

Bliva and varda

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss the use of the auxiliaries (or copulas) *bliva* and *varda* in the Nordic varieties. The phenomenon investigated is slightly different from the other phenomena discussed in NALS Volume 1 in that it is not really a syntactic phenomenon, but rather a lexical one. *Bliva* and *varda* are used as auxiliaries in periphrastic passives (followed by a passive participle), but they are also used as main verbs or copulas with the meaning 'become' or 'remain'/'stay', taking adjectival, nominal, prepositional or participial complements. *Varda* is an Old Norse auxiliary (*varða*), which originally was used primarily in the meaning 'become', but it was also the auxiliary used in periphrastic passives (see Markey 1969, p. 17). *Bliva* was borrowed from Middle Dutch (MD) and Middle Low German (MLG) (*bleiben/bliven*) around mid 14th century, originally mainly in the meaning 'remain'. As discussed extensively by Markey (1969), the 'become' meaning of *bleiben/bliven* had already developed when the auxiliary spread to Scandinavia. The main reason why *bliva* spread at the cost of *varda*, is according to Markey (1969, and see references therein) the fact that the paradigms for *varda* and the copula *vara* 'be' merged, as the phoneme /ð/ (as in *varða*) was lost in Mainland Scandinavian. Today, *bliva* is found all over Scandinavia, with the exception of Iceland and some parts of Eastern Finland. *Varda* is however also still used in most parts of Scandinavia, at least in the past tense, with the exception of Denmark, and the southern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland.

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntactic Database (NSD)

In the ScanDiaSyn survey, *bliva* and *varda* were tested in the past tense, in a construction with a passive participle. The following two sentences were tested in Norway, Sweden and Finland:

(1) Han ble skadd i ulykka. (#427) (Nor.)

he BLIVA.PAST injure.PART in accident.DEF

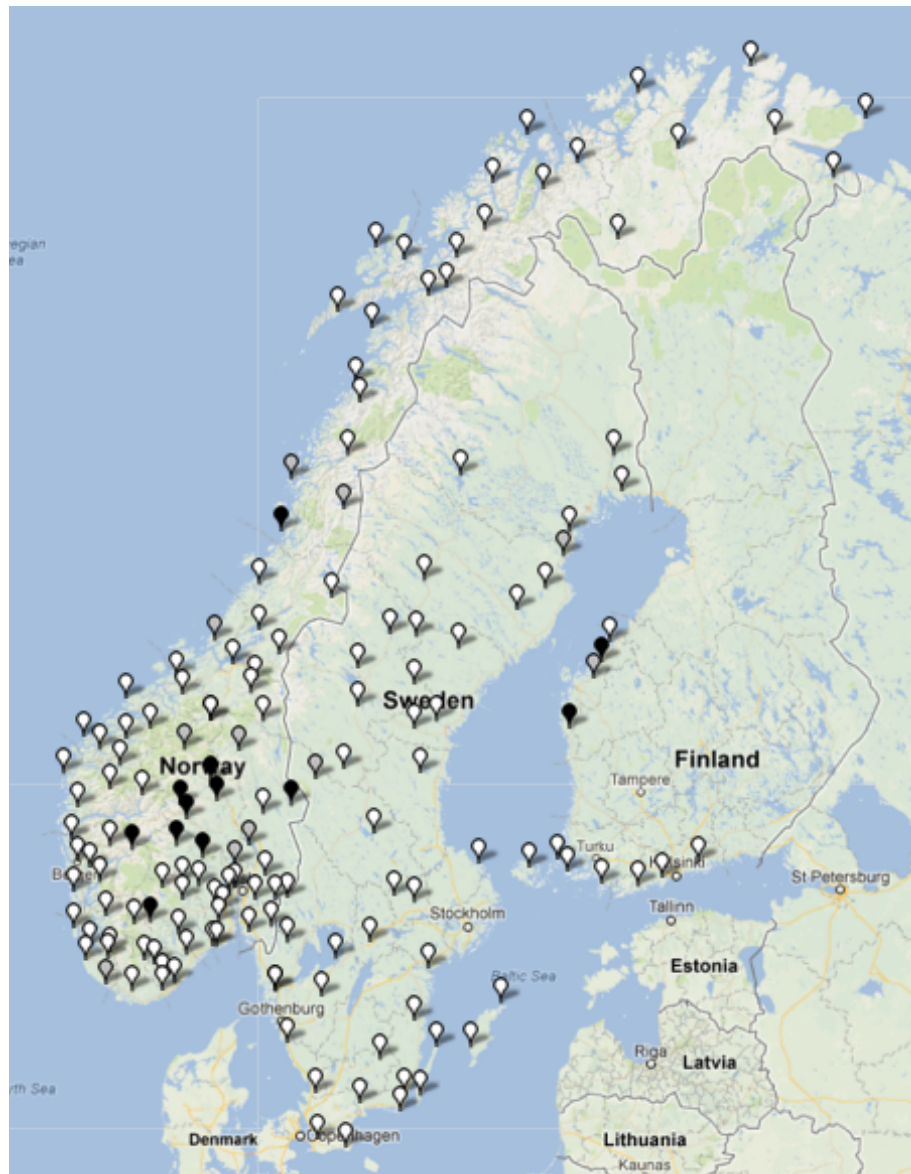
'He was injured in the accident.'

(2) Han vart skadd i ulykka. (#428) (Nor.)

he VARDA.PAST injure.PART in accident.DEF

'He was injured in the accident.'

The results are shown in Map 1 and Map 2 below:



Map 1: Past tense *bliva* followed by a passive participle.
 (#427: *Han ble skadd i ulykka. 'He was injured in the accident.'*)
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)



Map 2: Past tense *varda* followed by a passive participle.
 (#428: *Han vart skadd i ulykka.* 'He was injured in the accident.')

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

As can be seen in the two maps above, both *varda* and *bliva* are to a large degree accepted by the same speakers. As will be made clear in discussion part below, *varda* is in most parts of Mainland Scandinavia only used in the past tense and sometimes in the perfect tense, while *bliva* has a complete tense paradigm form most speakers.

In the Faroe Islands, *bliva* was also tested as a auxiliary in a past tense passive:

- (3) Vindeygað bleiv knappliga opnað av onkrum. (#427) (Far.)
window.DEF BLIVA.PAST suddenly open.PART by somethingSG.DAT.
 'The window was suddenly opened by something.'

The results are shown in Map 3 below:



Map 3: Past tense *bliva* followed by a passive participle in Faroese.

(#427: *Vindeygað bleiv knappliga opnað av onkrum.* 'The window was suddenly opened by something.')

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

As can be seen, there is quite a lot of variation in the Faroe Islands concerning the acceptance of *bliva* as a passive auxiliary. This will be returned to in section 3.4 below.

3. Discussion

Below I will first discuss Norwegian (3.1) and then Sweden (3.2), Eastern Finland (3.2) and finally Faroese (3.3).

3.1 Norway

In most parts of Norway, only the past tense and the past participial forms of *varda* are available. Many speakers have the following paradigm: *bli* (inf.)- *bli(r)* (pres.) - *vart* (past) - *vorte/værte/vørte* (perfect participle). In most parts of Norway where this paradigm exists, a full *bliva*-paradigm is also used by many speakers. The paradigm for *bliva* has the following form *bli* (inf.)- *bli(r)* (pres.) - *ble(i)* (past) - *blivi(t)/blitt* (perfect participle). Some speakers seem to alternate more or less freely between the two paradigms, while other speakers stick to one of the paradigms. [\[1\]](#)

In some parts of Norway, most notably Nord-Trøndelag and Oppland, the regular past and perfect participial forms of *bliva* are completely absent, as can be seen in map 1 above. Also in

the Nordic Dialect Corpus, we find spots in Norway where past or participial uses of *blive* are not attested, for example in southern Nordland (Hattefjell and Sømna), Nord-Trøndelag, Møre og Romsdal (Aure, Surnadal and Todalen), Oppland and Buskerud (Ål). The two maps below show the attested instances of the participial form of *bliva* (map 4) and *varda* (map 5). Note that the participial forms of *blive* and *varda* vary significantly throughout Norway. For *bliva* we commonly find the forms *blivi*, *blive*, and *blitt*, but also forms without /l/, such as *bitt*, and *bett* and *binnt* (mainly in Nordland and southern Troms). For *varda*, forms like *vørte*, *vårte*, and *værte* are common.



Map 4: Past tense of *bliva* (blitt/blive/blivi) in Nordic Dialect Corpus.



Map 5: Past tense of *varda* (*vørte*, *vorrte*, *værte*) etc. in Nordic Dialect Corpus.

Vannebo (1997) reports that infinitival and present tense forms of *varda* still exist in parts of Norway, most notably in Nord-Trøndelag, with the present tense form *val* (see below on the Österbotten dialect). In the Nordic Dialect Corpus, infinitival and present tense forms of *varda* are found only in Western Norway, most notably in Rogaland, Hordaland and Møre and Romsdal (this is in accordance with the patterns reported in Markey 1969). Here, the infinitival form is either *værta/vætta* or *værte/vætte*. The present tense *val*-form is not attested, though a very small number of present tense forms like *varre/vette/værte* and *værrt/varrt* can be found. Map 6 below shows the places where infinitival use of *varda* is attested.



Map 6: Infinitive of *varda* in Nordic Dialect Corpus. (green dot indicate that the infinitival ends in *-e*, the red dot indicates that it ends in *-a*.)

It should be noted that only one of the young informants uses the infinitival *varda* (a young woman from Voss, Hordaland, who consistently uses the form *vætta*). Similarly, there is only one, or possibly two instances of present tense *varda* from the younger informants.

3.2. Sweden

As we see in map 1 above, past tense of *bliva* (*blev*) is accepted all over the Swedish speaking area, with the exception of Österbotten in Finland. Past tense of *varda* (*vart*) is also accepted in most parts, with the exceptions of southern Sweden and southern Finland. However, there is an important difference between Norway and Sweden when it comes to *varda*. As was discussed in section 3.1, both past tense and the past participial forms of *varda* are used in large parts of Norway (see map 4 above for the past participle of *varda*), whereas only the past tense form is found in most parts of Sweden. The most common mixed/suppletive paradigm has the following shape: *bli(va)* (inf.) – *blir* (pres.) – *vart* (past) – *blivit/blitt* (perf. part.). In general, a complete *bli*-paradigm exists side by side with the mixed, with *blev* as the past tense form. In the Nordic Dialect Corpus, we see that many speakers alter between *blev* and *vart*.^[2] The only area where

we exclusively find *vart* is the part of Dalarna where Övdalian is spoken. Here we also find the only instances of the perfect participial form of *varda* – *uortet* (woman from Evertsberg) in the Swedish parts of the corpus.^[3] However, it should be noted that the spoken material from northern Sweden is still fairly small in the Nordic Dialect Corpus, and we can be quite sure that more tense forms of *varda* can be found in north-western Sweden (in Västerbotten), where we can expect to find a tense-paradigm of *varda* similar to that in Österbotten, Finland, as discussed below.

3.3. Österbotten

In Österbotten in Finland, we find spots where *bliva* is not used at all, and where *varda* has a full tense paradigm: *varda* (inf.) – *var/val* (pres.) – *vart/vort* (past) – *vari* (perf. part.). Most notably we find this in the Närpes dialect in southern Österbotten, as discussed extensively in Ivars (1988) and Ivars (2010). Markey (1969) reports that this paradigm is found in Nord-Trøndelag in Norway (see also Vannebo 1996) and northern Sweden (Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten), but it is not clear if this paradigm is still actively used in these areas.

In the Närpes dialect, the semantics of *varda* is slightly different from *bliva/varda* in the other parts of Scandinavia. As mentioned in the introduction, *bliva* was primarily used with meaning 'remain'/'stay' when it was first borrowed into Scandinavian, and at that time, *varda* did not have this meaning. Today in Österbotten, *varda* cannot mean 'remain'/'stay' (this is true for Icelandic *verða* as well). In the parts of Scandinavia where both *varda* (in the past (and perfect) tense) and *bliva* are used, the two verbs are now semantically equivalent, as shown in the following example, where both *varda* and *bliva* can be used in the meaning 'stay'/'remain':^[4]

- (4) Bilen blev /vart stående i garaget i flera månader. (Swe.)
car.DEF bliva.PAST varda.PAST stand.PRES_PART in garage.DEF in several month.PL
 'The car remained (standing) in the garage for several months.'
- (5) Han blev /vart borta i flera år. (Swe.)
he bliva.PAST varda.PAST away in several year.PL
 'He stayed away for several years.' (or 'He ended up being away....')

In Österbotten, the verb *lämna* 'leave', with an infinitival or locative complement, has to be used to express the meaning in 3 - 4, as shown in 5 - 6 below. Note that *lämna* cannot be used intransitively in the rest of Scandinavia (see Ivars 2003 for discussion of this construction, examples 5 - 6 from Ivars, p.c.):

- (6) Bi:lin lömna ti sta: i gara:sje i fleir moåna. (Öst.)
car.DEF leave.PAST INF.M stand.INF in garage.DEF in several month.PL
 'The car remained (standing) in the garage for several months.'
- (7) Han lömna bårt i fläir oår. (Öst.)
he leave.PAST away in several year.PL
 'He stayed away for several years.' (or 'He ended up being away....')

3.4. The Faroe Islands

The use of *blíva* and *verða* in Faroese has been extensively investigated by Majbritt Pauladóttir (see Pauladóttir 2009). According to Pauladóttir, the two verbs have existed side by side for a

long time; the first written instantiations of *blíva* are from the 15th century, though *blíva* was probably not incorporated into the spoken language until much later. Due to the conservative sociolinguistic situation, speakers have tried to avoid using *blíva* in written language since it is not considered 'good language' (see Pauladóttir 2009). *Blíva* seems to have entered the spoken language fairly late, under the influence of Danish. In contrast to the Mainland Scandinavian languages, *verða* is more or less absent in the past tenses in spoken language, though frequent in the present tense. This could be due to the fact that the preterite forms of *vera* 'be' and *verða* are hard to separate in spoken language (due to deletion of /ð/).

Interestingly, Pauladóttir notes that the two verbs have slightly different uses. As has been mentioned above, *varda* in Old Norse, Ostrobothnian and Icelandic is not used in the meaning 'remain'/'stay'. In Faroese however, this meaning is present with *verða*, though, interestingly, absent with *blíva*, which always has an inchoative meaning. This raises interesting questions about grammaticalization patterns, and the relation between tense/aspect and the semantic shift from 'become' to 'stay'/'remain' (or the other way around, see Markey 1969: 75-84).

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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>

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[1] Helge Sandøy (p.c.) informs me that the mixed/suppletive paradigm is very strong among the younger speakers in Møre and Romsdal.

[2] In a study on the use of *varda* and *bli* in the Swedish city Eskilstuna, Södermanland, as reported on by Eklund (2011), it was shown that *blev* and *vart* were more or less equally frequent, and that half of the informant

categorically used one of the version, while the other half altered between the two version.

[3]The Swedish part of the Nordic Dialect Corpus is at the time of writing much smaller than the Norwegian part, and glosses are sometimes missing and therefore it is harder to exclude the existence of past participial uses of *varda* in other places in Sweden.

[4]There may be some some speaker variation here: some speakers report that they have a preference for *blev* in 5, though they find both verbs equally good in 4.