

Marta Petryk

Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Culture
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

An Old Language with a New Status. Some Aspects of the Kvens' Identity in the Borderland

Abstract

Kvens are one of the groups which are recognized as minorities in Norway. Both the definition and the ethnonym of "Kven" are very controversial. According to the most common definition Kvens are the descendants of the Finnish immigrants to Norway. One should remember however that we can meet opposition if we use the word "immigrants" because in the case of Kvens we are often talking about migration within northern Scandinavia prior to the establishing of state borders as we know them today. The term Finnish is not generally accepted either. Researchers and those members of the group who emphasize the ethnic variety in today's Finland are particularly skeptical about this name. Nevertheless, many representatives of the group called Kven are of the opinion that "Kven" and "Finnish" mean the same. They protest also against being called Kvens because this word was once used by the Norwegian majority with a pejorative connotation. Among the contemporary definitions of Kvens the following very often appears: "Kvens are the Finnish-speaking people who came to Norway before 1900 and the descendants of those people" (Skarstein 2002: 85). This definition may also evoke opposition because Kven has been recognized as a separate language in Norway since 2005 and the distinguishing between Kven and Finnish is very important for many researchers and language users.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s), 2014

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

Editor in chief: Jolanta Sujecka

Conception and academic editing of this issue: Maciej Falski

In this article I will address the issue of language as an important identity creating factor. After I have given the most important information about the hardly known minority group I will present a short description of the Kven language's classification and status in Norway – both earlier and nowadays. Then I want to present how the Kven language is used while creating the Kven identity.

Key words: Kvens; Norwegian culture; national identity; minorities

The history of Kvens in Norway and their status – from immigrants to a national minority

Individually, Kvens have been registered in the Norwegian tax censuses since 1520 (Stortingsmelding¹ Nr. 15). There were not many Kvens in Norway, but they were scattered over a large area. Probably they were Finnish immigrants who sought work and used to come to Norway to take part in the seasonal fishing (Guttormsen 2001: 23). The first half of the 18th century is the beginning of regular Kven immigration to Norway which continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries (Stortingsmelding No. 15). It is debatable whether the immigration of Finnish people to northern Norway after the Second World War can be recognized as Kven immigration.

Einar Niemi divides the Finnish immigration to Norway into three stages. The first, from ca 1720 to 1820 was, in his opinion, the continuation of the colonization which took place in the 17th and 18th century. The next stage stretches from the 1820s to the end of the century, when the influx of people of Finnish descent nearly stopped. The third stage is the immigration after the Second World War (Niemi 1994: 124-125).

Before the Kvens were formally recognized as a minority, their status was discussed in the whole of Norway. The minority groups in Norway can be divided into three categories:

1. indigenous people, i.e. minorities that had lived in the area before state borders were established;
2. national minorities, i.e. minorities that have lived in the country longer than one hundred years.
3. immigrant minorities, i.e. minorities that had come to Norway during the last hundred years (Megard 1999: 80).

According to this division, the Kvens in Norway are a national minority and they received this status in 1999.

¹ Report to Storting (The Norwegian Parliament).

Subjective identity of being Kven

The ethnic identity of people who live in northern Norway is difficult to describe. Bjørn Olav Megard mentions, on the basis of his research in Vadsø, three categories used to define ethnic affiliation:

- Either/or – to be Norwegian or Kven or Saami
 - Both/and – to belong to more than one category
 - Neither/nor – not to belong to any pure ethnic category
- (Megard 1999: 134-138).

To find an explanation for the strategies that people who can be regarded as Kvens use to identify themselves, one should be aware that the area where they have traditionally lived, is called the meeting place of three tribes – Norwegians, Saami and Kvens. This division is of course very simplified. In the region where people have lived beside each other and entered interethnic marriages it is completely comprehensible that the ways they define themselves and others can be surprising. According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, an individual person is a product of his/her relations with other people and every person has many identities which are chosen and used, depending on the situation (Eriksen 2005: 37-43). We find an example of this in Megard's M.A. thesis. Megard mentions a man called Jon who has a right to be registered in the Samemanntallet (The Saami census) and – as Megard understood it – is registered there. He is also a member of the Norwegian Kven Association (Norske Kveners Forbund). In different situations he represents either Saami or Kven interests (Megard 1999: 137-138). Another factor which makes the identity issue more complicated, is the relation between the national and the ethnic identity. Thomas Hylland Eriksen addresses this issue with reference to Saami people, but we can use an analogous approach concerning Kvens. According to Eriksen, Saami are Norwegian citizens, in the political sense, with Norwegian passports and political rights, but ethnically they are Saami, with a common origin, history and foundation myth (Eriksen 2005: 40). Some of my informants, when asked who they were, emphasized this difference, answering that they were Norwegian citizens and ethnic Kvens. Others gave different answers, for instance they regarded themselves only as Kvens, talked about Saami roots or expressed the connection to the place of origin.

Both the difficulty in defining clearly who can be regarded as Kven and the situation in northern Norway contribute to the fact that the matter of self-identification has a great meaning. A person living in northern Norway who is of Finnish (or Kven) descent might have among his or her ancestors Saami or ethnic Norwegians from the north or other parts of the

country. Such people can define themselves as Norwegian, Kven, Saami or as a Norwegian citizen of Finnish descent; they may also define themselves as Norwegians, regarding state status or citizenship, while ethnically as Kvens. It happens that even closely related people have different opinions about their identity. The fact that for many years the word “Kven” used to be interpreted as an invective is the reason that many representatives of this group are still against the use of this ethnonym, although they are interested in the history of their families and proud of their roots which are other than Norwegian. Such people define themselves often as Norwegian of Finnish descent.

Why language?

According to Edwin Ardener,, identity is not something we have but the way we are identified (passive) and the ways we identify (active) (Ardener 1992: 23). If we take into consideration the ways Kven people are identified (by the majority, the authorities or researchers) and identify themselves, the language has an important place among other factors such origin, settlement history etc. In this article I will refer to some statements which demonstrate that the people I asked about Kvens considered the use of language as a very important factor in deciding that they identified themselves or other people as Kvens. It seems to be quite universal to identify others or oneself on the basis of the language they really or presumably speak. Michał Buchowski for instance mentions an interesting example of language as a criterion for distinguishing between “us” and “them”, in the case of Slavs, for whom Germans were “those who cannot speak”² and “Slavs”³ were people who share the same word and belong to the same group (Buchowski 1997: 58). Therefore, the language is worth investigating in the context of identifying oneself and being identified. Moreover, the methods of using language as a tool to create kvenness and the evolution of its name and status are, apart from the Kven ethnonym, a good example for illustrating the theory of Frederik Barth that ethnic differences are not a derivative of lack of social interactions but just the opposite – they became often important foundations for building of wide social systems (Barth 1969: 10). The new migration from Finland to Norway after the Second World War meant that the descendants of the earlier immigrants had to define themselves in relation to the Finns who came to do seasonal work (Anttonen 2000: 18)⁴. The Kven revitalization movement in the 1980s and later resulted in a

² For instance “Niemcy” in Polish.

³ For instance “Słowianie” in Polish.

⁴ Not only in relation to the Norwegian majority and Saami people.

greater tendency to define Kvens in opposition to the Finnish minorities in Norway, Finnish citizens in Finland and Finland as a national state.

When I went to Tromsø for the first time in 2002, as a student of Norwegian philology, to do research for my M.A. thesis, I was not aware how complicated was the problem I had begun to investigate. Before coming I had read many articles and information on the internet which gave me the impression that the Kven people were a homogeneous group, with concentrated settlement and that they spoke Finnish. This word – “Finnish” – occurred quite often in the texts I read, even in the title of a well-known book about the Kvens, “Den finske fare” by Einar Niemi and Knut Eriksen. Later, when I continued my Kven research as a Ph.D. student at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, and went to do my fieldwork to Tromsø and Alta in 2006 and 2007, Kven was an officially recognized minority language in Norway. During all those years I became more and more aware of differences, nuances, conflicts and disputes regarding both the existence of a separate group called the Kvens, the Kven ethnonym and history, its relation to the national state of Finland and other groups of Finnish origin, and – of course – also the language issue. Simultaneously with the discussion about whether it was justified to distinguish between Kvens and other Finnish groups, there was also a language debate. There are different opinions among both researchers and users if we should call it a separate language or a dialect of Finnish. Also nowadays the opinion that Kven and Finnish are the same language is very popular.

I concentrated my research on people who recognized themselves as Kvens or had nothing against being called by that name, even if they preferred to use the words “Finn” and “Finnish” while talking about themselves, their origin and language. I have also heard and read opinions from those who considered “Kven” an invective and refused to use this ethnonym. Owing to the approach I had chosen, my information about such attitudes was limited, nevertheless I did make some observations. Irrespective of what the person concerned thought about the Kven/Finnish debate, most of opinions I have heard or read emphasized the significance of the language as an identity creating factor.

From a group of dialects to a minority language

Since 2005 Kven is officially recognized as a minority language in Norway. Previously, Kven was the official name for Finnish, more precisely for a group of Finnish dialects, called Kven dialects. Today Kven is officially recognized as a separate language which is used, taught, revitalized

and needs a written form. According to some researchers and users this approach is incorrect. The issue of whether to classify Kven as a language or a group of Finnish dialects is important in creating identity, both the Finnish and the Kven one.

To make this issue more clear I will present the classification of Kven dialects among the Finnish dialects before and its status nowadays.

A very clear overview of the different ways of classifying Kven dialects before Kven was recognized as a language, can be found in Hanne Elin Utvik's MA thesis. Traditionally, Finnish dialects were divided into eastern Finnish dialects and western Finnish dialects. According to this classification the northern Finnish dialects were a group of the western Finnish dialects, and Kven dialects were a subgroup of the northern Finnish dialects. Utvik mentions here the division which was made by Martti Rappola. Further, she refers to another division, by Heikki Paunonen. Here the Finnish dialects are divided into "pure" eastern dialects, "pure" western dialects and "mixed" northern dialects. According to Paunonen the division into only two groups, i.e. the eastern and the western one, was too sharp and inadequate. Pursuant to the second division, the last one – the northern Finnish dialects – was divided into two big groups – torne and kemi dialects and further into five subgroups: kemi, kemijärvi, torne, gällivare and Kven dialects. Torne og kemi dialects belong to the first of the big groups – torne. Kemi og kemijärvi dialects – to the second big group – kemi. The Kven dialects reflect the division into torne og kemi – the eastern Kven dialects have many properties which are typical for the kemi-group, while the western dialects are closer to dialects from Tornedalen (Utvik 1996: 44-46).

The debates about whether Kven is a separate language show that it is difficult to make unambiguous decisions on the basis of objective criteria. It seems to be principally a political question. I have talked to persons who were skeptical or did not attach any importance to the issue – they used to say that Kven and Finnish were the same language, sometimes using the term Kven for old Finnish or Finnish from Børselv (a village in Porsanger municipality). In the debates concerning language, participants often discussed if it were possible or not for Kven users to communicate with Finns who speak Finnish. The opinions are divided, which can be the result of the variety of Kven languages in Norway, the distances between the places where users live and Finland, how often they visit Finland, etc.

Irene Andreassen mentions differences between the treatment of Kven language by the Norwegian authorities and of the minority languages in Sweden by the Swedish authorities in the context of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which was ratified by Norway in 1999. Norway's official report to the Council of Europe did

not distinguish between Kven and Finnish. Therefore, the Kven language got less protection than Finnish, Saami and Meänkieli in Sweden, where they were considered languages of territorial minorities. Critical remarks from the Council of Europe resulted in the Norwegian government ordering an analysis, prepared by professor Kenneth Hyltenstam, which was to explain if Kven was a language or a dialect. According to the report, when we take into consideration both linguistic and social aspects, Kven is rather a language than a dialect. Nevertheless, the findings caused great controversies (Andreassen 2004-2005: 32-33). In 2005 Norway recognized the Kven language as an official minority language, different from Finnish (Stortingsmelding Nr. 23).

Despite different opinions, Kven is recognized as a separate language nowadays and, as a result, has increased prestige, with the name being more frequently used in various situations. The language is also taught under its own name at universities in northern Norway. It is worth mentioning that, according to the act which came into force in 1991, Saami and Kven names, used by local people, should also appear on maps, signposts with place names, censuses etc. Therefore, in some municipalities in northern Norway, it is possible to see signposts in three languages.

The written language

One of the aspects connected with the preserving, revitalization and spreading of a language is developing and teaching of its written form. Benedict Anderson writes that the modern print-languages which replaced Latin made it possible for “speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes” to comprehend each other via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of even millions of people who belonged (and only those people) to their particular language-field. In this way these fellow-readers formed the embryo of the nationally imagined community. “Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation” and “third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were ‘closer’ to each print-language and dominated their final forms” (Anderson 2006: 44-45). Irene Andreassen, the chairwoman of the Kven Language Council and government consultant for the Kven place names, emphasizes how important is to develop the written Kven language. She describes changes which are taking place in minority communities causing that minority languages disappear and are replaced by the majority language. Andreassen

postulates emancipation and revitalization of the language, which should consist in diffusing of the minority language in its oral and written form in one or more public sector in which the language has not been used yet (Andreassen 2004-2005: 29-30). Andreassen is of the opinion that a language, this means also the Kven language, cannot survive nowadays without a culture based on its written form (*ibidem*: 38).

The Kven Language Council was for certain a milestone in language planning. The council was established in 2007 and had, as one of the most important tasks, to create standards for the written language (Ruijan Kaiku 3/2007: 20). Nevertheless, the Kven language and culture were being taught at the University in Tromsø already in 2006 (Söderholm 2009-2010: 205). Eira Söderholm describes that it was her task to prepare a curriculum for course of the Kven language. There were neither textbooks nor grammar books at that time and Söderholm had to prepare teaching materials. She had to decide what kind of language she would teach. She considered if it was better to use texts in different dialects or to make a compromise language using features from some dialects. In autumn 2004 the first novel of a Kven author, Alf Nilsen-Børsskog, was published. The language Nilsen-Børsskog used was Kven from the Porsanger municipality. After other texts by people from Porsanger were published, Söderholm decided to prepare text and grammar books based on that dialect. Among students there were some Finnish teachers, and the course gave them skills they needed to teach Kven. Also, the Finnish speaking journalist from *Ruijan Kaiku*, the Kven-Finnish newspaper in Norway, learnt Kven and was able to write texts in this language after finishing the course (*ibidem*: 205-206).

The written Kven language is used also in literary works. In 2002 Kaisa Maliniemi Lindbach considered what criteria we should use to define Kven literature. According to Lindbach, the authors' subjective choice was an important criterion (Lindbach 2002: 128). She mentioned Idar Kristiansen, Hans Kr. Eriksen and Bente Pedersen as Kven writers – all of them wrote their texts in Norwegian. Nevertheless, my informants in Finnmark in 2007, asked if they knew any Kven authors, mentioned most often those three, and Alf Nilsen-Børsskog who wrote in the Kven language. One of them said that she was not able to mention any Kven authors or books because Kven was a spoken language, but then she remembered that there was a novel written in Kven. Generally, after an analysis of sources which I had read, concerning the Kven literature, as well as statements from different informants from 2006 and 2007, I observed that the authors who had written in Norwegian were mentioned rather by persons who had something to do with research or Kven studies, while the name of Nilsen-Børsskog, who had been known and promoted as a Kven author from a Kven village, writing

in Kven, was most popular, without regard to if the person in question had a “scholarly” background.

Some of the old texts, associated with Kven people, were renamed according to the new strategies, for instance from the stories collected in the 1920s by Just Qvigstad and Johan Beronka and published as Finnish stories, some were chosen and published by the Finnmark College in 2003 as *Kven Stories and Legends* (adapted and with commentaries by Vappu Inkeri Pyykkö in co-operation with Hanne Elin Utvik).

Different attitudes

Karl husker godt den dagen han begynte på skolen. Den morgenen, mens mor og far og et par av de yngre brødrene sitter og spiste frokost, ser far på Karl og sier alvorlig:

- Hør godt etter nå, gutt! Han kremter før han fortsetter. – Det viktigste du skal lære på skolen er norsk. Så fortsetter han etter en liten pause: – Norsk – skriftlig som muntlig – er det viktigste, det vet du meget godt, men regning eller matte er også fag du må kunne. Blir du flink i disse fagene, vil jeg være fornøyd.

Han vet godt hva han snakker om, far, for selv om han har et klart hode, har han strevd med å lære å snakke norsk rent. Han vet av erfaring at barn som vokser opp i tospråklig miljø, får ofte problemer med å beherske dem begge fullkomment. Dette merker man klart blant folk i bygda, og årsaken er den store forskjellen mellom det norske og det finske språket (Pedersen 2005: 38)⁵.

This short quotation comes from the book written by Henry Pedersen from Vestre Jakobselv in Finnmark county in northern Norway. Karl has much in common with the author, but the novel is not a biography in the strict sense because the action includes also episodes which the author did not experience himself. Karl’s forefathers came from Finland, but the family

⁵ Translation: “Karl remembers well that day when he started school. That morning, while mother and father and two younger brothers sat and had breakfast, father looks at Karl and says earnestly: - Listen good now, boy! He clears his throat before he carries on. – The most important thing you shall learn at the school is Norwegian. Then he carries on after a short break: – Norwegian – written and spoken – is most important, you know that, but you should also know arithmetic and math. If you are clever in these subjects, I will be satisfied. Father knows well what he is talking about, because he had to work hard to learn to speak Norwegian purely, although he was clever. He knows from experience that children who grow up in the bilingual environment, often have problems with using both languages perfectly. It is easy to observe among people in the village, and the reason is the big difference between Norwegian and Finnish language.” (Transl. by M.P.)

lives in Norway. The parents speak Finnish to each other, and when they talk to the children they use either Finnish or Norwegian. Karl starts the school in the 1930s, a short time before the Second World War. The short piece I quoted above, shows a range of issues concerning the language.

First, Karl's father is of the opinion that the Norwegian language is the most important subject at school. Second, he thinks that bilingualism is no advantage, on the contrary – it makes it difficult to use both languages correctly. Third, the characters use the name Finnish while speaking about the language. The 'Kven' designation in the title can be a little misleading compared with designations used in the book. I met the author when he visited Tromsø in the autumn of 2006 and talked to some persons from the Kven community. He said that he had objections to using the Kven-word in the title but decided to do so after a consultation with his daughter.

As mentioned above, for many years *Kven* was regarded an invective, used by the Norwegian majority, not the endoethnonym. Even nowadays there is a strong opposition against using this name, although many Kven activists and researchers has been struggling to change the negative attitude by, among other things, giving the earlier invective status and using it in positive way. The reasons for the controversies about the ethnonym, language and belonging are connected with the long history of the Kven people in Norway.

From the beginning of the Kven migration to Norway the attitude towards them was ambivalent. Kvens were regarded as clever farmers (Guttormsen 2001: 25). Their agriculture was able to make the Norwegian economy stronger and consolidate the territory (Stortingsmelding Nr. 15). According to the Norwegian authorities, until the middle of the 19th century Kvens had a high status because they were pioneers in farming and were known for their cleanliness (Niemi 2001: 21). From the second half of the 19th century until about the Second World War, the situation was completely different. Kvens, Saami and other minorities were regarded as foreign nations and the policy of Norwegianization was introduced. There were different reason, with one of them being the ideology of the national state with one kind of people, one language and one culture. In addition, the minorities in the North, the border minorities, lived close to the neighbor states Russia and Finland which were regarded as a danger. Moreover, the growing competition on the labor market contributed to a more strict minority and immigration policy (*ibidem*). Sigrid Skarstein mentions restrictions concerning purchasing of land, based on citizenship and language, as well as Norwegianization policy in the school and church. (Skarstein 2002: 93-94). At the time when the concept of Norwegianization prevailed, the language and its status were supported by religion, i.e.

Laestadianism, a pietistic movement which started in the middle of the 19th century. Ivar Bjørklund describes that:

We can now witness how Sámi and Kvæn organized themselves through the Læstadian ideology and established an opposition against the form of guardianship which they were subjected to. Through the Læstadian world view they developed an alternative sense of reality where they turned upside down the portrayal which Norwegian authorities had given of their culture and way of life. Their preachers turned material poverty into spiritual wealth; It was the poor people – Sámi and Kvæns – who were God's chosen. "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than it is for a rich man to enter God's kingdom." (...) Sámi and the Finnish languages of the Kvæns were considered holy languages – **bassi giella** – knowledge in Norwegian was of less importance. The Norwegian educational system was turned away – such profane knowledge was only "book knowledge". You could never come to terms with God in your head; only in your heart (Bjørklund 1985: 50).

In this way the religion became tightly connected with the Kvens conceptions about their identity. Talking to my informants I heard often that they regarded Laestadianism and the language as something "typically Kven".

After Finland became a sovereign state, the Norwegian authorities became afraid of the Lapua Movement which struggled to build the Great Finland, including also parts of Norway (Eriksen 1967: 228). They were frightened that Kvens would become a fifth column if the Lapua Movement demanded those parts of Norway where Finnish was spoken. The Second World War showed that the fear was unfounded. Many Kvens took part in the war as soldiers in the Norwegian army and made a big contribution (Petterson 1999: 49). After the Second World War, Kvens were regarded as assimilated in Norwegian society (Anttonen 1999: 491). Teemu Ryymin mentions the Kven revitalization in the 1980s and later. According to him, there were three main factors which contributed to this: the global ethnic mobilization in the 1960s and later, among others the Saami movement in the 1970s, the new immigrants from Finland⁶, as well as Finnish and Saami organizations which gave Kven patterns they could follow (Ryymin 2001: 62).

This complicated and varied history had, of course, an influence on the Kvens' attitudes to the ways they identified themselves, to what they regarded as an important condition of belonging to the community, and to the language they spoke. Olav Beddari maintains that the Norwegian Finns have always had their written language, i.e. standard Finnish (Beddari 2009:

⁶ Cf. Anttonen 2000, mentioned above.

227). In his opinion, it is more practical to teach the standard language (Finnish) than a dialect (Kven) (Beddari 2009: 238 – 239). Olav Beddari has been known for a long time as an opponent of distinguishing between Kvens and other groups of Finnish origin. For instance, in 1991 he maintained that the use of the Kven name by activists was motivated by their struggle to obtain the means to research the group (Beddari 1991: 14). Olav Beddari is one of the representatives of people who have a skeptical or negative attitude towards the use of the Kven ethnonym, regarding Kvens as a separate group and Kven as a separate language. I did not talk to many of such people because my research, as I mentioned above, was not concentrated on them, but I met one person who represented this attitude and attended the Kven course nevertheless. She was of the opinion that “Kven” was an invective, but she wanted to learn the language because she wanted to know her mother language.

Among my informants there were Kvens who were engaged in political activities. They emphasized usually that Kven was not the same as Finnish, both in the sense of belonging to the group and the language. They called Kven a language and regarded it as very important. It did not mean that Kven was their mother language. Many times I was told that the mother tongue of the person I had talked to was Norwegian. People who were not so interested in Kven politics had an inclination to use both terms – Kven and Finnish interchangeably and seemed not to attach any importance to distinguishing between them. One of the informants even mentioned the mixed language – Finnish-Norwegian as something typical for Kvens. Another expressed the opinion that to be Kven meant to be a mix of Finn and Norwegian. The Kven newspaper *Ruijan Kaiku* expresses both explicitly and implicitly in descriptive texts that Kven is a language, not a dialect, and it is different from Finnish. Nevertheless, the interviews in the newspaper show the variety and ambivalence in the usage of designations, for instance the Kven author Reidun Mellem says that many people she knew as a child *kvened* well, that means – they spoke Finnish (*Ruijan Kaiku* 2/2010: 11). Others emphasize that Kven is not Finnish. For instance Josef Lindbäck, who calls Kven his mother language and identity and writes that he does not wish the Norwegian Finnish Association’s struggle to get Finnish recognized as a minority language in Norway to succeed at the expense of Kven. He calls himself Kven with a Kven background and identity and Kven as his mother language (*Ruijan Kaiku* 2/2008: 4).

Conclusion

Kvens in Norway have the status of a national minority. Their language is officially recognized as a minority language. Not all people who can be called Kvens accept this situation. Many of them regard the Kven name as an invective and emphasize their connections to Finland and the Finnish minority groups in Norway.

In northern Norway, which is a borderland with both Norwegian, Saami, Finnish and other influences, the strategies of identifying oneself and other people, used by the inhabitants, are varied, but the language issue is always attached importance to. The official status of the language has evolved from a group of Finnish dialects to a separate minority language called Kven. That has resulted in increased usage of the Kven designation while speaking about the language and in a need to construct a written language, common for all users who speak different dialects and for those who do not speak Kven yet.

The strategies of using the language as an identity creating factor by users, researchers, media, etc. are varied. One of them consists in identifying Kvens with Finns, consistent use of the designation Finnish and avoiding the Kven name. On the other hand, those who are engaged in Kven political activities, emphasize the differences between Kvens and Finns, Kven and Finnish language, and they do not use the names interchangeably. There are also Kvens who regard the language as a very important aspect of their identity, often as their mother language, but are not so concerned about designations when speaking about themselves and the language.

References

- Anderson Benedict (2006). *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London.
- Andreassen Irene (2004-2005). "Ei framtid for kvensk språk? – Status og utfordringer i dagens situasjon". *Arina 1*: 29-39.
- Anttonen Marjut (2000). "Finnish migrants to North Norway – supporting or threatening the Kven identifications of today?". *Ethnologia Fennica. Finnish Studies in Ethnology*: 15-28.
- Anttonen Marju (1999). *Etnopolitiikkaa Ruijassa: suomalaislähtöisen väestön identiteettien politisoituminen 1990-luvulla*. Helsinki: 487-503.
- Ardener Edwin (1992). "Tożsamość i utożsamienie", In: Mach Zdzisław, Paluch Andrzej K. (ed.), *Sytuacja mniejszościowa i tożsamość*. Kraków: 21-42.
- Barth Fredrik (1969). "Introduction", in: Fredrik Barth (ed.). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Oslo: 9-38.

- Beddari Olav (2009). "Kamp om vår språk og vår identitet". In: Robertsen Thor (ed.), *Den finske arven*. Vadsø: 223 – 239.
- Beddari Olav (1991). "Niemis 'kongelige' kvenaksept". *Finnmarken*. (24th may 1991): 14.
- Bjørklund Ivar (1985). "Local history in a multiethnic context – the case of Kvænangen, northern Norway. Some remarks on the relationship between history and social anthropology". *Acta Borealia* (1/2-1985): 47-56.
- Buchowski Michał (1997). "Tożsamości Europejczyków: jedność i podziały", in: Mucha Janusz, Olszewski Wojciech. *Dylematy tożsamości europejskich pod koniec drugiego tysiąclecia*. Toruń: 51-84.
- Eriksen Hans Kr. (1967). "Kvenene – det finske folket i Nord-Norge". *Håloygminne* (4): 217-241.
- Eriksen Thomas Hylland (2005). "Identitet", in: Eriksen Thomas Hylland (ed.). *Flerkulturell forståelse*. Oslo: 36-56.
- Guttormsen Helge (2001). "Kvensk innvandring til Nord-Norge", *Ottar* 3: 22-27
- Lindbach Kaisa Maliniemi (2002). "Drømmen om Ruija – havlandet", in: Gröndahl Satu (ed.). *Litteraturens gränsland ~ Innvandrar- og minoritetslitteratur i nordisk perspektiv*. *Uppsala multhiethnic Papers* 45. Uppsala: Centrum för multietnisk forskning: 119-138.
- Megard Bjørn Olav (1999). *Kvener eller finskætta: en undersøkelse av betegnelse „kvener” „og etterkommere etter finske innvandrere” i politisk diskurs og i utforming av identitetstilknytning*, M.A. thesis, Universitetet i Oslo.
- Niemi Einar (2001). "Kvenene og den norske staten – Et anstrengt forhold", *Samora*, 5: 21.
- Niemi Einar (1994). "Den lange, lange sti over myrene og ind i skogene. Hvem har traket op de den?", In: Einar Arne Drivenes, Marit Anne Hauan, Helge A. Wold: *Nordnorsk kulturhistorie 2. Det mangfoldige folket*. Oslo: 119-131.
- Pedersen Henry (2005). *Kvengutten Karl – bakgrunn og oppvekst*. Tromsø.
- Petterson Arvid (1999). "Kvenene – en glemt minoritet". *Historie* (1/1999): 46-51.
- Ryymin Temu (2001). "Creating Kvenness: identity building among the Arctic Finns in northern Norway". *Acta Borealia* (1/2001): 51-67.
- Skarstein Sigrid (2002). "Mobilitet og stabilitet. Kveners og finlenderes bidrag til stabilisering av inbyggertallet i Finnmark". In: Gerd Johanne Valen, Kjersti Skavhaug, Kjersti Schanche (eds.), *Flytting og forandring i Finnmarks fortid*. *Artikkelsamling fra museene i Finnmark*, Alta: 84-103.
- Söderholm Eira (2009/2010). "Kvensk som universitetsfag". *Arina*: 204-206.
- Stortingsmelding Nr. 15 (2000–2001). *Nasjonale minoriteter i Noreg - Om statleg politikk overfor jødar, kvener, rom, romanifolket og skogfinnar*.
- Stortingsmelding nr. 23 (2007–2008). *Språk bygger broer. Språkstimulering og språkopplæring for barn, unge og voksne*.
- Utvik Hanne Elin (1996). *Norske ord i finsk språkdrakt. En studie av nyere skandinaviske substantivisk i kvensk/ruijafinsk tekstmateriale med hovedvekt på norske lån*. MA thesis, Universitet i Tromsø.
- Articles from Ruijan Kaiku. *The Kven newspaper*:
Ruijan Kaiku 3/2007: 20. «Kvensk språkråd opprettet»

Ruijan Kaiku 2/2008: 4. «Kvensk – mitt morsmål og min identitet»
Ruijan Kaiku 2/2010: 11. «Et hiva kvinnfolk»

Stary język o nowym statusie. Kilka aspektów tożsamości Kvenów na Pograniczu

Kvenowie są jedną z kilku grup uznawanych w Norwegii za mniejszości. Zarówno definicja jak i etnonim „Kven” budzą wiele kontrowersji. W myśl najpowszechniejszej definicji Kvenowie to potomkowie fińskich imigrantów w Norwegii. Jednakże trzeba pamiętać, że posługując się słowem „imigranci” możemy natrafić na sprzeciw, ponieważ w przypadku Kvenów mówimy często o migracjach na obszarze północnej Skandynawii wcześniejszych od ustanowienia dzisiejszych granic państwowych. Podobnie termin Finowie nie jest powszechnie akceptowany. Wątpliwości budzi on zwłaszcza wśród badaczy oraz tych członków grupy, którzy podkreślają zróżnicowanie etniczne dzisiejszej Finlandii. Mimo to wielu członków grupy nazywanej Kvenami uważa, że „Kven” i „Fin” oznaczają to samo. Protestują przy tym przeciwko nazywaniu ich Kvenami, ponieważ to niegdyś używane przez norweską większość słowo miało pejoratywny wydźwięk. Wśród współczesnych definicji kategorii „Kven” często pojawia się następująca: „Kvenowie to fińskojęzyczny lud przybyły do Norwegii przed rokiem 1900 oraz jego potomkowie” (Skarstein 2002: 85). Również i ta definicja może napotkać opór, ponieważ kveński uważany jest w Norwegii za odrębny język od roku 2005, a różnicę między kveńskim a fińskim bardzo wielu badaczy i użytkowników języka uważa za istotną. W niniejszym artykule zajmę się kwestią języka jako znaczącego czynnika tworzącego tożsamość. Przedstawię najważniejsze wiadomości o mało znanej mniejszości, a następnie omówię krótko klasyfikację i status języka kveńskiego w Norwegii, dawniej i dzisiaj. W końcu zajmę się kwestią wykorzystywania języka w procesie tworzenia tożsamości Kvenów.