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Contact address:  
Magdolna Kovács  
Åbo Akademi  
Department of Finnish  
Fänriksgatan 3 A  
FIN-20500 Åbo  
Finland  
E-mail: mkovacs@abo.fi

Pekka Sammallahti: *The Saami Languages: An Introduction*.  
Karasjok: Davvi Girji, 1998. Pp. 268.

Reviewed by Ida Toivonen

*The Saami Languages: An Introduction* describes and discusses the Saami language group (formerly known as Lappish), which is part of the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family. Although only a little more than 20,000 speakers remain, they are spread over a relatively large area in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the

Kola peninsula in Russia. North Saami, which is the main focus of the book, is by far the largest language, with approximately 10,000 speakers.

The book is a very welcome addition to the Finno-Ugric literature, which has until now been lacking such a thorough overview. The clear and attractive layout makes it easy to use. The seven chapters and seven appendices together create the most useful guide to a language group that I have ever encountered.

Chapter 1 is a very brief introduction. It sketches the demographic situation of the Saami languages, and it also summarizes some of their typologically interesting shared traits.

Chapter 2 discusses the subgrouping of the languages. The Saami languages are divided into two main groups: Western and Eastern Saami. Each group consists of five languages, which are in turn divided into main dialects. The chapter includes several maps, which illustrate the discussion in a helpful way. Sammallahti discusses each language and dialect division and explains the criteria by which the subgroupings have been determined. For example, the so-called prothetic stops in nasal geminates coincide with the split between the Eastern and the Western languages. North Saami *eadni* 'mother' is representative of the Western group, and contrasts with Inari Saami *enni* 'mother' of the Eastern group. This chapter includes a list of correspondence sets, including forms from the ten languages and also some of the main dialects, as well as the reconstructed Proto-Saami forms.

Chapter 3 gives a phonological overview. The discussion is mainly based on the Enontekiö dialect, which is, according to Sammallahti, one of the most conservative subdialects of the West Finnmark dialect of North Saami. The discussion in this chapter is clear, careful and thorough. Both the diachrony and the synchrony of the phonological phenomena are explained. One of the more interesting features discussed is that of consonant quantity: Saami has three contrasting quantities in qualitatively identical consonant

centers (for example, /kol'liis/ 'gold'<sup>1</sup> NomSg+Sg3Px,<sup>2</sup> ≠ /kolliis/} 'gold' Gen-AccSg+3SgPx ≠ /oliis/ 'at, near'). Many of the Saami languages also have preaspiration. The chapter also includes a very interesting discussion of North Saami 'secret languages' or 'disguised speech'.

Chapter 4 describes the synchrony and the diachrony of the rich morphology. The main morphological mechanisms in Saami are phonological alternation, suffixation, compounding and encliticization. Saami has a rich case system; for example, standard North Saami has seven cases. One of the many interesting morphological features of the languages is that the person agreement marking differs in the present and the past tense.

The topic of Chapter 5 is syntax. This chapter is fairly short, consisting of only twelve pages. It briefly touches on issues like word order (the basic word order is SVO), infinitival constructions, and various agreement patterns. Again, the examples are mainly drawn from North Saami, but the data are often contrasted with facts from South Saami, since this language differs interestingly from the others. One reason why this chapter is short is that the boundaries between morphology and syntax are not very clear in Saami, and many topics covered in chapter 4 are interesting syntactically as well as morphologically.

Chapter 6 is devoted to the lexicon and lexical semantics. More than half of the chapter consists of the etymologies of some hundred words. The rest of the chapter divides the Saami lexicon into categories, which go beyond simple syntactic categories such as 'noun' and 'verb'. For example, intransitive verbs are divided into three groups, according to the kind of argument they take (no subject, a subject, or a subject and a place complement).

Chapter 7 provides sample texts from each of the ten languages which are all accompanied by translations and detailed word lists.

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<sup>1</sup> The sign ' marks the longest possible quantity.

<sup>2</sup> Px=possessive suffix.

Every text is given in standard orthography, phonological transcription and narrow phonetic transcription. The texts make it possible to further explore issues discussed in the previous chapter. The fact that the transcriptions are given at different levels of phonetic detail makes the chapter an excellent source of material for teaching phonology.

The appendices mainly consist of descriptions of the historical development of sounds and morphemes starting from Finno-Saamic forms through Pre-Saamic and Proto-Saamic to the modern day languages. Together the appendices form a brief historical grammar and an etymological dictionary of the language group. They are an excellent complement to the rest of the material of the book.

Large portions of the book consist of lists of forms, and therefore it is most suitable as a reference book. Since the book is organized into clearly labelled subsections it is easy for researchers and teachers in linguistics and Finno-Ugric philology to extract whatever material might be needed for different occasions. The transcription system used renders much of the material less accessible to non-Finno-Ugricists than it could be. Sammallahti does not use the standard IPA system of transcription; instead, he uses the Finno-Ugric Phonetic Alphabet, which is less familiar to most people. All the relevant diacritics and symbols are described in an appendix, so the transcriptions are possible (though not trivial) to decipher. However, many of the examples are given in the standard orthographies of the individual languages. Since the languages have adopted different writing conventions (the Kildin Saami data appears in a variant of the Cyrillic alphabet), much of the data is difficult to use for any researcher interested in phonology.

The book is quite technical, and it presupposes substantial knowledge of linguistics and some familiarity with issues in general Finno-Ugric linguistics. Most of the discussion is concise and clear, but often (due to limitations of space, surely) quite sketchy, and references to relevant literature in the appropriate places in the text would be useful in addition to the bibliography. Moreover, more reference to theoretical literature would have been helpful. Several

Saami phenomena (for example, the three-way quantity distinction) are quite rare typologically, and could have been identified as such in the text. Since the book is rather advanced and will therefore be read mainly by specialists in the field, such discussions would be of interest to many of its readers.

Overall, *The Saami Languages: An Introduction* is an excellent overview of the Saami languages. Although the focus is on one particular dialect, the reader gains insight into the whole group of languages and their ancestors. The wealth of examples helps to illustrate the discussion, and also enables researchers to explore issues not discussed in the book. This is definitely an important publication which fills a gap in the Finno-Ugric literature. It is a must for anybody interested in the Saami languages, or the Finno-Ugric languages in general. I also highly recommend the book to phonologists and morphologists looking for interesting data.

Contact address:

Ida Toivonen

Department of Linguistics

Stanford University

Stanford, CA 94305-2150

USA

E-mail: [toivonen@csli.stanford.edu](mailto:toivonen@csli.stanford.edu)