

“I PUTS IT AWAY” – EARLY PROTO-MORPHOLOGICAL WAYS OF INFLECTING VERBS IN A CHILD ACQUIRING SAAMI

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Abstract. In this article, some protomorphological ways of inflect verbs in the acquisition of Saami at age 1;8–3;0 are discussed. The main focus is the forms for first person singular present indicative. The child uses the adult-like forms during all the period since the emergence of first person singular at age 1;9–1;10 but in addition to the adult-like forms, there are three main ways to inflect verbs in the child’s language. Using the stem without the *-n*-suffix is a typical way of inflection at the age of 2;0–2;8. Almost at the same time, at 2;1–2;9, the forms for third person singular present indicative are used instead of the adult-like forms for first person singular. The third difference compared to adult language is the strong gradation of consonant centres in bisyllabic verbs.*

Keywords: bilingual first language acquisition, morphology, verb inflection, North Saami, Finnish

1. Introduction

By the time a child reaches the age of three, (s)he will inflect the most common verb forms in the same way as adult speakers, but how does a child acquire this competence? Acquiring verb inflections, like all morphological acquisition, is regarded as being a progressive and cumulative process, which proceeds from the premorphological stage through the protomorphological stage to modular morphology (Kilani-Schoch, Dressler 2002: 45). Initially, a child acquires new word forms as unanalysed items, almost like new lexemes. This early reproductive stage, when the child cannot yet understand the meaning of different elements of word forms, is called the premorphological stage. In this stage, the child uses normally one inflection of each lexeme (Dressler, Karpf 1995: 102, Laalo 1997: 187, 1999:

* The article is based on my research project on the acquisition of verb inflections in North Saami. The analysis of the data is in progress, so the findings presented in this article should not be considered final. I would like to thank Pekka Sammallahhti, Karen Inga Eira and Outi Guttorm for their valuable comments on the earlier version of this article. For the final version of the article I naturally take the full responsibility. Parts of this article are based on my Saami-language paper (see Ijäs 2009). This article is translated from Finnish into English by AAC Global Oy.

354, 362). For example, a Saami-speaking¹ child may use the verb *addit* ‘to give’ in its imperative form only, *atte* ‘give’, and of the verb *boahitit* ‘to come’ only the third person singular, *boahotá* ‘comes’.

As the child’s vocabulary gradually accumulates, (s)he will need several morphological forms in order to express the functions of various word forms. (S)he will begin to use several inflections of each lexeme and start forming individual rules for inflecting words. This stage, when the child has reached an active period in morphological acquisition, is called the protomorphological stage. At this productive stage, rather than imitating word forms as inseparable items, (s)he will start forming her/his own morphological rules. At the protomorphological stage, the child will test the same rules in various contexts, resulting in word forms that deviate from those used by adults. (Dressler, Karpf 1995: 100, Laalo 1998: 362, Bittner et al. 2003: xviii–xix) A child may, for example, use one inflection pattern for words that in fact belong to different inflectional classes. A Finnish-speaking child might form the preterit form of the word *sataa* ‘to rain’ in a similar way as the preterit of the word *heittä* ‘to throw’: *sat-i* (AL²: *sato-i*), cf. *heitt-i* ‘(s)he/it threw’ (see Laalo 2003: 341–345). With Saami-speaking children, the merger of inflectional classes has been observed to take place in, for example, the following cases, in which bisyllabic *i*-stemmed verbs have been inflected according to the inflectional model of *a*-stemmed verbs: *jáma-i* [die-PST.3SG] ‘(s)he/it died’, *vácca-i* [walk-PST.3SG] ‘(s)he/it walked’ (AL: *jámi-i*, *vácci-i*), cf. AL *mana-i* [go-PST.3SG] ‘(s)he/it went’. Gradually, a child’s elementary morphological system will expand to include subclasses for inflections and word formation, and (s)he will begin inflecting words according to adult language systems (Bittner et al. 2003: xix).

The morphological acquisition of several typologically different, albeit mainly Indo-European majority languages, has been discussed in the international Cross-linguistic Project on Pre- and Protomorphology in Language Acquisition³, but so far only a small amount of research has been carried out on, for example, the acquisition of Saami.⁴ I will discuss in this article certain early inflectional models that a Saami-speaking child uses during the process of acquiring verb forms, and I will concentrate specifically on the inflectional variants of the first person singular present indicative, which I will be referring to in short as first person (singular) forms. The reason for focusing on these specific forms is that a child uses them from the very beginning of the verb inflection acquisition process and therefore they reveal the earliest protomorphological inflectional variants employed by a child. On the other hand, the first person singular forms are also interesting, as they are morphologically more complex than a child’s first premorphological, often monomorphemic forms, such as those mentioned above, *atte* and *boahotá*. The acquisition process of the first person forms therefore reveals the means a child employs when solving the problem of the morphological variation of the word stem and the affixation.

¹ With Saami, I am referring to North Saami, which is the variety spoken by 75% of Saami-speaking population, some 17,000 speakers (Sammallahti 1998: [1]).

² AL ‘adult language’.

³ The project actually encompasses 17 different languages. The project was founded by Prof. Wolfgang U. Dressler, and it is financed by the Austrian Academy of Sciences. (<http://www.oeaw.ac.at/ling/preproto.html> 8.2.2010).

⁴ See, however, Bals 2002, 2004.

2. Data

My research is based on data provided by my trilingual daughter, whose first languages are Saami and Finnish. She was born in 2002 in Tromsø in Northern Norway where the majority language is Norwegian. At the age of two she moved with her family to Guovdageaidnu (*Kautokeino* in Norwegian), where 85% of the population of 3,000 are Saami-speaking. Her father speaks Saami to her, while her mother speaks Finnish, and the parents communicate in Saami with each other. For her first 15 months she stayed at home with her mother and heard more Finnish than Saami, but ever since starting her Saami-speaking kindergarten at the age of 1;3, the dominant language in her environment has been Saami. Her father comes from Gáivuotna (*Kåfjord* in Norwegian), but most other adult Saami speakers around her speak the Guovdageaidnu dialect.

The data was recorded on video and includes conversations between my daughter and her father between the age period 1;8 and 3;0. The recordings were made in two of three week intervals, first for 30 minutes at a time, and from the age of 2;5 onwards for an hour at a time, for a total of 21.5 hours of video data.

Owing to the extensive scope of the data, I have restricted my analysis to a maximum of three consecutive occurrences of each new inflection of each lexeme. A new inflection is constituted by a form that is morpho(phono)logically different from the forms registered previously. The data includes 286 verb forms gathered in this manner.

A key concept in this article is *target form*, which I use to refer to the morphologically modularised form a child hears around him/herself and which over time the child will incorporate into his/her speech. There may be more than one target form in some cases, for example, when several dialectal variants exist.

3. First person singular present tense in Saami

There are three stem classes for verbs in Saami: bisyllabic, trisyllabic, and contracted verbs. Bisyllabic and contracted verbs are further divided into sub-classes according to the latus vowel. Particularly the stem of the bisyllabic words undergoes qualitative and quantitative changes when inflected. The quality and/or the length of the vowel centre and the consonant centre of the stem alternates in the different inflected forms, as does also the latus vowel, as shown in the following examples: *boahht-i* [come-IMP.2DU] ‘come!’ / [come-PTCP.PRS] ‘coming’; *boahťá-n* [come-PTCP.PST] ‘(has/have/had etc.) come’ / [come-CONNeg.PST] ‘(did not) come’; *boadđá-n* [come-1SG] ‘I come’; *boahťi-t* [come-INF] ‘to come’ / [come-1PL] ‘we come’; *bohte-t* [come-3PL] ‘they come’ / [come-PST.2SG] ‘you came’ / [come-IMP.2PL] ‘come!’ etc. In trisyllabic and contracted verbs there is no gradation in the consonant centre nor any alternation in the vowels in first and second syllables.

The personal suffixes in first person singular are *-n* and *-an*. The suffix *-n* is appended to the bisyllabic and contracted verbs and the suffix *-an* to trisyllabic verbs. In present-tense bisyllabic verbs the suffix is appended to the weak stem, for example, *bora-n* (< *borra-t* ‘to eat’), *boadđá-n* (< *boahťi-t* ‘to come’). The forms can appear either in the longer largo form or the shorter allegro form. In the largo form,

- (4) [mun] **geahča-n** (.) [gosa mana-i] (2;1)
 1SG watch-1SG where go-PST.3SG
 'I watch where (it) went'
- (5) [mu(n?)] **boahtá-n** (AL: boadá-n) [bargga] (2;1)
 1SG COME-PTCP.PST/CONNEX.PST⁶ soon
 'I come soon'

The potential use of first person inflections is reduced by the fact that the child occasionally uses the noun *biigá* to refer to herself⁷ or a shortened version of her own name (Eliinná in Saami, Elina in Finnish) *Enná* then adding a third-person verb form: *biigá borrhá* 'biigá eats', *biigá ohcá* 'biigá looks', *biigá ballá* 'biigá is afraid', *Enná geargá* 'Enná has time to'.⁸ At the age of approximately two years, the child begins to increasingly use the first person pronoun and the congruent verb form: *mun bijan* 'I put', *mun geahčan* 'I watch'. This method of reference will become established nearer to the age of 2;6, but the verb inflection used may still occasionally be the third person form (see 5.2.).

5. The inflectional variants of the first person singular form

According to my data, what is typical to the acquisition process of the first person singular inflection category is that although target forms have been registered throughout almost the entire data collection period from the time they first appear in a child's speech, she will use other forms alongside the target forms. Furthermore, while she uses a variety of morphologically different verb forms, which variant is dominant at a given time varies throughout the course of the collection period.

5.1. Non-suffixed form

A typical inflectional variant in the first personal singular is the non-suffixed word stem, appearing in a child's speech at the age of two and which remains in use for approximately eight months (2;0–2;8).

- (6) [m m mun] **bija** [áhči jusa da] (2;4)
 1SG put daddy.GA with here
 'I put here with dad'
- (7) [mu] **bijá** [dákkár-a -] (2;7)
 1SG.GA put this-GA
 'I put this'

⁶ See 5.3.

⁷ *biigá* originally means 'maid, servant', but is also used as a term of endearment to refer to little girls who are close to the speaker, often instead of a proper name.

⁸ The reason for using the third person form may lie in the fact that adults often use third-person forms when talking with children when referring to either themselves or their companion (see Toivainen 1980: 46). This type of speech is also registered in my data, where the father refers to the child as well as to himself with a noun (f = father, E = child)

f *biigá sárgu lámppa* ((question)) 'biigá draws a lamp'

E *ii'no'*

f *ii okei* (.) *áhčči sárgu lámppa* 'no okey (.) daddy draws a lamp' (1;8)

- (8) [mu] **oaínná** [duoika] (2;1)
 1SG.GA see mosquito
 ‘I see a mosquito’
- (9) [á á] **áiggu** [mu mu mun] *dearpa-t* (2;5)
 will 1SG beat-INF
 ‘I will beat’

As the previous examples show, the latus vowel in the stem is either in largo or allegro form according to the structure of the target form, and the consonant centre is in weak grade. The use of the personal pronoun *mun* [1SG.NOM] ‘I’ without the /n/ sound in some of the examples above may be connected to the non-suffixed verb form, but it is hard to tell for certain what triggers such an inconsequent use of a *mu*-form that resembles the genitive-accusative case, cf. *mu* [1SG.GA] ‘my; me’. The child uses the stem as the first person singular form particularly at the age of two and a half.

Non-suffixed forms also appear in trisyllabic and contracted verb categories:

- (10) [de mu] **geahččada** (2;5)
 then 1SG.GA try/try.3SG
 ‘then I try’
- (11) [mun] **háliida** (2;8)
 1SG want/want.3SG
 ‘I want’
- (12) [mu mu mu] **čohkká** [unna beavddi-s ná] (2;5)
 1SG.GA sit/sit.3SG small table-LOC like this
 ‘I sit by a little table like this’
- (13) [mun] **lea** [gáhhttu] (2;5)
 1SG be/be.3SG cat
 ‘I am a cat’

Interpreting these forms is not as unambiguous as with bisyllabic forms. This is because the lack of a personal suffix makes them identical with the third person singular forms (see 5.2.).

Another non-suffixed form is the strong-grade *máhtte*, in which the latus vowel is, in this context, unusual, *e*. The form was registered in the collected data twice, the other one presented in the following example:

- (14) E [do don máhte-t (AL: máhtá-t) bidja-t dá]
 2SG can-2SG put-INF here
 ‘you can put here’
- f [mon (.) jáhkátgo]
 ‘me ((question)), do you think’
- E [i-n mu] *máhtte* (AL: máhte)
 neg-1SG 1SG.GA can.CONNEG
 ‘I can’t’
- [nie bidja-t diekko (.) á áhčči (.) mu mun]
 so put-INF there dad 1SG
 ‘so put there, dad I’

<i>máhtte</i>	[<i>diekkár-a</i>	<i>bidja-t</i>	<i>lávka-i</i> ((?))]	(2;7)
can	that-GA	put-INF	bag-ILL	
'I can put that in a bag'				

The example shows that the child uses a strong-grade *máhtte* deviant from adult language first, instead of a weak-grade present negative *máhte*, and immediately after this, the same form is used to refer to the child herself in a positive sentence. As mentioned above, the lack of inflectional morpheme is commonplace at this stage of child language acquisition, but replacing the latus vowel with *e* was registered on three occasions only: once in the form *máhtte-n* and twice in *máhtte*. In all three cases, the child and/or her father had shortly before used the negative form *máht(t)* *e*, the latus vowel in which seems to have caused the use of the non-suffixed *máhtte* form as a finite form.

It is also noteworthy that the child uses the vowel *e* on the first line of the above examples as the latus vowel in *máhte-t* (AL: *máhtá-t*), see also the child's other usage that deviates from adult language, using *e* as the latus vowel (which are not, however, very productive based on the data), such as *bease-t*⁹ (AL: *beasa-t* [get-2SG] 'you get'), *bidje* (AL: *bidjá* [put.3SG] 'puts') and *galgge* (AL: *galgga* [CONNEG] 'must (not)'). The stem with the latus vowel *e* may therefore be a kind of "universal stem" that the child uses in a number of different contexts. Forms in which, contrary to the general rule, the vowel in the unstressed syllable is *e*, also exist in the language of those adult speakers whose Saami skills are not very strong, for example, *sáhte* [can.3SG] '((s)he) can', cf. AL: *sáhhtá* [can.3SG] '((s)he) can' (cf. AL: *sáhte* [CONNEG] 'can (not)'; *sáhhte* [can.1PL] '(we) can', cf. AL: *sáhhti-t* [can-1PL] (cf. AL: *sáhhte* [can.2DU/ PST.3PL] '(we) can/ they could').

The data features examples of the usage of weak-grade stems also in other inflections: the child uses the forms *bijá* [put], *boadá* [come] and *dáhta* [can] in second person singular, but each of these forms were registered only once, which would indicate that in practice, the use of the non-suffixed form is "reserved" for one purpose, the first person singular. The non-suffixed form is used only in the present tense, because in the preterit forms, the first of which appears at the age of 2;3, the child uses the *n*-suffix throughout the data collection period.

The use of the stem as a non-suffixed inflectional form has also been documented in Finnish child language. A Finnish-speaking child may use the noun stem without the genitive suffix *-n* and express the morphological characteristics of the word through gradation only: *mekko* [dress.NOM] : *meko* [dress.GEN], cf. AL: *mekko* [dress.NOM] : *meko-n* [dress-GEN]. The reason behind this is assumed to be that the suffix *-n* is not as salient as gradation. (Laalo 1997: 199–200, 2002: 92, Karjalainen 1979: 25–26.) The word-final *-n* is not always easily discernible in Saami either, and therefore it is possible that gradation is a more salient feature for a Saami child than an inflectional suffix, cf. second person singular suffix */h(t)/*; cf. also first person singular preterit forms in the data, which all have the suffix *-n*.

⁹ In the form *bease-t* the vowel in the unstressed syllable could, in principle, be interpreted as being influenced by the second syllable vowel in the form *pääse-t* [get-2SG] '(you) get' in Finnish, the child's other first language. See also the latus vowel in the present negative *bease* in the following example written by an adult: *Dán jagi juovlabasáras Guovdageainnus ii bease* ([CONNEG] < *beassa-t* [get-INF]) *dušše vuoitolišku geahččalit, doppe beasat maid vásihit báikkálaš juigiid ja lávluid*. 'In this year's Christmas bazaar in Guovdageaidnu you get not only to try your luck in the draw but also to listen to local yoikers and singers.' (Áššu 18.12.2007 p. 4.)

5.2. Third person forms

Nearly concurrently with non-suffixed forms, at the age of 2;1–2;9, the child also uses the third person singular forms for the first person inflectional forms, as evident in the following examples:

- (15) [*mun*] ***manná*** [*gávpog-ii* (.) (>)]
 1SG go.3SG TOWN-ILL
 ‘I go to town’
 [(>) *biigá* *boahtá* *bargga*] (2;1)
 “*biigá*” come.3SG soon
 ““*biigá*” comes soon’
- (16) [*gea* (.) *dieppe*] ***galgá*** [*mun* *dahka-t* (.) (>)]
 look there must.3SG 1SG do-INF
 ‘look, there I must do’
 [(>) *mun*] ***bidjá*** [*ná ná ná* *nie* (.) *ale* (.) (>)]
 1SG put.3SG like this like this so NEG.IMP.2SG
 ‘I put this way so, don’t’
 [(>) -- *nie* (.) *mun*] ***bidjá*** [*eret* (.) *don* *i-t* (>)]
 -- so 1SG put.3SG away 2SG NEG-2SG
 ‘-- so I put away, you must’
 [(>) *oaččo* *nie* (.) *mun*] ***dahká*** [*nie* *ná* *nie*] (2;4)
 can.CONNEG so 1SG do.3SG so like this so
 ‘not do so, I do so, like this, so’
- (17) [*gea* *ale* (.) *mun*] ***duhtta*** (2;4)
 look NEG.IMP.2SG 1SG get angry.3SG
 ‘look, don’t, I get angry’

The use of the third person singular instead of the first person fades after the age of two and half years. As a negative verb, the child usually uses the *in*-form as in adult language from its very first appearances onwards at the age of 2;0, but at a little under two years and six months, the child also starts using the third person singular form *ii* alongside the *in*-form. Its use alongside the target form continues sporadically up until the age 2;9:

- (18) [*m-m mun*] ***ii*** [*lea(-t?)* *váltán*] (2;4)
 1SG NEG.3SG be(-CONNEG) take-CONNEG.PST
 ‘I have not taken’
- (19) [*mu mu mu (?)*] ***ii*** [*gille*] (2;5)
 1SG.GA NEG.3SG want.CONNEG
 ‘I don’t want’

Finnish-speaking children may also use the third person singular verb form with a first person singular pronoun, according to Toivainen, until the age of two years and six months, for example, *minä* [1SG] *hakee* [get.3SG] ‘I get’ (cf. AL: *hae-n* [get-1SG] ‘I get’) (Toivainen 1980: 46–47).

With trisyllabic and contracted verbs, the third person singular form and the non-suffixed form converge so that in the examples (11) and (12) above, the verb forms *háliida* and *čohkká* are ambiguous.

5.3. The consonant centre in bisyllabic strong-grade stems

The choice of the grade in the consonant centre does not cause too many problems for a two-year-old, although at that age the following forms with the weak instead of the strong grade were registered: *galgá-n* [must-1SG] ‘I must’ (cf. AL: *galgga-n* [must-1SG] ‘I must’); *boahtá-n* [come-1SG] ‘I come’ (cf. AL: *boadá-n* [come-1SG] ‘I come’; see Chapter 4.) and *man(n)a-n* [go-1SG] ‘I go’ (cf. AL: *mana-n* [go-1SG] ‘I go’). The central consonants in the forms used by the child and the target forms are usually identical, but especially from the age 2;7 until the end of the data recording period, the child sometimes uses forms with a strong-grade consonant centre, in addition to the target forms. It follows that the forms converge with other forms in the adult language paradigm, as the following examples show:

- (20) [*mu mu mu mun*] ***dahka-n*** (AL: *daga-n*) (2;7)
 1SG do-PTCP.PST/CONNEX.PST/ACT.NOM/VN
 ‘I do’
- (21) [*juo mun*] ***galga-n*** (AL: *galgga-n*) [*manna-t*] (2;8)
 yes 1SG must-PTCP.PST/CONNEX.PST/ACT.NOM/VN go-INF
 ‘yes I must go’
- (22) [*go dál mun*] ***váldá-n*** (AL: *válddá-n*) [*eret (>)*]
 because now 1SG take-PTCP.PST/CONNEX.PST away
 ‘because now I take (it) away’
 [(>) *dá-i-d go dat lea juhka-n*] (2;10)
 this-PL-ACC when it be.3SG drink-PTCP.PST
 ‘these when it has drunk’
- (23) [*ja*] ***bidja-n*** (AL: *bija-n*) [*duo-sa*] (2;11)
 ja put-PTCP.PST/CONNEX.PST/ACT.NOM/VN that-ILL
 ‘and I put there’

All the above forms (apart from *dahkan*, which was registered three times) are exceptions to the forms usually used by the child. For example, the gradation of the consonant centre *dj : j* was registered as early as at 1;10: *bidjá : bija* (see also Bals 2002: 49; according to her, *dj : j* gradation is one of the earliest gradation types children acquire).

When a child uses the stem (e.g. *bijá*, cf. AL: *bija-n*) in parallel with the form with a strong-grade consonant centre (e.g. *bidja-n*, cf. AL: *bija-n*), it would also be possible to categorise strong-grade, non-suffixed forms such as *manná* and *máhtá*, which I have now interpreted as being third person forms, as stems, in which the grade of the consonant centre deviates from that of the target form, cf. *bijá* and *bidjá*. This interpretation is supported in the case of *a*-stemmed forms by the fact that in the target forms of the Guovdageaidnu and Gáivuotna dialects, for example

the one which according to standard orthography is spelled *manan*, the latus vowel *a* is lengthened when the vowel centre of the word is short and the consonant centre is in quantity I or II: *manán*, *dagán*, *logán* etc. (see Sammallahti 2006: 175–176).

5.4. The shortening of trisyllabic stems

The number and frequency of inflectional forms of trisyllabic verbs registered in the data was substantially lower than those of bisyllabic verbs. However, certain main characteristics are discernible, as shown by examples in Sections 5.1. and 5.2. Trisyllabic stems may also be shortened into bisyllabic ones to begin with, either so that the word form used by the child does not contain the second syllable present in the adult language form or that the third syllable in the adult language form, and thereby also the inflectional suffix, is lacking in the form used by the child:

- (24) [*mh mun*] ***báhki-n*** (AL: *bálkest-an*) [*dohko*] (1;9)
 1SG throw-1SG there
 ‘I throw it there’
- (25) ***háji*** (AL: *háliid-an*) [*bojja-t* *vel* *eambbo*] (2;6)
 want eat-INF even more
 ‘I want to eat even more’
- (26) [*mun*] ***veahk-an*** (AL: *veahkeh-an*) [*du*] (2;7)
 1SG help-1SG 2SG.GA
 ‘I help you’

The shortening of trisyllabic words into bisyllabic ones has also been documented by Berit Anne Bals Baal, in whose data the youngest informants, two and two-and-a-half-year-old children, only used bisyllabic words, for example *rahhka*, cf. AL: *ráhkad-it* [make-INF] ‘to make’, *baači*, cf. AL: *bávččag-ii* [hurt-PST.3SG] ‘(it) hurt’, *věahhke*, cf. *veahket* [help.IMP.2SG] ‘help!’ (Bals 2002: 69–70, 53)¹⁰. In one of the early stages of word acquisition, common to many languages, words longer than two syllables are shortened. According to studies on the phonological development of Finnish-speaking children, words may be shortened also during a stage known as the systematic language acquisition, so that words with three or more syllables are shortened into bisyllabic ones. (Kunnari 2000, Savinainen-Makkonen 2001, Savinainen-Makkonen, Kunnari 2004: 86)

5.5. Non-frequent inflections

In addition to the principal inflection types discussed above, the child also uses other inflectional forms instead of first person forms. Most of the forms were single occurrences and exceptions to the forms the child usually uses, and I will therefore not discuss those in detail in this conjunction. One of these occurrences is interesting because it may be a case where the child’s other first language Finnish affects the Saami inflection. Namely in one verb form, the child uses the latus vowel, which deviated from the vowel in the unstressed syllable in the target form:

¹⁰ See also the trisyllabic and quadrosyllabic forms in my data, registered at the age 1;11–2;1: *čohkkodit* (AL: *čohkked-it*) [sit down-INF] ‘to sit down’, *billahuvvá* [break, break down.3SG] ‘breaks, breaks down’, *bálkest-it* [throw-INF] ‘to throw’, *bávččag-ii* [hurt-PST.3SG] ‘(it) hurt’, *oahtti-me* (AL: *oasti-me*) [buy-ACT.ESS] ‘buying’.

- (27) [go mun] **lávlla-n** (AL: *lávllu-n*) [dan nuppe --] (2;11)
 when 1SG sing-1SG it.GA other.GA
 ‘when I sing the other --’

Here, the form *lávllan* ‘I sing’ seems to have been affected by the Finnish form *laulan* ‘I sing’. In adult language the verb *lávlut* ‘to sing’ belongs to bisyllabic *u*-stemmed verbs, but the vowel *a* in the second syllable of the Finnish first person singular form may be the reason for the child inflecting the verb according to model for bisyllabic *a*-stemmed verbs, cf. for example Saami *guovla-t* [peek-INF]: *guovlla-n* [peek-1SG]. The use of the vowel *a* may also have been motivated by the fact that there are far more *a*-stemmed verbs in Saami than *u*-stemmed ones, and that they are more frequent than *u*-stemmed verbs. The form *lávllan* appeared in the data twice towards the end of the recording period, but in the same recording, one minute after the *lávllan* forms, also the target form appears:

- (28) [kánske mun] **lávllu-n** [dien] (2;11)
 maybe 1SG sing-1SG it.GA
 ‘maybe I sing it’

The *lávllan* form can in fact be regarded as an exception among the verb forms used by the child, since there are no other examples in which the present-tense form of the bisyllabic verb subclass would incorporate the latus vowel of another subclass.

6. Conclusion

The target forms of first person inflectional forms began to establish in the child informant’s language at the age of around two and a half years, but she would use other inflectional variants alongside them almost up until the end of the data recording period.

The main stages of the acquisition process of the target forms are illustrated in Diagram 1, which gives the various variants of the form *bija-n* [put-1SG] ‘I put’ and the age at which they were used. On the vertical axis is the child’s age (year, month and day) at which each form was recorded on video, while the horizontal axis gives the form variants in chronological order. The vertical columns show when a given form was used and how many times. The figure in brackets refers to the number of times each variant was registered on the tape recorded at that particular age. The plus sign means if the form was used at least as many times as indicated by the number in brackets. For example the child may have used the *bijan* form countless times from the age 2;8.27–28 onwards until the form *bidjan* appeared at the age 2;11.1–2, but the diagram only shows the first three consecutive occurrences of each variant (in this case: *bijan*), which are different from the preceding variant (in this case *bijá* at the age 2;7.10), namely one at the age 2;7.30 and two at the age 2;8.27–28.

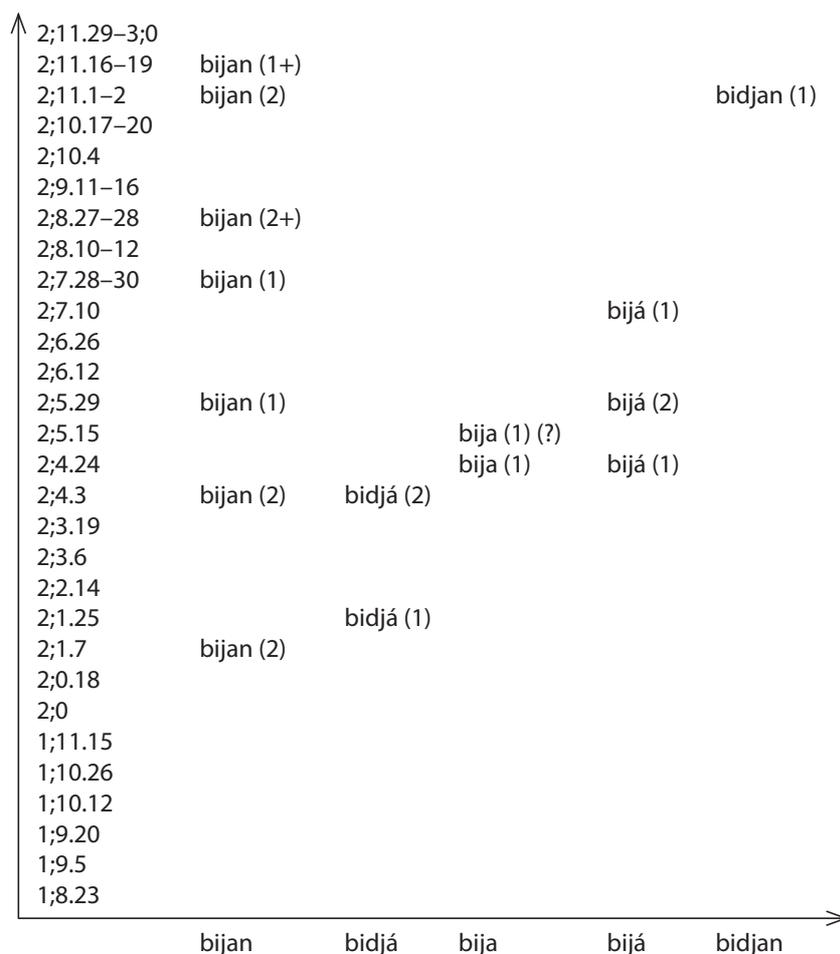


Diagram 1. Acquisition of the form *bijan*

The Diagram 1 shows that the target form *bijan* was first registered at the age of roughly two years and that the child uses it almost throughout the entire data recording period. However, a few weeks after the first occurrence, the target form is replaced by a third person form *bidjá*, but it disappears a few months later, when a non-suffixed form appears in the child's language, the latus vowel being either in largo or allegro form. The child uses the non-suffixed form and the target form in parallel for a few months until the target form becomes established as the sole form after the age of two and a half years. However, when the child is nearly three years old, one occurrence is still registered of a form with the consonant centre in strong grade.

The diagram shows that in addition to the target form *bijan*, the child uses three other inflectional variants deviating from the morphophonology of the target form: (1) the non-suffixed forms *bija* and *bijá*, (2) the third person singular form *bidjá* and (3) the strong-grade form *bidjan*.

Based on all the first person singular forms featuring in the data, it appears that non-suffixed forms and the third person singular forms are used almost in parallel: the former at the age 2;0–2;8, the latter at the age 2;1–2;9. The data has five lexemes that have been used both in a non-suffixed form and the third person singular form, and based on these five lexemes it can be assumed that when acquiring the language the child may use third person forms and non-suffixed forms consecutively (as in the forms of the lexemes *BIDJAT* and *DAHKAT*) or in parallel (as

in the forms of the lexemes GALGAT, MANNAT and ÁIGUT). It would, however, require a more extensive sample of data to ascertain whether it is more common for the child to use these forms consecutively or in parallel.

The child uses the word stem particularly for the first person singular, but the third person singular form is used, according to the data, instead of the target form also in other persons and numbers, such as the second person singular and third person plural.

The child uses strong-grade forms particularly in the latter part of the data recording period, at the age 2;7–2;11, and they are mostly isolated incidences, appearing alongside target forms. Usually the consonant centre is in the weak grade as per the target form model, but like in other inflections, the grade may also deviate from the grade of the consonant centre in the target form.

In addition to the three main inflectional forms that deviate from the target form, as mentioned above, the child may also use other inflections. Although most of these occurrences were registered only once or twice, they reinforce the view that the acquisition process of the verb inflection system is a complex one and show that during the protomorphological phase, the child experiments with combining various morphophonological rules before eventually acquiring the target forms.

Abbreviations

1	first person	INF	infinitive
2	second person	LOC	locative
3	third person	NOM	nominative
ACT	the so-called action	PL	plural
CONNNEG	connegative	PRS	present
DU	dual	PST	past
ESS	essive	PTCP	participle
GA	genitive-accusative	SG	singular
ILL	illative	VN	verbal noun
IMP	imperative		

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“MA PANEB SELLE ÄRA” EHK VARASED PROTOMORFOLOOGILISED VERBIMUUTE-STRATEEGIAD SAAMI LAPSEKEELES

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Artikkel kirjeldab mõnesid protomorfoloogilisi verbimuuteviise põhjasaami lapsekeeles vanuses 1;8–3;0. Uuringu keskmeks on valitud kindla kõneviisi oleviku ainsuse esimese isiku vormid. Laps kasutab neid juba alates verbimuutesüsteemi õppimise algusest, seetõttu peegeldavad just need vormid kõige varasemaid protomorfoloogilisi infleksioonivariante, mida laps kasutab. Need vormid on sageli ka morfoloogiliselt keerukamad kui lapse esimesed ühemorfeemilised vormid.

Laps kasutab täiskasvanule sarnaseid muutevorme kogu keelearengu perioodil alates ainsuse esimese isiku vormi tekkest vanuses 1;9–1;10, kuid lisaks täiskasvanutega sarnastele vormidele leidub veel kolm põhilist viisi, kuidas laps verbe muudab. Vanuses 2;0–2;8 kasutab laps verbe sageli ilma *n*-lõputa, nt *bija* (vrd täiskasvanukeeles *bija-n* ‘panema-SG1PRES’). Umbes samal ajal, vanuses 2;1–2;9, kasutatakse esimese isiku asemel kindla kõneviisi oleviku ainsuse kolmanda isiku vormi, nt *boah tá* (vrd täiskasvanukeeles *boad á-n* ‘tulema-PRES.SG1’). Kolmas erinevus täiskasvanust on tugeva astme kasutamine kahe silbiliste sõnade konsonantses keskmes, nt *váldán* (vrd täiskasvanukeeles *váldd á-n* ‘võtma-PRES.SG1’).

Lisaks kolmele ülalnimetatud muutelõpule kasutavad lapsed ka muid lõppe. Kuigi enamik muudest juhtudest esines vaid 1–2 korral, kinnitavad need seisukohta, et verbimuutesüsteemi omandamise protsess on keerukas, ning et protomorfoloogilises faasis eksperimenteerib laps erinevate morfoloogiareeglite kombineerimisega, enne kui lõpuks sihtvormid omandab.

Võtmesõnad: kakskeelne esimese keele omandamine, morfoloogia, verbivormistik, põhjasaami keel, soome keel