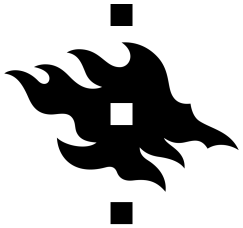
NATIONAL RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Bivalent verb classes in Skolt Saami: A pilot study

Alena Blinova (Higher School of Economics, Moscow)
Ksenia Shagal (University of Helsinki)

SAALS 4, Uppsala University, 14–15 November 2019

Outline

- Background: a wide-scale project
- Data collection and annotation
- Bivalent classes in Skolt Saami
- Skolt Saami from a Uralic perspective
- Conclusions

Background

- A wide-scale project on bivalent verb classes in Eurasia (Say 2018; Say et al. 2018)
- Bivalent verbs are especially prone to show deviant valency behaviour (Bickel et al. 2014)

- 130 verb meanings given in context
  - ‘Peter ate an apple’
  - ‘Peter helped Mary’
  - ‘Peter fell in love with Mary’
  - ‘Peter is different from Michael’

- Primary data (questionnaires filled in by language experts)

- Family-specific study: Uralic languages → Saami languages

Language sample: Uralic

12 languages from
7 subgroups:

Saami
- Skolt Saami

Finnic
- Standard Finnish
- Ingrian Finnish
- Estonian

Mordvinic
- Erzya Mordvin
- Moksha Mordvin

Mari
- Hill Mari

Permic
- Komi-Zyrian
- Komi-Permyak
- Udmurt

Ugric
- Hungarian

Samoyedic
- Enets

Data collection

- Predicates
  - only predicates that can be expected to be bivalent
  - many predicates that are known to tend to deviate from the transitive prototype

- Translations
  - elicited from native speakers
  - annotated for argument coding devices (flagging and indexing) by language experts
  - variation in argument realization, synonyms etc. are disregarded: one pattern annotated for each predicate

Questionnaire

- 130 sentences

X-NOM + kå'dded + Y-ACC

Peâtt	*koo'dd-i*	*Mää'rj.*
Peter.SG.NOM	kill-PST.3SG	Maria.SG.ACC

‘Peter killed Maria.’

X-NOM + vaikkted + Y-ILL

Ââ'ǩǩ	*vaaikat*	*muštt-u.*
age.SG.NOM	influence.PRS.3SG	memory-SG.ILL

‘Age influences memory.’

Data annotation

- **Transitivity**
  - one class of verbs is identified as transitive in each language
  - by definition, this is the class which encompasses verbs like ‘break’ and ‘kill’ (Haspelmath 2011)
  - morphosyntactic devices employed to signal transitivity vary cross-linguistically, e.g.
    - case frames (Skolt Saami)
    - differential object marking (Finnish)
    - optional object indexing (Mordvinic, Hungarian)

Data annotation

- **Transitivity ratio**
  - the number of transitive verbs divided by the total number of verbs (Haspelmath 2015)
  - transitivity ratio in Skolt Saami = 68 (transitive) / 125 (total) = 0.54

- **Transitivity profile**
  - The set of verbs that are (in)transitive in individual languages
  - for Skolt Saami:

‘be afraid’	INTR
‘throw’	TR
‘have enough’	INTR
‘resemble’	INTR
etc.	...

Data annotation

- **Valency classes**
  - Valency classes: two verbs belong to the same valency class iff their two arguments are coded by identical devices respectively

Peâtt	*pââll*	*piânnj-est.*	
Peter.SG.NOM	fear.PRS.3SG	**dog.SG.LOC**	‘Peter is afraid of the dog.’
Skääll	*teâuddj-i*	*čää'ʒʒ-est.*	
bucket.SG.NOM	fill-PST.3SG	**water-SG.LOC**	‘The bucket filled with water.’
Peâtt	*kuõsk-i*	*seinn-a.*	
Peter.SG.NOM	touch.PST.3SG	**wall-SG.ILL**	‘Peter touched the wall.’

  - *põõllâd* ‘be afraid’ and *teâuddjed* ‘fill’ belong to the same valency class, while *kuõskkâd* ‘touch’ belongs to a different class

Bivalent verb classes in Uralic

- Uralic languages are more diverse in terms of their transitivity profiles than other language families in Northern Eurasia
- Uralic languages follow certain areal patterns with respect to both transitivity ratio and individual valency classes
  - Enets → other languages of Siberia
  - Hungarian → Standard Average European
  - Permic, Mordvinic and Mari → Slavic (Russian) and Altaic
  - Baltic Finnic languages on their own
- Language contact is an important factor in valency class organization in Uralic languages

- **Skolt Saami?**

1. Transitive

Number of predicates: 68

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + Y-ACC

Examples:

Peâtt	*koo'dd-i*	*Mää'rj.*
Peter.SG.NOM	kill-PST.3SG	Maria.SG.ACC

‘Peter killed Maria.’

Peâtt	*kooll*	*musiikk.*
Peter.SG.NOM	hear.PRS.3SG	music.SG.ACC

‘Peter hears the music.’

2. Intransitive: NOM + GEN + postposition

Number of predicates: 18

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + Y-GEN + postposition (*vuâkka, diõtt, tuâkka, rââst, ool, årra, vuâstta, vuâlla*)

Examples:

Peâtt	*kuâđđj-i*	*Mää'rj*	*tuâkka.*
Peter.SG.NOM	remain-PST.3SG	Maria.SG.GEN	behind

‘Peter fell behind Maria.’

Peâtt	*õõmtõõžž-i*	*sǩiâŋk*	*diõtt.*
Peter.SG.NOM	be.surprised-PST.3SG	gift.SG.GEN	because.of

‘Peter was surprised at the gift.’

3. Intransitive: NOM + COM

Number of predicates: 9

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + Y-COM

Examples:

Peâtt	*teeivõõđ-i*	*Mää'rja-in.*
Peter.SG.NOM	encounter-PST.3SG	Maria-SG.COM

‘Peter encountered Maria.’

Peâtt	*reeidčõõđ-i*	*Mää'rja-in.*
Peter.SG.NOM	have_a_quarrel-PST.3SG	Maria-SG.COM

‘Peter had a quarrel with Maria.’

4. Intransitive: NOM + ILL

Number of predicates: 8

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + Y-ILL

Examples:

Peâtt	*la'ddj-i*	*ridd-u.*
Peter.SG.NOM	reach-PST.3SG	bank-SG.ILL

‘Peter reached the bank.’

Peâtt	*vastti-i*	*u'čteel-a.*
Peter.SG.NOM	answer-PST.3SG	teacher-SG.ILL

‘Peter answered the teacher.’

5. Intransitive: NOM + LOC

Number of predicates: 7

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + Y-LOC

Examples:

Peâtt	*pââll*	*piânnj-est.*
Peter.SG.NOM	fear.PRS.3SG	dog-SG.LOC

‘Peter is afraid of the dog.’

Peâtt	*tu'ǩǩad*	*čee-st.*
Peter.SG.NOM	like.PRS.3SG	tea-SG.LOC

‘Peter likes tea.’

6. Intransitive: LOC + NOM

Number of predicates: 5

Encoding: X-LOC + predicate + Y-NOM

Examples:

Peâtt-ast	*lij*	*vuei'vv-kõpp.*
Peter-SG.LOC	be.PRS.3SG	head-disease.SG.NOM

‘Peter has a headache.’

Åå'n	*Peâtt-ast*	*lie*	*nokk*	*tie'ǧǧ.*
Now	Peter-SG.LOC	be.PRS.3PL	enough	money.PL.NOM

‘Now Peter has enough money.’

7. Intransitive: NOM + NOM

Number of predicates: 1

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + Y-NOM

Example:

Tät	*kopp*	*mähss*	*õhtt*	*eu'rr.*
PROX.SG.NOM	cup.SG.NOM	cost.PRS.3SG	one.NOM	Euro.NOM

‘This cup costs 1 euro.’

8. Intransitive: NOM + *ko*/*mâte* + NOM

Number of predicates: 2

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + *ko*/*mâte* + Y-NOM

Example:

lj	*muu*	*päi'dd*	*lij*	*jee'resnallšem*
NEG.3SG	1SG.GEN	shirt.SG.NOM	be.PRS.3SG	different

ko	*tuu*	*päi'dd.*
than	2SG.GEN	shirt.SG.NOM

‘No, my shirt is different from yours.’

9. Intransitive: NOM + ESS

Number of predicates: 1

Encoding: X-NOM + predicate + Y-ESS

Example:

Tät	*tiŋgg*	*kååččeet*	*kompass-ân.*
PROX.SG.NOM	thing.SG.NOM	be.called.PRS.3SG	compass-ESS

‘This tool is called a compass.’

10. Intransitive: LOC + GEN + postposition

Number of predicates: 1

Encoding: X-LOC + predicate + Y-GEN + postposition (*väjja*)

Example:

Peâtt-ast	*leäi*	*õõut*	*eeu'r*	*väjja.*
Peter-SG.LOC	be.PST.3SG	one.SG.GEN	euro.SG.GEN	short

‘Peter was one euro short.’

NOM COM

- A fairly uniform class of across Uralic languages
  - ‘encounter’, ‘fight’, ‘be friends’, ‘get to know’, ‘speak’, ‘agree’, ‘have a quarrel’, ‘mix’

- Different coding devices
  - Skolt Saami, Komi: NOM COM
  - Udmurt, Hungarian: NOM INS
  - Enets: NOM LOC
  - Mordvinic: NOM NOM *marto*/*maṛtə*
  - Hill Mari: NOM NOM *dono*
  - Finnish: NOM GEN *kanssa*

LOC NOM

- 5 predicates
  - ‘feel pain, have a Y-ache’
  - ‘have a Y (illness)’
  - ‘suffice, have enough Y’
  - ‘have Y’
  - ‘remain’
    + ‘be short of Y’: LOC GEN *väjja*

- **GEN NOM** encoding in most Uralic languages, e.g. in Udmurt:
  Petâ-lèn *mašina-ez* *van’*
  Petja-GEN car.NOM-POSS.3SG COP.PRS
  ‘Petja has a car.’

LOC NOM

- **LOC NOM** is Skolt Saami

Peâtt-ast	*lij*	*nuõpp-kõpp.*
Petja-LOC	be.PRS.3SG	cold(disease)-disease.NOM

P. has the flu.

- **ADE NOM** in Standard Finnish

Peka-lla	*on*	*flunssa.*
Pekka-ADE	be.PRS.3SG	flu.NOM

P. has the flu.

~ Russian

Transitive verbs

- Transitive in all Uralic languages
  - ‘take’, ‘eat’, ‘make’, ‘break’, ‘put on’, ‘lose’, …
- Intransitive in most Uralic; NOM PART in (some) Finnic
  - ‘govern’, ‘miss’, ‘follow’, ‘help’, ‘need’, ‘flatter’, ‘avoid’, ‘envy’, …
- Intransitive in other Uralic and in other neighbouring languages
  - ‘believe’, ‘trust’, ?

Conclusions and further prospects

- Skolt Saami
  - similar to other Uralic languages (NOM COM)
  - similar to Finnic languages and Russian (LOC NOM)
  - parallel to Finnic: NOM PART > NOM ACC (transitive)
  - exceptional pattern (transitive ‘believe’ & ‘trust’)

- Other Saami varieties:
  - North Saami, Kildin Saami (coming soon)
  - others?

Acknowledgements

- Sergey Say (wider project)
- Tim Feist (assistance with data collection and interpretation)
- Language experts (Uralic languages):
  - Maria Ovsjannikova (Enets), Irina Külmoja (Estonian), Ksenia Studenikina (Hill Mari), Vasilisa Zhigulskaja (Hungarian), Daria Mishchenko (Ingrian Finnish), Ekaterina Sergeeva (Komi Permyak and Komi Zyrian), Maria Kholodilova (Moksha Mordvin)
- Participants of the research projects supported by Russian Foundation for Humanities (2009–2011; 2011–2013) at the Institute for Linguistic Studies, RAS

References

- Bickel, Balthasar, Taras Zakharko, Lennart Bierkandt, and Alena Witzlack-Makarevich. 2014. Semantic role clustering: An empirical assessment of semantic role types in non-default case assignment. *Studies in Language* 38 (3). 485–511.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2011. On S, A, P, T, and R as comparative concepts for alignment typology. *Lingustic Typology* 15(3), 535–567.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2015. Transitivity prominence. In: Malchukov, Andrej L. & Comrie, Bernard (eds.), *Valency classes in the world's languages: A comparative handbook*, vol. 1, 131–147.
- Say, Sergey. 2018. Valentnostnye klassy dvuxmestnyx predikatov: teoretičeskij kontekst, zadači issledovanija i struktura sbornika [Valency classes of two-place predicates: theoretical context, goals of the study, and the structure of the volume]. In Sergey Say (ed.), *Valentnostnye klassy dvuxmestnyx predikatov v raznostrukturnyx jazykax* [Valency classes of two-place predicates in typologically diverse languages], 5–24.
- Say, Sergey, Dmitry Gerasimov, Sergey Dmitrenko, Natalia Zaika, and Viktor Xrakovskij. 2018. Valentnostnye klassy dvuxmestnyx predikatov: tipologičeskaja anketa i instrukcija issledovatelju [Valency classes of two-place predicates: the typological questionnaire, and the guidelines]. In Sergey Say (ed.), *Valentnostnye klassy dvuxmestnyx predikatov v raznostrukturnyx jazykax* [Valency classes of two-place predicates in typologically diverse languages], 45–46.