

Variation and change in genitival constructions in Danish and Swedish (1600–2000)

Summary for the general public

The aim of the project is to study two genitival constructions and their variation in Danish and Swedish in the years 1600–2000. The constructions in question are: 1) genitival prepositional construction (e.g., *statsministern i Sverige* ‘the Prime minister of Sweden’) and 2) the s-genitive (e.g., *Sveriges statsminister* ‘Sweden’s Prime minister’). As the examples above indicate, the two constructions are interchangeable in many contexts with no change in meaning – they are both genitival constructions indicating that one referent (here: ‘Prime minister’) belongs in one way or another to another referent (here: ‘Sweden’). The aim of the project is thus to explore what factors may have an influence on the selection of one or the other construction. Among the studied factors are: animacy, definiteness and givenness of the referents, length of the nominal phrase and type of relation expressed by the construction. Another aim of the project is to trace the history and development of the Danish and Swedish genitival prepositional construction, which so far has not been researched thoroughly.

Research description. The theoretical framework of the project is corpus-based variationist linguistics, an approach whose main tenet is that variation is an inherent part of language and that it is not random, but rather systematic. The research will include preparation of a searchable corpus of Danish and Swedish texts, annotation of said corpus and excerpting of constructions in question. Subsequently, statistical and qualitative analyses will be conducted through which the factors influencing the genitival variation and the characteristics of the prepositional construction in its various stages of development will be identified and described.

The research topic is undertaken mainly due to the fact that the prepositional construction is widely used in modern Danish and Swedish as an alternative to the s-genitive, yet it has so far not received much attention from language researchers. It is still unclear, for example, when the construction began to be used more frequently and what types of contexts and referents were most frequently used with the construction in its early stages of development (ca. 1600–1800).

Expected results include a detailed preference model for the prepositional construction and the s-genitive describing the factors influencing the variation between these constructions in texts from 1600–2000. Another result is a detailed description of characteristics of the prepositional construction in its various stages of development. The results will expand our knowledge not only about the Scandinavian languages, but also about the genitival expressions in Indo-European languages in general.