

Petter Morotaja

Inari Sámi language is a small Finnish-Ugric language spoken in an area circulating Lake Inari in Northern Finland. It is one of minority Sámi languages with only about 400 speakers. Not many years ago, Inari Sámi language was deemed to disappear, since most speakers were middle-aged or older as a result of Finnish assimilation. However, because of revitalizing efforts started in the 1980s and gaining momentum in later years it is not uncommon nowadays to hear children and young adults using Inari Sámi in their everyday lives in Inari. Inari Sámi language is a language of media, science, art, and literature.

To describe how Inari Sámi literature accounts for its history of marginal and marginalized language in the middle of bigger languages, there are two ways of looking at it. The first one is to look back and process the feelings of shame of speaking such an unpopular language and low esteem of speakers. These writings might be memoirs of school dormitories or stories about coping with changing environment and culture. The second one is to dismiss historical perspective and look into alternative realities - or perhaps just into future - where it is permitted to step outside of boundaries of a minority language. The two ways are both seen in Inari Sámi literature as a complement for each other. In my presentation, I am going to discuss the importance of both approaches.