

Object Shift

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1. Introduction

Object Shift (OS) is a characteristic feature of the Scandinavian languages. It has also been studied extensively (cf. among many others Holmberg 1986, 1999, Holmberg and Platzack 1995, Vikner 1995, 2006, Josefsson 2003, 2010, Thráinsson 2001, Erteschik-Shir 2005, Fox and Pesetsky 2005, Andréasson 2008, 2009, 2010, to appear, Mikkelsen 2011, Anderssen and Bentzen 2012, Anderssen et al. 2012, Bentzen et al. to appear, Østbø Munch 2013). The typical pattern, illustrated in (1), shows that (weak/unstressed) pronominal objects have to shift across negation (and other adverbs). This pattern generally holds true across the Scandinavian languages. However, with respect to DP objects, there is a distinction between Icelandic, where such objects may occur in front of negation/adverbs, and the Mainland Scandinavian languages (MSc) and Faroese, where DP objects have to follow these elements, as shown in (2). (The Icelandic example in (2a) is taken from Thráinsson 2001: 161):

- (1) a. Jeg så **den** ikke. (Norwegian)
I saw it not
- b. % Jeg så ikke **den**.
I saw not it
 ‘I didn’t see it.’
- (2) a. Jón las {**bókina**} aldrei {**bókina**}. (Icelandic)
John read book.the never book.the
- b. Jon leste {***boken**} aldri {**boken**}. (Norwegian)
John read book.the never book.the
 ‘John never read the book.’

Furthermore, OS is dependent on verb movement in the sense that it only takes place if the finite verb has moved leftwards in the clause. This has become known as Holmberg's Generalization. Thus, there is no OS in clauses with periphrastic tense (3) and in embedded clauses without verb movement (4):

- (3) a. Jeg har ikke lest **den**. (Norwegian)

I have not read it

- b. * Jeg har **den** ikke lest.

I have it not read

'I have not read it.'

- (4) Han angret på ... (Norwegian)

he regretted on

- a. at han ikke leste **den**.

that he not read it

- b. * at han **den** ikke leste.

that he it not read

'He regretted that he didn't read the book.'

However, several people have pointed out that there is quite a bit of variation both across the Scandinavian languages and within the various dialects with respect to how obligatory OS is (cf. e.g. Andréasson 2008, 2009, 2010). Thus, the availability of OS was tested in the Scandinavian Dialect Syntax project. The results are presented in the next section.

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntax Database (NSD)

The possibility of OS with DP objects was tested in Norway, Sweden, and Finland with the following example:

- (5) Derfor leste han **boken** ikke. #1247 (Norwegian)

therefore read he book.the not

'Therefore he didn't read the book.'

As expected, this example was rejected everywhere in the areas it was tested.

The distribution of OS with pronominal objects was tested with the sentences in (6) in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, with the sentences in (7) in Denmark, and with the sentence in (8) in Iceland:

- (6) a. Derfor leste han ikke **den**. #1248 (Norwegian)

therefore read he not it

- b. Derfor leste han **den** ikke. #1249 (Norwegian)

therefore read he it not

‘Therefore he didn’t read it.’

- (7) a. Bo læste jo aldrig **den**. #1248 (Danish)

Bo read after.all never it

- b. Bo læste **den** jo aldrig. #1249 (Danish)

Bo read it after.all never

‘After all, Bo never read it.’

- (8) Ég nota **hana** bare aldrei. #1020 (Icelandic)

I use it only never

‘I just never use it.’

As can be seen from Maps 1-2 below, OS of pronominal objects is generally accepted in Denmark, Sweden and Iceland. In Norway it is also mostly accepted, but it should be pointed out that in certain areas in Trøndelag, sentences like (6b) above tend to be rejected. Moreover, in Finland, OS of pronominal objects is accepted in the southern counties of Åland, Åboland and Nyland, but rejected in Österbotten.



Map 1-2: Object Shift of pronominal objects (#1249: *Derfor leste han den ikke.* 'Therefore he didn't read it.'; #1020: *Ég nota hana bare aldrei.* 'I just never use it.').

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

Map 3 shows that *absence of OS* in sentences like (6a) and (7a) is generally rejected in Denmark and in the southern parts of Norway. In the rest of Norway, and in Finland and Sweden, on the other hand, it is typically accepted (or given a medium score):



Map 3: Lack of Object Shift with pronominal objects

(#1248: *Derfor leste han ikke den.* 'Therefore he didn't read it.')

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

In Denmark, partial OS across only one of two adverbs was tested with the following example:

(9) Bo læste jo **den** aldrig. #1019 (Danish)

Bo read after.all it never

'After all, Bo never read it.'

This example was consistently rejected all over Denmark.

The relative order of objects and negation was also tested with ditransitive verbs in Denmark, with two DP objects, (10), an indirect DP object and a direct pronominal object, (11), an indirect pronominal object and a direct DP object, (12), and finally with two pronominal objects, (13). For the examples in

(10), only (10a) is accepted, and is judged as grammatical all over Denmark, while (10b,c) are rejected everywhere. Moreover, both examples in (11) are rejected in all locations in Denmark. For the examples in (12), we find that (12b) is accepted everywhere, while (12c) is rejected everywhere. (12a) is also generally rejected, but receives a few medium scores (Nordjylland, Ærø, and Falster), and a high score in Als. Finally, concerning the examples in (13), only (13c) is accepted everywhere. (13a, b) are more or less always rejected.

(10) a. Per gav aldrig Elsa bogen. #1295 (Danish)

Per gave never Elsa book.the

b. Per gav Elsa aldrig bogen. #1296

Per gave Elsa never book.the

c. Per gav Elsa bogen aldrig. #1297

Per gave Elsa book.the never

‘Per never gave Elsa the book.’

(11) a. Lise gav Ken aldrig den. #1298 (Danish)

Lise gave Ken never it

b. Lise gav Ken den aldrig. #1299

Lise gave Ken it never

‘Lise never gave it to Ken.’

(12) a. Bo gav aldrig hende bogen. #1300 (Danish)

Bo gave never her book.the

b. Bo gav hende aldrig bogen. #1301

Bo gave her never book.the

c. Bo gav hende bogen aldrig. #1302

Bo gave her book.the never

‘Bo never gave her the book.’

- (13) a. Per gav aldrig hende den. #1021 (Danish)
Per gave never her it
- b. Per gav hende aldrig den. (#1022)
Per gave her never it
- c. Per gav hende den aldrig. (#1023)
Per gave her it never
 ‘Per never gave it to her.’

Summing up the findings from the test sentences in (10)-(13), the general picture is confirmed: DP objects cannot do OS in Danish, while pronominal objects are required to do so. Consequently, all examples where a DP object (regardless of whether it is the direct or the indirect object) has shifted across an adverb are rejected. Likewise, examples where a pronominal object has failed to undergo such object shift are judged as equally degraded. (See similar patterns of object placement in Danish causative *let*-clauses, [Larsson 2014](#)).

In Denmark, the position of locative adverb *der* ‘there’ with respect to negation was also tested, with the following examples:

- (14) a. Ken sover aldrig **der**. (#1014) (Danish)
Ken sleeps never there
- b. Ken sover **der** aldrig. (#1015)
Ken sleeps there never
 ‘Ken never sleeps there.’
- (15) a. Per bor aldrig **der**. (#1016) (Danish)
Per lives never there
- b. Per bor **der** aldrig. (#1017)
Per lives there never
 ‘Per never lives/stays there.’

The results show that in most Danish dialects also the locative adverb obligatorily shifts across adverbs, as the maps for the judgments of the examples in (14) illustrate:



Map 4: Lack of shift with locative adverb.

(#1014: *Ken sover aldrig der.* 'Ken never sleeps there.')

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



Map 5: Shift with locative adverb.

(#1015: *Ken sover der aldrig.* 'Ken never sleeps there.')

2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus (NDC)

Potential contexts for OS are relatively infrequent in spontaneous speech since objects often constitute new information, and thus do not occur in a pronominal form (see Anderssen et al. 2010 for a comparison of the frequency of pronominal objects versus pronominal subjects in a spoken corpus). However, searches were run in the NDC for strings of the pronominal object forms listed in (16) in the combinations with negation immediately preceding or following them, as well as a wildcard and negation immediately following them, as illustrated in (17). (The particular pronouns were chosen because they have a distinct object form in the language in question)

- (16) a. meg deg ham henne oss — — seg (Norwegian)
 b. mig dig honom henne oss er dem/dom sig (Swedish)
 c. mig dig ham hende os jer dem sig (Danish)
 d. meg teg — hana okkum tykkum — seg (Faroese)
 e. mig þig — hana okkur ykkur þá sig (Icelandic)
me you him her us you them REFL

- (17) ikke meg vs. meg ikke vs. meg * ikke (Norwegian)
*not me me not me * not*

The results sentences, and their discourse contexts, were carefully checked through transcriptions and audio files. Occurrences with stressed pronominal objects in unshifted positions were excluded from further investigation, since such objects cannot undergo OS in any of the Scandinavian varieties. The results of these searches clearly show that weak pronominal objects are much more likely to undergo OS than to remain in situ. In the Faroe Islands as well as in Iceland, there were only 6 potential contexts attested, and they all display OS in both countries. For the other languages, the frequency of OS is also very high: 82.4% in Sweden (28 out of 34 potential contexts), 87.6% in Norway (149 out of 170 potential contexts), and 94.4% in Denmark (17 out of 18 potential contexts). In most of the countries, the numbers are too low to give any indications of geographical variation. However, in Sweden and particularly in Norway, we do see a geographical distribution with respect to OS. In Sweden, 5 out of the 6 examples with pronouns in situ are from the county Dalarna in the north of Svealand (2 from Leksand and 3 from Klitten). The 6th one is from the county Medelpad (Indal) in the south of Norrland. In Norway, the 21 instances without OS cluster in the western parts of the country (2 in Hordaland, 8 in Møre & Romsdal, and 5 in Sogn & Fjordane) and in Trøndelag (5 in Nord-Trøndelag and 1 in Sør-Trøndelag). Note that in Leksand and Klitten in Sweden, there were no examples of shifted pronominal objects; in Indal, there was one such example. In contrast, in the areas in Norway where absence of OS was attested, occurrences of OS were also attested (5 in Hordaland, 19 in Møre & Romsdal, 5 in Sogn & Fjordane, 2 in Nord-Trøndelag, and 6 in Sør-Trøndelag). This suggests that while OS might indeed be absent in the dialects of Leksand and Klitten in Sweden, it is merely optional in the counties in question in Norway.

3. Discussion

The results from the NSD and the NDC confirm what has generally been claimed in the literature with respect to OS in the Scandinavian languages, namely that weak pronominal objects typically shift across negation, whereas DP objects do not. Moreover, in accordance with the literature, the NSD data confirm that OS is not accepted in Österbotten in Finland. However, the results also show that OS is not always completely obligatory in Norway and Sweden. In fact, when only considering the results from the NSD, acceptance of pronominal objects in situ seems rather widespread (see Map 3). As mentioned in the introduction, it has been claimed that OS is somewhat optional in Swedish (cf. Andréasson 2008, 2009, 2010, Bentzen et al. 2013 to appear). (Notably, similar claims have been made for Denmark, and according to Christensen 2005, the Danish islands Lolland and Falster lack OS. These claims are not supported in the NSD results.) Moreover, the NSD data suggest that optionality is widespread also in Norway, contrary to traditional assumptions. However, the credibility of the results from Norway and

Sweden is somewhat weakened in that the sentences tested contained both pronominal subjects and pronominal objects in potential shifting contexts (see (6)). This might have caused some confusion for the informants since pronominal subjects to some extent are allowed in a post-negation position (see [Bentzen 2014](#)). Moreover, there is a risk that informants have assigned stress to the object pronoun and hence accepted it in an unshifted position. Another reason to take the results from the NSD with some caution is that they are only partially supported by the data from the NDC. While the NSD results suggest that lack of OS is accepted all over Sweden, we basically only find this in spontaneous speech in Dalarna, in Älvdalen (Klitten) and the neighbouring municipality of Leksand. That precisely these areas in Sweden lack OS has been pointed out before, already by Levander (1909) and confirmed in a more extensive study in Garbacz (2010). Furthermore, in Norway, the NDC shows that lack of OS is only produced spontaneously in very specific areas in the western parts of the country (Hordaland, Sogn & Fjordane, and Møre & Romsdal) and in Trøndelag. Interestingly, these areas are the ones where OS is in fact rejected in the NSD (see Map 1). These two findings together strongly indicate that OS is at least optional in these areas of Norway. Østbø Munch (2013) argues for a similar distribution of variable OS in Norway.

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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>