



# Agreement Challenging Lexicon: The North Saami *buorre* 'good'

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In Uralic languages the typical situation is that the adjectival modifier does not have agreement with its head. In Saamic languages the situation is roughly the same. In North Saami the adjective **buorre** 'good' has partial case and number agreement with its head. Interestingly, the counterparts in some other languages act differently in comparison to other adjectives.

## Etymology

The Saami word *buorri* descends from Finnic-Permic *\*para* 'good'. In Finnic languages it is attested in e. g. comparative and superlative forms Finnish *parempi* 'better' and *paras* 'best', and in verb derivatives, such as *parantua* 'get better'. Other etymological cognates are Erzya *paro*, Moksha *para* 'good', Mari *poro*, *puro* 'good, healthy', Udmurt *bur* 'good; right (hand, side); luck, success, richness' and Komi *bur* 'good'. It is a loanword from Aryan *\*para(s)* (Sammallahti 1998, UEW 1988).

## Agreement

In North Saami demonstrative pronouns, numerals and some indefinite pronouns expressing an approximate number (e. g. *moadde* 'a couple') agree with the noun at least in some extent. Adjectival modifiers do not agree with the head but they have a separate form for modifier (e. g. *čáhppat*, mod. *čáhppes*). The adjective *buorre* 'good' is an exception, as it displays the same kind of agreement with demonstratives:

### 'good knife'

Singular	Plural
Nom. <i>buorre niibi</i>	Nom. <i>buorit niibbit</i>
G/A <i>buori niibbi</i>	G/A. <i>huriid niibbiid</i>
Ill. <i>buori niibái</i>	Ill. <i>huriid niibbiide,</i> <i>huriide niibbiide</i>
Loc. <i>buori niibbis</i>	Loc. <i>huriid niibbiin</i>
Com. <i>huriin niibbiin</i>	Com. <i>huriid niibbiiguin</i> <i>huriiguin niibbiiguin</i>
Ess. <i>buorrin niibin</i>	

### 'that house'

Singular	Plural
Nom. <i>dat dállu</i>	Nom. <i>dat dálut</i>
G./A. <i>dan dálu</i>	G./A. <i>daid dáluid</i>
Ill. <i>dan dállui</i>	Ill. <i>daidda dáluide</i>
Loc. <i>dan dálu</i>	Loc. <i>dain dáluin</i>
Com. <i>dainna dáluin</i>	Com. <i>daid dáluiguin</i> <i>daiguin dáluiguin</i>
Ess. <i>danin dállun</i>	

In many other Saamic languages the systems differ from North Saami. In Inari Saami the agreement is the same, but in Skolt the paradigm is suppletive. In South Saami the cognate for *buorre* occurs only in comparative and superlative forms. The basic form is *hijven* and it does not agree as a modifier. The Lule Saami *buorre* does not differ from other adjectives.

language	predicative	modifier	agreement
Lule	<i>buorre</i>	<i>buorre</i>	no
North	<i>buorre</i>	<i>buorre</i>	as in demonstratives
Inari	<i>pyeri</i>	<i>pyeri</i>	as in demonstratives
Skolt	<i>pue'rr</i>	<i>šio'gg</i>	no

Forms and agreement in other Saamic languages

The descendants of Finnic-Permic *\*para* in Mordvin and dialects of Komi differ from other adjectives that usually do not agree with the head:

In Komi, Udora dialect:

**Bur-ö mort-ö vo-i-s**  
 good-ILL human-ILL come-PRET-3SG  
 'He became a good person'  
 (Bartens 2000: 130)

In Erzya Mordvin:

**Par-t tejter-t**  
 good-PL girl-PL  
 'good girls'  
 (Bartens 1999: 108)

The Udora dialect of Komi has been influenced by the Finnic languages. In Erzya there are also some other adjectives that have number agreement with their head words (Bartens 1999, 2000). In Erzya and Moksha demonstratives don't agree in case as modifiers. However, they agree in number. In Permic demonstrative pronouns do not display case or number agreement as modifiers except in dialects of Udora and Vym in which there is case agreement.

In the Finnic languages both adjectives and demonstratives have case and number agreement as modifiers (see table below).

Adjective modifier	Demonstr. modifier
<i>hyvä-ssä talo-ssa</i> good-INNESS house-INNESS 'in a good house'	<i>tä-ssä talo-ssa</i> this-INNESS house-INNESS 'in this house'
<i>hyv-i-ssä talo-i-ssa</i> good-PL-INNESS house-PL-INNESS 'in good houses'	<i>näi-ssä talo-i-ssa</i> this.PL-INNESS house-PL-INNESS 'in these houses'

### Agreement between modifier and head in Finnish

In Mari the cognate *poro* 'good, healthy' does not differ from other adjectival modifiers. The adjectives do not agree with the heads, neither do the demonstratives. An example of Eastern Mari:

**poro kumyl-žy-m ončykt-yš**      **Tide kepež y-m to'lo**  
 good will-3SG-ACC show-PRET.3SG This summer-ACC come.PRET.3SG  
 'He showed his good will'      '(S)he came this summer.'

## Summary

- ❖ The agreement of *buorre* in Saamic seems not as common as has been assumed (cf. Itkonen 1966: 319-320)
- ❖ The agreement between adjective and noun is a rather new and areal phenomenon, but the pronouns seem to have agreed with the head a long time in the history of Finno-Ugric language
- ❖ In all languages where *\*para* has irregular agreement compared to adjectives, the type of agreement is typical for demonstrative pronouns.

### Further question

- ❖ What can this tell us of the relation between adjectival and pronominal modifiers in earlier stages of language?