

Verb-particles: placement with respect to reflexive pronouns

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1. Introduction

As was discussed in the section on verb particles in active clauses, the verb particle always precedes the direct objects in Swedish, while it often follows the direct object in the other Nordic varieties, especially when the direct object is a non-stressed pronoun. When it comes to simple reflexive direct objects (*sig*)^[1], the pattern in Swedish is more complex. Depending on verb class, the particle either precedes (1a) or follows (1b) *sig*. Some particle verbs allow both options, often with slightly different interpretations: when the particle follows the reflexive, the particle seems to modify the event rather than the following state (1c). This is exemplified in (1) below (curly brackets indicate possible positions for the particle):^[2]

- (1) a) Han kedjade {??sig} FAST {sig} i staketet. (Swe.)
He chain.PAST RFLX stuck RFLX in fence.DEF
 'He chained himself to the fence.'
- b) Han satte {sig} ner {*sig} på bänken. (Swe.)
He sit.PAST RFLX down RFLX on bench.DEF
 'He sat down on the bench.'
- c) De trängde {sig} IN {sig} i huset. (Swe.)
They squeeze.PAST RFLX in RFLX in house.DEF
 'They squeezed themselves into the house.'

In the other Scandinavian languages, the particle always follows the reflexive. There are, however, constructions like *kle av sig* (lit. 'dress off refl', 'undress oneself') which might involve a preposition phrase rather than a particle (see discussion in [Lundquist 2014a](#), example (12)).

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntactic Database (NSD)

Reflexive particle verbs were investigated only in the Swedish speaking area. The following sentences were tested:

- (2) Han_i blev trött så han satte ner sig_i. (#1424) (Swe.)

He get_{PAST} tired so he sit._{PAST} down_{RFLX}
 'He got tired so he sat down.'

- (3) Han_i blev trött så han satte sig_i ner (#1425) (Swe.)
He get_{PAST} tired so he sit._{PAST} RFLX down
 'He got tired so he sat down.'

The standard order for this particle verbis the one in (3), i.e., with the particle following the reflexive. As we see in the maps below, the non-standard order is rejected everywhere except for southern Finland (Nyland and Åboland):



Map 1: Particle preceding reflexive (sätta sig)
 (#1424: *Han blev trött, så han satte ner sig. 'He got tired, so he sat down.'*)
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)



Map 2: Particle following reflexive (sätta sig)

(#1425: *Han blev trött, så han satte sig ner.* 'He got tired, so he sat down.')

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

The reflexive particle verb *vända sig om* was also tested with two different word orders:

(4) Kan du_i vända om dig_i och titta hit (#1426) (Swe.)

can you_{PAST} turn._{INF} around _{RFLX} and look._{INF} here

'Can you turn around and look here, please?'

(5) Kan du_i vända dig_i om och titta hit? (#1427) (Swe.)

can you_{PAST} turn._{INF} _{RFLX} around and look._{INF} here?

'Can you turn (yourself) around and look here, please?'

Here again, the reflexive-particle order is the unmarked order, and by far the most accepted, as can be seen in the maps below, though locally in southern Finland and locally in Sweden, the inverse order is accepted as well:



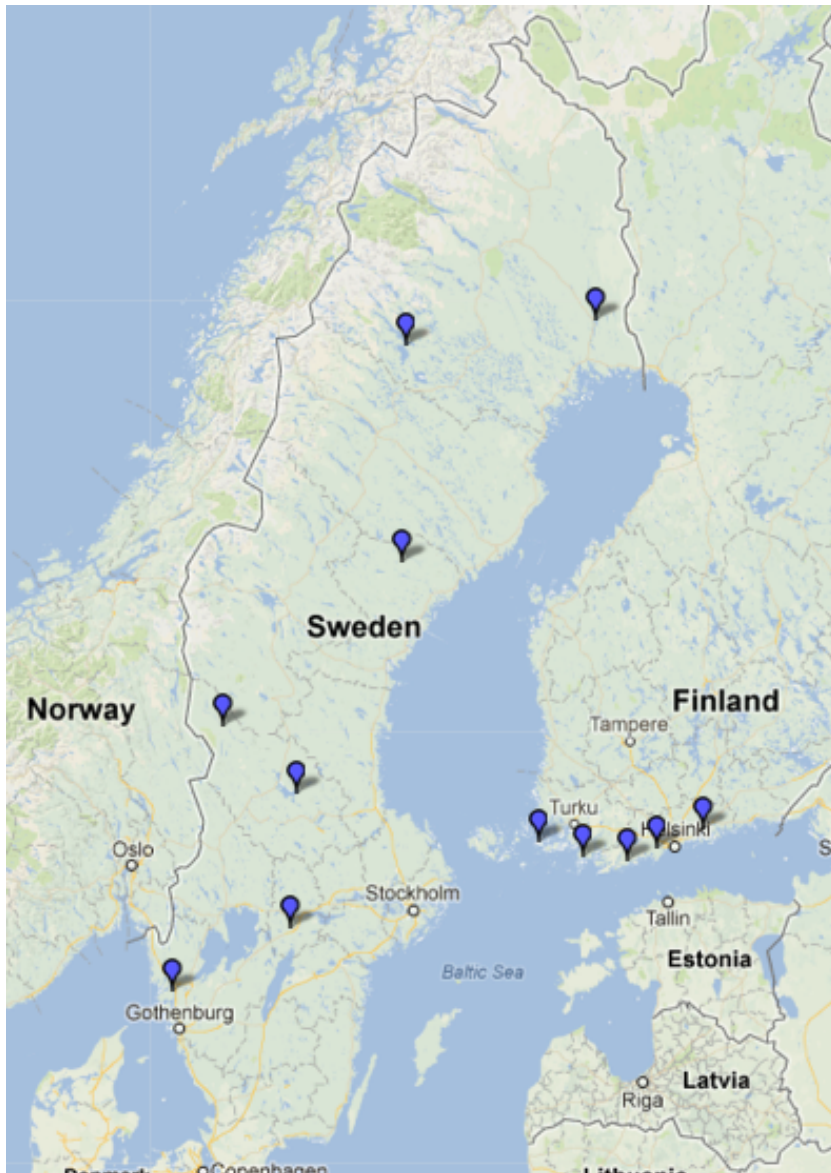
Map 3: Particle preceding reflexive (vända sig)
(#1426: Kan du vända om dig och titta hit? 'Can you turn around and look here, please?')
(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)



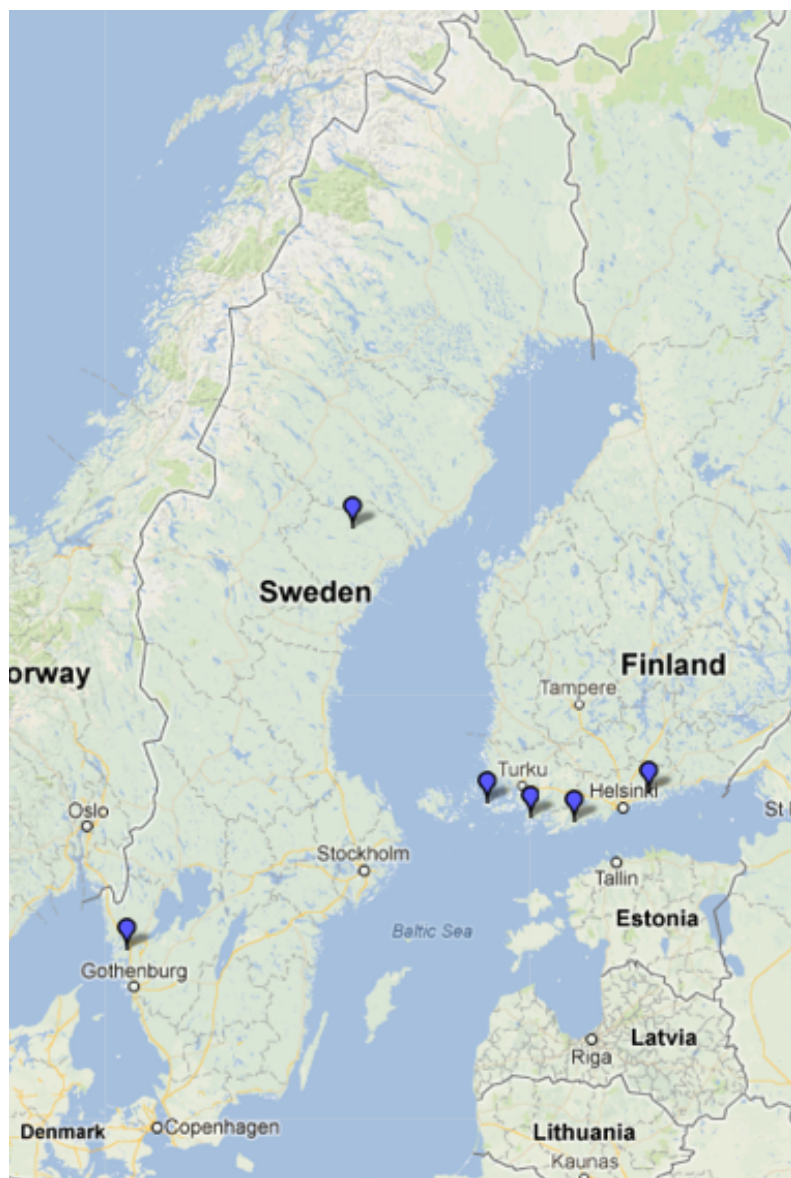
Map 4: Particle following reflexive (vända sig)
 (#1427: Kan du vända dig om og titta hit? 'Can you turn (yourself) around and look here, please?')
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

3. Discussion

In the maps above, we can see that the particle - reflexive order is a clear dialectal trait of southern Finland. As we could see in map 3, the order particle - reflexive is also accepted at some locations in Sweden. In map 5 and map 6 below, acceptance scores for younger and older informants are compared, and as we can see, older speakers (map 5) are more likely to accept the non-standard order than younger speakers (map 6), which indicates that the non-standard order was more widespread in Swedish dialects at earlier stages:



Map 5: Particle preceding reflexive (vända sig), older speakers (#1426: Kan du vända om dig och titta hit? 'Can you turn around and look here, please?') (Blue = measure point where sentence got high score)



Map 6: Particle following reflexive (vända sig), younger speakers
 (#1426: *Kan du vända om dig och titta hit? 'Can you turn around and look here, please?'*)
 (Blue = measure point where sentence got high score)

We can also find attested examples in the Nordic Dialect Corpus of the non-standard order from older informants in Sweden in locations where the order is accepted. The example in (6) is from an older man in Anundsjö (Ångermanland):

- (6) Då satte de upp sig. (Anundsjö, OM)
Then sat they up RFLX
 'Then they sat up.'

It should be noted that both orders are available in the southern Finnish dialects (with the exception of Snappertuna, where only the "non-standard" order seems to be accepted). In other words, the placement of a particle with respect to a reflexive pronoun seems to be free in these dialects. Interestingly, these dialects also show a freedom in the placement of verb particles with respect to regular object pronouns (or even regular noun phrase objects), as is discussed in [Lundquist \(2014a\)](#). The following sentence, with particle following a direct object pronoun is accepted only in southern Finland (map shows only judgments from older

speakers):

(7) Jag satte den på.
I turned it on
 'I turned it on.'

(#1423) (Swe.)



Map 7: Particle following direct object pronoun, older speakers
 (#1423: *Jag satte den på.* 'I turned it on.')

(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

As mentioned in the introduction, many (probably most) verbs in Swedish require the particle to precede the reflexive pronoun, i.e., we see the same order between particle and reflexive and particle and regular pronoun (or noun phrase). It is not fully clear what determines the placement of the particle, but the reflexive - particle order seems to be mainly used when the verb (plus particle) denotes a change of location or posture. Change of state verbs (and other types of verbs) on the other hand, tend to require the particle to directly follow the verb, e.g. *lugna ner sig* ('calm down'), *klä upp sig* ('dress up') and *skämma ut sig* ('shame/embarrass oneself').

The other Nordic languages require the reflexive pronoun, just like a regular pronoun to surface before the particle. No difference between change of location/posture verbs and change of state verbs can thus be seen in e.g. Norwegian and Danish. However, in Icelandic a split similar to the Swedish one can be detected. As discussed by Wood (2013), sometimes the bound morpheme *-st* can be used where we expect a regular reflexive pronoun. Wood labels this type of *-st*-verbs "figure reflexives". The figure reflexives are also restricted to

change of location (and possible posture) readings (though much more restricted than the Swedish reflexive - particle-construction). An example of a figure reflexive is given in (8), followed by the equivalent Swedish sentence, where the particle has to follow the reflexive: [3]

- (8) Þau vilja brjótast inn í húsið. (Ice..)
they_{NOM} want break._{ST} in in house._{DEF}
 'They want to break into the house.'
- (9) De bröt {sig} in {*sig} i huset. (Swe.)
They break._{PAST RFLX} in RFLX in house._{DEF}
 'They broke into the house.'

More research is needed to establish the similarities and differences between the Icelandic figure reflexives and the Swedish pre-particle reflexives.

References

- Lundquist, Björn. 2014a. 'Verb-particles: active verbs,' *Nordic Atlas of Linguistic Structures (NALS)*. <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nals#/chapter/4>.
- Wood, Jim. To appear. 'Reflexive -st verbs in Icelandic,' *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 42 p.

Web sites:

- Nordic Atlas of Language Structures (NALS) Journal: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nals>
 Nordic Dialect Corpus: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>
 Nordic Syntax Database: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>

[1] The placement is not affected by the person value of the anaphor. Thus, locally bound first and second person object pronouns have the same distribution as third person *sig*, while non-anaphoric first, second and third person object pronouns patterns like regular noun phrases and non-reflexive third person pronouns.

[2] In the examples given here, and also in the sentences in the survey, the post-reflexive particle lacks the typical particle stress. There is also a group of reflexive particle verbs where the reflexive is sandwiched between the verb and the particle, and the particle still carries particle stress, like *ge sig AV* (lit. 'give oneself off', 'leave') and *bryta sig LOSS* (lit. 'break oneself lose', 'break free'). These reflexive particle constructions tend to have a more idiomatic, less transparent, meaning, compared to the ones tested in the survey.

[3] At the point of writing, we do not know if speakers accepting the particle-reflexive order in (2) and (4) would accept the particle to precede the reflexive in (9).