

# Omission of auxiliary HAVE

Piotr Garbacz & Ida Larsson

*University of Oslo & Stockholm University and University of Oslo*

## 1. Introduction

In many Nordic varieties, the infinitive of the perfect auxiliary HAVE can sometimes be omitted. Past tense forms of modals can take a non-finite perfect without the infinitive of auxiliary HAVE:

- (1) Han skulle (ha) varit här (Swe.)

*he should have.INF been.INF here*

'He should have been here.'

At least in some cases, omission of non-finite HAVE seems to have interpretational effects (cf. e.g. Taraldsen 1994, Julien 2002). In Faroese, the semantic difference is clear and systematic; cf. the example with an infinitive in (2a) with the counterfactual example with the supine in (2b) (cf. Thráinsson et al. 2004:309).<sup>1</sup>

- (2) a. Han mundi detta. (Far.)

*he might fall.INF*

'I think he fell'

- b. Han mundi dottið.

*he might fall.SUP*

'He almost fell.'

(Thráinsson et al. 2004:309)

In Swedish, also the finite forms of auxiliary HAVE can be omitted. Omission is possible in all non-V2 contexts, i.e. in non-root clauses and in root clauses with *kanske* 'maybe' (see Holmberg 1986, Platzack 1986, Larsson 2009:376-383); see (3) and (4) (and cf. [Bentzen 2014](#) for a discussion of *kanske*).

- (3) Statistiken över brottslighet som kommit till polisens kännedom (Swe.)

*Statistics.DEF over criminality that come.SUP to police.DEF.GEN awareness*

'The statistics on criminality that has come to the police's awareness'

- (4) Han kanske inte (har) skrivit brevet ännu. (Swe.)  
*he maybe not has write.SUP letter.DEF yet*  
 ‘Maybe he hasn’t written the letter yet.’  
 (Larsson 2009:377)

Omission of finite HAVE has no semantic effects, and examples without auxiliary can be interpreted either as present or as past perfects depending on context. Possessive HAVE is never omitted, and no other auxiliaries are optional in the same way.

Omission of non-finite and finite HAVE was investigated in the Swedish part of the ScanDiaSyn-survey. Results from the Nordic Syntax Database (Lindstad et al. 2009) and the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009) are presented below. The restrictions on omission are discussed in section 3 below.

## 2. Results

### 2.1 Nordic Syntax Database (NSD)

Two of the tested sentences involve subordinate clauses without a finite verb, i.e. cases where finite forms of auxiliary HAVE are omitted; cf. (5) and (6) below:

- (5) Jag förstod att han sprungit hela vägen hem. (#1428) (Swe.)  
*I understand.PAST that he run.SUP whole way.DEF home*  
 ‘I understood that he had run the whole way home.’
- (6) Han är trött eftersom han slitit hela dagen. (#1429) (Swe.)  
*he is tired because he work.hard.SUP whole day.DEF*  
 ‘He is tired because he has been working hard the whole day.’

The sentence in (5) involves a *that*-clause, with the past tense in the matrix. The primary reading is therefore that a past tense of the auxiliary is omitted.<sup>2</sup> Sentence (6) involves a reason clause, and the matrix verb is in the present tense.

The sentence in (5) is accepted in most locations in Sweden, but it is rejected in most locations in Finland and in a few locations on the Swedish east coast; see Map 1.

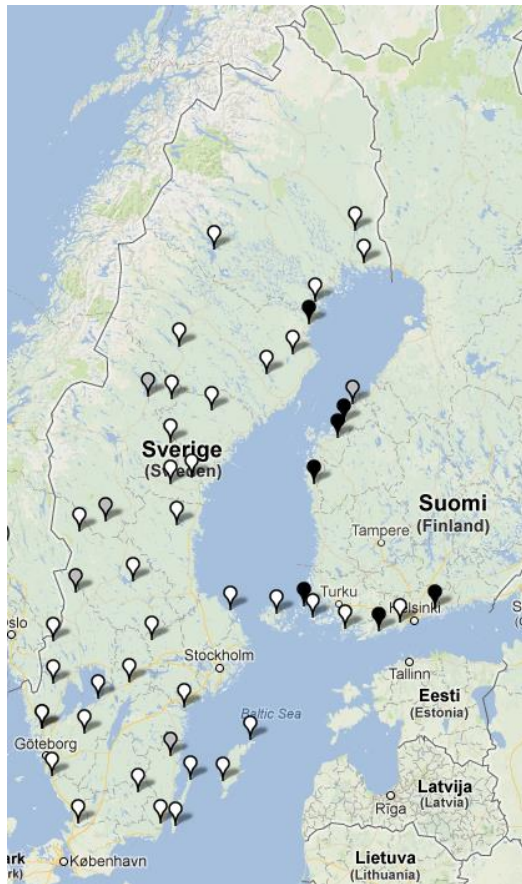


Map 1: Omission of finite HAVE in that-clause.

(#1428: *Jag förstod att han sprungit hela vägen hem. 'I understood that he had run the whole way home.'*)

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

Sentence (6) does not receive a low score in any locations in Sweden, apart from one (Byske, Västerbotten); see Map (2). In Finland, the sentence is rejected in several locations, but it is accepted in four locations in the south and southeast.



Map 2: Omission of finite HAVE in that-clause.

(#1429: *Han er trött eftersom han slitit hela dagen.* ‘He is tired because he has been working hard the whole day.’)

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

Interestingly, informants in Dalarna (Särna and Leksand) accept finite auxiliary omission, although this has been assumed not to be possible in the most conservative vernaculars (cf. Garbacz 2009:230 for Övdalian). With respect to auxiliary omission, the speakers in the survey in other words follow the standard, but note that there is some variation between speakers in the Northern inland.

One sentence tested the possibility of non-finite HAVE-omission in the complement of a modal verb in the past tense:

(7) Du skulle sprungit lite snabbare. (#1430) (Swe.)

*you should run.SUP a.bit faster*

‘You should have run a bit faster.’

Also this sentence is accepted in most parts of Sweden, but it gets an intermediate or low score in locations along the Norwegian border (Köla and Dalby in Värmland, Särna in Dalarna, and Lillhärdal in Härjedalen) and in a couple of locations in Northeastern Sweden. Like the sentences without finite HAVE, it is mostly rejected in Finland; see Map 3.

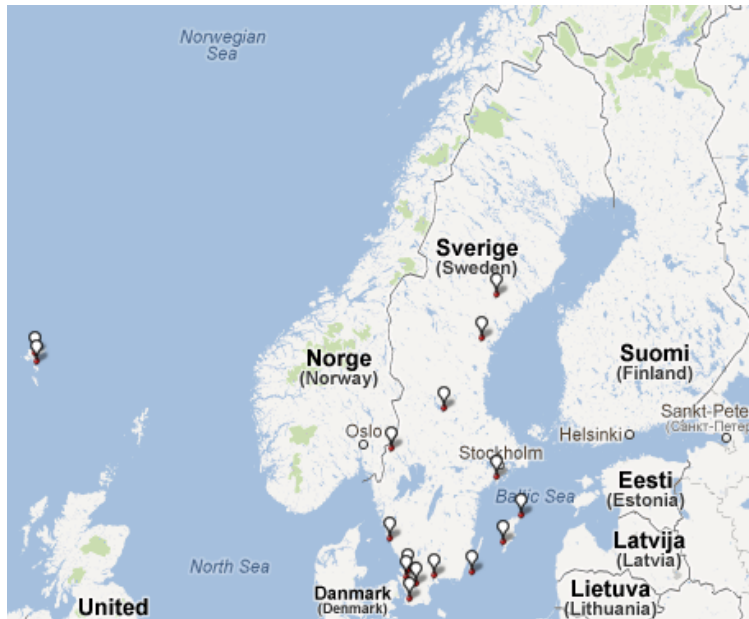


Map 3: Omission of non-finite HAVE in the complement of a past tense modal (#1430: *Du skulle sprungit lite snabbare.* ‘You should have run a bit faster.’) (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score).

## 2.2 Nordic Dialect Corpus (NDC)

Omission of finite HAVE is not uncommon in Swedish, and it can be attested in the NDC. An example is given in (8), and the geographical distribution of the examples in the corpus is shown in Map 4.

- (8) *manga kölingar som flyttat ut kommer tillbaka* (Swe.)  
 many inhabitants.of.Köla that move.SUP out come.PRES back  
 ‘Many of the people from Köla that have moved out, have come back.’ (kola\_om4)



Map 4: Omission of finite forms of the perfect auxiliary HAVE in the NDC. (White = place of attestation).

As can be seen in Map 4, there are no examples of finite auxiliary omission from the other Nordic languages, with the exception of two of examples from Faroese, which are both produced by young informants; see (9).

- (9) a. Er tað tú sjálvur sum vunnið? (Far.)  
*is it you self that win.SUP*  
 ‘Is it you that have won?’ (fuglafjoerdur\_f7)
- b. tað sum teir skotið (Far.)  
*it that they.MASC shoot.SUP*  
 ‘what they have scored’ (torshavn\_t33)

The examples in (9) are quite surprising, since omission of finite forms of the auxiliary is generally taken to be possible only in Swedish.

Non-finite auxiliary omission is, on the other hand, widespread in the Nordic languages. Examples from Faroese, Norwegian and Swedish are given in (10).

- (10) a. so skuldi tað ikki verið nakað problem (Far.)  
*so should it not be.SUP any problem*  
 ‘so this shouldn’t be any problem.’ (klaksvik\_k4)
- b. en gitarspiller som skulle vært med (No.)  
*a guitar.player that should be.SUP with*  
 ‘a guitar player, who was supposed to be in.’ (alvdal\_04gk)

- c. hon skulle passat väldigt bra på jordbruk (Swe.)  
*she should fit.SUP very good on agriculture*  
 'It would suit her to work on a farm.' (frillesas\_ow2)

### 3. Discussion

Omission of finite forms of HAVE is typically assumed to be a Swedish phenomenon (but possibly originating from German influence; see Platzack 1983 and Larsson 2009:380-382), and it is generally assumed to be impossible in the other Nordic languages. However, Iversen (1918:49) mentions that omission of the auxiliary sometimes occurs in the dialects around Tromsø in Northern Norway. He claims that the phenomenon is not found in the variety spoken in the town of Tromsø. As an example of omission, he gives the sentence in (11). Whether omission of finite HAVE still occurs in some part of Northern Norway is not known, and as far as we know, Iversen's observation has not been confirmed.

- (11) det var som en Ø høyrte eit skot (No.)  
*it was that one hear.SUP a shot*  
 'It was as if you had heard a shot.'  
 (Iversen 1918:49)

According to Holm (1950) finite HAVE-omission is possible in all dialects in Sweden, and it occurs both in written and spoken Swedish (see Malmgren 1985 and Andréasson et al. 2002 for additional corpus data and discussion, and cf. Teleman et al. 1999:1552). On the other hand, it is generally assumed to be impossible in Finland-Swedish. However, the results from the survey show that sentences with omitted HAVE might be possible in some locations in Southern Finland. The speakers on Åland appear to be particularly liberal, and they are also in other respects closer to Standard Swedish than many other dialects in Finland.

As we have seen, there are a few examples of finite auxiliary omission in the Faroese part of the NDC. One way to explain them would possibly be to relate them to the double supine (especially as both examples are produced by younger speakers), or to the fact that supine forms often can occur without (non-finite) HAVE in Faroese (Thráinsson et al. 2004:235-236, [Larsson 2014](#)). It should, however, be noted that the examples in (9) do not necessarily have the modal reading typical for examples with supine forms for expected infinitives (see [Larsson 2014](#)).

In fact, it seems clear that finite and non-finite auxiliary omission should be kept apart, at least partly. The restriction on omission of finite HAVE is clearly related to syntactic position (and possibly nothing else): finite HAVE can as noted be omitted in (all) non-V2-contexts (Holmberg 1986, Platzack 1986, Larsson 2009). As pointed out by Andréasson et al. (2002), finite HAVE can be omitted in exclamatives like (12). Without a clear context, it is not clear whether it is a present or past tense form that has been omitted. More generally, there seem to be no requirement that the features of HAVE

(finiteness, tense) be recoverable (as suggested by Julien 2002; see Andréasson et al. 2002 and Larsson 2009 for discussion).

- (12) Vad du (har/hade) jobbat! (Swe.)  
*what you have.PRES/have.PAST work.SUP*  
 ‘So much you have worked!’

Omission on non-finite HAVE, on the other hand, is generally restricted to the complement of certain modals, and it typically only occurs when the modal is in the past tense; cf. (13a) and (13b).

- (13) a. Han kunde (ha) jobbat. (Swe.)  
*he could have.INF work.SUP*  
 ‘He could have worked.’
- b. Han kan (\*ha) jobbat.  
*he can have.INF work.SUP*  
 ‘He may have worked.’

As noted above, HAVE-omission sometimes seem to be restricted to counterfactual contexts; see (2) above and the Norwegian examples in (14) (cf. Julien 2002:69). Example (14a) is ambiguous between an evidential and a counterfactual reading (we disregard the different temporal readings of non-finite perfects; see Julien 2002). The example in (14b), on the other hand, only has the counterfactual reading. Julien (2002) suggests that examples with and without HAVE have different structures, and that sentences like (14b) do not have a silent HAVE, but altogether lacks the structure associated with the auxiliary (cf. also Taraldsen 1984).

- (14) a. Hun skulle ha gjort det (No.)  
*she should have.INF do.SUP it*  
 i. ‘She had reportedly done it.’ (Hearsay)  
 ii. ‘She ought to have done it.’ (Counterfactual)
- b. Hun skulle gjort det.  
*she should do.SUP it*  
 ‘She ought to have done it’ (Counterfactual)

However, not all cases of HAVE-omission are of the same kind, and in Swedish, non-finite HAVE-omission does not seem to be restricted to counterfactual contexts. In fact, there is considerable variation w.r.t. the restrictions on non-finite HAVE-omission (see Julien 2002 for discussion). For instance, some speakers judge (15) as grammatical without HAVE, while for others it is marginal or ungrammatical (Julien 2002:85). Note that the interpretation is not counterfactual, even in the absence of HAVE, and that the matrix verb is in the present tense.



(15) Dom verkar %(ha) kommit för sent. (Swe.)

*they seem have.INF come.SUP too late*

'They seem to have come to late.'

Examples with a present tense modal + supine can also be found. In examples like (16) the modal has an evidential reading:

(16) ingen av dem erkände det struptag som ska dödat mannen (Swe.)

*none of them confessed the throttle that is.said.to kill.SUP man.DEF*

'none of them confessed to the throttle that is said to have killed the man'

(<http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=128&artikel=2470984>)

It is possible that some of the examples of non-finite HAVE-omission in Swedish (e.g. examples like (16)) should be treated together with omission of the finite forms. This would account for the fact that omission of non-finite HAVE is sometimes possible in Swedish but impossible in the corresponding sentences in Norwegian. Julien (2002) suggests that unlike Norwegian, Swedish has a silent (finite or non-finite) auxiliary HAVE. Something additional must, however, be said to account for the fact that the restrictions on non-finite auxiliary omission is not the same as for omission of finite HAVE, and that the tense of the matrix verb (and modal reading) often plays a role for non-finite auxiliary omission also in Swedish (see (14) above). Although examples like (15) and (16) do occur, they are not accepted by all speakers that accept finite auxiliary omission.

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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>

<sup>1</sup> In other varieties of Scandinavian, participial morphology sometimes more generally has modal meaning; see e.g. Eide 2011 and [Larsson 2014](#).

<sup>2</sup> Given the right context, the embedded clause can also be interpreted as a present perfect (with an omitted present tense form of the auxiliary).