Fieldwork report on case variation in northern Sweden and Bornholm

Perhaps due to a widespread perception that there are few phenomena of theoretical interest in ‘case-poor’ languages, patterns of vestigial (aka, pronominal) case variation across the Germanic family remain significantly under investigated (as pointed out by Sigurðsson 2006 with reference to predicates). Intra-individual (aka, ‘sociolinguistic’) variation in vestigial-case languages has received even less attention, despite relatively robust attestation in English (Emonds 1986, Schütze 2001, Angermeyer and Singler 2003, Quinn 2005, Parrott 2007), Danish (Hansen and Heltoft 2011, Parrott 2009), Norwegian (Johannessen 1998, Hilton and Parrott 2009), and Swedish (Sigurðsson 2006, Holmberg 1986, Eklund 1982).

Therefore, in this talk, I will present the results of fieldwork carried out October 14-16, 2012 in the northern Swedish towns of Arjeplog and Storeforsen, as well as on the island of Bornholm, Denmark November 19-20, 2012. The purpose of the fieldwork is to ascertain general patterns of inter-individual case variation in Swedish and Danish, and to test some specific claims about intra-individual case variation that have been made in the literature. The fieldwork utilizes a hybrid methodology combining an informal sociolinguistic interview with traditional intuition elicitation tasks. Informants are encouraged to discuss the test sentences so that the existence of intra-individual variation can be inferred from any social attitudes (not) expressed.

In northern Sweden, the main focus is on ‘case-neutral pronouns’ (CNPs) which have, to my knowledge, only been discussed by Holmberg (1986) in the English-language linguistic literature (see also Eklund 1982 for a dialect survey of the phenomenon in Swedish). In certain northern Swedish dialects, Subject Form (SF) pronouns variably occur as verbal and prepositional objects, where only Oblique Forms (OFs) occur in ‘standard’ dialects. CNP variation is highly salient for many speakers of Swedish, especially in the north.

(1)  
  a. Hon ville kyssa jag.
  b. Hon gav den åt du.

According to Holmberg’s single informant, CNPs are only possible when they are ‘true objects’, that is, when the pronoun receives both its case and theta role from the same head; otherwise, the OF occurs.

(2)  
  a. * Jag rakade jag.
  b. * Dom har ansett jag galen.
  c. * Han har sett jag komma.
  d. * Hon har gett jag boken.
These and similar CNP structures were tested in both towns, along with predicates, coordinate DPs, and comparatives.

In ‘standard’ Danish varieties, quite the opposite of Swedish, OFs are evidently the default and occur in predicates, clefts, pronoun-headed relatives (PHRs), and other structures.

(3)  a. Det er bare mig.
    b. Det er dig, der laver en masse larm.
    c. Ham, der har læst din bog er her.

As in English, OF default is associated with widespread attestation of socially salient variable case mismatches inside coordinate DPs (CoDPs).

(4)  a. Jens og mig skal snakke om det.
    b. Hende og jeg kørte hjemme i går.

The Danish variety spoken on Bornholm, however, used to be like Swedish in having SF in predicates, at least (Pedersen 2009). It is unknown whether SF default is still attested on Bornholm or whether the dialect has assimilated to ‘standard’ Danish OF default. Most crucially, the fieldwork will seek to determine whether case variation in CoDPs is attested on Bornholm. The other structures mentioned (predicates, clefts, comparatives, and PHRs) will also be tested with the informants.

References


