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Variation in Ume Saami: The Role of Vocabulary in Dialect Descriptions

Descriptions of Variation in Saami

It is well known that Saami shows considerable regional variation and this variation can be found throughout the language, i.e. in grammar as well as in lexicon. The variation is so extensive that nowadays researchers in Saami prefer to talk about different Saami languages, not dialects. Six different written standards are in use for the varieties of different areas, but the number of Saami languages is usually regarded as being even higher. Finnish researchers in Saami usually distinguish between ten Saami languages (Sammallahti 1998: 1), earlier also called “main dialect groups” (Korhonen 1981: 15). There are, however, also traditions that distinguish “three principal branches” of the Saami language (Collinder 1949: 2), and there are still other ways of distinguishing main dialects or languages (cf. Korhonen 1981: 19). Thus even if the classification into ten languages put forward by Finnish researchers may be dominant today and can be supported with good arguments, there can hardly be said to exist any consensus as to the number of Saami languages or main dialects (Korhonen 1981: 18; Larsson 1999: 113; Larsson 2001: 54). Here it could also be pointed out that the eastern Saami varieties seem to have been divided into languages in a more detailed way than the southern Saami varieties. On the one hand, Sammallahti (1998: 6) distinguishes between Akkala, Kildin and Ter Saami languages in the east but regards South Saami as one language with two main dialects. Hasselbrink (1981: 21f.), on the other hand, distinguishes between three main dialects in South Saami, Ume Saami excluded (Larsson 1999: 114).

Of course, within each of these “languages”, “main dialect groups” or “principal branches” there is considerable variation (see Sammallahti 1998: 6–38 for a good overview). Here I will use the terms *language* and *dialect* without any fundamental difference, since the only reliable distinction between them depends on political factors. I will use mostly the term *variety* when speaking about the language form of a specific village.

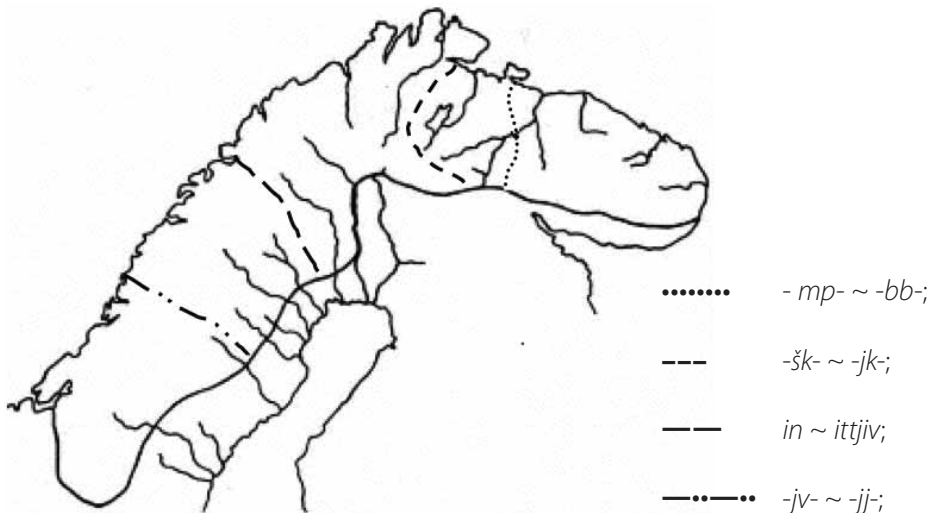
In general, the descriptions of Saami language variation and the definitions of its varieties are illustrated by means of maps showing the geographical distribution of different sounds and sound contexts (i.e. isophones). Some sound

variations, i.e. changes historically speaking, are taken as fundamentally important and in many cases they divide the Saami language area into two parts, resulting in neat dialect maps. (The instances of such differences discussed here are shown on map 1.) Such a split of the language area can be observed in, for example, the development of *mp* > *bb* where only the easternmost dialects on the Kola peninsula have preserved the original combination of nasal + stop, e.g. SaaSk. *suä* 'b'b ~ SaaKld. *suəmmB* 'stick'. In the case of *-*šk*- (and *-*št*-) where the sibilant has either been preserved as a sibilant or changed into a fricative, the borderline runs further to the west, viz. between North Saami and Inari Saami, cf. SaaN. *guoika* ~ SaaIn. *kuoš'kâ* 'rapid'. The change of *-jv-* > *-jj-*, on the other hand, is restricted to South Saami, i.e. dialects south of Ume Saami, cf. SaaS. *biejje* ~ SaaU. *bäivee* 'day; sun'. Certainly, not only phonological differences can be described in this way. To give just one example from morphology, it can be mentioned that the negated past tense, e.g. 'I didn't work', is formed in two different ways in Saami. In the west and in the south, the negation verb is in the past tense and the main verb is in the connegative: SaaL. *ittjiv barga* (Neg. Verb + Past Tense + 1Sg 'work' + connegative). In the east and north, on the other hand, the negation verb has no tense marking but the past tense is expressed by means of the past participle of the main verb: SaaN. *in bargan* (Neg. Verb + 1Sg 'work' + Past Ptc). The isomorph between these systems runs between Lule Saami and North Saami.

There are several cases where we find variation between three or more forms among the Saami varieties. One such case is the accusative singular of bisyllabic nouns, where different endings have different geographical distributions: in North Saami there is a \emptyset -ending (making the form identical to the genitive singular), but in Lule Saami and further south we find different endings reflecting Proto-Saami *-*m*, such as *-v* and *-p*. This means that a map showing this variation would be rather complicated. On the one hand, there will be a borderline between varieties maintaining a distinction between the genitive and the accusative, but on the other hand there will be borderlines between the different forms of the accusative ending. In comparison, the genitive singular of bisyllabic nouns would offer a more clear-cut map. One isomorph would run between Ume and Arjeplog Saami, separating the southern dialects (or languages), where the case ending *-n* is to be found, from Arjeplog and Lule Saami where there is no case ending in the genitive singular. The other isomorph would run between the Unna Tjerusj (Sörkautum) dialect of Lule Saami and Torne Saami, where the Arjeplog and Lule dialects make a formal distinction between the genitive and the accusative, whereas no such distinction is made north of this isogloss. (Korhonen 1981: 212)

Even if there are plenty of such instances of variation in Saami, phonological differences that divide the Saami language area into two parts are usually preferred on the dialect maps of Saami. Binary oppositions can be shown clearly by means of isophones and this way of presenting variation and distinguishing different languages (or main dialects) is mainly based on such differences that

Figure 1. Some frequently alleged isophones and isomorphs in Saami:



are regarded as important. Collinder (1949: 285) sees the degree of importance of such features as depending on two factors, either descriptive or historical. However, it would hardly be an exaggeration to maintain that, in general, the historical aspect has played the leading role. This is quite reasonable, since the connection between the dialect geography and the history of the Saami language(s) is so obvious, and since the dialect variation presents an extremely important source of material for understanding the historical development of Saami (Larsson 1999: 115).

One example of the interconnection of language history and dialect variation in Saami is the importance attached to gradation, where varieties without gradation have tended to be regarded as belonging to South Saami, even if other criteria would join them with Ume Saami (Lagercrantz 1941: 319; Hasselbrink 1944: 5, 13 and 1981: 21; Rydving 2008A: 162; Larsson 2009; Sammallahti 2009: 15; cf. Rydving 2008B: 370 for more criteria). With all probability this has to do with the importance ascribed to gradation a century ago, when gradation became “the crucial explanatory feature in the sound history of Uralic” (Korhonen 1986: 132). That view is also reflected in Moosberg’s (STS) investigation of gradation in the western varieties of Ume Saami, where he describes gradation as “this very important feature”. For such reasons, the existence or absence of gradation came to be regarded as a far more important criterion than e.g. the assimilation of *-jv-* to *-jj-*, (cf. Map 1), a feature that has a similar – but not identical – distribution to that of gradation. The varieties of Southern Tärna and Ullisjaure, which display *-jv-* but have no gradation, were regarded as belonging to South Saami – and are often regarded as such even today.

As could be seen already from this example, Ume Saami being positioned between Arjeplog Saami to the north and Vilhelmina (South) Saami to the south, displays dialect features corresponding to features in dialects both to the north

and the south. As in the dialects to the north, Ume Saami has (some) gradation and has preserved *-jv-*, but similar to South Saami it has e.g. the ending *-snə* in the inessive singular and a non-short high vowel in words like *birra* ‘around’ (cf. SaaS. *bijre* / SaaArj. *pirra*) and *gùllat* ‘to hear’ (cf. SaaS. *govledh* / SaaArj. *kullat*) (Ume Saami forms according to Schlachter 1958, South Saami forms according to ÅADB and Arjeplog forms according to Lehtiranta 1989). Such circumstances have led some scholars, such as Korhonen (1981: 17), to regard Ume Saami as a transitional dialect (or language). Other researchers regard Ume Saami as belonging to South Saami, but they then denote that unity as “South Saami in a broader sense of the word” (e.g. Hasselbrink 1944: 2; cf. Sköld 1961: 68). This uncertainty as to where to draw the decisive borderlines between the main dialects (or languages) depends of course on which criteria are regarded as most fundamental (Korhonen 1967: 14).

Choice of Criteria

As could be seen above, Saami dialectology tends to focus on isophones that divide the Saami language area into two parts and reflect such historical developments that are regarded as important. In Pekka Sammallahti’s handbook of Saami (1998) the phonological arguments are fundamental to his presentation of the areal variation of Saami. There are over 80 such arguments, to which are added around 20 morphological ones – but there are no lexical arguments. Vocabulary questions are dealt with twice in Sammallahti’s presentation, when he states that the vocabulary of the variety of the village Girjgis unites it with the Lule Saami varieties to the south but “structurally it belongs to North Saami” (Sammallahti 1998: 19). In other words, language structure is regarded as a more reliable criterion than vocabulary. In fact, Sammallahti (1998: 37) underlines that the Saami languages “have largely the same basic vocabulary”, which he supports with an analysis of the Swadesh basic list of 100 words (on the Swadesh list see McMahon & McMahon 2005: 33; Tillinger 2008: 119). Even if it is true that very basic words, such as terms for parts of the body that tend to be very old in any language (cf. Larsson 1996), are generally common to most of the Saami varieties, it seems a little too easy to liberate oneself from the lexical variation in Saami simply by considering the top 100 words in this way.

Another point of view is put forward in the course book *Davvin* (Guttorm et al. 1983), a book written by first-language speakers of North Saami, where lexical differences are regarded as very essential (see, for example, p. 142). Here it is certainly not my intention to claim what is right and what is wrong, but I wish merely to illustrate the point that criteria can be selected in different ways.

In his book on Jukkasjärvi Saami, Björn Collinder (1949) deals with the question of Saami dialect boundaries in the north of Sweden in another way, placing lexical differences alongside phonological and morphological ones. Even if the instances selected by him seem to be rather haphazard, they nevertheless

raise the fundamental question of the relative weight of different criteria. I shall give a couple of concrete examples from Collinder's (1949: 277, 281) list of dialect features from Jukkasjärvi. As in the varieties north of Jukkasjärvi final *-m* has developed into *-n* in the 1 Sg. verbal ending (e.g., SaaKt. *manan*, SaaJukk. *manan* but SaaL. *manav* 'I go'), but on the other hand, the word for 'to shoot' corresponds to the Lule Saami word, cf. SaaKt. *báhčit*, SaaJukk. *vuohčit*, SaaL. *vuohjtjēt*. It is always difficult, if not impossible, to weigh the relative importance of such criteria. While a sound change runs through the whole language system, differences in vocabulary may, on the other hand, cause greater difficulties in communication. Collinder (1949: 285) does not offer a solution to this problem, but instead he presents two different results, one counting the lexical instances and one excluding them.

There are no doubt strong traditions in Saami dialectology and the common opinion is largely dependent on a prevailing understanding as to which criteria are to be regarded as most important. However, Knut Bergsland (1968: 85) has put forward another viewpoint when he declares almost programmatically, "To clarify the history of the various dialectal areas it may be wise to put the old beliefs into the archives and to take out all the empirical material available." The present article is an attempt to live up to Bergsland's idea.

Ume Saami Lexical Variation

Differences in vocabulary seem to be difficult to deal with in the traditional framework of Saami dialect geography. The easiest way of attending to this problem would be to continue giving the highest priority to phonological arguments and use lexical instances only as support. From the lexical material one can extract phonological evidence and use it for traditional dialect descriptions. The words themselves would thus not serve as evidence in their own right. Applying such a method to the Ume Saami material of my investigation, one would, for example, find clear phonological differences between the eastern and the western area in Ume Saami, as in e.g. the development of the fricative *-δδ-* within the word. In the east this sound has been preserved but in the west it has developed into *-rr-*, cf. eastern *naδδə* ~ western *narrə* 'shaft, handle'. Some words, such as that for 'eagle', could be used as supportive evidence for this isophone, since it has the same geographical distribution (with the exception of the Maskaure variety where there is a variation *-δδ-* ~ *-rr-*; Larsson 2010: 216). If treated in this way, the lexical material will lack independence and will only be supportive of the "real", important arguments, in other words the phonological ones. That would, however, not be satisfying, since lexical differences are probably more disruptive to communication than phonological ones, as pointed out above.

In Saami studies so far, the notion of Ume Saami has been synonymous with Wolfgang Schlachter's dictionary *Wörterbuch des Waldlappendialekts von*

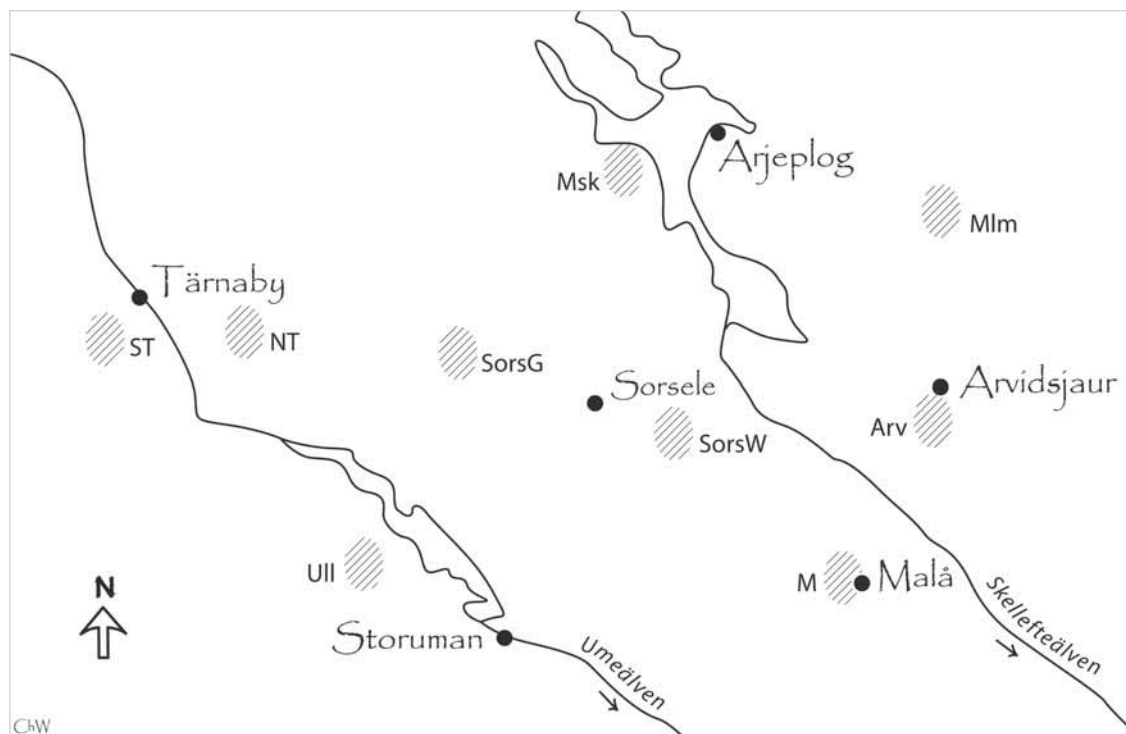


Figure 2. The Ume Saami localities investigated:
 M = Malå, Arv = Arvidsjaur, Mlm= Malmesjaure, Ull = Ullisjaur, SorsG = mountain dialect of Sorsele, SorsW = forest dialect of Sorsele, Msk = Maskaure, ST = Southern Tärna, NT = Northern Tärna.

Malå und Texte zur Ethnographie (1958) in spite of the fact that this dictionary, regardless of its high standard, describes an idiolect: the language of Lars Sjulsson in Setsele outside Malå as recorded in 1940. Therefore, as long as this source alone is used in research, Ume Saami will be radically different from all other Saami languages (or main dialects) in not showing any regional variation. There is, however, rich material to be found in archives. The material in the SOFI archives at Uppsala and Umeå adds some 35,000 words to the 5,000 words in Schlachter's dictionary and this material represents up to nine different Ume Saami varieties. During my year at the project "Early Networking in Northern Fennoscandia" at the Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) in Oslo, I worked with Ume Saami material that can be utilized for investigations into the variation in this dialect (or language).

This archive material contains word collections more numerous and extensive than the available grammar descriptions. There are sketches of grammar from only three different localities – to which should be added the sketch on Malå Saami in Schlachter (1958) – but there are word collections of varying extent from nine localities.

In total the Ume Saami lexical material consists of five collections. The most extensive is the one by Axel Calleberg (ULMA 22480) covering five different localities, mainly in the eastern part of the area (Malå, Malmesjaure, Maskaure, Ullisjaure and Sorsele). The basis of this collection is K. B. Wiklund's collection from Malå (KBW 25-26). Then there are three vocabularies collected by Nils Moosberg that cover the western part of the area (Northern and Southern Tärna, Mountain and Forest variety of Sorsele; ULMA 16775: 1-2, 16776, 16777), and one collection by Tryggve Sköld from the Arvidsjaur (more precisely the village of Mausjaure) variety (ULMA 25660, DAUM 10670). Consequently, in the case of Malå, we even have two different collections at our disposal: the one by Calleberg reproducing the Wiklund collection from 1900 and the dictionary of Schlachter, the material of which was collected in 1940 and the book itself published in 1958. This is true also for the Forest dialect of Sorsele, which was described both by Calleberg and – to a somewhat smaller extent – by Moosberg. Sköld's material from Arvidsjaur diverges from the other collections: it was brought together some 50 years later than the other collections and did not follow the same pattern as they did. To give a concrete example, Sköld's Arvidsjaur material doesn't contain any word for 'beggar', as the other collections do, but it is the only one with a word for 'TV set'. Altogether the Ume Saami material consists of almost 40,000 words. Even if some varieties, above all the Mountain dialect of Sorsele, are not represented by any extensive material, the total material of the Ume Saami varieties gives truly solid information on the vocabulary of this dialect (or language) and makes it possible to present a reliable picture of Ume Saami variation. Today, Ume Saami is one of the Saami varieties in danger of becoming extinct, even if revitalizing efforts are being carried out. Whatever path that development takes, the old dialect variation is gone and can only be studied on the basis of archival material. In other words, the Ume Saami word collections seem to be an excellent example of archival material that has not been used and can help in modifying our picture of Saami language history and in grouping its varieties. The fact that the vocabulary collections represent nine localities, but grammar descriptions are available only from four villages – Malmesjaure (ULMA 2966), Malå (Schlachter 1958), Maskaure (ULMA 2860) and Ullisjaure (ULMA 2139: 2, 2784) – creates an urgent need for a method dealing with variation in vocabulary.

As pointed out above, in Saami studies Ume Saami has so far been almost synonymous with the idiolect of Lars Sjulsson outside Malå that was described by Schlachter (1958). This makes it somewhat complicated to draw the boundaries of the Ume Saami area, since the borderlines are dependent on what features are seen as characteristic of Ume Saami. In this article the varieties investigated are all found in the Ume Saami area of Sammallahti's map (1998: 5), with a slight adjustment of the southern borderline which I draw along the watershed between the Vojmån and the Ume rivers. I do not maintain that all these varieties make up the Ume Saami language (or dialect) – that is discussed in my extensive investigation (Larsson 2012) – but the archive material available makes it reasonable to treat the varieties in this area.

The Method Applied

Having rich lexical material and more limited grammatical material at one's disposal, one will inevitably have to address the question of lexicon versus grammar in dialect geography. Even if information on the phonological system can be extracted from the recorded word forms, it would seem strange not to investigate the lexical material itself, especially today when there is a growing interest in using words for grouping varieties of different kinds (e.g. Michalove 2002 with quoted literature; McMahon & McMahon 2005). The problem to consider then will be the weight of the various criteria. These difficulties are, however, caused by the mixing of grammatical and lexical criteria (Larsson 2010: 203). As long as isophones and isomorphs are treated separately from investigation of the geographical distribution of words, the question of the relative weight of the different categories of arguments will not arise. Furthermore, the distribution of words does not have to be dealt with using isoglosses (in the true sense of this notion) but by using statistical methods. One of the most important advantages of the work at CAS is the fact that projects in other fields of research are working in the same building. This favors cross-discipline discussions and it gave me a possibility to meet Graham Chapman, a researcher in social sciences who has solid experience in working with statistics. The method used here is heavily dependent on his expertise and the results would certainly not have been the same without our discussions and cooperation. The method used is described in detail in Larsson & Chapman (forthcoming).

This way of dealing with the material does not imply that I would give priority to lexical arguments instead of phonological ones. All arguments should be used – in their own right – to yield a full picture of the areal variation of a language. The results of a traditional dialect map based on isophones and isomorphs can be compared to the results of a statistically based analysis of vocabulary, and these results together will present a picture that is probably more realistic and certainly better founded than those based on some selected isophone(s) that are regarded as fundamental. After all, a dialect description based on all material available is what Bergsland asked for more than 40 years ago.

A great advantage of the method applied is that it can deal with the total lexical variation, not only those cases where there is a binary opposition, as in the way favored when working with isophones. There are instances where the Ume Saami varieties are split into two groups, e.g. the word for 'eagle' being in the western varieties (*h*)*àr'čä* but in the eastern ones *àrtnäs*. There are, however, also instances where several word stems – all expressing one and the same meaning – are in use across the Ume Saami varieties. All such cases of variation can be considered with the method applied here. It must be remembered that shared elements in vocabulary are here understood as a sign of frequent communication, in other words networking.

The investigation starts from the collection of Calleberg, which covers five Ume Saami varieties. Since his material is arranged according to the meaning

of the words, I make meaning my starting point. To use Saussure's terminology, I start from *signifié* and first of all I exclude those cases where the *signifiant* is the same throughout the Ume Saami area; such instances say nothing about the variation within Ume Saami. Out of the approximately 4,500 lexical entries ("signifié") to be found in Calleberg's collection, some 750 show a variation in form ("signifiant"). These 750 meanings are then sought in the collections of Moosberg, Schlachter and Sköld. For eight localities, i.e. excluding the Mountain dialect of Sorsele, some 350 meanings show such a variation in form that can be utilized. The smallest amount of varying words (i.e. "signifiants") is, as could be expected, the words from all nine localities (i.e. including the Mountain dialect of Sorsele), where approximately 150 words displaying a variation can be selected.

When the form expressing a certain meaning in one variety – or several varieties – diverges from the form(s) of the other varieties, it is registered. The form itself is basically without importance and, what's more, the meaning is also unimportant in statistical processing. The varying forms express the variation in Ume Saami and the meanings basically serve to arrange the material. What really counts is the number of coincidences and divergences in the material and how they are distributed across the area. It could be seen as the ideal example of Saussure's thesis "Dans la langue, il n'y a que des différences." However, this numerical-statistical way of dealing with the material certainly starts with and is based on a linguistic analysis, considering which forms are to be regarded as identical, and it is possible to return to the word material to examine e.g. the semantics of words showing a particular geographic distribution.

Forest Saami Vocabulary

One example based on the sample of eight localities can elucidate the results of my investigations. As mentioned above, some 350 meanings are expressed with varying forms in the material from the eight villages. If we investigate which four localities show the highest number of coinciding forms, it turns out that almost 250 out of these 350 words are common to the varieties of Malå, Malmesjaure, Maskare and the forest dialect of Sorsele, in other words to the dialects in the eastern, forest area. The following groups of four show some 150 words in common, i.e. a considerably lower number of convergences.

It might come as a surprise that the variety of Arvidsjaur is missing from this group of eastern forest dialects. Given its geographical position one would certainly expect it to belong to this group. This is, however, a consequence of the fact that the Arvidsjaur material is later and has a different character than the material collected by Calleberg and Moosberg. In fact, this explanation is supported by further arguments. If we make Sköld's Arvidsjaur material our starting point and investigate which varieties display the most coincidences with the Arvidsjaur vocabulary, we will find that it is close to the eastern varieties of

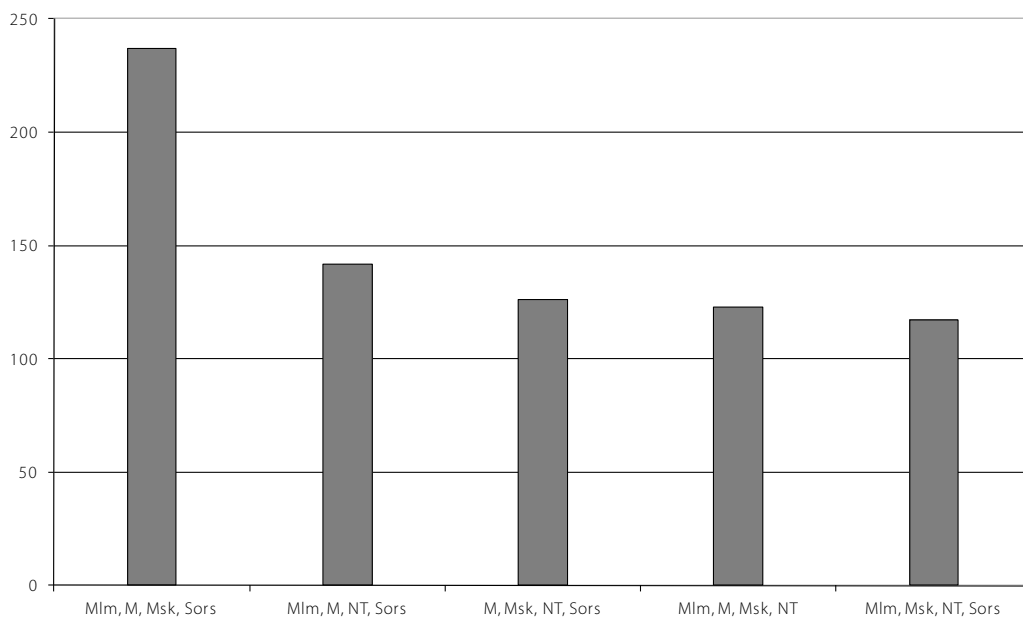


Figure 3.
Groups of four varieties arranged according to highest number of converging forms.

the Sorsele forest dialect, Maskaure, Malå and Malmesjaure. But if we start from some other variety, then Arvidsjaur will fall out due to the diverging material.

This is no doubt an indication – based solely on lexicon – that there is in fact a forest Saami dialect in the eastern part of the Ume Saami area. The phonological criterion presented above, i.e. the representation of the fricative **-δδ-*, recurs in the results of this investigation into the lexicon. There is, however, a slight difference in distribution, because in the village of Maskaure there is a variation between the western *narrə* and the eastern *nadδə* form, but its vocabulary converges to a high degree with that of the forest varieties in the east. So, in the Maskaure case one could raise the question of which criterion is more basic – phonology or vocabulary – but as far as I can see, such a discussion would hardly be fruitful. Selecting the most important criterion is equal to simplification.

The statistical data on the distribution of words can, however, lead to further conclusions. As was shown above, the four eastern forest Saami varieties of Sorsele, Maskaure, Malå and Malmesjaure show the highest number of words in common. The following four combinations of four varieties having words in common are made up by three out of these four villages combined – in each case – with the variety of the Mountain Saami village of Northern Tärna far up in the north-western part of the Ume Saami area. It is not the variety of Ullisjaure, nor that of Southern Tärna, but always the Northern Tärna variety, that is the fourth member of the group. This distribution pattern obviously reflects the fact that the reindeer breeding Mountain Saami of Northern Tärna have their grazing lands in the winter down in the forests in the vicinity of the four Forest Saami villages mentioned. The wintertime contacts of the Saami of Northern Tärna

are reflected in their vocabulary. What is particularly interesting is the fact that the Northern Tärna informant of Nils Moosberg was not a reindeer herder, but a pauper woman living a more or less sedentary life with her family in Boksjön, Tärna. Nevertheless, her vocabulary shows traces of the reindeer herders' wintertime contacts down in the forest area in the east. Indeed, it seems to be justified to speak of a local variety of Ume Saami that reflects the networks of its speakers.

Conclusion

Taking the collections of Moosberg, Calleberg and Sköld under consideration will, of course, result in new knowledge about variation in Ume Saami. It goes without saying that when using Schlachter's dictionary alone, which is based on an idiolect, one cannot get any picture of regional variation. Since the bulk of my material consists of word collections, one should find a way of dealing with vocabulary in Saami dialectology. Lexical material can be taken under consideration in dialect geography, but it should be treated on its own and not mixed up with phonological or morphological arguments. Mixing arguments will inevitably lead to a discussion about the weight of different arguments.

Certainly one should pay attention to all differences – phonological, morphological and syntactical as well as lexical ones – since they all make up the areal variation in language. In new models of description the relative importance of isophones will decrease, since other arguments are also considered, and this will probably yield a more complicated picture of Saami language variation. All efforts to select *the* arguments that reveal the position of every variety in the Saami dialect chain only end up in a simplification. As an example of such simplified argumentation, gradation was used above. This kind of argumentation certainly provides us with a nice, clean-cut picture, as all simplifications do. I am, however, more interested in regarding as many criteria as possible when describing this highly varying language (or these highly varying languages). Above all, a more complicated picture of Saami language variation will certainly be truer than a dialect map where a few isophones divide the Saami language(s) into – what is said to be – fundamental parts. Reality can be rather complicated.

Abbreviations

- SaaArj = Arjeplog Saami
- SaaJukk = Jukkasjärvi Saami
- SaaKt = Kautokeino Saami
- SaaL = Lule Saami
- SaaS = South Saami

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