

Measureless quantificational exclamatives

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1. Introduction

There is considerable variation related to the form of exclamatives across North Germanic varieties (see Delsing 2010 and Abels and Vangsnes 2010). However, in the *Nordic Syntax Database* there is only information about one particular and somewhat special kind of exclamative construction, here termed ‘measureless quantificational exclamative’ and exemplified by the Swedish example in (1).

- (1) Vad bilar det var här! (Swedish)
what cars it was here
‘What a lot of cars there are here!’

Measureless exclamatives convey a surprise over a presupposed large quantity of the kind of object denoted by the noun in the fronted *wh*-phrase, and they do so despite the fact that there is no overt quantifier in the phrase (compare gloss and translation). The construction is known from English and has for instance been recently discussed in Rett (2008: 148ff).

The *wh*-item used in this construction is the one that is otherwise used in queries for objects, i.e. the item corresponding to the pronominal use of English *what*.

2. Results

2.1 *Nordic Syntactic Database (NSD)*

The phenomenon of measureless quantificational exclamatives has only been tested by two sentences in the Norwegian questionnaire and three sentences in the Swedish one. The examples are given in (2) and (3).

- (2) a. Ka bila de va her! (#311) (North Norw.)

what cars it was here
‘What a lot of cars there are here!’

- b. Ka de va bila her! (#312)

what it was cars here
‘What a lot of cars there are here!’

(3) a. Vad bilar det var här! (#311) (Swedish)

what cars it was here

‘What a lot of cars there are here!’

b. Vad det var bilar här! (#312)

what it was vars here

‘What a lot of cars there are here.’

c. Vad med bilar det var här! (#1396)

what with cars it was here

‘What a lot of cars there are here.’

In the a.-examples the whole *wh*-phrase occurs sentence-initially whereas in the b.-examples the phrase is split with only the *wh*-word in initial position and the rest of the phrase (i.e. the noun) in the base position. (3c), which was only tested for Swedish dialects, is a version of (2a/3a) where a preposition (*med* ‘with’) occurs between the *wh*-word and the noun.

Maps 1 and 2 show the distribution of (2/3a) and (2/3b) across Norway, Sweden and Finland as it appears on the basis of the data in NSD.



Map 1: Whole *wh*-phrase occurs sentence-initially

(#311: *Vad bilar det var här!* 'What a lot of cars there were here.')

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



Map 2: *Wh-word in initial position and the rest of the phrase in the base position*
 (#312: *Vad det var bilar här!* 'What a lot of cars there were here.')

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

Map 1 shows that the unsplit version of the construction (2/3a) with very few exceptions is at Swedish measure points: the only exceptions are Borgå and Snappertuna in Nyland in Finland where the sentence gets a low score. The sentence also gets a moderate score at three measure points in Sweden, evenly distributed across the country. Furthermore, the sentence is also widely accepted in Northern Norway: it is only rejected in Porsanger in Finnmark, but otherwise it gets a medium score in five of the Northern Norwegian measure points. From Trøndelag and further south the sentence gets a high score in two measure points only: Stranda in Sunnmøre and Lindås in Nordhordland. There are however four other measure points with a medium score in Southern Norway.

Map 2 shows that the split version of the construction (2/3b) is rejected at all measure points in Norway and furthermore that it is accepted only at a subset of the Swedish measure points (28 in number). Interestingly, the split version gets a high score at the two measure points in Finland where the unsplit version gets a low score. Furthermore, the split version seems to be widely accepted in the northernmost part of Sweden, but strikingly not across the Gulf of Bothnia in Ostrobothnia in Finland. There is otherwise no clear geographical pattern further south in Sweden.

Map 3 gives the distribution of the version of the construction where the preposition *med* 'with' appears between the *wh*-word and the noun (3c), and we see that this version has an even more restricted distribution in the judgment data than the split version.



Map 3: Construction where the preposition *med* 'with' appears between the *wh*-word and the noun
 (#1396: *Vad med bilar det var här!* 'What a lot of cars there were here.')

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

In section 3 we will see that the odd positive measure points in Western Norway for (2a) are less unexpected than one might think at first glance. Furthermore, for the other two variants of the construction, which have a restricted distribution in the Swedish area, we will see that there are some interesting age differences.

2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus (NDC)

In the NDC we have found the following two Norwegian examples of measureless quantificational exclamatives. The example in (4) is uttered by an older female informant at the Northern Norwegian measure point Stamsund and the example in (5) is uttered by an older male informant at the Western Norwegian measure point Bergen.

(4) *tænk på ka sny de va* (Norwegian)
think on what snow it was
 'Think about what a lot of snow there was' (stamsund_04gk)

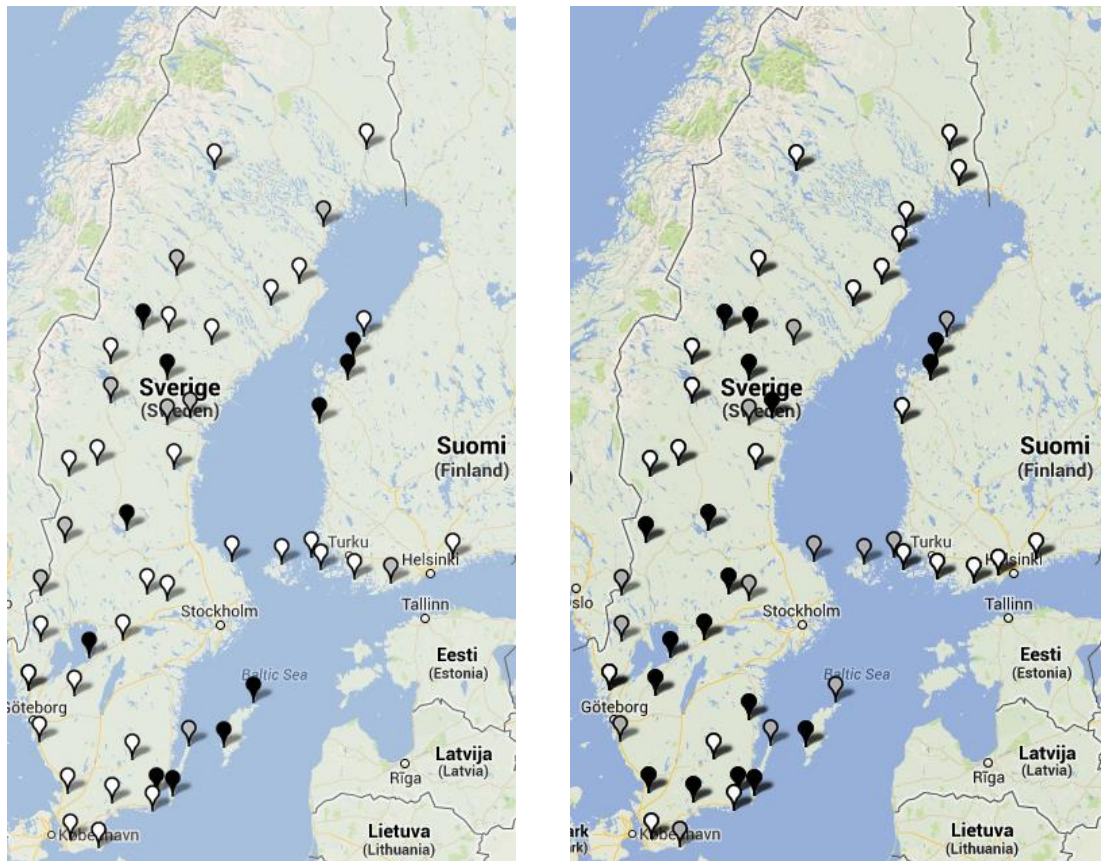
(5) *gu korr bila dær e* (Norwegian)
God how cars there is
 'God, what a lot of cars there are' (bergen_03gm)

The Bergen example is interesting for two reasons: (i) The informant rejects the test sentence, and (ii) the *wh*-word used is not the one otherwise used in this construction in other Norwegian dialects.

No Swedish examples of this construction have been discovered in NDC. However, both for Swedish and for (Northern) Norwegian there are abundant examples of the construction in texts on the World Wide Web (see section 3.1).

3. Discussion

As mentioned above, there are some interesting age differences related to the distribution of (3b) and (3c) across Swedish dialects in NSD. In short, the split version in (3b) is accepted by young informants to a much higher degree than by older informants. This becomes evident when comparing maps 4a and 4b: 4a (leftmost) shows positive and negative results among young informants whereas 4b (rightmost) shows positive and negative results among older informants.



Maps 4a (left) and 4b (right): *Wh-split* in measureless degree exclamatives among young (4a) and older (4b) Swedish informants

(#312: *Vad det var bilar här!* 'What a lot of cars there were here.')

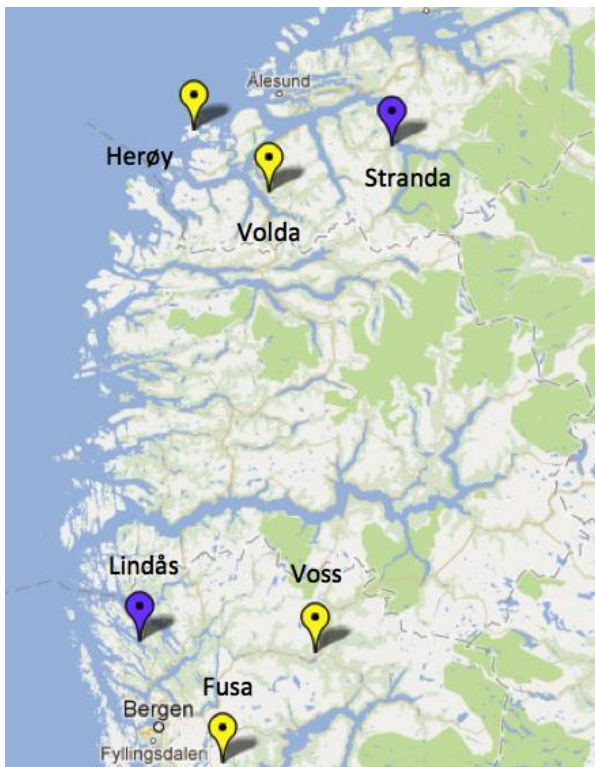
(White = high score; grey = medium score; black = low score)

For the sentence in (3c) (#1396) where the preposition *med* 'with' appears between the *wh*-word and the noun, the situation is more complex, and there is more individual variation. In brief, there are more older

informants than younger informants who accept the sentence, and also more women than men who do so. Sentence (3c) (#1396) was not included in the Norwegian questionnaire.

The reason is that its relevance was not known at the time when the Norwegian questionnaire was developed and the data collection started, but this does not mean that this variant of the construction is non-existent in Norwegian dialects. We will see below that examples can easily be found on the World Wide Web.

As we see from Map 1 above, there are two seemingly isolated positive measure points in Western Norway. These are Stranda in the district of Sunnmøre (Møre og Romsdal county) and Lindås in the district of Nordhordland (Hordaland county). When looking more closely at individual positive results outside Northern Norway and the two positive results in Western Norway, we do find some at measure points adjacent to Stranda and Lindås. At the two other Sunnmøre locations, Volda and Herøy, the older informants all give the score 4 whereas the younger informants give 1. At Voss, east of Lindås, the two female informants give 5 and so does the older man at the location Fusa southeast of Lindås (and south of Voss). In addition to this there is one positive (5) judgment from Stavanger (older woman) and another from Sirdal (younger woman) further to the south, and both young informants from Trondheim give the sentence a 4. At all other measure points in Southern and Central Norway the judgments are low (1-2) across the board. Map 5 shows the relative location of the mentioned measure points that are close to Stranda and Lindås.



Map 5: Measure points in Western Norway with either average positive judgments (purple) or some individual positive judgments (yellow) of (unsplit) measureless degree exclamatives (#311 *Vad bilar det var här!* 'What a lot of cars there were here.').

This suggests that it is quite likely that the construction has a certain distribution in these areas of Western Norway and that the positive results at Stranda and Lindås are not just a coincidence.

3.1 Other sources

Although we have found very few examples of the construction in the *Nordic Dialect Corpus*, examples are plentiful on the World Wide Web both for North Norwegian and for Swedish. In (6) we see some examples from North Norwegian of the same type as sentence (2a) (#311 in NSD), and in (7) we furthermore see examples of the variant with the preposition *med* ‘with’ intervening between the *wh*-word and the noun (the Swedish example in (3c), #1396 in NSD). These examples can be identified as Northern Norwegian by the orthography and the context they were found in.

(6) a. Volsomt ka bila som drive å krasja der da (Northern Norw.)
violently what cars SOM does & crashes there then
 ‘My, what a lot of cars are crashing over there!’

b. Oy ka snø dåkker har fått,
oh what snow you.PL have got
 ‘Oh, what a lot of snow you have got!’

c. Steike ka mygg!!!
fry what mosquitos
 ‘Damn what a lot of mosquitos!’

(7) a. Dæven ka med folk som har joina (Northern Norw.)
damn what with people SOM have joined
 ‘Damn, what a lot people who have joined!’

b. Nei gud ka med sne dåkker har der nede!
no God what with snow you.PL have there down
 ‘God, what a lot snow you have down there!’

The examples in (7) thus document that the variant with the preposition *med* ‘with’ is found also in Norwegian dialects. In hindsight we may conclude that it would have been of quite some interest to map the distribution of this variant also across Norwegian dialects.

3.2 Theoretical issues regarding measureless quantificational exclamatives

The variant of the construction with the preposition *med* ‘with’ may be indicative of the underlying structure of the construction. In Vangsnes (2012) it is argued that the measureless quantificational

exclamatives have a structure akin to container~contained nominals of the kind in (8) where an optional linking *med* may occur.

- (8) a. ei flaske (med) bringebærsaft
 a bottle with raspberry-juice
- b. en kasse (med) epler
 a box with apples
- c. en flokk (med) svaner
 a flock with swans

The idea pursued is that the *wh*-item in the exclamative construction combines with an abstract measure noun which in turn combines with the measured expression, i.e. the noun and modifiers following the preposition.

The *wh*-item used in measureless quantificational exclamatives is the same item that is used in queries for things, i.e. the *wh*-pronoun corresponding to English *what*. On this point Northern Norwegian and Swedish differ in the following way: Whereas Swedish also uses this *wh*-item in degree exclamatives with an overt measure, North Norwegian uses a different item (*kor*) when there is an overt measure. In turn, the Northern Norwegian item used in exclamatives with an overt measure is also used in degree questions where Swedish also uses a different item than ‘what’. These facts are shown by the examples in (9) (Northern Norwegian) and (10) Swedish.

- (9) a. Ka/*kor bila de va her! (North Norw.)
 what/how cars it was here
 ‘What a lot of cars there are here!’
- b. Kor/*ka mange bila de va her!
 how/what many cars it was here
 ‘What a lot of cars there are here!’
- c. Kor/*ka mange bila va de der?
 how/what many cars was it there
 ‘How many cars were there there?’
- (10) a. Vad/*hur bilar it var här (Swedish)
 what/how cars it was here
 ‘What a lot of cars there are here!’

b. Vad/*hur många bilar det var här!

how/what many cars it was here

‘What a lot of cars there are here!’

c. Hur/*vad många bilar var det där?

how/what many cars was it there

‘How many cars were there there?’

This shows us that the *wh*-items *ka/vad* and *kor/hur* have different distributions in (Northern) Norwegian and Swedish, and the construction measureless quantificational exclamationives constitutes a piece in that puzzle. Further discussion about the construction can be found in Vangsnes (2012), and more general discussions of the distribution of *wh*-items in North Germanic can be found in Vangsnes (2013).

The NDC corpus example from Bergen mentioned above is of some interest to the comparison of Northern Norwegian and Swedish. This example has the *wh*-item *kor* rather than *ka*, and as pointed out in Vangsnes (2012) it may be the case that the Bergen dialect actually uses *kor* across the board in exclamationives both with and without an overt measure, thus displaying a separate subsystem as far as the distribution of the *wh*-items in question is concerned.

3.3 Historical development

The construction is mentioned by Larsen and Stoltz (1912: 129) in their grammar of the Bergen city dialect. The example they provide is the following.

(11) Ka blåbær hær e!

what blueberries here are

‘What a lot of blueberries there are here!’

The very same examples is noted as possible in the Tromsø city dialect by Iversen (1918: 38). An interesting detail concerning (11) is that the *wh*-item is *ka* rather than *kor* as we have found for the contemporary Bergen dialect.

These historical records otherwise square well with the geographical data from NSD and NDC, i.e. that the construction is found in Northern Norway and in (parts of) Western Norway. To what extent the geographical distribution was non-contiguous also a hundred years ago remains to be investigated further, but on a general note the dialectological link between Northern and Western Norway is well established.

The fact that the construction is shared across Swedish and North Norwegian is interesting from a culture historical perspective. Furthermore, the fact that we observe an age difference with the split version in the Swedish dialect area may indicate an ongoing historical change whereby splitting becomes more acceptable.

3.4 Related constructions

The absence of measureless quantificational exclamatives from large parts of Southern Norway may be only apparent. From the Sogn dialect in Western Norway (judgments of the author) and the Fosen dialect in Trøndelag (judgments from Kristin Melum Eide) the following sentence types with a universal quantifier convey much the same semantics as the *wh*-construction we have discussed above.

- (12) a. Alt ao ‘ra blaober da va her! (Sogn, Western Norway)
all.N.SG of it blueberries it was here
 ‘What a lot of blueberries there are here!’
- b. Aill de blåberan de va her! (Fosen, Trøndelag)
all.PL it blueberries it was here
 ‘What a lot of blueberries there are here!’

Several grammatical puzzles arise from examples like this, and pursuing them would lead to far here. The mere fact that they are introduced by a universal quantifier rather than an *wh*-item is of considerable interest.

References

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- Vangsnes, Øystein Alexander. 2013. Syncretism and functional expansion in Germanic *wh*-expressions, *Language Sciences* 36 (2013), 47–65.

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>