

Similarity, equality and the like in North Saami

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The presentation will discuss various linguistic expressions of similarity, equality and certain related meanings in North Saami, the most widely spoken language of the Saami branch of the Uralic language family. As with many other aspects of the grammar, the expressions of similarity and equality in North Saami make the language appear morphosyntactically quite close to the language type known as Standard Average European (SAE), in a way belonging to the same northern periphery of the SAE area as the related Finnic languages such as Finnish and Estonian. The North Saami equative constructions are largely in line with the Scandinavian and Finnic data discussed by Haspelmath & Buchholz (1998: 293–295).

On the other hand, the geographical position of the Saami languages and especially the current geopolitical position of North Saami has given the language a unique position on the typological map of Europe, as one part of the language community is heavily influenced by – and bilingual in – Finnish (Uralic), whereas the major part lives under the constant influence of Norwegian and Swedish (Indo-European). As a consequence, the similative constructions include variation between the preposition-like (SAE) and postpositional (Uralic) similative markers as seen in (1a) and (1b), respectively:

- (1) a. *Don hálat dego Máret.*
2SG speak.2SG like Máret
- b. *Don hálat Máreha láhkai.*
2SG speak.2SG Máret.GEN like
'You speak like Máret.'

As markers of roles phrases or functives (Creissels 2013), the Saami languages traditionally have a specific morphological case, the essive (2a). The essive is currently being replaced by the similative preposition (2b) under the influence of the Scandinavian *som* with similar functions:

- (2) a. *Mun dajan dán du áhččín.*
1SG say.1SG this.ACC 2SG.GEN father.ESS
'I am saying this as your father.'
- b. *Mun dajan dán dego du áhčči.*
1SG say.1SG this.ACC as/like 2SG.GEN father
'I am saying this as/like your father.'

Similar variation between synthetic and analytic strategies is further seen among expressions for comparison of inequality, and even comparison of equality. Certain adjectives denoting physical properties have special equative forms that, not unlike comparative adjectives and postpositions such as *láhkai*, take genitive complements:

- (3) a. *Luossa lei seamma guhkki go fanas, dahje goit guhkit go mun.*
salmon be.PST.3SG same long STD boat or at.least long.CMPV STD 1SG
- b. *Luossa lei fatnasa guhku, dahje goit mu guhkit.*
salmon be.PST.3SG boat.GEN long.EQU or at.least 1SG.GEN long.CMPV
'The salmon was as long as the boat, or at least longer than me.'

The postpositional similative marker *láhkai* (1b) with its transparent origin in the illative case form of *láhki* 'way, manner' (→ *láhkai* 'in the manner of') is also occasionally used with a purposive meaning 'for', and has ultimately taken a rather unusual grammaticalization path to a marker (*-nláhkai*) of non-finite clauses with semantic functions as wide as similarity, pretending and purpose (4):

- (4) *Molso juvllaid dálvvi láhkai ja gárvodetne bivvanláhkai.*
change.1DU tire.PL.ACC winter.GEN like and dress.1DU withstand.cold.CVB.SIM
'We change tires for the winter and dress to keep warm.'

The presentation aims to contribute to our general understanding of the semantic notions of similarity and equality by mapping the synchronic and diachronic network of the above expressions in an indigenous minority language at the crossroads of the traditional usage of the language and the modern-day interference of two rather different types of majority languages that are, in a sense, in the process of splitting the traditional language community.