

Language variation in the revitalisation process

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Abstract

The revitalisation of the almost extinct Ume Saami language raises questions as to what norm to establish as the written standard language. Ume Saami is known from one printed description, which presents an idiolect in the south-eastern part of the language area. There is, however, unpublished archive material from nine Ume Saami varieties which reveals an extensive language variation. Two main dialects can be distinguished: an eastern, forest dialect and a western, mountain dialect. The latter group also includes the highly divergent variety of Ullisjaure. There are clear differences between these dialects in phonology, morphology and vocabulary. In this article it is argued that an Ume Sami standard language should be based on one phonological and one morphological system, preferably the eastern one where the last speakers can be found today. As to vocabulary, however, all of the collected material can be used to enrich the Ume Saami standard language.

Keywords: Saami languages, Ume Saami, language revitalisation, written standard, language variation, local varieties.

Ume Saami in the Saami chain of languages

Ume Saami, the language that I will be dealing with here, positions itself as the second-most southern in the Saami chain of languages. These languages are spoken in the northern parts of Scandinavia, Finland and on the Kola peninsula in Russia. For a language historian it is easy to see that all of the current Saami languages of today have developed from the same proto-language, but since all Saami cannot understand the Saami language of all other Saami, it is more correct to use the term 'Saami languages', not 'dialects'. Today, six different Saami written standard languages are used in different parts of the Saami area. These orthographies are not there just for fun, but are instead a consequence of the extensive differences in phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary that exist between the languages. As a matter of fact, the Saami languages present excellent examples of the difficulties connected with the creation of written standards.

Since all Saami are at least bilingual, it is difficult to give any exact figure of the total quantity of speakers. A reasonable guess could be around 50 000 persons. Northern areas cannot nourish large populations, so the number of Saami can be seen as an adaptation to their environment. In part, however, the number of Saami has also been affected by authority politics – as described below – and by the fact that many Saami are among those persons from northern Sweden who have moved south to make a living in the industrial cities of south and central Sweden. Many Saami have had difficulties in keeping up their first language when they live outside of this core area. Out of the Saami speakers, the largest group by far consists of those speaking North Saami – at least 75 % of the Saami speak this language – and, consequently, several Saami languages are at present represented by only a very few speakers.

One of the most threatened, almost extinct Saami languages is Ume Saami. The traditional Ume Saami language area is mainly situated on the Swedish side of the border between Norway and Sweden, and it is the language on the Swedish side that is reasonably well documented and described. That is also where the last speakers of the language can be found now – maybe some ten persons – and that is where there is also a movement for the revitalisation of the language.

Today, people in general associate the Saami with nomadising reindeer breeders. That way of life is, however, the result of a late development and of the intentional politics of the Government authorities. In older times, maybe up till the end of the eighteenth century, there was also a forest Saami culture, represented by a group of Saami equally as numerous as the mountain Saami (Larsson 2012:15-29). The economy of the forest Saami was primarily based on fishing, but they also hunted and kept small herds of reindeer. The forest Saami moved only within the forest area throughout the seasons, whereas the nomadising mountain Saami spent the summer up in the mountains in the west and the winter down in the forests, where the trees protected against snow and storms. Today, only fragments remain of the forest Saami culture – and it is best preserved in the area of the Ume Saami. The mountain Saami in the western part of this area (i.e., in the summertime) are, however, descendants of families speaking North Saami who were relocated to this area: during the second half of the nineteenth century Russia closed the border between Finland and Sweden, thereby preventing several North Saami groups from accessing their traditional winter lands on the Finnish side of the border. Therefore, considerable groups of North Saami speakers were moved south, for example, to the area of the Ume Saami. As a result of this process, hardly anybody speaks the old Ume Saami mountain dialect today.

The last speakers of Ume Saami are found in the forests in the eastern part of the area, and they represent the forest Saami culture. The Swedish language and culture are, however, totally dominant in this area. Even if Ume Saami seems to be on its way to extinction today, it was this very language that formed the basis of the most successful written standard language so far, the language that was used as the vehicle of Christian missionary work among the Saami of Sweden from the beginning of the eighteenth century. That language is, however, in many ways too remote from authentic Ume Saami to be used in a revitalisation today, although some orthographical principles of that language could be taken into consideration.

It must be emphasised that Ume Saami is not a language threatened in some – or most – domains and therefore in need of actions to strengthen its position, as was the case, for example, with North Saami at the end of the 1970s. Ume Saami is an almost extinct language, which, however, many people with a Saami background want to bring back to life again. In this way, its situation is similar to that of Manx Gaelic, the old, indigenous language on the Isle of Man. That language is dead, in the respect that there is no speaker who has learnt it from her or his parents or grandparents. But as a reaction against all well-off Englishmen settling on the island, the native population blew new life into the old language of the Isle of Man. Manx Gaelic was well documented and described, and today some 1500 persons regard themselves as speakers of this 'extinct' language (Todal 2008). As is well known, there are also similar examples from Australia.

Ume Saami printed sources and descriptions

The almost extinct Ume Saami language is scientifically documented in a dictionary by Wolfgang Schlachter (1958). This dictionary also contains a brief sketch of the grammar, as well as some texts and their German translation. The dictionary is based on the field notes of Schlachter, taken down in 1940. Within Saami and Finno-Ugric research, Schlachter's dictionary has become synonymous with the notion of Ume Saami: what is found in this dictionary exists in Ume Saami, what is missing does not exist in Ume Saami (cf., for example, Lehtiranta 1989:6). This unique, printed dictionary with its outline of grammar and texts has played an important role even within the revitalisation work. Nevertheless, the dictionary has a few basic deficiencies. At the end of the

Second World War, when Schlachter was staying with his parents in Dresden, part of his field notes were literally blowing in the wind. His parents managed to find some of them, but his dictionary still has some gaps that are not due to the special character of this dialect. The form *njualla*, for example, does not have the meaning 'arrow' in Schlachter's dictionary, a meaning that is attested in all other Saami languages and dialects, as well as in almost every other Uralic language. Other word-collections show that this meaning was, of course, common in Ume Saami too. Secondly – and more important – Schlachter's dictionary is based on interviews with one single individual, Lars Sjulsson, in Setsele outside the village of Malå in the south-eastern corner of the Ume Saami language area. So, Saami researchers have understood the language spoken by this particular individual, in the form it was documented in spring 1940 and published in the dictionary in 1958, as 'Ume Saami'. The dictionary has not even been supplemented with the word collections of K.B. Wiklund, taken down in the same parish in 1900 from another informant who lived some 10 kilometers south of Lars Sjulsson's farmstead.

The limited material obtainable in print and the strong traditions in Saami and Finno-Ugric linguistics have resulted in a situation where not even the delimitation of Ume Saami against surrounding Saami languages is clear. One single criterion – the gradation of consonants – has been regarded as decisive once the border was drawn between Ume Saami and the neighboring South Saami language to the south. The varieties in the villages Southern Tärna and Ullisjaure, spoken south of the Ume River, have until now been considered to belong to South Saami on the basis of this single criterion (cf., for example, Hasselbrink 1944:2, 13; Larsson 2012:177-179).

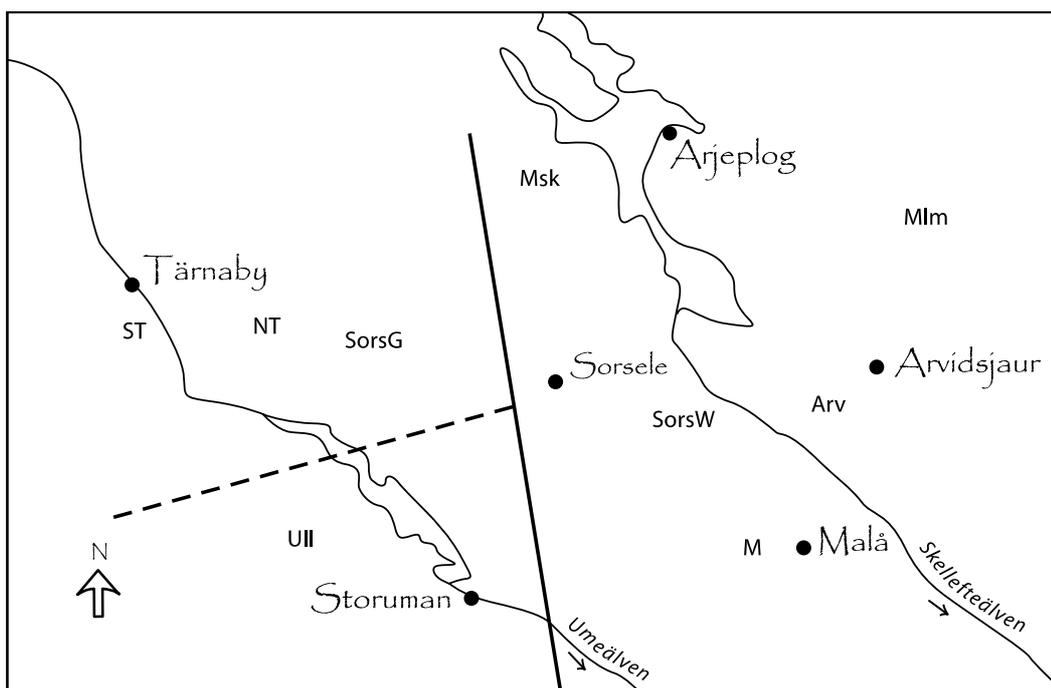


Figure 1. The nine varieties of Ume Saami and the dialect boundary (Map from Larsson 2012)

Ume Saami archive materials

Archives in Uppsala and Umeå contain collections of field notes that offer abundant information about the nine Ume Saami varieties in this investigation, including the last two mentioned. When more criteria are taken into consideration, it is obvious that the idea of Southern Tärna and Ullisjaure as parts of South Saami is, in fact, untenable.

The existing archive material puts us in a better position when it comes to our knowledge about Ume Saami: if Schlachter’s dictionary contains some 5000 words, the total material amounts to ten times that much when the archive collections are taken into consideration. There are also descriptions of the declension and conjugation in three varieties that are more extensive than Schlachter’s sketch from Malå, namely from Malmesjaure (Mlm), Maskaure (Msk) and Ullisjaure (Ull) (Figure 1). All this material from other varieties than Malå had, however, not been made use of before the publication of my monograph (Larsson 2012), nor was it known to the Ume Saami of today.

The Ume Saami archive material shows considerable variation, which I have treated in an investigation (Larsson 2012). The work on that book raised the issue of the relationship between language variation and the revitalisation of an almost extinct language that I discuss here. With such rich material from nine varieties at hand, Ume Saami language revitalisation does not necessarily have to be based on an idiolect in one corner of the language area, even if – as a published dictionary – it is well known and traditionally holds a strong position among researchers. The language variation documented raises several questions of principle that I hope and believe will be relevant not only in the vicinity of the North Pole, but also in other parts of the world where minorities strive to revitalise their language.

The lexical collections allow us to observe a series of differences in phonology. As a rule, these differences systematically divide the Ume Saami area into a western, generally mountain Saami and an eastern, forest Saami area (table 1). The differences might seem small, but they are examples of systematic distinctions dividing the Ume Saami area, and the same variation can often be found in other parts of the Saami language area as well. Furthermore, these differences often connect further to the surrounding Saami languages to the north and to the south of the Ume Saami area. As a rule, the western Ume Saami varieties seem to agree with South Saami, and the eastern varieties with Arjeplog Saami to the north and northwest.

Table 1. Examples of phonological differences between western and eastern Ume Saami

West	East	Meaning
/rr/: <i>ùòrrät</i>	/δδ/: <i>òδδēt</i>	‘sleep’
/r+C/: <i>müerhkie</i>	/θ+C/: <i>muöθkē</i>	‘a distance along rapids or a lake where you have to carry your boat’
/ln/: <i>süellnie</i>	/ltn/: <i>süölnē</i>	‘dew’
/VV+nasalC/: <i>jämmēt</i>	/VV+pm/: <i>jàpmēt</i>	‘die’
/jεε-/: <i>jeänā</i>	/εε-/: <i>eεnū</i>	‘(big) river’

There are examples of a similar split of the Ume Saami language area within morphology as well, but in this case we do not have as much material at our disposal. As mentioned above, when it comes to morphology only four varieties have been described and information about the remaining varieties can only be picked out of the lexical collections, where some case-forms can occasionally be excerpted from the example clauses that are sometimes given. The ending of the accusative singular is one example of such a split, having *-p* in the west and *-w* in the east. The areal distribution is almost identical to the division in the phonology examples in Table 1: the ending in the east coincides with that in the Arjeplog and Lule Saami languages to the north, and the ending in the west with that in the neighboring South Saami language. The morphological variation is, however, not restricted to cases where the area is split into two parts. In Ullisjaure one case form – the illative meaning ‘into something’ – has developed in a unique way in the

singular of some stem types (Larsson 2010). This form has no correspondences in other Ume Saami varieties or in the neighboring Saami languages. In a similar way the eastern forest variety of Malmesjaure has a form in the conditional mood without correspondences either in the rest of the Ume Saami varieties, or in the neighboring Arjeplog Saami (Larsson 2012:136). So, if the obtainable material is reliable, the speakers of the Ullisjaure variety used a unique illative form, and the forest Saami in Malmesjaure were the only ones to use that particular form in the conditional mood. One wonders about the kind of extra-linguistic conditions that allowed that kind of variation.

In this connection, it should be added that some researchers have expressed the view that South Saami is characterised by an extensive individual variation that could even be taken as a sign of the decline of the language (Bergsland 1946:IX; Hasselbrink 1944:7). My own investigation into Ume Saami achieved the opposite result: even if one single informant in the field notes represented each one of the varieties, the varieties seem (to have been) steady local systems. This result could be obtained by taking the biography of each informant into careful consideration.

The Ullisjaure variety and its closest neighbor to the west, Southern Tärna, provide an illustrative example. As it is a forest Saami village in the western part of the area, Ullisjaure holds a position of its own. This can be seen both in vocabulary and in morphology. Many words are unique to Ullisjaure and in Ullisjaure morphology there is, as mentioned above, one allomorphic form in the illative singular that does not have any correspondences in other Ume Saami varieties (Larsson 2012:166-168). The neighboring variety of Southern Tärna has, in contrast, the normal Ume Saami illative singular forms. As to vocabulary, Southern Tärna is closest to Northern Tärna and the mountain variety of Sorsele. In other words, Southern Tärna mostly agrees with the other mountain varieties; the variety of the forest village Ullisjaure differs from the other three western varieties. This is quite remarkable, considering that the informant in Southern Tärna, Sara Andersdotter, was born in Ullisjaure and was, in fact, a relative of the Ullisjaure informant, Thomas Olofsson; she was his maternal aunt. She had, however, gotten married in Southern Tärna and had been living there for 43 years when Moosberg interviewed her. Consequently, she must have adapted her language to that of her new home village during these years. If the individual variation had been extensive (in other words: tolerated), she would not have changed her language.

The fact that forms in the western varieties coincide with those of South Saami and that forms of eastern varieties coincide with those in the languages to the north and northwest should not be interpreted in such a way that the notion of Ume Saami's existence is fictional. There are solid criteria uniting all the nine Ume Saami varieties, while at the same time distinguishing them from the neighboring Saami languages to the north and south.

One of the most obvious among these criteria is a phonological one, namely the development of a short **i* in the first syllable. In the Saami languages north of Ume Saami this **i* has developed into a short *a*, whereas it has been preserved as a closed vowel, *i*, in South Saami. In both cases the representation is independent of the context. In Ume Saami, however, the development of **i* depends on the phonetic context, namely on the stem-vowel in the following syllable, which results in a double representation of **i*, either as *a* (as in Saami languages north of Ume Saami) or as *i* (as in the Saami language south of Ume Saami; cf. table 2). The Ume Saami examples in Table 2 are taken from the forest variety of Sorsele, but the representation of **i* is identical within all the nine varieties in my investigation (Larsson 2012:110). This double representation of the old **i* is unique to Ume Saami.

Table 2. Representation of Proto-Saami *i in the first syllable

Meaning	South Saami	Ume Saami	Arjeplog Saami	Lule Saami
'name'	<i>n'ïmme</i>	<i>namma</i>	<i>namma</i>	<i>namma</i>
'blueberry'	<i>sirrie</i>	<i>sirrē</i>	<i>sarrie</i>	<i>sarre</i>

The vocabulary of Ume Saami also displays a similar east-west division. In my extensive investigation into Ume Saami language variation (Larsson 2012), I selected those words out of the nine varieties that show a considerable formal variation in the Ume Saami varieties. By considerable variation I mean, for example, the use of another word stem, not minor phonetic variations or the use of different derivational suffixes. Words that are identical in form and meaning all over the Ume Saami area (and maybe even in other Saami languages) certainly cannot bear witness to the grouping of varieties *within* Ume Saami, and all such words were consequently left out of the investigation. Words displaying internal Ume Saami variation can, however, be used as criteria when establishing the dialect groups of this language. To exemplify this, two cases can be used: the word for 'moon' is *mànnū* all over the Ume Saami area (and north of it), whereas there are two different word-forms for 'to answer' – *vasstēdit* and *svòrrat* – that are used in different Ume Saami varieties. Only words of the latter type can help us establish variety-groups and subdialects in Ume Saami.

Some of the nine varieties show a high number of converging forms in my vocabulary sample. First of all, it turns out that the eastern villages of Malmesjaure, Malå, Maskaure and the forest variety of Sorsele show a high degree of correspondence. Almost 60 % of the varying words are identical in these four varieties. Malå is then represented by Schlachter's dictionary and completing words from Wiklund's field notes. This means that the words registered in Schlachter's dictionary (1958) are, in fact, not idiolectal, but can be taken as representing eastern forest Saami. The following group of four consists of the four western varieties, and their lower degree of coinciding forms – some 40 % – is explained by the variety of Ullisjaure, which often differs from the other three western varieties (Figure 2).

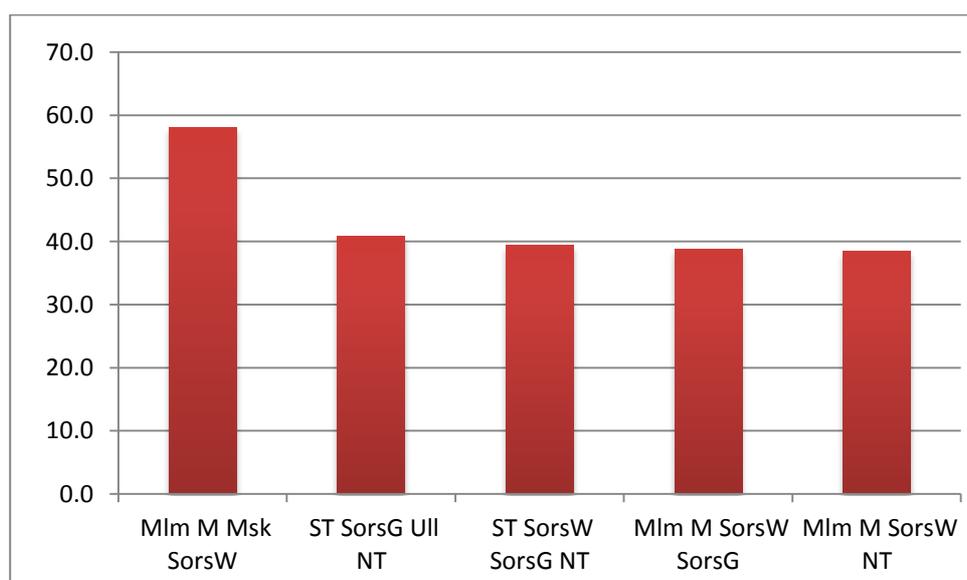


Figure 2: Varieties grouped according to number of converging words

So, a lot of words unite the forest Saami varieties in the villages of Malå, Malmesjaure, Maskaure and Sorsele. Arvidsjaur, situated between the villages of Malå and Malmesjaure, also belongs to this eastern group, but the different character of the field notes from Arvidsjaur makes it difficult to ascertain its position with the same degree of certainty.

In the same way, the western mountain varieties share a lot of words. Ullisjaure was a forest Saami village in the western part of the area (fig. 1) and this fact is reflected in the language of the village. This variety has its place somewhere in between: it has a lot of words of its own but it basically follows the western pattern, for example, when it comes to phonology. The material from Ullisjaure is very extensive indeed, depending both on the history of the field work and on the fact that the informant, Thomas Olofsson, obviously was a very knowledgeable person.

Language variation and standard language

Ume Saami presents a rather clear-cut example of a language variation that causes problems in a language revitalisation process.

- There is one published description of Ume Saami, with high prestige among researchers and among the Ume Saami themselves – but it presents an idiolect in the south-eastern corner of the Ume Saami area.
- The archive material shows that there were two main dialects in Ume Saami: a western mountain dialect and an eastern forest dialect. Both are well documented, especially as far as phonology and vocabulary are concerned.
- The old western dialect has, however, no speakers today. The reindeer breeders in that part of the area are descendants of North Saami speakers.

The rich material from Ullisjaure represents an Ume Saami variety, not a south Saami one, as was maintained earlier. So, Lars Sjulsson, the excellent informant of Malå, was not the only one who really mastered the language. There are several good informants hidden in the archive material. How then should one deal with, for example, the material collected from Thomas Olofsson in Ullisjaure, who was an equally good informant but represented a highly divergent variety, not least when it comes to vocabulary? Which language form should be preferred in the language revitalisation work: the eastern one of Lars Sjulsson in Malå, the western one of Thomas Olofsson in Ullisjaure, or maybe a third language form?

The fundamental question here is: if you want to revitalise an (almost) extinct language, is it better to strive for a coherent standard? In that case, the situation of Ume Saami could be seen as ideal: there is one well-documented idiolect generally regarded as 'the real form of Ume Saami' both by researchers and by the Ume Saami themselves. Would it therefore be appropriate to let the field notes from other villages rest in peace in the archives and make Lars Sjulsson's language the Ume Saami standard?

The revitalisation process of North, Lule and South Saami clearly demonstrates that one single written standard is needed. The Saami have judged – and rightly so – that only such a language can achieve an official status as a minority language and then be used in the official name forms on maps and road signs and in teaching materials for schools. In the case of Ume Saami there is no alternative to the establishing of one standard language given the extremely low number of speakers today and the fact that they – to my knowledge – all represent the eastern dialect of Ume Saami. It is characteristic of the present situation that – as far as I know – nobody

speaks the variety of the village Ullisjaure, the Ume Saami variety that has the richest documentation in the archive material.

Even if the western dialect is well documented in the archive material, no speakers today use it. That could be seen as an argument to leave it out of a new Ume Saami standard language. In principle there are no arguments against letting the dialect of only one part of a language area form the basis of a written standard. The old Finnish written language was based on the southwestern dialect around Turku, which was the centre of the bishopric and the administration (Laanest 1982:58). In the development of written Italian, the language of Toscana played a very important role (Söhrman 2006:118). In the development of the written standard of Swedish, the language of Stockholm was more important than, for example, that of western Sweden (Wessén 1975:114 ff.). In a similar way, Malå in the south-eastern part of the Ume Saami language area could be made the basis of written Ume Saami, especially since Schlachter's dictionary can be supplemented with Wiklund's material collected in the same parish some 10 kilometers south of Sjulsson's home and 40 years earlier. Therefore the variety of Malå is probably the best documented one. One problem would, however, remain, namely the fact that there is only a sketch of the morphology in Schlachter's Malå dictionary, and Wiklund does not present anything on Malå morphology either. There are, on the other hand, better descriptions of the morphology of two other forest Saami varieties, Malmesjaure and Maskauere, which could serve as a basic grammar of the eastern Ume Saami dialect and standard language.

On the other hand, a new Ume Saami standard language is a project that should engage as many persons in the local population as possible. Therefore it would be appropriate to let such a language embrace the entire Ume Saami area and include the variation that once characterised its language. This variation is documented in the material of the archives, but not all documented variation should be accepted in the standard language. Unique forms, like the illative singular form of Ullisjaure or the forms of the conditional mood in Malmesjaure, must of course be left out. From the point of view of language history, it is interesting that such forms are attested, and if some speaker were to turn up using them spontaneously, that would be an even greater pleasure – however unlikely that might be. Nevertheless, all attested variation should certainly not be introduced into the standard language. A written language is not an archive.

The low number of Ume Saami speakers both simplifies and complicates matters. However, one must constantly remember that a language revitalisation like this one totally depends on the support and enthusiasm of the local Ume Saami population. There is no school system – at least not yet – that could back Ume Saami in a way similar to how the majority language is supported.

When there is a long tradition of written language and a school system teaching – and thus supporting – the standard, there is a tendency that the written language threatens the dialect variation, the natural variation of a spoken language. For example, in Swedish, one can observe pronunciations – especially by young people – that are clearly influenced by the orthography. In Saami, it is the other way round: the dialect variation threatens the common written standard. The communities of Saami speakers are small and local, and therefore it is difficult for the native speakers to accept written forms that they do not recognise from their own spoken Saami. The differences of this kind can be rather conspicuous. In the North Saami written standard, the conditional mood is characterised by the element *-š-* as in eastern dialects, but in the western dialects of North Saami, for example in northern Sweden, there is a totally different conditional element, *-l-* (cf. east *manašin* vs. west *manalin* 'I would go'). It takes quite a lot of self-confidence for a speaker of a minority language to accept the alien forms of the written language without

giving up the authentic forms in their spoken language. Such problems have made teachers in Saami schools in northern Sweden write the local words on small pieces of paper that they then glue into the readers to replace the non-local words (Jansson 2005:113 f.). That certainly weakens the position of the common standard, but at the same time it illustrates the feeling of uncertainty vis-à-vis their own native language.

There are also some other circumstances that can cause an insecurity of this kind. The ending of the accusative singular, for example, is, as mentioned, *-w* in the eastern and *-p* in the western part of the language area. Since the last speakers represent the eastern dialect, which is also the dialect in Schlachter's dictionary, there seem to be plenty of arguments for using the ending *-w* in the standard language. Now, the problem is that the ending of the western dialect is the same as in the neighboring South Saami, and the ending *-w* in the eastern dialects is the same as in neighboring Arjeplog and Lule Saami north and north-west of Ume Saami. The choice of ending in the standard language can thus be taken as a signal as to which relationship is most fundamental: the South Saami or the Arjeplog Saami one. This might certainly sound like hair-splitting, but the creation of a new Ume Saami written standard has for a very long time been blocked by the question of whether it should be based on the orthographic principles of South Saami or on the principles of the Saami languages to the north. Among scholars there is also a discussion, originating long ago yet still ongoing, about the position of Ume Saami: is it closer to its neighbours to the south or to those to the north? In such a context, even the question of the accusative ending can develop into a major issue.

A written standard language can, without any problems, contain elements from different parts of the language area, especially when surrounding factors favour a mixture. The old Finnish literary language was, as mentioned above, based on the dialect around the bishopric and administration centre of Turku. During the nineteenth century an opposition grew against the western character of the written language, but at the same time this language had a high prestige since it was used in the Bible and other religious literature. Elias Lönnrot, the creator of the internationally famous epos Kalevala, was actively working for an increased number of eastern elements in the written standard, and thanks to his and many others' work there came an end to what is known as 'murteiden taistelu', 'the battle of the dialects'. Today western and eastern elements stand side by side in Finnish texts.

One must remember, however, that in the case of Finnish there were several factors at work, among others the unquestioned authority of Lönnrot and an emerging school system in Finnish. Above all, Finnish – the language of the common people – became a very important vehicle for the national awakening in Finland and it played a basic role in the struggle for national independence which was achieved in 1917. The situation of Ume Saami is radically different: there is no Ume Saami speaking country people to rely on, there is no native intelligentsia comparable to that of Finland in the nineteenth century, and there are no plans for a politically independent Ume Saami nation. What there is, is an ardent interest in revitalising the old language of the area in order to strengthen the identity of the native population and let the history and culture of the area become visible.

Suggested steps to be taken

How, then, could a written Ume Saami standard language be formed to be used in the revitalisation? First of all, it must be underlined that such a process must be controlled by the Ume Saami themselves, that is to say, those people of the area who are descendants of Ume Saami

speakers and feel that they have been deprived of their language. Their enthusiasm cannot be replaced by benevolent advice from the outside; to support a highly endangered language, like Ume Saami, all good forces must, however, unite. This is an experience from, for example, the revitalisation of North Saami. If I may count myself among the good forces, I would recommend something like the following for the written standard in this case.

It is important to let speakers of a minority language understand that their own vernacular is not less correct than the written standard. In spoken language, all variation that is natural to the speaker should, of course, be used and encouraged.

When it comes to creating a written Ume Saami standard, it seems appropriate to make a choice between the eastern and the western phonological systems. The last speakers represent the eastern forest dialect, and therefore it seems reasonable to sacrifice the different sound system of the western mountain dialects. It is probably good language politics to ignore the typically western pronunciation [rr] for the /δδ/ in the east. Hardly any speaker would feel offended.

In the same way, and with the same arguments, the morphological system could be based on the eastern varieties, since there are more complete descriptions of declension and conjugation in the eastern varieties. As to syntax, we know of very few differences in the Ume Saami area, which is – at least in part – a consequence of the limited amount of texts.

In one respect, however, an Ume Saami written language could make use of the entire potential which is documented, namely in the case of vocabulary. It would indeed be unnecessarily orthodox to limit the vocabulary of Ume Saami to that registered in Schlachter's dictionary and other eastern documentations. The richest vocabulary can be found in the field-notes based on the information from Thomas Olofsson in Ullisjaure – who at the same time represented the most divergent variety of Ume Saami. A few examples will illustrate this fact.

The informants from the eastern villages provide one word with the meaning 'to writhe', either *streučatit* or *moššarit*. Thomas Olofsson, however, uses both words; *moššarit* is used for adults and *streučatit* is used for children in pain. In the eastern Saami varieties one word, *sìδδū*, is used for the meanings 'side, flank', but Thomas Olofsson makes a distinction and gives two different words: *sairrū* denoting the side of a human being and *irht* denoting the flank of an animal. Introducing words from this divergent variety – adapted, of course, to the eastern phonological system – into a written Ume Saami would increase the expressiveness and variation of the standard language, and at the same time it would maintain part of the cultural heritage of Ume Saami for the future.

Summing up, one could say that the natural variation of a language complicates the revitalisation process, since it becomes necessary to make a choice. In that process, the phonological and morphological variation has to decrease in the written standard, but words are not necessarily endangered in the revitalisation of a language.

Abbreviations

Arv = Arvidsjaur

M = Malå

Mlm = Malmesjaure

Msk = Maskare

NT = Northern Tärna

SorsG = Mountain variety of Sorsele

SorsW = Forest variety of Sorsele

ST = Southern Tärna

Ull = Ullisjaure

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