

## The so-called relation forms of nouns in South Saami: A byproduct or remnant of Uralic \*-mpV?

The paper describes a previously little-known grammatical category in South Saami. Termed here as “relation forms”, the phenomenon in question is etymologically related to the comparative and superlative marking of adjectives, but synchronically quite distinct from it. The suffix *-be/-âbpoe* can be attached not only to adjectives (e.g., *nuerebe* ‘younger’, *bâarasâbpoe* ‘older’), but also to nouns and kinship terms in particular (e.g., *tjidtjebe* ‘(the) mother’, *vuanavâbpoe* ‘(the) mother-in-law’), and the superlative marker *-mes/-ommes* can be used similarly, albeit to a lesser extent. The paper discusses the position of such forms in South Saami morphology, syntax and sentential semantics, especially in relation to markers of definiteness and possession. From a diachronic perspective, South Saami sheds new light on the origin of the Saami-Finnic (and Hungarian) comparative marker \*-mpV, and from a typological point of view, it is proposed that the closest analogues to the Saami phenomenon can be found in Tungusic, which also adds to our understanding of the development of \*-mpV comparatives – possibly from a more original contrastive function of the suffix.

1. Introduction
2. Background: comparatives, superlatives, possessive suffixes and definite articles in South Saami
3. Relation forms: a synchronic description
  - 3.1. History of research
  - 3.2. Morphology
  - 3.3. Syntax
  - 3.4. Semantics
  - 3.5. Interim conclusion
4. Relation forms: diachronic and comparative observations
  - 4.1. On the origins of the Saami comparatives and superlatives
  - 4.2. Typological perspectives – from the Russian Far East
5. Discussion and conclusion

## I. Introduction

One of the received wisdoms within Uralic historical morphology is that even though no Proto-Uralic comparative or superlative forms can be reconstructed – and many Uralic languages do without any such forms – the Saami-Finnic comparative degree marker *\*-mpV* appears to correspond to its functional Hungarian equivalent *-bb*, as shown by, for example, South Saami *orrebe* ‘newer’, Finnish *uudempi* (: *uudempa-*) id. and Hungarian *újabb* id. Superlative forms such as South Saami *orremes*, Finnish *uusin* (: *uusimpa-*) and Hungarian *legújabb* ‘newest’, however, have clearly different origins. On the other hand, the Saami-Finnic comparative in *\*-mpV* and the Hungarian one in *-bb* are not obviously of common origin either, as there seems to be no full consensus on the possible cognates of these suffixes in other branches of the family, and the original function as well as the material origin of the potentially Proto-Uralic *\*-mpV* has also been debated. However, perhaps the most important thing to note is that the discussion on the origins and history of *\*-mpV* came to standstill more than two generations ago; it appears that the question has not been addressed in detail since Fuchs (1949) and Raun (1949a). A remarkable exception, however, are the most recent remarks by Pystynen (2015) and Janhunen (2018), to be discussed further below (Section 4.1).

The purpose of the present paper is twofold: an autonomous synchronic description of a little-known comparative- and superlative-related phenomenon in South Saami (Section 3), followed by an attempt to understand it from a diachronic-cum-typological perspective (Section 4). In spite of the introductory remarks on the adjectival comparative degree markers in Saami, Finnic and Hungarian, the primary foci of the following sections are very different. After a brief introduction to the comparative, superlative and certain other grammatical morphemes in South Saami (Section 2), the major part of the paper (Section 3) provides a synchronic description of a heretofore little-known grammatical category – termed here as “relation forms”, corresponding to the Norwegian term *forholdsformer* (Bergsland 1982/1994, Magga & Magga 2012). The relation forms in question are evidently materially related to the Saami-Finnic comparative and the Saami superlative, but they appear to have gone completely unnoticed in all general descriptions of the synchrony and diachrony of Saami-Finnic comparative and superlative markers.

To provide a concise and straightforward introduction to the subject matter of this study, it is instructive to reproduce the three examples of the phenomenon as presented in the best-known grammatical description of South Saami by Bergsland (1982: 107; 1994: 110), who briefly states that when speaking of two persons or things, it is possible to refer to their distinct identities by using a morpheme that is formally identical to the comparative degree marker *-be/-åbpoe* (cf. *urre-be* ‘new-er’ and *båaras-åbpoe* ‘old-er’). The same examples have been later repeated by Magga and Magga (2012: 50):

- (1) *Daktaråbpoe*     *darjoeji*     *guktie*     *tjijtjebe*     *jeehti*.  
 daughter.åbpoe     do.PST.3SG     as     mother.be     say.PST.3SG  
 ‘The daughter<sub>i</sub> did as her<sub>i</sub> mother<sub>j</sub> said.’  
 (Bergsland 1982: 107; 1994: 110; Magga & Magga 2012: 50)<sup>1</sup>
- (2) *Dellie*     *tjijtjebasse*     *jeehti*.  
 then     mother.be.ILL     say.PST.3SG  
 ‘Then s/he<sub>i</sub> said to his/her<sub>i/j</sub> mother<sub>k</sub> (to his or her own mother or to the mother of someone else under discussion).’  
 (Bergsland 1982: 107; 1994: 110; Magga & Magga 2012: 50)

Further, Bergsland adds that when speaking of a relationship between many, it is possible to use the suffix *-mes*, otherwise the marker of superlative degree (cf. *orre-mes* ‘new-est’):

- (3) *Idtjin*     *maanah*     *seahkerh*     *govledh*     *maam*  
 NEG.PST.3PL     child.PL     care.CNG     listen.INF     what.ACC  
*tjijtjemes*     *jeehti*.  
 mother.mes     say.PST.3SG  
 ‘The children did not care to listen to what the mother said.’  
 (Bergsland 1982: 108; 1994: 110; Magga & Magga 2012: 50)

As for the secondary yet logical consecutive aim of the study, a better understanding of the functional range of the Saami-Finnic comparative (\*-*mpV*) as well as that of the Saami superlative (\*-*moksi*) enables us to take a new look at the origin of \*-*mpV* in particular (Section 4). Most importantly, it appears that the Uralic phenomena discussed here have heretofore unnoticed parallels in Tungusic, suggesting that the so-called relation forms of South Saami may well reflect some of the most original functions of the comparative in \*-*mpV*: It is proposed that the recondite functions

of the relation forms in Saami do not go back to the Saami-Finnic comparative *per se*, but may instead be direct descendants of the original contrastive functions of *\*-mpV*. Another, less likely – but typologically all the more interesting – alternative would be to regard the relation forms as a phenomenon that has branched out from the originally comparative functions of *\*-mpV*. This said, the research history of the comparative marker *\*-mpV* will not be discussed in detail until Section 4.<sup>2</sup>

The description to be presented in Section 3 is based on nearly all written data and information available. In addition to earlier brief descriptions of the phenomena in question, most of my examples come from the multi-genre texts of South Saami (nearly 1,100,000 words) made available by the SIKOR corpus at UiT The Arctic University of Norway, as well as from various other texts ranging from early language samples such as the earliest authentic stories in what can be termed South Saami (Halász 1886; 1887) to virtually all kinds of modern texts published in the language. Although much of the data comes from a comparatively large corpus with respect to the size of the language community – of less than one thousand speakers – this study is almost exclusively qualitative in nature. It has not been possible to extend and diversify the topic and methods of the present observational description of written language data to the study of spoken language or a pursuit of grammaticality judgments by native speakers within the confines of this study.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Background: comparatives, superlatives, possessive suffixes and definite articles in South Saami<sup>4</sup>**

Before delving into the core subject matter of this study, brief background information on some of the relevant parts of South Saami grammar is in order. To begin with the inflectional properties of adjectives, it may be noted that the adjectives in South Saami are a relatively noun-like part of speech and that most adjectives can be inflected for case and number. However, the more characteristic inflectional categories for adjectives consist of attributive and predicative as well as comparative and superlative forms. (Alternatively, it would be possible to regard comparatives and superlatives as belonging to the realm of derivation (cf. Nickel & Sammaltahti 2011: 642–645 for North Saami), but for the purposes of the present study, this is mainly a matter of taste that does not significantly affect our understanding of the so-called relation forms in South Saami.)

Adjective inflection is one of the most complex areas of South Saami morphology. Most adjectives have three degrees: the positive, the comparative, and the superlative. In the positive, most autochthonous adjectives have distinct forms in predicative and attributive positions (e.g. *Bïegke bijvele* ‘(the) wind (is) warm’ but *bijveles bïegke* ‘a warm wind’). However, the mutual relations of the four categories do not lend themselves easily to generalization. Some adjectives have identical forms for both predicative and attributive position (e.g. *noere* ‘young’, *båeries* ‘old’), but most un-derived adjectives have distinct predicative and attributive forms, and one can seldom automatically derive one from the other. Many adjectives, such as *båeries* ‘old’, end in *-s*, but for some, the *-s* element occurs in the predicative form only (e.g. predicative *baahkes* vs. attributive *baahke* ‘hot’), whereas for other adjectives, the situation is reversed (e.g. predicative *bijvele* vs. attributive *bijveles* ‘warm’). The predicative and attributive forms may also be quite dissimilar from one another (e.g. *vyölkehke* vs. *veelkes* ‘white’ or *aeblihtadtje* vs. *aeblehts* ‘lazy’).

The comparative and superlative markers are *-be* and *-mes*, respectively, for stems that are regarded as disyllabic, but for the trisyllabic stems *-åbpoe* and *-ommes* are used. However, the choice of the suffix is not always obvious, the stems may undergo vowel changes, and for some adjectives, the comparatives and superlatives are based on the attributive forms, whereas for other adjectives, the predicative forms (or both forms) are used. Some adjectives lack comparatives and superlatives altogether. Table 1 provides a condensed and simplified picture of the complexity of adjectival morphology in South Saami.

Given the complexity of adjectival morphology, it is somewhat understandable that in the actual use of this endangered language, many attributive forms tend to be used at the expense of predicative forms in predicative functions as well. On the other hand, some forms, such as the “predicative” *baahkes* and the “attributive” *baahke* ‘hot’, are used interchangeably for both functions in actual use. Furthermore, especially recent loan adjectives such as *fleksijbele* ‘flexible’ often occur in analytic comparative and superlative constructions instead of synthetic forms: *jienebel/jeenjebe fleksijbele* ‘more flexible’ for *fleksijbelåbpoe* and *jenemes/jeenjemes fleksijbele* ‘most flexible’ for *fleksijbelommes*. Here it is possible to see that the adverbs *jienebel/jeenjebe* ‘more’ and *jenemes/jeenjemes* ‘most’ (and further variants) contain the markers *-be* and *-mes*, which are attached to the root *jienebe-/jeenje-* ‘much’. Further, the same morphemes can occur

The so-called relation forms of nouns in South Saami

Positive		Comparative	Superlative
Predicative	Attributive		
<i>noere</i> ‘young’	= <i>noere</i>	<i>nuerebe</i>	<i>nööremes</i>
<i>båeries</i> ‘old’	= <i>båeries</i>	<i>båarasåbpoe</i>	<i>båarasommes</i>
<i>baahkes</i> ‘hot’	<i>baahke</i>	<i>baahkebe</i> ( <i>baahkesåbpoe</i> )	<i>baahkemes</i> ( <i>baahkesommes</i> )
<i>bijvele</i> ‘warm (of weather, clothes)’	<i>bijveles</i>	<i>bijvelåbpoe</i>	<i>bijvelommes</i>
<i>vyölkehke</i> ‘white’	<i>veelkes</i>	<i>vielkebe</i>	<i>veelkemes</i>
<i>fleksijbele</i> ‘flexible’	<i>fleksijbeles</i>	<i>fleksijbelåbpoe</i>	<i>fleksijbelommes</i>
<i>jassije</i> ‘thick (of flat objects)’	<i>jassijes</i>	<i>jassajåbpoe</i>	<i>jassajommes</i>
<i>gissege</i> ‘thick (of round objects)’	<i>gisse</i>	<i>gissebe</i>	<i>gissemes</i>
<i>aeblihtadtje</i> ‘lazy’	<i>aeblehts</i>	( <i>aeblihtåbpoe</i> )	( <i>aeblihtommes</i> )

Table 1: A sample of South Saami adjective inflection

in adverbs based on spatial nouns, e.g. *vueliebisnie* [under.CMPV.INE] ‘further down’, *åerjebisnie* [south.CMPV.INE] ‘further south’ and *miehtjebasse* [away.CMPV.ILL] ‘further away’. In this respect, the South Saami comparative and superlative behave quite like their counterparts in other Saami languages as well as analogous morphemes in Finnic and other branches of Uralic (e.g., Finnish *metse-mmä-ksi* [forest-CMPV-TRANSL] and Mari *kožla-škâ-rak* [forest-ILL-CMPV] ‘further toward the forest’; cf. Raun 1949b; Hakulinen 1979: 115–116; Bereczki 1990: 44).

Although the so-called relation forms to be discussed in the following sections are materially related to the comparative and superlative, a functional approach to word forms such as *tjïdtjebe*, *tjïdtjebasse* and *tjïdtjemes* seen in (1–3) must take into account at least two other morphosyntactic features of the South Saami noun phrase, namely possessive suffixes and article-like demonstratives.

South Saami does not have possessive suffixes as a productive morphological category, but some kinship terms in particular do have possessive forms. For example, *tjædtjeme* ‘my mother’, *tjædtjedh* ‘your mother’, and *tjïdtjese* ‘his/her mother’ are possessive forms of the nominative *tjïdtjie* ‘mother’. The morphological composition of possessive forms is quite unpredictable, as seen in *tjïdtjiem* [mother.ACC] : *tjædtjemdh* [mother.ACC.2SG]; *tjædtjan* [mother.ILL] : *tjædtjasadh* [mother.ILL.2SG]; *tjïdtjeste* [mother.ELA] : *tjïdtjïestadh* [mother.ELA.2SG]. Usually, personal pronouns in the genitive are preferred (e.g. *mov tjïdtjie* [1SG.GEN mother]), and anaphoric reference can also be expressed using the reflexive pronoun *jïjtje* (e.g., *jïjtse/jïjtjese tjïdtjiem* [REFL.3SG.GEN mother.ACC] ‘her/his own mother (obj.)’). It is highly relevant to note here that comparative-like relation forms such as *tjïdtjebe* (1) have also been described as possessive forms by Lagercrantz (1923: 91–92) and Hasselbrink (1981–1985: 121–122); see below for further discussion.

The last preliminary remark concerns one of the most distinctive features of the South Saami noun phrase in comparison to those in other Saami languages or the rest of Uralic, for that matter. Hungarian is often considered the only Uralic language with true indefinite and definite articles (*egy* ‘a(n)’, *a(z)* ‘the’), but Finnish and Estonian, and, to lesser extent, North Saami have also occasionally been discussed from the same perspective (Laury 1997, Guttorm 2015). However, it seems safe to say that the highly frequent article-like uses of the numeral *akte* ‘one’ and the demonstrative pronoun *dïhte* ‘it; that’ make South Saami one of the strongest candidates for a Uralic article language:

- (4) *Akte*            *baernie*    *aktem*            *nïejtem*    *vööjni,*            *men*  
 one(=INDF)    boy            one(=INDF).ACC    girl.ACC    see.PST.3SG    but  
*dïhte*            *nïejte*    *dam*            *baarniem*    *ïdtji*            *vuejniéh.*  
 it(=DEF)    girl    it(=DEF).ACC    boy.ACC    NEG.PST.3SG    see.CNG  
 ‘A boy saw a girl, but the girl didn’t see the boy.’ (Ylikoski, forthcoming)

The more detailed questions concerning the nature of the article-like phenomena seen above fall outside the scope of the present study (cf. Hasselbrink 1981–1985: 94; Bergsland 1946: 106–107; 1985; Magga & Magga 2012: 223), but when discussing the functions of the so-called relation forms in the language, they must be understood in light of the fact that they occur in a language that has a relatively frequent and grammaticalized means to

express definiteness.<sup>5</sup> This said, the following section is devoted to the relation forms and their relations to adjectival comparatives and superlatives as well as to possessive suffixes and other determiners in South Saami.

### 3. Relation forms: a synchronic description

Possibly because of their unprecedented position among more prototypical representatives of nominal inflection (such as possessive suffixes) and denominal derivation, the research history of the so-called relation forms in *-bel-åbpoe* and *-mes/-ommes* consists of only brief, scattered and even counterfactual remarks. After a short summary of earlier research (Section 3.1), the phenomenon in question is scrutinized from morphological (Section 3.2), syntactic (Section 3.3) and semantic (Section 3.4) points of view; at the end, a summarizing discussion on the essence of the relation forms is presented (Section 3.5).

#### 3.1. History of research

The short history of the description of the relation forms in South Saami can be easily divided into two parts: the past and the present. The present is represented by Bergsland's (1982/1994) and Magga and Magga's (2012) modern grammars of South Saami, in which it is stated that the morpheme that is formally identical to the comparative degree marker is used to refer to two separate participants that in some way belong together, and in the case of more than two participants, the morpheme identical to the superlative may be used (see Examples 1–3 above).

As Magga and Magga's (2012) *Sørsamisk grammatikk* is largely identical to Bergsland's (1982/1994) *Sydsamisk grammatikk*, even their example sentences are identical. However, a revealing difference between the two is that under Bergsland's (1982/1994) section entitled *Forholdsformer* ("relation forms"), he also mentions the existence of reciprocal derivatives in *-tjh/-adtjh* such as *vielle* 'brother' → *vielletjh* 'brothers (to each other)', *tjijtjie* 'mother' → *tjijtjetjh/tjædtjetjh* 'mother and her child(ren)', whereas Magga and Magga describe the latter in a more expected context among other denominal nouns in the derivation section of their grammar. As for the relation forms (or "relation suffixes", *forholdsendelser*), Magga and Magga present those as a part of noun inflection, following case-cum-number paradigms and possessive suffixes. On the other hand, although

Bergsland also describes his relation forms (including reciprocals) right after possessive suffixes, the subsequent section is entitled *Andre substantiv avledet av substantiv*, “Other denominal nouns”. In other words, Bergsland places the phenomenon in question in the realm of derivation, whereas for Magga and Magga such forms are inflectional instead; I will return to this question in the following sections.

Despite the above-mentioned differences, Bergsland as well as Magga and Magga describe the relation forms quite uniformly in comparison to earlier accounts, which have mostly concentrated on the comparative-like *-be/-åbpoe* and described it as a third person singular possessive suffix. The first scholar to describe the phenomenon appears to have been Lagercrantz (1923: 91–92), who characterizes the possessive form *tjadtje-se* [mother-3SG] ‘his/her mother’ as having a “reflexive” meaning and being paralleled with the (implicitly non-reflexive) possessive suffixes *-be/-åbpoe* and *-mes*, as seen in his examples *vijve-be* [son.in.law-be] and *tjadtje-mes* [mother-mes]. However, he does not provide clear examples of such functions, and at best translates such forms by their lexical meaning only (e.g., *tjadtjemes* ‘Mutter’). On the other hand, elsewhere he presents three examples including (5–6), but it still remains unclear whether *aehtjiebistie* (5) is meant to be an example of a non-reflexive (non-anaphoric?) possessive suffix. At any rate, Lagercrantz describes *aehtjiebistie* (5) and *eethjemes* (6) as nouns with possessive suffixes:

- (5) *Haeneste aehtjiebistie ohtje-beetnegadtjh.*  
 beg.MOM.3SG father.be.ELA little-money.DIM.PL  
 ‘He begs for a little money from his father.’ (Lagercrantz 1923: 33; 1926: 18)  
 (Lagercrantz: ‘er erbettelt von seinem Vater ein klein wenig Geld.’)

- (6) *Eethjemes jijtse bāarasammes maanese gosse*  
 father.mes REFL.GEN.3SG old.SUP child.ILL when  
*pruvreme, dlie provhcoe raajedh jallh*  
 marry.PST.PTCP then do.habitually.3SG dowry.INF or  
*raajoem vedtedh.*  
 dowry.ACC give.INF  
 ‘The father, when his oldest child has married, usually  
 gives him/her a present.’ (Lagercrantz 1926: 33)  
 (Lagercrantz: ‘der Vater (eig. „sein Vater“) pflegt, wenn sein ältestes  
 Kind sich verheiratet hat, ihm ein Geschenk zu geben.’)

The next attempt to describe *-be/-åbpoe* is the most comprehensive to date. In his PhD thesis grammar, a glossematic description of the dialect of

Plassje (Røros), Bergsland (1946: 181–182) discusses only the “comparative derivant” *-be/-âbpoe*, stating that a *-be/-âbpoe* form “establishes a relation” between the base form and something else. According to Bergsland, such a relation could be characterized as a third person possessive suffix – “or a definite article” – but unlike possessive suffixes, *-be/-âbpoe* is not necessarily reflexive. Unfortunately, Bergsland does not explain his view in more detail, but he nevertheless is the first one to present a number of example sentences as well as to point out that *-be/-âbpoe* is most often attached to kinship words and that the resulting word form stands in opposition to other participants. However, Bergsland also presents other examples, and he appears to be the only one to have ever pointed out that the cognates of *-be/-âbpoe* in Pite and Lule Saami occasionally have similar functions. As regards *-mes*, Bergsland mentions that this kind of relation form is found in the northernmost variety of South Saami as described by Lagercrantz (1923), but is apparently lacking in the southern dialect spoken in Plassje. I will return to all of remarks and present many of Bergsland’s examples in the following sections. However, it is notable that in his later grammar of the language, Bergsland (1982/1994) was rather taciturn on the nature of the phenomenon in question.

For the sake of completeness, it may be noted that the Lagercrantzian idea of describing *-be/-âbpoe* as a non-reflexive possessive suffix is also repeated by Hasselbrink (1981–1985: 121–122) in the grammatical introduction to his dictionary, albeit without further discussion or example sentences. Otherwise, it is remarkable that the phenomenon has apparently never been mentioned outside Saami linguistics, neither in synchronic descriptions nor diachronic studies on the origin of the Saami-Finnic comparative in *\*-mpV*. Within Saami linguistics, the only remarkable exception outside South Saami grammars may be Grundström’s dictionary of Lule Saami (see Section 4.1).

### 3.2. Morphology

After a lengthy introduction to the core of the present study, this section aims to provide the first comprehensive description of the morphological properties of the so-called relation forms in South Saami. As seen above, the prevailing picture of the relation forms depends almost entirely on the three *-be/-âbpoe* forms and one *-mes* form in the three example sentences seen in (1–3) in Section 1. These are the only example sentences presented

since Bergsland (1946) more than seventy years ago, first by Bergsland himself (1982: 107–108; 1994: 110) and most recently by Magga and Magga (2012: 50). To break loose from the tradition, almost fifty new example sentences will be presented and discussed in the following sections. First consider the following examples from various sources:

- (7) *Eelle* **tj***id***tj***ie***binie** *saemeste* *jih*  
*Eelle* mother.be.COM speak.Saami.3SG and  
**a***e***tj***ie***binie** *daaroste*.  
 father.be.COM speak.Norwegian.3SG  
 ‘Eelle speaks Saami with her mother, and Norwegian with her father.’ (SIKOR)
- (8) *B**å**a**r**a**s**o**m**m**e**s* *h**o**v* *s**o**p**t**s**e**s**t**e* *g**u**k**t**i**e* *g**å**a**n**g**k**o**e**h* *g**o**e**s**e**n*  
 old.SUP DPT tell.3SG how bent spruce.GEN  
*n**u**a**l**a**n* **o***n***n***e***-***å***a***b**p**e**b**e***m** *g**æ**v**n**j**o**e**s**t**a**m**m**e*.  
 under little-sister.be.ACC hang.PST.PTCP  
 ‘Then the oldest one told how they had hooked the baby  
 sister under a bent spruce.’ (Bientie 2013: 14)
- (9) *D**e**l**l**i**e* *s**t**a**a**l**o**e* *h**e**a**l**s**e**h**t**i* *g**a**l**k**i**n* *b**å**å**s**t**i**d**e* *b**å**e**t**e**d**h*.  
 then ogre send.a.message.PST.3SG shall.PST.3PL back come.INF  
*M**e**n* *i**d**t**j**i* **d***a***k***t**a***r***å***b***p**o**e* *s**i**j**h**t**h* *b**å**å**s**t**i**d**e* *j**u**h**t**e**d**h*.  
 but NEG.PST.3SG daughter.åbpoe want.CNG back travel.INF  
*M**e**n* **d***i***h***t***e** **v***i***j***v**e***b***e* *l**i**j**h**k**e* *j**u**h**t**i*.  
 but DEF son.in.law.be anyway travel.PST.3SG  
 ‘Then the Ogre sent them a message to come back. But the [Ogre’s] daughter did  
 not want to come back. But the son-in-law came anyway.’ (Bergsland 1987: 83)
- (10) *D**e**n**n**i**e* *s**t**å**v**r**o**s**n**e* *j**i**s* **v***u***a***n***a***v***å****b***p**o**e* *j**i**h* *g**ø**ø**k**t**e*  
 DEF.INE board.INE DPT mother.in.law.åbpoe and two  
*a**l**t**e**s**e* *v**i**e**l**l**i**j**s**t**e*.  
 3SG.GEN brother.PL.ELA  
 ‘On the board [of a culture center], in turn, are his mother-in-law  
 and two of his brothers.’ (SIKOR)

The so-called relation forms of nouns in South Saami

- (11) *Akten baahkes giesiebiejjien edtja Ávletje*  
 one.GEN hot summer.day.GEN shall.3SG Ávla.DIM  
*tjietsobem Næjlam áadtjodh dâeriedidh*  
 younger.brother.be.ACC Næjla.ACC get.INF accompany.INF  
*aehtjh-aahkeben gâajkoe guessine.*  
 paternal.grandmother.be.GEN to guest.ESS  
 ‘One summer day, little Ávla is going to have his uncle Næjla  
 to accompany him to visit grandma.’ (SIKOR)
- (12) *Ij Leah, dah viellebh hov lin aaj,*  
 NEG.3PL be.CNG DEF.PL brother.be.PL DPT be.PST.3PL also  
*voestes jaepie hov tjâanghkosne årroejimh gaajkhk dovnh*  
 first year DPT assembly.INE live.PST.1PL everybody.together  
*mânnoeh dej viellebigumie jih dejnie voeres*  
 IDU DEF.PL.GEN brother.be.PL.COM and DEF.COM old  
*geeleskottjine dennie vaeresne (...)*  
 old.man.COM DEF.INE mountain.INE  
 ‘No, they were not [alone], the brothers were there too, in the first year we  
 all lived together with the brothers and with the old man in the highland.’  
 (SIKOR)
- (13) *Jih jeenjeh miesieh baatsedieh jih aaj*  
 and many(.PL) reindeer.calf.PL remain.3PL and also  
*giedtien sijse bâetieh jih ietniebidie ohtsedidh.*  
 enclosure.GEN into come.3PL INF<sup>6</sup> mother.be.PL.ACC seek.INF  
 ‘And many reindeer calves are left, and they also come to the  
 enclosure to look for their mothers.’ (Bergsland 1987: 31)

The above examples are quite representative of the most typical occurrences of *-be/-âbpoe* forms in actual language use. They are predominantly formed from kinship terms such as *tjiddtjie* ‘mother’, *aehtjie* ‘father’, *onne-âabpa* ‘little sister’, *daktere* ‘daughter’, *vijve* ‘son-in-law’, *vuanove* ‘mother-in-law’, *tjietsie* ‘paternal uncle younger than one’s father’, *aehtjh-aahka* ‘paternal grandmother’, *vielje (vielle)* ‘brother’ and *ietnie* ‘mother’, and they inflect for cases like accusative (8, 11, 13), genitive (11) and comitative (7, 12). Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the relation forms, which has not been visible in the three example sentences (1–3) repeated in the grammatical descriptions of the language, is that they are inflected not only for case, but also for number, as seen in (12–13).

Although earlier grammarians have described *-be/-åbpoe* as one of the possessive suffixes or a related morpheme separate from derivation, *-be/-åbpoe* forms in and of themselves have never been explicitly described as entities that are inflected quite like any nouns. It has not been possible to attest authentic inflectional forms for all cases in both numbers, but as the same goes for most lexemes in South Saami, it is safe to present the inflectional paradigm of *tjïdtjebe*, for example, on a par with those of its base root *tjïdtjie* ‘mother’ and the deverbal noun *jieleme* ‘life’ (← *jieledh* ‘live’). As can be seen in Table 2, *tjïdtjebe* is inflected according to the same pattern as *jieleme* and other similar trisyllabic nouns; for example, they undergo analogous stem-internal and stem-final vowel changes and take the same number/case suffixes – regardless of the difficulty of separating such bound morphemes from one another and from their lexical bases.

	‘mother’		‘mother’ (relation form)		‘life’	
	SG	PL	SG	PL	SG	PL
NOM	<i>tjïdtjie</i>	<i>tjïdtjïeh</i>	<i>tjïdtjebe</i>	<i>tjïdtjïbh</i>	<i>jieleme</i>	<i>jïelemh</i>
GEN	<i>tjïdtjïen</i>	<i>tjïdtjï</i>	<i>tjïdtjïeben</i>	<i>tjïdtjïebi</i>	<i>jïelemen</i>	<i>jïelemi</i>
ACC	<i>tjïdtjïem</i>	<i>tjïdtjïide</i>	<i>tjïdtjïebem</i>	<i>tjïdtjïebïdie</i>	<i>jïelemem</i>	<i>jïeliemïdie</i>
ILL	<i>tjïædtjïan</i>	<i>tjïdtjïide</i>	<i>tjïdtjïiebasse</i>	<i>tjïdtjïebïdie</i>	<i>jïeliemasse</i>	<i>jïeliemïdie</i>
INE	<i>tjïdtjïesne</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïne</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïbisnie</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïbïnie</i>	<i>jïeliemïsnïe</i>	<i>jïeliemïnïe</i>
ELA	<i>tjïdtjïeste</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïjste</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïbïstïe</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïbïjstïe</i>	<i>jïeliemïstïe</i>	<i>jïeliemïjstïe</i>
COM	<i>tjïdtjïïne</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïgïjïmïe</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïbïnïe</i>	<i>tjïdtjïïbïgïjïmïe</i>	<i>jïeliemïnïe</i>	<i>jïelemïgïjïmïe</i>
ESS	<i>tjïdtjïïne</i>		<i>tjïdtjïïbïnïe</i>		<i>jïeliemïnïe</i>	

Table 2: Inflectional paradigms of the South Saami *tjïdtjie* ‘mother’, the relation form *tjïdtjebe* (from *tjïdtjie*) and *jieleme* ‘life’

So, relation forms such as *tjïdtjebe* inflect for case and number, but how productive are the forms themselves? Does the answer to this question tell us anything about their place on the inflection-derivation cline? According to Bergsland (1982: 107–108; 1994: 110) as well as Magga and Magga (2012: 50), the relation forms refer to persons or things, but the grammarians’ examples refer to mothers and daughters only. Indeed, nearly all attested relation forms refer to human referents, and the forms are particularly common with kinship terms such as those seen above and the many others to be seen in the following sections. It is notable that *ïetnïebïdie* [mother.be.PL.ACC] in (13) is derived from *ïetnïe* ‘(animal) mother’, which

most commonly and also here refers to non-human animal mothers rather than human mothers (*tjiddtjie*). It was mentioned above that Bergsland (1946: 181–182) explains that *-be/-åbpoe* is most often attached to kinship words and that the resulting word form stands in opposition to other participants; compare the relation of a mother and her children in (1–2) and similar kinship relations in (5–13) above.

However, Bergsland (1946: 182) also mentions the forms *treavkebh* [ski.be.PL] and *plærebe* [leaf.be] based on the non-kinship-related and even inanimate nouns *treavka* ‘ski’ and *plærie* ‘leaf’, and other sources contain *naehkebem* [skin.be.ACC] based on *naehkie* ‘skin’, and non-kinship-related animate nouns such as *voelpebe* [friend.be] and *kraannebi* [neighbor.be.PL.GEN]. On the other hand, such forms are quite exceptional manifestations of a category that is nevertheless clearly dominated by kinship terms. These and other forms will be discussed from a semantic point of view in Section 3.4. It is noteworthy that such forms exist, although it seems safe to state that the relation forms in *-be/-åbpoe* are most productive for kinship terms. The South Saami have a relatively rich kinship system and, as a result, it has been possible to attest more than two dozen kin-term-based *-be/-åbpoe* forms in the electronic corpus of South Saami (SIKOR) and other texts. Example (14) is one more example that illustrates the riches of South Saami kinship terms and their ability to combine with the relation form suffix:

- (14) *Jijtje tjoeri universitetesne årrodh, mohte*  
 REFL must.PST.3SG university.INE stay.INF but  
*muahrebe Patricia gon maakebe Helmuth*  
 mother’s.younger.sister.be Patricia and male.relative.be<sup>7</sup> Helmuth  
*tuvristigujmie barkijægan jih dah guaktah*  
 tourist.PL.COM work.3DU and 3PL couple  
*meehtigan monnem viehkiehtidh.*  
 be.able.PST.3DU 1DU.ACC help.INF  
 ‘He himself had to stay at the university, but his aunt Patricia and her husband Helmuth work with tourists and were able to help us.’ (SIKOR)

Leaving the more experimental questions of productivity for future studies, I present a summary of my findings from all the relevant sources in Table 3.

Base	Meaning	Relation form
<i>aahka</i>	'grandmother; old woman'	<i>aahkebe</i>
<i>aahkuve</i>	'grandchild (of a woman)'	<i>aahkuvebe</i>
<i>aajja</i>	'grandfather; old man'	<i>aajjebe</i>
<i>aehtjie</i>	'father'	<i>aehtjebe</i>
<i>aehtjhaahka</i>	'paternal grandmother'	<i>aehtjhaahkebe</i>
<i>baernie</i>	'child'	<i>baernebe</i>
<i>böösebe</i>	'boy; son'	<i>böösebe</i> (diminutive <i>böösebadtje</i> )
<i>daktere</i>	'daughter'	<i>daktaråbpoe</i>
<i>eejhtege</i>	'parent'	<i>eejhtegåbpoe</i> (plural <i>eejhtegåbpoeh</i> )
<i>elkie</i>	'(married) son'	<i>elkebe</i>
<i>gaalla ~ geelle</i>	'husband'	<i>gaallebe ~ geellebe</i>
<i>gujne</i>	'wife; woman'	<i>gujnebe</i>
<i>gåmma</i>	'wife'	<i>gåmmebe</i>
<i>hosbåanta</i>	'male householder'	<i>hosbåantebe</i>
<i>ietnie</i>	'mother (mostly of animals)'	<i>ietnebe</i>
<i>jielbielie</i>	'male cousin'	<i>jielbielebe</i>
<i>jøne</i>	'maternal uncle'	<i>jønebe</i>
<i>kraanna</i>	'neighbor'	<i>kraannebe</i>
<i>laevie</i>	'fiancé(e)'	<i>laevebe</i>
<i>maadteraajja</i>	'forefather'	<i>maadteraajjebe</i>
<i>maake</i>	'male relative'	<i>maakebe</i>
<i>maana</i>	'child'	<i>maanebe</i>
<i>muahra</i>	'mother's younger sister'	<i>muahrebe</i>
<i>naehkie</i>	'skin'	<i>naehkebe</i>
<i>nějte</i>	'girl; daughter'	<i>nějtebe</i>
<i>onneåabpa</i>	'little sister'	<i>onneåabpebe</i>
<i>plaerie</i>	'leaf'	<i>plarebe</i>
<i>seasa</i>	'paternal aunt'	<i>siesebe</i>
<i>tjidtjie</i>	'mother'	<i>tjidtjebe</i>

The so-called relation forms of nouns in South Saami

Base	Meaning	Relation form
<i>tjietsie</i>	‘father’s younger brother’	<i>tjietsebe</i>
<i>treavka</i>	‘ski’	<i>treavkebe</i>
<i>triengke</i>	‘hired man’	<i>triengkebe</i>
<i>vielle</i>	‘brother’	<i>viellebe</i>
<i>vijve</i>	‘son-in-law’	<i>vijvebe</i>
<i>voehpe</i>	‘father-in-law’	<i>voehpebe</i>
<i>voelpe</i>	‘friend’	<i>voelpebe</i>
<i>vuanove</i>	‘mother-in-law’	<i>vuanavåbpoe</i>
<i>åabpa</i>	‘sister’	<i>åabpebe</i>

Table 3: Noun-based *-be/-åbpoe* forms (here in the nominative singular) in the various sources of this study

It can be seen in Table 3 that the variant *-åbpoe* is relatively marginal in relation to *-be*, but this seems only to correlate with the proportion of trisyllabic (kinship) nouns with respect to disyllabic ones. The *-åbpoe* forms seem to inflect as naturally as those in *-be*, as evidenced by forms like *daktaråbpoe* [daughter.åbpoe.GEN] and *vuanavåbpoe* [mother.in.law.åbpoe.GEN] in written sources. However, the attested relation form based on *aahkuve* ‘grandchild (of a woman)’ consists of two instances of *aahkuvebasse*, the illative singular of the unattested *\*aahkuvebe*, whereas the expected form for a trisyllabic noun such as this is *aahkuvåbpoe*, yielding the illative *aahkuvåbpose*.

Table 3 contains only such relation forms – for a total of 38 nouns – that have been attested in actual use, but the list could be extended with analogous forms for *gobpe* ‘(old) man’, *goffere* ‘godfather’, *gossene* ‘godson’, *kristahtjie* ‘godfather’, *nyjsenæjja* ‘woman’ and *åerpene* ‘sibling’, registered in Hasselbrink’s (1981–1985) dictionary and some of its predecessors, but without sentence context. Hasselbrink also mentions *aahkuvåbpoe* (plural *aahkuvåbpoeh*, ‘aakkuvabbaah’ < àχku\*appàʰ; Collinder 1943 s.v. *ak’kob*), the expected variant of *\*aahkuvebe*.

When compared with underived nouns like *tjìdtjie* ‘mother’ or derived nouns like *jieleme* ‘life’, relation forms like *tjìdtjebe*, with all their case/number forms, look more like nouns and much less like representatives of any inflectional category of the type that are commonly known in other languages of Northern Europe. Like in all Saami languages, possessive

suffixes – excluding relation forms that have also been characterized as such – generally follow case markers in South Saami: *tjædtje-dh* [mother-NOM/GEN.2SG] : *tjædtje-m-dh* [mother-ACC-2SG] : *tjædtja-sa-dth* [mother-ILL-2SG] : *tjïdtjje-sta-dth* [mother-ELA-2SG]. In this context, it would be quite unintuitive to regard the element *-b(e)-* in the *tjïdtjje* paradigm (Table 2), for example, as a possessive suffix.

The morphological property that most clearly speaks against regarding *-be* as an inflectional morpheme can be seen in the following examples:

- (15) *Gårroeh bieleste Ellen Dærga, Anna Dærga, Sanna Jonassen,*  
left side.ELA E.D. A.D. S.J.  
*Anna Dunfjeld jïh böösebadtje Leif Dunfjeld.*  
A.D. and son.be.DIM L.D.  
‘Depicted from the left are Ellen Dærga, Anna Dærga, Sanna Jonassen,  
Anna Dunfjeld and her little son (or: the little boy) Leif Dunfjeld.’  
(Saemeste saaman p. 46)
- (16) *Onnohtje saemien (skovle)niejte guhkiem tjahkasji joejkeminie*  
tiny Saami (school.)girl long sit.PST.3SG yoik.PROG  
*fierhten iehkeden. Akte aajne baakoe sov vuelesne*  
every.GEN evening.GEN one only word 3SG.GEN *vuelie.INE*  
– *vielle. Mohte daate baakoe satnem mujhtehte*  
brother but this word 3SG.ACC remind.3SG  
*aehtjebem, tjïdtjebem, åabpebh jïh onn-ohkje*  
father.be.ACC mother.be.ACC sister.be.PL and tiny  
*viellebadtje, mah Leah guhkene vuelehks-laantesne*  
brother.be.DIM REL.PL be.3PL far.away lowland.INE  
*bovtsigujmie.*  
reindeer.PL.COM  
‘The tiny little Saami schoolgirl sat yoiking for a long time every night. The one and only word in her *vuelie* (South Saami chant) was *vielle*, brother. But this word reminded her of her father, mother, sisters and tiny little brother who were far away in the lowlands with the reindeer.’ (Sjulsson 2013: 26)

The forms *böösebadtje* and *viellebadtje* consist of the nouns *bööse* and *vielle*, which are followed by not only the relation form marker *-be* but also the diminutive derivational suffix *-dtje*, an otherwise expected ancillary with words referring to young children. Such forms are reminiscent of adjective forms like *bueriebadtje* [good.CMPV.DIM] ‘somewhat better’,

*guhkiebadtje* [long.CMPV.DIM] ‘somewhat longer’, *stueriebadtje* [big.CMPV.DIM] ‘somewhat bigger’ and *unniebadtje* [small.CMPV.DIM] ‘somewhat smaller’, which are formally diminutive comparatives (cf. Bergsland 1946: 185–186; Hasselbrink 1981–1985: 110) – and analogous to Latin *meliusculus*, *longiusculus*, *maiusculus* and *minusculus* id., or contemporary English *better-ish*, *longer-ish*, *bigger-ish* and *smaller-ish*. However, while in the latter forms the diminutive “diminishes” the meaning of the comparative instead of that of the adjectival root (‘more A’ → ‘a little more A’), in *böösebadtje* and *viellebadtje* the diminutive rather modifies the concrete referents of the nouns *bööse(be)* ‘boy; son’ and *vielle(be)* ‘brother’, regardless of how the meaning of *-be* ought to be understood. At any rate, within the nominal inflection of the Saami languages, diminutive suffixes apparently never follow inflectional suffixes such as possessive suffixes but rather precede those.

As regards the other relation form marker, *-mes*, it was already noted that it is used much less frequently, and Bergsland (1946: 182) ascribes it to the northern dialects of South Saami, whereas *-be* is used also in the south and has cognates in Pite and Lule Saami that are used in a similar manner. In addition to (3), the following examples can be given:

- (17) *Maanan aehtjemes jis jeanoebealesne jijtse*  
 child.GEN father.mes DPT riverside.INE REFL.GEN.3SG  
*vinhtsem møøleminie.*  
 boat.ACC paint.PROG  
 ‘The child’s father, in turn, is painting the boat at the riverside.’ (SIKOR)

- (18) *Vööлки vuanavommesen rãantjam lijrehten.*  
 leave.PST.3SG mother.in.law.ommes.GEN reindeer.OX.ACC lead.CVB  
 ‘He left, leading his mother-in-law’s reindeer ox.’ (Lagercrantz 1926: 76)

- (19) **Tjijtjemes** *leah sov baernide moeneme*  
 mother.mes.PL be.3PL 3LOG.GEN son.PL.ILL mention.PST.PTCP  
*dan bijre juktie eah edtjeh dah baektien*  
 it.GEN about so.that NEG.3PL shall.3PL 3PL steep.hill.GEN  
*sijse nolleskovvedh guktie Baektien-Laara. Aehtjemes leah*  
 into be.fooled.INF like Baektien-Laara father.mes.PL be.3PL  
*altese dakteridie vaaroeltamme guktie edtjeh*  
 3PL.GEN daughter.PL.ILL warn.PST.PTCP so.that shall.3PL  
*goerkesasse vaeltedh man gavhtan baernieh maehtieh*  
 mind.ILL take.INF Q.GEN for boy.PL may.3PL  
*nietijste annetji billedh.*  
 girl.PL.ELA little fear.INF  
 ‘The mothers have told their sons about it, so that they won’t  
 be fooled and end up inside the mountain like Baektien-Laara.  
 The fathers have warned their daughters, so that they may  
 understand why boys may be a little afraid of girls.’ (SIKOR)

- (20) **Gaajhkh aehtjemes dohkh diekie vuejeh barkoste jih**  
 all(.PL) father.mes.PL back.and.forth drive.3PL work.ELA and  
*viht gâatan.*  
 again home.ILL  
 ‘All fathers drive back and forth from work to home.’ (SIKOR)

Not unlike *-be/-âbpoe*, it can be seen that also these relation forms inflect in case (18) and number (19–20). The most common forms are based on the disyllabic *aehtjie* ‘father’ and *tjijtjie* ‘mother’, but the trisyllabic *vuanove* ‘mother-in-law’ yields a relation form in *-ommes* (cf. the formation of superlatives in Table 1). However, while the relation forms in *-be/-âbpoe* seem not to differ from the comparative, the relation of *-mes/-ommes* to the superlative in *-mes/-ommes* seems to be less regular:

- (21) **Govnebuatska dam bâeries aahkemesem bæjphan**  
 Govnebuatska DEF.ACC old grandma.mes.ACC pipe.GEN  
*âvteste gæjhta jih dle vaadtsije gâncan gâajkoe.*  
 for thank.3SG and then start.walking.3SG king.GEN to  
 ‘Govnebuatska (Norwegian *Askeladden*) thanks the old lady  
 for the pipe and starts walking to the King.’ (SIKOR)

- (22) *Dejtie jijtse gâajkoe gohtje, jih dah jis*  
 3DU.ACC REFL.GEN.3SG to call.3SG and 3DU DPT  
*Seebedevusem, aehtjemesem, vinhtsese laehpielægan triengkigujmie*  
 Zebedee.ACC father.mes.ACC boat.ILL leave.3DU hired.man.PL.COM  
*ektesne, jih Jeesusem dâeriedægan.*  
 together and Jesus.ACC follow.3DU  
 ‘He called them to himself, and they left Zebedee, their father, in  
 the boat with the hired men, and followed Jesus.’ (Mark 1:20)

While *aahkemesem* [grandma.mes.ACC] and *aehtjemesem* [father.mes.ACC] may look like regular accusative forms of trisyllabic nouns in *-mes*, they differ from the expected accusative forms of superlatives with this ending: Even though the base nouns *aahka* ‘grandmother; old woman’ and *aehtjie* ‘father’ yield forms like *aahke-mes-em* and *aehtje-mes-em*, the corresponding superlatives for adjectives like *kruana* ‘green’ and *aelhkie* ‘easy’ would usually be the less agglutinative *kråanemes* [green.SUP] : *kråanemassem* [green.SUP.ACC] and *aelhkemes* [easy.SUP] : *aelhkiemassem* [easy.SUP.ACC]. In other words, it seems that there is no full one-to-one relationship between the relation form marker *-mes* and the superlative marker *-mes*. On the other hand, superlatives like *veerre-mes-em* [bad-SUP-ACC] are also attested (SIKOR), and therefore it is possible that the two types of *-mes* are not that distinct from one another after all.

A purely morphological point of view alone is hardly enough to make us understand the nature of the phenomenon labeled as “relation forms” in South Saami grammars. In the following sections, our horizon will be widened to the syntax and thereafter to the semantics of these forms.

### 3.3. Syntax

Before turning to the semantics of the relation forms, a few purely syntactic remarks can be presented. In a word, the syntax of relation forms does not differ from that of ordinary nouns, whether derived or underived. In other words, the syntactic behavior of *-be/-åbpoe* and *-mes/-ommes* fits the morphological profile just presented. It appears that the essive and inessive are the only cases not attested in the available texts<sup>8</sup>, and, as a consequence, relation forms can be observed in all major functions of nearly all cases: not only as nominative subjects, but also as accusative objects (8, 11, 13, 16, 21, 22), nominative objects (16) and in various complemental and adverbial functions of the illative (2), the comitative (7) and the elative (5). The

genitive is most often either a possessor, as in *vuanavommesen rãantjam* ‘mother-in-law’s reindeer ox’ (18), or the complement of an adposition, as in *aehtjh-aahkeben gãajkoe* ‘to the paternal grandmother’ (11). In (23), the noun phrase *tjïdtjie aehtjebistie* functions as the demoted elative subject of a passive clause:

- (23) *Ollem jaksehtallh tjïdtjie aehtjebistie.*  
 NEG.IMP.1SG catch.up.ADV.PASS.CNG mother father.be.ELA  
 ‘I hope I won’t get caught by mom and dad.’ (SIKOR)

Expectedly, plural subjects in *-bh* (12) and *-mesh* (19–20) occur in agreement with plural predicates. Example (24) contains the noun phrase *aehtjebh tjïdtjebh* [father.be.PL mother.be.PL] which, like *tjïdtjie aehtjebistie* above, exhibits a covert coordination typical of South Saami (cf. Bergsland 1982: 75; 1994: 75–76). When the referent of the subject NP refers to two persons, the verb is in the dual:<sup>9</sup>

- (24) *Gosse dellie aehtjebh tjïdtjebh böötigan gãatan,*  
 when then father.be.PL mother.be.PL come.PST.3DU home.ILL  
*dellie maanah lin bãarhte.*  
 then child.PL be.PST.3PL away  
 ‘When the father and mother came home, the children were gone.’ (Bergsland 1987: 80)

As regards the internal syntax of NPs headed by relation forms, they behave like ordinary nouns: In the examples presented above, it has already been possible to observe that many such forms are accompanied by the article-like *dih̄te* ‘it; that; the’ (here often glossed as DEF), which agrees with its head in an ordinary manner (Bergsland 1946: 106–107; Magga & Magga 2012: 54, 223): *dih̄te vijvebe* ‘the son-in-law’ (9), *dah vieljebh* ‘the brothers’ and *dej vieljibegujmie* ‘with the brothers’ (12) and *dam bãeries aahkemesem* ‘the old woman’ (21). Further, a relation form can be modified by adjectives (*dam bãeries aahkemesem* ‘the old woman’) and possessive genitives such as *maanah* in *maanah aehtjemes* ‘the father of the child’ (17) or *Eallan* ‘Ealla’s’ in (25) and *dan baernien* in (26):

- (25) *Eallan aehtjebe aaj jaami daennie ovlæhkosne.*  
 Ealla.GEN father.be also die.PST.3SG this.INE accident.INE  
 ‘Ealla’s father was also one of those who died in the accident.’ (SIKOR)

- (26) *Dellie mah tjidtjebem aaj dan baernien åadtjoem*  
 then DPT mother.be.ACC also DEF.GEN boy.GEN get.ISG  
*bovestidh jih bårrelidh.*  
 kill.MOM.INF and eat.MOM.INF  
 ‘Then I can kill the boy’s mother as well and eat her.’ (Halász 1887: 48)

In sum, the relation forms behave just like any nouns, but it may be noted that they do not seem to combine with possessive suffixes, a rather marginal and unproductive category in South Saami. For an illustrative synopsis summarizing many of the observations above, see (27):

- (27) *Desnie dihte altese åemie gånmebe, vuajna guktie*  
 there DEF 3SG.GEN deceased wife.be see.3SG how  
*båetieh edtjeh viedtjedh.*  
 come.3PL shall.3PL fetch.INF  
 ‘His wife who has died is there, and he sees that they  
 [spirits] are coming to get her.’ (Jacobsen 2010: 29)

In other words, one of the most complex noun phrases headed by a relation form is *dihte altese åemie gånmebe* ‘the deceased wife of his’, which in turn could be inflected in case and number like *tjidtjebe* in Table 2 above – and such forms could be used in all syntactic functions needed.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.4. Semantics

While it is relatively easy to describe the morphology and syntax of the relation forms in *-be/-åbpoe* and *-mes/-ommes*, in order to really understand the role of these forms in South Saami, we must understand their meaning. Undeniably, this has been the most difficult task for earlier scholars and still remains as such. Even though the relation forms have been characterized as possessive suffixes (Lagercrantz 1923, Hasselbrink 1981–1985) or something very much like possessive suffixes (Bergsland 1946), the most recent grammars (Bergsland 1982/1994, Magga & Magga 2012) have refrained from characterizing them as such – albeit without providing an exhaustive alternative.

Indeed, the latter descriptions have remained surprisingly agnostic as regards the semantic – or pragmatic – functions of the forms in question. In light of the actual language data, this seems to have been a wise and understandable decision: the relation forms provide an unusually vague basis for generalizations, and they seem to lack obvious analogues in the

descriptions of the related (Saami and other Uralic) and neighboring (Germanic) languages. For this reason, it is most convenient to refer to individual forms like *tjïdtjebe* [mother.be] without presenting their meanings with English translations like ‘mother’, ‘his mother’, ‘her mother’ or ‘the mother’, although all these alternatives seem to fit into the translations of individual sentences in which such forms occur. In fact, this state of affairs is somewhat similar to that of many of the so-called possessive suffixes in many of the Uralic languages east of Saami and Finnic. As is well known, third person possessive suffixes in particular are widely used for information structuring purposes (cf. Nikolaeva 2003, Künnap 2004, Leinonen 2006), and it appears that it is possible to look at the South Saami relation forms from the same perspective, as already hinted by Bergsland (1946: 181), who states in passing that *-be/-åbpoe* could also be characterized as a definite article. However, as already understood by Bergsland himself, South Saami *dih̄te* (4, 9, 10, 12, 21, 26, 27) is the default definite article of the language, being one of the most grammaticalized Uralic demonstratives in this respect.

As has been seen above, the so-called relation forms are most often based on various kinship terms, and from both morphological and syntactic points of view, such forms look and behave like ordinary nouns. From a semantic perspective, one is therefore tempted to ask whether relation forms like *tjïdtjebe* [mother.be], *viellebe* [brother.be], *vijvebe* [son.in.law.be] and *vuanavåbpoe* [mother.in.law.åbpoe] still ought to be understood simply as a part of denominal derivation, on a par with other derivational suffixes that are used to expand the relatively closed set of kinship terms. As mentioned above, Bergsland (1982: 107–108; 1994: 110) actually describes the relation forms in *-be/-åbpoe* and *-mes/-ommes* in connection with reciprocal derivatives in *-tjh/-adtjh*. The derivations of the latter type refer to symmetrical relationships such as *vielletjh* ‘brothers (to each other)’ or less symmetrical relationships such as *tjïdtjetjh/tjædtjetjh* ‘mother and her child(ren)’.

Another group of derived “relation forms” among kinship terms is those formed with the suffix *-sassa/-assa*: these words refer to prospective relatives of the type expressed by the base noun: a prospective *vijve* ‘son-in-law’ is *vijvesassa* ‘prospective son-in-law’, and *vuanove* ‘mother-in-law’ is the base for *vuanavassa* ‘prospective mother-in-law’. From a semantic perspective, the pan-Saami morpheme *-bielie* behaves quite like the derivational suffixes *-tjh/-adtjh* and *-sassa/-assa*, although *bielie* is otherwise a

noun for ‘half’, and *tjïdtjïebielie* ‘stepmother’ and *viellebielie* ‘half-brother’, for example, can therefore be seen as compound nouns (for the most comprehensive account of the South Saami kinship terminology, see Bergsland 1942; see also Bergsland 1946: 181–185).

However, a significant difference between the above-mentioned derived kinship terms and the main topic of the present study is that while it is possible to present quite exact and stable translations for these such as ‘Xs to each other’, ‘prospective X’, ‘step-X’ and ‘half-X’, it is difficult to provide analogous general yet concrete translations for *-bel-åbpoe* or *-mes/-ommes*. Unlike the former derivations, the latter forms seem to acquire their meanings in actual sentence contexts, and this feature undeniably makes the relation forms more grammatical (inflectional) and less lexical (derivational) than the least problematic kinship terms. This can also be seen in the fact that at least the relation forms in *-bel-åbpoe* are formed from all kinds of kinship words, whereas derivations like *\*tjïdtjïesassa* ‘prospective mother (to someone)’ and *\*gåmmabielie* ‘stepwife’ seem to be nonexistent for pragmatic reasons.

Of course, it is appropriate to remember that in the course of the fragmented history of describing the relation forms in South Saami, most grammarians (Lagercranz, Bergsland [1946] and Hasselbrink) have approached the phenomenon as a subtype of possessive suffix. In addition to these non-native authorities of the language, Anna Jacobsen, one of the foremost South Saami activists, has given the following word forms the accompanying Norwegian translations in the glossary of her South Saami reader:

<i>aehtjebe</i>	‘faren hans’ (‘his father’)
<i>aehtjemes</i>	‘faren, til flere’ (‘the father, to many’)
<i>tjïdtjebe</i>	‘moren hans’ (‘his mother’)
<i>tjïdtjemes</i>	‘moren, til flere’ (‘the mother, to many’)

(Jacobsen 1993: 36)

Again, we are left in between the two alternatives. Here, it seems like *-be* was a possessive suffix (‘his X’), whereas the *-mes* forms resemble definite forms, also with a possessive flavor ‘the X, to many’. In order to better understand what the author means by such glosses, it is instructive to look at the beginning of the text in question in its entirety. The short story *Maam daen biejjien gaskebeajjan* ‘What are we going to have for dinner tonight?’ begins as follows:

- (28) a. *Maam daen biejjien gaskebeajjan?*  
 Q.ACC this.GEN day.GEN dinner.ILL  
 ‘What are we going to have for dinner tonight?’
- b. *Åvla gihtjie goh edtja skovlese vaadtsajidh.*  
 Åvla ask.3SG when shall.3SG school.ILL start.walking.INF  
 ‘Åvla asks when he is leaving for school.’
- c. *Tjijtjebe joe barkose vualkeme.*  
 mother.be already work.ILL leave.PST.PTCP  
 ‘Mother has already gone to work.’
- d. *Aehtjebe lea buerteste vaeltieminie.*  
 father.be be.3SG table.ELA take.PROG  
 ‘Father is cleaning off the table.’
- e. *Daen biejjien edtja moerh låadtodh, bovresne  
 this.GEN day.GEN shall.3SG wood.PL chop.INF store.INE  
 minnedh jih gaskebiejjiem voessjedh.*  
 visit.INF and dinner.ACC cook.INF  
 ‘Today he is going to chop wood, go to the store and cook dinner.’
- f. – *Im manne jis daejrieh, aehtjebe vaestede.*  
 NEG.1SG 1SG DPT know.CNG father.be answer.3SG  
 ‘Well, I don’t know, father replies.’
- g. – *Åadtjoem gujht vuejnedh maam bovresne gaavnem.*  
 get.1SG anyway see.INF Q.ACC store.INE find.1SG  
 ‘I’ll see what I find in the store.’
- h. *Aehtjemes gujht daajra, joekoen beapmoeh*  
 father.mes anyway know.3SG special food.PL  
*vuertieh gosse satne gâetesne abpe biejjiem*  
 wait.3PL when 3SG home.INE entire day.ACC  
 ‘At least the father knows that the family is expecting a  
 special dinner when he is at home the entire day.’
- i. *Daejrieh buerebe gosse astosne maahta beapmoeh*  
 know.3PL good.CMPV when leisure.INE can.3SG food.PL  
*voessjedh.*  
 cook.INF  
 ‘They know that it [the meal] gets better when there is time for cooking.’

The so-called relation forms of nouns in South Saami

- j. *Tjïdtjemes fierhten biejjien barkosne, gâetide*  
 mother.mes every.GEN day.GEN work.INE home(.PL).ILL  
*bâata gosse maanah skovleste bâetieh.*  
 come.3SG when child.PL school.ELA come.3PL  
 ‘Mother is at work every day and comes home  
 when the children come from school.’
- k. *Gaajhkehsh leah bârrestohteminie, guktie tjïdtjemes*  
 everybody.PL be.3PL get.hungry.PROG so.that mother.mes  
*tjoevere varki gaskebiejjiebeapmoeh jurjehtistedh.*  
 must.3SG fast dinner.food.PL arrange.MOM.INF  
 ‘Everyone is hungry, so mother must fix dinner quickly.’ (Jacobsen 1993: 35)

The passage in (28) is the beginning of a fictional text, and therefore all referents are new to the reader. Neither the mother nor the father is more definite than what can be expected in a context where a child is asking about the evening’s dinner before leaving for school in the morning. The nouns *tjïdtjie* and *aehtjie* are not introduced in their basic forms, but as relation forms – *tjïdtjebe* ‘his mother’ and *aehtjebe* ‘his father’. Unlike possessive suffixes proper, these forms are seldom directly anaphoric. However, what is more important is that the “comparative” *-be* forms turn suddenly into “superlative” *-mes* forms. Already in (28h), the father is *aehtjemes* – ‘the father to (or: among) many’, and in (28j), Åvla’s mother seems not to be depicted as such (cf. *tjïdtjebe* in 28c) anymore, but rather as *tjïdtjemes*, the mother to more children in the family.

However, it appears that in actual use there is a lot of fluctuation in the occurrence of *-be* and *-mes* forms: For example, the noun phrase *maanah aehtjemes* [child.GEN father.mes] ‘the child’s father’ in (17) (repeated below for convenience) refers to the father of a one single child in a story in which his mother is first referred to as *tjïdtjebe* [mother.be], but after the introduction of the father in the family consisting of an infant and his two parents, and in a sense “the father” (*aehtjemes*) to the mother as well, the mother (*tjïdtjebe*), too, takes the role of the mother in the entire family (*tjïdtjemes*). Indeed, Maja Lisa Kappfjell (p.c.) has suggested that even in (28), *aehtjemes* (28h) and *tjïdtjemes* (28j–k) could be translated into Norwegian with the words *faren/moren i husstanden* [father.DEF/mother.DEF in household.DEF] ‘the father/mother in the household’. This view is supported by (29) from the same passage as (17). After an incident in which all three family members are involved, the father of the **family** (*aehtjemes*) is able to give the infant back to **his** mother (*tjïdtjebasse* [mother.be.ILL]):

- (17) *Maanan aehtjemes jis jeanoebealesne jijtse vinhtsem*  
 child.GEN father.mes DPT riverside.INE REFL.GEN.3SG boat.ACC  
*møoleminie.*  
 paint.PROG  
 ‘The child’s father, in turn, is painting the boat at the  
 riverside.’ (SIKOR < Vangberg 1998: 23)

- (29) *Aehtjemes soejmi laakan maanam vaalta jih varki*  
 father.mes carefully like child.ACC take.3SG and fast  
*vihth våålese goegkerde. Varki gåatan skådta jih*  
 again down creep.3SG fast home.ILL hurry.3SG and  
*maanetjem tjidtjebasse vadta.*  
 child.DIM.ACC mother.be.ILL give.3SG  
 ‘The father takes the child carefully back and creeps down quickly. He hurries  
 home and gives the infant<sub>i</sub> to his<sub>j</sub> mother.’ (SIKOR < Vangberg 1998: 23)

Despite the labels “possessive suffix”, “relation form” or “relation suffix”, the semantic functions of the relation are a difficult nut to crack. In principle, it would be easiest to call these forms “possessive” or “definite” – whatever these labels may mean to different people – but these alternatives have not even been mentioned as a possibility in the most authoritative grammars (Bergsland 1982/1994, Magga & Magga 2012). Indeed, while in many contexts it is natural to translate *tjidtje-be* as ‘his/her mother’ and *tjidtjemes* as ‘their mother’, the forms *per se* cannot be analyzed and glossed as mother-3SG or mother-3PL.

Nor do the morphemes stand clearly for definiteness. This is potentially suggested by sentences like (9), (12), (21) and (27), in which the relation forms are preceded by the article-like demonstrative *dihite*. The relation forms do resemble *dihite* in that it appears difficult to point to occurrences in which the morphemes in question would be obligatory. In many cases, the use of relation forms, not unlike the use of *dihite*, seems to be related to information structure; it appears that both *dihite* and *-bel-åbpoe* can often be omitted without an obvious change in propositional meaning or grammaticality (Maja Lisa Kappfjell, p.c.). On the other hand, translations such as the Norwegian *moren hans* [mother.DEF his] ‘his mother’ and *moren, til flere* [mother.DEF to many] ‘the mother, to many’ for *tjidtjebe* and *tjidtjemes*, respectively, suggest that the choice of relation form contributes to the propositional meaning – but to an entirely different degree than the kinship terms *tjidtjetjh/tjædtjetjh* ‘mother and her child(ren)’ and *vuanavassa* ‘prospective mother-in-law’ mentioned above.

To continue to provide authentic examples for the first time since Bergsland (1946), the following examples are presented in order to show that it is possible to question nearly everything that has been stated on the forms by previous scholars or reasoned above. As has been noted above, Lagercrantz (1923: 91–92) and Hasselbrink (1981–1985: 121–122) have characterized the *-be* and *-mes* forms as third person possessive suffixes. Nevertheless, Examples (24) and (26) show that it is possible to come across *-be* forms in sentences where they do not refer to relatives of someone in the third person singular. In light of the original context of (30), *viellebem* clearly refers to the brother of the addressee:

- (30) *Vaedtsieh amma viellebem veedtjh.*  
 walk.IMP.2SG DPT brother.be.ACC fetch.IMP.2SG  
 ‘Go get your brother.’ (SIKOR)

However, it would be awkward to analyze *-be* as a possessive suffix referring to not only third but also second person singular, as the list would continue with the first person singular seen in (31):

- (31) *Voestesieresne dle tjidtjebe aajnehke lohkehtæjja saemien*  
 beginning.INE DPT mother.be only teacher Saami(.GEN)  
*gïelesne, jïh manne tjidtjebem lohkehtæjjine utnim*  
 language.INE and 1SG mother.be.ACC teacher.ESS have.PST.ISG  
*gaajhki jaepiej, 4. klaasseste 9. klaassese.*  
 all.PL.GEN year.PL.GEN 4th grade.ELA 9th grade.ILL  
 ‘In the beginning, my mother was the only Saami teacher, and I had my mother as a teacher for all the years, from the fourth to the ninth grade.’ (SIKOR)

Further examples include *geellebe* (32) and *gâmmebe* (33), which refer to the spouses of the two (first person singular) speakers, respectively. In (33), *gâmmebe* is even preceded by the genitive possessor *mov* ‘my’:

- (32) *Geellebe ij saemesth, juktie mijjeh*  
 husband.be NEG.3SG speak.Saami.CNG so.that 1PL  
*sinsitnine daaroestieh [sic].*  
 each.other.COM speak.Norwegian.3PL  
 ‘My husband doesn’t speak Saami, so we speak Norwegian with each other.’  
 (SIKOR)

- (33) *Dihte mij mov gånmebe mænngan sjidti,*  
 3SG REL 1SG.GEN wife.be later become.PST.3SG  
*lij dellie barkeminie Oslovesne, Instituttetne mij*  
 be.PST.3SG then work.PROG Oslo.INE institute.INE REL  
*edtji ektievuekie-jielemem giehtjedidh.*  
 shall.PST.3SG society-life.ACC investigate.INF  
 ‘The one who later became my wife was working in Oslo at  
 that time, at the Institute for Social Research.’ (SIKOR)

In the same vein, *tjiddtjebistie* in (34) refers to the mother of the first person singular speaker:

- (34) *Byjjeslaakan idtjim ööhpehtimmiem utnieh, viehkiem*  
 publicly NEG.PST.1SG teaching.ACC have.CNG help.ACC  
*gujht tjiddtjebistie åadtjoejim, bene dihte lij*  
 anyhow mother.be.ELA get.PST.1SG but it be.PST.3SG  
*eevre privaate.*  
 altogether private  
 ‘I didn’t get an official education, but I got help from my  
 mother, although it was entirely private.’ (SIKOR)

To extend the picture even further, examples like (24) above show that unlike what has been claimed about the division of labor between *-be/-åbpoe* and *-mes/-ommes*, the former is not limited to referring to relatives (or the like) of singular persons. As seen already in Section 1, it has been stated that when speaking of a relationship between many, the relation forms in *-mes* are used instead of those in *-be*, which is supposedly reserved for referring to one of the two in pairs such as a mother and her daughter. In (35) below, however, the elative form *tjiddtjebistie* is used to refer to a mother of many – in other words, in a context in which superlative-like forms in *-mes* ought to be expected, if Bergsland (1982: 108; 1994: 110) and Magga and Magga (2012: 50) are to be taken literally (see Example 3). On the other hand, it is worth noting that in his description of a southern dialect Bergsland (1946: 182) ascribes such forms to other dialects. This said, it appears that sentences like (24) and (35) have not necessarily been foreign to Bergsland, either:

The so-called relation forms of nouns in South Saami

- (35) *Nov lij badth dihte learoe maam tjidtjebistie*  
 DPT be.PST.3SG DPT DEF learning REL.ACC mother.be.ELA  
*åådtjeme mij darjoeji mijjeh idtjimh*  
 get.PST.PTCP REL make.PST.3SG 1PL NEG.PST.1PL  
*neerrehtimmeste aaperh, bene dan bijjelen lokngesimh.*  
 ridicule.ELA care.CNG but it.GEN over rise.PST.1PL  
*(Dah lohkehtæjjah eah lin jeatjahlaakan mijjese*  
 DEF.PL teacher.PL NEG.PST.3PL be.PST.3PL differently 1PL.ILL  
*goh jeatjabidie.)*  
 than other.PL.ILL  
 ‘I suppose that it was the teachings from our mother that caused  
 us not to care about mocking, but to rise above it. (The teachers  
 didn’t treat us differently from the others.)’ (SIKOR)

The above examples suggest that there is no reason to regard *-be* as a possessive suffix, as the same morpheme is used to refer to “possessions” of at least 3SG, 1SG (31–34), 2SG (30) and 1PL (35) persons. Example (36) from the 19th century shows that the same goes for 3PL:

- (36) *Baarnieh tjidtjebem jïjtjesh goltelin, (...)*  
 son.PL mother.be.ACC REFL.GEN.3PL listen.PST.3PL  
 ‘The sons listened to their mother, (...)’ (Halász 1887: 29)

It has been seen above that the demonstrative *dihte* is the default morpheme serving as a definite article, and since it also occurs with *-be* and *-mes* forms (see Examples 9, 12, 21 and 27), the relation forms are not necessarily the primary means of marking definiteness, either. On the other hand, it is possible to observe that if *-be* is to be interpreted as a marker of definiteness, expressions such as *dihte bööremes viellebe* (37a) seem very analogous to Scandinavian phrases such as the Norwegian *den beste broren* (37b) in which the *-en* of *broren* can be characterized as a suffixal definite article. However, as (37a) seems to be a translation from (37b), the authenticity of (37a) – interestingly containing the superlative adjective *bööremes* preceding the “comparative” relative form *viellebe* – can always be questioned, regardless of the fact that (37b) is itself also a translation from English:

- (37) a. *Datne d̄ihte b̄ööremes viellebe abpe veartanisnie.* (SIKOR)  
 2SG DEF good.SUP brother.be entire world.INE
- b. *Du er den beste broren*  
 2SG be.PRS DEF good.SUP brother.M.DEF  
*i hele verden.* (Simon 2004)  
 in entire world.DEF

‘You are the best brother in the entire world.’

Of course, at this point it is necessary to raise the question about the true nature of the so-called relation forms: If they are neither possessive suffixes nor undeniable markers of definiteness, what are they?

Even on the basis of the more than 500 *-be* and *-mes* forms at my disposal (via the 1.1M-word SIKOR corpus and a number of other printed and electronic sources), it is difficult to make confident generalizations on their functions. However, it appears that although the relation forms can often be translated into English (and Norwegian and Swedish) using possessive pronouns and definite articles, an important key to understanding the functions of these forms lies in the notion of contrast. This is most visible in longer passages such as (28) or against similar contextual backgrounds (see Examples 17 and 29 above). In a way, it could be possible to describe the meaning of many relation forms of the type *X-bel-åbpoe* using rather clumsy translations like ‘the one who is/was X’ or ‘the/his/her own X’. For example, the meaning of (1) (‘the daughter did as her mother said’) is in a sense “the one who was the daughter did as her own mother said”.

From this perspective, it is also understandable that *aehtjemes* and *tjidtjemes* can refer to the parents of a single child (28) when used in a context in which they could be paraphrased as ‘the father/mother in the household (consisting of three persons)’, or more generally ‘the father/mother among the many’. Conversely, it is possible to use *tjidtjebe* to refer to the mother of a son (*Laara*) and his little sister (*onne åabpebe*), as from the perspective of the son, she may be ‘his own mother’ rather than *tjidtjemes* ‘his and his little sister’s mother’:

- (38) *Laara, tjidtjebe jih onne åabpebe Tronesen*  
 Laara mother.be and little sister.be Tronesen  
*gåajkoe jåhteme.*  
 to travel.PST.PTCP  
 ‘Laara, his mother and his little sister have traveled to Tronesen.’ (SIKOR)

An overwhelming majority of relation forms refer to relatives, to the extent that it would be intriguing to propose that the relation forms are a morphological category limited to kinship terms, and, conversely, the kinship terms may appear to be a closed class inflected differently from other nouns (for cross-linguistically common special features of kinship terms, see Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001). However, this is not the case. As a matter of fact, we have already seen the phrase *dam bâeries aahkemesem* ‘that old grandma (acc.)’ (21) in which *aahkemesem* refers not to a grandmother but to another old woman, as the base word *aahka* carries both meanings. Likewise, the following example does not tell about the two grandfathers (*aajja*) of the speaker, but about two old men whom the speaker had met for the first time:

- (39) *Bâeries aajjmesh vienhtigan laantese kruahka*  
 old old.man.mes.PL think.PST.3DU ground.ILL bury.3SG  
*edtja dihte bearkoe sâvroestidh jih møørehkâbpoe*  
 shall.3SG DEF meat sour.MOM.INF and tender.CMPV  
*sjidtedh.*  
 become.INF  
 ‘The old men supposed that it [the bear] buries the meat in the  
 ground so that it becomes sour and tender.’ (SIKOR)

At least the relation forms in *-be* are possible for nouns that are definitely not kinship terms. The form *kraannebi* (40), based on *kraanna* ‘neighbor’, occurs in one of the first published samples of the language:

- (40) *Sâ dihte Gaasen-munnie vihth minnji gâncan*  
 then DEF Gaasen-munnie again leave.PST.3SG king.GEN  
*skâakese jih tjoehpedisti gâncan gaajhke skâakem*  
 forest.ILL and cut.MOM.PST.3SG king.GEN all forest.ACC  
*jih kraannebi skâakem.*  
 and neighbor.be.PL.GEN forest.ACC  
 ‘Then Gaasen-munnie went to the King’s forest again, and cut down the  
 entire King’s forest and the forest of his neighbors.’ (Halász 1887: 136)

Another example is *voelpebe*, which refers to one of the two friends in Aesop’s fable about two companions and a bear. Upon encountering the bear, one of the two has climbed up a tree while the other has played dead on the ground:

- (41) *Bierne skåajjese vøølki jih nimhtegh gaatoeli.*  
 bear forest.ILL leave.PST.3SG and just.like.that disappear.PST.3SG  
**Voelpebe moereste väälese bøøti.**  
 friend.be tree.ELA down come.PST.3SG  
 – *Maam bierne dutnjien jeehti? voelpebe sijhti govledh.*  
 Q.ACC bear 2SG.ILL say.PST.3SG friend.be want.PST.3SG hear.INF  
 ‘The bear went to the forest and disappeared right away.  
 The other friend came down from the tree. – What did the  
 bear tell you?, the friend wanted to know.’ (SIKOR)

The above example fits quite well the standard description of the relation forms. There are two persons in a reciprocal relationship and the relation form refers to one of the two: *voelpebe* seems to stand for ‘the other of the two friends’ instead of a definite ‘the friend’ or a possessive ‘his friend’. (The preceding sentence does not tell about either one of the friends, but about the bear.) But then again, the relation form *kraannebi* in (40) rather refers to ‘his (the King’s) neighbors’, who have not even been mentioned earlier in the fairy tale.

To give one more example, the following passage demonstrates the fact that relation forms can be used to refer simultaneously to a householder and his relation to his wife, but also to a non-relative, his hired hand:

- (42) *Gosse die dihte triengke vööjni ahte hosbåantebe*  
 when DPT DEF hired.man see.PST.3SG COMP householder.be  
*veelti dam biedterassem, dellie ussjedi ahte*  
 take.PST.3SG DEF.ACC atlas.ACC then think.PST.3SG COMP  
***hosbåantebe veelti bööremes stujtem. Dellie***  
 householder.be take.PST.3SG good.SUP piece.ACC then  
*ussjedi dam jijtse hosbåantam juktiestidh.*  
 think.PST.3SG DEF.ACC REFL.GEN.3SG householder.ACC slay.INF  
*Men dellie gujnebe vööjni ahte triengke vesties*  
 but then wife.be see.PST.3SG COMP hired.man wicked  
*åssjaldahkh utni. Dellie gujne badth jeehti*  
 thought.PL have.PST.3SG then wife DPT say.PST.3SG  
*jijtse ålmese edtja triengkebasse vedtedh*  
 REFL.GEN.3SG husband.ILL shall.3SG hired.man.be.ILL give.INF  
*dam biedterassem.*  
 DEF.ACC atlas.ACC

‘When the hired hand saw the householder take the atlas vertebra (the topmost vertebra of the neck), he thought that the householder had taken the best part of the meat. Then he planned to kill his master. But then his (the householder’s) wife noticed that the hired hand had evil thoughts. Then she told her husband to give the atlas to the hired hand.’ (Bergsland 1987: 81)

The apparent optionality of relation forms is seen in the cooccurrence of the unmarked nouns *triengke* ‘hired hand’, *gujne* ‘wife’ and *hosbåantam* ‘householder (acc.)’.

Finally, Examples (43–44) show that the morpheme *-be* can also be attached to non-animate nouns:

- (43) *Mah dihte plaerebe?*  
 Q DEF leaf.be  
 ‘Is this the leaf [belonging to the flower we were talking about]?’ (Bergsland 1946: 182)

- (44) *Treavkebh dan laabja.*  
 ski.be.PL so wide  
 ‘[He was called Laabje, because] his skis were so wide (*laabja*).’ (Bergsland 1946: 182)

Examples (43–44) show almost the only attested instances of inanimate relation forms. Both were mentioned by Bergsland (1946) in his grammar of the Plassje dialect. It is not easy to characterize such forms as productive, but they have not been impossible either. It is worth noting that although the latter examples do not refer to human bonds such as kinship, neighborhood or friendship, they nevertheless refer to rather tight unions such as the inalienable possession between a plant and its leaves (43).

True, the relationship between a man and his skis (44) may belong at first sight to the realm of alienable possession and many skis to choose from, but the relationship between an old-time reindeer-herder and his pair of skis is in fact comparable to that between a plant and its leaves. Actually, *treavka* ‘ski’ seems to be one of the few South Saami inanimate nouns that resemble kinship terms in that the derivational suffix *-sassa/-assa* ‘prospective X’ can be attached to it. It was mentioned at the beginning of this section that *-sassa/-assa* is used to turn kinship terms like *vijve* ‘son-in-law’ and *mænnja* ‘daughter-in-law’ into words for a prospective *vijve* or *mænnja*, as in *vijvesassa* ‘prospective son-in-law’ and *mænnjasassa* ‘prospective daughter-in-law’. Example (45) comes from a description of South Saami wooing, in which the man is making his future bride a pair of skis (cf. Bergsland 1946: 185):

- (45) *Die vööлки vihth dihte saemien baernie jijtjse*  
 so leave.PST.3SG again DEF Saami(.GEN) boy REFL.GEN.3SG  
*hiejmen gääjkoē ā skåakese vööлки, treavkasassah*  
 home.GEN to and forest.ILL leave.PST.3SG ski.material.PL  
*tjoeppi ā guksesem.*  
 cut.PST.3SG and birch.burl.cup.material.ACC  
 ‘Then the Saami young man went home again, and he went to the forest  
 and got material for skis and a birch burl cup.’ (Halász 1887: 164)

Relation forms for non-animate nouns like *plaerie* ‘leaf’ and *treavka* ‘ski’ seem to be entirely absent in the 1.1M-word corpus of mostly contemporary South Saami. However, I have come across one additional occurrence in which the accusative form of *naehkebe* is a relation form based on the non-animate noun *naehkie* ‘skin’:

- (46) *Naan aejkien ālma dan gierhkien lihke guktie*  
 some time.GEN man DEF.GEN wolverine.GEN near so.that  
*guhkiessoehpenjinie jaksoes, mohte rovnigs, iktesth buektehte*  
 gun.COM accessible but strange, always manage.3SG  
*naehkebem voebnesjidh.*  
 skin.be.ACC take.care.INF  
 ‘At times, the man is so close to the wolverine that it is possible  
 to shoot it with a gun, but miraculously, it always manages  
 to take care of its skin (= itself).’ (Vest 2005: 105)

Again, the inalienable relationship between a wolverine and its skin is comparable to that between a plant and its leaves. What is more, this relation form strongly suggests that it has a function comparable to that of possessive suffixes in languages where such a category is more prolific than in South Saami. Example (46) is a translation from a North Saami novel in which *náhkki*, the skin of the wolverine, is marked with a possessive suffix:

North Saami

- (47) *Muhtimin almmái fidnegoah tá geatkki juo*  
 sometimes man get.INCH.3SG wolverine.GENACC already  
*báhčimuddui, muhto dego ipmašis dat goittot*  
 shooting.distance.ILL but like miracle.LOC that anyhow  
*ovtto seastá náhkis.*  
 always spare.3SG skin.GENACC.3SG  
 ‘At times, the man is so close to the wolverine that it is possible  
 to shoot it with a gun, but miraculously, it always manages  
 to take care of its skin (= itself).’ (Vest 1988: 85)

In principle, possessive suffixed forms like *aehtjemse* [father.ACC.3SG] (← *aehtjie* ‘father’) suggest that an analogous form *?naehkemse* could be expected, but the translator has nevertheless chosen to translate *náhkis* [skin.GENACC.3SG] as *naehkebem* [skin.be.ACC]. It must be remembered that it is impossible to regard *-be/-åbpoe* as a possessive suffix in the sense of referring to a third person (singular and/or plural) only (see 30–36 above). In any case, it is notable that relation forms are still able to refer to inanimate inalienable possession – two generations after Bergsland’s (1946) examples (43–44).

To repeat, the semantic functions of the relation forms in South Saami are very difficult to generalize – the neighboring languages of Northern Europe simply seem to lack analogous categories, and even for South Saami, it appears impossible to present a comprehensive definition of the functions of the forms in question. The following subsection aims to provide an interim conclusion on the morphological, syntactic and semantic observations discussed above.

### 3.5. Interim conclusion

South Saami is a relatively little studied Uralic language and especially its so-called relation forms are so unusual, heterogeneous and poorly described that it has been necessary to provide plenty of examples of the phenomenon – not only for this description but for future studies as well. In actual sentence contexts accompanied by English translations, it may appear that the relation forms can most often be translated using the definite article or possessive pronouns, but this hardly applies to individual relation forms outside of their context: The relation forms do not have straightforward equivalents in English or any of the geographically close languages.

As regards the morphology and syntax of the relation forms, the most common and apparently the most productive form is the one in *-be/-åbpoe*, which is identical to the adjectival comparative marker. Unlike possessive suffixes, to which such forms have earlier been likened, the morpheme *-be/-åbpoe* can be described as a regular bound morpheme that is attached to (mostly kinship) nouns according to similar – albeit more regular – morphophonological rules as the comparative marker (cf. Table 3 in Section 3.2; see also Bergsland 1982: 73; 1994: 74; Magga & Magga 2012: 67–70). As seen in Table 2, relation forms like *tjijtjebe* (← *tjijtjie* ‘mother’) are inflected in number and case just like deverbal nouns such as *jieleme*

‘life’ (← *jieledh* ‘live’) and other regular trisyllabic nouns. A rather marginal, although interesting feature can be seen in (15) and (16), where the diminutive nouns *böösebadtje* [boy/son.be.DIM] and *viellebadtje* [brother.be.DIM] are based on the relation forms *böösebe* [boy/son.be] and *viellebe* [brother.be] – in other words, the derivational suffix *-tje* is attached to forms that could otherwise be considered inflectional forms of some kind. Again, the relation forms behave like comparative forms such as *buerebe* ‘better’ and *unnebe* ‘smaller’, which have diminutives like *bueriebadtje* ‘somewhat better’ and *unniebadtje* ‘somewhat smaller’.<sup>11</sup> However, the “superlative” relation forms in *-mes/-ommes* are less common and obviously absent in certain dialects, and they also seem to be inflected differently from the standard inflection of adjectival superlatives (see Examples 21 and 22). From a syntactic perspective, relation forms behave quite like any nouns – underived and derived alike.

As regards the semantics of the relation forms, most of the authentic occurrences of such forms do fit the simplified picture depicted in the most recent grammars (Bergsland 1982: 107–108; 1994: 110; Magga & Magga 2012: 50). However, there are enough different kinds of exceptions and downright counterexamples to seriously challenge the received view of the relation forms, although the resulting picture unfortunately contains so much variation that it does not lend itself easily to generalizations. Before being characterized as “relation forms” (Bergsland 1982/1994) or word forms containing “relation suffixes” (Magga & Magga 2012), *-be/-åbpoe* and *-mes/-ommes* were labeled as possessive suffixes by Lagercrantz (1923: 91–92) and Hasselbrink (1981–1985: 121–122), and a similar view was also presented by Bergsland (1946: 181). Indeed, the latter alternative seems quite possible for the majority of relation forms that do refer to kinship relationships between the people in question. However, the idea of possessive suffixes appears to lose its meaning when it can be observed that at least *-be/-åbpoe* is able to refer to inalienable possessions, or relatives, of not only third person participants but first and second persons as well. Instead, it seems that the relative forms occupy a functional niche that partly coincides with that of possessive suffixes – a category that has a very marginalized position in the language. This was already hinted by Bergsland (1946: 182), who considered the “possessive comparative” *-be* an extension of the “opposite comparative” by referring to the conceptual closeness of ‘his father’ and ‘among the two, the one who is the father’.

As for Bergsland's (1946: 182) early observations on the relation forms, he regarded *-be* as an emerging possessive suffix for the third person but also observed (48), in which the relation form occurs with the second person singular pronoun *datne* (genitive *dov*):

- (48) *Doh dov vïellebh gaatoeh dejnie mov*  
 that 2SG.GEN brother.be.PL disappear.3PL DEF.COM 1SG.GEN  
*goevelinie.*  
 chisel.COM  
 'Those brothers of yours are leaving with my  
 chisel.' (Qvigstad 1924: 260; 1996: 12)

Bergsland regards the above example as an instance of contamination, but it is remarkable that while (48) occurs in a story told by Ole Samuel Elsvatn (1866–1911) in 1887, such usage has not faded away and can still be observed in (33), where *mov gãmmebe* [1SG.GEN wife.be] 'my wife' is a 21st-century translation of Norwegian *kona mi* [wife.DEF my.F] id.

The puzzling position of the relation forms within the grammatical system of South Saami is reminiscent of the so-called prolative ('along; through; via') forms in *-raejkien/-raejkiem* (plural *-reejki/-raejkieh*) on the fringes of noun inflection. As described in Ylikoski (2015), the morphemes in question behave mostly like local cases, although their nominal origin is transparent – they are all inflectional forms of the noun *raejkie* 'hole': SG.GEN *raejkien*, SG.ACC *raejkiem*, PL.GEN *reejki* and PL.NOM *raejkieh*. The prolatives are similar to the relation forms in that both types are to a certain degree quite productive and morphologically and syntactically regular, but they are not obviously among the most important categories in the language. Instead, even though the prolatives behave quite like case-marked nouns and have grammaticalized from a concrete noun to expressing purely spatial meanings such as in *geajnoe-raejkiem* [road-PROL] 'along the road' and *geajnoe-raejkieh* [road-PL.PROL] 'along roads', they can usually be replaced by other cases (genitive, accusative, elative) or by various adpositions.

From a semantic point of view, the relation forms are more problematic than the prolative forms with concrete spatial meanings. Whereas the prolative forms can be avoided by using other, partly synonymous morphemes instead, many relation forms could be replaced with rather marginal possessive suffixes. However, they can also be replaced – and co-occur – with genitival modifiers and the demonstrative cum definite

article *dih̄te*. Moreover, many of the occurrences of relation forms could also be substituted with plain nouns in the same case without an obvious change of propositional meaning. As a matter of fact, I have not been able to identify any contexts in which the use of a relation form would seem absolutely mandatory, i.e. required by the grammatical rules of the language. But then again, this does not mean that the relation forms are void of meaning and completely needless.

After all, and in spite of many counterexamples that reveal the true heterogeneity of relation forms, most of the authentic relation forms in all types of texts do fit the idea of a *relation* form, or Bergsland’s (1982/1994) *forholdsform*. Most often, *aehtjebe* does stand for approximately the same as the English words *the father of the two* or *the one who is the father*, and when speaking of the one who is the father in a group consisting of more than two persons, *aehtjemes* (22) or *eehtjemes* (6) can be used. On the other hand, it is possible to use *voelpebe* [friend.be] and *viellebe* [brother.be] in contexts in which both participants are friends (41) or brothers (49) one to the other, which makes them once again look like possessive suffixes:

- (49) *Alma edtja viellebem jaemiedasse seedtedh jih*  
 man shall.3SG brother.be.ACC death.ILL send.INF and  
*aehtjie jijtse maanam, (...)*  
 father REFL.GEN.3SG child.ACC  
 ‘A brother will betray his brother to death, a father  
 will betray his own child, (...)’ (SIKOR)

In conclusion, a relation form in *X-be/-åbpoe* most often stands for ‘the one who is the X in relation to Y’ and *X-mes/-ommes* for ‘the one who is the X in the group’. When comparing relation forms in *-be/-åbpoe* with the comparative in *-be/-åbpoe*, Bergsland (1946: 182, 202) characterizes the former as an “oppositive” or “selective” comparative, and in cases where the suffix resembles possessive suffixes, the characterization “possessive comparative” (Norwegian “*possessiv*” *komparativ* with scare quotes) is also used.

It is important to remember that the data presented above stems from many different dialects and registers of South Saami, across the timespan from the 1880s (26, 36 and 40) to the 2010s (8). Therefore, it would certainly be erroneous to think that every instance of a relation form belongs to a single language system. However, it appears that both the morphological makeup and the syntactic properties of the relation forms are actually

surprisingly constant; the morphology of comparative and superlative adjectives is subject to much more variation. What is more labile is the semantics of the relation forms: It is difficult to grasp the exact meaning of a given relation form in a given context, as it is possible to see many examples in which the forms in *-be/-åbpoe* do not refer to unambiguous and complementary roles of pairs such as the daughter (*daktaråbpoe*) and her mother (*tjidtjebe*) repeated in the grammar books and in (1–3) above. For those who might want to regard such forms as third person possessive suffixes, many obvious counterexamples (see Section 3.4) can be found. Relation forms in *-mes* are much less common and seem to be altogether absent in some dialects (Bergsland 1946: 182), making them even more difficult to generalize on.

Finally, it may be made clear that there is nothing adjectival in the superficially “comparative” relation forms – neither in syntax nor semantics. The non-adjectival relation forms in South Saami thus clearly differ from the occasional comparative forms of Finnish nouns, for example. In (50), the comparative – or, perhaps better, moderative – *äidimpi* means approximately ‘more of a mother (than X)’, not unlike the analytic expression *enemmän äiti* with a similar meaning:

- Finnish
- (50) *Onko joku toinen äidimpi kuin toinen?*  
 be.3SG.Q someone other mother.CMPV than other  
*Onko kotiäiti enemmän äiti kuin työäiti?*  
 be.3SG.Q home.mother more mother than working.mother  
 ‘Is someone more of a mother than the other? Is a stay-at-home mom more of a mother than a working mother?’ (Lankahullu 2012)

The difficulties in describing the true nature of South Saami relation forms may be a symptom of an ongoing change or even a gradual loss of the category in question. In a way, the present collection of relation forms in actual use is reminiscent of lexical corpora that contain data from various dialects, genres and time periods and can be used as the raw material for etymological studies in which all nuances of a polysemous word or word family may be equally important in order to understand the past and present of the morpheme in question. The following section is devoted to diachronic observations on the relation forms in South Saami.

#### 4. Relation forms: diachronic and comparative observations

In the above sections, the South Saami relation forms have been described almost entirely from a synchronic perspective. In the following, a diachronic point of view is adopted, and after a brief overview of earlier research on the origins of the Saami comparatives and superlatives (Section 4.1), the discussion is extended from the westernmost parts of Europe to Tungusic languages spoken in the eastern end of the Eurasian landmass, as languages like Ewen and Nanai turn out to provide highly interesting analogues to the relation forms in South Saami (Section 4.2). In light of typological parallels from Tungusic as well as from Indo-European, it is suggested that the South Saami relation form in *-be/-âbpoe* may have preserved some of the earliest functions of the Uralic suffix *\*-mpV*.

##### 4.1. On the origins of the Saami comparatives and superlatives

To my knowledge, the origins of the so-called relation forms – nouns followed by morphemes that are homonymous and unquestionably cognate with the pan-Saami comparative and superlative markers – have never been discussed in print. For example, the phenomenon is not mentioned in the two major treatises on Saami historical grammar by Korhonen (1981) and Sammallahti (1998), nor are the forms mentioned in any of the major studies on Saami-Finnic or Uralic comparatives and superlatives in general (e.g., Ramstedt 1917, Beke 1928, Ravila 1937, Fuchs 1949, Raun 1949a). Even Raun's (1949b) paper "Zur Komparation der Substantive im Finnisch-ugrischen" provides data from only Finnic and Hungarian, and his examples, such as Estonian *mehe-m* [man-CMPV] (← *mees* 'man') 'kräftiger, tüchtiger' and Hungarian *rózsá-nál rózsá-bb* [rose-ADE rose-CMPV] 'rosiger als eine Rose', refer to quite adjective-like denominal comparatives rather than to phenomena that would semantically resemble those of South Saami (cf. also Finnish *äidi-mpi* [mother-CMPV] in Example 50 above).

The only scholar to have discussed South Saami relation forms and the history of the comparative cum relation form *-be* on approximately the same pages is Bergsland (1946: 181–183; 203–204), but even he keeps the synchronic description of relation forms apart from the few general comments on the prehistory of the comparative suffix. In a word, no-one seems to have tried to explain the origin of the phenomenon. However, Bergsland

(*ibid.* 182) does make a brief fine-print note in which he mentions that the use of the comparative marker as a relation form marker has also been attested in Pite and Lule Saami (for vague references, see Bergsland). He refers to material collected in the 19th century and states that such functions in those languages are “obviously obsolete” (*tydeligvis foreldet*), but it is worth noting that such forms have existed and to some degree still exist, as many of them have even been published anew as such. The Lule Saami “relation forms” in *-p* (: *-bu-*) are identical to the comparative degree marker in the language (cf. *nuorra* ‘young’ : *nuora-p* [young-CMPV] : *nuora-bu* [young-CMPV.GEN]). The relation form *áhtjebuv* in (53) is one of the two occurrences I have encountered in post-19th-century texts:

- Lule Saami
- (51) *Niejdda viehkal goahtáj iednebu lusi mánáv*  
 daughter run.MOM.3SG home.ILL mother.p.GEN to child.ACC  
*gehtjatjit.*  
 see.SUP  
 ‘The daughter runs home to her mother to see the child.’ (SIKOR)
- (52) *Akti manná dat Stálo vivva vuohpas*  
 once visit.3SG it ogre.GEN son.in.law father.in.law.GEN.3SG  
*lunna, ja niejdap rávvi boadnjebu manen*  
 at and daughter.p order.3SG husband.p.GEN with  
*biebmojt iednestis, hálajt sán iednes*  
 food.PL.ACC mother.ELA.3SG want.3SG 3SG mother.GEN.3SG  
*njálga biebmojt.*  
 delicious food.PL.ACC  
 ‘One time the Ogre’s son-in-law visits his father-in-law and his (the father-in-law’s) daughter orders her husband to bring her food from her mother; she wants to have her mother’s delicious food.’ (SIKOR)
- (53) *Dievátja nalta de bárnne ájttsá áhtjebuv soage*  
 hill.DIM.GEN off DPT son notice.3SG father.p.ACC birch.GEN  
*vuolen, vuojnnet jasska oademin.*  
 under see.INF peacefully sleep.PROG  
 ‘Looking from the hill, the son notices that his father is sleeping under a birch, he seems to be sleeping peacefully.’ (SIKOR < Tuolja 1987: 61)

It may also be noted that such forms are mentioned in Grundström’s comprehensive dictionary of Lule Saami dialects, in which forms like *oap-páp* and *vieljap* are translated as “system” (*hans, hennes, sin syster*) and

“*brodern*” (*hans, hennes, sin bror*), respectively (Grundström 1946–1954 s.v. *åppāp, vieljap*):

Lule Saami

- (54) **Oappáp** *tjuovoj* **vieljabuv.**  
 sister.p follow.PST.3SG brother.p.ACC  
 ‘The sister followed the brother (her brother).’  
 (Grundström: ‘systemen följde brodern (sin bror)’  
 (Grundström 1946–1954 s.v. *vieljap*)

As for *oappáp*, Grundström adds that the forms are rare, and indeed, these kinds of word forms are lacking in contemporary dictionaries (e.g., Kintel 2012) and grammar books (Spiik 1989), with apparently the only exception being *iednep* [mother.p], *áhtjep* [father.p], *niejdap* [daughter.p] and *bárnep* [son.p] in Korhonen’s (2007) dictionary. Moreover, such forms are absent in modern texts such as those available in the 1.2M word corpus (SIKOR) – Tuolja’s (1987) novel being the sole exception (53).<sup>12</sup>

As has been mentioned above, superlative-like relation forms in *-mes* are also lacking in the Plassje dialect of South Saami (Bergsland 1946: 182), and it is therefore no surprise that such forms seem to be absent from other Saami languages as well. However, when mentioning *-mes* forms, Bergsland fleetingly refers to the existence of the South Saami interrogative pronoun *gåabpa/gåabpetje* ‘which of the two’ and its North Saami equivalent *goabbá*, which in turn is accompanied by the “superlative” pronoun *guhtemuš* ‘which (of the many)’. While *gåabpa/gåabpetje* and *goabbá* have cognates throughout the Saami branch as well as in Finnic (see below), the distribution of *guhtemuš* seems to be limited to the most central languages from Pite to Aanaar Saami; furthermore, its relation to the Saami superlative in *\*-moksi* is quite complicated (see Itkonen 1964).

The origins and usage of the Saami comparative and superlative forms have been discussed by many scholars, but this has almost always been done within the study of Uralic comparatives and superlatives – or the lack of such forms in many branches – in general (e.g. Budenz 1886: 448–454, Ramstedt 1917, Beke 1928, Ravila 1937, Fuchs 1949, Raun 1949a). On the other hand, the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the present century have witnessed a remarkable stagnation during which the description of the origins of the comparative and superlative markers has been limited to repeated references to the received view, although the question cannot be regarded as solved. Perhaps the most influential original study

has been Ravila's (1937) paper on the development of the comparative in Saami, Finnic and Hungarian, although many of his thoughts and examples were presented already by Budenz (1886: 448–454).

As mentioned at the very beginning of the present study, and in almost all studies on the subject, the Saami-Finnic comparative marker *\*-mpV* (e.g., South Saami *-be/-åbpoe* and Finnish *-mpi* : *-mpA-*) seems to correspond to the Hungarian *-bb*, but the relations of the superlatives (South Saami *-mes/-ommes*, Finnish *-in* : *-impA-*, Hungarian *leg-A-bb*) are much less straightforward. Moreover, one of the oft-repeated truths is that there is little evidence of a pan-Uralic or pan-Finno-Ugric comparative in *\*-mpV*; instead, the Saami-Finnic and Hungarian comparatives are usually regarded as results of the convergent development of an element that was originally a derivational suffix with other functions. Opinions – and interests of Eurocentric Finno-Ugricists – differ as to whether Tundra Nenets moderative adjectives (*səwa* 'good' → *səwa-mpoy*<sup>o</sup> [good-MODER] 'rather good' (cf. Finnish *some-mpi* [nice-CMPV] 'nicer') and (*ŋarka* 'big') → *ŋarka-mpoy*<sup>o</sup> [big-MODER] 'rather big' ought to be considered cognates of the Finno-Ugric comparatives (see Bergsland 1946: 204; Hajdú 1976: 146; Korhonen 1981: 247; Janhunen 2018: 51–53; Aikio, forthcoming).

To mention but a few of the most comprehensive descriptions of Saami, Finnic and Uralic historical morphology, scholars like Hakulinen (1979: 116), Korhonen (1981: 247) and Janhunen (1982: 29) refer to originally contrastive and especially spatial functions of *\*-mpV*, as evidenced by Saami pronominal adverbs such as South Saami *daebpene* 'here', *debpene* 'there', *duebpene* 'there (further away)' and *dubpene* 'there (far way)', as well as East Mari adjectives and adverbs like *umbal* 'distant', *umbalne* 'at a distance; far away' and *ümbal* 'top; surface', *ümbalne* 'above, on the top'. The moderative functions of the Nenets suffix are often ignored in this context.

Some authors such as Itkonen (1966: 270), Häkkinen (1985: 91–92; 2002: 86–87) and Abondolo (1998: 18) give more attention to the contrastive or oppositive (and not necessarily spatial) functions of the suffix. The most commonly cited examples include the above-mentioned North Saami interrogative pronoun *goabbá* 'which (of two)' (~ South Saami *gåabpa/gåabpetje* id.) and its transparent Finnic cognates such as Finnish *kumpi* id. and Estonian *kumb* id. (< Pre-Proto-Saami, (Pre-)Proto-Finnic *\*ku-mpa* [Q-*\*mpV*]). Another common example is North Saami *nubbi* 'other; second' (~ South Saami *mubpie* id.), going back to Pre-Proto-Saami *\*muu-mpa* [other-*\*mpV*] and paralleled by (Erzya) Mordvin *ombo* 'other' and *omboće*

‘second; following’, apparently based on another, pronominal stem. Example (35) also contains South Saami *jeatjabidie* [other.PL.ILL] (nominative *jeatjebe*), in which the comparative cum relation form suffix *-be* is attached to the pronominal-adjectival stem *jeatja-* ‘other’, resulting in the pronominal meaning ‘other; else’ (cf. Bergsland 1946: 182).

It may also be added that in addition to the well-known interrogative pronoun *kumpi* ‘which (of two)’ and the partly reduplicative indefinite pronoun *jompikumpi* ‘either one (of two)’ in present-day Finnish (~ Estonian *emb-kumb*), earlier Finnish also had a corresponding demonstrative pronoun *sempi* ‘that; it (of two)’ and a relative pronoun *jompi* ‘that (of the two)’. In the following examples from the 16th century, the semantic closeness to the adjectival comparative is obvious:

Finnish

- (55) *Nytt riteleuät miehett cumbi lähimäife-mbi on*  
 now dispute.3PL man.PL which.of.two near-CMPV be.3SG  
*perimän, olkan fembi lähimmäife-mbi lunaftaman*  
 inherit.INF be.IMP.3SG that.of.two near-CMPV redeem.INF  
*peripinnett cumbi lähimmäife-mbi on pericunnan*  
 prerogative.PTV which.of.two near-CMPV be.3SG heirs.GEN  
*lughufa.*  
 number.INE

‘When two men are disputing over which of the two is the nearer heir, the nearer one to redeem the inheritance shall be that of the two who is nearer in succession.’ (SKM II: 43)

Finnish

- (56) *Sanouat caxi löynnens yhden kimalaiften*  
 say.3PL two find.PST.PTCP.GEN.3PL one.GEN bee.PL.GEN  
*hulikan, ottakan fembi löytäiäifen palkan,*  
 hive.GEN take.IMP.3SG that.of.two finder.GEN reward.GEN  
*iombi enfin löyfi eli ilmoitti.*  
 that.of.two first find.PST.3SG or make.known.PST.3SG

‘When two people claim to have found a beehive, let the finder’s reward be taken by that (of the two) who was the first one (of the two) who found it or made the claim.’ (SKM II: 89)

Although the above discussion on the South Saami relation forms and their origin is based on the prevailing view in which the Uralic suffix *\*-mpV* is seen as a historically nominal-adjectival morpheme, there is also an alternative line of thought. Among scholars who have tried to explain

the origins of *\*-mpV*, the most remarkable exception to the prevailing view has been Ramstedt (1917), who briefly suggested that *\*-mpV* was originally a participle (*\*-pA*) of derived verbs ending in *\*-m-*. As pointed out by Janhunen (2018: 52), Collinder (1960: 260, 273) may have been the only scholar to support Ramstedt's hypothesis, which has otherwise been ignored by others. Interestingly, nearly a century later, Pystynen (2015) presented a quite similar preliminary hypothesis independently of Ramstedt. The most recent contribution to the topic comes from Janhunen (2018) who cautiously rehabilitates Ramstedt's early proposal, including typological parallels from Turkic (see also Aikio, forthcoming). According to this hypothesis, adjectives that refer to properties like 'red' and 'dark' could go back to participles meaning 'reddening' and 'darkening'.

Although the thoughts presented by Ramstedt, Pystynen and Janhunen do not directly contradict the received view with the main focus on nominal suffixes, the participial hypothesis is hardly compatible with it. Instead of focusing on the contrastive functions of *\*-mpV*, the participial hypothesis draws attention to the moderative functions of the suffix. Most importantly, Janhunen presents examples from Nenets, which lacks an obvious category of adjectives (see also Jalava 2013), but instead expresses properties using both nouns and verbs. On the other hand, he acknowledges that this hypothesis presents both morphological and semantic challenges, some of the most important being that the presumed cognates of the *\*-mpV* comparatives in Saami, Finnic and Hungarian do not function as comparatives – and can be found only in Nenets.

The most obvious advantage of the participial hypothesis is that it offers an explanation that breaks *\*-mpV* down into even simpler terms: This could explain why there are few signs of a true Proto-Uralic comparative form – which may have never existed – but instead, there are some seemingly related and possibly convergent comparatives and analogous forms spread across Uralic. On the other hand, while some of the functions of *\*-mpV* could be explained by the participial hypothesis, this is not true for all of them. In fact, a large part of the westernmost branches – in addition to Saami and Finnic, also Mordvin and Mari – have depronominal, contrastive *\*-mpV* forms that hardly seem to go back to participles with moderative meanings. It is also worth noting that among the diachronically and synchronically heterogeneous comparative forms in Uralic, the *\*-mpV* comparatives in Saami, Finnic and Hungarian are considered the least moderative and most contrastive and emphatic (see Raun 1971:

107–110, 117–118). In contrast to the participial hypothesis alone, a more logical but undeniably much less elegant alternative could be the hypothesis that some of the moderative-comparative *\*-mpV* forms may go back to Proto-Uralic participles, whereas some of the more contrastive comparatives – and South Saami relation forms – may have an altogether different origin. This question must, however, be left for future studies.

As for the origins of the superlative in South Saami, much less is known, as the obvious origin of the suffix *-mes/-ommes* is limited to Proto-Saami. Opinions differ as to whether the suffix must be considered a loan from Finnic or whether it is a collateral cognate of the (deadjectival) derivational suffix *-mus/-mys* as seen in Finnish *ylimys* ‘member of the nobility’ (← *ylä-* ‘top part’), which is cognate to South Saami *jille-mes* ~ *jille-mes* [high-SUP] ‘highest’, or *laiskimus* ‘sluggard’ (← *laiska* ‘lazy’), cognate to North Saami *láiikki-mus* [lazy-SUP] ‘laziest’ (see Korhonen 1981: 248; Sammallahti 1998: 91).

To return to the relation forms, it can only be repeated that the origins of these special functions – of what seem to be comparative and superlative markers that occur mostly with kinship terms – have apparently not been pondered in any publications. The phenomenon has not even been mentioned in diachronic studies of any kind. Interestingly enough, the only relation form I have encountered in such studies has gone without attention by Fuchs (1949: 147), who mentions the words *gaampelåbpoe tjiđtjebistie* ‘older than one’s mother’ as an example of the case marking for the standard of comparison, thus focusing only on the comparative *gaampelåbpoe* ‘older’ and the relative case suffix (*-stie*). The example comes from sentence (57) recorded by Lagercrantz (1939 § 1919):

- (57) *Juktie*      *gaampelåbpoe*      ***tjiđtjebistie***,      *dam*  
 because      old.CMPV      mother.be.ELA      3SG.ACC  
*jiehtieh*      ”*muahra*”.  
 say.3PL      *muahra*  
 ‘If [the mother’s sister] is older than the mother [of the speaker],  
 she is called *muahra* [sic<sup>43</sup>].’ (Lagercrantz 1939 § 1919)

It is worth noting that in the earliest approaches to the origins of the Saami-Finnic comparative, scholars like Budenz (1886: 449–450), Ravila (1937: 40–41), Fuchs (1949: 152) and specifically Beke (1928) paid attention to the fact that the interrogative pronouns like North Saami *goabbá* ‘which (of the two)’ (~ South Saami *gåabpa/gåabpetje* id.) and Finnic (Finnish) *kumpi* id. are etymologically analogous to Greek *πότερος*, Sanskrit कतर

(*katará*) and Old English *hwæper* ‘which (of the two)’, all going back to Proto-Indo-European *\*kʷóteros*, which in turn is made up of the interrogative stem *\*kʷo(s)-* and the contrastive suffix *\*-teros*.<sup>14</sup> The same suffix also occurs in Latin *alter* ‘second; other’ (cf. *alius* ‘(an)other’ as well as South Saami *mubpie* ‘other, second’ and Erzya *ombo* ‘other’ mentioned above), but most importantly, descendants of Proto-Indo-European *\*-teros* also include comparative suffixes in Greek (-*τερος*), Sanskrit (-*तर* = *-tara*) and Celtic (e.g. Greek *πρεσβύτερος* ‘older; senior; elder’ ← *πρέσβυς* ‘elderly; aged’; Sanskrit *पुण्यतर* = *puṇyatara* ‘purer; holier’ ← *पुण्य* = *puṇya* ‘purity; pure’). However, this parallelism has received barely any attention for decades. It will be seen in the following section that it is typological parallels like these – together with the heretofore neglected relation forms – that provide us with interesting perspectives for reconstructing the prehistory of the Saami-Finnic(-Hungarian) comparative.

#### 4.2. Typological perspectives – from the Russian Far East

For over half a century, there has largely been a consensus on the origins of the Saami-Finnic comparative and the supposedly convergent history of the comparative in Hungarian. In principle, there is no need to question the received view, but instead of continuing to repeat what has already been stated by Budenz (1886: 448–454), it seems reasonable to try and dust off the classical view by adopting a slightly wider perspective. The new perspective on Uralic *\*-mpV* – and the South Saami comparative cum relation form in *-bel-âbpoe* in particular – is provided by Tungusic languages and especially Alonso de la Fuente’s (2011) study on the origins of the so-called comparative suffix *\*-tmAr/-d(i)mAr* in Northern Tungusic.

Before commencing with Tungusic, it may be noted that there seem to be no typological studies on the diachrony of comparative markers. Instead, Haspelmath (2001: 1501–1502) points out that while most languages of Europe do have comparative forms for adjectives, such morphological categories are relatively uncommon elsewhere. In fact, even the Tungusic “comparatives” are often mentioned in scare quotes and are also known as “dual-comparatives”, “intensifiers”, “partitive(-comparative)s” and “selectives”. However, more important than the labels used are the functions of such morphemes labeled as comparatives here. Consider the following two pairs of examples from Ewen (Northern Tungusic) and Nanai (Southern Tungusic):

- Ewen
- (58) *Эрэк оран тарак орандук гудадмар.*  
*Erek oran tarak oranduk guda-dmar.*  
 this reindeer that reindeer.ABL high-CMPV  
 ‘This reindeer is higher than that reindeer.’ (Popova 2015: 170)
- Ewen
- (59) *Эвэдмэр — Фёдор, мэнэдмэр — Иннокентий.*  
*Эвэ-дмэр — Fjodor, тэнэ-дмэр — Innokentij.*  
 Ewen-CMPV Fyodor Itelmen-CMPV Innokenty  
 ‘The Ewen is Fyodor; as for the Itelmen, he is Innokenty.’  
 (Alonso de la Fuente 2011: 185 < Benzing 1955: 53)
- Naikhin Nanai
- (60) *Улги мападуй сэтуйдимэ.*  
*Ulgi tapadyu setuy-dime.*  
 Siberian.chipmunk bear.ABL weak-CMPV  
 ‘The chipmunk is weaker than the bear.’ (Alonso de la Fuente 2011: 187 < Avrorin 1959: 211)  
 (Avrorin: ‘Бурундук в сравнении с медведем — тот, который из них слабый.’)
- Naikhin Nanai
- (61) *Вайчай най гуудимэвэ пуентухэни.*  
*Waycay nay giu-dime-we puentuxeni.*  
 hunting man roe-CMPV-ACC hurt.PST.3SG  
 ‘The hunter hurt the roe (but no other animals).’  
 (Alonso de la Fuente 2011: 187 < Avrorin 1959: 197)  
 (Avrorin: ‘Охотник косулю (ту, которая из них косуля) ранил.’)

As for Ewen *tarak oranduk gudadmar* ‘higher than that reindeer’ and Nanai *tapadyu setuydime* ‘weaker than the bear’, they resemble the corresponding South Saami comparative constructions *dehtie bovtseste jillebe* [DEF.ELA reindeer.ELA high.CMPV] and *bierneste hiejjiehtåbpoe* [bear.ELA weak.CMPV], respectively. However, the same suffixes, Ewen *-dmar/-dmər* and Nanai *-dimal/-dime* (*-jimal/-jime*), can also be attached to nouns like ‘Ewen’, ‘Itelmen’ and ‘roe’. This, of course, seems similar to the relation forms in South Saami. Space does not allow for a detailed description of the Tungusic data and its variegated research history, but the resemblance with South Saami is quite striking. The reader is referred to Alonso de la Fuente (2011) and the references cited therein, but the following lines summarize the fragmented research tradition quite well:

According to Benzing's [1955] description, Ewen  $V^{\circ}-(A)dmAr \sim C^{\circ}-dAmAr$  is not only a comparative marker, but also one which is used to express duality ("potentielle-elliptische Dual"). Generally speaking, the "dual" function entails a contrast between two entities. Other authors have come up with different labels, e.g. Malchukov [1995] calls it "Intensifier". On the other hand, Cincius [1947 and] Novikova [1960] both seem to consider that "Comparative" is the proper label. However, Cincius recognises that this suffix has a particular use, the same described by Benzing, for which she uses, like Malchukov, the label "Intensifier" (lit. указание, усиление). (Alonso de la Fuente 2011: 184)

One of the claims of Alonso de la Fuente's Tungusological contribution is that the Northern Tungusic "comparative" marker (58–59) is etymologically distinct from that of Southern Tungusic, i.e. the one seen in the Nanai examples (60–61) above. Nevertheless, the two are functionally so similar that the author is content to describe the phenomena seen in the relation-noun-like examples (59) and (61) – irrespective of the different origins of Ewen *-dmər* and Nanai *-dime* – as follows:

The explanation behind the "Partitive", "Dual" or "Selective" function so described by Avrorin [1959], Benzing [1955] and Kazama [2008] for Nanai, Ewen and Ulcha (and Orok) respectively is by far the easiest task to be dealt with in this paper.

**The function underlined by this suffix is nothing else but the (particularising-)antinomic one.** Both functions, comparison and antinomy, are linked semantically and well spread cross-linguistically. The best-known example is the (Proto-)Indo-European suffix *\*-(t)ero-* (...) (Alonso de la Fuente 2011: 189; emphasis J.Y.)

Here, Alonso de la Fuente goes on to describe the development of PIE *\*-tero-* – the same affix that has been mentioned by many Uralists as seen in the previous section. As Alonso de la Fuente's condensed paper focuses on the historical phonology and morphology instead of syntax and semantics, it must be admitted that he is quite bold in claiming that expressions of comparison and what he terms "antinomy" are "well spread cross-linguistically"; I am not aware of typological studies on this topic. However, when the comparative-marked nouns (such as those in (59) and (61)) are said to have "particularizing", "antinomic", "contrastive", "intensifying" or "selective" functions, their use seems to resemble that of South Saami relation forms indeed. As seen in the quotation above, Benzing (1955) characterizes Ewen *-dmar/-dmər* as a "potential (or elliptic) dual". His description of the functions of these forms comes so close to the picture depicted in Section 3 for the relative forms in South Saami that Benzing is also worth citing verbatim:

Neben der Bezeichnung der Mehrheit (und, in Resten, der Zweierheit?) kennt das Lamutische noch eine, **in ihrer wirklichen Bedeutung ganz unklare Form der Nomina**, von der ich aber glaube, sie der Behandlung der Einzahl und Mehrzahl anschließen zu sollen. Es handelt sich um **Formen mit besonderen Suffixen, welche ein Ding (oder eine Gruppe von Dingen) in Bezug auf eine Gesamtheit kennzeichnen. Mit Hilfe dieser Suffixe kann man anzeigen, ob ein Gegenstand Teil einer Gruppe von 2 Gegenständen ist** (elliptischer oder potentieller Dual — es existiert immer ein Element, das den Dual vervollständigt — s. § 102), oder ob er zu einer Gruppe von mehr als zwei gleichartigen Gegenständen gehört (elliptischer oder potentieller Plural, s. § 103).  
(Benzing 1955: 52; emphasis J.Y.)<sup>15</sup>

As it turns out, the form in *-dmar/-dmər* has recently been discussed also by Matic (2011) and Matic and Wedgwood (2013: 152–153), who describe it as a contrastive focus marker. Although the details of the true nature of this form fall outside the scope of the present paper, and the word forms in (59) and (61) seen above are lexically different from the kinship terminology that is the heartland of the South Saami relation forms, Cincius (1947: 237) and Benzing (1955: 52) mention the form *amadmar* (← *aman* ‘father’) and translate it as ‘отец (тогда и отец)’ and ‘(von den beiden) der Vater; aber der Vater’. Indeed, many such forms can be found in texts, and corresponding forms for mother (*enin*) exist as well:

Ewen

- (62) *Амадмар* хуты хупкучэкклэ эмэнин.  
*Ама-дмар* хути хиркисэкклэ этэнин.  
 father-CMPV child.REFL school.DIRLOC leave.TRANSLOC.3SG  
 ‘The father left his son at school.’ (Cincius 1947: 237)  
 (Cincius: ‘Отец (тогда и отец) сына в школе оставил.’)

Ewen

- (63) Вася эрэв энинтэкий тэлэнгчэлэн,  
*Vasja* эрэw энинтэкий тэлэнгчэлэн,  
 Vasya this.ACC mother.DIR.REFL tell.PST.PTCP.LOC.3SG  
*энидмэр* хоч урэлдэн.  
*эни-дмэр* хос ирэлдэн.  
 mother-CMPV very(.much) be.happy.3SG  
 ‘When Vasya had told his mother about this, the mother was very happy.’ (Sverčkova 1975: 127)  
 (Sverčkova: ‘После того как Вася рассказал об этом своей матери, мать очень обрадовалась.’)

In Matić and Wedgwood’s (2013: 152–153) words, Ewen *-dmar/-dmər* is seen in contexts where “there is a highly restricted (usually binary) distinction between two alternatives” and the suffix “produces an inference of the default set to which the denotatum of this noun belongs”, such as the set {father, child} in (63). While I acknowledge that detailed analysis of Ewen data belongs to the experts in the field, it is remarkable that these characterizations seem applicable to most occurrences of the South Saami relation forms. It is thus possible to present analogous South Saami sentences containing the relation forms *aehtjebe* (62’) and *tjijtjebe* (63’):

(62’) *Aehtjebe baerniem skovlese leehpi.*  
 father.be son.ACC school.ILL leave.PST.3SG  
 ‘The father left his son at school.’ (J.Y., personal  
 knowledge; confirmed by Maja Lisa Kappfjell)

(63’) *Gosse Vasja dan bijre tjædtjan soptsestamme,*  
 when Vasja it.GEN about mother.ILL tell.PST.PTCP  
*tjijtjebe joekoenlaakan aavoedi.*  
 mother.be very.much rejoice.PST.3SG  
 ‘When Vasya had told his mother about this, the mother was very  
 happy.’ (J.Y., personal knowledge; confirmed by Maja Lisa Kappfjell)

Leaving more fine-grained contrastive studies between Ewen and South Saami for the future, I wish to claim that Ewen and other Tungusic comparative markers definitely seem to be the closest available parallels to South Saami *-be/-åbpoe*. This observation has diachronic implications as well: It seems fruitful to try to understand the development of *-be/-åbpoe* in light of Alonso de la Fuente’s claims about the origins of the Northern Tungusic comparative. Referring to the Indo-European parallels mentioned above, Alonso de la Fuente (2011) is confident about the direction of semantic change in Tungusic as well:

The *opinio communis* claims that it was from the contrastive function that the comparative function developed after the generalisation of constructions like ‘A is old in comparison to B, which is young’ or ‘A is X, B isn’t’, where B was most likely marked with \*/-(t)ero-/. The evolution “antinomic” > “comparative” is the only reasonable conclusion to satisfactorily explain the historical distribution of \*/-(t)ero-/. (...) it would be really hard to argue otherwise about the direction in the functional evolution of the suffix \*/-(t)ero-/: how would have the comparative arrived to the much more restricted separative function? How would we explain why \*/-(t)ero-/ yielded comparatives in Greek, Old Indian or Celtic, and not in other languages? (Alonso de la Fuente 2011: 190)

It appears to me that Indo-Europeanists' and Alonso de la Fuente's (2011) reasoning can also be applied to Uralic \*-mpV, and this is actually not far from the prevailing view (Section 4.1). It might be typologically adventurous to assert that South Saami *-bel-âbpoe* has gradually developed from a comparative marker ('more') into a nominal suffix that can even be (mis)taken for a possessive suffix or definite marker (for the emergence of definites, see Lyons 1999 and De Mulder & Carlier 2011). Alonso de la Fuente (*ibid.* 195) actually seeks support for his proposal from Uralistics and refers to Finnish *kumpi* 'which (of the two)' in this connection. On the other hand, Poppe (1958: 206) already fleetingly points out that Benzing's (1955: 52) *amadmar* '(von den beiden) der Vater' is reminiscent of *kumpi* 'welcher von den beiden', and suggests that *amadmar* may originally have meant 'derjenigen, der mehr Vater ist'; the other would be 'less father', i.e. 'not the father'. It is likely that the South Saami data presented in this study provide more support to Alonso de la Fuente's Tungusic reconstructions.

Even if only vague and partial, the functional resemblance between South Saami *-bel-âbpoe* and Ewen *-dmar/-dm̄ar* as well as other corresponding morphemes in Tungusic (see Alonso de la Fuente 2011) is quite remarkable in itself, but on the other hand, this fits into the picture provided by Indo-European \*-tero- as well.<sup>16</sup> As the South Saami relation forms have not been discussed in historical Uralistics before, no-one has ever opposed the idea that the South Saami relation forms – with obsolete cognates in Pite and Lule Saami, too – might actually be among the best-preserved remnants of the most original pre-comparative functions of Uralic \*-mpV. On the other hand, it appears that the reconstructed history of the Tungusic comparatives does not offer direct help in reconstructing the ultimate origins of the Uralic comparatives: According to Alonso de la Fuente (2011: 198), the North Tungusic comparative marker seems to be a loan from a Mongolic moderative suffix, while its South Tungusic counterpart might go back to an ablative case suffix followed by an adjectival derivational suffix.

Of course, it is also possible to think that South Saami and the rest of the westernmost Saami languages on the westernmost fringes of the Uralic family might have developed the present-day relation forms on their own as a result of unknown factors. However, it may be equally possible to consider that relation forms such as *aehtje-be* may stem all the way from Pre-Proto-Saami if not Proto-Uralic *\*ic̄ä-mp̄ä* ~ *\*ec̄ä-mp̄ä*. Let us once again turn back to the interrogative pronoun *ḡaabpa* 'which (of the two)', which has cognates throughout Saami and Finnic up to South Estonian:

- (64) South Saami  
 a. **Gåabpa** dotneste **nuerebe?**  
 which.of.two 2DU.ELA young.CMPV  
 ‘Which one of you is younger?’ (Bergsland 1982:  
 74; 1994: 75; Magga & Magga 2012: 216)

Võro

- b. **Kumb** teist om **noorõmb?**  
 which.of.two 2PL.ELA be.3SG young.CMPV  
 ‘Which one of you is younger?’ (J.Y., personal knowledge)

Even though the descendants of Saami-Finnic *\*ku-mpa* may never have been regarded as comparative forms any more than relation forms, they are, in a sense, both. As can be seen in the above examples, the interrogative occurs naturally with comparative adjectives. Comparatives like *nuerebe* and *noorõmb* may also function as independent answers to the one-word questions *gåabpa?* and *kumb?*, respectively – such comparatives come close to nouns with their meaning of ‘the younger one; the one (of the two) who/which is younger’. This in turn is not far from another type of possible answer to the question *gåabpa?* (or the entire question clause in 64a) – in other words a relation form such as *aehtjebe*, often meaning approximately ‘the one (of the two) who is the father’.

Although it has become evident in Section 3 that the relation forms do not always have such evidently contrastive – or to use more Tungusological terminology, “antinomic”, “intensifying”, “particularizing” or “selective” – meanings, it is reasonable to think that word pairs like *aehtjebe* – *tjidtjebe* may have formerly meant ‘the one (of the two) who is the father’ and ‘the one (of the two) who is the mother’, just like *nuerebe* – *båarasåb-poe* stand for ‘the one (of the two) who is young’ and ‘the one (of the two) who is old’. Put more concretely, it is possible to equate the relation forms of (1) with the comparatives in (65):

- (1) **Daktaråbpoe** darjoeji guktie **tjidtjebe** jeehti.  
 daughter.åbpoe do.PST.3SG as mother.be say.PST.3SG  
 ‘The (one who is the) daughter<sub>i</sub> did as (the one who is) her<sub>i</sub> mother,  
 said.’ (Bergsland 1982: 107; 1994: 110; Magga & Magga 2012: 50)
- (65) **Nuerebe** darjoeji guktie **båarasåbpoe** jeehti.  
 young.CMPV do.PST.3SG as old.CMPV say.PST.3SG  
 ‘The (one who is the) young(er) one did as the (one who is the) old(er)  
 one said.’ (J.Y., personal knowledge; confirmed by Maja Lisa Kappfjell)

For the sake of completeness, it is worth noting that especially the above textbook example (1) and earlier characterizations of relation forms as possessive suffixes also remind us of the phenomenon referred to as the “Janus construction” in Lewis’ (1967: 48) description of Turkish. According to Lewis, the term refers to “the curious facing-both-ways construction wherein, when two people who are related or otherwise closely connected, are mentioned in one sentence, each is defined by a third-person suffix linking him to the other”. His examples include the following:

- Turkish
- (66) *Oğl-u baba-sı-na bir mektup yazdı.*  
 son-3SG father-3SG-DAT INDF letter write.PST.3SG  
 ‘The son wrote a letter to the father,’ ‘His – the father’s – son wrote a letter to his – the son’s – father.’ (Lewis 1967: 48–49)

What is more, Haiman (1980: 370–371) provides analogous examples from Hua (Yagaria), a language of Papua New Guinea, stating that it is one of “many other languages” in which possessive markers are used in such constructions.<sup>17</sup>

To return to Uralic, the remaining question is whether the Saami relation forms could be as old as the Saami-Finnic comparatives and the interrogative *\*ku-mpa*. Disregarding the separate development of the Hungarian comparative, the closest distant relative of the contrastive *\*-mpV* and (South) Saami depronominal *mubpie* ‘second; other’ in particular seems to be the above-mentioned (Erzya) Mordvin *ombo* ‘other’.

It ought to be possible to hypothesize that the denominal (and depronominal) *\*-mpV* forms may have at least as long a history as the deadjectival forms, if not an even longer one – as long as it is possible to identify a separate category of adjectives in earlier stages of western Uralic (cf. Pajunen 1998; Aikio, forthcoming). Of course, one can ask whether the westernmost Saami languages alone would have preserved (and developed further) a hypothetical and nebulous Pre-Saami-Finnic phenomenon that has been the basis of present-day relation forms and a possibly later innovation, the Saami-Finnic adjectival comparative. It must be admitted that the present study is not able to provide decisive arguments for this preliminary hypothesis, but the comparative evidence from Indo-European and Tungusic makes the hypothesis seem feasible.

It is also worth noting that if the common proto-language of Saami, Finnic and Mordvin were to be reconstructed based on these languages

alone, the only reliable cues for reconstructing an accusative marker in *\*-m* as well as the best evidence for an earlier OV order would be provided by South Saami. South Saami also appears to be the only Saami-Finnic language that has truly preserved the ancient use of the genitive case in possessive clauses – with analogical genitives in use in Mordvin and Mari (see Inaba 2015: 172–231). From this perspective, the language could also serve as a key for identifying the original functions of *\*-mpV*. As a minor comment to the oft-repeated assumptions about the original contrastive and/or spatial functions of the suffix, the core functions of the South Saami relation forms in *-be/-âbpoe* provide an important example of a relatively productive category, as the element in question occurs with (mostly) animate nouns, which are a far more open class than the pronominal stems to which earlier examples have been limited (see Section 4.1).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The preceding sections have mostly been devoted to the synchronic description of the South Saami relation forms in *-be/-âbpoe* and, to a lesser extent, those in *-mes/-ommes*. In Section 4, the discussion was extended to a brief comparison of the phenomena in question with unexpectedly analogous phenomena in Tungusic. In so doing, the discussion seeks to provide new typological perspectives on the South Saami relation forms, but in spite of some remarks and hypotheses concerning the origin of the South Saami *-be/-âbpoe* and its cognates in the rest of the Saami languages as well as in the neighboring Finnic, deliberately little has been said about the cognates of these morphemes in the more distant branches of Uralic, such as Hungarian and Samoyed. Although the decidedly diachronic approaches to the puzzle of Uralic *\*-mpV* is left for future studies, it appears that the South Saami relation forms must be taken into account in those studies. The same can be said about the ability of the Finnic comparative to occur as a moderative suffix attached to nouns such as *äiti* ‘mother’ (→ *äidimpi* ‘more of a mother’) in (50). In fact, in her description of Tundra Nenets, Nikolaeva (2014) mentions that the possible cognate of South Saami *-be* and Finnic *-mpi*, the moderative suffix *-mpoy<sup>oh</sup>/-poy<sup>oh</sup>*, can also occur with nouns with “some parametric component in their meaning”, which is emphasized by the use of the moderative:

Tundra Nenets

(67) *t'iki° n'a-mpom'i!*

this companion-MODER.1SG

'This is a real friend of mine!' (Nikolaeva 2014: 135)

To be sure, moderatives like this are very different from the South Saami relation forms, which are better characterized as contrastive, for example. Although the elements *-mpoy°h/-poy°h* and *-bel-åbpoe* might share a common ancestor in Proto-Uralic (*\*-mpV*), it must be remembered that its descendants in Saami and Samoyed have been growing apart from each other for several millennia. The contemporary functions of the suffixes must be regarded as more or less natural outcomes of long-standing diversification of the two branches – as well as Finnic and Hungarian, for that matter.

However, the existence of South-Saami-like relation forms in Lule Saami (51–54) as well as the existence of pan-Saami-Finnic words for 'which (of the two)' (South Saami *gåabpa* < *\*kumpa* > Finnish *kumpi*) suggest that the South Saami relation forms are not a quirk that can be ascribed to an idiosyncratic development in South Saami alone. A related contrastive meaning can be seen in the many "comparative" forms for 'other', such as South Saami *mubpie* 'other; second', Erzya *ombo* 'other' and South Saami *jeatjebe* 'other', as well as in other analogous pronouns in Finnic (*jompikumpi* 'either one (of two)', *jompi* 'that (of the two)', *sempi* 'that (of two)'; see Examples 55–56). Further, it may be noted that certain Finnic words for 'left' and 'right' go back to analogous derivations; cf. Estonian *parem* 'right, dexter; better' (← Proto-Uralic *\*para* 'good') and Finnish *vasen* (dial. *vasempi*) : *vasempa-* 'left' (← Proto-Uralic *\*wasa* id.), thus implying the contrastive or oppositive meaning 'of the two opposites, the one on the right/left side'.

To return to present-day South Saami in particular, it is important to keep in mind that the language is an interesting mixture of old and new. South Saami is in many aspects a rather conservative representative of the Saami branch, but at the same time an age-old neighbor of Germanic idioms that have shaped the language in numerous ways. Therefore, it is worthwhile to remember that when beginning his vacillation on the true nature of the relation forms, Bergsland (1946: 181) fleetingly mentions that *-bel-åbpoe* could also be characterized as a definite article.

Even though there are not many compelling reasons to resort to Bergsland's suggestion (see Section 3.4), it is certainly possible to think that

the Scandinavian languages, with their (rather fusional) suffixal definite articles, may have influenced the use of the relation forms. One of the most probable instances of Scandinavian interference was seen in (37a), where the noun phrase *dihthe bööremes viellebe* [DEF good.SUP brother.be] ‘the best brother’ looks very much like Norwegian *den beste broren* [DEF good.SUP brother.M.DEF] (37b). Other examples include *geellebe* [husband.be] (32) and *mov gämmebe* [1SG.GEN wife.be] (33), referring to the spouses of the two (first person singular) speakers, as it is possible to observe that the examples are translations from Norwegian sentences with the noun phrases *mannen min* [husband.M.DEF my.M] and *kona mi* [wife.F.DEF my.F], respectively. In the same vein, it would also be possible to translate words like *tjijtjebem jijtjesh* [mother.be.ACC REFL.GEN.3PL] ‘(listened to) their mother’ (36) and *doh dov viellebh* [that 2SG.GEN brother.be.PL] ‘those brothers of yours’ (48) into Norwegian as *moren sin* [mother.M.DEF their.M] and *disse brødrene dine* [those brother.PL.DEF your.PL].

Mere translational equivalence is hardly enough to prove that we are dealing with suffixal articles in South Saami; more research would be needed in order to make such a claim. It goes without saying that if the South Saami relation forms were analyzed as definite articles, this would be typologically remarkable, as definite articles – and Uralic definite articles in particular – are generally known to derive from demonstratives and possessive markers but not from morphemes related to comparatives (Lyons 1999, De Mulder & Carlier 2011).

Finally, the use of the superlative marker *-mes/-ommes* as a relation form marker has played only a secondary role in this study. In the 1.1M-word corpus (SIKOR) and other texts available, occurrences of these forms are virtually limited to the forms *tjijtjemes* [mother.mes] (3, 19, 28), *eehtjemes* ~ *aehtjemes* [father.mes] (6, 17, 19, 20, 22, 28, 29), *aahkemes* [grandma.mes] (21), *aajjemes* [grandpa.mes] (39) and *vuanavommes* [mother.in.law.ommes] (18), and they do not belong to all traditional dialects (Bergsland 1946: 182). In light of the fact that the Saami superlative marker *\*-moksi* is evidently a much younger suffix than *\*-mpV*, it is possible that the relation forms in *-mes/-ommes* are a relatively new and unestablished phenomenon that may have come into existence as a result of analogy with much older and more established relation nouns in *-bel/-åbpoe*.

In spite, and because, of the undeniable difficulties in analyzing and generalizing on the data discussed in this study, the so-called relation forms in South Saami are a noteworthy morphological category that seems

to lack any obvious parallels in the best-known present-day languages of Europe – Lule Saami, with its marginal forms such as *iednep* [mother.p], *áhtjep* [father.p], *niejdap* [daughter.p], *boadnjep* [husband.p], *oappáp* [sister.p] and *vieljap* [brother.p], being the only exception among the most vigorous Saami languages (Section 4.1).

The present study has labeled the category in question as “relation forms” mainly in order to make use of Bergsland’s (1982/1994) Norwegian term *forholdsformer*, but it may be added that characterizations such as these are actually quite suitable for the present purpose. The ad hoc label *relation form* is undeniably vague and rather unique – we are dealing with a morphological category whose true nature still remains somewhat elusive and is indeed rather unique among the languages of the Uralic language family as well among other languages spoken in Europe. However, despite the irrefutable heterogeneity of these forms and their functions in particular, most of them do fit the implications of the label *relation form* in many ways.<sup>18</sup> It is not unimaginable that a better understanding and awareness of the Saami forms and their Tungusic analogues may help us to identify and describe comparable phenomena in other parts of the world, as well as lead us to a better understanding of analogous phenomena in Indo-European languages with which Uralic *\*-mpV* was compared already in the 19th century.

As the main yet secondary contribution of this primarily synchronic study to general comparative-historical Uralistics, it can be concluded that the present-day functions of the South Saami relation forms in *-bel-âbpoe* probably do not go back to the Saami-Finnic marker of the comparative degree of adjectives. Instead, they can be regarded as direct descendants of the original contrastive, or oppositive, functions of Proto-Uralic *\*-mpV*, although this is definitely not the sole answer to the riddle of *\*-mpV*. The heretofore almost unknown relation forms in South Saami thus offer an interesting combination of typologically uncommon innovations in the vicinity of marking of possession and definiteness and, at the same time, a new key to a better understanding of the origins and development of Uralic comparatives. It is to be hoped that the observations presented here will be of interest and inspiration to synchronic, diachronic and typological linguistics alike.

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## Notes

- 1 For some reason, Bergsland (1982: 107; 1994: 110) and Magga and Magga (2012: 50) present (1) with the substandard, dialectal spelling <daktarabpoe> instead of <daktaråbpoe>, in which the form is reproduced here. The ultimate origin of this example seems to be (i), from a story recorded from Lars Nilsen Axmann (born in Míhte/Mittådalen in 1910) in 1941 and reproduced in 1987 with the expected spelling <daktaråbpoe>:

- (i) *Ja dâktarâppa båt dârjajj guh ahčəbə jehtəjj.*  
*Jaa daktaråbpoe badth darjoeji goh aehtjebe jehti.*  
 well daughter.åbpoe DPT do.PST.3SG as father.be say.PST.3SG  
 ‘Well, the daughter<sub>i</sub> did as her<sub>i</sub> father<sub>j</sub> said.’ (Bergsland 1943: 300; 1987: 82)

For illustrative and pedagogical purposes, I refer to Bergsland’s (1982: 107; 1994: 110) and Magga and Magga’s (2012: 50) <daktarabpoe> as <daktaråbpoe> in this paper. Further, the huge variation of earlier scholarly transcriptions has been reduced to a minimum by converting all data to the present-day South Saami orthography (and Example 54 to the Lule Saami orthography), or by using versions already modernized by others. Some of the dialectal or substandard word forms are presented in a standardized form and occasional misprints have been corrected. The core topic of the present study, the “relation forms” in *-be/-åbpoe* and *-mes/-ommes* are glossed as *be*, *åbpoe*, *mes* and *ommes* throughout the paper.

- 2 I wish to make clear that I have chosen to speak of “the Saami-Finnic comparative in *\*-mpV*” instead of “the Uralic (or Finno-Ugric) comparative in *\*-mpA*”, for example. Although the morpheme in itself can be traced back to the earliest predecessors of Saami and Finnic and can thus be characterized as Uralic, I do not wish to proclaim that the morpheme was used as a comparative marker in Proto-Uralic. The element is often represented as *\*-mpA*, but I have chosen to use a less definite notation *\*-mpV* (see Korhonen 1981: 246–247; Janhunen 2018: 50).
- 3 I wish to express my thanks to many colleagues, especially José Andrés Alonso de la Fuente, Rogier Blokland, Kaisa Häkkinen, Maja Lisa Kappfell, Olle Kejonen and Martin Joachim Kümmel, as well as the two reviewers for their valuable help and comments on earlier versions of this paper.
- 4 The contents of Section 2 is mostly adapted from a forthcoming grammar sketch of South Saami (Ylikoski, forthcoming).
- 5 Even a brief glance at the occurrence of *akte* and *dihte* in a corpus shows that their frequencies are significantly higher than those of their counterparts in other Saami languages. In the SIKOR corpus by UiT The Arctic University of Norway, the lemmas *akte* and *dihte* constitute 0.8% and 2.2% of the 1.1M word forms in the South Saami corpus, whereas North Saami *okta* and *dat* make up only 0.16% and 1.4% of the 28.4M word corpus. Note, however, that South Saami *dihte* also functions as a third person singular personal pronoun to a much greater extent than North Saami *dat*.
- 6 For the development of the coordinating conjunction *jih/jih* into an infinitive marker, see Ylikoski (2017).

- 7 The noun *maake* may refer to a number of types of male relatives, including the husband of an aunt who is older than the speaker.
- 8 Given the overarching syncretism between the comitative singular (*tjijtjebinie* [mother.be.COM] and *ahtjebinie* [father.be.COM] in 7), the inessive plural and the essive in South Saami, it is possible to present the essive form *tjijtjebinie* in Table 2. For semantic and pragmatic reasons, the South Saami inessive case is very rarely used for nouns with human referents.
- 9 It may be noted that even though relation forms are quite common in coordinated phrases like the ones seen in (23–24), the element *-be/-ābpoe* in itself is not a substitute for the coordinating conjunction *jih* ‘and’. Instead, it is more common to say *ahtjeh tjijtjeh* [father.PL mother.PL] ‘father and mother’ than *ahtjebh tjijtjebh* as seen in (24).
- 10 It must be admitted that the examples of superlative-like *-mes/-ommes* forms available for verifying the above generalization based on *-be/-ābpoe* forms are less authentic.
- 11 The ability to form diminutives could be used as a justification for regarding comparatives as derivations rather than as inflectional forms (cf. Section 2).
- 12 The relation forms in Grundström’s (1946–1954) dictionary would merit a more detailed study. As kindly pointed out by Olle Kejonen (p.c.), some of Grundström’s examples suggest that in Lule Saami, too, relation forms appear to be – or to have been – to a certain extent interchangeable with possessive suffixes (see, e.g., the examples s.v. *āhtjēp* and *sibjukabbō*). It is also of interest to note that according to Grundström (s.v. *par ‘nēp*), *bārnep* has two different meanings: in addition to the meaning ‘the/his/her son’ (*sonen (sin son)*), the other meaning is that of a comparatively sleek bachelor or a widower who is presumably intending to get married again ((*vid jämförelse mellan ogifta män:*) *äldre och därigenom förmer; även: finare klädd; kan jämväl sägas om änklings, som börjat gå finare klädd, så att man kan misstänka att han går i giftastankar*).
- 13 Even according to Lagercrantz (1939 § 4031), *muahra* denotes ‘mother’s younger sister’, whereas the word for ‘mother’s older sister’ is actually *gāeskie* (1939 § 2674).
- 14 As kindly pointed out by Martin Joachim Kümmel (p.c.), Sanskrit also makes use of the superlative कतम = *katamā-* ‘which (of many)’, being thus comparable with North Saami *guhtemuš* id. mentioned above.
- 15 I thank my reviewer for clarifying that the phenomenon labeled “elliptic or potential plural” by Benzing is nowadays better understood as an alienable possession marker and does not need to be discussed here.
- 16 See also Ostrowski (2013, 2018) for an analogous development of an earlier focus marker to the Lithuanian comparative marker *-jau(s)*.
- 17 I wish to thank Rogier Blokland for making me aware of the Janus construction in Turkish.
- 18 The term *relation form* is certainly not very informative or transparent *per se*, but the same goes for many etymologically unexpected linguistic labels such as *accusative* and *infinitive*.

## Abbreviations

ABL	ablative	INDF	indefinite
ACC	accusative	INE	inessive
ADVPASS	adversative passive	INF	infinitive
CMPV	comparative	LOC	locative
CNG	connegative	LOG	logophoric
COM	comitative	M	masculine
COMP	complementizer	MODER	moderative
CVB	converb	MOM	momentaneous
DAT	dative	N	neuter
DEF	definite	NEG	negative
DIM	diminutive	PL	plural
DIR	directional	PROG	progressive
DIRLOC	directive-locative	PRS	present
DPT	discourse particle	PST	past
DU	dual	PTCP	participle
ELA	elative	PTV	partitive
ESS	essive	Q	question
F	feminine	REFL	reflexive
GEN	genitive	REL	relative
GENACC	genitive-accusative	SG	singular
ILL	illative	SUP	supine
IMP	imperative	TRANSLOC	translocative
INCH	inchoative		

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