguistic purism also attested in other contexts (Dorian 1994; Field 2009). This resonated with my own experience having reclaimed Kven as an adult; I felt that Kven was a language I ought to speak, and preferably should speak fluently. Other researchers have also commented on how *språksperre* 'language barrier' has been used to describe this fear of speaking. In his discussion of overlooked issues of language revitalization Todal (2007: 205) mentions the language barrier and worries about being corrected by other speakers, citing Anders from the South Sámi area:

> Det ligg underbevisst at du skulle ha snakka samisk meir og betre. Ein skulle snakke rein samisk. Er det ikkje perfekt, får du halde kjeft. Det har vore lite toleranse for å gjera feil.
>
> There is an underlying subconscious attitude that you should have spoken Sámi more and better. You should speak pure Sámi. If it's not perfect, you should shut up. There has been little tolerance for making mistakes [article published in Norwegian, my translation]

Lately, the term *språksperra* has also been used in public spaces, such as online blogs, Facebook groups, letters opinion pieces in newspapers, etc. In 2012, the theme of the annual gathering of Noereh, a Sámi youth organization, was the language barrier. The participants produced a series of photos illustrating the process of facing and overcoming the language barrier. Figure 2 is one of them.

Figure 2: Over to the other side. Photo Copyright: Monica Hætta, Marita Kristin Eilertsen and Noereh—Sámi nuoraidorganisašuvdna. This image/content is not covered by the terms of the Creative Commons licence of this publication. For permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder.

The caption reads 'OVER TO THE OTHER SIDE' (in Norwegian, my translation), and the photo illustrates overcoming the language barrier. The person in the foreground is in the process of sawing through a barrier. The group on the other side is divided in two; the front row cheers him on, smiles and takes on an open body posture, whereas the second group, positioned in the back, takes a dismissive stance. They seem to signal rejection through their body posture—folded arms across their bodies, serious facial expressions and dressed in black. The webpage offers no explanation of the photo, but based on continuous fieldwork, I see this group as representing what often is referred to as the language police. The language police is perceived as traditional, fluent speakers who correct or even ridicule a person who has started to speak Sámi, leading to or strengthening their fear of speaking. Gal and Woolard (2001) describe two ideologies—ideology of anonymity and ideology of authenticity, defining hegemonic and minority languages, respectively. The majority of languages get their authority from a conception of anonymity; a language not associated with a specific group but rather the voice of everyone and thus not contributed to anyone in particular. This, in turn, gives the majority of languages a hegemonic power. Indigenous languages, on the other hand, are often seen as belonging to a specific group of people, rooted in a cultural context and belonging to a place (Higgins 2019). Therefore, speakers of Indigenous languages are expected to embody this rootedness of which language is seen as a central component.

The goal of language revitalization efforts is to enable individuals to reclaim a minority language, but paradoxically the language of such new speakers may be perceived as less authentic because the variant acquired through education tends to be standardized (Lane et al. 2017). Hence, the varieties spoken by such new speakers may be perceived as non-legitimate by traditional speakers and sometimes even by the new speakers themselves (O'Rourke et al. 2015). Such tensions involve negotiating authority and legitimacy with respect to authenticity, rootedness and language rights, thereby contributing to hierarchies of Indigenousness or 'varying degrees of authenticity assigned based on different ideological configurations of the language-identity relationship' (Shulist 2016: 113). Access to linguistic resources is associated with power, and revitalization processes can empower those who can claim a role as, and get recognized as, legitimate speakers of an Indigenous language, whereas those who do not succeed may feel side-lined and insecure. Based on her study of Navajo language ideologies, Field (2009: 47) points out that linguistic purism may trigger linguistic insecurity and thereby intensify language shift, an observation also made by Meek (2012) and Hinton and Ahlers (1999), who noted that younger adults refrained from speaking their Indigenous language when older speakers were present.

Avoidance and fear of speaking are described in a blog entry by Siri Gaski.[2] Her blog addresses a wide range of topics, often with a performative and humoristic stance. The extract below follows a section where she states that of the three languages she speaks, Sámi is the language she likes the least speaking, and that it, therefore, is obvious that she should speak more Sámi (Gaski 2011):

> But it is scary. It is really scary and I don't know if I dare. But my Sámi pain – the real, genuine pain, not the ironic Sámi pain – is, as for so many others, the language

Her experience echoes something Bjørn and I talk about at the end of our interview, namely a shared feeling that the minoritized language is the most difficult one to use, and we both describe speaking as scary. Likewise, Siri states that it is really scary and she does not know if she dares, Bjørn and I used the same adverb *skummelt*—'scary', though in the blog entry Siri relates the scary feeling to what she calls the real, genuine Sámi pain, identified by Siri as the language.[3] Siri goes on to state that she does not want to fear her language:

> But anyway, I don't want to be afraid of my language, I want to use it without fear and jump into it so often that I no longer get affected by potential language police bruises, even if this will take time and perhaps never go away, but sometimes one has to stop fearing. Now I will try. At least I'll think about it.

Again the emotional vocabulary is striking 'I don't want to be afraid of my language, use it without fear, stop fearing', and Siri also uses the word *språkpolitiblåmerka* 'language police bruises'. To get a bruise is a physical experience caused by usually hurtful contact with something or someone, but Siri's use of *bruises* here should be seen as a metaphor for the results from contact with the language police. Getting a bruise may be experienced as hurtful, but perhaps more importantly, it is an embodied consequence and remains for a while reminding us of the contact that caused the bruise. The fear of being bullied may therefore silence speakers, as also described by Jonsson and Rosenfors (2017) in their analysis of Elle, a Sámi woman who, though having learnt Sámi in school, only started speaking Sámi when she was 14. She experienced being teased when she made grammatical errors.

This complex history of shame and silence that new speakers of minority languages often carry has been passed on by their parents' and grandparents' generation. Often we are not even aware of how or when attitudes and feelings have been passed on to us and later materialized in practice, because time erases the memory of learned practice. Emotional aspects of language learning are particularly salient in Indigenous contexts, perhaps because speakers are made into the major carriers and responsible parties for securing the future of the language and carrying the burden of authenticity. Emotional aspects of language learning in these contexts seem to be more complex than in other contexts for language learning because of the identity politics and social control as to who has the right to claim the role of an authentic speaker, which runs deeper in Indigenous settings. In her study of Indigenous language education in Peru, Dueñas (2021) shows how youth who are reluctant to speak Quechua in an educational setting may be positioned as language deniers—someone who should and could, but would not speak the language. While anxiety is a documented aspect of the second language learning process, the identity politics around who can claim an

'authentic' Indigenous identity intensify this dynamic (King and Hermes 2014). For many new speakers, a key part of this perceived authenticity is to speak correctly and not make mistakes, as expressed by Jovnna from a village in the coastal Sámi area (Rasmus and Lane 2021):

Jus mun galgen hállat de mun galgen máhttit dan albma láhkai. Mun in sáhte boastut hállat. Dalle šattai áibbas sperre. Mun smihtten earát gal vurdet ahte mun máhtán albmaláhkai hállat. Mun jáhkán dat šattai ekstra sperre.

> If I was going to talk, then I had to talk perfectly and properly. I thought that I could not say something wrong. If I did that, the barriers came out. I thought that everyone expected that I should speak perfectly. I think that became an extra barrier (switch to Norwegian).

Learners may feel unsure when talking with more proficient speakers because they fear being corrected and resort to silencing themselves. Often speakers construct possible scenarios and encounter with perceived better speakers and imagine feared consequences (Juuso 2009). Such fears then lead to self-criticism and avoidance strategies. As is the case in several of the earlier examples, the worry of being corrected is also evident in Jovnna's statement as he says he thought everyone expected him to speak properly. This was also brought forward by Bjørn, who said:

> det her med å prate samisk (.) du skulle kunne det så bra (.) for at du ska (.) for at du ska (.) kunne prate det i det hele tatt (.) så e (.) så ligger lista ganske høyt (.) utfra kor bra du behersker det [..] prata du feil (.) så fikk du høre det

> this about speaking Sámi (.) you should know it so well (.) if you were (.) if you were (.) to speak it at all (.) so is (.) the bar is set quite high (.) according to how well you master it [...] if you made mistakes (.) you were told

King and Hermes (2014: 277) recount similar experiences by new speakers of Ojibwe:

> she was 'bullied' (in her words) and belittled by more advanced learners of Ojibwe when she attempted to practice speaking. These speakers made her feel anxious, insecure, and unworthy of the language—and like an inauthentic speaker

King and Hermes show how fear of belittlement for trying out the Indigenous language in conversation encourages learners to favour more passive (book learning or submersion) or more performance-based approaches (such as participating in ceremonies and settings where language use is ritualized). Hence, new speakers may perpetuate their feeling of inauthenticity through their own practices: by sticking to ritualized or emblematic language use, they stay on safe ground while perhaps simultaneously participating in language practices without taking the risk of feeling exposed or being ridiculed.

More proficient speakers who with good intentions correct new speakers may intend to offer support and guidance, but their actions may be interpreted as policing incorrect ways of speaking. Rasmus and Lane (2021) point out that the feeling of insecurity has both an outer and inner dimension; while new speakers often are worried about criticism and negative reactions from others, many of our participants talked more about self-criticism than being judged by others. I now turn to this third silence.

SILENCING OF OURSELVES

Self-silencing may be the result of the inner dimension of the feeling of insecurity, as the very act of speaking makes us feel uncomfortable and evokes feelings of insecurity and anxiety. Siri brings this up in a blog entry prior to the one mentioned above:

> Fear of using a language that should be the one I know the best but which isn't, fear that people will react to the fact that 'the daughter of …' doesn't know Sámi better than this, fear of not managing to say what I want to say. A whole lot of fear of a whole lot of stuff I know I shouldn't think about, but what I of course can't help thinking about

In this excerpt, Siri mentions that Sámi should be not only a language she knows, but the language she masters best, and she links this explicitly to a feeling of fear, repeating the noun *fear* at the beginning of three successive clauses, a literary technique that underscores her message. In her blog entries, Siri repeatedly returns to the perceived and expected ownership of Sámi, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

> But when we say that we learn Sámi perhaps often we mean that we want to know Sámi; because we know we should know it already, because this is or should be our mother tongue, so we want to skip the part where we try things out

Such a sense of belonging and ownership may strengthen a desire to learn an Indigenous language, but it can also be a dual-edged sword. The expectancy of reclaiming what one ought to already possess, described by Siri as *we know we should know it already*, places new speakers of Indigenous languages in a precarious position. When reclaiming an Indigenous language, new speakers find themselves in a space of tensions and possibilities as they strive to reclaim a language of their roots in order to become a speaker for the future. Through this process, they might be confronted with their own or their parents' silence and feeling of insecurity and shame. The history of Indigenous minority languages is often associated with both positive belonging to place and family, but also alienation, humiliation and shame, described by King and Hermes (2014: 279) as 'the scars of colonization' and Meek, drawing on Garrotte (2003), as

'a history of insecurities and a legacy of pain' (2022: 25). In reclamation processes, our encounters with colonial pasts become a reminder that the ghosts, what has been silenced or concealed, are very much alive and present (Gordon 2017). Such encounters may be painful on a deeply personal level as we face internalized scars and embodied memories when the colonial past resurfaces to haunt us.

Bjørn explains that his inner fear initially was a barrier to speaking Sámi, but it turned out that speaking Sámi was a lot easier than he expected. He started speaking Sámi when he moved to a larger town 'because there were many others who couldn't speak Sámi' and, like Jovnna, Bjørn made a conscious decision to use Sámi as his home language when he became a father. Jovnna explains that he initially just whispered to his child when they were alone so that nobody would hear him speaking Sámi and he could get used to the sounds of language without others listening (Rasmus and Lane 2021). When I asked Bjørn how he finds speaking Sámi compared to speaking Norwegian, he says that he still finds it harder to speak Sámi because he feels that he does not master Sámi equally well as Norwegian. He goes on to talk about a fear of speaking, and here his voice breaks:

> det e liksom det nesten (.) den her frykta liksom fra gaml- (.) som ble satt i meg (.) da æ va barn som sitter igjen (.) for æ opplevde jo det at når æ prata samisk (.) og (.) slutter å tenke på (.) klarer æ å uttrykke meg (.) alt det der (.) som kan sette stopp for (.) sette stopp for selvsikkerheta
>
> it is like it is almost (.) this fear from old- (.) which affected me (.) when I was a child (.) that remains (.) because I experienced when I speak Sámi (.) and (.) stop (.) thinking about (.) do I manage to express myself (.) all this (.) that can put a stop (.) put a stop to my self-confidence

Then follows a long pause and Bjørn laughs and goes on to say that when we talk about this he realizes that these are *sperrer* (barriers) inside his head that get activated quite frequently, but he realizes that this is just nonsense. Throughout our conversation, Bjørn's positioning shifts as he talks about how he set out to speak Sámi actively with his children and now also with his extended family. He recounts how he uses Sámi in professional settings, yet he keeps returning to the feeling of insecurity and having to overcome barriers.

Bjørn situates his fear of speaking in his head, and it is not uncommon to relate strong emotions to bodily experiences. Santos (2016: 26) underscores that the body has been overlooked in Western academic tradition: 'I think that the epistemologies of the South have focused on the body because the struggles are carried out by fighting bodies and the body suffers, rejoices, and dies'. In recent sociolinguistic research, a focus on the body as a resource in the semiotic repertoire has emerged. Language learning, including reclamation, is an embodied experience, and as pointed out by Busch (2017: 341) 'speakers—through emotionally loaded and bodily inscribed experience—"live" the

languages and ways of speaking to which they are exposed'. This is a key issue for understanding the processes of language shift and reclamation. Previous generations internalized the consequences of oppressive policies which then led to an unquestioned social practice of speaking Norwegian only to their children, resulting in a language shift. Such attitudes were passed on to my generation, who started the process of overcoming silence. Even though these policies now are a thing of the past, their consequences live on and may reappear in peoples' lived experiences of language, such as silencing by others and self-silencing. Indigenous language reclamation forces speakers to face a sense of loss and shame resulting from oppression and stigmatization experienced by themselves or their parents. Reclaiming a language may make speakers vulnerable and silence them in several ways: becoming an authentic speaker seems unattainable because they fear that their ways of speaking are viewed as less authentic when compared to those of traditional speakers. Through these processes they are faced with the ghosts of the colonial past, spectres that still haunt us and resurface in different ways in reclamation processes, leading to different types of silences.

HOPE AND TRANSFORMATIVE RECOGNITION

Silences are spectres; they are invisible, yet they are very much present as 'specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view' (Gordon 2011: 2). This is pivotal for language reclamation: we need to bring what has been in our blind field into view, which can be a deeply uncomfortable and even painful experience. However, as Gordon (2011: 7) reminds us, we are haunted, not only by ghost resurfacing from the past, but also by 'the shadowing of lost and better futures that insinuates itself in the something-to-be-done, sometimes as nostalgia, sometimes as regret, sometimes as a kind of critical urgency'. In Indigenous context, this 'something-to-be-done' frequently is language reclamation, and as I have attempted to show in this article, this is a complicated and sometimes contradictory process. Therefore, recognizing the disparate forces exerted on the individual in language reclamation processes is essential, including understanding how and why we are silenced and even silence ourselves, because like ghosts, silences can lose their grip on us when we face them. Haunting is a form of transformative recognition and has an inherent capability of spurring us into action, which in turn may lead to change. There are other possible futures, born out of struggle and awareness of suffering (Santos and Meneses 2020), therefore, facing hurts from the past is not in vain because this may bring about other futures. It is our bodies that forget, but it is also our bodies that can turn to remembering and reclaiming a silenced language (Lane in press). Overcoming silence may involve facing haunting social forces, which may be a daunting experience for new speakers who therefore need to be prepared for the challenges and joys ahead.

NOTES

1 I have cited several Sámi and other Indigenous scholars, but it is not always possible to tell from our family names that we are Sámi. This is the case for Indigenous scholars in other contexts as well.

2 The original text (in Norwegian) is available online.

3 In this blog entry, Siri Gaski does not explain what she means by the 'ironic Sámi pain', but I interpret this as using humour and irony to distance oneself from language loss and expectations that we should be 'genuine Sámi'.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Pia Lane is Professor of Multilingualism at the Center for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan (MultiLing), University of Oslo, Norway. Her research focuses on multilingualism, with a particular emphasis on language policy, language shift and language revitalization of Indigenous and minoritized languages. Her publications include Standardizing Minority Languages: Competing Ideologies of Authority and Authenticity in the Global Periphery, Routledge (co-edited with Costa and De Korne 2017) and Negotiating Identities in Nordic Migrant Narratives—Crossing Borders and Telling Lives, Palgrave (co-edited with Kjelsvik and Myhr 2022). She is co-editor-in-chief of LME Linguistic Minorities in Europe Online (LME), published by De Gruyter, and serves as a member of the Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
Address for correspondence: Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, P.O. Box 1102 Blindern, N-0317 Oslo, Norway. <pia.lane@iln.uio.no>