

THE VOICE OF A “TONGUELESS” PERIPHERY

“My Tongue Means Yes and Amen”¹ (Bengt Pohjanen)

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Abstract:

In my study, I am going to examine the relationship between language, politics and poetry in the context of identity development concerning the Meänkieli speaking community living in the Torne/Tornio² Valley.

The Torne River Valley (or Tornedalian) Finns were cut off from Finland in 1809, when Sweden lost the territory of Finland in favour of Russia. Ever since, the Tornedalian Finns have become the victims of a definite assimilation policy.

Their linguistic emancipation started in the 1980s. Their language, Meänkieli, has been a minority language officially acknowledged in Sweden since 2000. Still, it is a seriously stigmatized and endangered language nowadays, as well.

Many people in the world think that “language” should be understood as the language spoken by the majority of a national state. Still, most of the world’s endangered languages are the languages of indigenous and ethnic groups that only exist as minority languages. It is paradoxical that minority languages constitute, in fact, the large majority, although they have been considered peripheral or marginalized.

The notion of “periphery versus centre” has a long tradition in being applied in different fields of human sciences, mainly in social and political analysis. The aim of my research on the identity of ethnic and linguistic minorities is to rethink these

¹ Quoted from Bengt Pohjanen’s poem *My Tongue Is My World*. Original Meänkieli title: *Minun kieli oon minun mailma*.

² The name of the border-river between Sweden and Finland is Torne in Swedish and Tornio in Finnish.

notions in terms of the dynamics of multilingual ethnic minority versus unilingual national majority. I disapprove of the idea that what belongs to the centre is to be considered a standard and of greater value than what is associated with the periphery. In fact "periphery" and "centre" are related and dynamic terms, depending on the perspective from which we look upon them.

The most eloquent example of the spiritual richness of the periphery in Sweden is Bengt Pohjanen who writes poetry, prose, drama, opera librettos, articles, film scripts etc. in three languages: Meänkieli, Swedish and Finnish. Possessing a thorough knowledge of the once lively Meänkieli culture, he is also a consistent representative of alterity in the hegemonic Swedish culture.

As Bengt Pohjanen is a writer and a poet, as well as a public figure, a key personality of revitalizing the Meänkieli language, his works are especially suitable to be examined in a complex way, from the point of view of different human sciences (linguistics, literature, sociology, psychology).

Rezumat:

Acest studiu își propune să prezinte legăturile multiple dintre limbă, cultură și politică în contextul dezvoltării identității colective a unei populații fino-ugrice din valea râului Torne/Tornio din nordul Suediei, vorbitoare de limba meänkieli.

Această populație a fost desprinsă de 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 politici puternice de asimilare.

Trezirea și emanciparea lor lingvistică și culturală a început în anii 1980. Cu toate că în Suedia de azi limba meänkieli este în mod oficial recunoscută ca limbă minoritară (din anul 2000), totuși a rămas o limbă grav stigmatizată și amenințată. Din punct de vedere cultural, cea mai importantă personalitate publică a comunității vorbitoare de meänkieli este scriitorul și poetul Bengt Pohjanen. Scrie în trei limbi - meänkieli, suedeză și finlandeză - proză, dramă, poezii, librete de operă și publicistică. În a doua parte a studiului prezintă metodele prin care Pohjanen reprezintă vocea „periferiei” în limba sa maternă, meänkieli, deconstruind ideea hegemoniei culturii suedeze.

Keywords: *minority language, policy of assimilation, Meänkieli, stigmatization, linguistic and cultural identity, postcolonial discourse.*

Language and politics

For the majority of the citizens of a national state, their language and ethnic affiliation is obvious. This is not accidental, as in most European countries, for instance, they speak a dominant language which has a solid

social and political position. In a stereotypical monolingual national state, land, nation and language can be interpreted as mirroring one another, as different manifestation forms of one and the same identity.³

But what about minority languages and their speakers? These languages are almost all endangered and researches concerning them all draw attention to the fact that more than seven thousand languages spoken nowadays in the world will be reduced to their half by 2100, as there is a language dying every fortnight.⁴ Since each language includes the given community world-view, their way of thinking, knowledge about their surrounding and their history, all these would die out with the language, meaning that an important part of our world's heritage would disappear, as well.

In case of language death it is as if it were a natural process in analogy with human life: we are born, we live and once we die. But the extinction of a language, nowadays the death of languages in mass, we could say, cannot be considered natural at all. The replacement, as well as the extinguishing of a language is a response to the pressure (social, cultural, economic, military) upon the community that speaks it.

When a monolingual community becomes bi- or multilingual, the identity principles change, as well. Naturally, there are always changes in a language-community, but nowadays the number of endangered and extinguishing languages has reached a frightening level. Endangerment of languages does not only mean continuous weakening of language-identity, but also changing and fragmentation of the language-connections system. And there is no new identity automatically forming instead of the one connected to land, language and culture.⁵ This is generally a long process, full of contradictions.

The status of Meänkieli in Sweden

In the Torne/ Tornio Valley (Tornionlaakso in Finnish and Tornedalen in Swedish) there were probably already living Finns before the

³ Riho Grünthal, "Kieliyhteisön rapautuminen ja kielellisen identiteetin muutos: 2000-luvun ersämordvalaiset ja vepsäläiset", in *Kielissä kulttuurien ääni*, ed. A. Idström, S. Sosa (Helsinki: SKS, 2009), 268.

⁴ <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/enduring-voices/>, accessed March 25, 2013.

⁵ Riho Grünthal, "Kieliyhteisön rapautuminen ja kielellisen identiteetin muutos: 2000-luvun ersämordvalaiset ja vepsäläiset", in *Kielissä kulttuurien ääni*, ed. A. Idström, S. Sosa (Helsinki: SKS, 2009), 269.

Middle Ages and the area was basically unified both from the language and cultural point of view.

After more than six hundred years of Swedish supremacy (1155-1809), Finland had become part of the Czar's Empire. In 1808-1809 the so called "Finland's War" took place between Russia and Sweden; as a result, Finland became part of Russia. The agreement signed on September 17 in Fredrikshamn (Hamina in Finnish), 1809 did not take into consideration the situation of languages and divided the Torne/ Tornio Valley into two: its eastern part, as belonging to the Finnish Grand Duchy, was annexed to Russia, while its western part remained under Swedish hegemony. Politics made the contact between the two parts much stricter. The Finns living on the eastern bank of the river have become part of the Finnish nation and their language has remained a Finnish dialect. Those on the western bank have become a linguistic and ethnic minority in Sweden, their language having separately developed.⁶

According to 1998 state statistics data, there are about 50,000 Tornedalians living on the territory of five municipalities of Northern-Sweden: Haparanda, Övertorneå, Pajala, Kiruna and Gällivare.⁷ According to Winsa their number is 35,000-75,000.⁸ Only a fragment of them still speak Meänkieli and they are middle aged or old. Tornedalians live also outside the valley of the Torne/ Tornio, in the southern and central parts of Sweden.

As seen from Stockholm, the political and cultural centre of the national state, North-Sweden and its Torne/ Tornio Valley have always been marginalized from every point of view, as an extraneous region, inhabited by people speaking foreign languages: Sami (by the Lapps) and Meänkieli⁹. This population speaking Finno-Ugric languages represented an

⁶ Paula Andersson and Raija Kangassalo, "Suomi ja meänkieli Ruotsissa", in *Monena suomi maailmalla*, ed. H. Jönsson-Korhola, A.-R. Lindgren (Helsinki: SKS, 2003), 104-108; Leena Huss and Anna-Riitta Lindgren, "Monikielinen Skandinavia", in *Monikielinen Eurooppa. Kielipolitiikka ja käytäntöä*, ed. M. Johansson, R. Pyykkö (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2005), 257-258.

⁷ Leena Huss and Anna-Riitta Lindgren, "Monikielinen Skandinavia", in *Monikielinen Eurooppa. Kielipolitiikka ja käytäntöä*, ed. M. Johansson, R. Pyykkö (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2005), 257.

⁸ Birger Winsa, "Flerspråkighetens socioekonomi i Tornedalen", in *Kieli- ja kulttuurikontaktit*, ed. H. Sulkala (Oulu: University of Oulu, 2000), 148-149.

⁹ I am only going to deal with Meänkieli in my study and only mention Sami, as they have more or less a similar fate.

embarrassing factor in the Swedish imagined community¹⁰. At the same time Meänkieli is also marginalized in the Finnish official discourse considering it only a dialect, while it is an officially accepted minority language in Sweden.

The reasons for such an extended loss of language are to be mostly found in the minority policy. These are, for instance economic subordination (the basically thinly populated Torne/ Tornio Valley is getting abandoned because of lack of jobs), as well as cultural marginalization, negative attitudes concerning the minority language (from the Swedish majority, from the Finns in Finland, from the inner group members who have become Swedish-speaking inhabitants), as well as the direct language discrimination (deep gap between official acceptance of linguistic human rights and their putting into practice, lack of education in the non-dominant language, discrimination of those speaking the minority language).

Despite the official acknowledgement of Meänkieli in Sweden, this can hardly be noticed in rights practice or in public awareness. It does not have a generally accepted literary language yet and revitalisation of the language – so much needed in the area – is at an initial phase.

Bengt Pohjanen – the trilingual Meänkieli

Bengt Pohjanen (born in 1944) is the prodigiously multilateral and prolific writer of the Torne/ Tornio Valley and dedicated representative of Meänkieli literature. He pays a lot of attention to use Meänkieli almost as much in his literary and public activity as he uses Swedish. Besides these two languages he also writes in Finnish. His own forty-two pages long bibliography includes different genres: novels, poems, lyrics, essays, dramas, feuilletons, texts for musicals, short stories. He is also a translator in nine languages: Swedish, Meänkieli, Finnish, English, German, French, Russian, Livonian and Karelian.

He wrote his first novel in 1979, in Swedish – *Och fiskarna svarar Guds frid* (*So The Fish(ers) Befit God's Peace*). At the beginning of his career he wrote in Swedish. Then, an international seminar in Stockholm was fate (and language-) turning for him. It was here that he discovered that there are a lot

¹⁰ I use the notion “imagined community” in the Andersonian sense. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

of writers in the world who are constrained to create in a language different from their own mother tongue.

“But there are lots like me living in the world! Colleagues came from Africa, from the Caribbean Islands, from India, Japan and many other places. There were a lot of us bind together by our mutual experiences of living along the border, being in minority and despised. It was easy to understand one another. I felt them close though they were living in far away places. They seemed to be my relatives, even if the colour of their skins was different from mine. I realized then that the world is not monolingual. The world was like our small community at the seminar and I was part of this world. I met Salman Rushdie there, the British writer from India, who told us about the way he wrote his first novel in English, while thinking in his own mother tongue. I only knew this situation very well. I was thereafter that I wrote my first Meänkieli novel – in my own tongue”.¹¹

Members of a language minority can easily feel themselves some kind of rare, strange beings, until they realise that there are quite many in a similar situation, and try not to feel their own difference in language as a hindrance. As a matter of fact, those are in majority in the world who think in their own mother tongue but are constrained to speak a more ‘valuable’ language in order to be considered humans in their own countries.

Pohjanen’s mother tongue is Meänkieli but the Swedish educational system had tried to eradicate it in him. He rediscovered his mother tongue as a young adult, ever since assuming an important role in the revitalisation of the Meänkieli language and culture.

His mother tongue is the immovable basis of his personality and even if he declares three languages as his own, his whole activity proves that Meänkieli has always been the most important for him, even if he does not explicitly say so.

Pohjanen is the author of the first novel ever written in Meänkieli (*Lyykeri*, 1985 – meaning *The Luger*), as well as of the first drama (*Kuutot*, 1987 – *The Kuutto Family*). His works prove that literatures give the individual a possibility to share in their own people’s or ethnic group’s culture and collective memory. One of Pohjanen’s main aims is to present the relation of the Meänkieli culture to the majority (Swedish and Finnish) cultures. He has

¹¹ Bengt Pohjanen, *A csempészkirály fia*, transl. by Enikő M. Bodrogi (Kolozsvár/ Cluj: Koinónia, 2011), 8.

a high sense of presenting the reticulation of sub- and over-ordination between the minority and majority cultures, the individual's experience in sharing the same fate or being different, as well as minority strategies in an exclusionary society.

Culture as a strategy for survival

Postcolonial discourse draws attention upon the fact that the cultures of peripheral groups are willingly left out from definitions built upon traditionally hierarchic structures. After the notion has been re-evaluated in a post-modern sense, the cultures of previously overshadowed groups have now received their deserved role. The most important increment of postcolonial researches is the surfacing of colonial unseen discourse, a discourse loaded with heavy psychological trauma. According to Said when we are talking about the cultures struggling against one another we easily forget that different designations can get in conflict even in the same culture.¹²

This phenomenon can be easily exemplified by Torne/ Tornio Valley literature as a whole, as its multilingualism and cultural multicolourness can be well fitted into the frame drawn by postcolonial discourse. Bhabha ascertains that a whole range of groups marginalized from the cultural or racial point of view *a priori* wear the distinct features of minority. "[...] a range of culturally and racially marginalized groups readily assume the mask of the black, or the position of the minority, not to deny their diversity, but audaciously to announce the important artifice of cultural identity and its difference [...]"¹³.

Postcolonial researches also suggest that – along the history – the very groups that mostly suffered (suppressed, forced to live in diaspora, and relocated) offer the really lasting moral teachings to humanity. "In this salutary sense, a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history – subjugation,

¹² Edward W. Said, "Bevezetés a posztkoloniális diszkurzusba", in *A posztmodern irodalomtudomány kialakulása*, ed. Bókay A. et al. (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), 605.

¹³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 63–64, <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/Bhabha-LocationofCulture-chaps.pdf>, accessed February 13, 2013.

domination, Diaspora, displacement – that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking”¹⁴.

Bhabha says that “Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational.”¹⁵ It is trans-national as nowadays postcolonial discourse is deeply rooted in the special stories of being culturally uprooted. And it is translational at the same time, as the local stories of uprootedness give a complex picture of what culture is.

In the postcolonial theoretical context, the notion of hybridity has a central role¹⁶. I am not in favour of this word, firstly because practically every language and culture is interconnected with other languages and cultures, so it is hybrid from this point of view; on the other hand, the notion also has a negative connotation (half-breed, mixture, mongrel).

Deprived of mother tongue

One of the leading themes of the Torne/ Tornio Valley literature and the Meänkieli one in it¹⁷ is the trauma of the Swedish assimilation and loss of identity. This is the central theme of one of Pohjanen’s early poems, originally written in Swedish and published in 1973, entitled *Jag är född utan språk* (*Born Tongueless*). Then he translated it himself into Meänkieli and Finnish. Here is the poem in Meänkieli and English.

<p>Bengt Pohjanen: Olen kielettömännä syntyny</p> <p>Olen kielettömännä syntyny, mykkänä. Kieletön paanmuska katkasi naparihman.</p> <p>Kasusin rajala kahen kielen traakissa jonka viimassa</p>	<p>Bengt Pohjanen: Born Tongueless</p> <p>Tongueless I was born, dumb. A midwife – tongue-less herself – cut my funiculus.</p> <p>I grew up on a frontier; the crossfire of two languages kept cutting, dumbing</p>
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¹⁴ Ibid., 171–172.

¹⁵ Ibid., 172.

¹⁶ See, for instance *ibid.*

¹⁷ I make clear difference between Meänkieli minority literature which is written in Meänkieli, on the one hand, and Torne Valley literature, written in Swedish, on the other hand; I do not consider the latter to be a linguistic minority’s literature, but the literature written in and about one of the regions of Sweden, having a strong collective identity.

<p>olematon kieleni mykisty.</p> <p>Minut kasuatihiin olheen ihmiseksi, oppimhaan ruottin ja tunnusthaan kansalisuuen.</p> <p>Minua piiskathiin koulussa oppimhaan ruottin, olheen ihmisiksi kunnan alamaisena. Minua piiskathiin häpeähmään sitä mikä oli minun ommaa: kielettömyys ja raja.</p> <p>Minut rakennethiin ulkoa päin suunatulla väkivallalla ja sisäisellä pakola lyhennyksilä ja väärinkäsityksillä.</p> <p>Multa otethiin oma lekitimasuuni.</p>	<p>my tongue.</p> <p>As I was brought up into a human being, they warned me to learn language foreign to me and form my national identity.</p> <p>At school I was rammed language, and brought into a good citizen and subjection. They rammed in: what's mine – my being tongue-less and my border-existence – are shameful.</p> <p>I have been created with external violence internal constraint deprivations and misunderstandings.</p> <p>I was deprived of my identity Card.</p> <p>Transl. by Betty Léb</p>
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The poem is a manifestation of being excluded and deprived of identity. The lyrical ego is born "tongue-less" because the only accepted language in the given cultural and social environment is Swedish. Being continuously stigmatised, excluded and humiliated because of his mother tongue, an experience mostly connected to school, he finishes his poem with the line "I was deprived of my identity Card". It logically follows that the one who does not master the "language" does not even exist. In a

monolingual and monocultural society only those whose mother tongue is the majority language are considered citizens.

Lack, alienation, fragmentation characterizes the discourse of the poem. Its gloomy tension at rhythm level, as well as the diverging dynamics of poetic and everyday expressions perfectly fit the message.

This poem has a special significance according to Pohjanen. He had it published many a time in different places, translated it and had it translated into several languages. It can be found right on the opening page of his website¹⁸ in Swedish, Finnish, Meänkieli, Russian, English, Hungarian, Estonian, and Czech.

The poem has been published as the opening poem of Pohjanen's Meänkieli Grammar published in Swedish, first in 2005 and then in 2007.¹⁹ This still is the single Meänkieli Grammar published in Swedish.²⁰

It is an irregular grammar book. It clearly mirrors that its author is a writer of literature and his aim is not mainly to write a traditionally descriptive grammar, but rather to arouse interest for a language which not many know about even in its own fatherland. He made it more colourful by including literary texts, and in his examples and explanations he pays attention to assure an attractive lecture.

Pohjanen is a rebel. He revolts against a usual, accepted norm in almost all his works. He fights for his mother tongue and deconstructs the authority discourse. His poem *Born Tongueless* is undoubtedly one of the basic pieces of his creative world.²¹

Almost three decades passed after the poem was published until Meänkieli was declared an independent minority language in Sweden in 2000, together with other four languages (Finnish spoken in Sweden,

¹⁸ http://www.sirillus.se/index_bp.htm, accessed January 29, 2013.

¹⁹ Bengt Pohjanen and Muli, Eeva, *Meänkieli rätt och lätt* (Överkalix: Barents, 2007).

²⁰ The grammar is built upon an earlier Meänkieli variant, unique in its nature, as well: Matti Kenttä and Bengt Pohjanen, *Meänkielen kramatiikki* (Luuleå: Kaamos, 1996). The poem can be found in the Meänkieli variant on p. 141, but he has changed his translation several times since then. It is generally characteristic of Pohjanen to re-form his text again and again.

²¹ See also Anne Heith, "Fluid Identities and the Use of History: The Northern Lights Route and the Writings of Bengt Pohjanen" in *A European Cultural Studies Conference in Sweden 11-13 June 2007* (Linköping University Electronic Press, 2007), 234, <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/025/024/ecp072524.pdf>, accessed March 7, 2013 and Anne Heith, "Voicing Otherness in Postcolonial Sweden. Bengt Pohjanen's Deconstruction of Hegemonic Ideas of Cultural Identity", in *The Angel of History. Literature, History and Culture*, ed. V. Haapala et al. (Helsinki, 2009), 142.

Yiddish, Romani and Sami). The previous cultural and language limits seemed to have shifted to a positive change, at least at a political level. Still, an ethnic and linguistic researcher's perspective upon legal requirements and their application is different from the one of a majority member. It is mainly a member of a minority who is able to understand why – for the speakers of a language stigmatised for a long time – it is not implicit to wish to learn a given language when it is not forbidden any more.

Creating an alternative past and self-understanding

Socio-psychological researches have drawn attention upon the fact that the descendants of the victims of language and ethnic persecution have inherited such a trauma that they have not managed to go through it. But persecution has consequences that affect the descendants, as well.²² The history of the community living in the Torne/ Tornio Valley is an eloquent example that the generations that experienced the trauma of language and ethnic assimilation have not passed their ancestors' tongue, Meänkieli, over to the new generation. For the young people this language is nothing but the language of the old, part of a passed world.

An integral part of Pohjanen's mother tongue-world creating activity is also the creation of the past (confronting the authority discourse), functioning as self-creation all along his literary activity. He sublimates the historical experience of his community into literature, obviously having also other aims beside aesthetics.

In Pohjanen's works – no matter if prose, poetic, dramatic or journalistic ones – you can find a sometimes openly revolutionary expression. He speaks about and to his own group which is confused in its tongue and identity, being also despised and stigmatised by the majority. He makes an attempt of unifying them into a real community and to awaken the wish of returning to their own roots. This rhetoric sometimes also bears defiant confrontation. Let's see a few examples from his autobiographic novel.²³

²² Erős Ferenc, *Az identitás labirintusai* (Budapest: Janus/Osiris, 2001), 110.

²³ In Swedish: Bengt Pohjanen, *Smugglarkungens son*, (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2007). In Meänkieli: Bengt Pohjanen, *Jopparikuninkhaan poika*, (Överkalix: Barents, 2009). In Finnish: Bengt Pohjanen, *Jopparikuninkaan poika*, transl. by Jorma Aspegrén (Helsinki/Jyväskylä: Minerva, 2006). In Hungarian: Bengt Pohjanen, *A csempészkirály fia*, transl. by Enikő M. Bodrogi (Kolozsvár/ Cluj: Koinónia, 2011).

“Extra lingua nostram nulla est salus! There is no redemption outside our language! And in this language – the language of faith and noble conceptions – I also feel a home, as if God’s memory existed only for us”.²⁴

“Language is the fingerprint of the soul. Nowhere else can you get from one social stratum into the other but in the Tornio Valley. You only need to talk Swedish to your child. Still, we kept talking Meänkieli with stubborn non-compliance. As subjects, we are carrying this cultural heritage, as if it were a dead child under our hearts”.²⁵

A central element of Pohjanen’s past-creating activity is the Meänmaa-idea. He himself is the father of this notion. The name, meaning first of all a geographic territory (‘our land’), means also the name of a virtual country for the writer, whose inhabitants are bound together by a mutual language and culture. When talking about the territory inhabited by Meänkieli speaking people, the international connected literature uses the term Torne/ Tornio Valley. As the language is spoken in other regions as well, the use of Meänmaa seems to be more appropriate. This imagined community lives in a border area, not only from a geographical point of view, but also from a cultural perspective: it does not mean either the Finnish or the Swedish imagined communities; it is much more an intermediate area, “the third room of the border” – the way the writer speaks about it in his autobiographic novel.²⁶ For him, the history of the area where the Meänkieli live is different both from Swedish and Finnish ones and not at all less important. It is the story of this area he writes again and again about in his literary and journalistic works. And while he is trying to awaken the collective memory of his community, he is also attempting to understand his own place and role in this context. His literary image is in line with his concept of history, something in which he significantly differs from other writers of the Torne/ Tornio Valley. His perception overarching the borders means a boldly new image opposing state-centric thinking.

Pohjanen’s activity can also be approached from the point of view of creating mythology, both literally and figuratively. Pohjanen only knows well that it is crucial for a community – confused in its identity, alienated from its mother tongue traditions – to have its collective memory revived

²⁴ The novel is being translated into English by Betty Léb. The quotation is from Pohjanen 2009, 27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ See: Pohjanen 2011, 12, 19, 101, 197.

and its traditions re-created. In order to survive as a community, the Meänkieli need mutual memories, mutual symbols, mutual positive examples that can tight the bounds of belonging together. This is also the aim of Pohjanen's latest work, *The History of King Faravid*²⁷. The author has been working on this piece of prose since 2010, writing it in parallel in Meänkieli and Swedish. As I have found out from the writer himself in a private letter, he finished the Meänkieli variant on February 7, 2013. History, imagination, folk beliefs and traditions come to life under literary form in Faravid's story, further enriching the author's life work. According to the author's own words, the writing of this story awakened many linguistic memories in him and made many words surface from the deep well of his community's memory, which had long disappeared from everyday use.

Conclusions

This study is an attempt to highlight the strong connection between native tongue, cultural heritage and collective identity of a community with a highly endangered language.

Pohjanen's attitude towards his native language is a rare and commendable example in Torne/ Tornio River Valley literature of the fact that linguistic assimilation can be reversed on a personal level and that somebody who really wishes to preserve and develop his own language is able to do it.

It would be a big mistake to consider the work of a minority writer like Pohjanen marginal or regional either in Swedish or the world literature. The themes he deals with - the border, minority, smuggling, childhood memories, the experience of losing one's own language and learning a new language instead, faith, sorrow, happiness and love - are universal topics of literature.

Pohjanen is an artist whose work is at the same time universal and who has a strong local colour. He writes fiction having a high aesthetic value and meets at the same time the need to create a vast narrative about his own minority community, a narrative which helps the members of this minority place themselves in their own history that differs from that of the majority, laugh at their own jokes and recognize their own cultural heritage.

²⁷ Faravid I, king of Kvens lived in the 9th century. Pohjanen's story takes place somewhere between 990 and 1056.

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