

The determiner *somme* 'some'

Janne Bondi Johannessen

University of Oslo

1. Introduction

This chapter is about the quantifier *somme* 'some' found in some Norwegian dialects in addition to *nokon* (NN)/*noen* (BM) 'some, any'. The quantifier *somme* in the written language is used less in Bokmål Norwegian than in Nynorsk Norwegian, according to the Norwegian Reference Grammar (Faarlund et al. 1997:222-3). Faarlund et al. claim that it is used in the plural more often than in the singular, that it is a partitive quantifier denoting a part of a whole, and that it also denotes specific reference. The main pattern is not unlike *some* in Standard English (although Sandøy:1996 shows that in some dialects there are more subtle semantic distinctions). Examples (1)-(3), taken from the Norwegian Reference Grammar, show different uses of the two quantifiers:

- (1) **Somme** dager er vanskeligere enn andre (Norw.)

Some days are difficulter than others

'Some days are more difficult than others.'

- (2) Kari har ikkje kjøpt nokon (***somme**) bøker (Norw.)

Kari has not bought any some books

'Kari hasn't bought any books.'

- (3) Har Kari kjøpt nokon (***somme**) bøker? (Norw.)

Has Kari bought any some books

'Has Kari bought any books?'

(Faarlund et al. 1997:222-3)

A similar quantifier can be found in Icelandic and Faroese. According to Delsing (1993:192) the Icelandic quantifier is specified for a presupposed set. Icelandic also has a singular version of this pronoun, denoting an uncountable presupposed set. Faarlund et al (1997:223) say about the Norwegian quantifier that the singular form is rarely used. The Faroese equivalent has a specialised distributive meaning, where whatever is quantified cannot be consecutive (Thráinsson et al. 2004:132-33). The quantifier *somme* is also discussed in Dyvik (1979) and Vangsnes (1994: 90ff). Sandøy (1996:98-9)

looks at the finer dialectal differences with respect to the Norwegian quantifier, and say that while *somme* can be used as in a direct object in East Norwegian, this is not possible in the west of Norway. Sandøy (1996:100-1) also says that people from West Norway cannot accept *somme* in existential presentation constructions. We cannot test these claims in this chapter, since the syntax questionnaire does not have that level of detail. The next section will show what we have tested.

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntax Database

In the Nordic Syntax Database, two types of clauses were tested: The first was *somme* occurring in a negative clause, and the second was *somme* occurring as subject.

(4) Jeg leser ikke **somme** aviser (#932) (N)

I read not some newspapers

‘I don't read some newspapers.’

(5) **Somme** bønder vil ikke benytte seg av avløser-ordninga (#934)

(N)

Some farmers will not use RFLX of substitute.-

arrangement.DEF

‘Some farmers don't want to make use of the substitute-arrangement.’

Since *somme* can only refer to a specific set, it follows that it cannot normally occur under negation. However, it is not impossible for it to occur under negation if *somme* is still interpreted as having scope over the negation, as pointed out by Sandøy (1996:91). This requires very careful questioning of the informants, however, and it is likely that the recording assistants understood the clause differently, in which case the result is not convincing. This is unfortunately the case with sentence (#932). It is ambiguous, and could mean either 1): ‘I don't read any newspapers’ (in which case it should get a really bad grade from the informants who have *somme* at all), or 2) ‘There are some newspapers I don't read – while I'm not saying anything about other newspapers’. In the latter case the sentence ought to have got a top grade from the people who have *somme*.

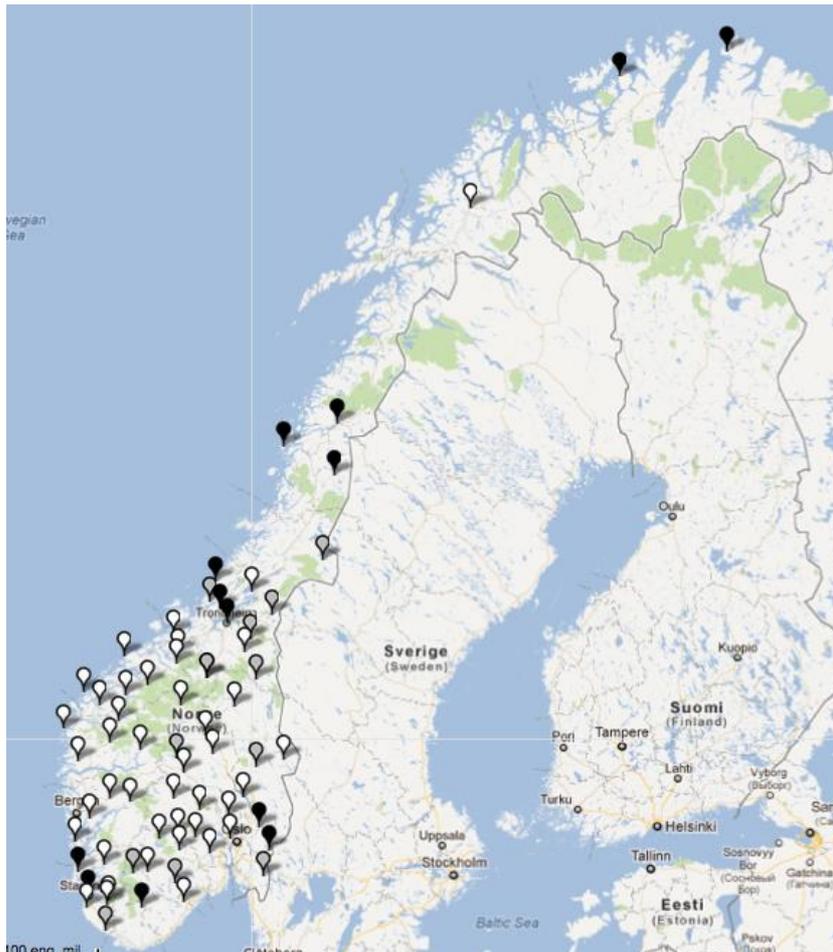
The result of sentence # 932 is shown in the following map:



Map 1: The determiner *somme* 'somme' in a presentation construction under negation (#932: *Jeg leser ikke somme aviser.* 'I don't read some newspapers.')

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

Map 1 shows different judgements scattered across most of Southern Norway. We must suspect that the scattered result reflects problems regarding the questionnaire. However, map 2, which is based on the unambiguous sentence with *somme* in a subject NP, shows a nice and tidy pattern.



Map 2: (#934) The determiner *somme* 'somme' in a subject NP.

(#934: *Somme bønder vil ikke benytte seg av avløser-ordninga.* 'Some farmers don't want to make use of the substitute-arrangement.')

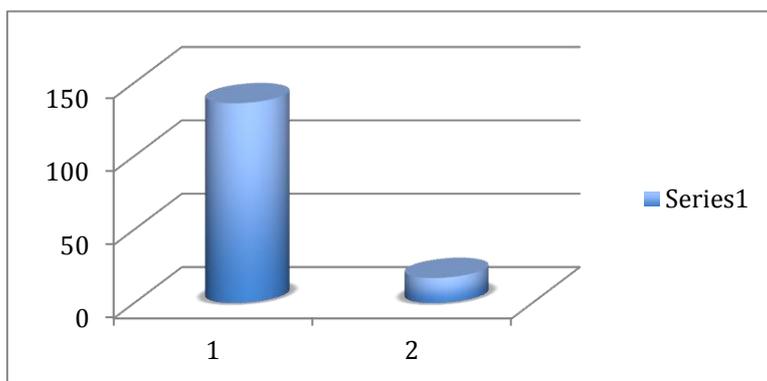
(White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score).

Map 2 shows that *somme* is accepted in most of Southern Norway, with the possible exception of the areas around Oslo, Stavanger and Trondheim. It should be mentioned here that although sentence # 394 is not ambiguous, there is a problem with the results from the questionnaire: Some of the fieldworkers decided to ask the informants beforehand whether they used the word *somme* or not. If they got a negative answer, they chose not to test the sentences at all. This must be one reason that there are so few (positive and negative) evaluations at all in Northern Norway.

2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus

It is worth looking at the Nordic Dialect Corpus (NDC) to see what the situation is like in spontaneous speech. There are 153 hits for *somme* in the NDC. They are all in Southern Norway, apart from Kirkesdalen and Lyngen, of which the first is an area whose language is influenced by old immigration (from the late 1700s) from the eastern valleys of Southern Norway. In addition to the geographical difference between north and south, there is also a striking difference in the recording years of these hits.

65 out of the 153 hits are from recordings from Målførearkivet – the old language archives at the University of Oslo. These are from between 1950 and 1980, and are thus at least 30 years older than the new recordings. Since there are more than 2 million words in the Norwegian part of the corpus, and the files from the old archives constitute only slightly over 200 000 words, we would expect one tenth of the hits to be from Målførearkivet. However, nearly half of them are (65 out of 153). This suggests that the use of *somme* is more common in the older language. Looking then at the age of the informants in the recordings of the modern Norwegian language, this hypothesis is confirmed. 71 of the hits of the modern speakers are old people (over the age of 50), while only 17 are uttered by young speakers. Judging from the data in the Nordic Dialect Corpus, it must be concluded that the quantifier *somme* is dying. This, interestingly, is not reflected in Map 2, which does not depict language production, but knowledge of one's dialect. People know and accept this quantifier in their dialect, but do not necessarily use it.



*Illustration 1: The first column depicts old people and language archive recordings of *somme*, while the second shows hits from young people around 2010.*

3. Conclusion

We have looked at the results of the evaluations of the quantifier *somme* ‘some’ in Norwegian as they appear in the Nordic Syntax Satabase. It is accepted in much of Southern Norway. However, when testing the use of *somme* in spontaneous speech, a different reality appeared. Nearly half of the hits are from old recordings. In addition, those that are from new recordings, are mostly uttered by old speakers: Only 17 young speakers (under the age of 30) use *somme* in the NDC, as against 136 hits by old speakers and old recordings. This quantifier seems to be dying.

References

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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>