Variation and change in the Scandinavian verb phrase

1. Relevance relative to the call for proposals

The Scandinavian languages have a long joint history, and they often show parallel historical developments. This is not unexpected, since they are closely related and have a continued close affinity socio-historically. However, there are cases where the Scandinavian languages show divergent developments. Previous studies have very often focused on older stages where at least the Mainland Scandinavian largely behave the same, and they rarely include more than one of the languages. Little is therefore known about the divergent syntactic development in the period from the 17th century and onwards. The project Variation and Change in the Scandinavian Verb Phrase wants to remedy this by looking at all of the Scandinavian languages from the end of the 17th century to the present. This period is interesting and important for several reasons – notably, this is when the different modern standard languages in Scandinavia are established. Considerable advances in the knowledge of the present-day languages now make the historical study feasible, and important for continued progress. The project contributes to innovation within the field of Scandinavian linguistics with its historical and comparative approach. As noted, little is known about grammatical variation and change during this period, and few historical studies has considered more than one language.

The focus of the project is the verb phrase, which is a core linguistic domain. The project will investigate four related phenomena: verbal particles (1), benefactive constructions (2), resultatives (3) and reflexives (4):

1. Johan kastade ut soporna. (Sw.)
   Johan threw out the trash
2. Johan bakade henne en kaka. (Sw.)
   Johan baked her a cake
3. Johan målade dörren vit. (Sw.)
   Johan painted the door white
4. Så tvättade sig Johan. REFL
   So washed Himself Johan.

These different but related phenomena are all crucial for our understanding of how humans construe events (actions) linguistically, and they show different patterns of variation and change in the Scandinavian languages. The variation partly relates to word order (the order between verbs and particles and the placement of reflexives varies), partly to phonology (the prosodic patterns in particle constructions vary), partly to lexical or semantic factors (the lexico-semantic restrictions on resultatives and benefactives vary). Since the languages are otherwise very similar, and since these specific constructions all concern the same syntactic domain (the verb phrase) and all in one way or another concern the introduction of (object) arguments, the project can address the question of how syntactic variation and change relates to variation and change in other domains, and ultimately contribute to the general question of how human linguistic competence is organized. Almost like in a laboratory, we can investigate the properties of a phenomenon by keeping certain factors constant, while varying others. Unlike previous work, the project will consider the different phenomena together, and include the historical dimension as well as different linguistic domains. In this way, the project can lead to important new insights.

The project manager, Ida Larsson, received her PhD at the University of Gothenburg (2009) with a dissertation on the history of the perfect tense and the structure of participles.
For this, she was awarded by the Swedish Academy and by the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. Larsson has worked on morphological change in the history of Swedish, on syntactic variation and change in the present-day dialects, and in projects concerning Scandinavian Heritage Languages in America. At the University of Oslo she has ongoing collaboration with professor Janne Bondi Johannessen and the Texttaboratory, and she is also involved in other relevant networks (see further below). She has published both in Scandinavian and international channels. During 2015, she is the guest editor of a thematic issue of Norsk Lingvistisk tidsskrift on dialect variation, and a thematic issue of Linguistic Variation on syntactic change. (CV is attached.)

2. Aspects relating to the research project

2.1. Background and status of knowledge
The question of linguistic variation has been at the core of grammatical theory for decades, and the issue of universality vs. variability is at the center of much current debate. Over the last years, there has been an upsurge in so-called micro-comparative studies, with large projects in several countries. These studies have in common that they involve comparison between closely related varieties (dialects) and concern in-depth analysis of variation on a micro-level. The results have given important insights into how languages can vary and how different phenomena best should be analyzed. However, many questions regarding both variability and stability remain, and the micro-comparative work has led to some debate with regard to how macro-level variation should be understood. There is ongoing international work that tries to resolve these theoretical issues (see e.g. Roberts & Biberauer 2012), which the present project will contribute to.

Considerable work has been carried out also in Scandinavia to investigate the syntactic variation in the present-day languages, within projects like NORMS (Nordic Centre of Excellence in Microcomparative Syntax) and the ScanDiaSyn-umbrella that had research groups in all of the Nordic countries. The Scandinavian languages are excellent testing grounds for hypothesis regarding syntactic variation, since they are so closely related, overall have similar syntax, share much of the lexicon, and have similar histories and social situations. This is ideal for micro-comparison. The results from the Scandinavian micro-comparative work provide a good starting point for more in-depth synchronic analyses, as well as for historical studies. The phenomena that will be investigated in the project have been subject to previous micro-comparative studies, but to a varying extent (see section 2.2.4).

The questions of synchronic syntactic variation are closely tied to questions of syntactic change. Diachronic data often give important clues as to how the synchronic system works and how different domains interact, while the synchronic analysis must be able to account for the observed variability. The questions of how linguistic competence (word order, prosody, categorization) varies and changes are still to a large extent unresolved. In particular, it is not clear how a language can show variability at one point in time and have a categorical rule at a later (or earlier) time, and how the apparent gradualness of ongoing change should be understood. Again, looking at the Scandinavian languages is ideal. The Scandinavian languages have a long written history, so it is often possible to trace the origins of the variation. In the present project, as in other micro-comparative work, the aim is to analyze aspects of the synchronic grammars of speakers from the end of the 17th century to the present, to explain why the grammars look the way they do, and in addition how they have changed across time. As noted, the diachronic origin of the observed micro-variation has received rather little attention. There are historical studies dealing with the earlier modern period, but largely considering one of the languages, and often focusing on standardization processes and stylistic variation rather than syntactic change. In other words, there is previous
work on which the project can build, but there are also crucial gaps in current knowledge, both with respect to the synchronic and the diachronic analysis. In addition to the general theoretical problems relating to variation and change, and the gaps in the knowledge of the syntactic developments in earlier modern times, there are unresolved issues with regard to the specific phenomena, and the connection between them. As will be detailed below, the relationship between syntax and prosody needs to be investigated for particles, the varying lexical and syntactic restrictions on benefactives and resultatives need to be considered further, and the status of reflexives is not fully understood. The project aims to fill these gaps.

2.2. Approaches, hypotheses and choice of method
The project builds on previous work on dialect variation in the modern languages but adds the understudied historical dimension. As in much micro-comparative work, it is important that the empirical investigations are informed by theoretical considerations, but also the other way around, that the theoretical development is guided by results from sound empirical studies. The project will investigate the following questions:

• What are the properties of particles, benefactives, resultatives and reflexives in the different older and present-day varieties of Scandinavian, and how are they related to each other and to other aspects of the grammatical system?
• How do these properties change across time, and why?

By addressing these questions the project will shed light on the more general theoretical questions of how human linguistic competence is organized, how different domains in the linguistic system interact, and how variation and change should be understood.

2.2.1. Theoretical approach and general hypotheses
Theoretically, the project starts from the assumption that syntax and semantics are tightly tied together, and from the micro-parametric view that syntactic variation should be analyzed in terms of features of particular items (see e.g. Roberts and Biberauer 2012 and references there for recent discussion). A working hypothesis, then, is that the functional elements that build resultative and benefactive structures vary between languages, that the featural make-up of reflexives vary, and possibly that the category of particles is different in the different Scandinavian languages. However, it seems clear that the variation is not of the same kind for all of the four phenomena. The project will explore the possibility that global properties of a language arise from an interaction of factors in different domains. Another working assumption is that the linguistic system allows for certain types of variation (e.g. that prosodic constraints can be violated), but not other types. With respect to verbal syntax, a starting point is that verbal roots are underspecified (but perhaps not completely unspecified) as to their argument structure, and that arguments are introduced by functional items rather than by the lexical verbs. However, there are also lexical properties that need to be considered for a full understanding of the phenomena at hand.

2.2.2. Choice of method
Methodologically, the project will use corpora for modern and older Scandinavian, as well as acceptability judgments from speakers of the present-day languages. Modern data are an important complement to the historical data. Firstly, despite recent advances in the study of the present-day languages, there are gaps in the knowledge of the phenomena under discussion. Secondly, the different Scandinavian varieties have changed to a varying degree, and the synchronic variation is expected to reflect the historical patterns, at least to some extent. Here, ongoing change in Faroese and Norwegian might be particularly interesting. Moreover, a larger set of methodologies is available for the present-day languages – it is of course not possible to directly study acceptability or pronunciation in older stages.
For present-day data, the Nordic Dialect Corpus (Johannessen et al. 2009) is an excellent starting point, since it covers all present-day dialects, and since it includes audio and video files. There are also other large national corpora available (see the references). In addition to corpus data, the project will collect acceptability judgments from speakers across the Scandinavian languages, mainly through Internet surveys (see e.g. Collins et al. 2009 and Johannessen & Vangsnes 2011 on the methodology). After initial corpus studies, the project will develop and carry out experiments to investigate prosodic variation in detail (see the project plan).

For the historical data, there are large corpora of Danish, Swedish and Icelandic, and a parsed corpus of Faroese (see references). In addition, a recent project in Iceland (led by Ásta Svavarsdóttir) has collected a corpus of informal Icelandic texts (letters) from the 19th century, which will be available for the project. The project manager has also initiated collaboration with a project on Swedish drama dialogue (see Melander Marttala & Strömquist 2001) and the Swedish Språkbanken (the Language Bank) at the University of Gothenburg, to tag a corpus of Swedish drama dialogue. These texts, which cover the period from the 18th century to the present, are ideal for the present purposes, especially since the language is often informal and lies close to the spoken language. Syntactic variation and change is expected to be particularly visible in informal genres. For older Norwegian (as for Faroese), the situation is less ideal, since Danish was long the written language. There is, however, a corpus going back to the 19th century, and collections of texts by Dalen & Hagland (1985) and Venås (1990), in addition to older dialect descriptions (see Nes 2005 and the studies in Sandøy & Jahr 2011 or an overview). Since very few syntactic studies have been done on Norwegian in this period, the project group will necessarily do some work to collect texts and evaluate their usefulness.

2.2.3. The phenomena
Particle verbs, benefactives and resultatives share several properties, and they have all been analyzed as involving small clause structure in the complement of the verb (cf. e.g. the discussion in Ramchand & Svenonius 2002 on particles, Beck & Johnson 2004 on benefactives, and Ramchand 2008 on resultatives). On a small clause account, the object DP is not a direct argument of (only) the verb, but (also) of a predicate that introduces a result state or possessive semantics. In the project, we will investigate whether an account along those lines is too simplistic, and whether an alternative analysis would fare better.

It is clear that these three phenomena concern the introduction of arguments (possibly in similar ways) but there are differences between them. Particles and resultatives can also be argued to have a similar semantics (depending on what is included among the particles): they introduce a target state. Benefactives has an intended end state where the indirect object (the beneficiary) has the direct object, but even in a perfective sentence this state is not necessarily realized (see e.g. Beavers 2011, Larsson 2011). In other ways, resultatives and benefactives pattern together, and behave differently from particles. For instance, verb-particle combinations often have an idiomatic meaning that cannot be predicted from the meaning of the parts. This is not the case for resultatives and benefactives, which have a predictable interpretation.

Also reflexives concern argument realization, but in almost the opposite way: they can have the function of detransitivizing a predicate. Reflexives behave in interesting ways in particle constructions, benefactives and resultatives. An investigation of reflexives can thus contribute to and be informed by the study of the other constructions. By considering the phenomena together, the project will achieve a fuller understanding of argument structure and of the verbal domain. Importantly, there is variation in the constructions across Scandinavian that calls for explanation; see section 2.2.4. below.
2.2.4. The subprojects
The project is concerned with four different aspects of the verb phrase, where we find variation between the Scandinavian languages – variation that is still not well understood. The work is organized in subprojects, but since the phenomena are related both empirically and theoretically, it is necessary that they are also considered in parallel (see the project plan).

Subproject 1: Particles
Some of the properties of particles are the same in all of the Scandinavian languages (see Larsson & Lundquist 2014 for an overview, references and examples). Despite the similarities, there are also well-known differences between the languages with respect to word order in resultative particle constructions (see Sandøy 1976, Svenonius 1996, Toivonen 2003, Hróarsdóttir 2008 and others), as well as differences in phonology (see e.g. Sandøy 1976, 1985, Kristoffersen 2000:288 f., Kuronen 2000, Riad 2014). A starting hypothesis in the project is that the syntactic differences to some extent have independent explanations, relating to differences in prosody or in the general principles of linearization. This would be a welcome result, since it would allow for the same syntactic analysis of particles in (ideally) all of the Scandinavian languages. We will explore the idea that the different word order patterns can be explained in terms of general principles of direct linearization (e.g. Adger et al. 2009, Ramchand 2014). Since there appears to be some diachronically stable variability in word order, we will investigate the possibility that there is some room for re-ordering the output even after linearization has taken place. Here, it seems likely that prosodic and information structural factors play a key role. The study will therefore look closer at the prosody of particles across Scandinavian. The prosodic patterns have not been studied in any detail before.

An account that gives independent explanations for the variation in particle constructions can however hardly fully account for the syntactic variation that we find in Scandinavian. Instead, there are reasons to believe that the particle is categorially different in Swedish than in the other Scandinavian languages, and that this difference is due to historical change in Swedish around the 18th–19th century (cf. Larsson & Lundquist 2014). For instance, there is interesting variation and change with regard to particle incorporation in passives. In addition, there are differences with respect to the co-occurrence of particles and double objects: until the 18th century Swedish (non-prepositional) particles could occur in double object constructions, as they still can in e.g. Norwegian and Icelandic (Collins & Thrainsson 1996, Tungseth 2007). There is no previous account of this difference between the varieties of Scandinavian.

Subproject 2: Benefactives
The study of what here has been referred to as benefactive constructions will in practice include both recipients (e.g. in throw me the ball) and beneficiaries (bake me the cake), i.e. what is sometimes referred to as free datives (but which lack dative morphology in the modern Mainland Scandinavian languages). There is some discussion in the literature as to how different benefactives and recipients are syntactically, and how they relate to double object constructions with verbs like give (see e.g. Tungseth 2006 and Basilico 2008 for opposing views). No doubt, they differ semantically (see e.g. Barðal et al. 2011). The subproject investigates the properties of the constructions further, considering diachronic and synchronic variation in some detail.

While the loss of particles in double object constructions in the history of Swedish is perhaps due to a change in the properties of particles, there are also other changes in the behavior of datives. First, there is variation and change with respect to what the lexical
restrictions on free datives are (see e.g. Thráinsson 2007:230f. and references there). In Mainland Scandinavian, a larger set of verbs seems to have allowed free datives in older stages; examples with verbs that cannot take beneficiaries today occur in Swedish as late as the end of the 19th century (cf. Mørck 2011 on Norwegian). The details of this variation are, however, poorly understood (see Lundquist 2014a for an overview, and references there) and will be investigated in this subproject. Secondly, there is variation (and change) with respect to whether the dative can (or must) be promoted to subject in passives, and what case it has in passives (see e.g. Falk 1997, Platzack 2005; cf. also Holmberg & Platzack 1995). Again, there are historically rather recent changes in several of the languages (Falk 1997 on Swedish, Viðarsson 2014 on Icelandic), which need to be investigated in more detail.

A working hypothesis is that the different changes in the dative constructions are related, and that they at least partly relate to changes in the system of (abstract) case (as suggested by Falk 1997). In addition to contributing to our knowledge of argument structure, the results from the subproject will thus have a bearing on the understanding of case (see e.g. the discussion of different types of structural and non-structural case in Woolford 2006).

**Subproject 3: Resultatives**

There is some variation in resultatives within and across the Scandinavian languages (e.g. with respect to resultatives predicated of instruments, resultatives with unaccusative verbs, and the distribution of reflexives), but it is not yet clear how systematic this variation is. Even within the languages, the varying lexical restrictions on resultatives are not well understood (see e.g. Lodrup 2000, Stensrud 2009, Whelpton 2010). Since there are few previous cross-linguistic studies, the project will investigate the variation mainly by collecting acceptability judgments. This subproject will not include systematic historical corpus studies, since the historical records are presumably too limited to give interesting and reliable results. (Sporadic historical examples will, however, be noted.) The purpose of this (smaller) subproject should be seen in connection to the other phenomena. Resultatives and benefactives cannot co-occur, and resultatives and particles only co-occur in some of the languages. The distribution of reflexives in resultatives is not well understood. For a fuller understanding of the other phenomena, and of variation in the Scandinavian verb phrase, an analysis of resultatives is thus necessary.

**Subproject 4: Reflexives**

Reflexive pronouns have a range of functions, and they appear in e.g. benefactive structures (Sw. *ta sig en öl* ‘take *REFL* a beer’, Barðdal et al. 2011) and resultatives (Sw. *äta sig mätt* ‘eat *REFL* full’). There is considerable variation in the present-day languages, and not only with regard to binding. In the Mainland Scandinavian languages, the reflexive *sig* is used for detransitivization in anticausatives (Sw. *dörren öppnar sig* ‘the door opens *REFL*’), where Icelandic has the verbal suffix (or clitic, Wood 2014) -st. The extent to which the simple reflexive behaves like an argument varies. In Swedish, we can note that the reflexive sometimes (but not always; see Lundquist 2014b) precedes a particle; ordinary object arguments always follow particles. Reflexives can also often precede subjects in Swedish; this is not possible in e.g. Norwegian. Jónsson (2011) argues that the reflexive *sig* is always an argument in Icelandic, and there are cases where Icelandic allows *sig* where it is banned in the other languages (e.g. as answers to questions). Icelandic also has reflexives in impersonal passives (Schäfer 2012); this would argue against its argument status. The aim of the subproject is to investigate the status of reflexives in the different languages. Among other things, the word order patterns in particle constructions and the placement w.r.t. subjects need to be investigated further.
Lundquist (2013) notes that the distribution of reflexives has changed in Swedish, in the last centuries, and that similar changes are on-going in Norwegian. He suggests that the reflexive develops from an argument to a non-argumental voice-marker. This change will also affect the possibility of non-local binding. In this subproject, this hypothesis will be tested in more detail.

3. **The project plan, project management, organisation and cooperation**

The aim of the project is a coherent analysis of variation and change in the verb phrase, where all four phenomena are covered, and where the relationship between them is clarified. It is of course important to coordinate the empirical studies in the subprojects. For instance, a corpus study of word order in particle will include cases with reflexives, as will the study of resultatives and benefactives. However, the focus will be on one or two of the subprojects at a time.

### 3.1. Project plan

1. semester: Kick off conference at the University of Oslo, with all of the project members and other researchers (open call). Write a book proposal based on the conference. Announce PhD position. Work on subproject 1.
2. semester: Hire PhD-student. Continued focus on subproject 1, and subproject 2. Project meeting on the prosody-syntax interface, prepare prosodic experiments.
3. semester: Focus on subproject 1 and 2. Carry out prosodic experiments (fieldwork). Announce postdoc/researcher position.
5. semester: PhD student and project manager on international stay (3 months). Focus on subproject 2 and 4.
6. semester: Focus on subproject 3 and 4.
8. semester: PhD defense. Workshop to sum up findings. Finalize book manuscript.

### 3.2. Project management

The project will be organized under the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Oslo. The project manager Ida Larsson is an Associate Professor in Scandinavian linguistics at the department. She will work 50 % in the project throughout the 4 years.

### 3.3. Organization

In addition to Larsson, there will be one PhD student and one 2-year postdoc/researcher in the project. The PhD student and the postdoc/researcher will focus on one of the subprojects each. The project group also includes six researchers who will contribute with their expertise through project meetings and invited talks, and in joint publications. They include experts covering all of the Scandinavian languages, and with relevant competence in several domains (syntax, prosody, historical change and dialectology). CVs are attached.

**Cecilia Falk, Professor of Scandinavian Linguistics at Stockholm University**

The research of Cecilia Falk has mainly concerned different aspects of clause structure and verb phrase structure in the history of Swedish. Two monographs investigate the development of obligatory non-referential subjects and the development of oblique subject-like arguments.
She has considerable knowledge of the history of Swedish with particular expertise in verbal syntax. This will be highly useful in the project.

Johannes Gísli Jónsson, Lecturer in Icelandic Linguistics at the University of Iceland
Jónsson’s main research area is syntax, theoretical as well as historical, with the main focus on Icelandic, Faroese and (more recently) Icelandic Sign Language. Much of Jónsson’s work relates to dialect syntax, and several topics are highly relevant to the project. He is for instance done considerable work on datives, quirky subjects, nominative objects, ditransitive verbs, reflexives and particles.

Björn Lundquist, researcher in Linguistics at UiT The Arctic University of Norway
Lundquist got his PhD from the University of Tromsø in 2009, with the dissertation entitled *Nominalizations and participles in Swedish*. Since then, he has studied linguistic variation in different projects. He has done extensive work on micro-variation within and between the Scandinavian languages, and recently focused on experimental approaches to linguistic variation, particularly with regard to the verb phrase in Norwegian. His knowledge of reflexives, particles and verbal syntax in the Scandinavian dialects will be important in the project.

Tomas Riad, Professor of Scandinavian Linguistics at Stockholm University
Riad’s main research area is phonology, particularly North Germanic prosody, synchronically and diachronically. He also works on the relationship between prosody and morphosyntax. Since part of the project relates to the prosody of particles, and the syntax-prosody interface, Riad’s expertise is highly useful.

Ida Toivonen, Associate Professor of Linguistics at Carleton University
Toivonen’s research focuses on Swedish syntax and semantics. She is an expert on several of the phenomena that will be investigated in the project. She has explored the phrase structural realization of verbal particles in Swedish and other Germanic languages. In addition, her research examines the interaction between reflexives and verbal particles, and the use of particles as aspect markers. Previous work also includes an analysis of benefactive NPs in English. In more recent work, Toivonen compares resultatives with directed motion constructions in the Germanic languages.

Jim Wood, Lecturer in Linguistics at Yale University
Wood finished my PhD in 2012 at New York University. His thesis *Icelandic Morphosyntax and Argument Structure*, focused on argument structure alternations in the Icelandic vP. He has worked on a number of other topics in Icelandic, including analytic causatives, dative-nominative constructions, and case-marking. Since 2012 he has been leading the Yale Grammatical Diversity Project, which seeks to document an analyze micro-variation across dialects of English. He will contribute with expertise in Icelandic, and theoretical knowledge of verb phrase structure and linguistic variation.

Additional cooperation and networks
The PhD student will participate in the PhD program of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Oslo and will have two supervisors, one of which is the project manager. It will be important to include students and younger scholars in the collaborations, and to contribute to developing a research-oriented teaching environment in Scandinavian linguistics. Master students will be encouraged to write their theses in connection to the project, and to participate in the workshops organized by the project. The project group will cooperate with
the SynSem research program at the University of Oslo, where the project manager is a participant. As noted, there is also collaboration with Swedish Språkbanken and the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavík on corpus development. For digital resources, the project will collaborate with the Textlaboratory (ILN, UiO) with which the project manager already has ongoing collaboration. The project builds on previous dialect-syntactic work, and it can also utilize several existing networks. Larsson and others in the project group were active members in the ScanDiaSyn-umbrella project and in the N’CLAV network on linguistic variation. Continued contact with scholars in these networks will be important. Larsson and Falk are part of the Scandinavian network for historical syntax, which has members in all of the Scandinavian countries, and they organized the last network meeting. Another meeting will be organized by the project. To enable collaboration and coverage of all of the Scandinavian languages, the budget includes funding for shorter research visits as well as two longer international stays for the project leader and the PhD student.

4. Key perspectives and compliance with strategic documents

Compliance with strategic documents
The project ties into the SynSem research program, which is a thematic research area at the faculty of Humanities at the University of Oslo. The Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies at UiO has a strategic aim to strengthen its participation in the Scandinavian and international research arena; the project will directly contribute to this. By including master students and younger scholars, it will also contribute strategically to a more research-oriented teaching environment. Three of the project members (including the manager) received their PhD in 2009 or later.

Relevance and benefit to society
New insights into the nature of linguistic competence and language change are useful in language teaching in school, interesting for e.g. historians and for the general public. The Scandinavian perspective is also highly relevant for teachers and the general public. We intend to publish a discussion of the key findings in journals and magazines that are directed at teachers and the general public.

Environmental impact
Travels will follow the guidelines of the University in Oslo.

Ethical perspectives
In the experiments, the project will use consent forms from the ScanDiaSyn project, and the privacy of the participants will be protected (excluding data that could compromise their privacy).

Gender issues
The project will be directed by a woman. 3/7 members in the project group are women.

5. Dissemination and communication of results

Dissemination plan
The project will publish a volume presenting major results, at a level 2 publisher, in addition to papers in Scandinavian and international journals. For details, see the application form.

References
Hróarsdóttir, Th. 2008: *Verb particles in OV/VO word order in Older Icelandic*. WPSS 82, 43-81.