

The largest bidirectional dictionary of North Saami and Swedish to date

SVONNI, MIKAEL. 2023. *Davvisáme-giela-ruotagiela, ruotagiela-davvisáme-giela sátnegirji = Nordsamisk-svensk, svensk-nordsamisk ordbok*. Kiruna: Ravda Lágáduš. 503 pp.

For decades, Mikael Svonni has played an instrumental role in the promotion and development of the North Saami language in Sweden. As both a native speaker and an emeritus professor of Saami linguistics, he has published not only scholarly papers but also editions of older North Saami texts, as well as translations of fiction for children and adults. Recently, he has also published grammars of the language, written in North Saami (2015, second edition 2019) and Swedish (2018); for reviews of these works, see Julien (2016), Kejonen (2019), and Siegl (2020).

For the general Saami public, however, Svonni is without a doubt best known for his pedagogical North Saami–Swedish, Swedish–North Saami dictionaries (1990, 2013, app version 2017), preceded by a North Saami–Swedish word list (1984). Found in the homes, schools, and workplaces of North Saami learners and speakers throughout the country, the products of Svonni’s lexicographic work

are used daily by teachers, students, journalists, translators, and writers. The book under review is thus a welcome update of the author’s 2013 dictionary.

With hard covers featuring a scenic mountain landscape, the book consists of three parts: front matter (pp. v–xi, in both North Saami and Swedish), a North Saami–Swedish section (pp. 13–267), and a Swedish–North Saami section (pp. 269–503). There is no list of abbreviations. The most apparent difference between the book at hand and its predecessors is its volume: the number of North Saami lemmas is approximately 18,000, and the number of Swedish lemmas tally 14,000 (to be compared to the 15,000 North Saami and 10,000 Swedish lemmas of the 2013 version). While this makes the present edition by far the most comprehensive dictionary of North Saami aimed at an audience in Sweden, it does not compare in scope to the North Saami–Norwegian dictionary by Kåven et al. (1995) with 35,000 lemmas, nor to the North Saami–Finnish dictionary by Sammallahti (2021) with its 53,000 lemmas. That said, the book is likely to cover the needs of most students and teachers, the North Saami section ranging from

abessiva ‘abessive’ to *Álánda* ‘Åland’ and the Swedish section ranging from *abborre* ‘perch’ to *övrig* ‘other’.

In adding new words to the dictionary, the author has been guided by the Swedish word list SAOL (*Svenska Akademiens ordlista*). An explicit purpose has also been to include “modern” vocabulary, in addition to words pertaining to traditional Saami culture. In practice, this means that apart from words like *nulla* ‘reindeer doe that has shed its antlers’ and *guldohallat* ‘be covered in snow (due to a snowstorm)’, the book also includes lemmas like *kiive* ‘kiwi’ and *mánnávávdno* ‘stroller’.

The variety of North Saami featured in the dictionary is the standard literary language, which in several respects differs from the varieties spoken in Sweden, i.e. the eastern Čohkkiras (Jukkasjärvi) and Gárasavvon (Karesuando) dialects. While the book contains some words characteristic of one or both of these varieties (e.g. *ruomas* : *ruopmas*- ‘wolf’, *ubbá* ‘kiss’), the selection of lemmas could be described as normative. In particular, many local variants of words with counterparts in the standard language have not been included, such as *akta* ‘one’, *čoaivi* ‘stomach, belly’, and *skovlo* ‘school’ (standard *okta*, *čoaivi*, *skuvla*), all featured in the North Saami–Swedish section of the 2013 edition. Occasionally, non-standard forms have

nevertheless found their way into the dictionary, e.g. *čoargi* ‘golden-eye’ (standard *čoadgi*).

Several loanwords included in the 2013 book have also been left out from the present edition, e.g. *boatkat* ‘kick’, *noját* ‘lean’ (< Finnish/Meänkieli *potkia*, *nojata*), and *vearál* : *vearáld-* ‘world’ (cf. Swedish *värld*, Old Norse *verǫld* etc.). An effect of this normative stance is, ironically, that Sammallahti’s (2021) North Saami–Finnish dictionary in some cases represents the varieties of North Saami spoken in Sweden better than the work under review, for instance including the common borrowings *eidde* ‘mom’ and *isá* ‘dad’ (< Finnish/Meänkieli *äiti*, *isä*) with the remark that they are used in Sweden. It should however be pointed out that Svonni’s dictionary does also contain loanwords not found in Sammallahti (2021), such as *uŋgá* ‘bear cub (yearling)’ (cf. Swedish/Norwegian *unge* ‘offspring, kid’), *lávddis* : *lávdas-* ‘plate’, and *mustet* : *musteg-* ‘blueberry’ (< Finnish/Meänkieli *lautanen* : *lutas-*, *mustikka*).

A number of lemmas in the book under review are to my knowledge not found in other North Saami dictionaries, with the exception of Svonni’s previous works. Such words, many of which have equivalents in the neighboring Lule Saami language, make the dictionary valuable for scholars. The adjective

ovddis : *ovdás-* ‘whole (not broken)’, for instance, has cognates throughout the western branch of Saamic (e.g. Eastern Čohkkiras North Saami *ogddis* : *ogdás-*, Lule Saami *åbdes* : *åbddås-*, South Saami *emties*), allowing for the reconstruction **omtēs*. A form *ovddis* must also be the source of the derived verb <*ovdasmam*> 1SG.PRS ‘become whole, after having been apart’ in the North Saami dictionary of Leem (1768–81), thus providing an etymology for this previously obscure word.

An important task of any bilingual dictionary is the presentation of lemmas, grammatical information, and translations. For a pedagogical dictionary, such as the one under review, there is a difficult balancing act between comprehensiveness, on the one hand, and accessibility, on the other. Svonni succeeds well in keeping lemmas succinct and translations pithy, while also providing necessary information on inflection. Both in the North Saami–Swedish and in the Swedish–North Saami section, each lemma is followed by morphological data and an indication of word class, as well as one or several translations into the other language, similarly accompanied by clear and relevant data on inflection.

Data on morphosyntax, such as the transitivity of verbs or the governing of specific cases by certain lemmas, is not made explicit in the

dictionary, although for some headwords short example clauses make it possible to infer this information. For instance, the clause *mii ballat sus* ‘we are afraid of him’ shows that the verb *ballat* ‘be afraid’ governs the locative case. Such examples are much appreciated by learners of a language, and in my view, more of them could have been included. In fact, a number of example clauses given in Svonni (2013) are excluded in the present edition, e.g. under the headword *liikot* ‘like’, leaving it to the reader to figure out that this word governs the illative case in the standard language.

A sometimes overlooked possibility of dictionaries is the opportunity to indicate phonological information that is not apparent in the practical orthography of a given language. Svonni makes use of this possibility, albeit in a somewhat unconventional way. In North Saami, consonants make a phonological three-way length contrast, distinguishing short, long, and overlong consonants. In the official orthography, however, this contrast is not indicated, conflating long and overlong consonants. In many dictionaries and other pedagogical materials, this ternary contrast is specified by means of marking overlong consonants with the so-called *deattamearka* (or *deaddomearka*, lit. ‘stress mark’) <’>, e.g. *beas’si* ‘birch bark’ vs. *beassi* ‘nest; oven’.

In Svonni's dictionary, on the other hand, overlong consonants are not overtly indicated as such. Rather, their length can be deduced from the presentation of their gradation pattern, e.g. *beassi, ss* 'birch bark' vs. *beassi, s* 'nest; oven'. While this clever way of marking the difference between long and overlong consonants has the benefit of staying close to the standard orthography, there is still a need to indicate the length of consonants also in non-gradating words. For such lexemes, overlong consonants are indicated by an apostrophe in square brackets after the lemma in question, e.g. *orru* [-r'r-] 'inhabitant'. I cannot help but wonder whether it would not have been easier to consistently indicate overlength in the lemmas themselves, provided of course with a note that this sign is left out in most North Saami texts. Notably, there are also instances where an overlong consonant is not indicated where it should be, e.g. in the words *oarri* 'squirrel' and *girječálli* 'author'.

Another drawback of the official North Saami orthography is that it does not distinguish between short /i, e, u, o/ and long /i:, e:, u:, o:/. In some dictionaries this contrast is indicated by a macron over the long vowels <ī, ē, ū, ō>, but as in the case of overlong consonants, Svonni indicates this phonemic distinction by way of square brackets after the lemma, e.g. *giron* [gi:-] 'rock ptarmigan'.

Here too, however, I often miss an indication of length, e.g. for the first vowels of *fron* 'whisk', *rebeš* 'fox', *vulos* 'down, downwards', and *doron* 'fighter, thug, troublemaker'. Also in Swedish entries, the indication of vowel length is somewhat arbitrary, e.g. specifying a long first vowel in *förstuga* [fö:r] 'hall' but not in *förskola* 'preschool'.

As in any work of this scope, there are bound to be some minor flaws. The headword <*muottál*> 'sister's daughter, sister's son' should, for instance, read *muottal*, the derivational suffix of both <*heaboheabmi*> (s.v. *skamlös*) 'shameless' and <*fuolaheape*> (s.v. *sorglös*) 'careless' should read *-heapme* (or *-heapmi*) '-less', the preposition *ilmmá* 'without' (< Finnish/Meänkieli *ilman*) is lacking among the word entries despite being used in the preface, and the verb *rávásmuvvat* 'age, mature (about people)' is inexplicably provided as a translation of Swedish *övrig* 'other'. Learners of North Saami would likely have appreciated the inclusion of the Swedish lemmas *ja* 'yes' and *nej* 'no' (to which the interjection *juo* and a negative auxiliary verb, respectively, correspond). It can also be noted that the title of the book is given as *Davvisámegiela-ruotagiela...* 'North Saami-Swedish...' on the front cover and on the second title page, but as *Davvisámegiela-ruotagiel...* on the first title page. Such inconsistencies do

not, however, detract significantly from the usefulness of the dictionary, and it is only to be hoped that this print edition will soon be followed by a digital version, much as the author's 2013 dictionary was followed by a widely used app in 2017.

Perhaps more than any other branch of linguistics, lexicography is a cumulative discipline. With the publication of the book under review, Mikael Svonni expands on

his previous work, creating a user-friendly resource for teachers, students, and others who come in contact with North Saami in Sweden. Scholars will also be happy to find a number of words not attested in other dictionaries of the language. Together with the grammars by the same author, Mikael Svonni's latest dictionary crowns a life's work dedicated to the maintenance of the North Saami language.

Olle Kejonen

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