

Noun Phrases

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1. Introduction

There is extensive variation in the structure of noun phrases across varieties of North Germanic. This has been extensively documented and researched in a number of publications, see e.g. Lundeby (1965), Delsing (1993), Holmberg (1994), Vangsnes (1999), Vangsnes et al. (2003), Julien (2005a), Dahl (2010) and references cited therein. Some of the best known variation pertains to the marking of definiteness and the position and syntax of possessors, including their interaction with definiteness. The topics displayed in the chapters here in NALS include previously less known issues, but before introducing them, we will briefly go through some of the broad aspects of Nordic noun phrase syntax, in particular definiteness marking and possessor constructions.

1.1 Basic word order and definiteness marking

The basic word order across all Nordic varieties is *Demonstrative – Adjective – Noun*, and the word order is also *Article/Quantifier – Adjective – Noun* in indefinite noun phrases. In this respect the North Germanic linguistic varieties are like the West Germanic ones, but a well-known specialty of North Germanic is the presence of a suffixed definite article in the grammar, a formative also referred to as the *enclitic article*. This article attaches to the head noun of noun phrases, and the only variety that lacks it, is Western Jutlandic, a group of dialects spoken in the western part of Jutland in Denmark.

Variation arises, however, in modified structures: in Icelandic an attributive adjective may precede a noun carrying the definite suffix, henceforth ‘N-DEF’, but in Norwegian, Swedish, and Faroese, an additional lexical preadjectival definite article will normally also appear, resulting in the phenomenon generally referred to as ‘double definiteness’. In Danish, on the other hand, adjectival modification is characterized by absence of the suffixed definite article and presence of a preadjectival lexical definite article. This is shown in (1) versus (2) – the examples in (1) mean ‘the horse’ and the ones in (2) ‘the black horse’.

(1)	a.	hestur-inn	(2)	a.	svarti hestur-inn	(Icelandic)
	b.	hestur-in		b.	tann svartu hestur-in	(Faroese)
	c.	hest-en		c.	den svarte hest-en	(Norwegian)
	d.	häst-en		d.	den svarta häst-en	(Swedish)
	e.	hest-en		e.	den sorte häst	(Danish)
	f.	æ hest		f.	æ sorte hest	(Western Jutlandic)
	g.	häst-n		g.	schwart-häst-n	(Northern Swedish)

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|----|------------------------------|----|--|-----------------------|
| h. | hest-n
<i>'the horse'</i> | h. | n svart-hest-n
<i>'the black horse'</i> | (Trøndelag Norwegian) |
|----|------------------------------|----|--|-----------------------|

The Northern Swedish structure in (2g) has the characteristics that the adjective is incorporated in the same prosodic word as N-DEF, and this phenomenon is also encountered in the central Norwegian dialects of Trøndelag where the A-N-DEF sequence may furthermore be preceded by a lexical definite article as in (2h): crucially, as discussed in Holmberg and Sandström (1994), the incorporation is the result of a productive syntactic process as adjectives in a corresponding indefinite noun phrase will constitute a prosodic word distinct from the noun.

1.2 Possessive constructions

Possessors, both possessive pronouns and possessor noun phrases (genitivals), occur prenominally in some varieties of North Germanic and postnominally in others. By and large, if possessors occur postnominally they will also be allowed prenominally. Norwegian may serve as a first illustration.

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|-----|----|------------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| (3) | a. | min | hest/*hesten | (Norwegian) |
| | | <i>my</i> | <i>horse/horse-DEF</i> | |
| | b. | hesten/*hest | min | |
| | | <i>horse-DEF/horse</i> | <i>my</i> | |
| | | <i>'My horse'</i> | | |
| (4) | a. | Pers | hest/*hesten | (Norwegian) |
| | | <i>Per's</i> | <i>horse/horse-DEF</i> | |
| | b. | hesten/*hest | til Per | |
| | | <i>horse-DEF/horse</i> | <i>to Per</i> | |
| | | <i>'Per's horse'</i> | | |

The examples show that a prenominal possessor is followed by a noun with no definiteness marker, whereas a postnominal possessor is preceded by N-DEF rather than an indefinite noun. We also see that DP possessors are marked differently in prenominal and postnominal position: The prenominal possessor is marked with a 'genitival s' whereas the postnominal possessor is part of a PP.

These examples from Norwegian represent the general pattern, but there are numerous deviations and restrictions, both within varieties as well as across varieties. The big picture is as follows. Icelandic, Norwegian and many Northern Swedish dialects allow both prenominal and postnominal possessors. Danish and Standard Swedish (including southern dialects) only allow prenominal possessors. In Faroese possessive pronouns only appear prenominally (except with kinship terms), but prenominal possessors may appear postnominally in a possessive PP construction. Possessive DPs may appear both prenominally (with genitival marking) or postnominally (in PPs). In several Northern Swedish and

Fenno-Swedish dialects possessive DPs may precede a definite noun, i.e. giving the structure *GenP – D-DEF*, and in a subset of these dialects even possessives may precede a definite noun.

At a more detailed level we find even more exceptions to the general pattern. Kinship terms ('father, mother, brother' etc.) often trigger further exceptions to the general pattern. As already mentioned, in Faroese they can be followed by possessive pronouns. The same goes for some southern Swedish dialects, i.e. south of the area that allows postnominal possessives. Furthermore, kinship nouns followed by postnominal possessives may in many varieties lack definiteness marking – that goes for Icelandic as well as many dialects of Norwegian.

Further details about North Germanic possessor constructions can be found in e.g. Delsing (1993), Holmberg and Sandström (1996), Vangsnes (1999), Julien (2005a, 2005b).

1.3 Case, number and gender

The North Germanic varieties have case marking to varying extents, ranging from Icelandic which, much like the Old Scandinavian languages, has four distinct cases (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive) on pronouns and on most adnominal constituents (quantifiers, adjectives, determiners including the suffixed definite article). In the Mainland Nordic standard languages (Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) case marking is only retained in the pronominal system, with a distinction between nominative and non-nominative only, hence much like in English. Faroese has lost its genitive case, but retains nominative, accusative and dative both on adnominal constituents and on pronouns. The classical Övdalian variety spoken in Älvdalen, Sweden, also has a three-way case system like Faroese, but most contemporary speakers seem to have a system with only dative specific marking. A fairly large, (mostly) contiguous area of Norwegian and Swedish dialects have also retained dative specific case marking, but only on the suffixed definite article and pronouns. Furthermore, in the varieties that have case marking in pronouns only, case oppositions may be conflated in some persons and to a varying extent.

Icelandic furthermore has extensive number and gender marking on adnominal constituents. There are three genders – masculine, feminine, and neuter – and we find exponents of gender both in the singular and in the plural. Standard Faroese also has extensive number and gender marking, but in spoken varieties there is some conflation in forms, in particular in the plural. Norwegian also has a three-way gender system, but with no gender oppositions in the plural, and for some types of adnominal constituents there is a conflation of masculine and feminine forms. Danish and Swedish have a two-way gender system with common versus neuter marking, and no gender oppositions in the plural. In some very few dialects, notably Western Jutlandic in Denmark and the Karleby-Nedervetil dialect in Ostrobothnia, Finland, gender marking on adnominal constituents is absent altogether.

2. The NALS chapters on Nordic noun phrase syntax and morphosyntax

2.1 Proprial articles

In many North Germanic varieties proper nouns may be preceded by what looks like a personal pronoun, i.e. giving expressions like *he Peter* and *she Mary*. Delsing (2003) has mapped the distribution of this phenomenon based on a thorough survey of the traditional dialectological literature, and the NALS entry reports the results of the ScanDiaSyn questionnaire data in the Nordic Syntax Database. Some discrepancies between the traditional picture and the new data have been found, and the entry discusses some possible sources for this.

2.2 Psychologically distal demonstratives

The phenomenon of *psychologically distal demonstratives* bears some resemblance to that of preproprial articles. A stressed element with the morphological shape of a personal pronoun may precede a proper or definite noun, resulting in a particular pragmatic interpretation of the phrase whereby the speaker signals *psychological distance* to the referent of the noun phrase. The geographic distribution of psychological distal demonstratives is much wider than that of preproprial articles, which is what we might expect given that they are not obligatory elements of the grammars but serve a particular interpretational function.

2.3 Case in coordinated conjuncts

The case of pronouns in coordinated conjuncts may in varieties of North Germanic may be different from case assigned to non-coordinated pronouns, i.e. much like in spoken varieties of English with *John and me went to the beach* versus *I went to the beach*. In the ScanDiaSyn project this has been systematically investigated for Swedish dialects, and the results indicate that the case assignment in these dialects is the same to coordinated and non-coordinated pronouns. However, data from the Nordic Dialect Corpus indicate that the situation is different in dialects of Norwegian and Danish.

2.4 The determiner *somme* ‘some’

Varieties of Norwegian have a particular indefinite determiner, *somme*, which in some dialects entails a specific, indefinite reading of the noun phrase. The chapter reports the attempt to map this in the ScanDiaSyn questionnaire. The chapter furthermore shows that corpus data suggest a decline in the use of this determiner in spoken Norwegian.

2.5 Wh-nominals: “adnominal how”

The syntax of interrogative noun phrases has been a largely uncharted territory in the Nordic languages. A recent contribution is Vangsnes (2008), and the entry homes in on one of the structures mentioned there, namely the adnominal use of the *wh*-item otherwise used in manner questions: varieties of North Germanic may have structures which word by word take the form *How car do you have?*. The ScanDiaSyn questionnaire investigation has systematically mapped this for Norwegian and Swedish dialects, and data from the Nordic Dialect Corpus furthermore provide valuable insights.

2.6 Doubling of indefinite articles

From the existing dialectological literature it is known that Northern Swedish and Northern Norwegian dialects may double the indefinite article in modified structures: whereas a singular indefinite article in the standard varieties will precede an attributive adjective, an “extra” indefinite article may in some

dialects follow the adjective, giving structures of the form *a big a horse*. In other dialects such a postadjectival indefinite article may only appear in degree nominals as for instance in *so big a horse*. The chapter reports on the geographical distribution of constructions of this kind in Norwegian and Swedish dialects.

2.7 Choice of non-referential subject in existential constructions and with weather-verbs

Across, and sometimes within, the North Germanic varieties there is variation as to what item is used as an expletive. Standard Danish, for instance, uses the item *der* ‘there’ in existential and presentational constructions, but the item *det* ‘it’ in other kinds of expletive constructions, including with meteorological verbs. Other varieties show different distributions, and in some varieties even *her* ‘here’ may be used as an expletive.

2.8 Morphological dative

As mentioned above, dative marking on pronouns and definite nouns is still found in Norwegian and Swedish dialects. The environments in which it is found vary, however, and the most robust context is when the nominal is governed by a preposition. The chapter discusses the geographical distribution of dative marking after prepositions, verbs and adjectives in contemporary Norwegian and Swedish dialects.

2.9 Definite article in indefinite contexts

As brought to wider attention by Delsing (1993), Northern Swedish dialects use the suffixed definite article in contexts where the noun phrase in question does not refer to given, specific entities, but rather has an indefinite mass interpretation. Delsing terms this use of the definite suffix ‘partitive’. The chapter reports on the data gathered on this phenomenon in the ScanDiaSyn project.

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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>