

South Saami finite verb morphology

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1. Introduction

In this article, I argue for a classification of South Saami verbs into three main inflectional classes and present the finite verb forms in the language.

South Saami (glottonym *áarjelsaemien giele*; ISO 639-3: *sma*; Glottocode: *sout2674*) belongs to the Saamic branch of the Uralic language family and constitutes the southern end of the Saamic dialect continuum. South Saami is a small and endangered language spoken in Sweden and Norway. There is no official number of speakers but estimates around 300–500 speakers are usually accepted and agreed upon, see, e.g., Sammallahti (1998). The group of first language speakers is much smaller than that number; the number of second language users on the other hand might be increasing.

South Saami has a comparatively long research tradition that dates back into the 19th century, see, e.g., Halász (1886). However, comprehensive descriptive work has not been carried out since the 1940s. See Bergsland (1946), Hasselbrink (1944) and Lagercrantz (1923), and compare for instance Magga and Magga (2012), which is largely based on Bergsland (1982). This latter publication, in turn, is a standardized version that relies on Bergsland (1946). Furthermore, contemporary material for the language today reflects often a prescriptive practice of language. This article aims, thus, at filling a gap in the description of the language. Additionally, adding to our understanding of South Saami, from the perspective of language *use*, but also from the perspective of language *change*, given the fact that previous studies are based on a language that was in use almost a century ago.

This article is based on the verb chapter of my doctoral thesis, *A grammar of spoken South Saami* (Kowalik 2023), and focuses on morphology and the inflectional patterns of finite verb forms. The copula verb and the negative auxiliary are not included, as they behave differently. The article is organized as follows: In section 2, I present a brief background to the language of investigation and the data for the study. In section 3, I present the general

properties of the verb in South Saami, including the subject markers. The three inflectional classes are presented in section 4. Results are discussed in section 5 and a conclusion is given in section 6.

2. Background

2.1 The language situation

In order to give this study a context, I want to make a brief note on the language situation of South Saami. A way to depict the situation is to categorize the different varieties, or possibly “layers”, that are found in South Saami. Simplified, the language is used by three generations: the older generation (age 70+) of first language speakers; a middle generation of second language speakers, language activists and teachers; and a younger generation of second language speakers, whose language usually relies on teaching and revitalization efforts of the middle generation.¹ Teaching and revitalization follow a prescriptive language use, and speakers that reclaim their language usually depend on, or orientate themselves towards the standardized South Saami. Standardized South Saami, and the official orthography (adopted in 1978), is also used in the written language.

This study is based on spoken language as used by the older generation of speakers. This generation represents arguably the last generation of first language speakers of South Saami, born during the 1940s. The number of these speakers is naturally much lower than the total number of speakers. The older generation uses a language that presents many interesting features which have not yet been documented or studied in detail. This language differs in some respects from the language represented in e.g., Bergsland (1946), but also from the (written) standard language. Exceptions to this division exist; that is, there are fluent speakers, teachers and activists even in the younger generations. These are usually of high value for language revitalization and the speaker community.

The language of the older generation is perhaps the most innovative language of continuous use of South Saami. It reflects the South Saami as spoken by the generation of grandchildren of the speakers that former descriptions are based on, e.g., Hasselbrink (1944). The majority language, that is, Norwegian or Swedish, is usually the stronger language of the speakers. Language contact has contributed to the current structure of the

¹ Exceptions to this division exist; that is, there are fluent speakers, teachers and activists even in the younger generations. These are usually of high value for language revitalization and the speaker community.

language, and contact phenomena and loan words can easily be identified in South Saami. However, the observed features are usually consistent between different idiolects and dialects in the data. The language of study, despite its regional varieties, shares thus a common structure. This is a strong argument against processes that can be observed in connection with language death as described in for instance Dyirbal (Schmidt 1983).

2.2 Earlier and current classifications

Different linguistic classifications and descriptions may serve different purposes, which may range from diachronic to didactic purposes.

Earlier descriptions of the verbal system in South Saami have often a high number of verb groups and distinguish between different “stem classes”, based on the number of syllables of verb stems. Lagercrantz (1923) divides verbs into two groups based on the syllable structure of the verb stem, with three respectively two subgroups. Hasselbrink’s (1981–1985) description has six verb groups, among these a group of “former contracted” verbs. Differences between these groups are restricted to the form of the stem, as suffixes do not differ considerably between the groups. In Bergsland (1946), verbs are divided into two main groups, where one has five subgroups. In Bergsland (1994), seven verb groups can be identified, although the means for this classification are not presented.

Table 1. Verb groups in South Saami according to Frändén et al. (2007)

Group	Disyllabic	Trisyllabic	Irregular	Contracted
1	<i>båtedh</i> ‘come’	<i>gotelidh</i> ‘listen’	<i>lea-</i> (copula)	<i>billijidh</i> ‘be scared’
2	<i>darjodh</i> ‘do’	<i>dåeriedidh</i> ‘follow’	NEG aux	
3	<i>guarkedh</i> ‘understand’	<i>aatskadidh</i> ‘try’		
4	<i>barkedh</i> ‘work’	<i>jåhtjidh</i> ‘move’	<i>edtjedh</i> ‘shall’	
5	<i>domtedh</i> ‘feel’	<i>daaroestidh</i> ‘speak Scand.’		
6	<i>veedtjedh</i> ‘get’			

Current descriptions, for instance Magga & Magga (2012) and learner-focused material such as the verb handbook *Verbh* (‘Verbs’) by Frändén et al. (2007),

operate with a division of verbs into two “main verb groups”. The division is based on the number of syllables of the stem (roughly, disyllabic vs. trisyllabic verbs), with six respectively five further “verb groups”, illustrated (with example verbs from Frändén et al. (2007)) in Table (1) above.

The system presented in these works reflects standardized South Saami. It is valid for verbs in prescriptive language use and sources and its purpose can be said to be mainly didactic.

The classification of verbs based on number of syllables has a long tradition and a historical motivation in Saamic linguistics. The purpose of the proposed classification in the present article, however, is purely synchronic. The corpus data collected for this study did not support a classification based on syllables from a pure synchronic point of view. Instead, a slightly different pattern emerges and I propose a grouping into three *inflectional classes*. I will use this term in contrast to *conjugational classes*, which I define as taking different finiteness markers, and which is not the case in South Saami.

2.3 Data and method

The data consists of around 35.5 hours recording with 12 different speakers of South Saami (most of whom are 75+ years of age today), plus complementary hand-written notes. The corpus material is collected by me (the author) since the year 2017 and ongoing. Of a total of 35.5 hours recording, around 12.5 hours are spontaneous speech, and the remaining 23.5 hours are elicitation. The recordings were processed in the annotation tool *ELAN* (Sloetjes & Wittenburg, 2008), transcribed into South Saami in an adapted orthography and translated into Swedish and English by the author, with the help of speakers if necessary. During data collection, focus is put on free (spontaneous) speech; however, paradigms presented below are usually complemented with elicited forms. The documentation project has furthermore a focus on the southern dialect of South Saami (today mainly spoken in the Swedish county of Härjedalen), but the data cover also central and northern varieties of the language.

The basis for the classification presented in this article are forms of ca. 300 different lexical verbs (types). Of these 300 verbs, a total of around 870 different (inflected) forms are attested. All verb forms were compiled and sorted according to their inflectional behaviour. The current data do not allow for a precise token-count.

3. Verbs in South Saami

3.1. General properties

Verbs in South Saami inflect for person and for the number categories singular and plural. Dual marking exists but is optional and not regularly used. Verbs do not inflect for gender.

South Saami has finite and non-finite verb forms. Verbal categories, such as various tenses, can be encoded in different ways, in bound and periphrastic expressions. Finite verb forms are used for the encoding of present and past. Non-finite verb forms are used in periphrastic expressions that encode perfect, pluperfect and progressive. The future is expressed with present tense or with modal verbs. However, verbal categories are not discussed in this article.

Verbal morphology is mostly concatenative in South Saami; verb forms are formed by attaching suffixes to a stem, and align with the following pattern (A):

(A) stem – (past tense marker) – subject suffix

The verb stem is defined as the form that does not undergo any changes when suffixes are added. The stem is thus not reflected in the infinitive form (which usually triggers reduction of the thematic vowel, e.g., *båetie*- ‘come-’ but *båetedh* ‘to come’). The thematic vowel is the vowel a stem ends in. All stems end in one of the thematic vowels *-e*, *-ie* or *-a*.

As scheme (A) illustrates, it is in general possible to segment and mark morpheme boundaries for verbs in South Saami. However, some forms in the paradigm reflect morpho-phonological alternations which make a segmentation less obvious.

Some scholars have chosen not to mark morpheme boundaries in South Saami, e.g., Ylikoski (2018) or Siegl (2017), whereas others mark boundaries, such as Blokland and Inaba (2015). I choose to mark morpheme boundaries for verbs (but not for the copula) in this article, as I believe that this adds transparency to the analysis.

The subject suffixes are in general the same for all verbs; two forms have allomorphs due to phonotactic restrictions. The stem vowels of the stems to which the suffixes attach, however, may change due to morpho-phonological alternations, and thematic vowels can change due to phonotactic restrictions. Based on this behaviour, verbs in the data are divided into three **inflectional classes**.

Class 1 contains verbs with the thematic vowel *-e* and is the largest verb class. Its inflection is linear but shows reduction of the thematic vowel in some forms. The group has two subgroups, one for disyllabic stems (1a) and one for trisyllabic stems (1b).

Class 2 contains verbs with the thematic vowel *-ie*.² All stems are disyllabic and have vowel alternations of the stem vowel in the present tense singular and in the entire past paradigm. The class is not large but contains verbs with a high frequency.

Class 3 contains verbs with the stem vowel *-a*, all stems are disyllabic. The inflection is linear and shows no alternation of the stem vowel. It is the smallest class but its verbs are also frequent.

A scheme for the thematic vowels, an example verb and the morphophonological characteristics (either no alternation of the stem, or umlaut/vowel alternation in parts of the paradigm) is presented in Table 2. Inflected forms of the example verbs for the first person singular and plural present tense and the first person singular past tense are given in Table 3.

Table 2. Scheme of alternations in the verb groups.

Class	Thematic vowel	Example verb	Morphophonological characteristic
1a	<i>-e</i>	<i>lohke-</i> ‘read’	stem unaltered (except 3SG)
1b	<i>-e</i>	<i>vaestede-</i> ‘answer’	stem unaltered
2	<i>-ie</i>	<i>båetie-</i> ‘come’	vowel altern. in PRS SG and PST
3	<i>-a</i>	<i>darja-</i> ‘do’	stem unaltered

Table 3. Example verbs for the three inflectional classes.

Class	Example verb	Present 1SG	Present 1PL	Past 1SG
1a	<i>lohke-</i> ‘read’	<i>lohke-m</i>	<i>lohke-be</i>	<i>lohk-i-m</i>
1b	<i>vaestede-</i> ‘answer’	<i>vaestede-m</i>	<i>vaestiedi-bie</i>	<i>vaested-i-m</i>
2	<i>båetie-</i> ‘come’	<i>båata-m</i>	<i>båete-be</i>	<i>böö-t-i-m</i>
3	<i>darja-</i> ‘do’	<i>darja-m</i>	<i>darje-be</i>	<i>darja-ji-m</i>

The inflectional classes are presented in detail in section 4 below. By inflectional classes I mean different inflectional patterns that share the same finite markers (subject suffixes) but may show some differences in the behaviour of the stem vowel. I use this term in contrast to *conjugational classes*, which I understand as inflectional patterns with fundamental differences such as different person/number suffixes.

² I propose a long vowel phoneme /i:/ for the phonemic status of this vowel (Kowalik 2023: 81).

The verb type frequency³ differs between the classes. Class 1, comprising the sub-classes 1a and 1b, is the largest class and has the highest type frequency. Class 2 and 3 are considerably smaller, but their members have usually a high token frequency. The distribution of the different classes (the verb type frequency) based on a sample of 296 different verbs in the corpus is presented in Table 4:

Table 4. Distribution of verb classes in the data.

Class	Total number of verb types	Percentage
1a	134	44 %
1b	94	32 %
2	46	16 %
3	22	8 %
	<i>total: 296</i>	

Based on the data, the following general remarks about verbs in South Saami can be made:

- About two thirds of all verb types in the data have a disyllabic stem, i.e., belong to class 1a, 2 and 3 (see Table 4).
- About one third of all verb types have a trisyllabic stem, i.e., belong to class 1b (see Table 4).
- Verbs with four, five and six syllables can be derived; however, these are less frequent in the data (see section 4 for examples).
- Only three verbs in South Saami are monosyllabic (both their stem and their finite forms): These are the copula (functioning also as auxiliary in periphrastic tenses), the negative auxiliary and a contracted form of the modal verb *galkedh* ‘shall’, i.e., *gam*, *gah*, *ga* (1/2/3SG present tense).
- Vowel alternation (umlaut) is important for one of the three verb classes (class 2, see section 4.1), which has fewer types but a high token frequency.
- Around eight percent of all verbs in the data are loan words (from Swedish/ Norwegian). All loan verbs are members of class 1 (mainly of 1a, some of 1b), which is also the largest class.
- Based on the accommodation of loan words, class 1 can be described as the only productive one.

³ I am aware of the limitations of these frequency counts. However, the figures may still be useful for a better understanding of the use of the verb classes in South Saami.

3.2 Subject suffixes

The subject suffixes (or person/number suffixes) are the same for all inflectional classes, with the exception of allomorphic forms for the first and second person plural suffixes (*-be/-bie* and *-de/-die*) due to phonotactic restrictions in the language, and two other allomorphs due to geographical variation. The suffixes for the present and past tense are presented in Table 5 below. The parentheses in the columns for the dual indicate that these suffixes have only been attested in elicitation.

Table 5. Subject suffixes for present and past.

	Present			Past		
	Singular	Dual	Plural	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	<i>-m</i>	<i>-n</i>	<i>-be, -bie; -o</i>	<i>-m</i>	<i>-men</i>	<i>-mh; -o, -bo</i>
2	<i>-h</i>	<i>(-den)</i>	<i>-de, -die</i>	<i>-h</i>	<i>-den</i>	<i>-dh</i>
3	<i>-Ø</i>	<i>(-gan)</i>	<i>-h</i>	<i>-Ø</i>	<i>(-gan)</i>	<i>-n</i>

The singular suffixes (*-m, -h, -Ø*) are identical for both tenses. The suffixes for the dual are different in the two tenses in the first person but are identical for the second and third person. Plural marking is different for all persons in the two tenses both in the standard and northern varieties: (*-be/-bie, -de/-die, -h* in present tense, *-mh, -dh, -n* in past tense). In the southern dialects, first person plural is identically marked in both tenses (*-o*). Variation and allomorphy are discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.2.1 Phonotactic allomorphy: *-be/-bie* and *-de/-die*

In Table 5 above, there are two suffixes listed for the first and second person plural present tense, *-be/-bie* and *-de/-die*. I will call these suffixes “short” (*-be, -de*) and “long” (*-bie, -die*) subject suffixes. As a rule, short suffixes attach to all disyllabic verb stems (that is, verbs belonging to class 1a, 2 and 3), long suffixes attach to trisyllabic verb stems (class 1b). These suffixes are thus allomorphs which occur in phonotactically different environments.

The allomorphy is triggered by word stress and phonotactic constraints in the language. Words in South Saami have a fixed word-initial stress. Words with more than three syllables receive a secondary stress on the penultimate syllable. Suffixes are always unstressed. A phonological word with the structure "CV.CV (two short open syllables with stress on the first one) is avoided. Instead, the final vowel (that is part of the suffix) is lengthened: *-be* into *-bie*, *-de* into *-die*. Thus, it is *loh.ke.be* ‘we read’ but *vae.stie.di.bie* ‘we answer’. See also the paradigms in section 4.1 below.

Some very few counterexamples to this rule exist in the data, in both directions (short suffixes used with trisyllabic verbs, e.g., *gavlesebe* ‘we hear each other’, and long suffixes used with disyllabic verbs). This could possibly indicate that the difference between the suffixes in general is less important to the speakers.

3.2.2 Dialectal allomorphy (1): final *-m* and *-b*

Another allomorphy is the dialectal variation between final *-m* and final *-b*. This is a geographical variation; southern and standard South Saami use final *-m*, northern dialects are attested using final *-b*. In the verbal system, this affects the first person singular (*-m*) as well as the first person plural past tense (*-mh*).

Examples are given below: (1) and (3) are examples from southern dialects (*eelki-m*, *doeki-mh*), and (2) and (4) (*eelki-b*, *lohki-bh*) from northern dialects:

- (1) *manne* ***eelk-i-m*** *skovle-m*
 1SG.NOM start-PST-1SG school-ACC.SG
desnie *Mihte-sne*
 DEM.LOC.SG Mittådalen-LOC.SG
 ‘I started school there in Mittådalen.’ [sma20170516a]
- (2) *goh* *manne* *lim* *tjijhtje* *jaepie-n*
 when 1SG.NOM be.PST.1SG seven year-GEN.SG
båaeries dellie ***eelk-i-b*** *skovle-sne*
 old then start-PST-1SG school-LOC.SG
 ‘When I was seven years old then I started in school.’ [sma20170919a]
- (3) *dah* *ledtie-h* *mijjieh* ***doek-i-mh***
 DEM.NOM.PL bird-NOM.PL 1PL.NOM sell-PST-1PL
 ‘We sold these birds.’ [sma20170614d]
- (4) *jih* *dihte* *learare*
 and DEM.NOM.SG teacher
idtji *dihte* *guarka-h*
 NEG.AUX.PST.3SG 3SG.NOM understand-IRR
maam *mijjieh* ***lohk-i-bh***
 what.ACC.SG 1PL.NOM read-PST-1PL
 ‘And that teacher, he didn’t understand what we read.’ [sma20170926j]

The suffix *-b* as 1SG marker are attested with all speakers from the northern area in the data. However, speakers are not always consistent and may also use *-m*. This might be due to the influence from the standard language.

3.2.3. Dialectal allomorphy (2): The southern marker *-o*

In the southern dialects of South Saami (Härjedalen), a different marker for the first person plural past is attested. Whereas the standard marker is *-mh*, with its northern variant *-bh*, in the dialects of Härjedalen, *-o*, sometimes *-bo*, is also used. In the data, the suffix occurs more frequent in the past tense. The suffix *-o* is attached either to the verb stem (in the present) or to the past tense marker *-i* (in the past). The suffix *-bo* requires the “long” verb forms and attaches to the long past tense marker *-ji* or trisyllabic verbs. With the exception of trisyllabic verb stems, both variants can be used with the same verb. First person plural past tense forms can thus be either of the following (see examples in Table (6)), depending on the dialect:

Examples for these suffixes are given in (5), (6) and (7):

Table 6. First person plural past tense forms.

Verb stem	Standard	Northern	Southern (1)	Southern (2)
<i>juhtie-</i> ‘move’	<i>juht-i-mh</i>	<i>juht-i-bh</i>	<i>juht-i-o</i>	<i>juhtie-ji-bo</i>
<i>barke-</i> ‘work’	<i>bark-i-mh</i>	<i>bark-i-bh</i>	<i>bark-i-o</i>	<i>barka-ji-bo</i>
<i>höölteste-</i> ‘dwell’	<i>hööltest-i-mh</i>	<i>hööltest-i-bh</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>hööltest-i-bo</i>

- (5) *dellie monnah datnem sijht-o gihtjij*
 now 1DU.NOM 2SG.ACC want.PRS-1PL ask.INF
naan baaka-j bijre
 some word-GEN.PL around
 ‘Now we want to ask you about some words.’ [sma20200219e]

- (6) *mijjieh provhk-i-o tjoekij*
 1PL.NOM use.to.do-PST-1PL ski.INF
Haandskina-sse
 Handskinnsvålen-DAT.SG
 ‘We used to ski to Handskinnsvålen’ [sma20180614a]

- (7) *jih bijjen Rödfjäll-sne giedtie*
 and ontop Rödfjäll-LOC.SG reindeer.field
lij gusnie mijjieh miesie-h
 be.PST.3SG where 1PL.NOM calf-NOM.PL
mierhkiesj-i-bo
 mark-PST-1PL

‘And up on Rödfjäll was the field where we marked the reindeer calves.’
[sma20180605c]

However, the *-o/bo* suffix is not used consistently by all speakers of the southern dialect. This is probably due to the influence of the standard language.

3.2.4 Dialectal allomorphy (3): final *-n* instead of *-m*

Another variation of the first person singular suffix is attested in the data of two of the southern speakers. Instead of the first person marker *-m* (or *-b* in northern dialects), *-n* can also be used (8):

- | | | | |
|-----|------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| (8) | <i>manne</i> | <i>mujhtie-ji-n</i> | <i>gumhtie</i> |
| | 1SG.NOM | remember-PST-1SG | how |
| | <i>maahte-me</i> | <i>orre-me</i> | |
| | can-PTCP | be-PTCP | |
- ‘I remembered how it could have been.’ [sma20181025k]

In the data, this is restricted to two speakers from the southern dialects (Härjedalen).

The final *-n* is found in North Saami as well, where it is the standard first person singular marker. It reflects the change from the Proto-Saamic 1SG marker **-m* into *-n*.

3.2.5 Dual suffixes

The dual as a category requires a short remark of its own. Dual verb morphology, with the exception of the first person, is in general not used in free speech by the speakers I worked with. The dual suffixes in parentheses in Table 5 are only attested in elicitation, whereas the suffixes for first person present (*-n*) and first and second person past (*-men*, *-den*) are attested in free, spontaneous speech. That is, third person dual forms are not attested in spontaneous speech in the data. Already Bergsland (1946, p.171) noted that dual verb morphology is in general not used. Many native speakers have a meta-linguistic awareness for this, and I have recorded comments like “we don’t use these [dual] forms” several times (e.g., in recording [sma20170508d]). Loss of dual number is cross-linguistically common, see, e.g., Corbett (2000: 269). The use of dual pronouns, however, is still obligatory in South Saami; this can be observed in other languages as well, such as Slovene (Corbett 2000: 94).

In the data, two strategies for dual reference have emerged: a neutralization of *number* (DU=PL, i.e., plural verb morphology is used for dual reference,

combined with dual pronouns)⁴ and a neutralization of person (one dual form, historically the first person dual marker, is used for all persons in the dual). The first strategy is more common in the data. It is in line with cross-linguistic tendencies and found in other Saamic languages as well, see, e.g., Feist (2015: 200). The second strategy, in which the dual number feature is kept but without person distinction, has to the best of my knowledge previously not been described for South Saami. This topic, however, will not be discussed any further in the present article, but the general absence of dual marking means that less morphological forms and changes of stem vowels need to be taken into account in the system.

4. Inflectional classes of verbs

In this section, I present paradigms for the three inflectional classes and discuss their inflection in more detail. The classes are presented in a descending order according to their type frequency (their size).

4.1. Inflectional class 1: e-stems

Inflectional class 1 consists of verbs with a thematic vowel -e and is the largest class. It includes both disyllabic and trisyllabic verb stems, which each form a subclass, labelled (1a) and (1b). Common for all verbs in this class is that the stem does not show vowel alternation. An exception is the third person singular present tense of disyllabic verbs, which is marked with a morpho-phonological alternation of the stem vowel and the thematic vowel. Another feature common for verbs of class 1 is that the thematic vowel is dropped before the past tense marker -i-. The personal pronouns do not distinguish between third person dual and plural.

Example verbs for subclass (1a) are *lohke-* ‘read’ and *gööle-* ‘fish’; example verbs for subclass (1b) are *vaestede-* ‘answer’ and *tjihkede-* ‘push one’s way forward’. See the paradigms in Tables 7 and 8 for subgroup (1a):

Table 7. Inflectional class 1a: *lohke-* ‘read’.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Present 1	<i>lohke-m</i>	<i>lohkie-n</i>	<i>lohke-be</i>
2	<i>lohk-h</i>		<i>lohke-de</i>
3	<i>lâhka-Ø</i>		<i>lohkie-h</i>
Past 1	<i>lohk-i-m</i>	<i>lohk-i-men</i>	<i>lohk-i-mh, -o</i>

⁴ The personal pronouns do not distinguish between third person dual and plural.

2	<i>lohk-i-h</i>	<i>lohk-i-dh</i>
3	<i>lohk-i-Ø</i>	<i>lohk-i-n</i>

The thematic vowel *-e* disappears in the second person singular present tense when it meets the suffix *-h* (i.e., *lohke+h* becomes *lohkh*).

Table 8. Inflectional class 1a: *gööle-* ‘fish’.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Present	1 <i>gööle-m</i>	<i>göölie-n</i>	<i>lohke-be</i>
	2 <i>gööl-h</i>		<i>lohke-de</i>
	3 <i>göölie-Ø</i>		<i>lohkie-h</i>
Past	1 <i>gööl-i-m</i>	<i>gööl-i-men</i>	<i>gööl-i-mh,</i> <i>gööli-ji-bo</i>
	2 <i>gööl-i-h</i>		<i>gööl-i-dh</i>
	3 <i>gööl-i-Ø</i>	<i>gööl-i-n</i>	

The third person plural ends either in *-ie* (e.g., *göölie*) or in *-a* (e.g., *lähka*). Synchronically, this can be described as follows: Verbs with a back vowel in the stem, as *lohke-*, are marked with a vowel alternation in the third person present tense and end on *-a* (*lähka*). Verbs with a front vowel in the stem, like *gööle-*, end on a long vowel *-ie* in the third person present tense (*göölie*). All verbs of this class show a long vowel *-ie* in the dual form.

Trisyllabic verbs (subgroup 1b) behave slightly different. While the stem remains unaltered, the vowels in the suffixes of trisyllabic verbs in the present tense plural are lengthened due to the phonotactic structure of a word in South Saami: 1PL *-be* into *-bie*, 2PL *-de* into *-die*. These suffixes are thus allomorphs which occur in different environments: *-be/-de* attach to disyllabic verb stems and follow thus an unstressed syllable (e.g., *loh.ke-be* ‘we read’), *-bie/die* attach to trisyllabic verb stems and follow thus a syllable with a secondary stress (e.g., *tjih.te.di-bie* ‘we push forward’).

Paradigms for these two verbs are presented in Tables 9 and 10 below:

Table 9. Inflectional class 1b: *vaestede-* ‘answer’.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Present	1 <i>vaestede-m</i>	<i>vaestiedie-n</i>	<i>vaestiedi-be</i>
	2 <i>vaested-h</i>		<i>vaestiedi-de</i>
	3 <i>vaestede-Ø</i>		<i>vaestied-h</i>
Past	1 <i>vaestied-i-m</i>	<i>vaestied-i-men</i>	<i>vaestied-i-mh</i>
	2 <i>vaestied-i-h</i>		<i>vaestied-i-dh</i>
	3 <i>vaestied-i-Ø</i>	<i>vaestied-i-n</i>	

Table 10. Inflectional class 1b: *tjihtede-* ‘push forward’ (No dual forms attested).

	Singular	Plural
Present	1 <i>tjihtede-m</i>	<i>tjihtedi-bie</i>
	2 <i>tjihted-h</i>	<i>tjihtedi-die</i>
	3 <i>tjihtede-Ø</i> , <i>tjihtede-a</i>	<i>tjihted-h</i>
Past	1 <i>tjihted-i-m</i>	<i>tjihted-i-mh</i>
	2 <i>tjihted-i-h</i>	<i>tjihted-i-dh</i>
	3 <i>tjihted-i-Ø</i>	<i>tjihted-i-n</i>

Some verbs of this group with a long vowel in the stem, such as *vaestede-* ‘answer’, show a change of the second vowel (V2) *-e-* into *-ie-* (*vaestede-* vs. *vaestiede-*). The possible vowel alternations of V2 of verbs belonging to class 1b are schematized in Table 11 below:

Table 11. Vowel change of V2 in trisyllabic verbs (1b).

V2 vowel change	example verb stem	example verb form
$e = e$	<i>tjihtede-</i> ‘push’	<i>tjihtedim</i> (1SG past)
$e \Rightarrow i$	<i>vaestede-</i> ‘answer’	<i>vaestiedim</i> (1SG past)
$e \Rightarrow a$	<i>vuartesje-</i> ‘see’	<i>vuartasjim</i> (1SG past)
$a/o = a/oe$	<i>daaraste-/</i> <i>daaroste-</i> ‘talk Scand.’	<i>daarastim</i> (1SG past) <i>daaroestim</i> (1SG past)

Whereas the first pattern ($e = e$, no vowel change) is the most frequent one in the data (see *tjihtede-* ‘push forward’ in Table 10), the changes e into ie and e into a are also common. The last pattern occurs least in the data.

Some verbs of subclass 1b can be shortened by syncope; usually, the vowel in the second syllable is omitted. For instance, the verbs *sop.tses.tidh* ‘talk’ or *hööl.tes.tidh* ‘live, dwell’ is contracted to *soptstidh* [sopts.tit] resp. *hööltstidh* [höölts.tit].

Verbs that originate from Swedish or Norwegian loans, as well as new loan-words, are usually members of this verb class (usually 1a). Example verbs are *provhke-* ‘use to’ (Swe/Nor *bruka/bruke*), *skeele-* ‘peel’ (Swe/Nor *skala/skrelle*), *bigke-* ‘build’ (Swe/Nor *bygga/bygge*), *tuhtje-* ‘think, consider’ (Swe *tycka*), *lyjhke-* ‘like’ (Nor *like*), *rååke-* ‘meet’ (Swe/Nor *råka/råke*). The other pattern, 1b, is less usual but occurs as well: *heannede-* ‘happen’, cf. Swe/Nor *hända/hende*.

4.2 Inflectional class 2: ie-stems

Inflectional class 2 consists of verbs with an even number of syllables in the stem that end in the vowel *-ie*, such as *bâetie-* ‘come’, *tjaelie-* ‘write’, *juhtie-* ‘move’ or *vedtie-* ‘give’. This class has vowel alternations in the stem in the present singular and in the past (as well as the non-finite forms infinitive and perfect participle). The past is formed by both vowel alternation and the past tense marker *-i*. The stem remains unaltered in the first person dual and third person plural present tense. Example paradigms for the class 2 verbs *bâetie-* ‘come’ and *juhtie-* ‘move’ are given in Tables 12 and 13 below. Verb class 2 comprises about 20 percent of all verbs in the data and has thus a rather low type-frequency, but the token-frequency for these verbs is usually high.

Table 12. Inflectional class 2 verb *bâetie-* ‘come’.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Present	1 <i>bâata-m</i>	<i>bâetie-n</i>	<i>bâete-be</i>
	2 <i>bâata-h</i>		<i>bâete-de</i>
	3 <i>bâata-Ø</i>		<i>bâetie-h</i>
Past	1 <i>bööt-i-m</i> , <i>bâetie-ji-m</i>	<i>bööt-i-men</i>	<i>bööt-i-mh</i> , <i>bööt-i-o</i>
	2 <i>bööt-i-h</i>		<i>bööt-i-dh</i>
	3 <i>bööt-i-Ø</i> , <i>bâetie-j-a</i>		<i>bööt-i-n</i>

Table 13. Inflectional class 2 verb *juhtie-* ‘move’.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Present	1 <i>jahta-m</i>	<i>juhtie-n</i>	<i>juhte-be</i>
	2 <i>jahta-h</i>		<i>juhte-de</i>
	3 <i>jahta-Ø</i>		<i>juhtie-h</i>
Past	1 <i>juht-i-m</i>	<i>juht-i-men</i>	<i>juht-i-mh</i> , <i>-o</i> , <i>-ji-bo</i>
	2 <i>juht-i-h</i>		<i>juht-i-dh</i>
	3 <i>juht-i-Ø</i> , <i>juhtie-ji-Ø</i>		<i>juht-i-n</i> , <i>juhtie-ji-n</i>

There is another pattern for forming the past tense in this class attested in the data. In this pattern, the stem remains unaltered and the past tense marker *-i-* is suffixed to the stem. To avoid hiatus, a semi-vowel *j* is inserted before the *-i-*. The open syllable *-ie* is thus closed into *-ij*. Then, the subject markers are suffixed. This results in the so called “long” past tense forms of the verbs (cf. the past tense of inflectional class 3). Examples are given in the Tables 12 and

13 above: 1SG past *bâetiejim*, 3SG past *bâetija* and 3SG past *juhtieji*, 1PL past *juhtiejibo*, 3PL past *juhtiejin*.

For *juhtie-* ‘move’, the stem vowel *u* is only affected for the singular forms of the present tense (*u* into *a*); there is no vowel alternation in the past tense. Different forms are also attested in the past tense; both regular and “long” forms are attested in the data, exemplified in the table with the third person singular (*juht-i = juhtie-ji*) and third person plural (*juht-i-n = juhtie-ji-n*). This variation is characteristic for inflectional class 2 verbs in the data.

The third person singular past tense has yet another parallel form, ending in *-a* instead of *-Ø*: For the long forms *bâetie-ji -Ø* come-PST-3SG, *juhtie-ji -Ø* move-PST-3SG the parallel forms *bâetie-j-a* come-PST-3SG, *juhtie-j-a* move-PST-3SG are also attested. This occurs also with verbs of class 1a. It is a less frequent form in the data, but occurs regularly, especially in the data for the southern dialects. It shows a parallel to the third person singular present tense form of these verb classes as it also ends in *-a*.

Vowel alternations, and a marker for the singular present tense triggered by morphophonology are the defining characteristics of this inflectional class. These forms are difficult to motivate synchronically. However, these are frequent forms and the verbs of this class are frequent, so the forms may be explained from a usage perspective.

Interestingly, several tokens without vowel alternation (where one would expect such) are attested in the data. This suggests that vowel alternations, which reflect umlaut patterns, might not be of fundamental importance for inflection. Examples are: 3SG past of *vuejnedh* ‘see’, attested forms are *vööjni* (stem vowel alternation) and *vuajni* (no alternation in the stem) (cf. the long form: *vuejnieji*).

4.3 Inflectional class 3: a-stems

Inflectional class 3 is a rather small class and comprises about 10 percent of the verbs in the data. However, verbs of class 2 can also be inflected according to the past tense scheme of this class, which makes it an interesting inflectional pattern. Whereas verb type frequency is low, token frequency of its class members is often high. Inflectional class 3 consists of verbs with a disyllabic stem in *-a*. In the northern dialects, this vowel is usually *-oe*. Paradigms for the example verbs are given in Tables 14 and 15 for *dâaja-* ‘cut’ and *guarka-* ‘understand’. Other examples for verbs in this class are *tjâadtja-* ‘stand’ and *darja-* ‘do’.

Inflectional class 3 verbs have no vowel alternation in the stem. Exceptions can be, again, found in the third person singular present tense. Like verbs of class 1a, this form may also be marked with a morpho-phonological device

reflecting umlaut (e.g., *gårkå*, *dååjå*). Usually, the stem alone is used as 3SG form (as in *guarka*, *dåaja*).

Table 14. Inflectional class 3 verb *dåaja*- ‘cut’.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Present 1	<i>dåaja-m</i>	<i>dåajie-n</i>	<i>dåaje-be</i>
2	<i>dåaja-h</i>		<i>dåaje-de</i>
3	<i>dåaja-Ø</i> , <i>dååjå-Ø</i>		<i>dåaja-h</i>
Past 1	<i>dåaja-ji-m</i>	<i>dåaja-ji-men</i>	<i>dåaja-ji-mh</i>
2	<i>dåaja-ji-h</i>	<i>dåaja-i-dh</i>	
3	<i>dåaja-ji-Ø</i>	<i>dåaja-ji-n</i>	

Table 15. Inflectional class 3 verb *guarka*- ‘understand’.

	Singular	Dual	Plural
Present 1	<i>guarka-m</i>	<i>guarkie-n</i>	<i>guarke-be</i>
2	<i>guarka-h</i>		<i>guarke-de</i>
3	<i>guarka-Ø</i> , <i>gårkå-Ø</i>		<i>guarka-h</i>
Past 1	<i>guarka-ji-m</i>	<i>guarki-i-men</i>	<i>guarka-ji-mh</i>
2	<i>guarka-ji-h</i>	<i>guarka-ji-dh</i>	
3	<i>guarka-ji-Ø</i>	<i>guarka-ji-n</i>	

The past tense is formed by adding the past tense maker *-i-* to the stem (i.e., *dåaja+i* ‘s/he cut’), resulting in the extra syllable *-ji-* (*dåaja-ji-*). The class shows syncretism in 2SG and 3PL present tense. In the southern dialects, an alternative 3PL form on *-ieh* (e.g., *dåajieh* ‘they cut’) is attested.

This group reflects a difference between the data and the standard language: whereas members of this class in the data end on *-edh* in the infinitive (like *darjedh* ‘make’, *arredh* ‘be, live’, *saarnedh* ‘tell’), they end in *-odh* in the standard language (*darjodh*, *årrodh*, *saarnodh*).

5. Discussion

In the data, three main inflectional patterns emerge, which are here described as three inflectional classes of verbs. The classes do not constitute different conjugational classes but reflect different inflectional patterns. The classification is primarily based on the thematic vowel of verb stems (either *-e*, *-ie* or *-a*) and this vowel’s behaviour in inflection, instead of being based on the distinction of syllables of a verb. However, phonotactics in the language are still relevant in the system, and the subgroup of class 1 are partly based on

the number of syllables. The verbal system in South Saami is usually known to be complex, but the morphology is generally concatenative. Morpho-phonological vowel alternations in the stem are restricted to one, albeit frequent, inflectional class. Especially the third person singular present tense is marked by this device. This type of marking is synchronically unmotivated, but occurs in frequent forms and may therefore be explained from a usage perspective. In these frequent forms, umlaut patterns may be preserved. These verb forms in the paradigm can be seen as the result of frequent use and diachronic changes.

The third person singular is in general zero-marked and has thus no explicit subject suffix. As has been shown, the third person plural is expressed with the bare verb stem in most classes, and the stem plus past tense marker in the past tense. However, there seems to be a certain association with *-a* as a third person marker. While some verbs show a stem vowel alternation and a third person marker *-a/-ǎ*, in the past tense long forms, an *-a* is added to the past tense marker (e.g., *juhtie-j-a* move-PST-3G). Whether this is an analogy to the morpho-phonological marking (as explained above) or not remains to be investigated. Another possibility is that *-ja* is an allomorph of the past tense marker ($i = ji = ja$).

Stem vowel alternation is a characteristic feature of South Saami. However, it is not a predominant feature and occurs mainly within one verb class (class 2). This class has a low type frequency, but its members have a high token frequency. The majority of verbs, as well as loan words, are inflected according to a linear, concatenative pattern without vowel alternations (class 1). Variations in verb forms, that is, forms without vowel alternations (such as *vuajni* instead of *vööjni*) as well as alternations where no such are expected (*gärkä* instead of *guarka*) are attested. This could indicate that South Saami is undergoing change regarding vowel alternations, as these alternations are not entirely obligatory.

In this article, focus was put on finite verb forms. Space did not allow to present non-finite forms. However, these forms and their segmentation aligns with the proposed classification.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I presented a classification of South Saami verbs into inflectional classes based on empirical data of spoken language. The purely synchronic classification is an attempt to present the verbal system as coherent and consistently as possible, and delete any redundancies in the description. The verbal system as described here differs from other contemporary

descriptions mainly in the fact that there are fewer inflectional classes. The difference between “odd-syllabic” (trisyllabic) and “even-syllabic” (disyllabic) verbs is reduced and they form here one verb class with stems ending in *-e*. Verbs with an infinitive form on *-odh* are not attested in the data, which allows to incorporate these verbs in the a-stem verb group. The proposed classification is closer to Lagercrantz (1923) and Bergsland (1946) than later, more standardized descriptions that reflect a prescriptive language, e.g., Bergsland (1994), Magga and Magga (2012). In that respect, the earlier classifications were possibly more descriptive than later literature; see Ylikoski (2017: 322) for a similar stance on that matter.

Apart from the verbal system as a whole, several details such as allomorphy, lengthening of suffixes and phonotactic restrictions are discussed. Some topics, however, still require further investigation. Among these is the vowel lengthening in some verb forms (for instance in the third person singular present tense and in the dual forms of all verbs) and the vowel changes in trisyllabic verb stems; another is the morpho-phonological marking of the third person singular. Perhaps the most interesting topic is the role of vowel alternations in the language, which might be undergoing change.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3—First, second, third person; ACC—Accusative case; AUX—Auxiliary; dem—Demonstrative; DU—Dual; GEN—Genitive case; INF—infinitive; ILL—Illative case; IRR—Irrrealis; LOC—Locative case; NEG—Negation; NOM—Nominative case; PL—Plural; PRS—Present; PST—Past; SG—Singular.

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