Syncretism in Kildin Saami substantive inflection: nanosyntactic approach

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The present paper deals with a nanosyntactic analysis of syncretism in Kildin Saami substantive inflection. Such patterns as ACC.PL = DAT.PL ≠ GEN.PL and NOM.PL = GEN.PL ≠ ACC.PL violate predictions of case containment hierarchy. The problem can be solved by splitting the traditional accusative and dative into big and small counterparts. This solution has an independent syntactic evidence. The patterns of syncretism attested in Kildin Saami declension shed light on the position of essive, translative, comitative, and abessive in the case containment hierarchy. Kildin Saami represents one further example of a language having GEN.SG = NOM.PL. Previously proposed nanosyntactic explanations can be equally applied to this phenomenon in Kildin Saami as well.

Keywords: Nanosyntax, syncretism, nominal morphology, Saami languages

Синкретизм в кильдинском саамском субстантивном склонении: наносинтаксический анализ

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Настоящая статья посвящена наносинтаксическому анализу падежного синкретизма в кильдинском саамском языке. Паттерны ACC.PL = DAT.PL ≠ GEN.PL и NOM.PL = GEN.PL ≠ ACC.PL, зафиксирован-

ные в субстантивном склонении, нарушают предсказания наносинтаксической иерархии падежей. Данная проблема решается расщеплением традиционных аккузатива и датива на большие и малые падежи, что имеет и независимое синтаксическое подтверждение. Паттерны синкретизма кильдинского саамского склонения также проливают свет на проблему взаимного положения эссива, транслатива, комитатива и абессива в иерархии. Кильдинский саамский является очередным примером синкретизма GEN.SG = NOM.PL, для которого продолжают быть актуальны предложенные ранее решения в наносинтаксической парадигме.

Ключевые слова: наносинтаксис, синкретизм, именная морфология, саамские языки

1. Introduction

A study of nominal morphology of Indo-European languages became a starting point for the development of Nanosyntax (see Caha 2009, Starke 2009). Such issues as hierarchy of cases, suppletion, and syncretism remain the focus of research in this framework. Expansion of typological samples and more accurate analysis of old data often challenge the models proposed by nanosyntacticians, cf. criticism in Zompì 2017 and Harðarson 2016. The latest overview of main ideas and accomplishments of Nanosyntax is given in Baunaz et al. 2019.

In the present paper, we discuss Kildin Saami substantive inflection in the light of the nanosyntactic approach. Data from other Eastern Saami languages (Skolt and Ter Saami) are sporadically involved as well. The main body of material was collected during our field trips to Lovozero (Lovozersky District, Murmansk Oblast, Russia). Kildin Saami had several dialects which are currently mixed in great measure. We do not take into account some dialectal differences irrelevant for this work.

The main problem we address in this paper is the position of genitive in the nanosyntactic case containment hierarchy. The hierarchy as in (1) was proposed by Pavel Caha (2009: 10) based on patterns of syncretism and overt case containment.

(1) NOM < ACC < GEN < DAT < INST < COM

Case decomposition in Nanosyntactic framework implies that a case form ordered higher in the hierarchy contains the heads responsible for the lower cases. For example, a dative form contains heads responsible for genitive, accusative, and nominative:

(2) $[_{\text{DAT}}$ A $[_{\text{GEN}}$ B $[_{\text{ACC}}$ C $[_{\text{NOM}}$ D]]]]

Overt case containment arises when a marker of a case is not directly added to the base of the word, but to another case marker, e. g., Tocharian B *yakweṃts* 'horse.com.sg' (Caha 2009: 69) can be analyzed as unmarked nominative *yakwe* + accusative *-ṃ* + comitative *-ts*. The hierarchy in (1) predicts:

a) that in the case of overt containment markers will be attached following the order of the cases and
b) that only cases adjacent in the hierarchy can be syncretic.

Kildin Saami substantive paradigms violate both predictions. Below we will show that this problem can be successfully solved within nanosyntactic framework.

2. Data

9 cases and 2 numbers are distinguished in Kildin Saami, though partitive and essive forms are the same in singular and plural. Kildin Saami substantive inflection is largely non-concatenative as some case and number forms differ only in length of a final consonant and quality and quantity of a root vowel:

(3) a. *muurr* 'tree.NOM.Sg' vs *muur* 'tree.NOM.PL';
b. *muur'-en'* 'tree-COM.SG' vs *muur'r'-en'* 'tree-ESS'
c. *poonnc* 'feather.NOM.SG' vs *ponc* 'feather.NOM.PL'
d. *p'eejjv* 'day.NOM.SG' vs *p'aajjv-a* 'day-DAT.SG' vs *p'iijv'-en'* 'day-COM.SG'

Five paradigmatic classes of underived substantives can be distinguished in Kildin Saami (see Table 1). The vast majority of sub-

stantives belong to class A, which is characterized by a strong grade (see Bakró-Nady 2022 on consonant gradation) in NOM.SG and a weak grade with zero ending in ACC.SG = GEN.SG = NOM.PL. Class B is a small closed class that includes monosyllabic nouns with a strong grade in the whole paradigm. Class C includes monosyllabic nouns with weak grade in NOM.SG and strong grade in ACC.SG = GEN.SG = NOM.PL. The nouns belonging to class C demonstrate various extensions of the stem in DAT.SG. Classes D and E include bisyllabic stems. Originally they had different forms of ACC.SG = GEN.SG: zero in D; *-e* in E. However, in speech of contemporary speakers, all bisyllabic primary nouns seem to inflect as in D.

Class E has recently undergone an analogical leveling following the pattern of class D. The accusative and genitive singular markers were dropped. Nowadays the accusative and genitive singular forms differ from nominative only in the consonant grade of the intervocalic consonant. Archaic forms occur in older texts and in dictionaries, but they are not attested in speech of modern speakers.

Table 1. Paradigmatic classes of Kildin Saami non-derived nouns illustrated with the lexemes *kuul'l'* 'fish', *kuus's'* 'guest', *puaz* 'reindeer', *jeem'p'er'* 'bucket', *čiiggar* 'cattle'

	A	B	C	D	E
	'fish'	'guest'	'reindeer'	'bucket'	'cattle'
			SG		
NOM	*kuul'l'*	*kuus's'*	*puaz*	*jeem'p'er'*	*čiigar*
ACC	*kuul'*	*kuus's'*	*puuʒ-e*	*jammpar*	*čiiggr-e* > *čiiggar*
GEN	*kuul'*	*kuus's'*	*puuʒ-e*	*jammpar*	*čiiggr-e* > *čiiggar*
DAT	*kuell-a*	*kuess-a*	*puuʒj-e*	*jammpr-e*	*čiiggr-e*
LOC	*kuul'-es't*	*kuus's'-es't'*	*puuʒ-es't'*	*jammpr-es't'*	*čiiggr-es't'*

Continuation of the table

	A	B	C	D	E
	‘fish’	‘guest’	‘reindeer’	‘bucket’	‘cattle’
INST	*kuul’-en’*	*kuus’s’-en’*	*puuʒ-en’*	*jammpr-en’*	*čiiggr-en’*
ABE	*kuul’-xa*	*kuus’s’-xa*	*puuʒ(e)-ahta*	*jammpr-ahta*	*čiiggr-ahta*
ESS	*kuul’l’-en’*	*kuus’s’-en’*	*puuʒ-en’*	*jammpr-en’*	*čiiggr-en’*
PART	*kuul’l’-e*	*kuus’s’-e*	*puuʒ-edde*	*jammpr-edde*	*čiiggr-edde*
PL					
NOM	*kuul’*	*kuus’s’*	*puuʒ-e*	*jammpar*	*čiiggar*
ACC	*kuul’-et’*	*kuus’s’-et’*	*puuʒ-et’*	*jammpr-et’*	*čiiggr-et’*
GEN	*kuul’-e*	*kuus’s’-e*	*puuʒ-e*	*jammpr-e*	*čiiggr-e*
DAT	*kuul’-et’*	*kuus’s’-et’*	*puuʒ-et’*	*jammpr-et’*	*čiiggr-et’*
LOC	*kuul’-en’*	*kuus’s’-en’*	*puuʒ-en’*	*jammpr-en’*	*čiiggr-en’*
INST	*kuul’-e=guejm*	*kuus’s’-e=guejm*	*puuʒ-e=guejm*	*jammpr-e=guejm*	*čiiggr-e=guejm*
ABE	*kuul’-exa*	*kuus’s’-exa*	*puuʒ-exa*	*jammpr-exa*	*čiiggr-exa*

The following patterns of syncretism are found in the paradigms of substantives:

a) ACC.SG = GEN.SG = NOM.PL (all classes)
b) NOM.SG = ACC.SG = GEN.SG = NOM.PL (class B)
c) INST.SG = ESS.SG (classes B, C, D, E)
d) ACC.PL = DAT.PL (all classes)
e) NOM.PL = GEN.PL (class C)

Pattern (b) is limited to a single paradigmatic class. The nouns of class B do not demonstrate consonant gradation. The lack of gradation can be easily explained if we assume that all nominal roots should be in weak grade in morphophonological representation. In NOM.SG, they undergo strengthening, i. e. the weak grade changes to the strong one. However, if there is already a long consonant in a weak grade, it cannot be further strengthened and remains unchanged. In light of these considerations, pattern (b) can be seen as non-systematic, i. e. conditioned by phonology (see Zompì 2017: 4—9 on the notions of systematic and accidental syncretism).

Although pattern (e) is limited to a single class of substantives as well, it cannot be explained in terms of morphophonological processes. It should be treated as a systematic syncretism. All other patterns are replicated in several paradigmatic classes, so we consider them systematic and will try to find a nanosyntactic explanation for them.

3. Analysis

The patterns observed in Kildin Saami contradict the predictions of Caha (2009). The Universal Case Contiguity predicts that only the cases that are adjacent in the Case Sequence can be syncretic.

(4) NOM < ACC < GEN < DAT < INST < COM

This hierarchy predicts possible syncretisms such as NOM = ACC = GEN, while it rules out syncretisms such as GEN = NOM ≠ ACC. However, there are several patterns of case syncretism in Kildin Saami that violate these constraints. In 3.1 we discuss the syncretisms of ACC.PL = DAT.PL ≠ GEN.PL and NOM.PL = GEN.PL. In 3.2 the syncretisms ACC.SG = GEN.SG = NOM.PL are discussed. Finally, in 3.3 we discuss the syncretisms of peripheral cases: ESS.SG = INST.SG.

3.1 ACC.PL = DAT.PL ≠ GEN.PL and NOM.PL = GEN.PL

The first syncretism (ACC.PL = DAT.PL ≠ GEN.PL) is found across all non-derived Kildin Saami nouns. The second one, however (NOM.PL = GEN.PL), is only attested in nominal class C.

The problem with the syncretism of ACC.PL = DAT.PL is as follows: neither ACC and DAT nor NOM and GEN are adjacent in the case containment hierarchy in (1). This fact should rule out such patterns of syncretism. However, at least Old Norse, Modern Icelandic, Faroese, Akkala, Skolt, Ter Saami, and Kildin Saami demonstrate ACC = DAT. For the first time, the problem was pointed out by Harðarson (2016).

A solution proposed in Starke 2017 suggests the introduction of two further cases into the containment hierarchy. Namely, big acc and big dat, which are ordered higher than genitive, SMALL ACC, and SMALL DAT respectively. After adding these cases the updated hierarchy looks as follows:

(5) NOM < SMALL ACC < SMALL DAT < GEN < BIG ACC < BIG DAT < INST < COM.

According to Starke's assumption, a language can have either one or two positions for ACC and DAT. Languages with differential object marking and dative shift have both positions for accusative and dative respectively. Languages without these features (like Kildin Saami) can choose arbitrarily between the two options. If a language has BIG ACC and BIG DAT the syncretism in question becomes possible. However, that Kildin Saami ACC and DAT are big remains an ad hoc solution if it is based only on the observations about the patterns of syncretism.

Caha (2018) proposes a test for big dative: that is, the preservation of a dative argument in non-finite clauses. In Icelandic, for example, there is no big dative, as the dative argument of the finite verb (6a) shifts to genitive in the nominalization (6b).

(6) a. *Astrid* *bjargaði* *skinkunni*
Astrid rescued ham.DEF.DAT
'Astrid rescued the ham'
b. *björgun* *skinkunnar*
rescue ham.DEF.GEN
'the rescue of the ham' (Harðarson 2016 after Caha 2018)

Russian demonstrates another pattern. The dative argument of the finite verb (7a) is preserved in nominalization (7b).

(7) a. *izmeni-t'* *žen-e*
betray-INF wife-DAT.SG
'To betray the wife'
b. *izmen-a* *žen-e*
betrayal-NOM.SG wife-DAT.SG
'The betrayal of the wife' (Caha 2018)

This difference between the Icelandic and Russian datives shows that we are dealing with two structurally different cases. The Russian dative, behaving more like an oblique case, should have more structure that prevents the turn to genitive in nominalization. The Icelandic dative, on the contrary, easily turns into genitive, which may indicate that it has less structure. That fits the assumption about big dative in Russian and small dative in Icelandic.

When applied to Kildin Saami, this test supports the big dative analysis, since dative is preserved in nominalization (8b).

(8) a. *paas'ʼpuž-a* *tʼijj-e*
thank-NPST.1SG 2PL-DAT
'I thank ye'
b. *sonn* *vuajjled'd'-e* *paas'ʼp-muž=bajas*
3SG.NOM forget-PST.3SG thank-NMLZ.GEN.SG=about
kaannc-a
friend-DAT.SG
'He forgot about thanking his friend'

The same test applied to Kildin Saami accusative shows that the accusative argument preserves its case in nominalization as well. It indicates that the accusative case in Kildin Saami is in fact the big accusative.

(9) a. *munn* *jeen-amp* *toonn-e* *kooppč-e*
1SG.NOM many-COMP 2SG-DAT collect-PST.1SG
muur'j-et'
fruit-ACC.PL
'I picked more fruits than you did'

b. *kuumpr-et'* *koppč-mušš* *ujjt-e*
mushroom-ACC.PL collect-NMLZ.NOM.SG go-3SG.PST
oommp *p'aajjv-a*
whole day-DAT.SG
'He left to pick mushrooms the whole day'

Big accusative and big dative are adjacent in the case containment hierarchy (5), hence, the syncretism of these cases is possible.

This extended hierarchy explains yet another syncretism. The syncretism NOM.PL = GEN.PL which is only found in nominal class C is ruled out by the hierarchy (1), but in the hierarchy (10) NOM and GEN are adjacent.

(10) NOM < ~~SMALL ACC~~ < ~~SMALL DAT~~ < GEN < BIG ACC < BIG DAT < INST < COM

3.2 ACC.SG = GEN.SG = NOM.PL

The syncretism of GEN.SG and NOM.PL is widespread in Indo-European languages (see Table 2). It is also found in Saami languages, such as Skolt, Kildin, and Ter Saami (Feist 2015: 139; Szabó 1968: 94—101).

Table 2. Examples of GEN.SG = NOM.PL in the World's languages

	NOM.SG	GLOSS	GEN.SG	NOM.PL	References
Latin	*terra*	'earth'	*terrae*	*terrae*	Fortson 2004: 255
Old Irish	*fer*	'man'	*fir*	*fir*	Fortson 2004: 288
Gothic	*giba*	'gift '	*gibos*	*gibos*	Fortson 2004: 305
Lithuanian	*rankà*	'hand'	*rañkos*	*rañkos*	Fortson 2004: 382
Skolt Saami	*võrr*	'blood'	*võõr*	*võõr*	Feist 2015: 144
Ter Saami	*jogɢ*	'river'	*jogi*	*jogi*	Szabó 1998: 97

This syncretism is often treated as purely accidental. However, there is an explanation of this syncretism in Skolt Saami in the nanosyntactic framework (Caha 2016). Since Kildin Saami data is similar to Skolt Saami data, we summarize here only the main idea of this analysis.

Caha (2016) proposes to introduce "a silent quantity noun GROUP" into the structure. The GROUP's dependents are marked with genitive as possessors. Hence, the following structure is assumed:

(11) $[_{\text{GEN.SG}}$ Z $[_{\text{ACC.SG}}$ Y $[_{\text{NOM.PL}}$ X $[_{\text{NP}}$ GROUP [[AGR] $[_{\text{GEN.SG}}$ Z $[_{\text{ACC.SG}}$ Y $[_{\text{NOM.SG}}$ X]]]]]]]]

The AGR head prevents a total syncretism of NOM.PL = GEN.PL, see Caha 2016 for more detailed argumentation.

3.3 INST.SG = ESS.SG

So far we have been discussing 'core' cases such as nominative, genitive, and accusative. The ordering of these cases has been heavily studied. The case containment hierarchy of the higher (≈ oblique) cases, however, is not quite clear. There is an approach by Stanislao Zompì (2017), who argued for a less strict ordering as in (12).

(12) {NOM, ABS, SNOM} < {ACC, ERG} < {DAT, LOC, INSTR, …}

Though such a hierarchy is much more in agreement with a wide range of empirical data (and that is a great advantage!), its predictive power decreases. Keeping limited optimism about the cartographic-like approach to case decomposition, we will overview the evidence for the place of Kildin Saami instrumental and essive cases in the case containment hierarchy of Caha 2009 rather than in the hierarchy of Zompì (2017).

Some notes on the semantics of the cases in question must be made here. Kildin Saami instrumental case demonstrates in fact a

typologically common comitative / instrumental polysemy, see Stolz et al. 2013 for a typological overview and Szabó 1984 for Saami data.

While *jammpr-en′* in (13a) has an instrumental meaning, *p'eeng-en′* in (13b) has clear comitative semantics. Such a polysemy may be analyzed as total syncretism in Nanosyntax.

(13) a. *sonn* *jammpr-en′* *koajv-e* *čaaz′*
3SG.NOM bucket-INST.SG scoop-PST.3SG water.ACC.SG
'He scooped up the water with the bucket'
b. *sonn* *vaan'c'el* *tʊge* *p'eeng-en′*
3sg.NOM go-PFV.PST.3SG there dog-INST
'He went there with a dog'

The label "essive" is somewhat misleading in the case of the Saami essive. This case should be named more accurately "essive-translative" since it can denote both static — often temporary — state (14a) and change of state (14b). The former use occurs rarer in our field data — we prefer to cite Kert's (1971: 163) example under (14a) — than the later one. See Szabó 1984 for a more detailed discussion of semantics.

(14) a. *munn* *jiil'l'-e* *robotn'ihk-en'*
1SG.NOM live-PST.1SG employee-ESS
'I lived as an employee.'
b. *kucc-a* *šeent-e* *mooǯ-es'*
puppy-DIM.NOM.SG become-PST.3SG beautiful-ATTR
p'enng-en'
dog-ESS
'The puppy became a beautiful dog'

One can observe the systematic syncretism INST.SG = ESS.SG in Table 1. It appears in all nominal classes except class A.

We would argue that this syncretism is driven not only by morphonology but by case semantics as well. In languages where there is an instrumental case, e. g. Russian in (15), it is likely to be used in essive (15a) and translative (15b) contexts as well:

(15) a. *ja* *sta-l* *plox-im* *lingvist-om*
1SG.NOM become-PST.SG[M] bad-INST.SG.M linguist-INST.SG
'I became a bad linguist'
b. *ja* *by-l* *plox-im* *lingvist-om*
1SG.NOM be-PST.SG[M] bad-INST.SG.M linguist-INST.SG
'I was a bad linguist'
c. *rabot-a* *napisa-n-a* *plox-im*
work-NOM.SG written-PASS.PTCP-F bad-INST.SG.M
lingvist-om
linguist-INST.SG
'The work is written by a bad linguist'

It can be hypothesized that in Kildin Saami the essive-translative case 'merges' with the instrumental case, but there are still class A nouns where there is no syncretism.

3.4 Where is the abessive case in the hierarchy?

Overt case containment in Ter Saami (another Eastern Saami language) gives interesting evidence about the part of the case containment hierarchy above comitative. As can be seen in Table 3, the abessive plural marker *-ta* is added to the form of comitative with its own marker.

Table 3. Partial paradigm of Ter Saami *n'ijt* 'girl'
after Szabó 1968: 100

Ter Saami *n'ijt* 'girl'	
GEN.PL	n'ijttɨ
COM.PL	n'ijttɨgiejm'
ABE.PL	n'ijttɨgiejm'ta

This fact points to the higher position of abessive compared to comitatitive. However, it is hard to make sufficiently reliable conclusions about the mutual location of abessive and essive / transla-

tive. This case does not occur in the plural in Saami (or simply does not distinguish between singular and plural) and the singular subparadigm does not provide any evidence from case containment or syncretism which could clarify the question. Provisionally we suggest the following order:

(16) … < INST < COM < ESS / TRANS < ABE

The reason for the hierarchy in (16) is that INST, COM, and ESS / TRANS should be adjacent to enable the discussed syncretism in Kildin Saami, and abessive should be structurally larger than comitative to explain the overt case containment in Ter Saami.

4. Conclusion

We have examined several patterns of case syncretism in Kildin Saam that seem to violate the hierarchy proposed by Caha (2009). While some of these patterns were typologically common (ACC.SG = GEN.SG = NOM.PL, see 3.2), some of those (ACC.PL = DAT.PL ≠ GEN.PL, see 3.1) required modifying the existing hierarchy, where we argued for Kildin Saami to have BIG ACC and BIG DAT. Furthermore, the syncretism INST.SG = ESS.SG was taken into account and treated as having a semantic basis. Finally, the abessive marker is considered the most peripheral case, as Ter Saami case containment data suggest.

The Kildin Saami language has a moderately large case inventory and displays non-concatenative morphology with paradigmatic classes. Languages like Kildin Saami provide a good test for morphological theories, including Nanosyntax. One can conclude that Nanosyntax can give successful explanations for such confusing data.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 — 1st, 2nd, 3rd person; ABE — abessive; ACC — accusative; AGR — agreement; ATTR — attributive; COM — comitative; DAT — dative; DEF — definite; DIM — diminutive; ERG — ergative; ESS — essive; F — feminine; GEN —

genitive; INST — instrumental; LOC — locative; M — masculine; NMLZ — nominalization; NOM — nominative; NP — noun phrase; PART — partitive; PASS — passive; PL — plural; PST — past; PTCP — participle; SG — singular; SNOM — S-nominative; TRANS — translative.

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