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**Towards a Description of the Dialect of Gammalsvenskby:  
Some problematic areas in current grammar description**

## Case Study 1: Distribution of definite vs. indefinite forms of nouns

Trivial restrictions on the use of the indefinite form:

- Only in sg.
- Only with count nouns
- In the pattern *där + vara* ‘there is’:

(1) *Näst paṭṭana jā-dār dūn*<sub>INDEF.SG.</sub>, *o näst gässe 'ō* ‘With the ducks, **there’s down**, and with the geese too’.

**NB:** the definite form occasionally occurs with *där + vara*, but this is rare:

(2) *To ve lēvd üte Pōln, so vā-dār üte skūḷa bḷakk-glāsna*<sub>DEF.PL.</sub> *po skūḷ-bānkja* ‘When we lived in Poland, so there were **the** inkpots in the school on the school tables’.

Outside these cases, the regularities in the distribution of definite vs. indefinite forms are hard to formulate (one should forget about prescriptive grammars and fixed standard languages?)

Very frequent occurrence of the definite form (both SG. and PL.):

(3) *Tom band kvasta*<sub>DEF.PL.</sub> *me kvast-rīse*<sub>DEF.SG.</sub> ‘They made <“tied”> brooms from sorghum’.

(4) *Än-e änt ska fall ütär kvaṭána, tā-ḍe 'ōtär o smittar 'fast-e rinjen 'umm me buskas-skōne*<sub>DEF.SG.</sub> ‘In order for it <dung for heating> not to fall apart, you take again and smear it around with **cattle dung**’.

(5) *Där vā-ḍo brämmen... ja väit, näst gamma stū mäseäitt brämmens-glāse*<sub>DEF.SG.</sub> *üte skōpe, a de drikk vā-ṭätta änt e müte* ‘Earlier, there was brämmen <home-made strong alcoholic drink>, at my granny’s place always stood a **vodka glass** in the cupboard, but to drink, it wasn’t in the habit’.

(6) *Täkkjana*<sub>DEF.PL.</sub> *söüm-dom mä bümäl, o štrözak gära-dom 'ō mä bümäl* ‘They sew blankets with cotton, and the mattress they also make with cotton’.

## Hypotheses:

? The definite form is used when the speakers refer to a repetitive or habitual situation in their household or in their village life ?

? The indefinite form **with** the indefinite article tends to occur when the speakers refer to a non-repetitive situation which is not regarded as habitual and does not belong to a certain routine:

(7) *Ja fōr s̄ate äitt nitt skaft titt po skiffļa* ‘I need to attach a new shaft there on the spade’.

(8) *He līsār äin strō! fron dānna, hon jä-ḍo änt po klink* ‘It shines a ray from the door, it’s, in fact, not on the latch’.

## Case study 2: Occurrence of perfect vs. preterite

121 verbs with *hōa* ‘have’

56 verbs with *vara* ‘be’

Regularities of making the perfect forms and word order with the perfect are strict and show little variation.

(9) *jäta* ‘eat’: *Tēr unde harbana brük’ folke sōa umm däen bait middan, to-dom hōa jäte* ‘There under the carts the people used to sleep in the daytime after noon, when they have eaten’.

(10) *To-de äntän hār jäte inatiñ änt, hōlt ja ’ō de tōa än pār bitar ’inn* ‘When you haven’t eaten anything yet, I liked to take in a couple of pieces’ <of pickled beetroot>.

(11) *knäivöl* ‘wear down’: *Hon hār skūen boṭṭ-knäivla* ‘She has worn down the shoe’.

(12) *sprint* ‘jump’: *Katta jär po būde upp-sprunte* ‘The cat has jumped on the table’.

(13) *sunna* ‘go to sleep’: *Nö jä-ṇ ṇ-sunna* ‘Now he’s gone to sleep’.

Total interchangeability with preterite (many more examples!):

(14) *Katta jär po būde upp-sprunte*<sub>PERF.</sub> ~ *Katta sprant*<sub>SUP.</sub> 'upp po būde

'The cat (has) jumped on the table'.

(15) *Han mado hōa mike färtjént* ~ *Han mado färtjént mike* 'He (has)

probably earned a lot'.

(16) *Tom hōa eda räint-e gjūd üte kättan* ~ *Üte kättan gjūd-dom eda*

*räint-e* 'Today they (have) made the front garden clean'.

(17) *Ja gehēdest gō, män hār grannt bott-e glēmd* ~ *...män glēmd bott-e*

*grannt* 'I needed to go, but I (have) completely forgotten'.

Hypotheses:

? The niche of the perfect is the speaker's desire to emphasise the topicality of an action that has been performed ?

? The specific perfect form is being replaced with a very frequent adverb *räi* 'already' ?

## Conclusions

- There are areas where the distribution of forms is (more or less) strictly regulated; there are grey areas where the regularities in the occurrence are not as clear-cut.
- The border line between specific grammatical meanings and free variation is blurred in grey areas.
- In such cases as Gammalsvenskby, one should probably get rid of the temptation to formulate regularities in the distribution of forms typical of strictly fixed standard languages (which does not mean we must expect too much chaos!)
- Clear-cut specific grammatical meaning can be blurred even if the formal structure remains intact and shows little variation.