

# Mid-distance binding: binding into infinitival clauses

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## 1. Introduction

While binding into finite embedded clauses traditionally has been claimed to exist only in the insular North Germanic languages, mid-distance binding, i.e. binding into a non-finite clause (see 1 below), is standardly assumed to exist in the North Germanic varieties that are spoken both in mainland Scandinavia as well and insular Scandinavia (see Faarlund et al. 1997: 160 ff. for Norwegian, Platzack 1998: 224 ff. for Swedish and Vikner 1985: 8 ff. for Danish). According to Faarlund et al. (1997), the non-local/mid-distance interpretation is most natural in the following sentence:

- (1) Hon<sub>i</sub> bad han minne seg<sub>i</sub> på avtalen. (Nor.)  
*she ask.PAST her remind.INF RFLX on agreement.DEF*  
'She asked him to remind her about the agreement.'

As pointed out in Faarlund et al (1997, 1160), there is some dialectal variation with respect to the acceptance of (1) in Norwegian. According to Teleman et al (1999/2:331ff.) there is considerable variation between Swedish speakers concerning the acceptability of mid-distance binding. As will be shown below, far from all speakers in Norway and Sweden accept sentences like (1).

In the ScanDiaSyn-survey, mid-distance binding was tested in Norway, Sweden and Finland. In Norway, only binding of a simplex object reflexive (as in 1 above) was tested. In Sweden and Finland both binding of a simplex object reflexive and binding of a possessive reflexive inside an object were tested. In Danish, only possessive reflexives were tested, but here it was tested whether the reflexive form is obligatory, or if pronominal forms were available as well. This was not tested for Swedish and Norwegian, but according to the sources mentioned above, a pronominal form in the complement of an infinitival verb can always be interpreted as co-referent with the main clause subject (i.e., in (1), the reflexive *seg* could be replaced by the third person feminine object pronoun *henne*).

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Nordic Syntactic Database (NSD)

In the ScanDiaSyn survey, the following sentence was tested in Norway, Sweden and Finland:

- (2) Hon<sub>i</sub> bad meg hjelpe seg<sub>i</sub> (#103) (Bok.)  
*she ask.PAST me help.INF RFLX*  
 'She<sub>i</sub> asked me to help her<sub>i</sub>'

The results are shown in Map 1:



Map 1: Mid-distance binding of simplex object reflexive.  
 (#103: *Hun bad meg hjelpe seg.* 'She asked me to help her.')

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

The variation seems to be only mildly conditioned by region/location, and we find variation within many measure points, and variation between adjacent measure points. There are some dialectal patterns though: in Norway, the sentence is rejected along the southern coast, gets high scores from the central parts of Southern Norway to Northern Norway, and with a high concentration of high scores in the Trøndelag area, an area famous for a high amount of non-

local reflexives (see Aasen 1864, Strahan 2003). The scores are in general quite low in Sweden, and higher in Finland. Some of the non-regional variation, but far from all, seems to be determined by age, as we see in maps 2 and 3 below: the older speakers have a much higher tolerance for the test sentence than the younger speakers, especially in Norway and southern Sweden:



Map 2: Mid-distance binding of simplex object reflexive, young speakers.  
 (#103: *Hun bad meg hjelpe seg. She asked me to help her.*)  
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)



Map 3: Mid-distance binding of simplex object reflexive, older speakers  
 (#103: *Hun bad meg hjelpe seg. She asked me to help her.*)  
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score))

In Sweden, Finland and Denmark, mid-distance binding of a possessive reflexive was tested as well. In the Swedish test sentence, the intervening embedded subject was a first person subject, while the intervening subject was a third person subject in the Danish test sentence, making the sentence potentially ambiguous.

- (3) a) *Hon<sub>i</sub> bad mig passa sin<sub>i</sub> katt.* (#1393) (Swe.)  
*she ask.PAST me watch.INF RFLX.POSS.CG cat*  
 'She<sub>i</sub> asked me to look after her<sub>i</sub> cat.'
- b) *Hun<sub>i</sub> bad ham hente sit<sub>i</sub> barn.* (#1393) (Dan.)  
*she ask.PAST him fetch.INF RFLX.POSS.NT child*  
 'She<sub>i</sub> asked him to pick up her<sub>i</sub> child.'

As the map below shows, mid-distance binding of a possessive reflexive is accepted in most measure points in Sweden and Denmark, though the scores are lower in eastern Finland (Österbotten).





Map 4: Mid-distance binding of possessive reflexive.  
 (#1393: *Hon bad mig passa sin katt.* 'She asked me to look after her cat./*Hun bad ham hente sit barn.* 'She asked him to pick up her child.')

In the Danish part of the survey, a sentence with a pronominal possessive in an object, co-indexed with the subject, as given in (4) below, was also tested:

- (4) Hun<sub>i</sub> bad ham hente hendes<sub>i</sub> barn. (#178) (Dan.)  
*she ask.PAST him fetch.INF her child*  
 'She<sub>i</sub> asked him to pick up her<sub>i</sub> child.'

This sentence was found acceptable by many informants, but the overall score for the reflexive version was higher than the pronominal version: almost half of the Danish informants found (4) completely unacceptable, with the given co-indexation. The acceptance is higher in Jutland and Fyn than the rest of Denmark, as shown in Map 5 below:



Map 5: Possessive pronoun in infinitive clause co-indexed with main clause subject. (#178: *Hun bad ham hente hendes barn.* 'She asked him to pick up her child.') (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

### 3. Discussion

There are several interesting aspects of the results presented above. Below I will first discuss the results from Norway, Sweden and Finland, and thereafter the results from Denmark. It should be noted that mid-distance binding was not tested in Insular Scandinavian, but according to e.g. Sigurjónsdóttir and Hyams (1992), mid-distance binding is accepted in Icelandic, for most speakers at least. No difference between the binding properties of simple reflexives and possessive reflexives has been reported for Icelandic or Faroese.

#### 3.1. Norway, Sweden and Finland

It is important to note that the limits on mid-distance binding are quite different from the restrictions on long-distance binding (i.e., binding into a finite subordinate clause, as discussed in separate NALS-chapters, Lundquist [2014a](#) and [2014b](#)). Long-distance binding is acceptable for most speakers in very specific contexts, basically only when the intervening embedded subject is inanimate or non-specific. The contrast between long-distance and mid-distance binding comes out clearly in the difference in acceptability between the following two test sentences, with bound possessive reflexives:

- (5) Grannen<sub>i</sub> ville att vi skulle passa sin<sub>i</sub> katt. (#1395) (Swe.)  
*neighbour.DEF want.PAST that we would look after RFLX.POSS.CG cat.CG*  
 'The neighbour<sub>i</sub> wanted us to look after his<sub>i</sub> cat.'
- (6) Hon<sub>i</sub> bad mig passa sin<sub>i</sub> katt. (#1393) (Swe.)

*she ask.PAST me watch.INF RFLX.POSS.CG cat*  
 'She<sub>i</sub> asked me to look after her<sub>i</sub> cat.'

As is discussed in [Lundquist \(2014a\)](#), sentence (5), is not accepted by any informants, while (6) is accepted by most informants, at least in Sweden, (and we have no reason to suspect that the results would be different in other parts of mainland Scandinavia).

However, when it comes to mid-distance binding of a simplex reflexive as in (2/#103), we see that this is more acceptable in the parts where long-distance binding is more acceptable, i.e. mainly Trøndelag (central Norway) and adjacent areas. The low scores for (#103) in both Sweden and parts of Norway are surprising, and what is especially surprising is the difference in acceptability between mid-distance binding of simple reflexives and possessive reflexives in Sweden. Although (6) (#1393) was not tested in Norway, several Norwegians that I have consulted find mid-distance binding of possessives more natural than mid-distance binding of simple reflexives. In North-eastern Finland (Österbotten) on the other hand, simple reflexives (#103) get a higher score than possessive reflexives in a mid-distance context, for reasons unknown. With the exception of Österbotten, it seems like mid-distance binding of simple reflexives have a similar spreading as more typical long-distance binding phenomena (see Strahan 2003), that is, it is possibly part of a more archaic binding system like the one we see in Icelandic today (where non-local binding basically is logophoric in nature). This is also supported by the fact that test sentence (#103) receives higher scores from the older informants than the younger informants. However, mid-distance binding of possessive reflexives seems to have become a natural part of the modern Mainland Scandinavian grammars. For more discussion on this topic, see Lundquist (2012a).

### 3.2. Danish

In the Danish part of the ScanDiaSyn survey, only possessive reflexives were tested in mid-distance contexts, and as we saw in the results above, mid-distance binding of a possessive reflexive was fully acceptable for almost all informants. We have no reasons to suspect that mid-distance binding of simple reflexives is less acceptable in Danish, and in the literature on binding in Danish, mid-distance binding is reported as being a natural part of the modern grammar, see e.g. Vikner 1985, from which the following example is taken:

(7) Peter<sub>i</sub> hørte Arne omtale sig<sub>i</sub> (Dan.)  
*Peter hear.PAST Arne mention.INF RFLX*  
 'Peter<sub>i</sub> heard Arne mention him<sub>i</sub>.'

Otherwise, true long-distance binding is unavailable in Danish, with the exception of the Northern Jutland dialect, as discussed in the chapters on long-distance binding. We thus have reasons to doubt that mid-distance binding of simple reflexives in Danish is tied to general long-distance binding. The results from the ScanDiaSyn-survey rather suggests that mid-distance binding in Danish is "local", in that the intervening embedded subject does not have the status of a subject. As shown in Map 5 above, many informants reject the co-indexation of the subject with a pronominal possessive in the infinitival clause. As far as I am aware, no speakers of Swedish and Norwegian (or even Icelandic) would reject a sentence like (4) above. Further, in the Danish part of the ScanDiaSyn survey, the binding properties of the embedded/infinitival subject was also tested, and it turns out that the embedded subject behaves more like an object than a subject. The following two sentences were tested, where co-reference between the infinitival subject and the possessive reflexive/pronoun was intended:

- (8) Hon bad ham<sub>i</sub> hente sit<sub>i</sub> barn. (#176) (Dan.)  
*she ask.PAST him fetch.INF RFLX.POSS.NT child*  
 'She asked him<sub>i</sub> to pick up his<sub>i</sub> child.'
- (9) Hon bad ham<sub>i</sub> hente hans<sub>i</sub> barn. (#177) (Dan.)  
*she ask.PAST him fetch.INF his child*  
 'She asked him<sub>i</sub> to pick up his<sub>i</sub> child.'

As Map 6 and Map 7 below show, the non-reflexive version is fully accepted by most informants, while the reflexive possessive pronoun is not



Map 6: Infinitival subject binding reflexive possessive.  
 (#176: *Hun<sub>i</sub> bad ham hente sit<sub>i</sub> barn. 'She<sub>i</sub> asked him to pick up her<sub>i</sub> child. )*  
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)





Map 7: Infinitival subject co-referent with possessive pronoun.  
 (#177: *Hun bad ham; hente hans; barn.* 'She asked him; to pick up his; child.')  
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

In Swedish and Norwegian, the infinitival subject can bind a reflexive possessive in its complement, and, as far as I am aware, many Norwegian and Swedish speakers would find (9) above ungrammatical (with the relevant binding configuration). The binding properties of the infinitival subject thus pattern with those of direct objects, as can be seen in their restriction of binding reflexives in preposition phrases, as is discussed in [Lundquist \(2014c\)](#). The mid-distance binding we see in Danish may thus be governed by different principles compared to the mid-distance binding in the rest of Scandinavia: mid-distance binding in Danish is simply local binding, where the intervening argument does not have the status of a subject.

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**Web sites:**

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Nordic Dialect Corpus: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>

Nordic Syntax Database: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/index.html>