

Relative and absolute chronology in Eastern Saami vocalism

Ilya Egorov

LMU Munich

Saami historical phonology is a relatively well-studied field. However, most major studies have focused on the development from Proto-Saami to North Saami (cf. Korhonen 1981; Sammallahti 1998), while the phonological development of other Saami languages has often been overlooked. This study aims to address this gap by examining the relative and, where possible, absolute chronology of changes in the vowel systems of the Eastern Saami languages.

A range of syncope and apocopes considerably changed the word structure of particular East Saami languages. Kildin and Akkila Saami are most affected by these processes, cf. PSaa. **muore* ‘tree’ > AkSaa *murr*, KSaa. *muurr*, PSaa. **āltō* ‘female reindeer’ > AkSaa. *aīt*, KSaa. *aallt*. These processes also occurred in Skolt and Ter Saami to some extent: PSaa. **muore* > SkSaa. *muōrr* (*muo rr*), TSaa. *mīrr*, but PSaa. **āltō* > SkSaa. *āldd* (*āld⁷*), TSaa. *ā l̥^dta*. Delabialization affected non-initial syllables of all languages except Aanaar: PSaa. **kuorōs* ‘empty’ > TSaa. *kj̥ ā ras*, KSaa. *kuras*, AkSaa. *kueras*, SkSaa. *kuâras*, AaSaa. *kuârus*. In Ter, it is evident also in the initial syllables: PSaa. **koatē* > TSaa. *kj̥ ā d̥t̥e* ‘Saami tent’. Other processes, such as the monophthongization and other quantitative changes of PSaa. **uo*, **ie*, **oa*, **ea*, the labialization of PSaa. **ā*, and the lowering of PSaa. **o*, will also be discussed in the presentation.

The main source is Lehtiranta’s (1989) etymological glossary, expanded with Itkonen’s (1958) materials and supplemented by other works processed in the Álgú database. This body of materials will also include Akkala Saami examples from Zaikov’s works (1987; Kert & Zaikov 1988). Consistent inclusion of Akkala Saami material will contribute to a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the phonological development of the Eastern Saami languages. Special attention in the etymological corpus will be given to Russian loanwords, which, in the absence of written sources, can aid in the absolute dating of phonetic shifts (cf. Juutinen 2022).

The revision of phonetic shifts in the Eastern Saami languages will help shed light on the structure of the Saami phylogenetic tree. It will provide important evidence for discussing

topological issues such as the affiliation of Aanaar Saami with the Eastern Saami languages, the subdivision into mainland (Aanaar Saami, Skolt Saami, Akkala Saami) and peninsular subgroups (Kildin Saami, Ter Saami), and the relationship between Akkala Saami, Skolt Saami, and Kildin Saami. In this context, a crucial role is played by the careful analysis needed to distinguish between innovations relevant to tree structure and secondary homoplastic changes, which will be undertaken in the scope of this talk.

Abbreviation

AaSaa – Aanaar (Inari) Saami; AkSaa – Akkala Saami; KSaa – Kildin Saami; PSaa – Proto-Saami; SkSaa – Skolt Saami; TSaa – Ter Saami.

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