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# Lexical proficiency as a measure of language vitality in North Sámi

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## **Background**

#### **PROFILE**

The Sámi languages are spoken in Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Kola Peninsula (Russia). While all Sámi languages are endangered, North Sámi is the most widely-spoken, with an estimated 20,000 speakers, mostly in Sweden & Norway (Svonni, 2008).

#### RESEARCH INTEREST

Since revitalizations efforts in the 1970s. Sweden and Norway have implemented different policies aimed at improving the situation for Sámi.

As part of an interdisciplinary project at the University of Konstanz, we investigate potential links between these policies and language maintenance practices, including:

- Language use
- Lexical proficiency
- Speech production
- Attitudes towards policies

Full data collection planned for Spring 2021



## The vocabulary measure

#### THE TEST FORMAT

- Yes/No vocabulary test following the DIALANG as a measure of general proficiency (e.g., Meara & Jones, 1987; Alderson, 2005; Lemhofer & Broersma, 2012)
- Contains 50 real words and 25 pseudowords (verbs in infinitive form)
- Participants judge whether word exists or not (1 point/correct answer)

#### ITEM CREATION (FOR PILOT)

#### Real words (N = 100)

Verbs from Swedish and Norwegian DIALANG tests (from a range of frequencies) and translated into North Sámi. E.g.,

šaddat (to grow), juohkit (to divide)

#### Pseudowords (N = 50)

Constructed by native speaker of Sámi following phonotactic constraints of North Sámi. Often combining stem and ending of two verbs, e.g., **čalmmuhit** = **čatnat** (to connect) + almmuhit (to notify)

#### INCLUSION CRITERIA

For inclusion in pre-test, the items needed to be

- Known to two native speakers and appear in SIKOR North Saami Corpus (real words)
- Judged as plausible by two native Sámi speakers, with no possible meanings and not in SIKOR corpus (pseudowords)
- Contain min. 5 and max. 12 letters (Table 1).
- Pre-test with 14 intermediate-native-like speakers of North Sámi on SosciSurvey

### **Pre-test results**

#### PRE-TEST (N = 14 participants)

Subsample was subjected to the following statistics (Table 1):

- Point-biserial correlations between response to each item and participants' total accuracy (cf. Amenta et al., 2020)
- Item facility, i.e., percentage of correct answers
- **Item discrimination**, i.e., ability of an item to discriminate between individuals (Alderson et al., 1995)
- Correlations with self-assessed proficiency (Figure 1).

The **75 best items** (50 real words + 25 non-words) were selected for the final version of the test.

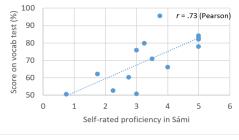


Figure 1. Relationship between vocabulary score and self-rated proficiency (reading/writing/listening/speaking) in Sámi

	Length	Item facility	Discrimination	Point-biserial
	(letters)	(%)	value	*correlations (r²)
Pseudowords				
Min	6.00	14.29	0	.03
Mean	7.96	58.29	.62	.40
Max	12.00	100.00	1.00	.78
SD	1.86	18.03	.28	-
Realwords				
Min	5.00	50.00	0	.07
Mean	7.16	84.85	.66	.51
Max	12.00	100.00	1.00	.85
SD	1.56	12.01	.25	-



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