

Avertives in the Saami languages of Finland: synchronic and diachronic remarks

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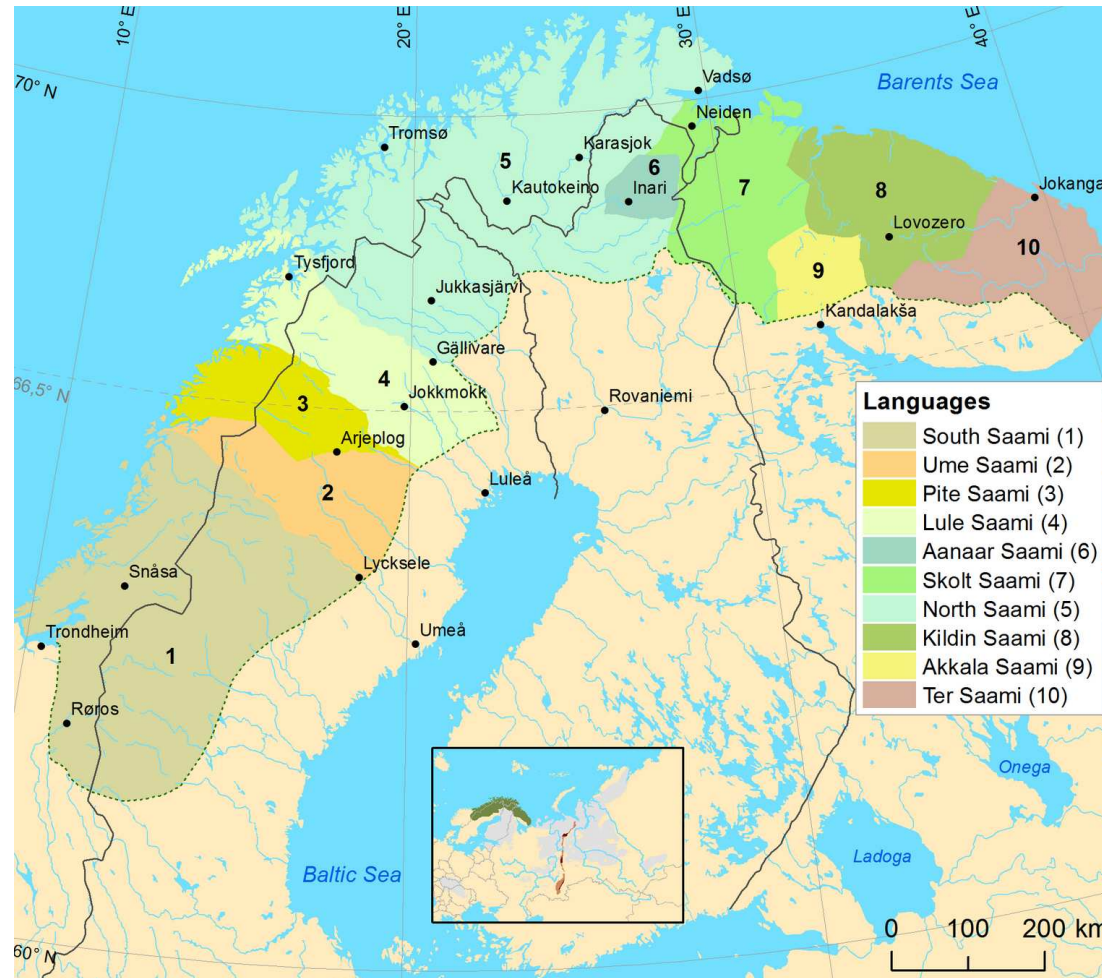
Contents of the talk

- a few words on the Saami languages
- Part I: the avertives I was going to focus on
- Part II: the avertives I ended up focusing on

The Uralic languages (Rantanen et al. 2022)

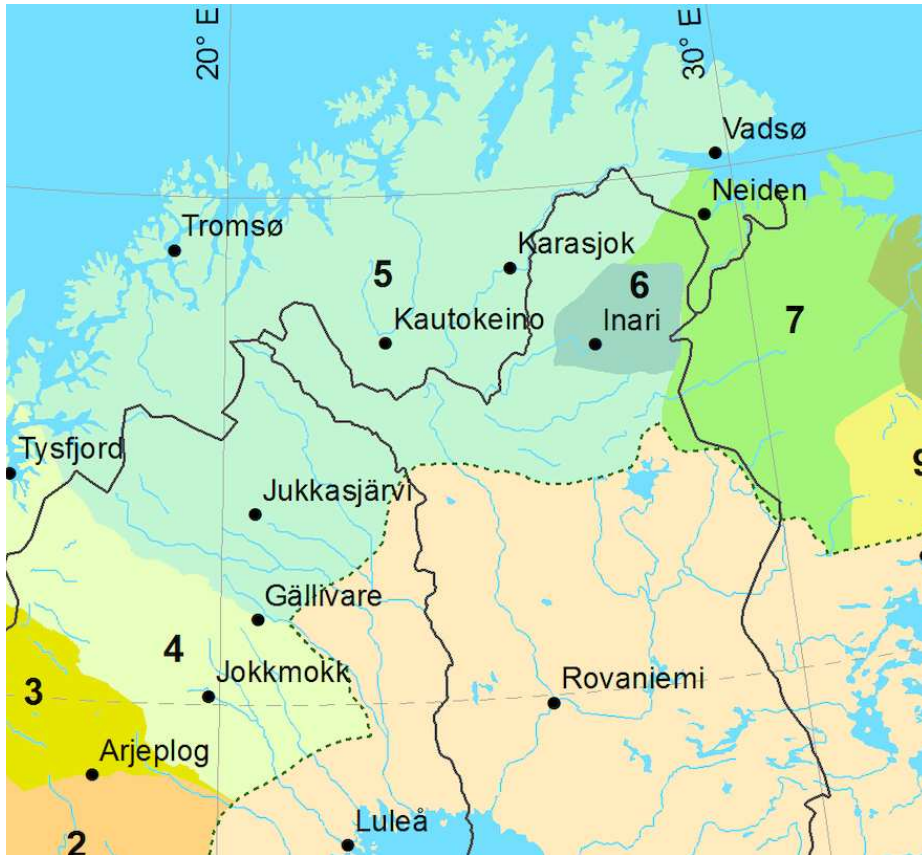


The Saami languages (Rantanen et al. 2022)



The Saami languages are as diverse as the Romance languages

The Saami languages of Finland



5 = North Saami,
~20,000 speakers

6 = Aanaar Saami,
~400 speakers

7 = Skolt Saami,
~250 speakers

Virtually all speakers are bilingual in a majority language.

Part I

The avertives I was going to focus on

Part I: the avertives I was going to focus on

- Avertive expressions in Saami have been barely studied.
- Apparently the only avertives that have gained special attention are the secondary functions of a periphrastic TAM construction that usually functions as a perfect conditional ('I would have fallen' instead of 'I nearly fell').

The conditional mood as an avertive?

- All Saami languages of Finland have a conditional mood, with synthetic present tense forms and periphrastic perfect tense equivalents.
- In spite of the different origins of the ‘be’ verbs in Saami and Finnic, the Saami conditional is mostly analogous to the Finnic (Finnish) one.

Skolt Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

mon joora-m 'I fall'
I fall-1SG

mon joor-čě-m ‘I would fall’
I fall-COND-1SG

<i>mon</i>	<i>leä-m</i>	<i>joorrâ-m</i>	'I have fallen'
I	be-1SG	fall-PST.PTCP	

mon le'čče-m joorrâ-m 'I would have fallen'
I be.COND-1SG fall-PST.PTCP

Skolt Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

<i>mon joora-m</i>			'I fall'
I	fall-1SG		
<i>mon joor-če-m</i>			'I would fall'
I	fall-COND-1SG		
<i>mon leä-m</i>	<i>joorrâ-m</i>		'I have fallen'
I	be-1SG	fall-PST.PTCP	
<i>mon le'čče-m</i>	<i>joorrâ-m</i>		'I would have fallen'
I	be.COND-1SG	fall-PST.PTCP	
<i>mon le'jje-m</i>	<i>joorrâ-d</i>		'I would have fallen'
I	be.PST-1SG	fall-INF	

Skolt Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

- Curiously, almost all Saami languages have two possibilities to form a perfect conditional, with seemingly no semantic differences:

mon le'čče-m joorrâ-m 'I would have fallen'

I be.COND-1SG fall-PST.PTCP

mon le'jje-m joorrâ-d 'I would have fallen'

I be.PST-1SG fall-INF

Skolt Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

- However, it has been noted that in Skolt Saami, the “Perfect Conditional II” (be.PST + V-INF) can also have avertive use.
- The functional distance between the perfect conditional and avertive is often small.
- Curiously, a morphosyntactically analogous construction in Finnish is the default avertive only.

Skolt Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

<i>mon</i>	<i>le'čče-m</i>	<i>joorrâ-m</i>	'I would have fallen' (Finnish)
<i>minä</i>	<i>olisi-n</i>	<i>kaatu-nut</i>	
I	be.COND-1SG	fall-PST.PTCP	

<i>mon</i>	<i>le'jje-m</i>	<i>joorrâ-d</i>	'I would have fallen'
I	be.PST-1SG	fall-INF	

<i>mon</i>	<i>le'jje-m</i>	<i>joorrâ-d</i>	'I nearly fell' (Finnish)
<i>minä</i>	<i>oli-n</i>	<i>kaatu-a</i>	
I	be.PST-1SG	fall-INF	

Skolt Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

- I was going to focus on the perfect conditional in order to learn more about its occasional avertive use and the relation of the construction to its Finnish analogue with purely avertive functions, since this is really interesting.
- Frankly, I do not have that many novel findings, but the search must continue.
- How did these develop? Which was first, where?

Skolt Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

- The Skolt Saami avertives have been attested since the early 20th century (Saukkonen 1965).
- In spite of very large corpora, no obvious avertive conditionals in North Saami.
- As for **Aanaar Saami**, avertive-like conditional constructions only in a fixed expression ‘almost did not believe one’s eyes’ (Niinemägi 2023)

Aanaar Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

Aanaar Saami

- a. *Sun ij lam oskođ čolmijdis, mut tuotâhân tot*
 3SG NEG.3SG BE.PST.CNG believe.INF eye.PL.ACC.POSS.3 but true.PTL DEM
vissâ lâi
 probably BE.PST.3SG
 ‘He didn’t believe (~ wouldn’t have believed) his eyes, but yet, it was prob-
 ably true’ (SIKOR)
- b. *Já ko poottim kirdemkiädán, jem lam*
 and when come.PST.1SG airport.SG.ILL NEG.1SG be.PST.CNG
čolmijdân oskođ.
 eye.PL.ACC.POSS.1 believe.INF
 ‘And when I came to the airport, I didn’t believe (~ wouldn’t have
 believed) my eyes.’ (SIKOR)

(Niinemägi 2023)

Aanaar Saami conditional mood as an avertive?

Finnish

- a. *En ollut uskoa silmiäni, mutta*
 NEG.1SG be.PST.CNG believe.INF eye.PL.PART.POSS.1SG but
tottahan se oli.
 true.SG.PART.PTL DEM be.PST.3SG
 ‘I (almost) didn’t believe my eyes, but yet, it was true.’ (fiTenTen14)
- b. *Kun tulimme perille, en ollut uskoa*
 when come.PST.1PL to_the_destination NEG.1SG be.PST.CNG believe.INF
silmiäni!
 EYE.PL.PART.POSS.1SG
 ‘When we got there, I (almost) didn’t believe my eyes!’ (fiTenTen14)

(Niinemägi 2023)

Part II

The avertives I ended up focusing on

Avertive adverb in Skolt Saami

- Even less attention has been paid to the avertive adverbs or particles such as the following:

Siõmmnast jiõm joorrâm.

almost NEG.1SG fall-PST.CNG

‘I almost fell’; “I almost did not fall”

Avertive adverb in Skolt Saami

- At first sight, *siõmmnast* + Neg looks like one of the many calques from the neighboring Russian:

Siõmmnast jiõm joorrâm.

almost NEG.1SG fall-PST.CNG

‘I almost fell’; “I almost did not fall”

Ja jedva/čut’ ne upal.

I almost NEG fall.PST.SG.M

Avertive adverb in Skolt Saami

- Most of the Saami languages west of Skolt Saami seem to express avertivity with similar adverbs but without negation:

Skolt Saami *Siõmmnast jiõm joorrâ-m.*
 almost NEG.1SG fall-PST.CNG
 ‘I almost fell’; “I almost did not fall”

North Saami *Mun measta gahččen.*
 I almost fall.PST.1SG

Avertive adverb in Skolt Saami

- Russian-like phenomena in Skolt Saami could easily be dismissed as recent Russian influence.
- a more careful examination of avertives reveals that surprisingly similar constructions can be found in all three Saami languages of Finland.
- Similar phenomena are found in Finnish as well.

Avertive adverb in Aanaar Saami

- Aanaar Saami *uccást* ‘almost’ is also – or at least has been – used with negative verb phrases:

Párnááh lijjii kale pevhištum já
 child.PL be.PST.3PL really frighten.PST.PTCP and

uccást iä čičäruškyede.
 almost NEG.3PL start.crying.CNG

‘The children were really frightened and almost start(ed) crying.’

Avertive adverbs in Aanaar and North Saami

- Aanaar Saami *uccást* ‘almost’ has a cognate in the neighboring North Saami (*uhtes*, *uhces*):

<i>Uhtes eai</i>	<i>duššan</i>	<i>oktii</i>
almost NEG.3PL	perish.PST.CNG	once

<i>go</i>	<i>fanas</i>	<i>gopmánii.</i>
when	boat	capsize-PST.3SG

‘Once they almost perished when their boat capsized.’

Avertive adverbs in Aanaar and North Saami

- Aanaar Saami *uccást* ‘almost’ and North Saami *uhtes*, *uhces* seem to be derived from the adjective *ucce/uhcci* ‘small’.

Avertive adverbs in North Saami

- In North Saami, there is one more avertive adverb apparently based on the interrogative pronominal stem *go(a)-*, usually in the form *goasii* or *gosii*.
- It appears that contemporary speakers seldom think of *goasii* or *gosii* as containing the negation verb 3SG form *ii*, as if preceded by *goas* ‘when’ or *gos* ‘where’.

Avertive adverbs in North Saami

- Occasionally, also other formations with an amalgamated negation verb occur:

Maŋŋá konseartta nuorra nieidda-t
 after concert young girl-PL

goaseai fallet Hoela.
 nearly.(NEG.)3PL attack.CNG Hoel.ACC

‘Young girls almost attacked Hoel after the concert.’

Avertive adverbs in North Saami

- Occasionally, also other formations with an amalgamated negation verb occur:

Oktii dilli lei nu heittot ahte
 once condition be.PST.3SG so bad COMP

goasⁱⁿ jámálgan gáhta ala.
 nearly.(NEG.)1SG faint.PST.CNG street.GEN onto.

‘I was so ill once that I almost fainted on the street.’

Part III

The Finnish avertives I ended up focusing on

The Finnish avertives I ended up focusing on

- Finally, North Saami *goasii*, *goasin* etc. made me notice an apparently obsolete avertive construction in Eastern Finnish dialects.
- As a consequence, I can also suggest a previously unnoticed etymology for the Finnish (general, not particularly avertive) adverb *miltei* ‘almost’.

The Finnish avertives I ended up focusing on

- Otherwise a forgotten curiosity in the Dictionary of Finnish Dialects (SMS), the following examples from Karelian and Savo dialects seem to be etymologically analogous to North Saami *goasii*:

Miltei silimään sattunna
 almost(.NEG.3SG) eye.ILL hit.PST.CNG
 ‘It [a stone] almost hit my eye.’ (Ilomantsi)

The Finnish avertives I ended up focusing on

- Today's Finnish speakers hardly see the negation verb *ei* (NEG.3SG) in *miltei* (< *miltä ei*), but it seems to have occurred in other forms as well:¹

milt**en* ***kuatunt *ämpäri* *kans*
 almost.**NEG.1SG** fall.PST.CNG bucket.GEN with
 ‘I almost fell with the bucket (on a slippery road).’
 (Kaukola)

¹ Apparently the second attestation of *miltei*, Ganander (1787) spells the expression as two words: <milt ej> ‘nästan’.

Conclusion



Spä'sseb! Takkâ! Giitu!