

Long distance binding 2: relative clauses

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1. Introduction

Long distance reflexives are in general more accepted in the insular North Germanic languages than in the mainland North Germanic languages (see e.g. Holmberg and Platzack 1995 and Thráinsson 2007 and references therein). However, binding into relative clauses seems to be more acceptable in the mainland varieties than in the insular varieties. As shown in (1), from Lødrup (2009), binding into a relative clause is sometimes possible in Norwegian:

- (1) Det kan og se ut til at at noen av informantene_i er preget av særinteresser (Bokmål.)
it may also look out to that some of informantene_i are influence.PASS.PART by special.interests
 som gjelder for sine_i institutter.
that apply for RFLX.POSS.PL department.PL
 'It may also seem as if some of the informants_i are influenced by the special interests that apply to their_i departments.'

As shown in (2), from Strahan (2011), binding into a relative clause is not possible in Icelandic:

- (2) *Það getur litið út fyrir að nokkrir heimildarmannana_i séu mótaðir af sérhagsmunum (Ice.)
it can look like such that some informant.PL are influence.PASS.PART by special.interestDEF
 sem varða sínar_i deildir.
REL concern.PRES RFLX.POSS.PL department.PL
 'It may also seem as if some of the informants_i are influenced by the special interests that apply to their_i departments.'

Lødrup (2009) shows that binding into relative clauses in Norwegian is restricted to contexts where the subject of the relative clause is inanimate, or non-referential. This restriction does not apply to long distance binding into complement clauses in Icelandic, or so-called mid-distance binding into infinitival clauses in Mainland and Insular Scandinavian. Lødrup also shows that long distance reflexives can be complex in relative clauses, in contrast to the long distance reflexives found in Insular Scandinavian (see [Lundquist 2014a](#) and [Lundquist 2014b](#) for discussion on other types of non-local reflexives):

- (3) Hun_i trodde hun gjorde det som var best for seg_i selv_i. (Ice.)
she think.PAST she did it REL was best for RFLX SELF
 'She_i thought she_i did what was best for her_i.'

2. Results

2.1 Nordic Syntactic Database (NSD)

In the ScanDiaSyn survey, the following sentence was tested in Norway, Sweden and Finland:

- (4) folk_i leser vel bare de brevene som er til seg_i selv_i. (#116) (Nor.)
people read.PRES presumably only the letter.PL.DEF REL be.PRES TO RFLX SELF
 'People_i presumably only read the letters which are for them_i'

In this sentence, the subject of the relative clause is inanimate, and long distance binding across this subject is expected to be possible. As seen in the Map 1 below, this sentence is accepted in most of the measure points:



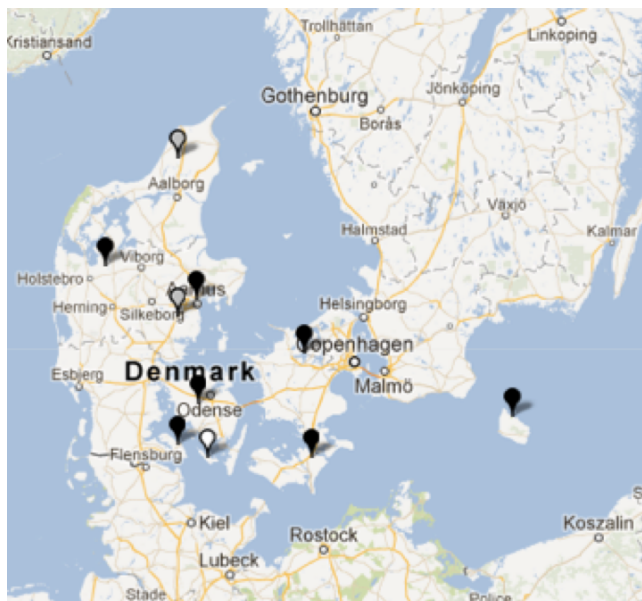
Map 1: Binding into relative clause.
 (#116: Folk leser vel bare de brevene som er til seg selv. 'People presumably only read the letters which are for them.')

There are some places where the sentence only gets a medium score, but there are no straightforward dialectal patterns. A closer look at the informants judgments shows that over 80 per cent of the informants gave the sentence a full score.

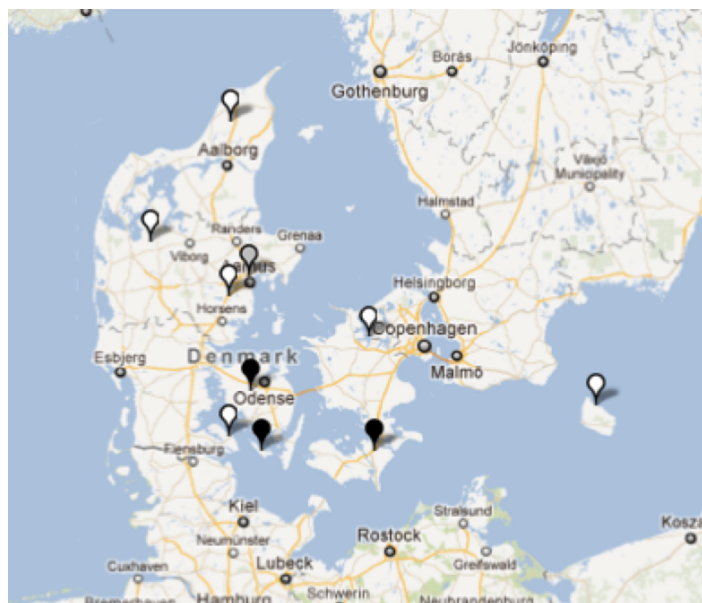
In Denmark, a set of four sentences was tested, where the co-referent element either has the form of a simple reflexive, a complex reflexive, a personal pronoun or a complex personal pronoun ('herself'). The subject of the embedded clause is non-referential.

- (5) Hun_i mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for sig_i. (#164) (Dan.)
she claim.PAST she did it REL was best for RFLX
 'She_i claimed she_i did what was best for her_i.
- (6) Hun_i mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for sig_i selv_i. (#165) (Dan.)
she claim.PAST she did it REL was best for RFLX SELF
 'She_i claimed she_i did what was best for her_i.
- (7) Hun_i mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for hende_i selv_i. (#166) (Dan.)
she claim.PAST she did it REL was best for RFLX SELF
 'She_i claimed she_i did what was best for her_i.
- (8) Hun_i mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for hende_i selv_i. (#167) (Dan.)
she claim.PAST she did it REL was best for RFLX SELF
 'She_i claimed she_i did what was best for her_i.

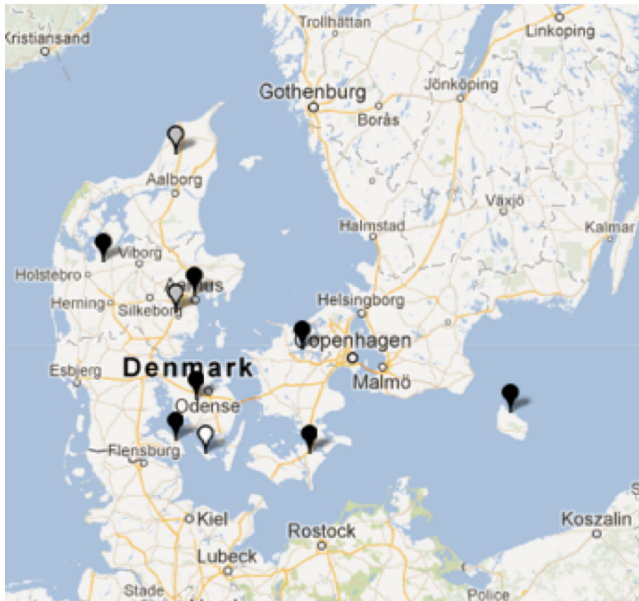
As the maps below shows, the complex reflexive form is the most acceptable form of the given alternatives (Map 3). The complex pronominal form is in general accepted as well (Map 5), while both simple forms are not accepted, with a few exceptions.



Map 2: Simple reflexive in relative clause.
 (#164: *Hun mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for sig.* 'She claimed she did what was best for her.')
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)

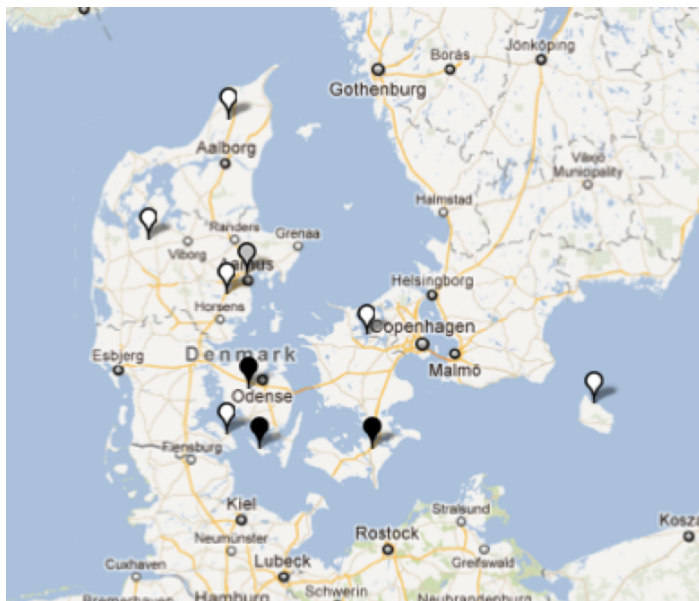


Map 3: Complex reflexive in relative clause.
 (#165: *Hun mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for sig selv.* 'She claimed she did what was best for her.')
 (White = high score, grey = medium score, black = low score)



Map 4: Binding into an embedded object
 (#166 *Hun mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for hende selv.* 'She claimed she did what was best for her.')

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



Map 5: Complex co-referential pronominal in relative clause.
 (#167 *Hun mente hun gjorde det som var bedst for hende selv.* 'She claimed she did what was best for her.')

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

The maps show that there is dialectal variation here, especially when it comes to the complex pronominal form (map 5), which is not accepted on Fyn and southern Sjælland. It is also interesting that simple pronominal form (map 4) is only accepted on one measure point, namely Ærø. The acceptance for the simple pronoun is probably much higher in the rest of Scandinavia.

3. Discussion

Below I will first look at some data from other sources that cover Icelandic and Faroese. Thereafter I will discuss different factors that facilitate binding into relative clauses.

3.1. Other data sources

As was shown in the introduction, long distance binding of the type tested above (example 4, 5 and 6) is not accepted in Icelandic. In Faroese, however, binding into a relative clause is accepted to a higher degree. In the dialect survey carried out on the Faroese Islands (Thráinsson et al. 2008-2009, see discussion in Strahan 2011), it was found that 67 per cent of the informants found the following sentence acceptable:

- (9) Hon_i visti ongan, sum var forelskaður í sær_i. (Far.)
she know.PAST no-one REL was enamorate.PART in RFLX.DAT
 'She_i knew no-one who was in love with her_i.'

Note that a sentence with the same structure as (9) above is not acceptable in Icelandic: only 22 per cent of the Icelandic informants in the Icelandic dialect survey accepted the corresponding Icelandic version of (9) (Thráinsson et al. 2005-2007, see discussion in Strahan 2011). Note however that binding into relative clauses is possible in Icelandic as long as the clause hosting the relative clause is embedded under a verb of saying or believing, that triggers subjunctive marking on the embedded verbs, see Thráinsson (1990) and (2008), and Holmberg and Platzack (1995) for discussion on the so-called 'Domino effect'. The following example is from Holmberg and Platzack (1995):

- (10) Jón_i segir að þetta sé stúlkan sem elski sig_i. (Ice.)
Jon say.PRES.3RD that this is.SUBJ girl SEM love.SUBJ RFLX.ACC
 'John_i says that this is the girl that loves him_i.'

We could suspect that the reflexive in the Danish test sentence (5)-(6) is also licensed by the superordinate verb of saying *mine* 'claim', just like in the Icelandic example above. However, the Icelandic long distance reflexive is always simplex. If Danish had a domino effect, we would expect (5) (simple reflexive) rather than (6) (complex reflexive) to be good.

3.2. Restrictions the intervener and the antecedent

As discussed in Lødrup (2009) and Strahan (2011), binding into relative clauses is licit in Mainland Scandinavian when the subject of the relative clause is inanimate or non-referential. Lødrup also shows that the intervening inanimate subject has to be a theme rather than a cause for LDR to be licit. The Swedish reference grammar (Teleman et al. 1999) also gives examples where the relative clause subject is an indefinite pronoun, like *ingen* 'no-one', similar to the Faroese example (9). When the subject of the relative clause is animate and specific, LDR is not licit in any of the North Germanic languages, as far as I am aware. Lødrup (2009) gives the following Norwegian ungrammatical sentence that presumably is bad all over Scandinavia:

- (11) *Dei_i kjenner mannen som kritiserar seg_i (sjølv_i) /bror sin_i. (Nor.)
they know.PRES man.DEF REL criticize.PRES RFLX SELF love./BROTHER RFLX.POSS.SG
 int. 'They_i know the man that criticizes them_i/their_i brother.'

We can tentatively conclude that LDR is licit in relative clauses only when an intervening subject is not likely to be a binder of an anaphor. For further discussion on this topic, I refer the interested reader to Thráinsson (2008), Lødrup (2009) and Strahan (2011).

The Norwegian/Swedish test sentence (4) and the Danish test sentences (5-8) differ with respect to the nature of the antecedent, i.e., the main clause subject. The antecedent in the Danish examples (5-8) is a specific third person pronoun, while the antecedent in the Norwegian/Swedish example (4) is a generically referring noun. As is discussed in [Lundquist 2014c](#), generic, non-bound reflexives are accepted by many speakers in Mainland Scandinavia. There is slight chance that the informants that accept (4), treat the reflexive as a non-bound generic reflexive rather than a long distance reflexive. This possibility is brought up by Lødrup (2009), but according to him, at least some Norwegian speakers reject generic non-bound reflexives while accepting sentences like (4). In Swedish, many speakers (including myself) would find (4) equally marked (or unmarked) as (12) below, where the reflexive lacks a syntactic antecedent, and receives a generic interpretation (or possibly a first person/speaker interpretation):

- (12) ?Det är alltid spännande med brev som är till sig_i själv_i. (Swe.)
it be.PRES always exciting with letter.PL REL are to RFLC SELF
 'It is always exciting with letters that are for one self.'

However, there are Swedish speakers who allow binding into relative clauses even when the reflexive has a non-generic reference. The Swedish reference grammar (Teleman et al. 1999, 2:343) gives the following example, where the antecedent is specific (and the intervening relative clause subject is indefinite), which is said to be acceptable for at least some speakers:

- (13) Han_i har ingen som ser till sig nuförtiden. (Swe.)
he have.PRES no-one REL look.PRES after RFLX nowadays
 'He_i has no-one that looks after him_i these days.'

According to the Teleman et al. (1999), the main clause verb influences the possibility of relative clause LDRs. According to them, binding into a relative clause is only possible when the main clause verb denotes some kind of possession, i.e., when the subject is a possessor of the object that contains the relative clause with the anaphor. If this claim is correct, there are as many as four different factors that influence the acceptability of long distance reflexives in relative clauses:

1. The nature of the main clause subject/antecedent: Generic vs. specific..
2. The nature of the intervening relative clause subject: definite/specific vs. indefinite/non-referring.
3. The main clause predicate: verb of possession vs. other types of verbs.
4. The embedded predicate: agentive/causative verbs vs. stative verbs (i.e., long distance binding is not possible when the intervening subject is an agent/causer).

More research needs to be done to establish whether all these factors are relevant in all of the North Germanic languages.

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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>