

Multilingual Names on the Finnish Basic Map

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Abstract

The *Finnish Basic Map* and the computerised *Place Name Register* maintained by the National Land Survey for map-making purposes have place names in five different languages: the official Finnish and Swedish, and three semi-official Sámi languages. As one would expect, distributions of the various languages overlap, and roughly one percent of the named places have names in more than one language.

All five naming systems are similar enough that semantically transparent toponyms can be translated from one language to another. The three Sámi languages are also similar enough that virtually all common multilingual names are also common in each of their respective languages. This is also true for Finnish and Swedish, but the names common to Finnish and the Sámi languages often involve elements that have a more limited geographic distribution in Finnish. All this gives some insight into the underlying cultural interplay, and also into the role of semantic transparency in name use.

Introduction

The Republic of Finland has two official and five semi-official languages, as shown in Table 1. Of these the Sámi languages, Finnish, and Swedish have the longest history of being spoken in the region, reaching further back than historical records. Pitkänen (2001) outlines how originally Finnish toponyms along the southern coast have been loaned to a new, Swedish-speaking population in the early Middle Ages, and also dates (1990) some of them to as early as the end of the last millennium B.C. Loan words in the Finnic languages also make it clear that contacts with Germanic languages have been constant since prehistoric times, and it has been argued (Itkonen 1983) that contacts with Indo-Europeans, both Baltic and Germanic, were the original cause for the differentiation of Finnic and Sámi languages. While there is documentary evidence of the Sámi still living in southern Finland in the 14th century (e.g., REA 1996:#269), the current Sámi-speaking region covers only the northernmost parts of Lapland.

	Language	Native speakers (2001)
Official	Finnish	90.40 %
	Swedish	6.63 %
Semi-official	Sámi	0.03 %
	– Northern	
	– Enare	
	– Skolt	
	Romany	0.01 %
	Finnish Sign Language	not listed

Table 1. Official and semi-official languages in Finland

The five languages are also the ones currently used on maps published by the National Land Survey. In this study I have used the Place Name Register, a computer database that contains all

the names that appear on the 1: 20,000 Basic Map (Leskinen 2007). As seen in Table 2, the languages differ very much in regard to number and geographical distribution of names in each of them. Finnish names are almost ten times as numerous as Swedish, and these in turn are again much more numerous than names in the Sámi languages. Within the Sámi group, Northern and Enare Sámi names are almost equally frequent, but the number of Skolt Sámi names is very small.

Language	Names	Places
Finnish	253,760	721,363
Swedish	42,527	74,799
Northern Sámi	5,171	5,781
Enare Sámi	3,704	4,249
Skolt Sámi	143	153
Total	305,096	798,005

Table 2. Number of names and named places

The geographical distribution of the different languages varies as much as the overall frequency. Figures 1–5 show both the absolute name density on 20×20 km squares for names in each of the five languages, and the proportion of names from this language relative to all toponyms. As one would expect given the relative numbers in Table 2, this simple visualisation shows clear differences between the five languages.

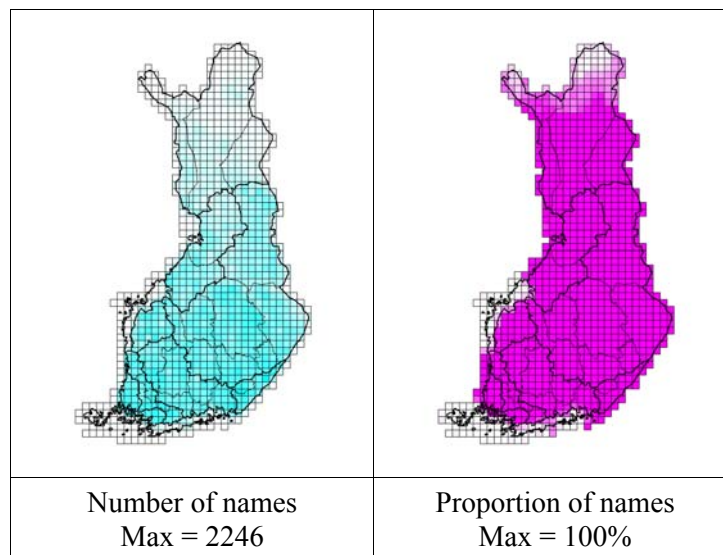


Figure 1. Number of Finnish names

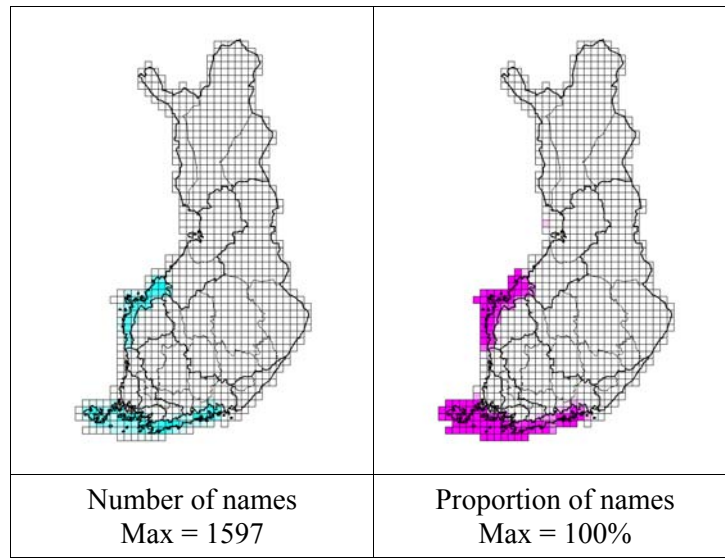


Figure 2. Number of Swedish names

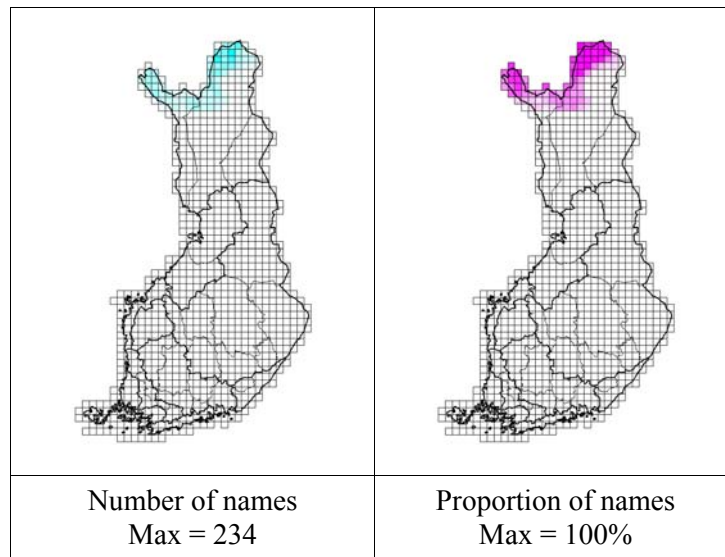


Figure 3. Number of Northern Sámi names

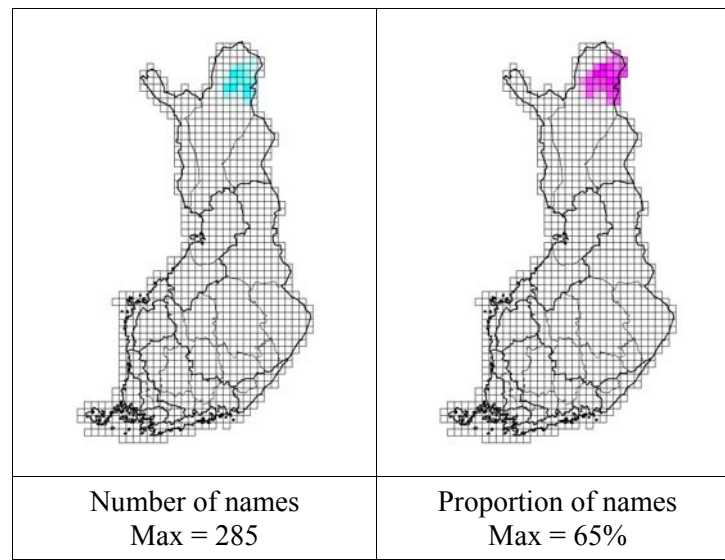


Figure 4. Number of Enare Sámi names

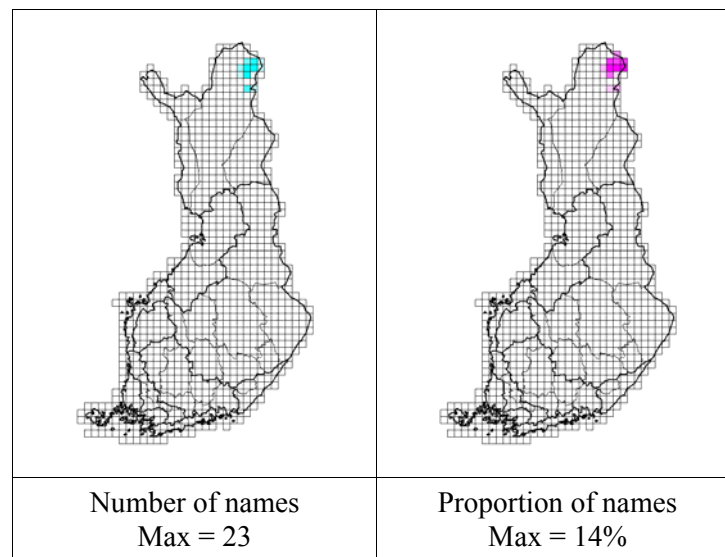


Figure 5. Number of Skolt Sámi names

Finnish names are found almost all over the country and typically are in a clear majority. The absolute density of the names varies widely, being highest in the early-settled agricultural and urban areas in the south and lowest in the northernmost parts of the country where the Finnish-speaking settlers arrived latest. Swedish names appear mostly along the southern and western coasts and in the archipelago, and they too have an overwhelming majority in the core Swedish areas. This is not surprising, as these regions have been monolingually Swedish from medieval times until very recently. The Sámi languages cover relatively compact areas in northernmost Lapland, and while Northern Sámi is clearly the majority language in its core region, the other two are much weaker, with Skolt Sámi appearing only as a small minority language.

Bilingual names

As the corpus includes toponyms in five different languages, and as a single place can have

names in several languages, there are in theory ten different ways to pair these languages. In practice, however, the maps in Figures 2–5 show that the distribution of Swedish names does not overlap with those of the Sámi languages. There are two exceptions for this: the municipality of *Inari / Enare / Anár / Aanaar / Aanar* has a name listed in all five languages, and the municipality of *Enontekiö / Enontekis / Eanodat* in Finnish, Swedish and Northern Sámi.

Leaving out the Swedish / Sámi combinations gives seven language pairs that can be considered meaningful in terms of multilingual naming. Table 3 shows these pairs and the number of places that have a name in both of the languages of the pair, as well as the number of monolingual place names in each language. This confirms what is already seen in the distribution maps: Finnish and Swedish are clear majority languages in their respective areas, and also Northern Sámi has a core area where it has a majority status, but both Enare and Skolt Sámi are minority languages – Skolt Sámi so much so that there are very few names that do not have an alternate in at least one of the other languages.

	Finnish	Swedish	Northern Sámi	Enare Sámi	Skolt Sámi
Monolingual	713,552	72,039	3,274	1,123	9
Finnish		2,760	2,318	2,930	126
Northern Sámi				388	41
Enare Sámi					133

Table 3. Numbers of bilingual names

Not very surprisingly, places that have a name in more than one language appear in relatively narrow areas where two languages overlap. However, in addition to these locations one can also see whether the same names appear elsewhere on the map: so, for instance, as there is a small lake with the Finnish name *Ruoholampi* and Enare Sámi name *Ruáhulááduš* ‘Grass Lake’, it may be useful to see the distribution of the name *Ruoholampi* elsewhere in the Finnish region and *Ruáhulááduš* in the Enare Sámi region. Figures 6–12 show such distribution maps for each of the seven non-trivial language pairs. Next to the map there is also a list of the most common bilingual names in each of the languages.

Almost all of the common bilingual names in the five languages are semantically transparent and follow the overall construction of an identifier followed by a classifier (cf. Leino 2007: 51–53). They are thus in the class of toponyms that Van Langendonck (2007: 206) considers the most marked. Often the alternates can be considered translations of each other, and it seems clear that translating names is a common or even the preferred method for transferring such names from one language to another. Ainiala (1996) has observed that the semantic content of names helps in remembering them, and that changes in lexicon often result in corresponding changes in toponyms. The same appears to hold also across languages.

While translating is common, not all bilingual names are translations. Loan names are also common, so that for instance Swedish *Källberget* ‘Spring / Fountain Hill’ has become Finnish *Kelperi*. Often only a part of the name is translated. Most often this is the classifier, as in Finnish *Sikoneva* ‘Swine Marsh’ / Swedish *Sikomossen*, partly because it is usually the element that is most clearly understandable across the language barrier. Sometimes, though, other elements are more clearly translatable, as in the case of the city of *Nykarleby / Uusikaarlepyy*. Sometimes the two names are completely unrelated, like Finnish *Lammassaari* ‘Sheep Island’ / Swedish *Alören* ‘Alder Islet’.

Figure 6 shows the places with both a Finnish and a Swedish name as blue crosses, their Finnish homonyms in green and Swedish homonyms in red. There are some blue crosses all over

the country, but this is mainly because these are the two official languages, and therefore cities and other major municipalities have a name listed in both. The bulk of the bilingual names, however, is concentrated in a narrow strip along the southern and western coast, between the mostly Finnish-speaking mainland and the traditionally Swedish-speaking coastal areas and archipelago.

The most common Finnish / Swedish bilingual names are also very common in general in these languages. Five of the top eight Finnish names have more than 100 homonyms, and seven of the top eight have over 40. Likewise, seven of the top nine Swedish names have over 30 homonyms. They are typical also in the sense that they, in the case of Finnish names, conform to the structural types described by Kiviniemi (1975) and, in the case of Swedish names as described by Zilliacus (2002). Moreover, none of the lexemes in them is restricted to a geographically small dialect.

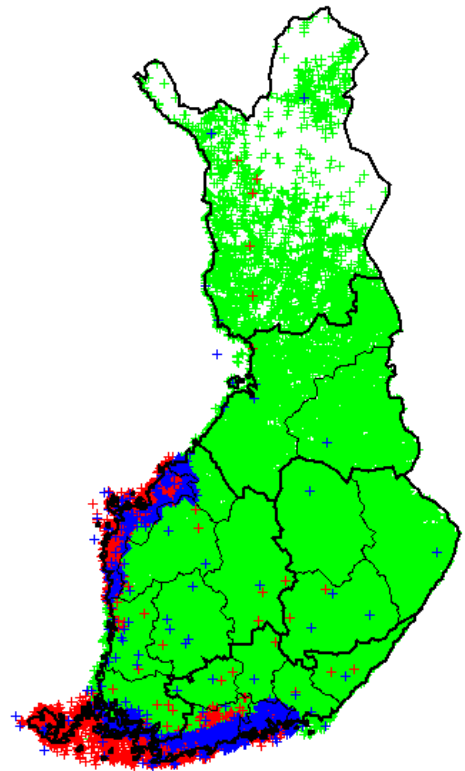
Finnish: top 8 names

- 6 Myllykylä
- 6 Lammassaari
- 6 Karhusaari
- 6 Isosuo
- 5 Mustajärvi
- 5 Malmi
- 5 Korkeakallio
- 5 Isoneva

Swedish: top 9 names

- 15 Stormossen
- 7 Högberget
- 6 Storängen
- 6 Sandö
- 6 Bockholmen
- 5 Långholmen
- 5 Lillträsket
- 5 Kvarnby
- 5 Högholmen

Figure 6. Finnish (green) / Swedish (red) bilingual names



The Finnish / Northern Sámi bilingual names, shown in Figure 7, are a somewhat different case. As can be expected given the different status of the languages, the bilinguals and their Sámi homonyms cover almost all the Northern Sámi area, but while the Finnish homonyms also occur all over the country their density does not follow the overall density of Finnish names. There are distinctly more of these homonyms in the northern and north-eastern parts of the country than one should expect, and likewise less of them in the southern and western parts. Also, while three of the top eight Finnish names have over 100 homonyms, four of them have less than 30.

While the difference in distributions can be partly explained by geographical differences between Lapland and southern Finland, this is not the only factor involved. A number of the most common names that have a Northern Sámi homonym include lexemes that are markedly northern and also mostly loans from the Sámi languages. These typically do not have homonyms in the south, so the explanation for the uneven distribution of the southern homonyms must be elsewhere. The southern edge of the Northern Sámi was settled by Finns mostly originating from

the province of Tavastia during the Middle Ages (Vahtola 1980) and the northern edge, in northernmost Norway, from the resulting settlements along the western border of the current Finnish Lapland roughly in the 17th century (Hyltenstam and Milani 2003). The southern occurrences of the homonyms of Finnish / Northern Sámi bilingual names are least frequent in those regions that were not involved in the Finnish settlement of Lapland.

The case of the Finnish / Enare Sámi bilinguals, in Figure 8, resembles the Finnish / Swedish case in that not only do the bilingual names cover virtually the whole region of Enare Sámi names, but also the Finnish homonyms appear surprisingly uniformly across southern Finland. Of the top nine Finnish names in the set, four have over 100 homonyms and three up to 30. There are some names that are distinctly northern and include lexemes with a Sámi origin, but most are quite unremarkable as Finnish names. It is not completely clear why names in the Enare Sámi region are different from the other two Sámi language areas in this respect, but one possible explanation can be the strong southern Finnish influence this area has had in the 20th century. Aikio (2003: 108) notes briefly that new Finnish names have been replacing older Sámi names in the western Enare region in the 20th century. In part this is related to the 1940's gold rush along the Lemmenjoki river (for which cf. Partanen 2004), and in part to tourism in the Saariselkä region. Both areas have over the past century had extensive contact with people from southern Finland, and this appears to have led to a more southern style of Finnish names than in the other Sámi areas.

The last group of the Finnish bilinguals, those involving Skolt Sámi as the other language, is much smaller than the others, and these names also cover the Skolt Sámi area completely. On the Finnish side, however, Figure 9 shows a distribution very much like that of Figure 7, although perhaps even more clearly as the overall number of names is so much smaller. Here too the Finnish homonyms are concentrated in western Lapland, north-eastern Finland and a region in the south that roughly covers the medieval Tavastian hunting grounds. This is nicely in line with Vahtola's (2003) description of how the originally Tavastian Finnish settlers of western and southern Lapland had commercial contacts with, and tax rights over, the Sámi people in late medieval and early modern times. Since the Finnish / Sámi bilingual names mostly involve natural features, it is understandable that the southern counterparts appear mostly in the hunting grounds rather than nearer the oldest agricultural areas. Interestingly, though, an earlier analysis of Finnish lake names in the Place Name Register (Leino 2004) assigned the entire Tavastia and western Lapland regions into the same cluster.

The various Sámi bilinguals are relatively straightforward. The Northern and Enare Sámi names, shown in Figure 10, resemble the Finnish / Swedish names in that these too appear as a narrow strip on the border of the two regions. The Northern and Skolt Sámi names in Figure 11 are similar except that there are few homonyms on the Skolt Sámi side. This is mostly because there are so few names – only eight of all the Skolt Sámi names have more than one homonym. This is also reflected in the Enare and Skolt Sámi names in Figure 12; as indicated in Tables 2 and 3 there are only twenty Skolt Sámi names in the Place Name Register that do not have an Enare Sámi alternate.

Finnish: top 8 names

- 9 Saarijärvi
- 8 Pahtavaara
- 7 Ahvenjärvi
- 6 Tammukkajärvi
- 6 Rautujärvi
- 6 Pitkäjärvi
- 6 Pahtajärvi
- 5 Haukijärvi

Northern Sámi: top 7 names

- 10 Suolojávri
- 8 Guhkesjávri
- 8 Báktevárri
- 7 Dápmotjávri
- 6 Rávdojávri
- 6 Hávgajávri
- 6 Báktejávri

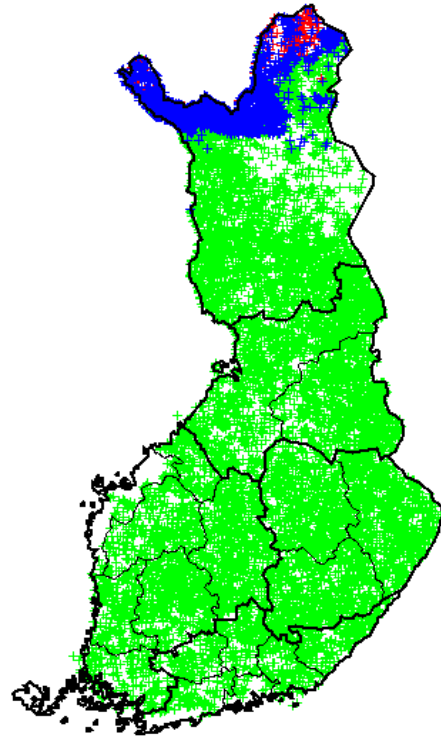


Figure 7. Finnish (green) / Northern Sámi (red) bilingual names

Finnish: top 9 names

- 19 Ahvenjärvi
- 11 Saarijärvi
- 10 Harrijärvi
- 8 Ruohojärvi
- 8 Lammassaari
- 7 Pitkäjärvi
- 7 Pahtavaara
- 7 Kortejärvi
- 7 Alajärvi

Enare Sámi: top 7 names

- 11 Vuáskujávri
- 11 Suáviljávri
- 9 Huáššijáavráš
- 8 Vuáskujáavráš
- 8 Suálujávri
- 8 Ruáhujáavráš
- 6 Kuhesjáavráš

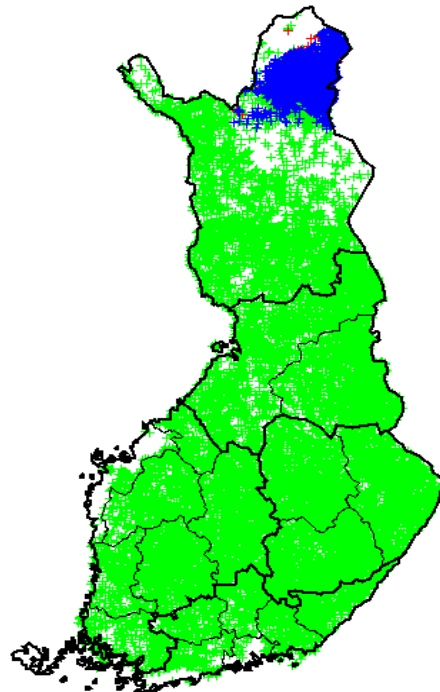


Figure 8. Finnish (green) / Enare Sámi (red) bilingual names

Finnish: top 5 names

- 4 Harrijärvi
- 3 Saarijärvi
- 2 Sevettijärvi
- 2 Nilijärvi
- 2 Ahvenjärvi

Skolt Sámi: top 5 names

- 3 Suä'vveljäu'rr
- 3 Suäljäu'rr
- 2 Če'vetjäu'rr
- 2 Vuâskjäu'rr
- 2 Njölljäu'rr

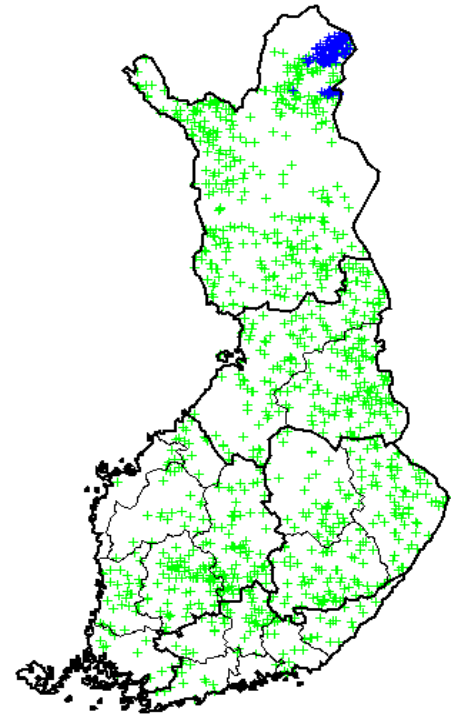


Figure 9. Finnish / Skolt Sámi bilingual names

Northern Sámi: top 4 names

- 3 Oaivošvárri
- 3 Jeagejárčielgi
- 3 Guhkesluoppal
- 3 Guhkesjávri

Enare Sámi: top 2 names

- 3 Uáivušvääri
- 3 Jeggijävrčielgi

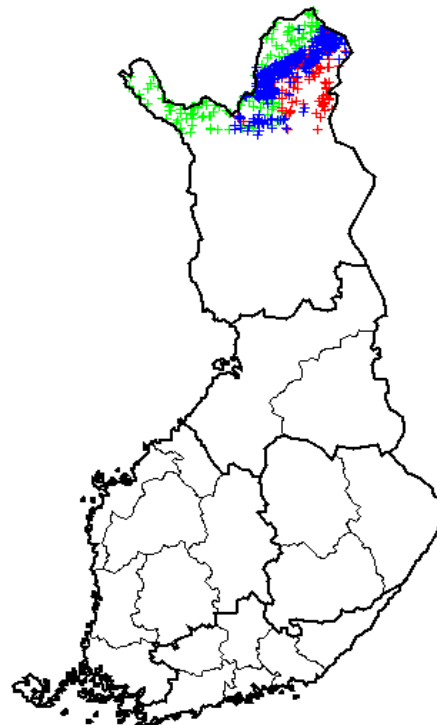


Figure 10. Northern (green) / Enare Sámi (red) bilingual names

Northern Sámi: top 1 name
2 Čeavetjávri

Skolt Sámi: top 1 name
2 Če'vetjäu'rr

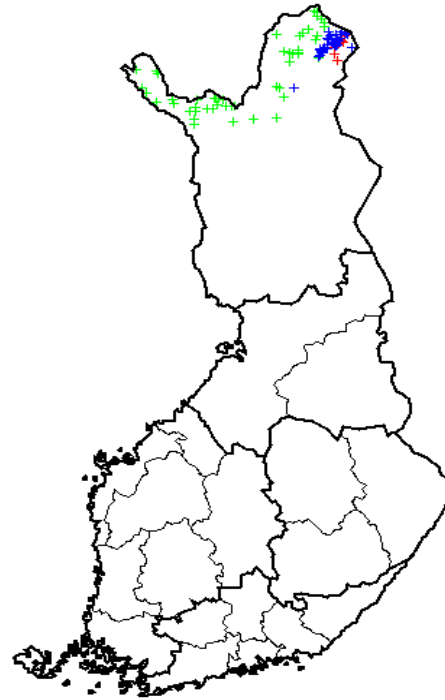


Figure 11. Northern (green)/ Skolt Sámi (red) bilingual names

Northern Sámi: top 5 names

- 3 Suávviljávri
- 2 Čevetjávri
- 2 Vaassiluáivi
- 2 Suáluijávri
- 2 Njollájávri

Enare Sámi: top 6 names

- 2 Če'vetjäu'rr
- 2 Vaasselvuei'vv
- 2 Suä'vveljäu'rr
- 2 Suäljäu'rr
- 2 Puállamvää'rr
- 2 Njölljäu'rr

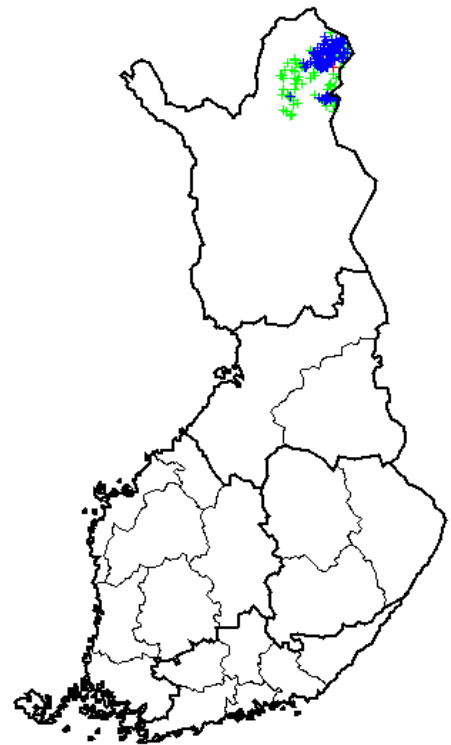


Figure 12. Enare (green) / Skolt Sámi (red) bilingual names

Conclusions

An analysis of the bilingual names shows differences mostly in language pairs that include Finnish. This is mostly because of the widely different numbers of names in the languages; there are simply so few Sámi toponyms that few firm conclusions can be made. This is especially true regarding Skolt Sámi, where only a handful of names appear more than once.

It seems clear that Finnish and Swedish are onomastically quite similar, and in general, the most common bilingual names are also common in their respective languages. Moreover, Finnish homonyms of these names are common all over the mainland and Swedish homonyms all over the archipelago and the Swedish-speaking coast. In other words, the bilingual names as a whole do not form a distinct category that has resulted from the contact between the languages, but instead the core onomastic practices of the two languages are compatible enough that a direct translation of semantically transparent names is a common occurrence.

The case of Finnish and Enare Sámi is rather similar, although there are far fewer names for settlements and other man-made artefacts than in the case of Finnish and Swedish. It would seem that the Finnish and Sámi naming systems are in general compatible, likely because of both common ancestry and some degree of continuous cultural contacts. On the other hand, most of the bilingual names appear to be ones where a name has been translated from one language into the other, instead of either the whole name or some of its constituent lexemes having been incorporated as loans. In view of the large number of southern Finns in the region over the past century it seems possible that original Sámi names have often been replaced by translations of new Finnish names.

Northern and Skolt Sámi names have a different relationship with Finnish ones. Here the names include more lexemes that have a narrow geographical distribution, most of which can be traced as loan words from the Sámi languages. This is understandable in view of how the contacts between Finnish and Sámi speakers have continued for centuries as the Finnish settlements have expanded since medieval times to cover much of the Northern Sámi region.

Bilingual names between the Sámi languages seem similar to those between Finnish and Swedish. The relationship between the languages is of course very different as the Sámi languages are closely related, but culturally the analogy is more appropriate. The agrarian Finns and Swedes shared very much the same culture, being subjects of the same crown; likewise the Sámi were in contact with each other and had a significant amount of shared cultural heritage.

Like the majority of common toponyms in each of the five languages, the most common bilingual names are semantically transparent. When such names need to cross from one language to another, translation seems an obvious choice. While this is by far not the only way for names to cross from one of these languages to another, it is one of the common ways. This can be seen as another small piece of evidence that the semantic content is not irrelevant but instead supports the onymic function of a place name.

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