

Null Subjects in Elfdalian

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There are about 3000 speakers of Elfdalian in the north western part of Dalecarlia, Sweden (Sapir 2005). Elfdalian differs from Swedish at all linguistic levels, and it is therefore from a linguistic perspective a language, not a dialect. It has been studied by Swedish linguists since the beginning of the 17th century.

One of the interesting syntactic features is that Elfdalian allows null subjects. This feature is probably an innovation, since none of the Old Scandinavian languages allowed null subjects of this type. In Elfdalian, it is fully grammatical to omit subjects of 1st and 2nd person plural:

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|----|---|----|--|
| 1. | Irum iema.
is-1pl home
'we are home' | 2. | Irið iema.
is-2pl home
'you are home' |
|----|---|----|--|

The verb agreement seems to be of relevance for the null subjects (cf. Rohrbacher 1999, Vikner 1997). Strong verbs are inflected as below – the personal pronouns are also shown, as well as Icelandic verbal inflection and pronouns (Levander 1909:84ff, Ringmar 2005:12):

	Elfdalian	Icelandic
sg.	1. ig bait	ég bít
	2. du bait	þú bítur
	3. an bait	hann bítur
pl.	1. wið baitum	við bítum
	2. ið baitið	þið bítíð
	3. dier baita	þeir bíta

Null subjects seem to have been allowed at least since the beginning of the 17th century; the examples in 3. are from Prytz (1622) and the ones in 4. from 1679 (from Hesselman 1937):

3. siå nu kumbe Lasse Olson atte; **wiljom** gäma bort oss, taste ahn gohr iädå.
look now comes L. O. back want-1pl hide away refl until he goes away
'Look, now Lasse Olsson comes back! We must hide until he goes away!'
4. Kappum rett i hwoss tast **werdum** iär duoller
pour-1pl-imp. right in us, until become-1pl here nice
'let us drink until we become merry here'
5. O **adum** ni diem i bettjin [...] (Levander 1917)
and had-1pl down them in creek-the
'and we put them in the creek' (translation Björklund 1958)
6. A du twajd ferdugan dig nu so **bellum** go aut? (Olsson 1988)
have you washed ready you-refl. now so be-able-to-1pl go out
'are you done washing yourself now so that we can go out?'

However, there is a crucial difference between omission of *wið* and of *ið*, illustrated in 7. and 8.:

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|---|---|
| 7. a. *Nu irum iema.
now be-1pl home
'now we are home' | b. *Wiso kåytum?
why run-1pl
'why are we running?' |
| 8. a. Nu irið iema.
now be-2pl home
'now you are home' | b. Wiso kåytið?
why run-2pl
'why are you running?' |

Null-*wið* seems to require a clause initial position, whereas null-*ið* may occur wherever in the clause.

In this talk, I will concentrate on the following questions:

- a. how have the null subjects in Elfdalian emerged (what has happened in the Elfdalian mind?) and how can the difference between them be explained?
- b. what can the Elfdalian null subjects tell us about the properties of null subjects in other Germanic languages (such as Bavarian and Zürich German) in general?

My theoretical point of departure will be Platzack (2004) and Fuß 2005.

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