

The morphology of verbs and its consequences for syntax A case study of a Northern Swedish dialect

In my talk, I will give a description of the verbal morphological system in the dialect of Lycksele lappmark in Northern Sweden. As a point of departure, I use Eide's (2007) proposal that English no longer codes finiteness in its verbal morphology. The novelty of the proposal is that it considers finiteness a feature. Based on this suggestion, Eide can make the prediction that it is the infinitive and the present tense that are collapsed and the past tense and the past participle, and not for instance the participle and the infinitive. She also argues that this change is the cause of a number of syntactic changes in English, such as do-support, a special category of modals, and the loss of V2. Her proposal is a suitable point of departure for a study of the dialect of Lycksele lappmark, where the verbal morphology has also gone through extensive simplifications.

The aim of the paper is threefold. First, I want to give a description of the verbal morphology of the dialect of Västerbotten in Northern Sweden, more precisely the dialect(s) of Lycksele Lappmark. Second, I try to argue that the dialect also has lost its ability to code finiteness in its morphology (cf. Delsing in print), and third, I discuss the consequences of this for Eide's claim about English.

The talk starts by describing some relevant sound changes, which in combination have caused levelling of forms in the productive, first, conjugation. Infinitive and present tense have become identical, as have past and the past participle. This levelling is also found in many cases of other conjugations. Furthermore, I also show that several groups of verbs have lost the relevant distinctions, although the loss is not due to sound changes. My conclusion is that Eide's proposal is a good instrument for describing what has happened in the dialect, but that her claims about influence on the syntax cannot be easily transferred into the dialect of Västerbotten. The dialect has no separate category of modals, has kept V2, and has no do-support, at least no more than the very marginal do-support-like constructions found in Standard Swedish (which has retained the finiteness distinctions in the verbal morphology).

References:

Delsing, Lars-Olof (in print) "Verbsystemet i en västerbottensk dialekt", in *Språk i Norge og nabolanda. Ny forskning om talespråk*. K Hagen & J. Bondi Johannessen (eds.). Oslo: Novus.

Eide, Kristin Melum (2007) "Finiteness and inflection: the syntax your morphology can afford". Available at Lingbuzz since 2007: <http://ling.auf.net/lingbuzz/000545>