

Deviant case forms in Standard Swedish and in Swedish dialects Notes from a field working trip

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Abstract:

This paper deals with deviant case forms in Swedish dialects, with the main emphasis on the possible existence of such forms in Northern Ostrobothnia (Finland). Deviant case forms are of two kinds: 1) uses of oblique forms in subject (or subject-affiliated) positions, and 2) uses of nominative forms in non-subject positions. The first pattern is well-known in Colloquial Danish and Norwegian, but within the Swedish area of Mainland Scandinavia it is only reported from Västra Nyland and Närpes. The second pattern is well attested in North Swedish and may also play a role in the Swedish dialects of Finland. In the field trip both patterns were investigated, however with emphasis on the use of oblique forms in subject positions. Little was found, but the absence of evidence does shed some light on the geographical distributions of these two deviational patterns.

1. Introduction

Deviant case forms, i.e. nominative in non-subject positions and oblique (also called ‘accusative’) forms in subject positions are well-known in Norwegian and Danish, where they to some extent have entered the standard language, and to some extent belong to the colloquial standard, i.e. the phrases everybody would use, except in writing and in formal oral situations. The existence of such phenomena in the Swedish-speaking areas of Mainland Scandinavia has remained obscure. This note is a report on some field work I have made on the matter.

2. The use of case inflection in Danish and Swedish

In Standard Danish the oblique form is expected when you identify yourself:

- (1) Det er mig
‘It is me (O¹)’

- and the same is true in long-distance topicalisations:

- (2) Ham tror jeg ikke skal være med

¹ In the glosses I use (N) to refer to a nominative form in the object language, and (O) to refer to an oblique form.

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'He (O) I do not believe shall participate'

Furthermore, existential constructions with pronouns (*Der er...*) demand the oblique case in Danish:²

- (3) Der var kun os, sagde han.
'There were only us (O), he said'

In several other constructions the oblique form is also necessary in oral style and to some extent in written language, in spite of the fact that these constructions suffer from a ban in more formal style. This deals with pronouns in coordinations where the oblique form is very frequent:

- (4) Peter og mig væltede klaveret
'Peter and I (O) turned over the piano'

Pronouns in front of identifying extensions (relative clauses, adverbs) may be oblique even when they have subject functions:

- (5) Ham der bor derhenne, er byens rigeste mand
'He (O) that lives over there is the richest man in town'
- (6) Ham der er byens rigeste mand
'He (O) there is the richest man in town'

Comparisons are another area where the case may deviate in Standard Danish. The traditional written norm demands congruence between the regular phrase and the comparative elements, making way for subtle distinctions:

- (7) a. Jeg har flere venner end dig
b. Jeg har flere venner end du
'I have more friends than you (N/O)

- where (7a) is supposed to mean that I have other friends, whereas (7b) means that my circle of my friends outnumbers your circle. However, in colloquial spoken Danish (like modern English usage) only Oblique form is used after the comparative connectors *som* ['as'] and *end* ['than'], and the resulting sentence is in principle ambiguous. At the time I made my

² Normally such constructions are explained as containing 'new' subjects, and the use of pronouns in this construction is therefore remarkable. Heltoft (1987) gives an excellent explanation why such pronouns occur. In fact they occur frequently enough to allow this usage to enter the traditional grammar as a regular rule.

investigations into Modern Danish usage (around 1990), the written language still maintained this distinction.

More details about these constructions may be found in Jørgensen 2000 with further references.

However, Swedish seems to have escaped this development to a large extent. It has namely been observed that certain Swedish dialects or regiolects do have deviant case forms. Nominative in non-subject positions was described in North Swedish by Anders Holmberg (Holmberg 1986). Oblique case in subject positions has been observed in Finnish Swedish by Gudrun Lundström (Lundström 1939) and Ann-Mari Ivars (Ivars 1988).

In this field report I am not going to discuss these results more thoroughly; I shall just make an account of my own attempts. I made some field work on the relevant constructions in Northern Sweden (Umeå region) in 1991, and in Västra Nyland in 1994. In 2006, in the framework of the NORMS project, I had the opportunity to continue the work in Norra Österbotten (North Ostrobothnia), the northernmost areas of Swedish dialects in Finland (Gamlekarleby / Kokkola, Nedervetil, Terjärv, Kronoby, Larsmo and Esse). The number, sex and age of the informants varied considerably, and especially the single Kokkola informant found it hard to give precise answers to the more fine-grained details. Although the results from this last trip were mostly negative, it does contribute to the picture of the geographical distribution of certain features.

3. The inventory of pronominal forms

In order to make sure that there are syntactic deviations in the use of the case forms, you need the confirmation that the case distinction is actually present in the morphological system. This is frequently not the case in Norwegian dialects, and the inventory of forms may often be reduced in Swedish too. Only Danish seems to have a full and well-established inventory of clearly distinct case forms.³ Such neutralisations, whether of the kind where both forms exist as synonymous or of the kind where only one form is currently in use, hamper the investigation, but of course the coexisting forms are the most troublesome ones.⁴

³ For details on the distribution of the case distinction through the standard languages and select dialects, see Jørgensen 2000 ch. 6.

⁴ The most complicated case is the Norwegian East Oslo dialect, where the three or four synonymous forms of the pronouns do have different distribution according to prosodic patterns and position in the string. It is possible to show, however, that this distribution only indirectly has to do with syntax proper. See Papazian 1978a, b.

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Throughout the Swedish-speaking area there is a strong tendency not to inflect the personal pronouns in the 3rd person. The official written norm still demands inflected forms for 3rd person plural (*de* | *dem*), but the common form *dom* is accepted in unofficial written language and in spoken language. Similarly 3rd pers. sing. masc. obl. *honom* (or similar derivatives from the old dative form) competes with *han*, which corresponds to the etymologically relevant accusative form. In Österbotten the form *honom* is frequently held to be part of the standard language, e.g. in Kronoby, where it derogatorily was called *härresk*, appr. “master-like”. In traditional dialects the only regularly inflected 3rd pers. form is 3rd pers. fem., but the parallel to the uninflected *han* sometimes urges the speakers to give up the inflected feminine as well. The actual number of inflected forms may therefore vary from dialect to dialect.

Thus, for testing purposes only 1st and 2nd person are relevant, since the case distinction with some certainty may be assumed to be present here. In the field work I have investigated the existence of oblique forms in the 3rd person and occasionally tested deviant case forms to see how the reaction would be. Most informants preferred variants of *han* to variants of *honom* and hence had no inflection in the masculine forms; the feminine forms were generally inflected, even though the actual form of the morphemes may vary considerably.

The questionnaire used in Northern Ostrobothnia was mainly built on my questionnaire from Västra Nyland. The examples were mostly quotes from different dialect sources; only a few constructions had to be constructed on Danish models in order to search the limits of certain constructions. The dialect features from Närpes or Västra Nyland were changed to make them look more plausible in the local dialects.⁵ The result may look funny, but it worked in most cases.

4. Nominative in object position and after preposition

The results that I achieved in Umeå 1991 concern nominative in object positions (including government of prepositional phrases). My test persons in Umeå⁶ turned down examples like these (cp. Jørgensen 2000 p. 206):

⁵ I am grateful to Jan-Ola Östman, who wasted a long night to give me substantial help with this matter.

⁶ The test persons in 1991 were chiefly university students living in Umeå, but born and raised in different parts of Northern Sweden.

- (8) a. *Har dom också frågat **du**?
 'Have they also asked you (N as object)?
 b. *Sen började dom jaga **vi**.
 'Then they started chasing us (N as object).
 c. *Elsa tycker **om du**.
 'Elsa likes you (N after prep)
 d. *Dom hoppade **på jag**.
 'They attacked me (N after prep).'

- but if they were part of a contrast, they seemed more acceptable:

- (8') a. Har dom också frågat "**du** - dom har frågat mej.
 'Have they also asked you – they have asked me (N as object)?
 b. Sen började dom jaga "**vi**.
 'Then they started chasing us (N as object).
 c. Elsa tycker **om "du** - int' om **jag**.
 'Elsa likes you (N), not me (N)'
 d. Dom hoppade på "**jag**, inte på Magnus.
 'They attacked me (N), not Magnus'

My Umeå informants of 1991 sometimes accepted examples without overt contrast (cp. Jørgensen 2000 p. 206):

- (9) Åke, det är en klasskompis till jag
 'Åke, that is a classmate to me (N)'

In the interviews from Stadsmål i Övre Norrland (Urban Speech in Upper Norrland) I found another constructions, namely coordinated pronouns in nominative:

- (10) då ha vi para ihop **jag och Lennart, hon och Dan**...
 'Then we have paired together me (N) and Lennart, she (N) and Dan ...'

Such examples were also accepted in the Umeå region. The form they were tested in, deviated from the actual quotes because the possible neutralisations in the 3rd persons should be avoided:

- (10') Då har vi parat ihop **jag och Lennart, du och Dan**, och sen dess ...
 'Then we have paired together me (N) and Lennart, you (N) and Dan, and then...'

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- (11) Det är så nästan med jag och Karin.⁷
'It is almost like that with me (N) and Karin'

Similar examples from Västra Nyland may be found in Gudrun Lundström's dissertation from 1939:

- (12) Je: ot **ja:g** de där
'Give to me (N) that thing'
- (13) Hon var it me **vi:** den da:gen
'She was not with us (N) that day'
(Lundström 1939 p. 55)⁸

Since they are quoted by Lundström only as examples without context or comment, it is difficult to say whether they actually have the same pragmatic context as the North Swedish examples, i.e. the contrastive meaning. In my 1994 investigation in Västra Nyland such examples were never recognised by the informants. The fieldwork concentrated on the occurrences of oblique forms in subject positions, and these constructions may have been neglected in this process. The informants in Västra Nyland were informed about the possible contrast meaning in these examples, and yet no bell seemed to ring to them.

Unfortunately, due to the fact that I mainly depended on my Västra Nyland material for the field trip, only example 12 was tested in Norra Österbotten in this form:

- (14) Ge åt jag den där - int åt Gunnar.
'Give to me (N) that thing – not to Gunnar'

This construction was only recognised once (in Larsmo) by one of the two informants, but since only this example was tested, it might be interesting to get back and test this matter in more detail, especially since continuous rumours has it that the construction in fact does exist elsewhere in Österbotten.

⁷ The original from STÖN had the 'correct' nominative: *det är så nästan mä mej å Karin* ('It is almost like that with me (O) and Karin'). Similar cases with 3rd person nominative forms were used as the model for the change; this example was used for testing because it used 1st person. In this way, pragmatic problems with 3rd persons changed into 1st persons were avoided.

⁸ For technical reasons Lundström's quasi-phonetical ortography has been modified slightly.

5. Oblique forms in subject position

This phenomenon has been reported from Västra Nyland (cp. Lundström 1939, Nyholm 1986) and Närpes (cp. Ann-Mari Ivars 1988, Jørgensen 2000 p. 225-8 with Ann-Mari Ivars as informant). The relevant constructions are not quite the same in both areas. The Närpes pattern is probably still present, but as far as I was able to find in my 1994 field trip to Västra Nyland, no living speakers used the pattern any more. I found several informants that remembered this usage among older speakers, and occasionally whole quotes could be collected. Evidently, the interpretation of the investigation has to be very careful in this situation.

According to Lundström (1939 p. 55 and 57) the predicative of the subject in Västra Nyland always had oblique case, like Danish or Norwegian:

- (15) Ä de **dej**, vo:r I:da, E:vals mω:ra?
'Is that you (O), our Ida, Evals mother'
- (16) An (katten) trω:dd väl, att det var **henna** (matmodern), o so ga: an se i fakk med ωn.
'He (the cat) probably thought it was her (O, *her* being the lady of the house), and then started having to do with her'

Occasionally Lundström has quotes with nominative (1939: 126):

- (17) ... men den, som int föld me:, de var **ja**.
'... but the one that did not come along, was I (N)'

There are two possible explanations for this observation: either examples like (17) derive from the Standard language, or the claim that the rule was obligatory, does not hold.

In Norra Österbotten only the nominative was acceptable in this construction.

In Västra Nyland, coordinated pronouns in subject positions could appear in both nominative and oblique forms (Lundström 1939: 61):

- (18) **Hanses mamma o vi:**, vi va myki övere:nskomande, vi:.
'His mother and we (N), we did get on very well, we (N)'
- (19) O alla mornar skω **syster min o mej** ti kolaskω:jin.
'And every morning my sister and me (O) had to go to the coal forest' **where?**

This feature was never recognized in Norra Österbotten.

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Comparative constructions may in Standard Swedish have both oblique and nominative case. The same pattern holds for Västra Nyland, but in Närpes there is a strong preference for oblique form in this construction (Ivars 1988: 171). Most informants in Norra Österbotten accepted both cases, but several informants from Esse ruled out the nominative in cases like:

- (20) Ha ä lika gambal som mä (?? or *: *som ja*)
'He is as old as I (O, *N)
- (21) Ja ä länger än tä (*än tu)
'I am taller than you (O, *N)

The two youngest informants ruled out nominative in all cases. However, to the middle-aged and the elderly informant the nominative turned out to be acceptable in sentences like:

- (22) Ha ä som mä / ja, ha
'He is like me (N/O), he.

In spite of this, even these two informants had a clear preference for oblique case in comparatives. Occasionally similar claims were found elsewhere, e.g. Larsmo. In Larsmo, however, the reduced form was sometimes ruled out by both of the informants questioned, and only the full (sentential) form of a comparison *gamblare än va ja ä* ('older than what I am') was considered acceptable. To one of my example sentences, a group of elderly men in Kronoby gave the nominative version spontaneously, but at second thought found the oblique version better. The same claim was made by the Kokkola informant, whose estimations unfortunately were somewhat insecure.

The evidence from Esse is too scarce to substantiate a claim that oblique case is in the process of establishing itself in comparative constructions in Norra Österbotten, even when compared to the other results. Nevertheless the phenomenon might be interesting enough to keep under observation.

Pronouns with additional identifying elements (determining relative clauses, local adverbs etc.) are frequent in Danish and have a strong tendency towards oblique forms, except in the most strict written language. Lundström (1939) has no useful parallel example, so a couple of Swedish parallels were constructed. However, neither in Västra Nyland nor in Ostrobothnia such examples were recognized:

- (23) Oss på Domarebackan har det rätt trevligt.

'We (O) at Domarebackan live quite well'

Right copying of pronouns in order to emphasize one of the actants is a frequent resource in Northern Scandinavia (cp. Nyholm 1986 with further references), but only rarely, if ever, found in Danish. In Västra Nyland examples like these were found with oblique forms, according to Lundström (1939: 56):

(24) Tω ä tω:koger, **dej**.

'You (N) are stupid, you (O)'

(25) Nu lä:r ωn a vari so vilder, **henna**.

'Now she (N) is said to have been so wild, she (O)'

Since the oblique forms in Danish show up in Subject positions if they carry emphasis, the use in right copying corresponds very well to the already established patterns; thus, this construction is not a good argument that the Danish and the Västra Nyland deviatonal forms are totally unrelated. In the investigations in Västra Nyland this usage of the case forms was recognized, but like the rest, they were apparently out of use. In Northern Ostrobothnia they were always corrected to nominative throughout. One informant (in Kokkola) claimed that right copying was foreign to the dialect altogether, a claim that has no weight, given the observable fact that the construction is used frequently by most speakers.

Topicalization out of a dependent clause also touches upon deviant case, most obviously in Danish, where the Standard Language version of the construction (and the colloquial standards along with it) forces an extracted pronominal subject to take the oblique case:

(26) Ham tror jeg ikke kan lede mødet i dag.

'Him (O) think I not can lead meeting-the today'

(I do not think he can lead the meeting today)

It is difficult to find evidence whether this special rule also is relevant to Swedish and Norwegian, even though extraction of a subject from the clause indeed does exist. Although well attested in the different Standard versions of Mainland Scandinavian, there are some difficulties with respect to the acceptability of certain variants of it, and especially extraction of a subject from a dependent clause is often rejected by the speakers, even when they do use the form itself. Reactions to questionnaires must therefore be taken with a grain of salt.

Deviant case in extracted subjects is found in Närpes, according to Ivars (p.c. to Jørgensen 2000: 226). In Västra Nyland relevant examples

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were not found in Lundström (1939) – indeed she does not touch upon this construction at all⁹ -- , and my tests did not reveal anything about their presence or absence. These examples (Jørgensen 2000: 226) illustrate the construction:

- (27) **Mie:g** tro:r an itt kan sloå: sko:lboånen.
'Me (O; extracted) does he not believe will be able to hit the schoolchildren'
- (28) **Tie:g** väit ja foå:r itt lömn nie:r oå:s
'You I know will not be allowed to stay with us'

In general the informants are unwilling to confirm the existence of this construction, both the special variant with extracted pronoun and the general construction. In the tests, examples of the Närpes pattern are quite frequently not recognized, and a replacement form is difficult to reach because extraction constructions are generally not accepted in the interviews. The Larsmo informants were the good guys in this context: both understood the construction and gave a possible version from the dialect, in both cases involving a nominative form.

6. Conclusion

The dialectal spread of these constructions is interesting. The potentially most wide-spread deviational pattern is the use of Nominative in object positions, since traces of it may be found at least from Northern Sweden to Southern Finland. There are many claims that this usage exists, but quite often in the dubious kind that 'they say so in the next village, but no-one does it here'. Still, there is enough evidence that the pattern does exist, or at least has existed.

The other deviational pattern, Oblique forms in subject- or subject-like positions, has its centre in the Danish sector of the Mainland Scandinavian area and has spread in Norway, probably only recently, since the phenomenon is hardly ever mentioned in descriptions of rural Norwegian dialects, only in urban dialects (Jørgensen 2000: ch. 9). The only attested occurrences of this pattern within the Swedish-speaking areas are the evidence from Västra Nyland and Närpes (Södra Österbotten), collected by Gudrun Lundström and Ann-Mari Ivars. Since no evidence has been found in the surrounding areas (Östra Nyland, as investigated by Lundström

⁹ Except for one example, which is given without comment: *Den banan minns ja nu so bra, som ha byggdas* (Lundström 1939: 188)

1939; Norra Österbotten, as investigated in this field trip), it is most likely that this deviational pattern is a strongly isolated phenomenon within Swedish and has no direct relation to the Danish and Norwegian pattern, in spite of the fact that the Västra Nyland deviational pattern in astonishingly many ways coincides with the Danish patterns, sharing many constructions with it.

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