

## Adjectival inflection across varieties of Norwegian

The Scandinavian standard languages are frequently assumed to have a clear-cut system of adjectival inflection with two paradigms: (i) *weak forms* used attributively in semantico-syntactically definite context and (ii) *strong forms* used attributively in indefinite contexts and in predicative positions (see e.g. Roehrs and Julien 2014). In this paper we will present data from non-standard varieties of Norwegian that do not conform to this general picture and which raise interesting questions for a theoretical account of adjectival agreement.

We start by an exposition of the standard picture. Whereas the strong and weak paradigm are fully distinct in e.g. Icelandic for any combination of gender, case and number, in the Mainland varieties, including Norwegian, there is no overt distinction between weak and strong forms in the plural, see table 1, which shows the exponents in the “regular” paradigms (disregarding for instance adjectives originating from past participles).

Table 1 below (see next page) illustrates that there are no distinctions for gender and number within the weak paradigm in Norwegian. In other words, Norwegian shows syncretism in two dimensions: across the strong/weak distinction in the plural and within the weak paradigm.

The use of the strong paradigm in the predicative and indefinite attribute contexts represents a third kind of syncretism. This syncretism is however broken by non-standard varieties of Norwegian: First, in Northern Norwegian dialects plural predicative adjectives will lack the ending *-e* otherwise found attributively. Second, although the Central Norwegian Halså dialect (and neighboring dialects) lacks this ending both in plural predicative adjectives and in the definite attributive context, the two endingless forms nevertheless carry distinct tones and hence are not syncretic. The contrast between Standard Norwegian, Northern Norwegian (prime) and the Halså dialect (double prime) is illustrated in (1)-(3) for the definite, the indefinite and the predicative context, respectively, and where “’” marks the so-called ‘circumflex tone’.

(1)	a.	den store bilen	<i>masc.</i>	c.	det store huset	<i>neut.</i>
	a.’	den store biln		c.’	de store huse	
	a.”	na stór biln		c.”	ta stór huse	
		<i>the big car-DEF</i>			<i>the big house-DEF</i>	
	b.	den store ferja	<i>fem.</i>	d.	dei store bilane/ferjene/husa	<i>pl.</i>
	b.’	den store færga		d.’	di store bilan/færgen/husan	
	b.”	na stór ferjá		d.”	sa stór bilanþ/ferjánþ/husa	
		<i>the big ferry-DEF</i>			<i>the big cars- /ferries- /houses-DEF</i>	
(2)	a.	ein stor bil	<i>masc.</i>	c.	eit stort hus	<i>neut.</i>
	a.’	en stor bil		c.’	et stort hus	
	a.”	æn stor bil		c.”	eit stort hus	
		<i>a big car</i>			<i>a big house</i>	
	b.	ei stor ferje	<i>fem.</i>	d.	store bilar/ferjer/hus	<i>pl.</i>
	b.’	ei stor færga		d.’	store bila/fæрге/hus	
	b.”	ei stor ferje		d.”	store bila/ferje/hus	
		<i>a big ferry</i>			<i>big cars/ferries/houses</i>	
(3)	a.	Bilen er stor.	<i>masc.</i>	c.	Huset er stort.	<i>neutr.</i>
	a.’	Biln e stor.		c.’	Huse e stort.	
	a.”	Biln e stor.		c.”	Huse e stort.	
		‘The car is big.’			‘The house is big.’	
	b.	Ferja er stor.	<i>fem.</i>	d.	Bilane/ferjene/husa er <b>store</b> .	<i>pl.</i>
	b.’	Færga e stor.		d.’	Bilan/færgen/husan e <b>stor</b> .	
	b.”	Ferjá e stor		d.”	Bilanþ/ferjánþ/husa e <b>stor</b> .	
		‘The ferry is big.’			‘The cars/ferries/houses are big.’	

The systems of Northern Norwegian and the Halså dialect are summarized in tables 2 and 3. Notice incidentally that the predicative plural is “smaller” than the indefinite plural in both Northern Norwegian and the Halså dialect.

As for analysis, we will first argue that analyses such as the ones in Sauerland (1996) and Roehrs and Julien (2014) are insufficient for capturing these patterns as they essentially treat strong adjectival agreement as the elsewhere case and fail to distinguish the predicative and indefinite attributive contexts.

In order to give a unified account of the empirical patterns, we instead advocate an analysis based on a separationist approach of the kind that is developed in Distributed Morphology (Embick 2015) and in exoskeletal theories (Borer 2013). Thus, we assume syntactic structures to be created by merging abstract matrices with valued and unvalued features, and Vocabulary Items (VI), i.e. exponents, are inserted into those matrices (“late lexical insertion”). As for the intra-Norwegian variation in attributive position, we assume that the underlying feature matrices are the same in the different varieties, and we analyze the various patterns as differences in the inventory of exponents and their insertion conditions, as regulated by the subset principle.

On the other hand, we assume that the attributive vs. predicative differences should be explained by assuming different underlying feature matrices. First, the absence of weak adjectives in predicative position is explained as the absence of a definiteness feature in predicative position (which also extends to the inflection of participles in those dialects that have agreeing participles). The weakening of the plural inflection in predicative position (as opposed to attributive position) in Northern Norwegian and the Halså dialect is likewise explained as the weakening and potential disappearance of the underlying feature category number in predicative position in those dialects.

Last, we will show that, apart from differences in underlying feature matrices, the agreement process may also operate differently in attributive vs. predicative position. This is shown by the possibility of semantic agreement in predicative position, but its total absence in attributive position (*politiet er effektive* ‘the police are effective-PL’ vs. \**eit effektive politi* ‘an effective-PL police’). Thus, formal agreement is possible both in attributive and predicative position, but semantic agreement is possible only in predicative position. We will give an analysis of this difference assuming that semantic-conceptual construal of an antecedent DP may influence on the valuing of the number feature in the agreement relation between that DP and a predicative adjective, whereas a corresponding semantic-conceptual construal cannot value number features DP-internally.

## References

- Borer, Hagit. 2013. *Structuring Sense Volume III: Taking Form*. Oxford University Press.  
 Embick, David. 2015. *The Morpheme: A Theoretical Introduction*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton  
 Roehrs, Dorian and Marit Julien. 2014. Adjectives in German and Norwegian. In P. Sleeman et al. *Adjectives in Germanic and Romance*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 245–262  
 Sauerland, Uli. 1996. The late insertion of Germanic inflection, ms., MIT.

	STRONG	WEAK
M. SG.	-Ø	-e
F. SG.		
N. SG.	-t	
PL.		

Table 1. Adjectival inflection in Standard Norwegian

	PRED.	INDEF.	DEF.
M. SG.	stor		stor-e
F. SG.			
N. SG.	stor-t		
PL.	stor		

Table 2. Adjectival inflection in Northern Norwegian

	PRED.	INDEF.	DEF.
M. SG.	stor		stør
F. SG.			
N. SG.	stor-t		
PL.	stor	store	

Table 3. Adjectival inflection in the Halså dialect