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## The resilient dative and other remarkable cases in Scandinavian vernaculars\*

### Abstract

In this paper we look at the case systems in three Scandinavian vernaculars spoken in Sweden, viz. Elfdalian, Skellefemål and Vätömål in relation to (i) problems concerning possible case systems and ways in which they can break down; (ii) earlier claims about case hierarchies; (iii) the interaction of case, number and definiteness in nominal paradigms. One type of system considered in the paper is based on the opposition between a default case (nominative/accusative) and a dative – an option excluded by previously suggested generalizations on possible case systems. Our data illustrate several different ways in which one and the same older four-member case system has been reduced, and our conclusion is that a strict hierarchy here cannot be established. The vernaculars studied are also relevant to the question of markedness relations in nominal paradigms: they give additional support to the claim that definite nouns may show more distinctions than indefinite ones, and counter to usual assumptions, singular nouns sometimes show fewer case distinctions than plural nouns, which may be explained by the uniform marking of the dative plural across all paradigms.

### 1. Introduction

It is common knowledge that the original Germanic four-case system has been more or less abandoned in most modern Germanic languages. Well-known exceptions are Standard (High) German and the Atlantic outlier languages Icelandic and Faroese. A much less publicized fact, however, is the partial retainment of the old case system in vernaculars spoken over a large area in the Scandinavian peninsula, that is, in Norway and Northern Sweden. The case systems of these vernaculars exhibit some interesting properties, which will be the topic of this paper, with the focus on varieties spoken in Sweden. Among other things, case marking interacts not only with the category of number but also with inflectional definiteness marking, giving rise to some additional complications. In some respects, the Scandinavian case systems constitute counterexamples to generalizations made in the literature. It is therefore suitable to start by reviewing two works on case systems, BLAKE (1994: 56), and WEERMAN & DE WIT (1999) (Section 2) and by giving a general typological background on possible interaction between case, number and definiteness (Section 3).

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## 2. Some earlier treatments of case systems

### 2.1. Blake (1994)

In BLAKE (1994: 157–162), some typological generalizations about case systems are made under the heading “Inflectional case hierarchy”. BLAKE acknowledges the difficulties in comparing case systems cross-linguistically: “... in comparing cases across languages we need to consider the functions covered by a particular case and we must not accept traditional labels at face value” (157). After this proviso, he goes on to say that looking at “a sample of case systems”, “we find that indeed they do tend to be built up in a particular order, i.e. a hierarchy emerges”:

(1) “NOM ACC/ERG GEN DAT LOC ABL/INST others”

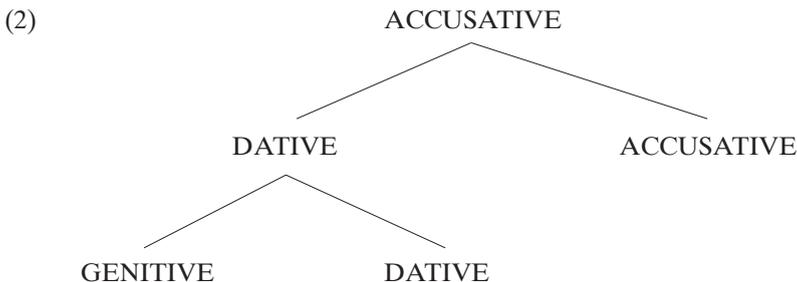
That is, if “a language has a case listed on the hierarchy, it will usually have at least one case from each position to the left”. As for BLAKE’s case labels, it was said earlier in the book that the central and defining function of the accusative could be taken to be “that of encoding the affected patient of activity verbs” (145), whereas that of the dative would be “to encode entities that are the target of an activity or emotion” (ibid.). The latter somewhat vague definition is given more substance in the list of more specific functions of datives, most notably the marking of the objects of “two-place verbs low on the transitivity scale such as HELP, SEEK, or LIKE”, three-place verbs such as GIVE and SHOW, and the roles of purpose and beneficiary.

BLAKE adds an important qualification in saying that the second case in a two-case system is likely “to cover such a wide range of functions that the label **oblique** would be more appropriate than accusative or ergative”.

BLAKE does not make precise the empirical basis for his claims: he does not say how large his sample is<sup>1</sup> or what languages it includes. On the other hand, since he is rather cautious in his formulations, referring to tendencies rather than to absolute constraints, it is not clear to what extent he would be bothered by individual counterexamples.

### 2.2. Weerman & de Wit (1999)

WEERMAN & DE WIT (1999: 1180–1181) propose that language learners (by which they mean children acquiring language) have access to hierarchically organized knowledge of case systems, schematized as follows:



<sup>1</sup> The number of individual languages referred to in BLAKE’s book is approximately 100–150.

(Actually, this representation is rather redundant. Since the higher terms appear twice, it is equivalent to a simple list, “accusative dative genitive”, basically a substring of (1) above, although with the order of genitive and dative switched.)

The child uses this knowledge in assessing the morphological evidence for a case system in the language. The initial assumption is that there is no morphological case in the language, i.e. a nominative case is assumed to exist by default. Ergative systems are explicitly left out of the discussion but are assumed to work on similar principles. In the schema, the right branches represent the default choice. “When there is morphological evidence for a dative form, the nondefault, this implies that the language has accusative as well.” As a result, “the following case systems are predicted to exist” (1182):

- (3)
- (a) ACCUSATIVE
  - (b) ACCUSATIVE and DATIVE
  - (c) ACCUSATIVE, DATIVE, and GENITIVE

WEERMAN & DE WIT use the hypothesis of the hierarchical structure to explain the process that is the main topic of their paper: the decline of the genitive case in Middle Dutch. The idea is that if the morphological evidence for a member of a case system deteriorates by phonological reduction, this can cause the loss not only of that case but also of hierarchically lower ones. In Middle Dutch, it is argued, the genitive disappeared because there was too little evidence for the cases one or two steps up in the hierarchy – dative and accusative.

At this point WEERMAN & DE WIT’s argument becomes a bit hard to follow. Of the three marked Germanic cases, genitive was the first to disappear in Middle Dutch, according to WEERMAN & DE WIT. That is, at the point when the genitive was lost, both the dative and the accusative were there in the system, although “there was hardly any phonological evidence for an accusative case”. This may appear baffling: wouldn’t the phonological reduction of the accusative markers also cause both the dative and the accusative itself to go down the drain? No, WEERMAN & DE WIT say, the presence of morphological evidence for the dative “implies that there should be an accusative as well, as they are immediate neighbours in the tree”. Thus the accusative can go on to exist based on “indirect evidence”. However, the force of such indirect reasoning is limited. The acquisition of case systems proceeds top-down: only when language learners have established “that there is a dative (and implicitly an accusative) can they go one step further down the tree and process evidence for a genitive case” (1183).

It is not clear how this applies to the situation in Middle Dutch, since it would seem to allow for a system with an explicitly marked dative motivating first an implicit accusative and then an explicit genitive. It also appears that WEERMAN & DE WIT go a bit far when they say that there was “hardly any phonological evidence” for the accusative in Middle Dutch. According to their own presentation, accusative was marked on singular masculine determiners and on weak singular masculine nouns (e.g. *die cnape* ‘the boy:NOM.SG’: *dien cnapen* ‘the boy:ACC.SG’). Many languages restrict accusative marking to pronouns or a small subset of nouns, and such systems do not seem to be very unstable.

It is also unclear from WEERMAN & DE WIT’s discussion how implicit a case can be. Is a system with an explicit dative and a totally implicit accusative allowed? That is, faced with

the presence of morphological evidence for a dative, would a child postulate that an accusative case exists, although it is never visible? This would in practice mean that a case system where a dative is opposed to a general default case would not be empirically distinguishable from the three case system in (3b).

The basic claim made both by BLAKE and by WEERMAN & DE WIT is that any case paradigm in a nominative-accusative language will have to include the accusative case. Among other things, this means that the accusative case will be the last one to get lost whenever a case system breaks down. The two studies suggest, however, opposite claims about the relation between the genitive and the dative cases: for BLAKE, the dative presupposes the genitive, while for WEERMAN & DE WIT, on the contrary, it is the genitive that presupposes the dative. In Section 4 we will use some Scandinavian case systems for evaluating these claims.

One major problem in empirically evaluating both the claims of BLAKE and those of WEERMAN & DE WIT is that they speak as if a language always has a single case system. As is well known, case marking may differ significantly between e.g. pronouns and nouns in one language. Thus, the majority of the Germanic languages that have got rid of case distinctions in nouns still preserve them in at least some pronouns – Dutch is no exception. It appears that when WEERMAN & DE WIT speak of “case morphology”, they are only thinking of case marking in lexical NPs. What the distinctions on pronouns are is apparently irrelevant for the child in choosing between possible case systems for nouns and their determiners. Otherwise the fact that Middle Dutch pronouns did distinguish nominative and oblique forms would have to enter the discussion.

BLAKE, on the other hand, often mentions pronominal case examples of case systems. It is clear that generalizations about case systems may look rather different depending on what is included, and not least whether one postulates one integrated case system for each language, or rather several at least partly independent ones.

One way of looking at a case system, which we will adopt in the present paper, is as a set of paradigms. The distinctions in the case system would be the union of all the distinctions made in the paradigms. The set of distinctions in a paradigm is thus by necessity equal to or smaller than the total set of distinctions in the system. When looking at actual case systems, it turns out that individual paradigms indeed tend to be considerably simpler than the total case systems. An interesting question is whether it is possible to find generalizations that hold of individual paradigms but not necessarily of case systems as wholes.

### 3. Case, number, definiteness and markedness principles

A nominal paradigm often involves several dimensions, e.g., case and number, which can interact in various ways. A nominal paradigm for a single lexeme can therefore be further broken into sub-paradigms organised in accordance with each of the involved dimensions, and individual sub-paradigms can again differ both from each other and from the whole paradigm. For instance, the case paradigm for a noun in the singular can show other distinctions than the corresponding paradigm in the plural.

Nominal paradigms in the Scandinavian vernaculars considered below involve three dimensions – case, number and definiteness, where both number and definiteness take two values each – singular vs. plural and definite vs. indefinite. Cross-linguistically, bound

definiteness markers are relatively rare: they occur only in 5 (or possibly 6) languages<sup>2</sup> in RIJKHOFF'S (2002: 186–187) global 52-language sample. Languages with both case and bound definiteness markers are even rarer: MATTHEW DRYER'S 700-language sample contains only 25 instances (MATTHEW DRYER p.c.). The nominal paradigms found in Swedish vernaculars are, thus, cross-linguistically quite unusual already with regard to their multidimensionality. An interesting question is, thus, whether it is possible to find generalizations on the interaction among the three dimensions that hold of individual sub-paradigms, but not necessarily of whole individual case paradigms.

Each of the three dimensions has been discussed in typological literature, although to various degrees, seldom in relation to the other two and from not always easily comparable angles. Thus, case is normally viewed as a nominal inflectional category par excellence – e.g., the putative typological generalizations we have seen above address the question of how **inflectional case** systems can be built up. The typological discussion of number and definiteness, on the other hand, is normally not restricted to nominal morphology, but considers a larger spectrum of means that languages may resort to for expressing relevant distinctions.

**Number** on the whole has a solid history of typological research and can boast of numerous robust cross-linguistic generalizations (for the most comprehensive typological study see CORBETT 2000). Here there are two main types of generalizations – which nominals will show or lack number distinctions in a language<sup>3</sup>, and how possible number values can be combined within one and the same language. The main precursor for the latter discussion is GREENBERG (1963: 94), whose universal number 34 states that “No language has a trial number unless it has a dual. No language has a dual unless it has a plural.”

While none of these generalizations is per se relevant for the present paper, what interests us here is the relation between the implicational universal given above and some other properties of number that have been described under the heading of typological markedness, again originally launched by GREENBERG (1966). For our purposes, the following criteria for identifying unmarked vs. marked values of a category mentioned in recent typological literature are of interest:

STRUCTURAL COMPLEXITY (GREENBERG'S PRINCIPLE S1 GENERALIZED)

“The marked structure tends to be more complex (or larger) than the corresponding unmarked” one (GIVÓN 1995: 28), or “the marked value of a grammatical category will be expressed by at least as many morphemes as is the unmarked value of that category” (CROFT 1990: 73)

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“The marked category (figure) tends to be less frequent, thus cognitively more salient, than the corresponding unmarked category (ground)” (GIVÓN 1995: 28), or “If a marked value occurs a certain number of times in frequency in a given text sample, then the unmarked value will occur at least as many times in a comparable text sample” (CROFT 1990: 85).

<sup>2</sup> Abkhaz, Basque, Gude, Koasati, Nasioi and possibly Chukchi.

<sup>3</sup> The main generalization is that “the singular-plural distinction in a given language must affect a top segment of the Animacy Hierarchy” (CORBETT 2000: 56).

## COGNITIVE COMPLEXITY:

“The marked category tends to be cognitively more complex – in terms of mental effort, attention demands or processing time – than the unmarked one” (GIVÓN 1995: 28).

## INFLECTIONAL BEHAVIOUR (GREENBERG’S PRINCIPLE S2):

“If the marked value has a certain number of distinct forms in an inflectional paradigm, then the unmarked value will have at least as many distinct forms in the same paradigm” (CROFT 1990: 79).

In the singular-plural opposition, relevant for the vernaculars considered here, all of the above mentioned criteria normally converge on the singular as the unmarked value and the plural as the marked value. Of particular interest for our purposes is the last markedness criterion, that considers interaction of two or more dimensions in a paradigm.

Cross-linguistic generalizations in the domain of **definiteness** are rare and normally restricted to particular sub-phenomena. For systems such as the Scandinavian ones, where the definite members of the paradigm tend to be overtly marked by an additional suffix, it might appear that the definite forms are the structurally more complex ones and that this would predict that there are at least as many distinct indefinite as definite forms. However, in his discussion of definiteness and markedness, GIVÓN (1995: 47–50) argues that definite NPs cannot be unequivocally viewed as more marked compared to indefinite ones. Structurally, he claims, there are no overwhelming grounds for considering the former more complex than the latter in languages that mark both. Somewhat unconvincingly, GIVÓN tries to save explicit indefiniteness markers even in languages that are said to have overt markers only for definites, by saying that only non-referring indefinites are unmarked. From the point of view of frequency, the three most frequent case roles (subject, direct object and dative-benefactive) tend to be definite. On the other hand, the majority of such occurrences are constituted by anaphoric or zero pronouns and not by NPs overtly marked as definite. Finally, “definite full-NPs”, GIVÓN says, “[w]hile being accessible, ... are not currently activated”, i.e., they pick out referents that have not yet been activated in the discourse, and their processing might therefore involve more steps than processing of indefinite NPs. The conclusion we can draw from GIVÓN’s discussion is that definiteness does not readily lend itself to characterization in terms of markedness.

Actually, there is very little work done on interaction of case, number and definiteness in general, and even less so in relation to nominal paradigms. The most relevant references here are AIKHENVALD & DIXON (1998) and CORBETT (2000). According to them, there are many examples of case systems with a larger number of distinctions in the singular than in the plural but no examples are given of the opposite possibility. Basque is mentioned as an example of a language in which number distinctions only hit definite nouns. Aari (Omoti), Koryak (Chukchi-Koryak), Mordvin (Uralic) and Albanian (Indo-European) show interesting interactions among case, number and definiteness within their nominal paradigm. Thus, in Aari only definite nominals inflect for case and number, while indefinite nominals neutralize both sets of distinctions. Judging by the few examples quoted above and by our own unsystematic browsing through grammars, definite nominals sometimes show more elaborate paradigms than indefinite ones.

Summing up the general picture of the interaction of case, number and definiteness that we obtain from the typological literature, we should expect at least as many case

distinctions in the singular as in the plural, whereas the predictions are less clear with respect to definiteness, where a higher number of definite forms are indeed attested.

In the next section we will consider some Scandinavian case systems in relation to the claims and predictions stated in sections 2 and 3.

#### 4. A closer look at some Scandinavian case systems

The loss of the genitive case in Dutch, as described by WEERMAN & DE WIT, is part of the general breakdown of the old Germanic case system in a large part of the Germanic-speaking territory. This process should be seen as one single historical process in an essentially contiguous area along the coasts of the North Sea and the Baltic, which could suitably be called “Littoral Germanic” (see Map 1; cf. also JOHANSSON 1997: 149). As noted in the introduction, geographically more peripheral areas have been partly or wholly immune to these developments. We shall now look at some examples of vernaculars spoken in northern Sweden which have retained at least significant parts of the old case system, at the same time as innovating the system in quite original ways. The location of the vernaculars in question is shown in Map 2.

##### 4.1. *Elfdalian*

Elfdalian (autonym *(öv)dalska*, Swedish *älvdalska*, Älvdalen Dalecarlian) is the vernacular traditionally spoken in the parish of Älvdalen in the Swedish province of Dalarna (Dalecarlia). Elfdalian belongs to the highly deviant dialect area of Dalecarlian (*egentligt dalmål*), comprising many vernaculars that are not comprehensible to speakers of Standard Swedish (and in many cases, also mutually incomprehensible). Elfdalian is generally considered to be the most deviant of these (from the viewpoint of Standard Swedish) and is also one of the most vigorous, being increasingly used as a written language. As for case, Elfdalian has preserved much of the old Germanic system, with some interesting developments, although the system is now at high risk, due to pressure from Swedish.

The grammar of Elfdalian was treated in an outstanding work from a century ago, LEVANDER (1909), which describes the language mainly as it was spoken by persons born before 1850, that is, a time when the influence of Swedish was still relatively small. The following account relies mainly on information from this work and from ÅKERBERG (ms.).

In the pronominal system, first and second person pronouns exhibit two-case paradigms, with a nominative opposed to an oblique or dative/accusative case, e.g. *ig* ‘I’: *mig* ‘me’. These pronouns lack separate genitive forms, but have corresponding possessive pronouns that agree with their head in gender, number and case. In LEVANDER’S treatment, third person pronouns maximally distinguish all the original Germanic cases. Thus, in the feminine singular, we find nominative *o*, genitive *enn(er)es*, dative *enner*, accusative *on(a)*. However, the distinction between nominative and accusative is neutralized for singular masculine and neuter pronouns, and that between dative and accusative in plural pronouns, so most pronouns have smaller paradigms. We may note, though, that there are separate genitive forms for all third-person pronouns in Elfdalian. Four-case systems are also found in some other pronouns, such as *isin* ‘this’, *ukin* ‘who, which’ and *noger* ‘someone’, even in the masculine.

When discussing the cases of Elfdalian nouns, there are really four paradigms to consider for each noun: indefinite singular, definite singular, indefinite plural, and definite plural. According to LEVANDER's grammar, all the traditional four cases of Germanic – nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative are found in Elfdalian. It is highly questionable, however, whether Elfdalian nouns should really be said to have an inflectional genitive. We shall return to this question later and consider for the time being paradigms consisting of the other three cases – nominative, dative, and accusative. We find such paradigms with one, two, or three distinct forms (cf. Table 1). For one-member and three-member paradigms, there is only one logical possibility each: for two-member paradigms, there are theoretically three possibilities – each of the cases may be distinct from the two others but only two of these possibilities are actually found: the “dative” system, where the dative is distinct from the nominative and the accusative, and the “oblique” system, where the dative and the accusative are identical but distinct from the nominative.

Declension class	INDEF.SG	DEF.SG	INDEF.PL	DEF.PL
MIa, c	2d	2d	3	3
MIb, d	1	2d	3	3
MII	2d	2d	3	3
MIIIa	2o	3	3	3
MIIIb	1	2d/3	3	3
MIV	2o	3	3	3
MV	1	2d	3	3
MVI	1	(1)	3	3
FI–FIII	1	2d	2d	2d
FIV–FV	2o	3	2d	2d
FVI–FVII	1	2d	2d	2d
FVIII	1	1	2d	2d
NIa	2d	2d	2d	2d
NIId	1	2d	2d	2d
NII	2d	2d	2d	2d
NIII–NV	1	2d	2d	2d
Average	1,44	2	2,5	2,5

M = masculine; F = feminine; N = neuter

2d = “dative two-member paradigm”: dative is distinct from nominative and accusative

2o = “oblique two-member paradigm”: dative and accusative (oblique) are distinct from nominative

Table 1: Number of case distinctions in Elfdalian nominal paradigms

The oblique two-member system is restricted to the singular indefinite paradigms of “weak” masculine and feminine nouns such as *ukse:uksa:uksa* (MIIIa) ‘ox’ and *kulla:kullu:kullu* (FIV) ‘girl’. The dative two-member system is found in the singular indefinite paradigms of neuters and “strong” masculines, e.g. *buärd:buärde:buärd* (N1a) ‘table’ and *kall:kalle:kall* (M1) ‘man’, although the distinction between the two forms is sometimes neutralized due to apocope of the final vowel, as in *kasungg:kasungg:kasungg* (M1b) ‘fur coat’. “Strong” feminines do not show any case distinctions in the singular indefinite paradigm, e.g. *nql:nql:nql* (F1) ‘needle’.

In the definite singular paradigms, apocope effects are absent since the dative ending *-e* is in general “sheltered” by the definite suffix, which, in addition, always has a distinct shape in the dative. Thus, caseless paradigms are only found with kin terms such as *faðer* ‘father’<sup>4</sup> and *syster* (FVII) ‘sister’ which do not mark definiteness overtly. Furthermore, since the definite suffix in itself exhibits a dative two-member paradigm, adding it to forms taken from the oblique two-member indefinite paradigms yields three-member paradigms for “weak” masculines and feminines, where the nominative, dative, and accusative are all distinct, e.g. *uksn:uksam:uksan* (MIIIa) ‘the ox’, *kullq:kullun:kullu* ‘the girl’. (In the forms *kullq* and *kullu*, the definite suffix shows up only in the form of a nasalization of the preceding vowel.)

In the plural, both indefinite and definite, the dative is always marked by the ending *-um*. This means that the minimal plural paradigm is a dative two-member one. In addition, masculine nouns generally have distinct accusative forms in the plural.

There is also considerable syncretism between indefinite and definite forms, particularly in the plural. Thus, the dative plural had identical indefinite and definite forms in all varieties of Elfdalian as spoken already when LEVANDER collected his material, although he noted that some older persons occasionally used a longer form for the definite (ending in *-umę*). The nominative plural endings *-er* and *-är* were used in many paradigms for the indefinite and definite respectively, but LEVANDER notes that the distinction between these was disappearing in many villages, and this process seems to have advanced further in more recent varieties of Elfdalian.

Finally, case is also marked on adjectives and numerals. In principle, nominative, dative, and accusative are distinct in adjectival and numeral paradigms, but there are also here numerous syncretisms, and in the modern language, the system tends to be simplified.

As can be seen from Table 1, the number of case distinctions displayed in the plural of Elfdalian nouns is systematically larger than or at least equal to the number of case distinctions in the indefinite singular of the corresponding nouns, which goes against the prediction at the end of section 3. We will come back to this point in section 5.

Let us now turn to the genitive in Elfdalian. According to LEVANDER’s grammar, all the traditional four cases of Germanic – nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative are found in Elfdalian. However, LEVANDER himself notes that the genitive is fairly rare, especially in the indefinite, where it is basically restricted to two kinds of lexicalized expressions, viz.

- after the preposition *et* ‘to’, in expressions such as *et bys* ‘to the village’, *et messer* ‘to the mass’, *et buðer* ‘to the summer pastures’
- after the preposition *i* ‘in’ in expressions of time such as *i wittres* ‘last winter’, *i kwelds* ‘yesterday evening’

<sup>4</sup> *Faðer* is an undeclinable noun in Elfdalian, that is, it has no plural, and bisyllabic nouns as a rule have no dative ending, due to apocope. Still, LEVANDER puts it in into class MVI (the same goes for *fafar* ‘paternal grandfather’ in example 8).

In these uses, the genitive preserves the original endings (-s in masculine and neuter SG.; -er in feminine SG and generally in the plural). This is not the case for the definite forms. Consider the following example:

- (4) Elfdalian [LEVANDER 1909: 96]  
*Ita jar i kullumes saing.*  
 this here is girl:PL.DEF.GEN bed  
 ‘This is the girls’ bed’

We would expect to find here something like \**kuller* but instead we have here something that looks like the dative plural form *kullum* followed by an ending -es. This kind of formation is in fact perfectly general. Thus, we get examples such as *smiðimes* ‘the black-smith’s’, where -es is added to the dative singular definite form *smiðim* of *smið* ‘black-smith’. Moreover, as LEVANDER notes, the -es ending may be added to the last word in a complex noun phrase, in which case the head noun will still be in the dative:

- (5) Elfdalian [LEVANDER 1909: 96]  
*Ann<sup>5</sup> upp i budum-es etta*  
 Anna.DAT up in summer.pasture.DAT.PL-es hood  
 ‘Anna-at-the-summer-pasture’s hood’
- (6) Elfdalian [LEVANDER 1909: 96]  
*An bar pridikantem jär upp-es an.*  
 he carry.PRET preacher.DAT.SG.DEF here up-es he  
 ‘He carried the luggage of the preacher up here, he did’

Indeed, if the possessor is expressed by a noun phrase determined by a possessive pronoun, -es is added directly to that noun phrase, with the possessive pronoun in the dative case:

- (7) Elfdalian [LEVANDER 1909: 96]  
*Isu jär lodu ar stendeð*  
 this.F.SG.NOM here barn.NOM.SG.INDEF have.PRS.SG stand.SUP  
*u mainum faðer-es garde.*  
 on my.M.SG.DAT father farm.DAT.SG.INDEF  
 ‘This barn has stood on my father’s farm’
- (8) Elfdalian [LEVANDER 1909: 96]  
*Eð war uärum fafar-es fafar*  
 it be.PRET.SG our.M.DAT.SG father’s\_father-es father’s\_father  
*so byggd du dar tšyälbuðe<sup>6</sup>.*  
 who build.PRET that.F.SG.ACC there shelter  
 ‘It was our great-great-great-grandfather who built that shelter?’

<sup>5</sup> The dative form of *Anna* is given by LEVANDER as *Anno* but the final vowel is elided here due to the morphophonological process known as apocope. In modern Elfdalian, proper names are commonly exempt from apocope (see further the main text).

<sup>6</sup> This word, which translates into regional Swedish as “(myr)slogbod”, denotes a structure somewhat similar to a bus stop shelter used during activities such as hunting, fishing and hay-harvesting in remote places.

These facts are compatible with an analysis in which a possessor noun phrase in Elfdalian is formed according to the schema “dative NP + *-es*”, which means that we are not dealing with a morphological genitive case here. Rather, the genitive case in Elfdalian only exists as a residual category in some lexicalized expressions (much like the dative case in Standard Swedish).

But according to LEVANDER this is not the most frequent possessive construction in Elfdalian. Instead, he says “the notion of genitive is usually expressed by a postposed dative” [our translation]. That is, a possessive noun phrase will consist of the possessee NP, normally in the definite form, followed by the possessor NP in the dative, as in the following examples:

- (9) Elfdalian [ÅKERBERG (ms.)]  
*Ulov add taið pennskrineð kullun.*  
 U. have.PRET take.SUP pen\_box.DEF girl:DAT.SG.DEF  
 ‘Ulov had taken the girl’s pen box’

This means that when the dative form is identical to the nominative, the possessor NP is simply juxtaposed to the possessee NP, as in

- (10) Elfdalian [LEVANDER 1909: 97]  
*kalln Smis-Margit*  
 man:NOM.SG.DEF S.  
 ‘Smis-Margit’s husband’

How did these constructions originate? It is fairly common for datives to take over the functions of genitives in possessive constructions. It is likely that this takes place through an extension of their use as indirect objects. Parallels to the postposed dative construction in Elfdalian are found in various places in Norrbotten and Västerbotten (see Skelleftemål below).

As regards the construction marked by *-es*, where the dative-marked NP precedes the head noun, its origin is less transparent. A plausible hypothesis, however, is that *-es* is a reduced form of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person enclitic masculine singular genitive pronoun *os* (<Old Scand. *hans*). In other varieties of Dalecarlian, the possessive marker takes forms such as *-as*, *-ås* [ɔs] or *-ôs* [øs], making such a derivation even more likely. This would make the construction basically equivalent in origin to what is found in various German dialects, i.e. examples such as *dem Mann sein Haus* ‘the man’s house’. Some kind of contamination from other genitive constructions is not wholly excluded, however. Thus, when the *-s* ending of the genitive spread in medieval Scandinavian, it was sometimes added to an oblique or dative form of the noun, and if that form ended in an *-a* (which was the case for weak masculine nouns), *-as* could have been reinterpreted and generalized as a genitive ending (see further the discussion of Vätömål below). Furthermore, it seems that there is a recent increase in the frequency of the *-es* construction in modern Elfdalian, which is most probably due to it being seen as the closest equivalent of the Swedish *s*-genitive. An interesting phenomenon in this connection is the tendency for native speakers to make *es* a separate word in written Elfdalian, suggesting that it has never quite become an affix. Perhaps most strikingly, *es* is used even after a preceding vowel, although, due to extensive apocope, hiatus is not a common phenomenon in Elfdalian. Consider a proper name such as *Anna*, for which LEVANDER gives the dative form *Anno* and the “genitive” *Annes*, the

latter being the logical outcome of apocoping the dative form before *-es*. In modern Elfdalian, however, proper names in *-a* are normally treated as undeclinable and are shielded against apocope. Thus ‘Anna’s book’ comes out as *Anna es buäk*.

Thus, the possessive constructions of Elfdalian can be taken to represent grammaticalization paths that are well attested elsewhere. As has already been mentioned, similar constructions, employing dative-marking of possessors, are found also in other vernaculars in northern Sweden, mainly in the provinces of Västerbotten and Norrbotten, although they are often in competition with other possessive constructions. The large geographical distance between the different locations where dative-based possessive constructions are used indicates that they either have separate origins or derive from a common source at a relatively early point in time, most probably in early medieval times (which in Sweden means before 1350). A number of other shared innovations between the areas in question suggest that the latter explanation is to be preferred. In general, the genitive can be said to have lost its status as a productive case in these areas (DELSING 1996: 41). It may be noted that this has taken place without there being any phonological “erosion” of the case system in general. Thus, in Elfdalian, as we have seen, the dative and accusative cases have been quite vigorous for a long time since the demise of the genitive, and there are no reductive processes that would threaten the genitive markers as such, as is witnessed by the fact that they still survive in lexicalized contexts.

Let us now summarize how the Elfdalian data relate to the claims and predictions formulated in sections 2 and 3.

**Case hierarchies:** As long as we look at the total case system comprising both nouns and pronouns, which includes the nominative, genitive, dative and accusative, it seems to agree with both BLAKE’S and WEERMAN & DE WIT’S ideas about well-behaved case systems. If we look at the case paradigms of nouns only, they include the nominative, dative and accusative – supporting WEERMAN’S & DE WIT’S claims, but not BLAKE’S. However, the majority of the individual case paradigms shows a two-member system with the dative distinct from the nominative and accusative – a possibility excluded by both BLAKE and WEERMAN & DE WIT.

**Case and number:** the case system as a whole has as many case distinctions in the singular as in the plural, but a large portion of individual paradigms show more case distinctions in the plural than in the singular – against commonly assumed markedness principles.

**Case and definiteness:** the case system as a whole has as many case distinctions in the definite paradigms as in the indefinite ones. Several individual paradigms, however, have more case distinctions in the definite singular sub-paradigm than in the indefinite singular one – thus giving support to the view that the definite is not necessarily structurally more marked than the indefinite.

Even compared to other vernaculars in northern Scandinavia, Elfdalian, especially in its “classical” form described by LEVANDER, is quite conservative as to the extent to which it preserves features of the old system. We shall now look at another system further to the north, where we can see that tendencies discernable also within Elfdalian have resulted in a considerable streamlining of the system.

#### 4.2. Skelleftemål

Skelleftemål (autonym *skelletmål*) is the vernacular traditionally spoken in and around the town of Skellefteå in the northern part of the Swedish province of Västerbotten. Its grammar is described in a fairly detailed manner in MARKLUND (1976). The inflectional system found there is fairly representative of the dialects spoken in large parts of northern Sweden, in particular with respect to the case system, in that the dominating type of paradigm for nouns is a two-case one with an opposition dative:non-dative, a possibility that is not foreseen by BLAKE and WEERMAN & DE WIT, but that has already been noted above as a fairly frequent paradigm type in Elfdalian.

We shall, however, start with the pronominal case system. With respect to case inflection, there is a clear divide in Skelleftemål between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns on one hand and basically everything else on the other. Like in many other Germanic languages, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns in Skelleftemål (with the exception of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural) distinguish nominative (subject) and oblique (object) forms, where the oblique forms can be said to comprise both dative and accusative functions. There is also a systematic distinction between stressed and unstressed forms. Like the other Continental Scandinavian languages, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns do not have separate genitive forms but rather possessive pronouns that agree with the head noun in gender, number and (marginally) case. We thus obtain the following system:

	1SG	2SG	1PL	2PL
<b>Nominative</b>	<i>jig/i</i>	<i>däuw/dö</i>	<i>ve</i>	<i>je</i>
<b>Oblique</b>	<i>meg/me</i>	<i>deg/de</i>	<i>åss</i>	<i>je</i>

In contrast, singular third person pronouns have separate dative and genitive forms but do not distinguish between nominative and accusative. We thus obtain the three-case paradigms shown below, where the non-dative (nominative/accusative) forms are labeled “default”:

	M.SG	F.SG	N.SG	PL
<b>Default</b>	<i>hân/-(e)n</i>	<i>hoN/-oN, -(N)a</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>däm</i>
<b>Dative</b>	<i>hânâm/-(N)âm</i>	<i>hännar/-(e)n</i>	<i>he/-(N)e</i>	<i>däm</i>
<b>Genitive</b>	<i>hânsj</i>	<i>hännasj</i>	<i>(däres)</i>	<i>däres</i>

The nominal case system in Skelleftemål is analogous to that of third person pronouns, except for the genitive, whose status is quite marginal: the form traditionally described as genitive in Swedish (ending in *-s*) has a very limited distribution in Skelleftemål, occurring only in some lexicalized phrases following the preposition *till* ‘to’ (which governed the genitive case in Old Nordic) and also as a way of forming expressions denoting families (e.g. *StenlUnns* ‘the family Stenlund’). Like in Elfdalian, there thus seems to be little ground for regarding the genitive as a productive inflectional case on nouns in Skelleftemål.

In other words, the category of nominal case can be regarded as having two members: default case and dative. Their interaction with other dimensions of nominal morphology creates a rather lopsided system, however. Since nouns inflect also for number (singular and plural) and definiteness (indefinite and definite), we would expect to have eight separate forms. In the default case, there are indeed four different possibilities, as illustrated here by the noun *vaigg* ‘wall’:

	SG	PL
INDEF	<i>vaigg</i> ‘wall’	<i>vaigga</i> ‘walls’
DEF	<i>vaidjen</i> ‘the wall’	<i>vaidjaN</i> ‘the walls’

In the dative, on the other hand, there are not four forms for each noun, but two – one for singular and one for plural, as in *pigen* ‘the maid’: *pigâm* ‘the maids’ (from *piig* ‘maid’), or just one for both, as in *vaidjâm* ‘the wall(s)’. There is thus no definite:indefinite distinction, and although MARKLUND does not say so explicitly, it appears that the normal interpretation of the dative forms is definite – the ending is also normally added to the definite stem (as in the case of *vaigg:vaidjâm*).

The dative in Skelleftemål has, basically, all its expected uses – in addition to the marking of indirect objects (including a large number of two-place verbs), also with many prepositions (such as *deill* ‘to’, *dâri* ‘in’ etc.) and some adjectives such as *lik* ‘like’. It also has a perhaps less expected use: after quantifier words such as *möitje* ‘much, many’, *nållta* ‘some’, *kilo* ‘kilo’, but only with plurals, not with singular mass nouns, which are said to lack a dative form. The postposed dative construction found in Elfdalian is also one of several ways of expressing possession in NPs in Skelleftemål, as in

- (11) Skelleftemål [MARKLUND 1976: 22]  
*skoN*                    *paitjâm*  
 shoe:SG.DEF    boy:DAT.SG.DEF  
 ‘the boy’s shoe’

Skelleftemål thus exemplifies a system in which there is essentially no trace in the noun inflection system of a nominative-accusative distinction, but where the dative has been alive and well throughout the existence of the vernacular. Such a system is not compatible with the claims of BLAKE and WEERMAN & DE WIT about possible case systems, since they assume that the first distinction is always between nominative and accusative or ergative. Looking at case systems in various languages, it can be seen, however, that the accusative is quite often non-distinct from the nominative in paradigms, although other oblique cases may be marked. Thus, in Indo-European languages which preserve the original case system, nominative and accusative are always identical in neuter nouns, and in Slavic, they are also identical in masculine inanimates. In Finnish, the accusative of nouns is always identical with either the genitive or the nominative – the latter is the rule in subjectless constructions. What is special for Skelleftemål and many other vernaculars in Northern Scandinavia is that they have generalized the nominative-accusative identification for all nominal paradigms (and often also many pronominal paradigms). There seems to be little support for the view that the distinction between nominative and oblique is a prerequisite for the existence of a separate dative case.

#### 4.3. Vätömål

To make the picture of the fate of the Germanic case system on Swedish soil complete, we have to mention a development that goes in another direction. In the province of Uppland, a nominative:oblique distinction seems to have survived at least until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. SCHAGERSTRÖM (1882: 52) says that in the vernacular of Vätö in the coastal area referred to as Roslagen, there was a nominative:accusative opposition in nouns with

animate reference, both proper and common nouns [e.g. *Antæ: Anta* (male proper name), *Stina:Stinô* (female proper name)].

This statement is quoted in various later encyclopaedia articles and other general works. However, several circumstances make it fairly clear that the accusative forms SCHAGERSTRÖM was talking about should really be called oblique, that is, they were used also in the traditional functions of the dative case. Thus, he says that the nominative normally was used as subject only (“seldom as object or after a preposition”), whereas the accusative was used “as an object, after a preposition or as a basis for the genitive”. SCHAGERSTRÖM does not distinguish here between direct and indirect objects. He also uses “accusative” as a label for the oblique forms of pronouns. Moreover, the basic paradigm he quotes is clearly that of “weak” nouns, which also in the more conservative varieties, as we saw in the case of Elfdalian above, have a two-case system with nominative opposed to genitive/dative/accusative, with endings analogous to those found in the Vätö vernacular. In Vätö, however, the masculine oblique *-a* has been further extended to male proper names ending in a consonant such as *Magnus:Magnusa*. In contradistinction to the vernaculars we have already looked at, Vätömål also had a viable genitive (SCHAGERSTRÖM 1882: 53) although it was restricted to animate nouns and its formation differs from that of Standard Swedish in that the ending *-s* is added to the oblique form of the noun, (if it is distinct from the nominative), e.g. *Larsas* (genitive of the male proper name *Lars*). By analogy, the ending *-as* has spread also to other nouns, e.g. *Agustas* from *Agust* (male proper name).

The Vätö vernacular shows us that there are several possible ways of reducing one and the same case system – a strict hierarchy cannot be established.

## 5. Scandinavian case systems and markedness principles

Let us now see how the predictions on interaction of case, number and definiteness formulated in section 3 come out when we look at the Scandinavian data, in particular those from Elfdalian.

As seen from Table 1 in section 4.1, the number of case distinctions displayed in the plural of Elfdalian nouns is systematically larger than or at least equal to the number of case distinctions in the indefinite singular of the corresponding nouns. With the exception of “weak” feminine nouns, the same holds if we compare plural forms to singular definites. If it is assumed that the plural is the marked member of the category of number, these facts certainly contradict the principle of inflectional behaviour in typological markedness (GREENBERG’s principle S2). Is there an explanation of this apparent anomaly?

The Elfdalian plural paradigms are of two types: three-member paradigms and dative two-member paradigms. We thus have a separate dative form with all nouns, and an accusative separate from the nominative in a subset of all nouns – the masculine ones. Indeed, dative and accusative marking display rather different behaviours, and should be discussed separately.

The accusative marking on masculine nouns is anomalous not only because it violates GREENBERG’s principle S2 but also because it seems to go counter to assumptions about the interplay of accusative marking and animacy/referentiality hierarchies. Overt marking of direct objects – the prototypical function of the accusative – is cross-linguistically more common with noun phrases that are animate, highly referential and/or highly individuated. It has been assumed (for instance by HOPPER & THOMPSON 1980: 523) that plural noun

phrases are “less individuated” than singular noun phrases, which would predict that they would be less prone to be marked for the accusative. This is also the case in e.g. German, where plural noun phrases do not in general display any distinction between nominative and accusative. It could be argued that the Elfdalian situation is indeed an anomaly – a side-effect of phonological changes that have happened to erase the distinction between nominative and accusative in “strong” masculine singulars. It would then be expected that such an anomalous situation would be unstable diachronically and would not survive for long in a language. Indeed, the accusative is clearly the weakest member of the Elfdalian case system, and seems to be on its way out in modern forms of the language, like in most other vernaculars in the peripheral Swedish area. It is unclear, however, if this process is quicker in the plural than in the singular, and whether there is positive evidence that the particular markedness anomaly that we see in “strong” masculine nouns in Elfdalian is not tolerated in human languages.

As has already been noted, the dative plural is marked on all nouns with a uniform ending *-um*, and is the same for the indefinite and definite paradigms. This is not a unique phenomenon for Elfdalian. In fact, a uniform ending *-um* for dative plurals is also found in older forms of Scandinavian (Old Swedish and Old Norse/Icelandic) and in Old English. In Gothic, there was a uniform ending *-m* in the dative plural but it was preceded by different vowels depending on the type of noun stem. A similar system is found in Old High German, although there seems to have been quite considerable variation, which in Middle High German gave way for a uniform ending *-n* in the dative plural for all nouns. In all Germanic languages, then, there has been a strong tendency to unify dative plural endings, although the results vary in their actual phonetic shape. In Scandinavian, the uniformization of the dative has gone further in that there is syncretism between the definite and indefinite dative forms, as seems to be the case in most of the dative-preserving area in Sweden<sup>7</sup>, and even between singular and plural datives, as we have seen in Skellefteå.

Parallels are found also outside Germanic. Modern Russian has a uniform ending *-am* in the dative plural for all nouns, although older forms of Slavic (like also modern languages such as Polish) had a system quite similar to that of Gothic, with different stem vowels before the ending *-m*. In Russian, the plural forms of other oblique cases such as the instrumental and the locative have also been made uniform across all noun paradigms (endings *-ami* and *-ax*, respectively).

As we saw above, the across-the-board use of the *-um* ending in the dative plural is one of the major factors behind the unexpectedly high number of case distinctions in Elfdalian plural noun paradigms. Here we can also find parallels in other languages. Due to the generalized dative plural ending *-n* in German, all plural nouns distinguish at least two case forms in the plural, with the exception of those which end in *-n* also in the other cases, such as *Frauen* ‘women’. (One could thus say that German plural nouns also exemplify the supposedly non-existent two-case system with dative as one member.) In fact, in some noun paradigms, such as *Arbeiter* ‘worker’, the dative plural (*Arbeitern*) is the only form out of eight that has an ending.

<sup>7</sup> The Dalecarlian vernacular of Orsa (*orsamål* or *ossmol*) is an exception in that there are separate forms for definite dative plurals ending in *-uma*. According to LEVANDER 1909, elderly persons in Älvdalen sometimes used definite dative plurals in *-ume* at the time of his investigation (first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

That a highly marked form has a uniform marking across all paradigms is entirely in accordance with standard assumptions about markedness. GREENBERG (1966: 29) formulates the following principle (S5): “An unmarked form will have at least as many allomorphs or paradigmatic irregularities as the marked form” – that is, we should expect greater uniformity in the shape of marked forms. But it seems that if the tendency towards uniform marking becomes strong enough, it may come into conflict with other assumptions about markedness, such as GREENBERG’s principle S2.

The plural dative endings in Germanic have both managed to survive where other noun endings have disappeared and to spread across paradigms. One possible reason for this may be that the plural dative endings are heavier and thus more salient than other case endings, making them both less sensitive to reductive phonological change and more easily learnable.

In these respects, there are certain parallels between the dative plural and the *s*-genitive in various Germanic languages. Also in the case of the latter, a salient ending has survived the general demise of the case system and even conquered new territory.

## 6. Summing up

In this paper we have looked at the case systems in three Scandinavian vernaculars spoken in Sweden, focussing on two main issues:

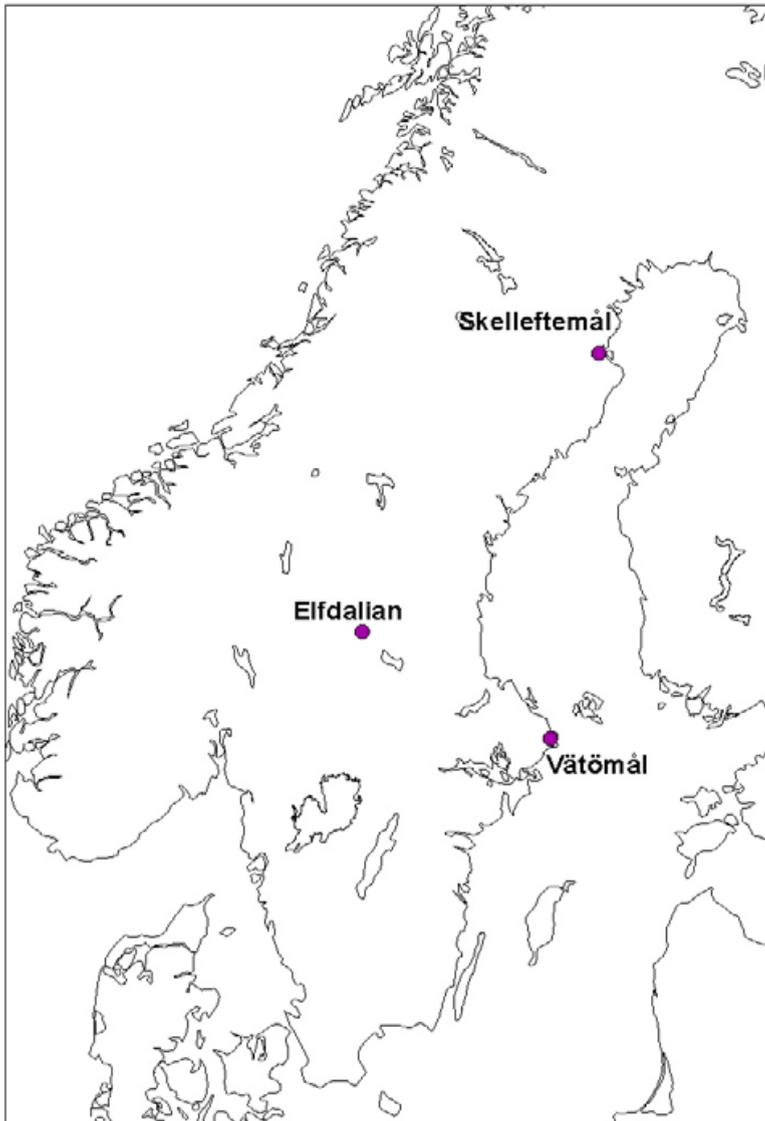
- what they tell us about possible case systems and possible ways by which case systems can break down; among other things, whether they support or contradict the claims on case hierarchies suggested in the literature; and



Map 1: This map shows the present-day extent of the Germanic languages in Europe (disregarding diaspora languages) with the dative-loss area in light grey and the dative-preserving area in dark grey.

- what they tell us about possible interaction of case, number and definiteness in a nominal paradigm; among other things, whether they support or contradict some of the usual assumptions related to the notion of typological markedness.

One of the systems considered in the paper is based on the opposition between the default (nominative/accusative) and the dative cases – an option excluded by the previously suggested generalizations on possible case systems. Our data illustrate also several different ways in which one and the same older four-member case system has been reduced, and our conclusion is that a strict hierarchy here cannot be established.



Map 2: Location of the three vernaculars discussed in the paper

On a superficial analysis, the singular and the indefinite would be the unmarked members of their respective categories, which would predict that the number of such forms would be equal or greater to the marked counterparts. However, we saw already in Section 3 that markedness relations are not unequivocal for definiteness. Indeed, the Scandinavian case systems give additional support to the claim that definite nouns may show more distinctions than indefinite ones. Also, counter to usual assumptions, singular nouns in these vernaculars sometimes show fewer case distinctions than plural nouns. One possible explanation for this is the uniform marking of the dative plural across all paradigms.

One point about morphological paradigms highlighted here is that if one considers not only the total set of opposing members in, say, nominal paradigms but also the sets of oppositions that characterize individual inflectional classes, certain tendencies may come out that are otherwise obscured.

### Abbreviations

ABL	ablative	LOC	locative
ACC	accusative	M	masculine
DAT	dative	NEUT/N	neuter
DEF	definite	NOM	nominative
ERG	ergative	PL	plural
F	feminine	PRET	preterite
GEN	genitive	PRS	present
INDEF	indefinite	SG	singular
INST	instrumental	SUP	supine

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