

The Sámi language



THE SÁMI LANGUAGE belongs to the Finno-Ugrian branch of the Uralic languages, and is linguistically related to the Baltic-Finnic languages (Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian). The Sámi language and traditional homeland stretches across the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden, as well as the Kola Peninsula in Russia. In Scandinavia, it stretches as far south as Femunden on the Norwegian side and to Dalarne in Sweden.

Northern Sámi is the largest Sámi dialect and is spoken by Sámis in Finland, Norway and Sweden. In 1979, a common written language for the Northern Sámi branch of the Sámi language was adopted. The orthography is close to the spoken language.

The Sámi language is rich in words and expressions describing nature, fauna, formations in nature and snow; terms that are important in hunting, fishing and reindeer herding societies. The changes in the Sámi lifestyle have resulted in loss of many particular terms and expressions which are no longer relevant or in use today.

A study conducted by the Sámi Trade and Development Centre in 2000 for the Sámi Language Council estimates Sámi language users in Norway at approximately 25,000. About half of these speak, read and write Sámi. There has been a positive development the past twenty years, particularly in the administrative area for Sámi language and encompassed by the Sámi Language Act in Norway, i.e. the municipalities of Nesseby, Tana, Karasjok, Porsanger and Kautokeino in Finnmark County, and Kåfjord in Troms County. Today, Southern Sámi is the most vulnerable Sámi dialect, since the Sámi language is no longer the everyday language in many South Sámi families. The Lule Sámi dialect is in a somewhat better position as many children are now learning Sámi at home and in school.

www.samediggi.no

www.galdu.org

The Sámi People – a Handbook, Karasjok 2006.



Language chart from Aage Solbakk, Sámi historjá 2 ("Sámi History 2").

1. Southern Sámi
2. Ume Sámi
3. Pite Sámi
4. Lule Sámi
5. Northern Sámi
6. Enare Sámi
7. Skolte Sámi
8. Ahkkil Sámi
9. Kildin Sámi
10. Ter Sámi