

SYNTACTIC PROPERTIES OF NORWEGIAN VERBAL MWEs (WG1)

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ABOUT THE STUDY

This poster shows how 859 Norwegian verbal MWEs, idiomatic expressions (IE) and support verb constructions (SVC), distribute over syntactic subtypes. The types reflect two structural aspects of MWEs: their *transitivity*, i.e. the semantic (free) arguments they take, and the *syntactic pattern*, i.e. the selected (fixed) components of the MWE. We also present the results of a pilot corpus study on the morphosyntactic variation of a subset of these MWEs.

SYNTACTIC TYPES

Syntactic pattern	No. of inst.	Example expression with literal and idiomatic translations
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Transitivity type 1: Intransitive, free subject

VP	168	gå på grunn , go on ground, <i>run aground</i>
VN	165	aksle landslagstrøya , shoulder the national team shirt, <i>play on the national team</i>
VNP	75	få avskjed på grått papir , get departure on grey paper, <i>be sacked</i>
VNAdv	19	bite tennene sammen , bite the teeth together, <i>clench one's teeth</i>
VAdvP	14	få tilbake med samme mynt , get back with same coin, <i>be retaliated</i>
VAdv	13	gå galt , go wrong, <i>go wrong</i>
VPP	4	gå fra asken til ilden , go from the ash to the fire, <i>go from bad to worse</i>
VPN	2	slå i hjel tiden , beat to death time, <i>kill time</i>
Misc.	27	Unclassified MWEs

Transitivity type 2: Transitive, free subject and one free object

VNPx	146	blåse nytt liv i x , blow new life in x, <i>revive X</i>
VXP	93	binde X på hender og føtter , bind X on hands and feet, <i>restrict X, hamper X</i>
VXN	29	blåse X en lang marsj , blow X a long march, <i>ignore X, neglect X</i>
VXAdv	26	blåse X overende , blow X on its side, <i>blow X over</i>
VPPx	23	falle i hendene på x , fall in hands on x, <i>be captured by x</i>
VAdvPx	11	brenne inne med x , burn in with x, <i>not get an outlet for x</i>
VNAdvPx	7	dreie hodet rundt på x , twist the head around on x, <i>make X fall in love with SUBJ</i>
VNPPx	5	legge ordene i munnen på x , put the words in the mouth of x, <i>put words in x's mouth</i>
Misc.	26	Unclassified MWEs

Transitivity type 3: Transitive, free subject and two free objects (direct and oblique)¹

VXAdvPx	1	få X inn i hodet på x , get X inside of the head of x, <i>get X into x's head</i>
VXNPx	1	stille X ansikt til ansikt med Y , place X face to face with Y, <i>make X face Y</i>

Transitivity type 4: Transitive, selected subject and one free object (X)

NVX	4	lykken smiler til x , fortune smiles to x, <i>fortune smiles on x</i>
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¹Direct object: X, oblique object: x

CORPUS STUDY ON SYNTACTIC VARIATION

We have used a corpus to study the syntactic variation of a selection of MWEs². The study is restricted to the two most common transitivity types in our data set (type 1 and 2), and the 8 most common patterns of each type, 58 MWEs in total. We searched for evidence of the following syntactic configurations:

1. Passive	Lusa kjennes på gangen.
2. Relativization	<i>Det verste med lediggangen er tiden som må slås i hjel.</i>
3. Cleft	–
4. Topicalization	Fra munn til munn går beskjeden om at det er dumt å gi fra seg fritiden gratis...
5. Pronominalization	<i>Det går faktisk an å ta det sure eplet og bite i det en gang iblant.</i>

We have also recorded evidence of other lexical or morphosyntactic variation, such as variation in the verb, inflection of nouns and adjectives, and determiners and modifiers.

²Leksikalsk bokmålskorpus (LBK) is a 100M token representative corpus of modern Norwegian bokmål developed for lexicographic purposes. Where the corpus returned no matches for a given MWE, complementary web searches were made.

VARIATION

Configuration	No. of MWEs ³
Passive	15/58 (26%)
Relativization	8/58 (14%)
Cleft	0/58 (0%)
Topicalization	9/58 (16%)
Pronominalization	2/58 (3%)

³The number of MWEs showing this kind of variation.

Out of the 58 MWEs, 42 also showed other lexical, morphological or syntactic variation.

DEGREES OF FLEXIBILITY

20 MWEs (34%) occurred in one or more of configurations 1-5.

27 MWEs (47%) did not occur in any of these configurations, but showed other kinds of variation.

11 MWEs (19%) did not show evidence of syntactic variation (except V2 and external modification).

The syntactic variation in our data seems to be independent of syntactic type.

VERBAL OR NON-VERBAL MWE?

The corpus results show that 13 MWEs vary to such an extent that it is difficult to determine their syntactic status. Non-verbal parts of these MWEs occur frequently with idiomatic meaning independently of the verb, e.g. as modifiers in NPs, or they occur with several different verbs rather than with one particular verb.

Example MWE	(få/gi/ha) blod på tann , (get/give/have) blood on tooth, <i>taste blood</i>
Example sentence	Med blod på tann viste de rødkledde stor angrepstilje.
Lit. translation	with blood on tooth demonstrated the red-dressed great attack-will
Id. translation	Tasting blood , the Reds demonstrated a strong desire to attack.

TRANSITIVITY AND PATTERNS

Transitivity type	No. of patterns
1. Intrans., free subject	8
2. Trans., free subject and one free object	8
3. Trans., free subject and two free objects	2
4. Trans., selected subject and free object	1

MOST COMMON PATTERNS

Pattern	No. of instances
V(X)P	261 (168 intransitive, 93 transitive)
VNP(x)	221 (75 intransitive, 146 transitive)
V(X)N	194 (165 intransitive, 29 transitive)

X = free object

PATTERN ALTERNATION

One MWE may have different syntactic realisations. Specifically, our corpus study indicates frequent alternation between the patterns VXN and VNPx. I.e., the free object may be realized either as a direct object or as an oblique object:

VXN	blåse X en lang marsj blow X a long march <i>ignore X, neglect X</i>
VNPx	blåse en lang marsj i x blow a long march in x <i>ignore X, neglect X</i>

Problems for lexical encoding:

Do we list these as separate entries in the lexicon, or as variants of the same MWE?

If these are variations of the same MWE, what is the base form?

SUPPORT VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

In the case of a verb + noun MWE combination, be it intransitive or transitive, there is a distinction to be made between SVC and IE. As a test for this distinction, we suggest relativization (1) followed by verb deletion (2):

SVC **gjøre forsøk (på x)**
do attempt on x
attempt x

(1) *forsøket som han gjorde (på humor) (var mislykket)*
the attempt that he made (on comedy) (was unsuccessful)

(2) *hans forsøk (på humor) (var mislykket)*
his attempt (on comedy) (was unsuccessful)

IE **gjøre slutt på x**
do end on x
end x

(1) **slutten som han gjorde på vårt vennskap ...*
the end that he made to our friendship ...

(2) **hans slutt på vårt vennskap ...*
his end to our friendship ...

Thus, we consider a clause with a SVC as having a nominal predicate (potentially separable from the verb), whereas an IE has a verbo-nominal predicate (solidarity between verb and noun).

SUMMARY AND FUTURE WORK

Our pilot study suggests that the distinction between flexible and fixed MWEs is not a binary, but a gradual one.

What can this variation tell us about the decomposability of Norwegian verbal idioms?

Are inflection, modification, and lexical variation indicators of semantic decomposability?

Where the syntactic status is unclear, should the verb be analyzed as part of the MWE, or as a collocate to a non-verbal idiom?