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Indefinite pronouns in Kildin Saami: too much variation?

Introduction: The system of indefinite pronouns in Kildin Saami¹ has been described as consisting of 2 indefinite series: referential indefinite *-l'aan'n'č* and non-referential indefinite *-n'e* (see Kert 1971:177, Rießler 2022: 227). However, during the fieldwork I have encountered two more series: *-n'ebedd* and *koee-*. Moreover, there is great variation in the use of these pronouns, and the present study seeks to explain it.

Data: As the fieldwork data suggest, the *koee-* series (1) corresponds to 'specific known' context of Haspelmath (1997), with the Russian *koye-* series being a clear diachronic source.

The *-n'ebedd* series (2) is used in non-referential contexts², except for under negation.

- 1) Tar'r'm' menne koee-k'e pudde
today I.DAT INDEF-who come.PST.3SG
'Today someone came to me'

- 2) pidd' men'-n'ibedd porrse
bring thing-INDEF eat.INF
'Bring me something to eat'

However, the most puzzling part of these data is not the novelty of these two negation markers, but rather the degree of variation across the community. more than a half of the respondents do not use *koee-*, and also *-n'ibedd* is frequently used instead of *n'e*. Therefore, there are two variables: presence or absence of *koee-* and the use of *n'e* vs *n'ebedd*.

Dialects or sociolinguistic variables? Due to historic reasons, the Kildin Saami community in Lovozero consists of speakers of different dialects. Therefore, most phonological and morphological variation found in Kildin Saami can be explained by dialectal differences (see Egorov 2022 for an overview).

However, the dialectal differences play no role here, as the speakers of the same dialect may use different indefinite pronoun systems. Instead, the use of *koee-* and *-n'ebedd* is conditioned by a speaker's awareness of 'literary Saami', as these forms, being Russian loans, are absent from the speech of local 'intelligentsia', who have a puristic attitude towards Kildin Saami.

¹ Saami < Finno-Ugric < Uralic. Mainly spoken in Lovozero, Murmansk region by about 100 people

² An anonymous reviewer asked for a more detailed discussion of the theoretical and typological consequences of these data. A relevant discussion will be given during the conference.

Selected references:

- Haspelmath, M. (1997). *Indefinite Pronouns*. Oxford University Press.
- Kert, G. M. (1971). *Saamskij jazyk (kildinskij dialekt) [Saami language (Kildin dialect)]*. Nauka.