

# Morphological dative in Norwegian dialects

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## 1. Introduction

The inflectional category of case was present in the Old Scandinavian languages, and it is still used in modern Faroese and Icelandic. In the standard Mainland Scandinavian languages, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian it has however been lost. Nevertheless, there still exist Norwegian and Swedish dialects that display relics of the former Germanic four-case system and the retained cases is – morphologically speaking – most often dative, whereas the opposition between nominative and accusative has been largely lost. The genitive has moved from being a case to being a (mostly possessive) phrase marker that is placed at the end of a noun phrase. Until recently there even existed Mainland Scandinavian dialects with a four-case system, for instance the vernaculars of Ovansiljan in the province of Dalarna in Western Sweden (Levander 1909, 1928). The Norwegian dialect of Setesdalen still has the opposition between nominative, dative and accusative in the person pronoun system, including the pronouns *eg* ‘I’ and *du* ‘thou’ (Hannaas 1919 and Arne Torp p.c.). The opposition nominative - accusative in nouns is however lost nowadays even in these most archaic varieties (for Övdalian, see Steensland 2000, Garbacz 2010, and Svenonius 2015).

The morphological case that has been the most resistant to the loss of the case system in Scandinavian is dative, and remains of it are still found across Norway and Sweden (see e.g. Reinhammar 1973; Sandøy 1985; Delsing 2003, Hanssen 2010, Anderson 2010, Åfarli & Fjøsne 2012, Mæhlum & Røyneland 2012, Eyþórsson et al. 2012). It is however not a fully productive phenomenon in any dialect, and its appearance tends to be limited to definite noun phrases and pronouns preceded by certain prepositions (this tendency is already mentioned in Aasen 1848:111).

According to the seminal study of Reinhammar (1973), dative inflection is found in dialects spoken in Sweden (the provinces of Dalarna, Härjedalen, Jämtland, Västerbotten, and Norbotten) and in Norway (the provinces of Hedmark, Oppland, Buskerud, Hordaland, Sogn og Fjordane, Møre og Romsdal, Trøndelag, Helgeland, and Aust-Agder). Similar data is also reported in Sandøy (1985), Hanssen (2010) and Mæhlum & Røyneland (2012), who are all based on Christiansen (1969). It is thus evident that the reader is introduced to dialect data that are more than half a century old, without being explicitly warned that the picture is not up-to date anymore (an exception here is Mæhlum & Røyneland 2012:187 who mention that dative is unstable and beating a retreat today).

Although the dative case in Mainland Scandinavian is today most often present on noun phrases and pronouns governed by a preposition, one also finds dative marking on indirect and direct objects after

certain verbs, as well as on noun phrases governed by certain adjectives. Dative marking on adjectives, numerals and indefinite articles is however much more restricted, as already noted by Reinhammar (1973). Dative inflection on adjectives was only found in Ovansiljan, being best retained in Älvdalen and Orsa, according to Reinhammar (1973). Newer studies nevertheless show that many speakers of Övdalian (i.e. the vernacular of Älvdalen) born after the World War II do not use dative inflection at all, neither on adjectives, nor on noun phrases (Garbacz & Johannessen 2015).

In Norway, dative inflection on adjectives was reported to be almost completely lost and limited only to frozen expressions (Reinhammar 1973). Also dative inflection on numerals was only reported from the region of Ovansiljan, and from the provinces of Jämtland and Härjedalen (Reinhammar 1973). However, more recent research shows that at least in Ovansiljan the dative inflection of numerals is at best limited to the older generations (Steensland 2000). Finally, the dative inflection on indefinite article was reported to be found only in Sweden: in the regions of Ovansiljan, Jämtland, and Västerbotten (Reinhammar 1973), but again, it seems very probable that this is not the case today, at least when the situation in Ovansiljan is considered.

The loss of dative has thus been progressing during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and this tendency has not changed in the last years either. Therefore it is expected that the use of dative in the ScanDiaSyn survey will turn out to be more restricted compared to the handbook descriptions in e.g. Sandøy (1985), Hanssen (2010), and Mæhlum & Røynealand (2012).

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Nordic Syntax Database (NSD)

In the NSD, the use of dative was only tested in the southern parts of Norway (the province of Trøndelag and all the provinces south of it). The following contexts for dative were checked: (a) a definite noun in a preposition phrase, (1), (b) a definite noun as an indirect object<sup>1</sup>, (2), (c) a preproprial article following a verb traditionally governing dative, (3), and (d) a definite noun following an adjective traditionally governing dative, (4).

- (1) De bor oppe i **åsa**. (#944) (Nor.)  
*they live up in hill.DAT*  
 ‘They live in the hillside.’

- (2) Jeg ga **hestom** vann. (#947) (Nor.)  
*I gave horses.DAT water*  
 ‘I gave the horses water.’

- (3) a. Du kan da ikke bry **n** **Kari** med det. (#951) (Nor.)  
*you can then not bother she.DAT Kari with it*  
 ‘You cannot bother Kari with that.’
- b. Du kan da ikke bry **a** **Gunnar** med det. (#952) (Nor.)  
*you can then not bother he.DAT Gunnar with it*  
 ‘You cannot bother Gunnar with that.’
- (4) a. Jeg er lei **konen** **hans**. (#956) (Nor.)  
*I am tired wife.DAT his*  
 ‘I am tired of his wife.’
- b. Du er vel ikke redd **oksa**? (#958) (Nor.)  
*you are well not afraid bull.DAT*  
 ‘You aren't afraid of the bull, are you?’

Unfortunately, the sentences above were not tested at all locations, a fact that influences the interpretation of the results. It is possible that the sentences that only were tested in a few locations could have been accepted in other locations too.

Acceptance of a definite noun in the dative case after a preposition traditionally governing dative, as in (1), is found in 19 places (out of the tested 75), see Map 1 below. The places are located in the provinces of Trøndelag, Møre og Romsdal (Volda, Bud, Todalen, Rauma, and Surnadal), Sør-Trøndelag (Røros and Selbu), Nord-Trøndelag (Meråker and Lierne), Sogn og Fjordane (Jølster and Stryn), Oppland (Vang, Vestre Slidre, Lom, Kvam, and Gausdal), Hedmark (Alvdal), Aust-Agder (Valle), and Buskerud (Ål).



Map 1: Preposition-governed dative

(#944: *De bor oppe i åsa.* 'They live in the hillside.')

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

Dative marking on a plural definite indirect object, as in (2), is accepted in twelve locations (out of the tested 30), see Map 2. The provinces where this dative marking is found are Nord-Trøndelag (Lierne and Meråker), Sør-Trøndelag (Selbu and Oppdal), Møre og Romsdal (Todalen and Stranda), Oppland (Vang, Vestre Slidre, Kvam, Gausdal, and Skreia), and Aust-Agder (Valle).



Map 2: Dative marking of the plural indirect object

(#947: *Jeg ga hestom vann. 'I gave the horses water.'*)

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

A preproprial article inflected for dative following a verb traditionally governing dative, such as *bry noen* 'bother somebody,' see (3) above, has been tested with a feminine noun (in 14 places) and with a masculine noun (in 24 places). This dative use is only accepted at six places, all in Central Norway, and only in two of these are both of the tested sentences judged as grammatical, see Maps 3 and 4. The construction is found in the provinces of Nord-Trøndelag (Meråker, where both sentences are judged as grammatical), Møre og Romsdal (Todalen, Stranda, and Bud), and Oppland (Kvam and Vestre Slidre - in the latter location both sentences are accepted).



Map 3: Verb-governed dative with feminine prepositional article

(#951: *Du kan da ikke bry n Kari med det* 'You cannot bother Kari with that.')

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



Map 4: Verb-governed dative with masculine prepositional article

(#952: *Du kan da ikke bry a Gunnar med det.* 'You cannot bother Gunnar with that.')

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

A noun inflected for dative following an adjective traditionally governing dative, as in (4) above, is also rarely judged as grammatical by the informants. This is the case in the provinces of Sør-Trøndelag (Selbu); Møre og Romsdal (Stranda), Hedmark (Avdal), and Oppland (Vestre Slidre, Gausdal, Lom, and Kvam). Still, only in two locations do the informants fully accept both (4a) and (4b): Meråker in Nord-Trøndelag and Vang in Oppland. The example in (4a) has been tested in 14 locations and is accepted in six of them, whereas the example in (4b) has been tested in 28 locations, being accepted in six of them. This is shown in Map 5 and Map 6.



Map 5: Adjective-governed dative

(#956: *Jeg er lei konen hans.* 'I am tired of his wife.')

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



Map 6: Adjective-governed dative

(#958: *Du er vel ikke redd oksa? 'You aren't afraid of the bull, are you?'*)

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

As can be seen on the maps, the acceptability of dative is restricted to a few places in Norway, and out of these, all the tested dative-sentences are judged as grammatical in only one location (Meråker in the province of Nord-Trøndelag). Several of the test sentences are also accepted by the informants in Oppland (Vestre Slidre, Vang, and Kvam). The dative context that gets the highest number of positive judgements is the definite noun following a preposition traditionally governing dative, the context that gets the lowest number of positive judgments is a noun phrase following a verb traditionally governing dative.

## 2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus (NDC)

Spontaneous occurrences of dative inflection are found in the NDC, both on noun phrases (5),(6) and on pronouns (7), (8). All examples are from Norway.

- (5) å så # arrbæie rømm på **gaLom** (Nor.)  
*and so worked they on farms.DEF.DAT*  
 '...and they worked at the farms.' (brekkom\_03gm)

- (6) nei e skulla jæLLp **onngâm** (Nor.)  
*no I should help young\_ones.DEF.DAT*  
 'Well, I was going to help the children.' (selbu\_04gk)

- (7) menn e # då åss møtt **hono** der (Nor.)  
*but I when we met him.DAT there*  
 '...and I went fishing with him.' (sunnadal\_ma\_01)

- (8) de va n Jan så kjøfft tå **hânno** gaarn (Nor.)  
*it was he Jan that bought of him.DAT farm.DEF*  
 'Jan bought the farm from him.' (surnadal\_18)

The following two types of dative were searched for: (1) dative of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine pronoun *han* 'he', in eight (orthographic) variants *honom, hånom, honnom, hånnom, hâno, hono, hânno, honno* 'him' and (2) dative plural of nouns, ending on *-om, -âm, -å*, and *-o*. here, it must be kept in mind that some dialects use nominative plural endings that are homograph/homophone to the dative endings. These cases of 'false dative' have been ruled out from the investigation.

The dative form of the pronoun *han* 'he' was found 17 times in seven locations in Central Norway, see Map 7. The dative plural was found 156 times in 35 locations, see map 8.



Map 7: Dative of the 3rd person masculine pronoun

han 'he'

(White = high score)



Map 8: Dative plural of nouns

(White = high score)

As can be seen in the maps, dative is mostly found in central Norway, in the provinces of Oppland and Hedmark, but also in northwestern Norway, in the province of Møre og Romsdal and in Trøndelag. It should be kept in mind that these maps are based on results from recordings going back to 1964. When only the recordings made between 2006 and 2012 are considered, it can be stated that the use of dative have diminished or even disappeared. The only place where the recordings were made both before 1984 and after the 2006 and where dative is found among young and old informants is Gausdal in the province of Oppland. In other places, like Nes in the province of Akershus, the dative has disappeared. Finally, in places like Røros it is only found today among older speakers, whereas it is found among younger speakers on recordings made 1968. The survey also shows that the verb-governed dative is very rare (only five hits in the whole corpus) and that it is only found among older informants in five locations in the provinces of Telemark (Hjartdal), Sunndal (Møre og Romsdal), Nord-Trøndelag (Inderøy), Oppland (Lom), and Sør-Trøndelag (Selbu), see Map 9. In comparison, the preposition-governed dative is much more frequent, as shown in Map 10.



Map 9: Verb-governed dative  
(White = high score)



Map 10: Preposition-governed dative  
(White = high score)

### 3. Discussion

The preposition-governed dative prevails and the vast majority of datives are produced by older speakers. The recordings, from 1964 to 2012, show 164 preposition-governed datives by the older speakers and only ten by the younger. Interestingly, all of the latter are uttered by men, a fact that possibly confirms the earlier finding that men retain traditional dialectal traits more than women do (Chambers & Trudgill 1980:98, Sandøy 1985:143).

As stated in the introduction, the use of dative in Norwegian dialects is not obligatory: the same informant may alternate between dative forms and nominative forms in traditional dative contexts, cf. (9).

(9) a. da va mi nå frammi **Gurustuggun** da vet du (Nor.)  
*then were we now at Gurustua.DAT then know you*  
 ‘So then we went to the Gurustua, you know.’ (*selbu\_04gk*)

b. å da va me frammi **Gurustuggin** kvar enaste synndaskvelling (Nor.)  
*and then were we at Gurustua.NOM every single sunday.evening*  
 ‘And we went then to the Gurustua every single Sunday evening.’ (*selbu\_04gk*)

The results clearly show that the use of dative case has continued to decrease during the last decades. Today, it is also attested in a much smaller geographical area than a couple of decades ago. The most common environment for a dative is after a dative assigning preposition, and the least accepted and only rarely uttered is after a dative assigning verb. This weakening position of dative in Norwegian dialects is also confirmed by recent studies, like Anderson (2010), Åfarli & Fjøsne (2012), and Eypórrsson et al. (2012).

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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>

