Report from ScanDiaSyn's 1. Grand Meeting in Leikanger

Date: August 24-28, 2005
Place: Statens hus, Leikanger, Norway
Participants: 50 linguists from Denmark, Finland, Great Britain, Iceland, Italy, The Netherlands and Belgium, Norway, and Sweden (see http://uit.no/scandiasyn/leikanger/6)

The meeting was organised around the following main topics:

1. Presentation of the different networks and projects organised under the Scandinavian Dialect Syntax project umbrella.
2. Presentation/exchange of (previous) experiences from similar research and research collaboration.
3. Presentation of ongoing research on (Scandianvian) dialect syntax.
4. Group work on research topics for ScanDiaSyn.

1. Presentation of the ScanDiaSyn umbrella

Øystein Vangsnes presented the ScanDiaSyn project umbrella which includes the NordForsk network, nationally funded subprojects in Iceland and Sweden, the ScanLex project, and NORMS. For a detailed presentation of the network, see the ScanDiaSyn home page (http://uit.no/scandiasyn/). The different parts of ScanDiaSyn are focusing on the following main goals:

- systematic coordinated investigation into the syntax of Scandinavian dialects, and collecting the material in a database (ScanDiaSyn)
- theoretically driven research on dialect syntax (NORMS)
- collaboration with established networks on dialect syntax (NordForsk)

The **ScanDiaSyn** project proper involves research groups at the following institutions:

- University of Iceland
- University of Faroe Islands
- University of Tromsø
- NTNU Trondheim
- University of Oslo
- University of Aarhus
- University of Lund
- University of Helsinki

The investigation will be carried out at some 450 measure points all over Scandinavia. Half of the measure points will be in Norway and Sweden. The material will be sampled both by means of

orally presented questionnaires and by recordings of free speech. The result will be the first pan-Scandiavian dialect collection ever.
The network grant of 300.000 NOK annually from **NordForsk** will primarily be used to organise annual grand meetings. In addition to the nine Nordic research groups the NordForsk network includes research groups at the following European institutions:

- University of Edinburgh
- University of Padova
- Meertens Institute/SAND (Netherlands)

The **NORMS** project was presented by Peter Svenonius. NORMS stands for "Nordic Center of Excellence in Micro-comparative Syntax". The network is funded by NOS-HS ("Joint Nordic Committee for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences") with 2 mill. EUR over 5 years. The research will be carried out by senior researchers and short term post docs. Half of the money is used for meetings, workshops, and conferences etc. The main research interest is the theoretical investigation of dialectal variation. This will be approached from two main angles. The project will focus on 10 dialect areas (areal approach) and 10 lingusitic features (topical approach).

As a subproject of ScanDiaSyn, the main goal of the **ScanLex** project is to make the future dialect syntax database searchable in all the Scandianvian standard languages plus English. Gunnar Hrafn Hrafnbjargarson explained how the ScanLex lexicon is being created based on multi-lingual corpora.

More generally, Øystein Vangsnes informed that the dialect samples will be transcribed in a way that reflects the actual pronunciation, and in cases where standard orthography is not suitable there will be both a tier with a quasi-phonological transcript and another one with word by word standard othography. Sound files will also be included in the database.

2. Presentation/exchange of (former) experiences from similar research collaboration.

Helge Sandøy presented his experiences from the pan-Scandiavian research project *Moderne importord i nordisk* (**"Modern import words in Scandianvian"**). As for the present situation there are hardly any networks within Scandianvian language research. The success of research networks like *Importord* and ScanDiaSyn will have considerable influence on the future pan-Scandinavian research politics. Because of the considerable similarities in society Scandinavia is well-suited for multi-national research collaboration. Since the Scandiavian languages and dialects all emerge from the same proto-language the area is suitable for a microvariational approach.

Similar to ScanDiaSyn the funding situation for the *Importord* network was very complex. Complex funding means also less time for research. Actually it would have been cheaper to fund some few full time research positions over shorter periods. However there has also been a political intention to involve as many universities and researchers as possible.

On of the main challenges was to standardise the material and research methods across the

participating research groups. But still, the individual researchers (e.g. PhD students) should be granted to choose different theoretical approaches. Sandøy stressed the need to be open-minded both in theoretical and methodological issues.

Another challenge was the coordination of the different subprojects. A logical progression has to be established between the subprojects. The progress of the network is dependent on many different people in different countries. The work is also dependent on technical expertise.

Large-scaled gatherings of the participating groups turned out to be very fruitful, especially for younger researchers. At such meetings they could get in contact with different scholarly backgrounds and in this way broaden their horizon. It is important to discuss many issues in plenary at the grand meetings. Another positive thing with grand meetings is that the participants have to work towards deadlines. This helps the network to finish the project within the scheduled period. The result of the (sub)projects of *Moderne importord* were published in a series at *Novus forlag*.

The need for courses (e.g. in statistics and phonology) was realised too late.

Cecilia Poletto presented the **ASIS**-project (**"Syntactic Atlas of Northern Italy"**). The northern dialects were chosen because they share some well-known grammatical properties and because there little research had been done in this field. The investigation should help one to approach the more crucial theoretical question of whether dialectal variation is radically different from typological variation. The practical main goal is to analyse the geographical variation of single syntactic phenomena in detail. The methodology used in the project is basically derived from Georg Wenker's approach. The different main working steps of the projects can be described as follows:

1. discover phenomena
2. discover the "domain of variation"
3. discover differences across dialects
4. discover descriptive generalisation(s)

Sjef Barbiers and **Hans Bennis** presented the **SAND**-project (**"Syntactic Atlas of the Dutch Dialects"**). The project was described under the following four headings:

(1) Organising: It turned out that a more centralised organisation (i.e. most work concentrated at one research institute and led by one head) is more efficient than a largely "democratic" and wide-spread structure. Nevertheless, the project was quite complex, and organisational and practical issues/challenges should not be underestimated in project as large as ScanDiaSyn.

(2) Funding: There was not sufficient funding to realise the project according to the original plans, e.g. tagging and transcription had to be constricted.

(3) Theoretical foundation/biases: The atlas should be useful for researchers working within different theoretical frameworks also in 50 years. This means that it should be theory neutral but still meet more general theoretical requirements. Among the participants, different theoretical perspectives were prevalent, e.g. generative syntax, language typology, and dialectology. Since the Dutch speaking area expands into Belgium and Northern France as well, different scholarly traditions met in the project. To some extent these different theoretical and scholarly perspectives could be combined in a fruitful way, e.g.:

- variation predicted by (generative) theory
- cross-linguistic generalisations (language typology)
- dialectological overviews

The disadvantages of there being different theoretical interests involved in the project are e.g.:

- different views on the importance of particular phenomena
- which aspects should have priority
- what kind of adequate "theory-neutral" description to chose

(4) Methodology: Since there turned out to be considerable dialectal variation, one decided to run an in-depth investigation of some selected phenomena instead of a broad and shallow approach. However, this strategy has the disadvantage that one risks to miss interesting variation, e.g. in dying dialects. Nevertheless, the main intention of the project is to contribute to linguistic insight rather than cultural conservation and/or revitalisation. The practical implementation of the survey proceeded along the following stages:

- stage 1 = inventorisation:
  - -creating biblioghraphy
  - -running interviews with (dialect-speaking) linguists
- stage 2 = pilot written questionnaire:
  - -not controlled for social variables
  - -424 test sentences
  - -goals:
    - (i) inventory of syntactic variables
    - (ii) first impression of distribution
    - (iii) try out different types of questions
- stage 3 = oral interviews / fieldwork:
  - -controlled for social variables
  - -both interviewer and informant are native dialect speakers in order to avoid accommodation
  - -the following elicitation techniques were used:
    - (i) indirect relative grammaticality judgements
    - (ii) translation tasks
    - (iii) empty slot tasks
    - (iv) completion tasks (with pictures)
    - (v) meaning questions

(5) Implementation of results: The results are published both in a paper version and on the internet. The atlas on the web is dynamic, i.e. the users can define their own queries. As for the the database and the web publishing, the following issues have to be considered:

- freeware/open source software
- flexibility (relational database)
- compatibility with other databases

The former SAND-group is now initiating international collaboration on dialect syntax. The main goal of the **Edisyn**-project (**"European Dialect Syntax"**) is to establish research projects in the different European countries and to promote collaboration between research groups. Meetings involving several countries have been held, but the are still many countries missing, e.g. France, Spain, the Slavic speaking countries, Finland, Germany. Since the phenomena to be investigated are relevant for many European languages and expand across the boarders, substantial EU funding should be justifiable.

A database of European syntactic variation is planned. The database will have a distributive structure: each research group maintains its own database; the different databases will be combined through a common platform. This collaboration requires common or compatible software. One should profit from existing work/achievements, e.g. applications, methods, elicitation techniques etc. In order to ensure fruitful collaboration, one has to keep in contact all the time.

In addition to the geographical interest, a future perspective will be to include diachronic variation.

3. Presentation of ongoing research on dialect syntax.

In the afternoon session of Thursday 25, 8 PhD students and young researchers presented their ongoing work on dialect syntax. The papers at this workshop are will be published as proceedings in a special number of *Nordlyd*.

4. Group work on research topics to be used in ScanDiaSyn.

The topics to be discussed in the group work are part of the inventorisation stage (cf. stage 1 in the SAND-project above). During the spring term of 2005, suggestions for topics were collected from the various ScanDiaSyn groups and published on the internal pages of the ScanDiaSyn homepage. The suggestions have been divided into the following 7 groups according to overarching topics:

1. The pre-field ("forfeltet", CP, Left Periphery)
2. The middle field ("midtfeltet", IP ...)
3. VP-syntax, case and agreement
4. NP/DP structure, articles, possessives ...
5. Complementation, embedded clauses, complementizers ...
6. P-syntax (particles and prepositions)
7. Negation

Øystein Vangsnes ran through all suggestions in plenary and asked for general comments. Cecilia Poletto noted that most of the examples are very short and only concentrate on one specific syntactic phenomenon. By restricting the sentences in this way it is unlikely to detect other interesting phenomena which one did not think of in advance. To avoid this one could collapse some of the constructions into one sentence at the pilot written questionnaire stage (cf. stage 2 in the SAND-project), or just add some more utterances.
The groups were given the following tasks:

1. Select a group leader
2. Provide further examples and/or add new aspects/phenomena/subphenomena
3. Rank the phenomena on a scale from a (=very relevant) to c (not very relevant) with relation to relevancy for (i) the whole research area, and (ii) theoretical interest
4. Improve and/or adjust methodology (also phenomenon-specific)

The main results of the group work were briefly discussed in plenary. Each group will send a more detailed report to Øystein Vangsnes who will organise the suggestions and put them on the ScanDiaSyn homepage. The groups were also encouraged to come up with bibliographical information of interest. A bibliography of previous work on Scandianvian dialect syntax will also be established on the homepage.

Tromsø, 15 September 2005

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