

## Negation in imperative clauses

Piotr Garbacz & Janne Bondi Johannessen

*University of Oslo*

### 1. Introduction

Imperative clauses in the Nordic languages typically display V1 word order. The referential subject is normally absent, with the exception of Icelandic, where it is normally overt (Einarsson 1967:159, Thráinsson 2007:6). According to Thráinsson (2007:6), the imperative verb is followed by a reduced form of the second person pronoun, except in very formal style, where the pronoun can be absent, or pronounced in its full form. Based on examples found in the reference grammars and some other sources, negative adverbs may appear either after the finite verb, as is typical in Swedish (Teleman et al. 1999), see (1), and Danish (Heltorf & Hansen 2011), see (2), or it can either follow or precede the verb, as in Norwegian (Faarlund et al. 1997), see (3).

(1) a. Kom        **inte**        hit    med   dig!    (Swedish)

*come.IMP*   *not*        *here*   *with*   *you*

‘Don’t come here, you.’

b. \***Inte**        kom        hit    med   dig!    (Swedish)

*not*        *come.IMP*   *here*   *with*   *you*

‘Don’t come here, you.’ (Teleman et al. 1999:2777)

(2) a. Bliv        **ikke**        narret!    (Danish)

*become.IMP*   *not*        *fooled*

‘Don’t be fooled!’

b. \***Ikke**        bliv        narret!    (Danish)

*not*        *be.IMP*        *fooled*

‘Don’t be fooled!’ (Hansen & Heltorf 2011:731)

- (3) a. Gå **ikke** over veien [...]! (Norw.)

*go.IMP not across road.DEF*

‘Don’t go across the road...!’

- b. **Ikkje** reis! (Norw.)

*not go.IMP*

‘Don’t go!’ (Faarlund et al. 1997:590, 874)

In Faroese, there are two imperative types; one imperative-inflected and one with the infinitive form. They behave differently with respect to negation: The imperative-inflected verb precedes the negative adverb, see (4a,b), and the infinitive verb used as an imperative follows the negative adverb, see (4c,d).

- (4) a. Far **ikki** til Svøríkis! (Faroese)

*go.SG.IMP not to Sweden!*

‘Don’t go to Sweden!’

- b. \***Ikki** far til Svøríkis! (Faroese)

*not go.SG.IMP to Sweden!*

‘Don’t go to Sweden!’

- c. **Ikki** fara til Svøríkis! (Faroese)

*not go.INF to Sweden!*

‘Don’t go to Sweden!’

- d. \*Fara **ikki** til Svøríkis! (Faroese)

*go.INF not to Sweden!*

‘Don’t go to Sweden!’ (Zakaris Svabo Hansen, p.c.)

In Icelandic, the negation is placed after the imperative verb, but like in Faroese, there also exists a non-finite option, in which the negation precedes the verb (see section 3.2), in which case the infinitive is also marked by the infinitive marker, see (5a,b).

- (5) a. Láttu **ekki** svona drengur! (Icelandic)

*let.SG.IMP. not thus boy*

‘Don’t behave like that, boy!’ (Blog:

<http://jennystefania.blog.is/blog/jennystefania/entry/1229102/>)

- b. **Ekki** að gráta! (Icelandic)

*not to cry*

‘Don’t cry!’ (Einarsson 1967:159)

The fact that there is a fair bit of variation both within and between the Nordic languages in the realisation of negation with imperatives, suggested that this was a topic worth testing in the ScanDiaSyn Dialect Survey. Below, we report on the variation between the two word orders Neg-Imp and Imp-Neg as it appears in the Nordic Syntax Database and the Nordic Dialect Corpus.

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Nordic Syntax Database (NSD)

The position of the negation in relation to the finite verb in imperative clauses has been tested in the NSD with the sentences in (6) and (7), among Norwegian, Swedish, and Faroese informants. It has not been tested in Iceland and Denmark.

- (6) a. **Ikke** gå så fort! (#874) (Norwegian)  
*not walk.IMP so Fast*  
 ‘Don't walk so fast!’
- b. **Inte** kör så fort! (#874) (Swedish)  
*not drive.IMP so Fast*  
 ‘Don't drive so fast!’
- c. **Ikki** far til Mykines í morgin! (#874) (Faroese)  
*not go.IMP to Mykines tomorrow*  
 ‘Don't go to Mykines tomorrow!’
- (7) a. Gå **ikke** så fort! (#875) (Norwegian)  
*walk.IMP not so fast*  
 ‘Don't walk so fast!’
- b. Kör **inte** så fort! (#875) (Swedish)  
*drive.IMP not so fast*  
 ‘Don't drive so fast!’
- c. Far **ikki** avstað við ongum píkadekkum! (#875) (Faroese)  
*go.IMP not of with no studded.tires*  
 ‘Don't head off without studded tires!’

The test results for the Neg-Imp word order in (6) are depicted in Map 1.



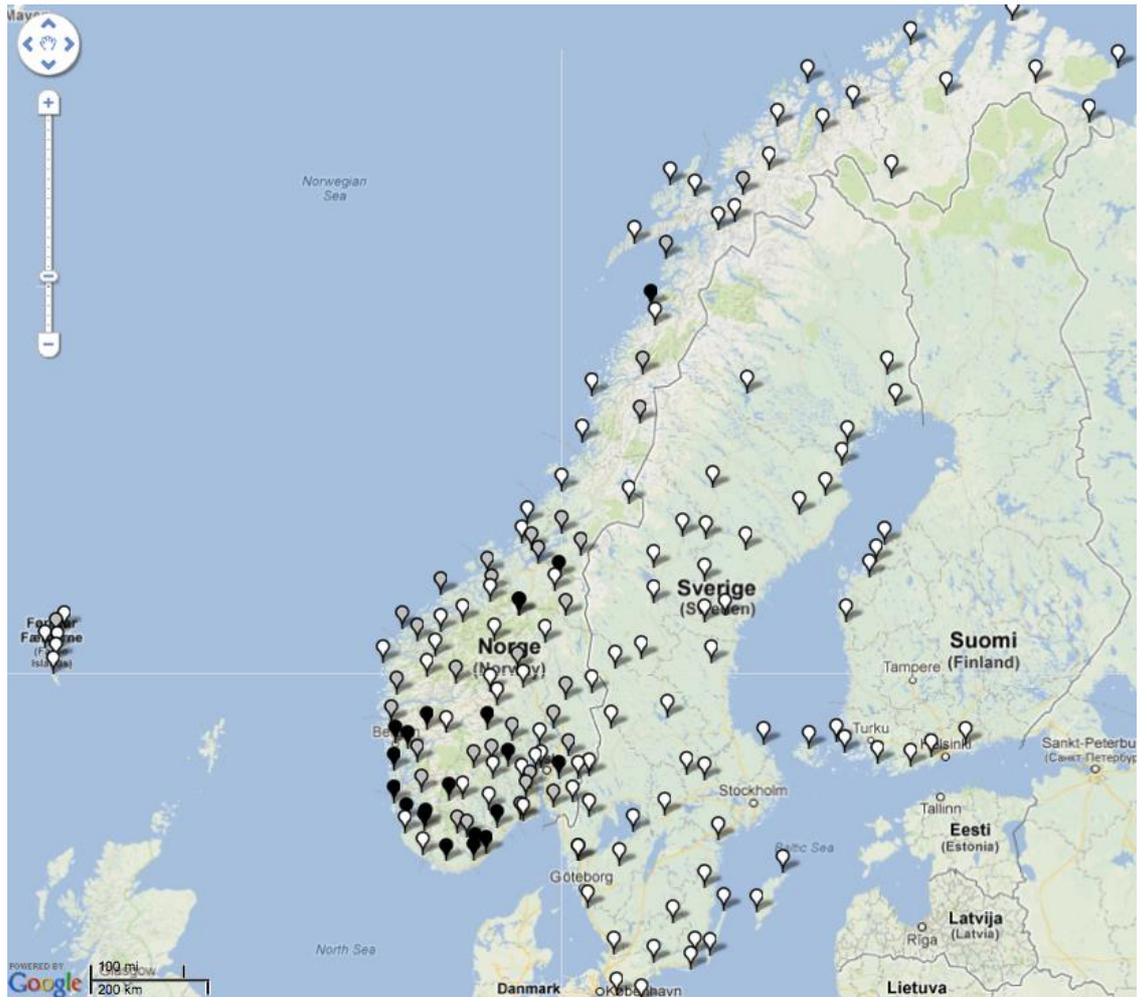
Map 1: Neg-Imp word order

(#874: *Ikke gå så fort. 'Don't walk so fast.'/Inte kör så fort. 'Don't drive so fast.'/Ikki far til Mykines í morgín. 'Don't go to Mykines tomorrow.'*)

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

We see that negation preceding the verb is accepted in every location in Norway, whereas it is always rejected in the Faroe Islands. In Sweden and in Finland, the word order is generally rejected, but accepted in two locations in Northern Sweden (Fjällsjö in the province of Jämtland and Anundsjö in the province of Ångermanland), and in one location in Finland (Brandö in the province of Åland).

The test results for the Imp-Neg word order exemplified in (7) are shown on Map 2.



Map 2: Imp-Neg word order. (#875: Gå ikke så fort. 'Don't walk so fast.' /Kör inte så fort. 'Don't drive so fast.' /Far ikki avstað við ongum píkadekum. 'Don't head off with studded tires.')

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

We see that the order with negation following the verb is accepted without exception in Sweden, Finland and on the Faroe Islands (where it is, however, judged as marginally possible in the location of Fuglafjørður on the island of Eysturoy). In Norway, the construction is most often rejected in the southernmost parts of the country in the counties of Hordaland (Bergen, Bømlo, Voss, Fusa), Rogaland (Karmøy, Stavanger, Hjelmeland, Gjesdal), Vest-Agder (Lyngdal, Kristiansand), Aust-Agder (Vennesla, Larvik, Sirdal, Vegårshei), and parts of the east: Buskerud (Rollag and Ål). Otherwise, it is often judged as marginally possible across the rest of the country, with the exception of the counties of Troms and Finnmark where it is almost always accepted.

## 2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus (NDC)

There are not many hits for imperatives in the Nordic Dialect Corpus. There are none for Icelandic and Danish, but there are some in Faroese, Norwegian and Swedish.

Both word orders are found in the corpus, however, the word order with the negation following the finite verb is only attested in Sweden, in the locations of Leksand (in the province of Dalarna) and Sorunda (in the province of Södermanland), see the sentences in (8) and the locations in Map 3.

- (8) a. ja, gör det inte (Swedish)  
 yes do.IMP it not  
 ‘Yes, don’t do it!’ (leksand\_om1)
- b. ge inte upp, det är bara att slita (Swedish)  
 give.IMP not up it is only to toil  
 ‘Don’t give up, just work hard!’ (sorunda\_ym1)



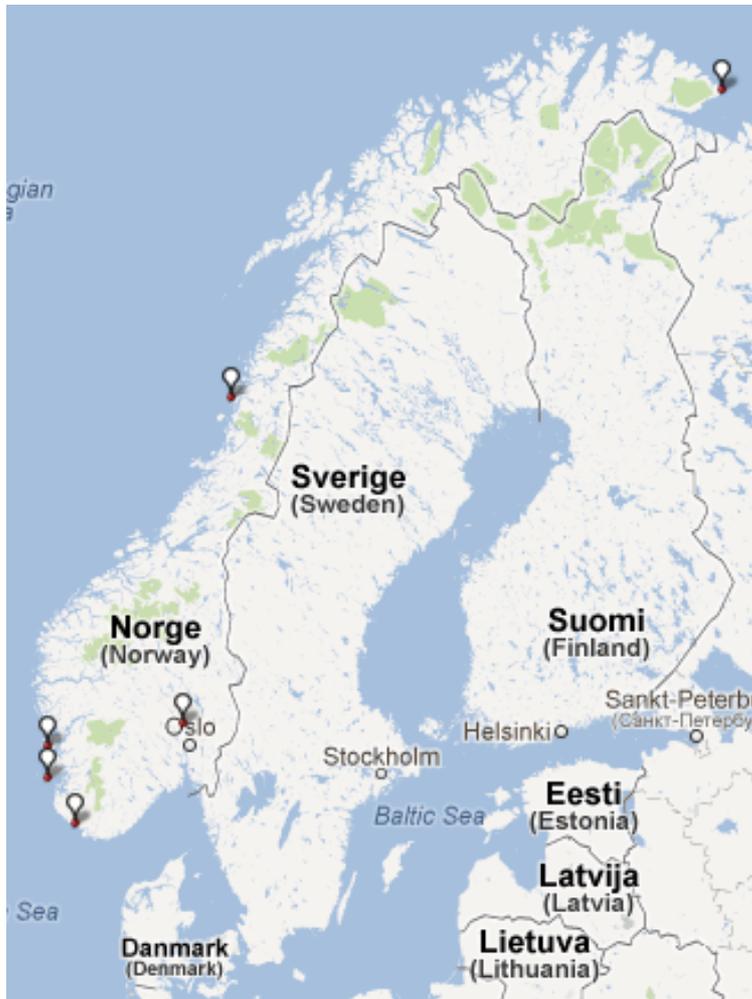
Map 3: *Imp-Neg-order in Swedish dialects as attested in the NDC. (White = attested.)*

The word order in which the verb follows the negation is found both in Norway and in the Faroe Islands, but not in Swedish. One important difference between these two countries is that whereas the verb following the negation in imperative clauses in Norwegian dialects is finite (inflected for imperative), see (9), the verb in this position in Faroese is non-finite, see (10).

(9) e **ikke** spør så vanskelig da (Norwegian)  
*eh not ask.IMP so difficult then*  
 ‘Eh, don't ask such difficult questions!’ (jevnaker\_02uk)

(10) ups **ikki** snakka um fólk (Faroese)  
*ops not talk.INF about people*  
 ‘Ops, don't talk about people!’ (fuglafjoerdur\_f6)

Negated imperatives with the structure of (9) are found 11 times across the whole of Norway, in the counties of Hordaland (Bømlo), Nordland (Herøy N), Oppland (Jevnaker), Rogaland (Karmøy, Sokndal), and Finnmark (Vardø), see Map 4. In the Faroe Islands, the negated imperatives of the non-finite type exemplified in (10) are found in the locations of Fuglafjørður on the island of Eysturoy and Sandur on the island of Sandoy, see Map 5.



Map 4: Neg-Imp-order in Norwegian dialects as attested in the NDC. (White = attestation.)



Map 5: Negation preceding the non-finite verb in imperative clauses on the Faroe Islands as attested in the NDC. (White = attestation.)

There are no instances of the finite imperative verb following or preceding the negation in the Faroese part of the NDC. For Norwegian dialects, the only instance of the negation following the imperative verb is found in the speech of a young man from Bergen (the West Norwegian county of Hordaland). Notably, the same informant rejects this kind of construction in the test sentence in (7), judging it as ungrammatical in his dialect.

- (11) spør du meg **ikkje** (Norwegian)  
*ask.IMP you me not*  
 ‘Don't ask me!’ (bergen\_01um)

However, the test sentence (7) is not identical in structure to (11). The latter contains a subject, which is rare with imperatives. It is a proper subject that has undergone subject-verb inversion. Further, there is a direct object *meg* ‘me’ here. We would go as far as claiming that the structure with subject and object is limited to a few lexical items, like *spørre* ‘ask’, *tro* ‘believe’, which can occur in this set phrase: Imperative + *du* ‘you’ + *meg* ‘me’. This would explain why the negation appears clause-finally; there is no place for it inside this fixed construction. Notice that it would actually also be ungrammatical to have

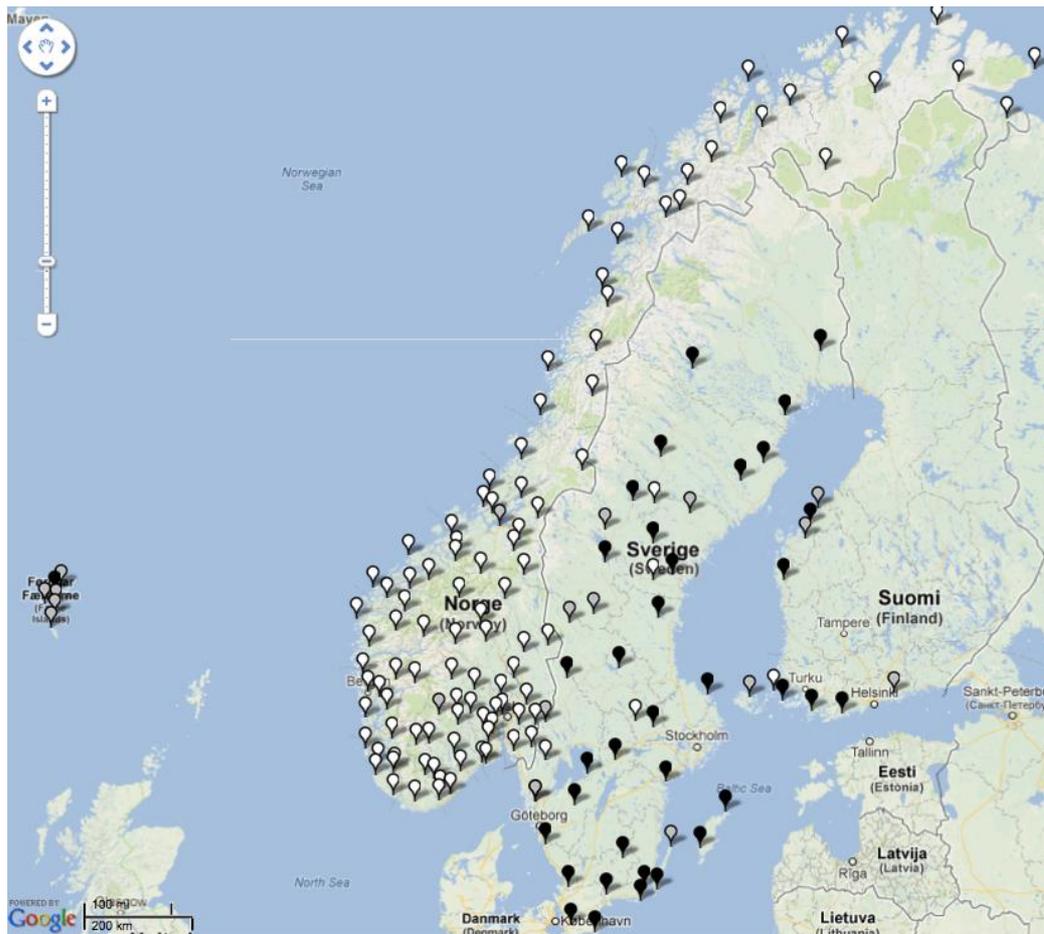
the negation pre-verbally with this construction. We think this construction is part of a different register, or is used to create a special effect. This would also explain why the informant rejects this word order in the NDC. As a final note we would like to mention that the word order in (11) is the same as that of polarity questions. However, we have listened to this utterance in the NDC, and it is clearly a discourse imperative.

The picture that emerges from both the NSD and the NDC is that the word order in imperative clauses in Swedish dialects is typically Imp-Neg. In Norwegian dialects the word order attested in the speech corpus is overwhelmingly Neg-Imp, with only one attested case of Imp-Neg. The Neg-Imp is also the one that is most clearly accepted in the Norwegian part of the syntactic database, while the Imp-Neg word order is marginally accepted, with the exception of the southeastern part of the country. On the Faroe Islands, the only attested word order in non-finite imperative clauses is Neg-Imp. There are no occurrences of the combination of a finite verb inflected for imperative and the negation.

### **3. Discussion**

#### *3.1 Age variation in the NSD*

We have tested the sentences with respect to a possible age variation. Starting with the Neg-Imp order, in Map 6a, we find that the young informants in the Faroe Islands do not completely reject this word order. There are also four places in Sweden (Svealand and Norrland) plus Åland in Finland where this order is accepted. In addition, several young people across Sweden and Finland give this structure a medium score, although the overall picture is still one of rejection in the latter two countries. In Norway there is a high acceptance rate and no variation across the whole country.

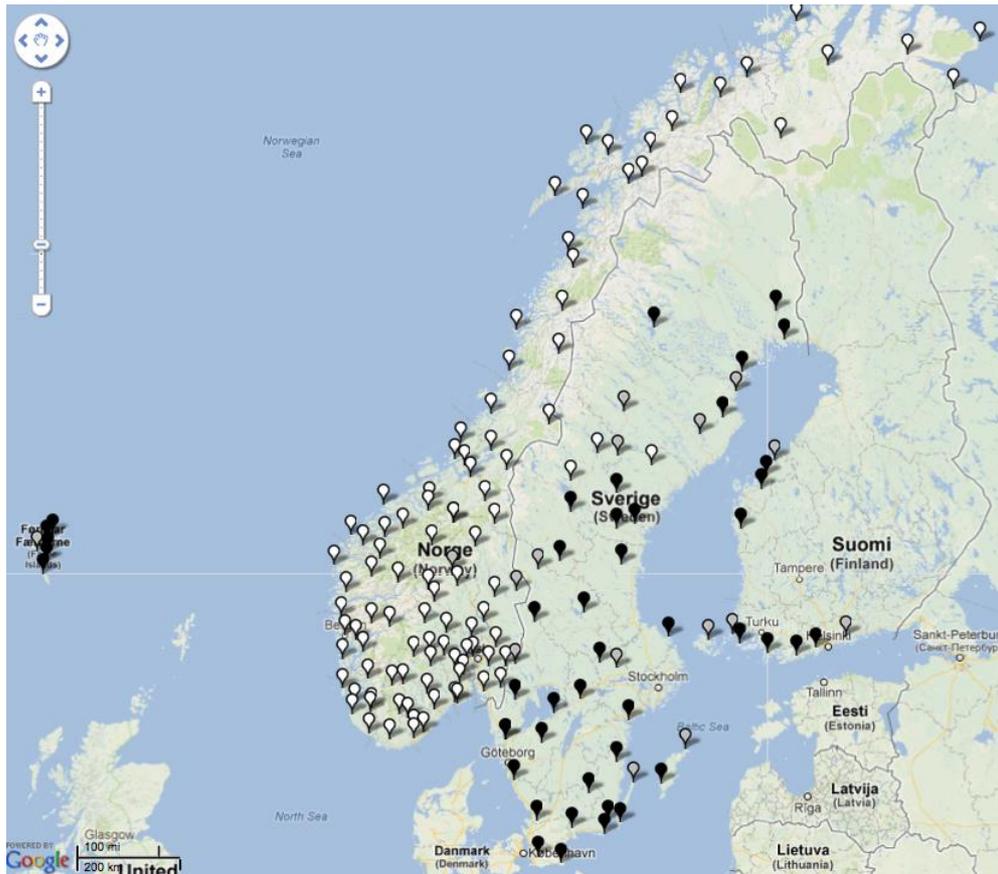


Map 6a: Neg-Imp-order among younger informants in Sweden, Finland, Norway and on the Faroe Islands.

(#874: *Ikke gå så fort. 'Don't walk so fast.'/Inte kör så fort. 'Don't drive so fast.'/Ikki far til Mykines í morgín. 'Don't go to Mykines tomorrow.'*)

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

Map 6b differs from Map 6a in the Faroe Islands and Sweden. The Neg-Imp order is generally rejected amongst the old informants in the Faroe Islands. The old informants in Sweden and Finland generally reject this construction, although there are three places with old informants accepting it in Swedish Norrland, and a few that give it a medium score. In Norway the general acceptance is overwhelming for the old informants as well as or the young ones.

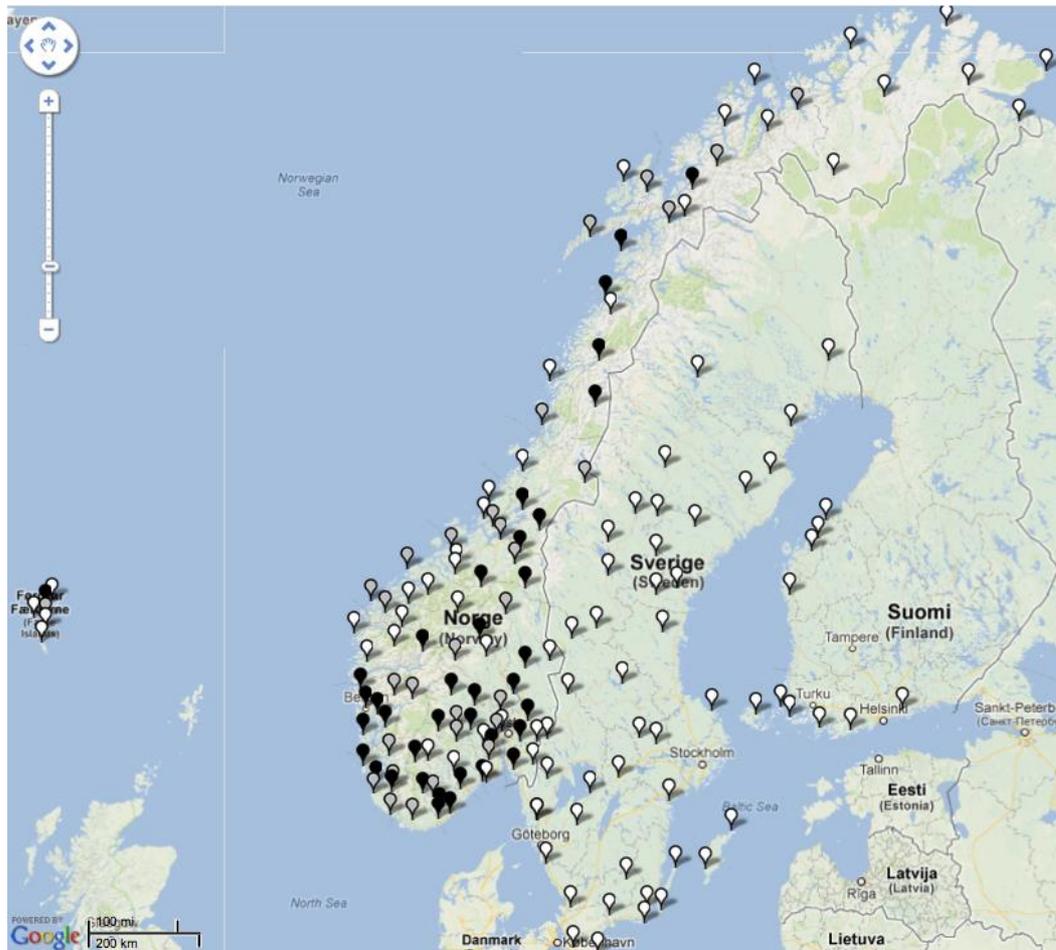


Map 6b: *Neg-Imp-order among older informants in Sweden, Finland, Norway and on the Faroe Islands (#874: Ikke gå så fort. 'Don't walk so fast.'/Inte kör så fort. 'Don't drive so fast.'/Ikki far til Mykines í morgín. 'Don't go to Mykines tomorrow.'*)

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

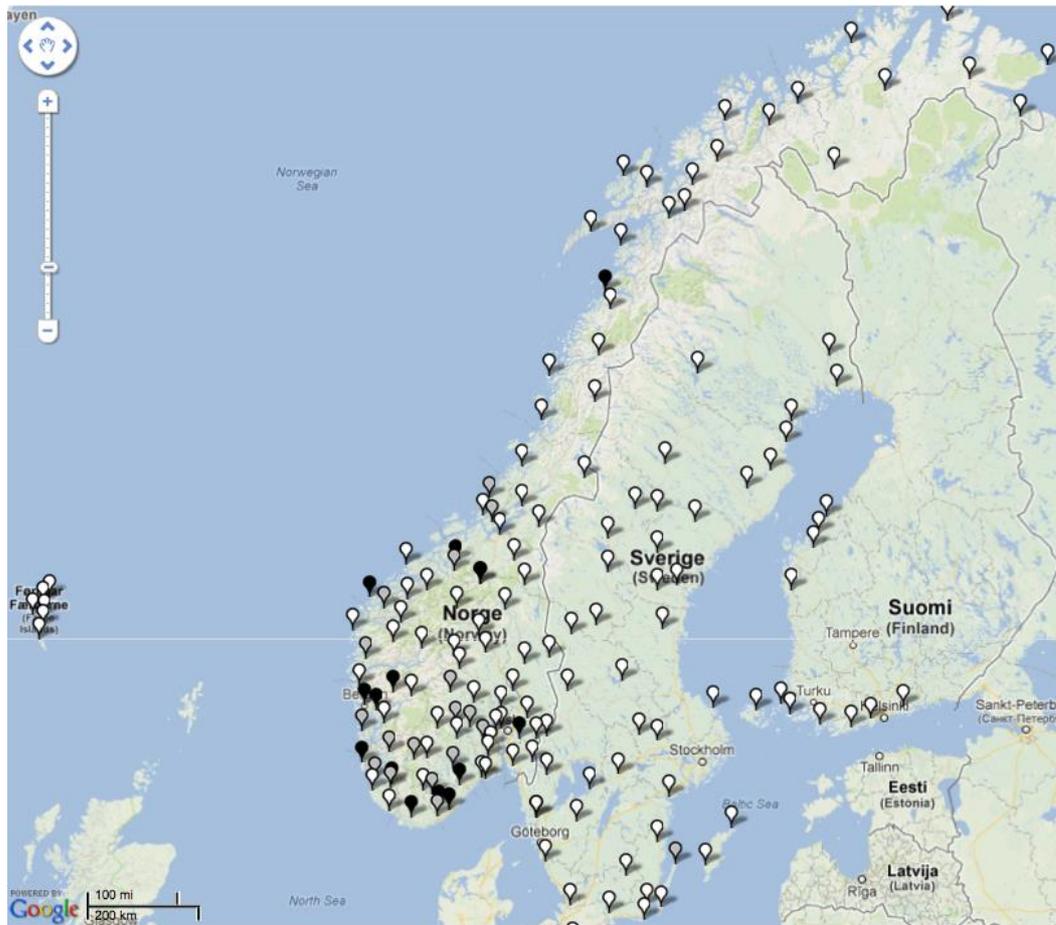
Maps 6a and 6b show that while both young and old informants in Norway are positive to the Neg-Imp order, there is some variation in the Faroe Islands, Sweden and Finland, with the highest difference showing up in the Faroes, where the young people overall give the construction a medium score, rather than a low score.

More age variation is observed for the order where the finite verb follows the negation, as in (7). This variation is most visible in the Norwegian and the Faroese dialects. Map 7a shows that the younger informants in Norway reject the word order Imp-Neg in many parts of the country, especially in southern Norway and northward to Troms county. The young Faroese informants reject the Imp-Neg order in Fuglafjørður on the island of Eysturoy, while in the capital, Tórshavn, they judge it as marginally possible; otherwise this order is accepted amongst the young informants in the Faroe Islands.



Map 7a: *Imp-Neg-order among younger informants in Sweden, Norway and on the Faroe Islands*  
 (#875: *Gå ikke så fort. 'Don't walk so fast.'/Kör inte så fort. 'Don't drive so fast.'/Far ikki avstað við ongum pikadekkum. 'Don't head off with studded tires.'*)  
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score.)

The older Norwegian informants accept the word order Imp-Neg in the majority of locations, rejecting it only in a smaller number of locations close to the southern, western and northwestern coast. In the Faroe Islands, this word order is judged as perfectly grammatical by all of the older informants. This is shown in Map 7b below.



Map 7b: Imp-Neg-order among older informants in Sweden, Norway and on the Faroe Islands

(#875: *Gå ikke så fort. 'Don't walk so fast.'/Kör inte så fort. 'Don't drive so fast.'/Far ikki avstað við ongum píkadekkum. 'Don't head off with studded tires.'*)

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

Maps no. 6a and 6b show that there is some age variation in Faroese and Swedish with respect to the Neg-Imp word order, with slightly more acceptance amongst the younger informants. Maps 7a and 7b show that there is an age difference with respect to the Imp-Neg word order in Norway and the Faroe Islands. It is more accepted amongst older than amongst younger informants.

### 3.2. Other data sources

The lack of hits for the combination of imperatives and negation in the Danish and Icelandic part of the Nordic Dialect Corpus may be due to the fact that the subcorpora for these languages are fairly small, and also that many of the recordings have been done as interviews between one assistant and one informant, rather than as a conversation between two informants. It may be unnatural for an interviewee to use the imperative form to an interviewer. In the Norwegian part of the corpus, which contains dialogues between informants, many of the imperatives are given in a friendly tone. Furthermore, most of the imperatives in the Norwegian subcorpus occur with the verb *spørre* 'ask', the negation of which an interviewee would rarely use to an interviewer. Thus, dialogues with negated imperatives require dialogues between equals.

However, it is possible to use written corpora to test whether the situation for Danish and Icelandic is indeed what the grammars say. The Danish Corpus Eye corpus of the newspaper *Information* contains 467 examples of imperatives with the expected order Imp-Neg. A typical example is given in (12). There are no examples of the other word order; Neg-Imp.

- (12) Sid **ikke** på mine underbukser (Danish)  
*sitt.IMP not on my underpants*  
 ‘Don’t sit on my underpants!’ (Corpus Eye Information)

We find some Icelandic imperatives in the Icelandic Text Corpus. One example is given in (13).

- (13) **Ekki** spyrja mig hvað ég á við með þessu (Icelandic)  
*not ask.INF me what I owned knowledge with This*  
 ‘Do not ask me what I meant by this.’ (Icelandic Text Corpus)

Surprisingly, the Icelandic imperative is an infinitive with a preposed negation, which would have followed the pattern of Einarsson (1967:159), if it had had an infinitival marker, too (cf. Section 1 above). We cannot explain that here.

### 3.3 The high number of medium rankings in the Norwegian part of the corpus

We will now turn to a discussion of Norwegian. While Map 1 has clear judgements in favour of Neg-Imp, which is also the word-order used in the vast majority of the attested imperatives in the Nordic Dialect Corpus, Map 2, depicting the judgements on the order Imp-Neg, is much less clear, with a great number of in-between judgements in addition to some of acceptance and some of rejection. What can this mean?

Since the latter order is hardly attested in the Norwegian part of the corpus, we think a possible reason for this acceptance could be something other than the speakers’s own dialect. A clue is the fact that Danish has the Imp-Neg order, as we saw confirmed in Section 2.2. The Danish language has had a strong influence on the Norwegian language situation, following the 400 years that Norway was under Danish rule. The main variety of the written language (Bokmål) is especially influenced by Danish, and is also used in a formal register, for law, church, public notices etc. In The Lexicographical Bokmål Corpus of written Norwegian language, there are 2453 hits for the order Neg-Imp, the Norwegian pattern we have seen so far. But there are also 550 hits for the opposite order: Imp-Neg. Since the Bokmål Corpus is a written language corpus, it is only to be expected that it will have more of the formal style. It is likely that the informants in the Norwegian part of the corpus are used to reading this order, hearing it church, and maybe also writing it themselves. They have all been exposed to public notes like: “Gå ikke over veien før bussen har kjørt.” ‘Don’t cross the road until the bus has left.’ Our guess is that it is this diglossic situation with regard to the imperative that has influenced the uncertainty judgements we find in Map 2. The Neg-Imp order is the preferred option in spoken language. For example, in an imagined situation in which people are sitting in a room full of petrol, people would shout “Ikke tenn fyrstikken!” ‘Don’t light the match!’. The order Imp-Neg would, in contrast, sound comic.

However, as pointed out by Kristine Bentzen (p.c.), the presence of an adverb like *nå* ‘now’ makes the Imp-Neg word order the only acceptable one. In fact, doing her part of the survey, she often suggested to the informants to instead evaluate a sentence with an adverb, like: “Gå nå ikke så fort!” ‘Don’t go so fast!’ This often gave positive results. We end this subsection inconclusively. The high number of medium scores may be due to a number of facts including influence from formal style, the way the survey has been performed, and of course also possible genuine dialectal or other kind of variation.

### 3.4 Conclusion

We have seen that there are two clear imperative word-order patterns in the Nordic languages. Swedish, Danish, Faroese and Icelandic have the order Imp-Neg, while Norwegian has Neg-Imp (most common) and Imp-Neg. The Faroese informants generally accept as grammatical the Imp-Neg word order. We also discussed why among the Norwegian informants there is medium-score grading for the order Imp-Neg, which is hardly used in spontaneous speech. We suggest that this could be influence from a higher register, but that presence of other adverbs could also play a role for the word order. Both among the Faroese and the Norwegian informants, the ScanDiaSyn survey as it appears in the NSD show that there is a difference between younger and older people, and that the younger people are more negative to the Imp-Neg word order.

### Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Zakaris Svabo Hansen and Þórhallur Eypórssón for assisting us with some of the Faroese and Icelandic data.

### References

- Einarsson, Stefán. 1967. *Icelandic grammar, texts, glossary*. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.
- Faarlund, Jan Terje, Svein Lie, and Kjell Ivar Vannebo. 1997. *Norsk referansegrammatikk*. Universitetsforlaget: Oslo.
- Hansen, Erik og Lars Heltoft. 2011. *Grammatik over det Danske Sprog, bind I-III*. Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab og Syddansk Universitetsforlag, Odense.
- Thráinsson, Höskuldur 2007. *The Syntax of Icelandic*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Neijmann, Daisy L. 2001. *Colloquial Icelandic: The Complete Course for Beginners*. Routledge, London.
- Postma, Gertjan and Wim van der Wurff. 2007. 'How to say no and don't: Negative imperatives in Romance and Germanic,' in: Wim van der Wurff (ed.), *Imperative Clauses in Generative Grammar: Studies in honour of Frits Beukema*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, 205–249.
- Teleman, Ulf, Staffan Hellberg, and Erik Andersson. 1999. *Svenska akademiens grammatik*. Svenska Akademien, Stockholm.

**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/>

Nordic Syntax Database: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/>

CorpusEye Danish Corpus from the newspaper Information: <http://corp.hum.sdu.dk/cqp.html>

Icelandic Text Corpus: Íslenskt textasafn Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum:

<http://www.lexis.hi.is/corpus/leit.pl?allt=&hreinsaform=N%C3%BD+leit>

Lexicographical Bokmål Corpus:

<http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/tjenester/kunnskap/sprak/korpus/skriftsprakskorpus/lbk/index.html>