

# Some *man*-ly oddities

Variation in adjectival agreement with the Danish impersonal pronoun  
*man* ('one') – and also collectives

# Danish predicative adjectival inflection

The adjective corresponds in number and gender to the number and gender of the subject nominal

*kat* ('cat') is singular, common gender

*flag* ('flag') is singular, neuter gender

*huse* ('houses') is plural (and neuter, but that makes no difference in the plural)

- |     |                |     |                 |     |                   |
|-----|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|-------------------|
| (1) | Katt-en        | er  | rød-Ø           | og  | hvid-Ø.           |
|     | cat-DEF.SG.C   | is  | red-SG.C.STRONG | and | white-SG.C.STRONG |
|     |                |     |                 |     |                   |
| (2) | Flag-et        | er  | rød-t           | og  | hvidt-t.          |
|     | flag-DEF.SG.N  | is  | red-SG.N.STRONG | and | white-SG.N.STRONG |
|     |                |     |                 |     |                   |
| (3) | Hus-e-ne       | er  | rød-e           | og  | hvid-e.           |
|     | house-PL-DEF.N | are | red-PL          | and | white-PL          |

# The Danish impersonal pronoun *man* ('one')

- Functions as a dedicated impersonal pronoun with a generic sense

(4) When **one** is in Italy **one** eats pasta.

(5) Når **man** er i Italien spiser **man** pasta.

- In contrast with English *one*, *man* does not strictly encode singular:

(6) Man mødes ofte i små grupper i skoven.  
MAN meet often in small groups in forest-DEF.

(7) Man vil gerne lave brede forlig i regeringen.  
MAN want gladly do broad deals in government-DEF.

(8) Man giver hinanden gaver til jul.  
MAN give eachother gifts for Christmas.

# *Man* and agreement – default verbal agreement, typically 3sg

Borer (2005) observes that dedicated impersonal pronouns behave like mass nouns: they are semantically plural but trigger syntactic singular agreement. (cited from Fenger 2018: 295, fn 5)

- (9) In dit land geef-t **men elkaar** cadeautjes met kerst. [Du]  
*In this country give-s IMP each.other presents with Christmas* (Fenger 2018, 295)  
In this country, **one** give-s **each other** presents at Christmas. [Eng]

**No verbal agreement in Danish, so will have to look elsewhere – predicative adjective agreement**

- (10) Hvad afgør, om **man er tilfreds-Ø** med livet?  
What decides if MAN is happy-SG with life-DEF  
(Berlingske 2023)
- (11) Hos [f]onden Axcel understreger [XYZ], at **man er tilfreds-e** med investeringen  
At fund.DEF Axcel stresses XYZ that man is happy-PL with investment.DEF  
(Ekstra Bladet 2024)

# Context – what does the literature say?

Egerland (2003)

## 2.1 Agreement Patterns

In the unmarked cases, Swedish *man* triggers singular agreement on an adjectival predicate in a copular construction as in (3) (Swedish finite verbs do not show morphological agreement):

- (3) Sw. När man är ung, ...  
when MAN is young[sg.] ...  
'when people are young...'

However, agreement patterns in such environments are somewhat elastic. Plural agreement becomes acceptable in cases like (4a-b) where context strongly favours a plural reading:<sup>5</sup>

Swedish:

- (4) a. Trots bevisföringen  
in spite of the evidence  
var man inte helt övertygad/övertygade om hans skuld.  
was MAN not completely convinced[sg.]/convinced[pl.] about his guilt  
'in spite of the evidence, people/they were not convinced...'  
b. Om man inte är gift/gifta  
if MAN is not married[sg.]/married[pl.]  
måste man ha skilda rum på detta hotell.  
must MAN have separate rooms in this hotel
- (5) a. Inom armén är man stolt/stolta över henne.  
within the army is MAN proud[sg.]/proud[pl.] of her  
'people in the army/they are proud of her'  
b. I Sverige kräver man att få avgöra detta själv/själva.  
in Sweden demands MAN to decide this self[sg.]/self[pl.]  
'in Sweden people want to decide this on their/our own'

Egerland suggests that the impersonal pronoun *man* in Swedish (and Danish, similarly *si* in Italian, and *on* in French) lacks a phi-feature specification altogether and is therefore compatible with both singular and plural adjectival agreement

Similar suggestions can be found e.g. in Gelderen (1997), Hoekstra (2010), Ackema and Neeleman (2018), and Fenger (2018).

# Context – what does the literature say?

**Hansen & Heltoft (2011: 557, 585)**

*Man/en* har plural stammebetødning [...]

Morfologisk er *man* singularis, hvad der ses af dets refleksive pronomen:

man skal passe på sin/\*deres bagage

På den anden side har *man* prædikativ i både singularis og pluralis:

så snart man er færdig/færdige, rækker man hånden op

[...]

Det hænger sammen med at *man* er semantisk pluralt (betegner et kollektiv) [...]

man samles hver onsdag ved middagstid  
man vedtog at protestere over ordningen  
det hjælper jo ikke at man rakker hinanden ned

## English:

*Man/en* is plural as its basic sense [...]

*Man* is morphologically singular, which can be seen from its reflexive pronoun:

MAN shall look-after REFL's/\*their luggage.

On the other hand, *man* has may take both singular and plural predicatives:

as soon MAN is done-SG.C/done-PL, put man hand-DEF up

That is connected to the fact that *man* is semantically plural (indicates/denotes a collective) [...]

# Context – what about collectives and adjectival agreement?

Again drawing on Hansen & Heltoft (2011), the Danish collectives may either be used with regular (singular) number agreement on the predicative adjective, or they may be used with plural agreement (what Corbett (2023 and previous works) calls semantic agreement).

**hele hans familie** var **sure** på ham  
*entire his family was mad-PL at him*  
**publikum** var **vilde** med forestillingen  
*audience was wild-PL with show-DEF*

**hele hans familie** er **hollandsk**  
*entire his family is Dutch-sg.c*  
**publikummet** var **talrigt**  
*audience-SG.DEF was numerous-SG.N*  
(Examples from Hansen & Heltoft 2011, 497)

The alternate (plural) agreement emphasizes the plurality of the collective subject while the standard singular agreement mechanically denotes agreement (loosely translated from Hansen og Heltoft 2011, 497).

# Context – what does the literature say?

Corpus study on adjectival agreement patterns with collectives in Norwegian

~70 % singular, ~30 % plural in one corpus

~35 % singular, ~65 % plural in the other corpus

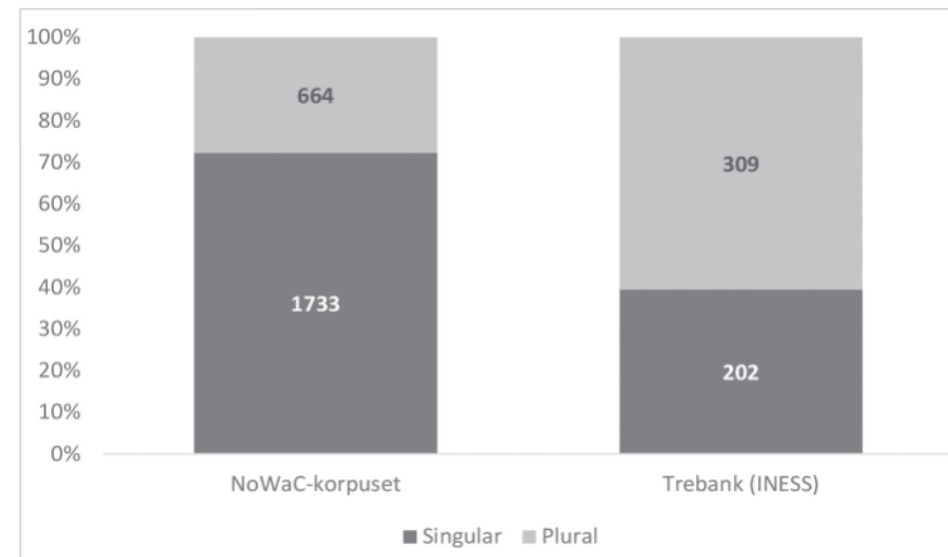
Plural agreement more likely when the collective subject is made up of humans, is agentive, is easier to individuate

(Nesset, Enger & Janda 2022: 128)

128 *Tore Nesset, Hans-Olav Enger og Laura A. Janda*

|                 | Singular | Plural | Totalt |
|-----------------|----------|--------|--------|
| NoWaC-korpuset  | 1733     | 664    | 2397   |
| Trebank (INESS) | 202      | 309    | 511    |

Tabell 1. Fordeling av entalls- og flertallskongruens i data fra to korpus.



Figur 1. Fordeling av entalls- og flertallskongruens i data fra to korpus.

# Context – what does the literature say?

Corpus study on bound pronouns with collectives in Danish:

Bound form seems to depend strongly on the specific type of collective, from 97% *sin/sit/sine* (*klub* ‘team’) to 37 % (*familie* ‘family’) and 3% (*par*, ‘couple’).

The authors also speculate that a higher amount of semantic agreement (which is not a term that they would agree with, for good measure) is more likely when the collective is more animate and easier to individuate.

(Schack & Jensen in prep., table from p. 6-7)

Tabel 1: landsdækkende aviser 2023

|                     | sin/sit/sine/dens/dets | deres |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------|
| <b>klub</b>         | 97 %                   | 3 %   |
| <b>regering</b>     | 96 %                   | 4 %   |
| <b>organisation</b> | 95 %                   | 5 %   |
| <b>virksomhed</b>   | 93 %                   | 7 %   |
| <b>parti</b>        | 92 %                   | 8 %   |
| <b>kommune</b>      | 86 %                   | 14 %  |
| <b>folketing</b>    | 85 %                   | 15 %  |
| <b>udvalg</b>       | 83 %                   | 17 %  |
| <b>hold</b>         | 81 %                   | 19 %  |
| <b>ledelse</b>      | 64 %                   | 36 %  |
| <b>politi</b>       | 62 %                   | 38 %  |
| <b>gruppe</b>       | 60 %                   | 40 %  |
| <b>befolkning</b>   | 38 %                   | 62 %  |
| <b>familie</b>      | 37 %                   | 63 %  |
| <b>par</b>          | 3 %                    | 97 %  |

**Data – KorpusDK**  
my initial PhD  
(defense) investigation

| PERCENTAGES                                     |                     | Pred. adj. |        |  | Bound pron. form |       |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|--------|--|------------------|-------|
|                                                 |                     | singular   | plural |  | sin              | deres |
|                                                 | Collectives         | 74 %       | 26 %   |  | 79 %             | 21 %  |
|                                                 | Impersonal man      | 94 %       | 6 %    |  | 100 %            | 0 %   |
|                                                 |                     |            |        |  |                  |       |
|                                                 | Quantifiers         |            |        |  |                  |       |
|                                                 | Alle                | 2 %        | 98 %   |  | 16 %             | 84 %  |
|                                                 | Begge               | 0 %        | 100 %  |  | 5 %              | 95 %  |
| 77660 pl (er være var + ADJ with -e ending)     | Enhver              | 100 %      | 0 %    |  | 97 %             | 3 %   |
|                                                 | Hver                | 100 %      | 0 %    |  | 90 %             | 10 %  |
|                                                 | Hver N              | 100 %      | 0 %    |  | 97 %             | 3 %   |
| 193360 sg (er være var + ADJ without -e ending) | Hvem som helst      | 0 %        | 0 %    |  | 100 %            | 0 %   |
|                                                 | Nogen = someone     | 75 %       | 25 %   |  | 52 %             | 48 %  |
|                                                 | Nogen = some people | 53 %       | 47 %   |  | 8 %              | 92 %  |
| =><br>28.7 % pl<br>71.3 % sg                    | Nogle               | 0 %        | 100 %  |  | 2 %              | 98 %  |
|                                                 | Én                  | 100 %      | 0 %    |  | 100 %            | 0 %   |
|                                                 | Ingen               | 70 %       | 30 %   |  | 63 %             | 37 %  |

Data –  
Hestenettet

| PERCENTAGES         | Pred. adj.          |        |  | Bound pron. |        |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------|--|-------------|--------|
|                     | singular            | plural |  | sin         | deres  |
| Collectives         | 54.0 %              | 46.0 % |  | 23.5 %      | 76.5 % |
| Impersonal man      | 98.8 <sup>1</sup> % | 1.2 %  |  | 100 %       | 0 %    |
|                     |                     |        |  |             |        |
| Quantifiers         |                     |        |  |             |        |
| Alle                | 6.7 %               | 93.3 % |  | 12.2 %      | 87.8 % |
| Begge               | 0 %                 | 100 %  |  | - %         | - %    |
| Enhver              | - %                 | - %    |  | - %         | - %    |
| Hver                | - %                 | - %    |  | - %         | - %    |
| Hver N              | - %                 | - %    |  | - %         | - %    |
| Hvem som helst      | - %                 | - %    |  | - %         | - %    |
| Nogen = someone     | - %                 | - %    |  | - %         | - %    |
| Nogen = some people | - %                 | - %    |  | %           | - %    |
| Nogle               | - %                 | - %    |  | - %         | - %    |
| Én                  | - %                 | - %    |  | - %         | - %    |
| Ingen               | 21.4 %              | 78.6 % |  | 20.7 %      | 79.3 % |

1 This amount of standard/expected agreement is almost exactly the same as found in Christensen, Nyvad & Ehlers (2024) where we investigated alternative adjective agreement in Hestenettet with a different lens. The main difference is that that article only looked at a specific set of verbs that all show alternative agreement patterns.

# When does *man* occur with plural inflection on the adjectival predicate?

| <i>enige/uenige om/med</i>     | 10 | 58.8 % |
|--------------------------------|----|--------|
| Fronting of p-OBJ <sup>1</sup> | 3  | 17.6 % |
| <i>forskellige</i>             | 2  | 11.8 % |
| <i>færdige</i>                 | 1  | 5.9 %  |
| <i>glade for</i>               | 1  | 5.9 %  |
| <i>opmærksomme på</i>          | 1  | 5.9 %  |

*man* mainly occurs with plural inflection on the predicate when

- a) the predicate strongly encodes plurality, or
- b) unrelated structural factors favour alternative agreement

Først så skal **man være enige** om hvad forfangede er.  
*first then must MAN be in-agreement about what laminitis be-PRES*

Dem skal **man være varsomm-e** med.  
*them shall MAN be careful-PL with*

Men bare vise andre folk sine børn som **man er glad-e** for.  
*but just show other people REFL's kids which MAN be-PRES happy-PL for*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Christensen, Nyvad & Ehlers (2024) where the data show a higher relative frequency of alternative agreement when the P-Obj is fremflyttet.

# Do specific collectives occur more often with plural adjectival inflection on the predicate? (Hestenettet)

|              | Plural |        |  | Singular |        |
|--------------|--------|--------|--|----------|--------|
| par          | 15     | 78.90% |  | 4        | 21.10% |
| politiet     | 39     | 76.50% |  | 12       | 23.50% |
| befolkning   | 6      | 54.50% |  | 5        | 45.50% |
| Venstre      | 1      | 50%    |  | 1        | 50%    |
| familien     | 63     | 45.70% |  | 75       | 54.30% |
| hold         | 6      | 37.50% |  | 10       | 62.50% |
| gruppe       | 4      | 33.30% |  | 8        | 66.70% |
| kommunen     | 6      | 30%    |  | 14       | 70%    |
| regeringen   | 4      | 26.70% |  | 11       | 73.30% |
| ledelsen     | 1      | 16.70% |  | 5        | 83.30% |
| virksomhed   | 0      | 0%     |  | 4        | 100%   |
| klub         | 0      | 0%     |  | 15       | 100%   |
| Enhedslisten | 0      | 0%     |  | 2        | 100%   |
| parti        | 0      | 0%     |  | 1        | 100%   |

Singular – refers to the size of the family as a whole:

men kærestens **familie er rimelig stor-Ø**

*but partner's family is fairly large-SG*

og der er alle svigertingester velkomne

*and there be-PRES all in-laws welcome*

Plural (hypothetical) – refers to the size of each individual family member:

men kærestens **familie er rimelig stor-e...**

*but partner's family be-PRES fairly large-PL*

Not generally the picture, however – no obvious meaning difference here:

... at **politiet er ligeglad-Ø** med børnene!

*that police-DEF be-PRES indifferent-SG with kids-DEF*

At **politiet er ligeglad-e** med dyr, men...

*that police-DEF be-PRES indifferent-PL with animals but*

# A sort of summary

- The use of adjectival agreement with *man* and (certain) collectives in KorpusDK and Hestenettet do not give credence to the hypothesis that *man* behaves syntactically/semantically like a collective (cf. Hansen & Heltoft 2012) – at least not when viewed quantitatively
- *man* can and does occur with plural inflected adjectives but only when the predicate itself encodes plurality (as described in Egerland 2003), or when other structural factors favour alternative agreement (cf. Christensen, Nyvad and Ehlers 2024, and this is just as true for all other types of subjects)
- The surveyed collectives generally show a high amount of semantic agreement (plural agreement with singular subjects) – the amount varies quite a bit between the collectives where some strongly favour semantic agreement and some strongly favour syntactic agreement. My data largely back up the results in Schack and Jensen (in prep.) where it is argued that high member-level accessibility (and animacy/humanness and agentivity as argued in Nessel, Enger & Janda 2022, and distributivity as argued in Åfarli & Vangsnes 2020) makes plural agreement more likely.
- The two corpora (once again) show interesting differences in adjectival agreement and bound forms across the surveyed subject types and more could certainly be made of this ;)

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<https://munin.uit.no/bitstream/handle/10037/28412/article.pdf?sequence=2>

Åfarli, Tor A. & Øystein A. Vangsness. 2020: Formell og semantisk adjektivkongruens i norsk. *Oslo Studies in Language* 11(2), 527–540

## Appendix: Search strings and numbers in Hestenettet

**Man:** Annotated 2080 examples ~ random sample of 10 % of 20,719 hits on *Hestenettet* (man er|være|var adjective)

**Collectives:** Annotated all 861 hits on *Hestenettet*

([word="SF|Konservative|Radikale|Socialdemokraterne|Socialdemokratiet|Venstre|Enhedslisten|Folkeparti|befolkning|befolkningen|familie|familien|folketing|folketinget|gruppe|gruppen|hold|holdet|klub|klubben|kommune|kommunen|ledelse|ledelsen|organisation|organisation|par|parret|parti|partiet|politi|politiet|regering|regeringen|udvalg|udvalget|virksomhed|virksomheden"] [word="er|være|var"] [tag="A.\*"])

Annotated all 202 hits on *Hestenettet*

([word="SF|Konservative|Radikale|Socialdemokraterne|Socialdemokratiet|Venstre|Enhedslisten|Folkeparti|befolkning|befolkningen|familie|familien|folketing|folketinget|gruppe|gruppen|hold|holdet|klub|klubben|kommune|kommunen|ledelse|ledelsen|organisation|organisation|par|parret|parti|partiet|politi|politiet|regering|regeringen|udvalg|udvalget|virksomhed|virksomheden"] [tag="V.\*"] {0,3} [word="sin|sit|sine|deres"])

**Alle:** Annotated 255 (~ 10 %), [word="alle"] [word="er|var|være"] [tag="A.\*"]

**Begge:** Annotated 270 (= 25 %), [word="begge"] [word="er|var|være"] [tag="A.\*"]

**Ingen:** Annotated 318 (= 100 %), [word="ingen"] [word="er|var|være"] [tag="A.\*"] resp. 35 sin/deres

# Man-Data – Hestenettet and KorpusDK

| Label                              | Filter                                                                              |                                                                                     | Frequency |                        |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| -t/-ede - ikke altid forskel pl/sg |    |    | 79        | <div><div></div></div> |
| Adverb, no adjective               |    |    | 40        | <div><div></div></div> |
| No sg/pl distinction (alene, b...  |    |    | 378       | <div><div></div></div> |
| Not relevant                       |    |    | 147       | <div><div></div></div> |
| Plural adjective                   |   |   | 19        | <div><div></div></div> |
| Singular adjective                 |  |  | 1382      | <div><div></div></div> |
| flere sammen                       |  |  | 20        | <div><div></div></div> |

Annotated 2080 examples ~ random sample of 10 % of 20,719 hits on *Hestenettet* (*man* er|være|var adjective)

# Kollektiv-Data – Heste



Collectives singular-plural • 861  
0.72 per million tokens • 0.000072%

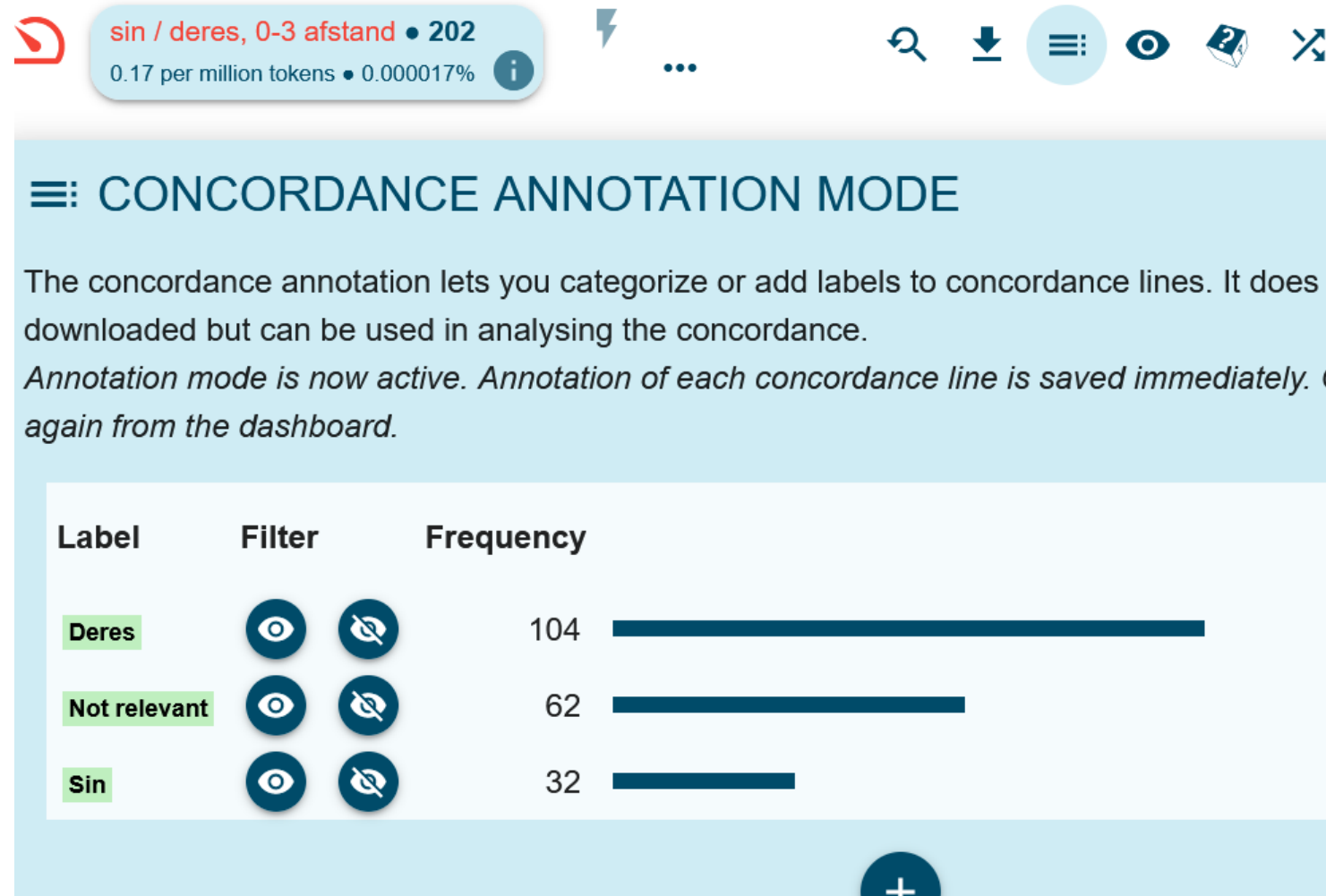
Sort by labels • 0  
• 0%



Annotated all 861 hits on *Hestenettet*

([word="SF|Konservative|Radikale|Socialdemokraterne|Socialdemokratiet|Venstre|Enhedslisten|Folkeparti|b

# Kollektiv-Data – Hestenettet and KorpusDK



sin / deres, 0-3 afstand • 202  
0.17 per million tokens • 0.000017%

## CONCORDANCE ANNOTATION MODE

The concordance annotation lets you categorize or add labels to concordance lines. It does not download but can be used in analysing the concordance.  
*Annotation mode is now active. Annotation of each concordance line is saved immediately. Can be turned off again from the dashboard.*

| Label        | Filter                                                                                                                                                                     | Frequency |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Deres        |     | 104       |
| Not relevant |   | 62        |
| Sin          |   | 32        |

Annotated all 202 hits on *Hestenettet*

([word="SF|Konservative|Radikale|Socialdemokraterne|Socialdemokratiet|Venstre|Enhedslisten|Folkeparti|b

# Alle-Data – Hestenettet and KorpusDK

 Subcorpus Social Media ×

**alle - sin/deres binding • 336**  
1.31 per million tokens • 0.000028% i

## ≡: CONCORDANCE ANNOTATION MODE

The concordance annotation lets you categorize or add labels to concordance lines downloaded but can be used in analysing the concordance.  
*Annotation mode is now active. Annotation of each concordance line is saved immediately from the dashboard.*

| Label                      | Filter                                                                                                                                                                  | Frequency       |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>LABEL</b>               |       | 0               |
| <b>deres</b>               |     | 245 <div></div> |
| <b>no relevant binding</b> |   | 57 <div></div>  |
| <b>sin/sit/sine</b>        |   | 34 <div></div>  |



 **alle - pl/sg adjective • 2,529**  
2.11 per million tokens • 0.00021% i

**shuffle • 2,529**  
2.11 per million tokens • 0.00021% i

## ≡: CONCORDANCE ANNOTATION MODE

The concordance annotation lets you categorize or add labels to concordance lines downloaded but can be used in analysing the concordance.  
*Annotation mode is now active. Annotation of each concordance line is saved immediately from the dashboard.*

| Label                                   | Filter                                                                                                                                                                      | Frequency       |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>-t/-ede ending, not always a ...</b> |       | 9 <div></div>   |
| <b>no sg/pl difference</b>              |     | 20 <div></div>  |
| <b>not relevant</b>                     |   | 91 <div></div>  |
| <b>plural adjective</b>                 |   | 126 <div></div> |
| <b>singular adjective</b>               |   | 9 <div></div>   |

Annotated 255 (~ 10 %), [word="alle"][word="er|var|være"][tag="A.\*"]

# begge-Data – Hestenettet and KorpusDK

 **begge - sg/pl adjective • 1,080**  
0.9 per million tokens • 0.00009% 

> **shuffle • 1,080**  
0.9 per million tokens • 0.00009% 



## ≡: CONCORDANCE ANNOTATION MODE

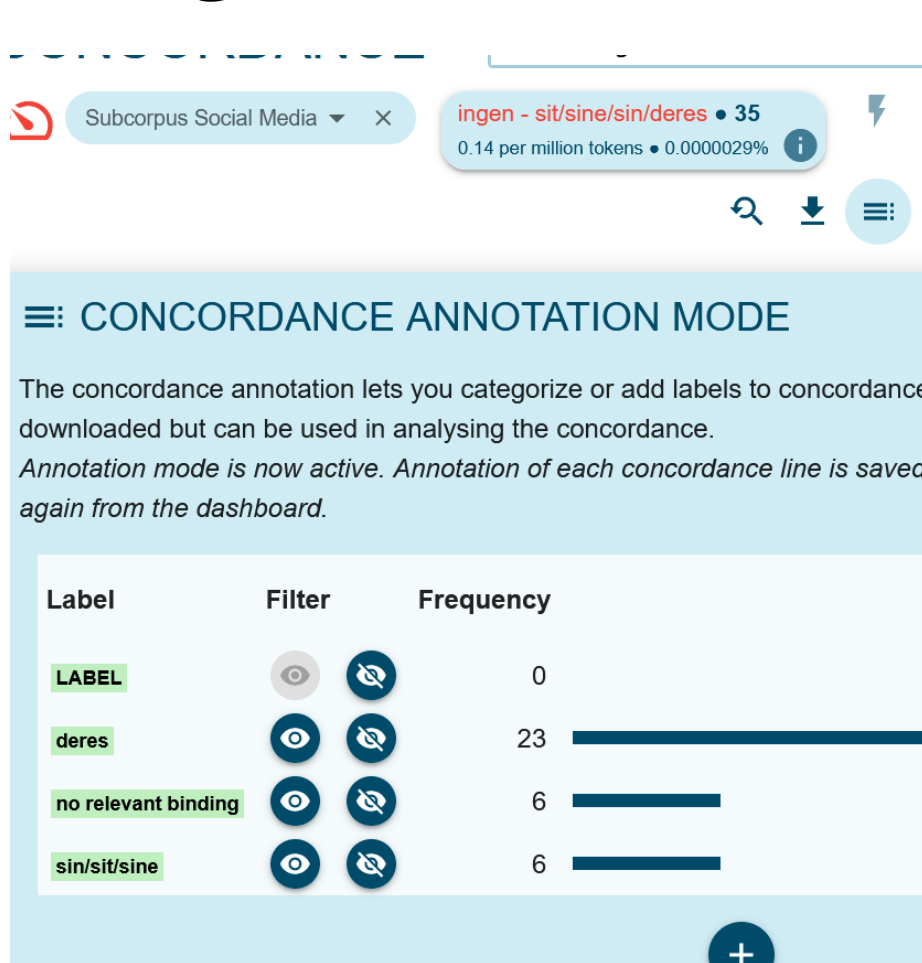
The concordance annotation lets you categorize or add labels to concordance lines downloaded but can be used in analysing the concordance.

*Annotation mode is now active. Annotation of each concordance line again from the dashboard.*

| Label                                | Filter                                                                                |                                                                                       | Frequency |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| -t/-ede - not always a difference... |    |    | 3 ■       |
| no sg/pl difference                  |   |   | 4 ■       |
| not relevant                         |  |  | 233 ■■■■■ |
| plural adjective                     |  |  | 30 ■■■    |
| singular adjective                   |  |  | 0         |

Annotated 270 (= 25 %), [word="begge"][word="er|var|være"][tag="A.\*"]

# ingen-Data – Hestenettet and KorpusDK



Subcorpus Social Media x

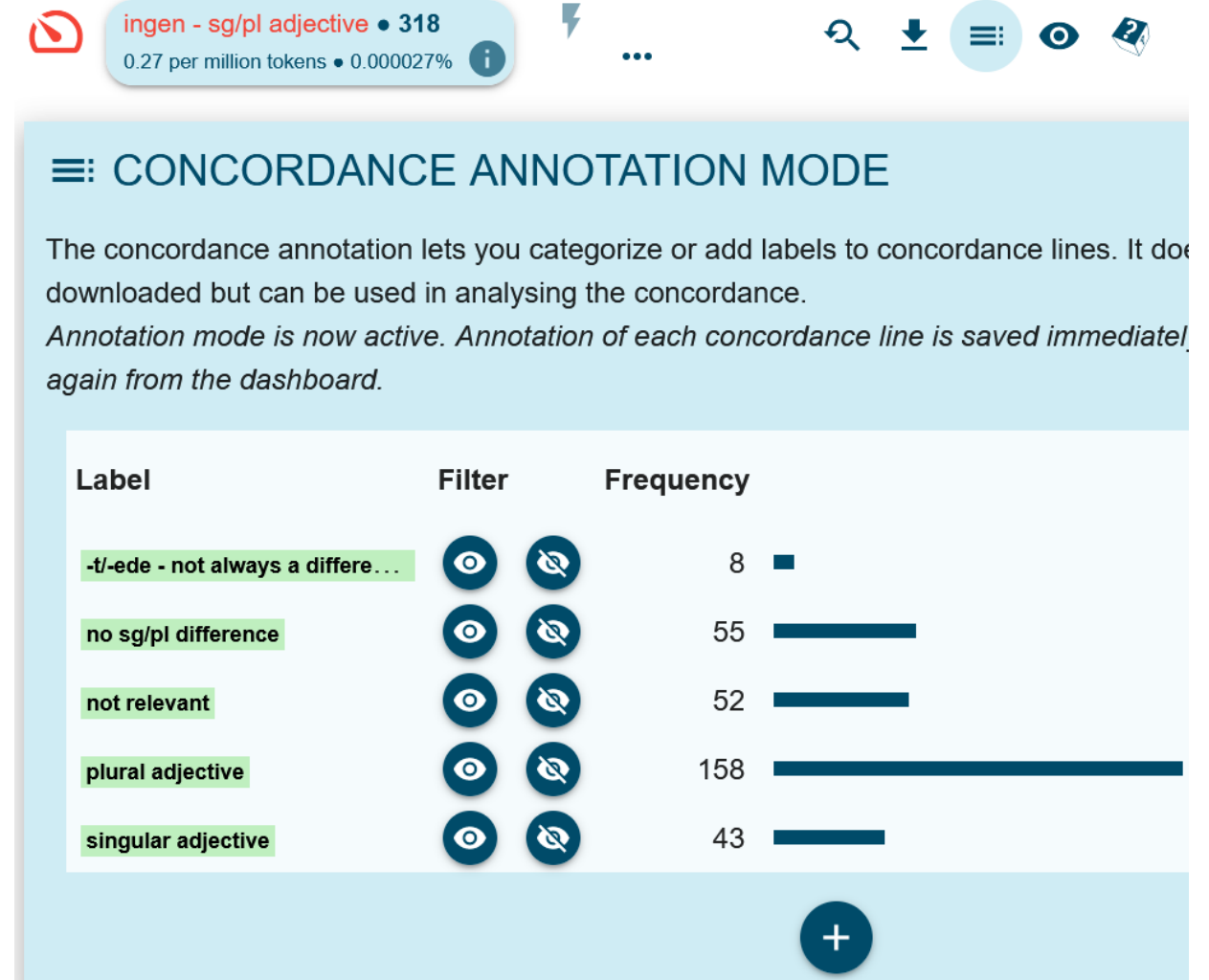
ingen - sit/sine/sin/deres • 35  
0.14 per million tokens • 0.0000029%

### CONCORDANCE ANNOTATION MODE

The concordance annotation lets you categorize or add labels to concordance lines. It does not get downloaded but can be used in analysing the concordance.  
*Annotation mode is now active. Annotation of each concordance line is saved immediately and can be retrieved again from the dashboard.*

| Label               | Filter                                                                                                                                                                  | Frequency |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| LABEL               |       | 0         |
| deres               |     | 23        |
| no relevant binding |   | 6         |
| sin/sit/sine        |   | 6         |

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ingen - sg/pl adjective • 318  
0.27 per million tokens • 0.000027%

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| Label                                | Filter                                                                                                                                                                      | Frequency |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| -t/-ede - not always a difference... |       | 8         |
| no sg/pl difference                  |       | 55        |
| not relevant                         |       | 52        |
| plural adjective                     |   | 158       |
| singular adjective                   |   | 43        |

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Annotated 318 (= 100 %), [word="ingen"][word="er|var|være"][tag="A.\*"] hhv. 35 sin/deres