

Kildin Saami

A brief introduction

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This is a brief linguistic introduction to Kildin Saami a highly endangered indigenous Uralic language of Russia.

Kildin Saami (Endonym *killt sām'kill'*) belongs together with Ter Saami to the peninsula group of the East Saamic languages (Sammallahti 1998). It is actively spoken by only approximately 100 native speakers (Scheller 2011), mostly in Lovozero (*Lujavv'r*) to where most speakers have been forced to resettle. Originally, Kildin Saami was spoken all over the central inland parts and the central costal parts of the Kola peninsula. Four dialects are still maintained: the Killt dialect, the Koardegk dialect, the Lujavv'r dialect and the Arsjogk dialect. The neighboring Saami dialects in the Northwest belong to Skolt Saami. Ter Saami dialects were formerly spoken in the eastern parts of the peninsula, but there are practically no Ter Saami speakers left in these areas. The last Ter Saami speakers live scattered around in Lovozero, Murmansk and on other places. The third neighboring Saami language, Akkala Saami originally spoken in the Southwest of the Kildin Saami dialect area, is also moribund or perhaps already extinct.

Today Russian is the dominating language in practically all domains of Kildin Saami live. Consequently Russian is strongly influencing Kildin Saami vocabulary and grammar. Contacts with the Karelians, that lasted at least until the first half of the 20th century, has also left considerable traces; another historical contact language which influenced Kildin Saami is Norwegian. The *Izva* variety of Komi, on the other hand, seems to have left no traces at all. This is despite the fact that Kildin Saami and *Izva* Komi have been in close contact since the outgoing 19th century; studies of contact-induced changes in Kildin Saami are Itkonen 1943; Itkonen 1958b; Rießler 2007; Rießler 2009; Blokland and Rießler 2011.

	SG	PL	SG	PL
NOMINATIVE	kuess'k	kues'k	puaz	pūdz-e
GENITIVE	kues'k	kūs'k-e	pūdz-e	pūdz-e
ACCUSATIVE	kues'k	kūs'k-et'	pūdz-e	pūdz-et'
ILLATIVE	kuassk-a	kūs'k-et'	pūdz-je	pūdz-et'
LOCATIVE	kues'k-es't	kūs'k-en'	pūdz-es't	pūdz-en'
COMITATIVE	kūs'k-en'	kūs'k-eguejm	pūdz-en'	pūdz-eguejm
ABESSIVE	kues'k-xa	kūs'k-exa	pūdz-ahta	pūdz-exa
ESSIVE	kuess'k-en'		pūdz-en'	
PARTITIVE	kuess'k-e		pūdz-jedt'e	

Table 1: Inflection paradigms of the nouns *kuess'k* (North Saami *goaski*) ‘aunt (elder maternal sister)’ and *puaz* (North Saami *boahzu* ‘reindeer’)

Phonology A characteristic feature in Kildin Saami phonology is the relatively large consonant inventory. Most consonants, including sonorants, exhibit a voice opposition. Furthermore almost all consonants have a phonologically distinct palatalized counterpart. As for the nasal and lateral dentals /n/ and /l/ there is an opposition not only to the respective palatalized phonemes /n^j/ and /l^j/, but also to the nasal and lateral palatals /ɲ/ and /ʎ/ (*mann* /man:/ ‘moon; month’, *mann'* /man^j/ ‘egg’, *mannj* /maɲ:/ ‘daughter in law’; *pāll*) /pa:l:/ ‘ball’, *māll'* /ma:l^j/ ‘juice’, *māllj* /ma:ʎ:/ ‘rust’). Note that the description of “semi-palatalization” of the nasal and plosive dentals, reproduced in the Russian linguistic literature on Kildin Saami (at least since Г. М. Ке́рт 1971), is the result of a miss-interpretation of the palatal-palatalized distinction, which is scarcely attested cross-linguistically (Rießler and Wilbur 2007; Кузьменко and Рислер 2012; Stadnik 2002).

Morphology The morphology in Kildin Saami is predominantly concatenative (almost exclusively suffixing). Some inflectional forms are marked by nonlinear morphemes, either consonant gradation (like in *kuess'k* : *kues'k* in the paradigm in Table 1) or vowel ablaut (like in *jēll'e* : *jill'e* in the paradigm in Table 2). Consonant gradation, vowel ablaut and other kinds of stem allomorphy occur also regularly as the result of paradigmatic morphophonological processes. Since most morphological features are coded by cumulative formatives and chains of more than two suffixes scarcely occur, Kildin Saami is characterized by much weaker agglutination than other Uralic languages.

Nouns in Kildin Saami belong to different inflectional classes and inflect for two numbers and 9 cases (cf. the paradigm in Table 1). Number and case marking is merged into portmanteau suffixes exhibiting a few syncretic forms. Number inflection is missing in essive and partitive.

Pronominal inflection resembles that of nouns. Note that a third number value, dual, characterizing the pronominal inflection in several other Saamic languages is

INFINITIVE		jēll'-e		vānn'cl-e	
		SG	PL	SG	PL
NONPAST	1	jāl-a	jēll'-ep'	vānn'cl-a	vānn'cl-ep'
	2	jāl-ak	jēll'-bedt'e	vānn'cl-ak	vānn'cl-ebpe
	3	jäll	jēll'-ev	vānn'cal	vānn'cl-ep'
	IMPERS	jēl'-et'		vānn'cl-et'	
PAST	1	jīll'-e	jīl'-em'	vānn'cl-e	vānn'cl-em'
	2	jīll'-ek'	jīl'-et'	vānn'cl-ek	vānn'cl-et'
	3	jīl'-e	jīll'-en'	vānn'cel'	vānn'cl-en'
	IMPERS	jīll'-eš'		vānn'cl-eš'	
CONDITIONAL	1	jāl-če	jāl-čep'	vānn'cl-ehče	vānn'cl-ehčep'
	2	jāl-ček'	jāl-čebp'e	vānn'cl-ehček'	vānn'cl-ehčet'
	3	jāl-ahč	jāl-čen'	vānn'cl-ahč	vānn'cl-ehčev
IMPERATIVE		jēl'	jēll'-e	vānn'cel'	vānn'cl-egke

Table 2: Finite inflection paradigms of the verbs *jēll'e* (North Saami *eallit*) ‘to live’ and *vānn'cle* (North Saami *vázzilit*) ‘to walk away’

missing. Kildin Saami has also lost the possessive inflection of nouns. The historical possessive suffixes, mostly the 1st person singular, occur only in a few lexicalized kinship nouns (e.g. *jānna* ‘my mother, mommy’).

Verbs in Kildin Saami belong to different inflectional classes and exhibit infinite and finite inflection, the latter with three moods, two tenses, two numbers and three persons. Tense, number and person marking is merged into portmanteau suffixes. Beside three personal inflections there is a fourth impersonal form in the indicative mood (*tārr'm jēl'et' šigtenn'e* ‘today one lives good’, *ēvvtel' jīll'eš' per'a* ‘in former times one lived better’; cf. also the paradigms in Table 2).

Note that a third number value, dual, characterizing the verbal inflection in most other Saamic languages is missing in Kildin Saami. Kildin Saami has also lost the potential mood inflection. The historical potential forms occur only with the verb ‘to be’ where they are used as future tense auxiliaries, e.g. *munn linnče puedt'e* ‘I’ll come’ (*linnče* POT:1SG ← *lihče* COND:1SG ← *lea* PRS:1SG ← *lijje* INF ‘to be’).

Derivational morphology is very rich, especially for verbs where it codes aktionsart, passive, diminutive and other features. The verb *vānn'cle* in Table 2 presents an example of a subitive verb derived from ← *vānn'ce* ‘to walk’.

Syntax Phrase structure is for the most part head-final, including the predominant occurrence of postpositions instead of prepositions and strict head-finality in noun phrases with noun, adjective, and pronoun modifiers. Relative clauses, however, follow the noun they modify. In the verb phrase a shift from SOV to SVO word order seems to be taking place.

Attributive adjectives do not agree with the modified noun (*šūrr puaz* ‘big reindeer

(SG), *šūrr pūdze* ‘big reindeer (PL)’, unlike pronominal and numeral modifiers, which show limited case agreement (*tedt puaz* ‘this reindeer’ *tenn pūdze* ‘of this reindeer (GEN.SG)’, *tenn pūdzahta* ‘without a/the reindeer (ABESS.SG)’). Another theoretically interesting feature in the morphosyntax of noun phrases is case-marking of nominals which have higher numerals or other quantifiers as determiners (*vidt pūdze* ‘five reindeer’, *jenne pūdzedt’e* ‘many reindeer’).

Like in all other Saami languages negation in Kildin Saami is expressed by means of an inflected negation auxiliary followed by the main verb in a special connegative form (*munn puada* ‘I come’, *munn 1SG emm NEG:1SG pued’* COME:CONNeg ‘I don’t come’).

History of research and standardization The first book written (partly) in Kildin Saami was the Gospel of Matthew published in a Cyrillic script by the Finnish linguist Arvid Genetz in 1878. Genetz translated the text from Russian with the help of Saami consultants. Genetz also wrote the first Kola Saami dictionary in 1891 based on his Bible translation and a few other collected texts. Even the first short grammatical description of Kildin Saami (written in Hungarian) by Halász (1883) is based on Genetz’ text collection. The first Kildin Saami school grammar (in Roman script) was written by Эндюковский (1937). T. I. Itkonen’s (1958) comparative Kola Saami dialect dictionary (written in phonemic transcription and with translations into Finnish and German) is the most comprehensive source for Kildin Saami vocabulary. The first comprehensive grammar of Kildin Saami was published by Г. М. Кеprt (1971). A Kildin Saami-Russian dictionary including a prescriptive grammatical sketch is Афанасьева et al. 1985, other bilingual dictionaries are Г. М. Кеprt 1986 and Sammallahti and Chvorostuchina 1991. The latter also includes a short appendix with the most basic inflectional paradigms.

A new Cyrillic orthography for Kildin Saami has been developed by a group of researchers, teachers and language activists since the 1980s. It is used, in different variants, in the three aforementioned dictionaries, in textbooks for elementary schools as well as in several published literary texts (Rießler 2013; Rießler 2014).

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