

Optionality of Form in Demonstrative Noun Phrases in Swedish

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Swedish has two different ways in which to mark demonstrative noun phrases. Consider the following examples:

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| (1) <u>den här</u> hunden, <u>det här</u> huset, | 'this here dog', 'this here house', |
| <u>de här</u> barnen | 'these here children' |
| (2) <u>denna</u> hund, <u>detta</u> hus, <u> dessa</u> barn | 'this dog', 'this house', 'these children' |

(1) illustrates a two word demonstrative prefix which is used with the definite noun phrase form. (2) illustrates a demonstrative which is used with the unmarked form of the noun. (1) and (2) are often described as dialectal variants, with (2) being more common in Swedish dialects on the west coast whereas (1) is considered to more common in all other dialects. But both forms are also commonly believed to be interchangeable in most situations in both dialects, though some informants have expressed the idea that *denna/detta/dessa* is more natural with abstract referents.

Are (1) and (2) merely dialectal variants of each other or are they sometimes used in different contexts, perhaps related to the abstractness or concreteness of the referent? To examine this question I plan to perform an internet-based controlled production task. Swedish speakers from both dialects will be presented with short 3 line stories followed by one of two conditions. In condition 1, they will be asked to complete the story by filling in the subject of a sentence with a demonstrative nominal phrase. The rest of the sentence is formed so that only an abstract subject (condition 1a) or alternatively a concrete subject (condition 1b) is possible. In condition 2 they will be given one of the two demonstrative articles and asked to complete the story by writing the last sentence, beginning with a nominal phrase subject. The stories are formed so that each story can be completed by referring to both an abstract or a concrete referent, so that the same story can be tested with different conditions on different subjects. Below is an example of one story with all conditions:

Story

Eleverna vantrivs allt oftare i skolan.
Många klasser har alldeles för små
klassrum.

*Students are often unhappy in school.
Many classrooms are far too small.*

Lärarna i vår trångboddade skola är väldigt
upprörda.

The teachers in our overcrowded school are very upset

Condition 1

a _____ har blivit outhärdlig.
(abstract predicate)

a. _____ has become unbearable.

b _____ måste byggas ut eller så måste
studenterna flyttas.
(concrete predicate)

b. _____ has to be added on to, or
students need to be moved.

Condition 2

a. Den här {noun} _____.

This _____.

b. Denna {noun} _____.

This _____.

My hypothesis is that with condition 1, where the semantic type (abstract or concrete) of the referent is fixed, speakers will tend to use both forms with a great degree of free variation in both the abstract and concrete conditions, with however differences in tendencies due to dialect. This would show that forms that are otherwise freely optional will be used freely when the further reference is unambiguous and the producer is freed from the entire burden of making the reference clear, i.e. there is no ambiguity of reference so optionality of form increases. But in condition 2, where the sentence could be completed with reference to either a concrete individual or to an abstract object, and where the form is fixed, subjects will tend to produce the two word demonstrative with concrete referents, and the one word demonstrative with abstract referents, regardless of dialect. I will discuss my results in reference to the second hypothesis of the workshop.