

Justifying the Choice of Academic Language through the Theory of Science

Marit B. Henriksen

A simple matter?

Language plays a central role in a researcher's dialogue with colleagues and with the public. This paper deals with the situation for researchers whose mother tongue is an indigenous or minority language, who do their research in areas or countries where the majority language isn't one of the world's larger languages. Even in countries where English is not the native language, there seems to be an increasing opinion that English is the most suitable and acceptable language for academic purposes. In addition, it is often argued that it is not acceptable to write in a lesser used language, e.g., in the Sámi language, if you want to make an academic career. Politically, it is decided at a high level that the use of lesser used languages, such as Sámi, should be strengthened. In practice, though, it is a challenge to achieve the goal of using Sámi e.g. academically as long as higher education and research evaluation systems emphasize publishing in English through international publishing channels.

Through my own research, I have reflected on the language issue and how to make room for indigenous or lesser used languages in the academic setting. I have been advised that I should choose English as the language of my research, and that the choice of language is not an academic issue, but rather a question that belongs to the political arena. This paper is an attempt to examine whether it is possible to justify the choice of academic language (in my case, Sámi language) on the basis of the rules of academia itself; that is, on basis of the ethos of science.

On the academic language situation

When discussing this language issue, it seems relevant to take a brief look at both the past and present language traditions of science and the use of Sámi in academic contexts.

Language conventions in European academia

For a long time, Latin had a special position, especially in the academic circles of Europe, or the West, and was widely used as the language of communication – both in writing and speech. Latin kept this strong position until the mid-1700s. Then the situation changed, and from the 1750s onward, the national languages of the European countries were more commonly used in public and academic contexts. From the 1850s, the use of Latin decreased, and the major national languages of Europe (German, French and English) were commonly used in academia. In this period, German strengthened its position as an academic language.

After World War II, German lost ground as an academic language. National languages were commonly used in academic contexts, and English began to develop into the international means of communication in academia.

At present, the position of English as an international academic language still seems to be growing stronger, and studies show that this has an impact on the use of national languages for academic purposes. A study done in Norway shows that, in 2001, eighty-one percent of the doctoral theses were written in English (Ljosland 2003: 19), and Norwegian research circles have begun to see this trend as a challenge.

Sámi in academia

The Sámi area (referred to as Sápmi) covers parts of four different nation states, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Sámi belongs to the Finno-Ugrian language family. There are ten different Sámi languages: South Sámi, Ume Sámi, Pite Sámi, Lule Sámi, North Sámi, Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, Akkala Sámi, Kildin Sámi and Ter Sámi. North Sámi is the largest of these languages in number of speakers, and is spoken in the northern parts of Norway and in parts of northern Finland and Sweden, in most communities as a minority language. Today, the overall number of Sámi speakers is relatively low, and in many areas Sámi language is endangered or even extinct. This is a result of the assimilation politics that were led by different governments towards the Sámi people, in connection with missionary activities and for nation building purposes.

In Finno-Ugrian research, languages have been used in quite the same way as in European academic circles in general. In addition, Hungarian was used for academic purposes in the 1700s and 1800s and Finnish came into use as an academic language in the late 1800s. From then on, studies of Sámi language were mostly published in German, Finnish, Norwegian and English (Wickman 1988: 792–818). In the 1970s, discussions on the study of Sámi issues and the use of Sámi in research increased, and, since then, also the use of Sámi as the original language in academic publications at the highest level of scholarship has gradually increased. The arguments for using Sámi are similar to the ones that were expressed in the 1800s when national languages were evolving into academic languages.

In Norway, Sámi became an academic subject at the University of Oslo in the 1870s. After the founding of the University of Tromsø in 1974, Sámi became a subject there as well. From then on, Sámi as a subject lost some of its footing in the University of Oslo, where Sámi as a subject was discontinued in 1989.

Sámi is at present a subject in higher education and/or research in Norway at the University of Tromsø, the Sámi University College in Guovdageaidnu, Bodø University College and Nord-Trøndelag University College; in Finland at the University of Oulu, the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi and the University of Helsinki; and in Sweden at the University of Umeå and the University of Uppsala. Sámi language can also be studied at educational centres which

provide university-level courses in cooperation with some higher education institution. The amount of research done from the Sámi perspective varies greatly from institution to institution, and so does the extent to which Sámi is used as a language of instruction and communication. Sámi University College is the only independent institution of higher education and research which uses Sámi as the main language in all its operations (as a subject, as language of instruction, in research and in administration).

The number of Sámi speaking students is quite low, mainly due to the language policy that was led towards the Sámi, as mentioned above.

It is a challenge for the educational system to make subjects more academic in Sámi language. Just like Norwegian (and many other smaller national languages), Sámi has to compete with English as an academic language. As a minority language, Sámi is still in a very different situation from Norwegian, because Sámi is not the major language of any country. Thus, Sámi has to compete with the four national languages of the Sámi region (Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Russian) as well as with English in both academia and most other social areas of language use.

Reflections on the theory of science

Branches of the theory of science

Theory of science is a meta-science which aims at exploring how or under what conditions fields of science try to attain the goal of providing accurate, reliable and interesting data. Theory of science can be divided into three branches: *the history of science*, *the philosophy of science*, and *the sociology of science*. The history of science examines the historical progress of science in general or particular fields of science. The philosophy of science studies and explains the philosophical norms and conditions of research. The sociology of science, in turn, examines the position or the role of science in society and the relationship between society and science (Gilje & Grimen 1995: 11, 19–20, 254; Kjølrup 1996: 23).

The philosophy of science emphasizes, for example, basic norms and conditions such as tenability or validity, and the repeatability of studies. This, again, entails that the study must be open and available for review. Scientific studies must also be objective, so that the views, beliefs, values and attitudes of the researchers themselves affect scientific results as little as possible. Objectivity entails many challenges in view of the fact that scientific understanding or its dissemination is always connected with time, the social situation and the conditions of society (Kjølrup 1996: 26). As concerns objectivity, there are also specific challenges connected with the carrying out of a study by indigenous or minority researchers (see Section 3.2).

The sociology of science connects norms and values to the position of science in society and the relationship between science and society. Associate Professor Kalleberg defines validity

as the highest norm of science, explaining that this norm is implemented through compliance with research ethics or profound moral guidelines (imperatives). He refers to the American sociologist Robert Merton in explaining six basic moral imperatives, which are disinterestedness, critical attitude, originality, universalism, communism (common property or ownership) and humility (Kalleberg 2002: 156–180).

Kalleberg writes especially about *scientific humility*, arguing that this guideline should affect the relationship of science to the community of researchers, the community that is being studied, and the users of the research. Scientific humility means that researchers should be aware of the boundaries of professional knowledge and realize that they can learn from other people. Still, researchers should not use scientific humility to disparage themselves or their competence. Kalleberg contrasts scientific humility with what he refers to as “scientific arrogance”, which he considers to be a result of ethnocentric misunderstandings; according to him, such arrogance can hinder compliance with the norm of tenability or validity in science.

Kalleberg further examines how humanistic research is carried out in communication with people and society. Researchers are expected to communicate with both the community in which they carry out their study and with other researchers in their field. Kalleberg refers to this communication as double dialogue, claiming that such a dialogue is both specific to and necessary in cultural and social fields of study (Kalleberg 2002: 156–180). Communication with other researchers in one’s field entails peer review. Peer review enables all those who are involved in the branch to participate in checking, verifying and criticizing other researchers’ scientific results and the reliability of these results. This takes place in professional discourse between equal colleagues. It is the obligation of a researcher to expose research results to such criticism.

The special challenges of indigenous researchers

The carrying out of a study is tied to the paradigms of the fields of science, characterized by the professional examples, values, concepts and ways of thinking in each particular field of science (Kjørup 1996: 113). Indigenous researchers – i.e. Aikio (1990), Deloria (1997) and Smith (1999) – have examined scientific paradigms critically and analyzed how implicit norms and values of paradigms affect indigenous researchers and studies conducted on indigenous issues. Their analyses are interesting, as they refer to challenges connected with how indigenous researchers can join the academic community.

Established scientific conventions contain methods that do not always succeed in embracing and acknowledging all the sources of information. For example, indigenous cultures abound in competence which has, so far, not been accorded the position it deserves. Therefore, indigenous researchers have analyzed the views and values that scientific conventions and research paradigms represent. Do the paradigms provide opportunities to study issues from the indigenous perspective without sacrificing the reliability of the study methods and the validity of the results?

According to Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith, there has been a relationship of dependence between Western research paradigms and economic or imperialistic interests. She claims that “the nexus between cultural ways of knowing, scientific discoveries, economic impulses and imperial power enabled the West to make ideological claims to having a superior civilization” (Smith 1999: 64). This has had implications for the perspective of science in general. As a result, the condition of the majority automatically becomes “the centre”, because the superiority of the West is seldom questioned. Smith writes about an approach of post-colonialism and decolonization. She emphasizes that this approach does not aim at rejecting Western science and its results. Instead, one of its objectives is to examine the relations between *minorities* and *majorities*, or *indigenous peoples* and *the West*, in the theory of science and in research. This approach also aims at analyzing the implicit values of research paradigms: What should (indigenous) research focus on, and from whose perspective and with what kinds of objectives should this research be conducted? Can the indigenous condition become “the centre” in the theory of science? (Smith 1999, p.39.) Sámi researcher Marjut Aikio (1990: 18) also refers to these issues. If we return to the concepts used by Kalleberg, we can assume that this issue rises from ethnocentrism¹¹ and ethnocentric misunderstandings of the European conventions of science.

The requirement of objectivity, or impartiality, is one of the most important scientific norms. Its purpose is to make sure that the personal views and interests of a researcher do not influence the results of the study. It is considered an advantage if the researcher manages to examine issues from an outside perspective or through a “stranger’s” eyes. Indigenous researchers experience that the requirement of objectivity strikes them in a more severe way than researchers who belong to the dominant population.¹² It is often questioned whether indigenous researchers can objectively present the knowledge that has been created amongst their people or in their society. Their interest in carrying out genuine research in their own society may also be called into question, and they may be considered biased defenders of their own communities.

This can also apply to mainstream researchers who have become “too familiar” with indigenous communities. Norwegian Professor Kirsti Strøm Bull says: “I was [...] told that I was not objective, as I had good contacts in the Sámi community. Friendship and real knowledge about the daily life of the Sámi made me a less reliable researcher. [...] Sámi researchers have been called into question much more outspokenly [...]. Many of them have been told that they are incapable of doing research on Sámi issues because they are Sámi

¹¹ Kalleberg uses the term ethnocentrism referring to the tendency of a ‘group of people’ (*ethnos*) to describe, explain and evaluate the culture of other groups as if their own culture were naturally located in the centre. The term ‘ethnos’ is used quite broadly for any category of ‘those born in the area’ – whether they are Norwegians, Eastern Norwegians, people of this time, business leaders, Sámi, Muslims, bishops, senior citizens or social scientists. (Kalleberg 2002: 172.)

¹² “In methodological terms there is a major problem in bringing non-Western traditions within the scope of serious scientific perspective, and that there is inherent racism in academia and in scientific circles. Some of the racism is doctrinaire and unforgiving – for instance, the belief that, for a person and/or community possessing any knowledge that is not white/Western in origin, the data is unreliable. A corollary of this belief is that non-Western peoples tend to be excitable, are subjective and not objective, and consequently are unreliable observers” (Deloria 1997: 34)

themselves. A Norwegian researcher who studies his/her own society is not questioned in the same way” (Strøm Bull 2002: 89). It is characteristic that the ability of researchers representing the dominant population to objectively study issues concerning the majority society is not called into question in the same way. We can ask whether such an interpretation of objectivity rises from ethnocentric misunderstanding or the “scientific arrogance” of the academic heritage.

The use of language in academic contexts is another challenge. An indigenous language may be protected through legislation and political decisions. For example, Sámi is an official language in Norway according to law. It is decided on high political levels that Sámi should be used in research and higher education. Nevertheless, the priorities and conventions of strong and broad-based academic circles can, in practice, result in linguistic inequality. In this situation, the choice of academic language becomes a dilemma for indigenous researchers: Do they want to write in their native language, and are they allowed to do so, or must they write in a national language or English, and what are their reflections before making this choice?

Choosing the working language of academic research

Choice of language - A theory of science issue?

A study conducted in Norway shows that the norms of a scientific field are important in the choice of the language in which the research is carried out. It also shows that, in Norway, the norms often lead to the choice of English as the academic working language or the language of outreach, even though English is not the researchers' native language. The use of English seems to be expected to such an extent that researchers do not even think of questioning it; thus, the choice of academic language becomes automatic rather than an active choice (Ljosland 2003: 96-97, 105).

Is it possible, then, to justify the choice of academic language in terms of the theory of science? If so, what are the arguments? My analysis is based on the ways in which humanistic research preserves and passes down culture and is linked with society; I also examine the issue on the basis of Kalleberg's views, which are based on the sociology of science. Kalleberg has emphasized *scientific humility* presumably because this guideline is connected to all the other imperatives (Kalleberg 2002: 161).

In my opinion, the choice of academic language is a matter of scientific humility, and I connect this guideline first with scientific openness and double communication. Still, it does not seem to be enough to determine the most suitable academic language solely on the basis of these two factors. Therefore, I also examine how the choice of academic language is connected with the guideline of common property and with the way theories and scientific results should be to the benefit of all.

The choice of academic language - openness and communication

Research in the social and cultural fields is characterized by the need to conduct studies in communication and dialogue with people. This entails a form of communication that Kalleberg calls double dialogue – as the researcher needs to communicate with both the academic community and with the community where the research is carried out (Kalleberg 2002: 165). One objective of such double dialogue is that the research must be open to critical evaluation. As one of the standards of science, the academic community must be allowed to review the validity of the study (peer review). On the other hand, the researcher also receives critical commentary from the community in which the study is carried out, as the members of the community are, presumably, specialists on their own society and social conditions.

In my opinion, this could be referred to as *multiple communications*, because there may be several groups with which the researcher communicates both in the academic and the studied communities. In academia, there may be a local or regional level (for example, within a country) in addition to the global level. At the regional level of science, indigenous and minority researchers may form separate groups. For example, those who do research on the Sámi language form a "regional" group of researchers who work across national borders. The community in which the study is carried out also has several groups: the study field (e.g. the informants of the study), the public, and the users.

In this communication, the language of academic research and outreach is an important instrument. The following figure illustrates the suitability of the academic language for such dialogue. In the figure, there are four different groups with which the researcher communicates. The figure also includes three language categories: the international academic language (i.e. English), the national language (where this is not English), and the indigenous language. Using my own doctoral thesis¹³ as an example, I examine how suitable the languages are in terms of the communication groups.

¹³ Working title: “Álaheivuona mearrasámegiela suopmana guorahallan, mas deattuhuvvo fonemarádju, fonemadistribušuvdna ja fonologalaš variašuvdna” (“A Study of the Sea Sámi Dialect on the Alta Fjord with a Focus on Phonemes, their Distribution and Phonological Variation”).

Figure 2: Suitability of academic language in terms of communication groups

Language					
English					
National language*					
Indigenous language**					
	Field of study	The public	Regional academic community	Global academic community	Communication group

Suitability of language:

Note:

	Most suitable
	Suitable
	Less suitable

* Here, “national languages” may be Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish or Russian.
** Here, “indigenous language” means Sámi.

The first communication group: The field of study

Communication with the field starts with the planning of the research, and continues throughout the study and publishing of results. The way the researcher uses language is important throughout this process. The research situation requires confidence and trust between the researcher and the studied community.

Presumably, it is easier to build this trust when the researcher knows the language of the informants or the community that he/she is studying.

Language reflects the special knowledge a people possesses concerning their sources of livelihood and society in general. Thus, language is precise and suitable for providing information on issues concerning the community in question. Informants may not be able to explain these issues precisely in another language, if that language does not have a corresponding basis of knowledge and terminology with which information is received. This may affect how the material is interpreted and understood; it may also, eventually, affect the validity of the results.

Communication is important in making the results available for review provided by the informants in the field of study. For my research, the indigenous language (Sámi) was the most suitable one, because I do research on a dialect of Sámi language. Not all my informants or members of the studied community are used to written Sámi, and it is also possible to communicate with the field in the national language (here, Norwegian). English will not work as a means of communicating the results of the study to the informants and their community.

My informants are mainly elderly people, whose native language is Sámi, with Norwegian as their second language – or they grew up becoming simultaneously bilingual in Sámi and Norwegian. Most of them have not had English as a subject in school.

The second communication group: The public

The results also need to be available to the wider public. The primary specialist public that I expect to comment on the results of my dialect study is the Sámi community in general. Therefore, Sámi is the most suitable means of communication also with this group. The situation of this group is similar to that of the field of study, or informants' community: not everyone is used to reading the Sámi language, and, therefore, it would also be possible to use the national language (here, Norwegian) as an instrument of communication. By using Norwegian, I would also reach the members of the wider society who are interested in my research – but only in the Norwegian part of Sápmi. If I want to reach the members of the mainstream society who are interested in the subject in the other countries with a Sámi population, I would have to use the national languages of these countries (Swedish, Finnish or Russian) or English.

The third communication group: The regional academic community

The results of a dialect study are primarily used by other researchers who do research on the Sámi language (throughout Sápmi), and they can also be referred to as a regional academic community. They are the most immediate group of colleagues who will provide valid commentary on the study results. Students doing their BA or MA degrees in Sámi are also part of the regional academic community as users of these research results. In the case of this group, Sámi is the most suitable language to ensure communication and make the results available. This choice is also connected with the promotion of Sámi as an academic language.

As there are ten Sámi languages (see section 2.2), not all of them with official written standards, and not all of them being mutually intelligible, it may be necessary to publish research results in some language other than Sámi. In such a situation, English might be a suitable means of communication, as there are great differences between the national languages of the Sámi region.

The fourth communication group: The global academic community

Generally, peer review requires that the study results be available and understandable to the international academic community. For this purpose, national languages are mostly unsuitable (for example, Norwegian can be used in wider linguistic circles only or mostly in Scandinavia). In this context, English would be the most suitable academic language.

The choice of academic language and the benefits of science

The "communist" guideline means that the academic community owns and makes use of the results of research¹⁴, and that theory and scientific results should be to the benefit of all.

Just as there are several levels of communication with colleagues and the public, there can also be several levels to "the benefit of all". This academic community is an interest group which is not necessarily closely connected with the studied environment. Usually, there are more immediate target groups which may have a need to get and make use of the research results. One such target group may be the community which has initiated the research or in which the need for the study has arisen and the study is carried out. The imperative of scientific humility entails that a researcher respects this immediate target group and their knowledge. In my opinion, this means, for example, that a community should not be used only as a source of information and material – as may happen when researchers who are members of the dominant population conduct studies on indigenous knowledge (Aikio 1990: 23). Researchers should be able to share their research results with the immediate target group, so that the results are accessible to this community and benefit its further development.

Scientific research benefits society in many ways. I will not analyze the benefits of concrete study results here. Instead, I will examine how scientific research can benefit society indirectly. E.g. the use of language for academic purposes can be beneficial to society in various ways. For example, it can contribute to the status and the domains of language, to the development of a professional language, and to language as a resource which maintains both culture and identity.

The impact of academic language – The domain issue

In sociolinguistic research, the American researcher Fishman has used the concept of "domain" to explain in what kind of social and formal contexts language is used. The term is used in research on minority languages in multilingual societies, and is relevant e.g. for the Sámi language. The domains at the level of society include family (or home), the work sphere, education, the Church and religious communities, entertainment, media, politics and contacts with authorities, etc.¹⁵ (Fishman 1991: 44). In multilingual societies, a minority language is often used primarily in informal domains, whereas the majority language is used in formal domains (Hyltenstam – Stroud 1991: 47). Thus, the theory of domains can be applied to measure the status of language usage. According to Fishman, it is important for a language to be used in the formal domains: for example, in higher education and research; furthermore, a loss of footing in such domains means that the situation of the language is

¹⁴ "Here, 'communism' means the common ownership of scientific theories and data. Scientific research results are usually a result of social cooperation. There is no private title to the results. They belong to the whole community of researchers" (Gilje & Grimen 1993: 234).

¹⁵ The contexts in which a language is used can also be examined in a stricter sense. We can analyze certain role relations within the domains, for example, parent – child, grandparent – grandchild (within the family domain), or employee – employee, supervisor – lower employee (within the domain of work) (Fishman 1991: 44).

deteriorating (Fishman 1991: 107). The domain concept is somewhat problematic, as the term itself and the different domains have not been defined comprehensively (Ljosland 2003: 27–29, 108–109). Nevertheless, I use the term domain here to refer to the settings in which language is used in society, and my focus is on the language domain of education and research.

As mentioned earlier, English is being used increasingly in the academic domain. Of course, there are practical reasons for this, as the results can be published widely, and the researcher reaches a wide audience by using English. Even so, this may lead to a gradual weakening of the status of other (national or lesser used) languages in the academic domain, which may have an impact on the general social status of these languages.

A language is not a force that itself actively supports or suppresses another language. It is the active use of a language in the different domains that determines both the position and the status of the language and how this status changes. The maintenance of the domain of an academic language is closely connected with the linguistic choices of the managers of the domain (here: researchers). On the grounds that academic use of a language affects the status of this language in society in general, we see that the use of a language for academic purposes benefits society – in addition to the basic results of the conducted research. This is important for the status of e.g. Sámi language, as Sámi is both a minority language and in many areas an endangered language. Therefore, it is vital to promote the academic use of Sámi and thus provide Sámi society with additional linguistic benefits or “profit” which can be used to raise the status of Sámi in society.

The influence of the academic language on development of a professional language

Knowledge and distribution of knowledge are connected with language. For distribution of knowledge, we need a professional language at a high academic level, at lower professional levels and in contacts with the public. The development of an accurate and practicable professional language is part of the process of building basic academic conditions, and this takes place e.g. in research and the publishing of research results. After such development, the professional language can be passed down to the lower levels of the educational system e.g. through teaching.

Every language is especially precise in certain fields. Such linguistic variety is connected, for instance, with social conditions and the level of specialization in the sphere of livelihoods. As an example, Sámi has an extremely precise vocabulary concerning reindeer herding and other primary trades or livelihoods. The inclusion of this terminology in research and higher education benefits both the maintenance and the development of terms and knowledge. Language is created through use. When new social or professional fields (e.g., academic branches) are created, we need to develop a professional language for these fields as well, both linguistically and in terms of the field itself. This can be solved, for example, by constructing new concepts, giving old terms new meanings, or by introducing loan words or

adapted concepts. If we want new professional language to become established in a certain language, this process needs to be linked with the active use of the language. This is why a language cannot be just a subject of research: it also needs to be used as a means of research and expression.

In terms of linguistics, one language cannot be considered more academic than another. The actual use of a language in the academic domain determines whether the development of the professional language reaches a sufficiently high level so that the language is practicable in the academic setting. If a language is neglected in academic contexts, the professional language will lag behind. The choice of the academic language and the development of professional language are interconnected, and the development of professional language clearly benefits from the use of the language in academia.

Language as a resource which strengthens culture and identity

Sámi researchers have discussed the connection between language and identity. For example in a study by the Nordic Sámi Institute¹⁶, language was seen as the most important explanatory factor for Sámi identity. In this study it was stated that “From the cultural perspective, we find a few cultural characteristics that are also called the characteristics of identity. They contain the sources of livelihood, such as fishing and hunting, semi- or non-nomadic reindeer herding and agriculture. Other characteristics can be found in the culture of the spiritual history, such as shamanism and rituals connected with the bear. Furthermore, we find such characteristics in art, that is, in images, useful objects, crafts, the traditional clothing, music, yoiking and in language, which is probably the most important characteristic” (Ruong 1987: 19; translation from Sámi).

The relationship between language and identity is a challenging issue. The human identity is based on a person's ability to understand and manage both his/her personality and the environment. This fundamental competence is acquired during one's lifetime as one communicates with other people. Language is a person's most important means of communication and the instrument through which he/she builds up his/her basic understanding and perception. Aikio has written about the importance of one's native language (1990: 24). She refers to the mother tongue a person's special linguistic and cultural capital, linking language with the very existence of a person. She also states that the maintenance of the language is vital for the continuity and passing down of culture. Thus, presumably, a person's mother tongue is the best means for dealing with things that are connected with learning and the construction of an identity. What, then, is the impact on the construction of one's (professional) identity, if one's mother tongue does not have status in the arenas in which the communication and the learning that shape identity take place? And what is the impact on the community being studied and the persons giving information, if they experience that their information will not be published in their own language? From the point of view of shaping people's and a nation's, identity and basic understanding, it is extremely

¹⁶ The Nordic Sámi Institute was affiliated with Sámi University College in 2005.

important to change the conditions of communication and language usage in the educational system.

Conclusions

This paper is based on my reflections concerning the choice of academic working language, related to my own research project on Sámi language. I have examined the choice of academic language with reference to norms and guidelines from the established theory of science. Scientific humility (as opposed to scientific arrogance and ethnocentrism) is a general guideline, which I link to principles of scientific openness and communication, and to different measures of the benefits of science – i.e. how academic language can be of indirect benefit to society, in addition to the specific results of particular studies that are conducted. Scientific openness and communication with the public is an important guideline, which requires a consciously made choice of academic language. Scientific humility entails dealing with the language issue so that communication between the different groups is possible and the groups have the opportunity to review and provide critical commentary on the research results. Various considerations can be used for determining the most suitable academic language, and when making the choice, it is necessary to take the needs of the communication groups into consideration. Through choice of academic language, the researcher either broadens or restricts the opportunities of the communication groups to review the study and its results.

By deciding to carry out the research and publishing the results only in an indigenous language, one succeeds in reaching the communication group(s) that can review results on the basis of their competence as primary-level specialists. It is important that this group can control whether their information has been included correctly in the results of the research. By publishing in an indigenous language such as Sámi, one also reaches a regional academic community of Sámi researchers, regardless of national borders in the Sámi area. However, in such a case, one greatly restricts the opportunities of the global academic community to join the discourse and review the study.

If a study is carried out, and results are published, only in an international academic language (such as English), this opens the opportunities of review from the global academic community. This will, however, restrict or take away the opportunities of the local public to participate in the review of the results in areas where English is not the majority language (such as in Norway, where most people have English as their second or even their third language). When the research community and the local public cannot join in the discourse, the level of critical assessment decreases and the quality verification of the results will be insufficient. The publishing of scientific results only in English (and not in the national or indigenous language) may even be considered a conscious way of preventing the local public from joining the reviewing process.

The norm of “communism” in science requires that science be common property and “to the benefit of all”. In my reflection, also the principle of science being to the benefit of all may be linked to the guideline of scientific humility. Here, the questions are: how can research be to the utmost benefit of all? Which groups need to use the results, for example, to attain social goals, and what kind of obligations does the academic community have to meet the needs of these groups? By the choice of academic language, a researcher can appreciate both the needs of the studied community and the academic community in general. This may require publishing the results in more than one language. If the language of the studied community is used academically, this may benefit society indirectly, as it has an effect both on the maintenance and the development of the language as well as on its general status. Language is a means of communication; and it also plays an important role in our education and the shaping of our understanding and identity.

It is a challenge for Sámi research that there are many languages that we can use: the various Sámi languages, the different national languages, and the international academic language(s). I feel that research into Sámi issues should benefit Sámi society both through its results and through its language. This goal can be attained only if we take responsibility in the sphere of language and allow Sámi to be the original language of our research. At the same time, the ethos of science obliges us to make our research available to the academic community for review. Thus, the choice of academic language is not a simple matter – and it has no simple solutions. It may not be impossible to choose only one academic language, as we need to reach several communication groups with our research results. I intend to use Sámi as the original language in my research, as I feel that this meets the needs of the Sámi society in the best way. However, I also find it necessary to publish my results in other languages and, in this way, meet the requirement of openness as concerns other academic circles.

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