

# Bare nouns in Middle Norwegian

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## Introduction: bare nouns

(1) *Dæyr nu konongr*  
dies now king

'Now the king dies.' (ÓSHL, 218588)<sup>1</sup>

I will discuss bare nouns that are

- ▶ singular
- ▶ count nouns

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<sup>1</sup>The legendary saga of St. Óláfr, <http://foni.uio.no:3000>

## Mass and plural nouns are excluded

### Mass nouns

(2) *Jeg liker brød*  
I like bread

(3) \**Jeg liker katt*  
I like cat

### Plural nouns

(4) *Jeg liker katter*  
I like cats

(5) \**Jeg liker katt*  
I like cat

Cf. e.g. Longobardi (2001)

## Point of departure:

- ▶ Old Norwegian (ON) allows bare nouns in contexts where Modern Norwegian (ModN) does not (e.g. Nygaard 1905, Dyvik 1979).

(6) \**Nå dør konge*  
now dies king

(7) *Nå dør kongen*  
now dies king.the

Although the basic difference between ON and ModN is established, very little is known about bare nouns in the period *in between*, i.e. **Middle Norwegian** (MidN) (ca. 1370–1550).

When, and how, were bare nouns lost?

Investigations of MidN

- ▶ fill an empirical gap
- ▶ may shed new light on theoretical and typological questions concerning bare nouns and DP syntax more generally

# Outline

- ▶ A more detailed overview of the situation in ON and ModN
- ▶ Typology and development in other languages – hypotheses
- ▶ MidN
- ▶ Sketch of a syntactic analysis
- ▶ Conclusion

## Modern Norwegian

Article system consisting of

- ▶ indefinite article (Bokmål *en, ei, et*, Nynorsk *ein, ei, eit*)
- ▶ suffixed definite article (*-en, -a, -et*)
- ▶ preposed definite article with adjectives  
(double definiteness: *den gule skjorta* 'the yellow shirt')

Articles are generally **required** in contexts where nouns are referential.<sup>2</sup>

(8) *Jeg har en katt*  
I have a cat

(9) *Katten heter Buster*  
cat.the is.called Buster

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<sup>2</sup>For some exceptions, cf. Borthen (2003), Julien (2005, chap. 7) and Halmøy (2010).

Nouns can be bare in *predicate* contexts

- ▶ The noun does not have a referential function (Faarlund et al. 1997, Longobardi 2001)

(10) *Han er lærer*  
he is teacher  
'He is a teacher'

Articles are used with *subjectively characterising* predicates (Dyvik, 1979)

(11) *Han er en god lærer*  
he is a good teacher  
'He is a good teacher'



## Old Norwegian

No article system in the modern sense.

Bare nouns could be interpreted as both definite and indefinite.

- (12) *Oc tækr nu sol upp koma*  
and takes now sun up come

‘And now the sun rises.’ (ÓSHL, 220668)

- (13) *Rane het maðr*  
Rani was.called man

‘There was a man called Rani.’ (ÓSHL, 218592)

Nouns could also appear with the **precursors** of the modern articles.

- ▶ *hinn/-inn*: often referred to as a def article even in ON, but more limited distribution<sup>3</sup>

(14) *þa mællte svæinen lios lios lios.*  
then said boy.the light light light

‘Then the boy said: Light, light, light’ (ÓSHL, 218738)

- ▶ *einn*: still a numeral in ON (Faarlund 2004, 56, Börjars et al. 2016, 11)
- ▶ Dyvik (1979): *einn* takes on a restricted article function in ON. Marks *specific* reference.

(15) *kæmr at hanum æínn ogorlegr golltr*  
comes towards him one/an awful hog

‘One/an awful hog comes towards him’ (ÓSHL, 219112)

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<sup>3</sup>*Hinn* as a preposed, free form is reserved for contexts including adjectives, but differs from the modern article *den* in important ways, see e.g. Faarlund (2009).

# Typology

- ▶ Articles are important in ModN and many other present-day Germanic and Romance languages
- ▶ Other languages, e.g. most Slavic languages, lack them altogether (e.g. Bošković 2008)
- ▶ Implicational relationship wrt. *definiteness* (Longobardi, 2001)
  - ▶ If a language allows *definite* bare nouns, it also allows indefinite bare nouns.<sup>4</sup>
  - ▶ **Modern Icelandic**, Celtic, Hebrew

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<sup>4</sup>But cf. Dryer and Haspelmath (2013) for counterexamples.

## Diachronic development in other languages

Previous research on related languages: e.g.

- ▶ Swedish (e.g. Leijström 1934, Brandtler and Delsing 2010, Skrzypek 2012, Stendahl 2013, Stroh-Wollin 2015)
- ▶ Danish (e.g. Jensen 2007a,b, Heltoft 2010)
- ▶ Faroese (Börjars et al., 2016)
- ▶ English (Crisma, 2011)

**General observation: The definite article is older.**

- ▶ Icelandic still only has the def article, no indef article (Thráinsson, 2007, 2)
- ▶ Faroese: freely occurring indef bare nouns in *Seyðabrævið* (1298), def bare nouns restricted.

**However** – Stroh-Wollin (2015, 16 and ref. there) on Swedish:

- ▶ the *precursor* of the def art is older, BUT
- ▶ the def and the indef article reached their modern status as *obligatory* (in)def markers **at the same time**
- ▶ around the mid-15th century
- ▶ ...“even though there are no doubt scattered counterexamples to be found.”

# Hypotheses

Two different hypotheses emerge from the previous research.

1. Norwegian went through at stage at which bare nouns could only be indefinite (→ Icelandic).
2. Definite and indefinite bare nouns were lost more or less at the same time (→ Swedish).

# Middle Norwegian

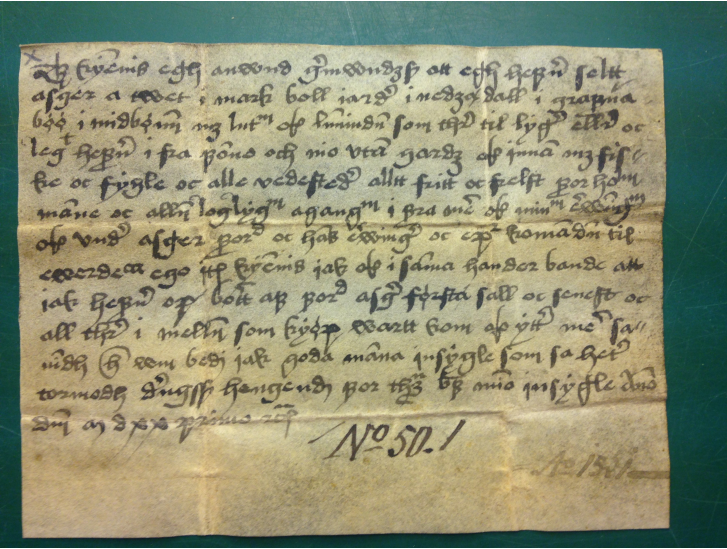


Figure 1: DN IX.505

## Data

Sample of 97 charters from *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, bare nouns cannot be automatically searched for in any digital MidN corpus → manual investigation

The charters date from the period 1371–1562.

Mixed Norwegian provenience, but they generally exhibit little influence from Swedish and Danish.

**Principle of excerption:** bare nouns that would no longer be possible in ModN.

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<sup>5</sup>Available in print and at  
[http://www.dokpro.uio.no/dipl\\_norv/diplom\\_field\\_eng.html](http://www.dokpro.uio.no/dipl_norv/diplom_field_eng.html).



## Chronology

Bare nouns are found throughout MidN, even in the most recent documents.

Some of the very latest instances:

- (16) *at... Signe tager then arff            allen... oc eigj **broder son***  
that... Signe takes that inheritance all...    and not brother son  
'that... Signe gets all of the inheritance, not the nephew.' (DN XI  
708, 1562)

- (17) ...at *erligh velbirdig man* mester torber olson vor ssogne  
...that honest wellborn man master Torber Olson our parish  
*herre talede till ewind hørland ppaa hoffz vangen*  
master spoke to Ewind Hørland on Hoff's field

'...that a/the honest, wellborn man master Torber Olson, our parish master, spoke to Ewind Hørland on the field of Hoff.' (DN XXI 853, 1541)

- (18) ...oc var *ther i bastuff...*  
and were there in bath.room

'and they were there in the bathroom' (DN IV 1066, 1514)

The data thus seem to suggest that the complete loss of bare nouns was

- ▶ a relatively **recent development**
- ▶ possibly more recent in Norwegian than in Swedish.

... “scattered counterexamples” (Stroh-Wollin, 2015)?

Table 1: Bare vs. non-bare nouns in early vs. late MidN

Period	Bare nouns	Non-bare nouns	Total
1371–1432	24 ( <b>16.2%</b> )	124 (83.8%)	148 (100%)
1463–1562	34 ( <b>14.2%</b> )	206 (85.8%)	240 (100%)
Total	58 (14.9%)	330 (85.1%)	388 (100%)

Bare nouns are

- ▶ slightly less frequent in late MidN
- ▶ but not significantly so ( $p = 0.3433$ )<sup>6</sup>

Suggests they are not “scattered counterexamples” (archaisms/relics).

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<sup>6</sup>Equality of proportions test.

## Definite vs. indefinite bare nouns

Do we find evidence of a stage at which Norwegian only allowed bare nouns with an *indefinite* interpretation?

Again, late MidN is the most relevant period. I will focus on data from ca. 1460 onwards.

## Definite interpretation

Nouns often appear with *hinn/-inn*:

- (19) *tinget* 'the assembly', *preste boled* 'the support of the local priest',  
*torssdagen* 'the Thursday'... (DN XXI 853, 1541)

However, **def bare nouns are also found.**

- (20) *at... Signe tager then arff            allen... oc eigj broder son*  
that... Signe takes that inheritance all...    and not brother son  
'that... Signe gets all of the inheritance, not the nephew.' (DN XI  
708, 1562)

**broder son** 'nephew':

- ▶ Signe's brother's son, previously mentioned (anaphoric reference)
- ▶ Kinship term

Def interpretation may arise through inference.

(21) *...oc var ther i **bastuff**...*

and were there in bath.room

‘and they were there in the bathroom’ (DN IV 1066, 1514)

(22) *oc vt ad **dør** gek oc Hiarandher Stæffansson bondhen i*

and out of door went too Hiarander Sæffansson master.the in  
*gorden med honum*

farm.the with him

‘And the master of the household, Hiarandher Stæffansson, also  
went out through the door with him.’ (DN II 1016, 1501)

(23) ...kom for oss i *sakerssthy* i domkerken i forde  
...came before us in sacristy in cathedral.the in aforementioned  
*Bergwen oldermannen aff Brygghen ok nogre aff*  
Bergen master.of.guild.the of Bryggen and some of  
*køpmennen...*  
merchants.the

'...the master of the guild and some of the merchants came before us in the sacristy of the cathedral in aforementioned Bergen...' (DN VI 610, 1490)

Ex. 21 – 23: Bare nouns denote parts of buildings.

- ▶ The relevant buildings are present in the universe of discourse.
- ▶ Common knowledge that these buildings have doors, sacristies...
- ▶ Could also be seen as inalienable possession



Somewhat similarly:

(24) *fførste sethe han migh vm fadh med sikh...*  
first put he me around plate with him

‘At first, he let me eat at the table with him’ (DN IV 1029, 1498)

In the universe of discourse, **fadh** ‘plate’ can be identified as the plate around which the people in the household used to gather for meals.

**So:** Bare nouns with a definite interpretation seem to have been possible in late MidN.

Observations wrt. their distribution

- ▶ Often complements of prepositions ( → *Seyðabrævið*, 1298, Börjars et al. 2016)
- ▶ Bare nouns denoting parts of buildings are mentioned by Nygaard (1905). Continuity from Old Norse.
- ▶ Kinship terms.

## Indefinite interpretation

Indefinite nouns mostly appear with *einn*

- (25) *eth sath tynggh* 'a constituted assembly', *eth wittne* 'a witness', *eth arbysth* 'a crossbow', *en knif* 'a knife', *eth slaggh* 'a stroke' (DN II 1079 1525)

Difficult to quantify – hard to tease the numeral and the article apart.

## Possible indication of a new grammatical function:

*einn* can be found in contexts of **non-specific reference** ( $\leftrightarrow$  ON, Dyvik 1979)

- (26) *Er myn kerlige bøn tiill E. N. atti mig en grun*  
is my humble request to Your Honour owe me a property  
*nider paa Strandenn hos E. N. gaardt fore fulle leige*  
down at Strandenn by your honour's estate for full rent  
*tiill en siøbodt ellir i par hus...*  
for a shack or a pair houses

'My humble request to Your Honour is that you let me a property down at Stranden by your honour's estate for full rent for a shack or a couple of houses.' (DN X 633, 1531)

## Some instances with bare, indefinite nouns

- (27) *thi att ther stander... wtj logen at broder werder*  
because that there stands... in law.the that brother becomes  
*broder arfuj...*  
brother heir...

'Because it says... in the law that a brother shall inherit from his brother... (DN XI 708, 1562)

No brother has been previously mentioned or can be inferred.

**However:** The charter cites the law – may reflect an older stage.

- (28) *...ath Osstæ kom tiil migh ghaende... och bad sigh almessæ*  
...that Osstæ came to me walking... and asked refl alms.sg  
*aff migh*  
of me

'...that Osstæ walked over to me... and asked me for alms' (IV 1029, 1498)

- (29) *...ena mark guls betaladh jnnan en maneth ok halff mark gulds*  
...one mark gold paid within a month and half mark gold  
*betaladh korsmessa i war*  
paid Cross.mass in spring

‘... one mark of gold paid within a month and half a mark of gold paid by Cross Mass in spring...’ (DN XI 249, 1482)

**But note:** *halfr* ‘half.’ Swedish allows bare nouns at a particularly late stage in contexts like this (Leijström, 1934, 181).

- ▶ Does *halfr* function as a quantifier?
- ▶ If so, not a bare noun.

## Ambiguous cases

- (30) ...*at erligh velbirdig man mester torber olson vor ssogne*  
...that honest wellborn man master Torber Olson our parish  
*herre talede till ewind hørland ppaa hoffz vangen*  
master spoke to Ewind Hørland on Hoff's field

'...that a/the honest, wellborn man master Torber Olson, our parish master, spoke to Ewind Hørland on the field of Hoff.' (DN XXI 853, 1541)

The "honest and well born man" has not been mentioned before, and cannot be inferred, but is identified uniquely by means of two appositions.

Both def and indef article possible in ModN (and English)

Several similar instances (both men and women, different adjectives)



## Intermediate conclusion

Bare nouns can be found even in late MidN. Their loss is rather recent.

Recall the two hypotheses:

1. Norwegian went through a stage at which bare nouns could only be indefinite.
2. Definite and indefinite bare nouns were lost more or less at the same time.

No clear evidence of 1.

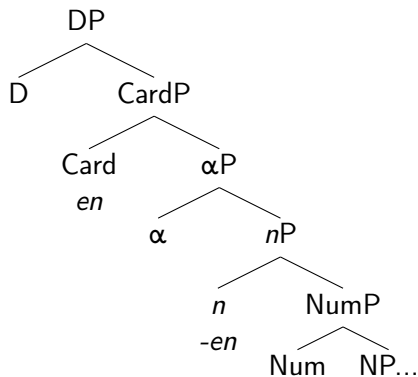
2 is more compatible with the data.

**However:** Reason for caution in some (most?) of the indef cases.

*Def* bare nouns were possibly retained for longer than indef bare nouns.

## Sketch of a syntactic analysis

**Starting point:** Julien's (2005) analysis of nominal phrases in Modern Scandinavian.<sup>7</sup>



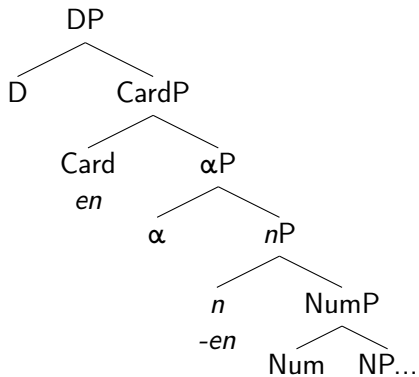
DP, *n*P, NumP and NP obligatory;  
“essential to the interpretation” in  
Modern Scandinavian

The indef art is generated in CardP,  
like numerals

The def art is generated in *n*P

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<sup>7</sup>Simplified version.



D must be identified:

- ▶ Overt determiner in D, or
- ▶ Agreement with lower heads (movement)
- ▶ This prevents bare nouns

Def nouns: D Agrees with *n*, a [Def] feature

Indef nouns: Agreement with Card, number and gender features.

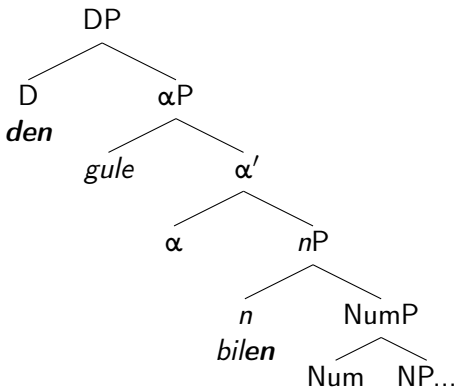
**Note:**

1. Indefiniteness is not [-Def] feature, but the *absence* of [Def]
2. Definiteness/referentiality have *two* sources: *nP* and DP

Both *nP* and DP may be overtly realised – def DPs with adjectives

(31) *den gule bilen*  
the yellow car.the

(32) *\*gule bilen*  
yellow car.the



Movement of *n*P to Spec-DP blocked by  $\alpha$ P (Julien, 2005, 29)

## How is MidN different?

Diachronic insights from Stroh-Wollin (2015) (Swedish)

Two sources of definiteness/referentiality in Modern Scandinavian (but different technical implementation from Julien):

Stroh-Wollin's dP  $\approx$  Julien's nP

Three diachronic stages:

1. No definiteness marking (EdgeP-NP)
2. Optional definiteness marking (EdgeP-(dP)-NP)
3. Obligatory definiteness marking (DP-dP-NP)

**MidN is at stage 2:**

nP is optionally present, but still no DP (as a functional category).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. also Lohndal (2007) and Faarlund (2009) on the DP in earlier Norwegian. Main point in the present context: the def. article is generated below D.

## Optionality:

- ▶ *nP* (dP) present “only if the speaker chooses to express definiteness explicitly” (Stroh-Wollin, 2015, 27)
- ▶ not necessary in PPs and particularly with kinship terms, parts of houses...

## Evidence of *nP* occurring without DP in MidN

(33) *ad wi varom i nedre garden...*  
that we were in lower farm.the...

(DN II 983, 1495)

## ModN

(34) *i \*(den) nedre gården*  
in \*(the) lower farm.the

## The role of DP

The ModN stage, without bare nouns, is reached when DP is introduced as an obligatory functional category.

- ▶ Lander and Haegeman (2014), Stroh-Wollin (2015), Börjars et al. (2016)

Bare nouns seem to correlate with other syntactic properties arguably related to D, notably **null arguments** (Tomioka 2003, Bošković 2008, Barbosa 2013, Walkden 2014, Kinn 2016).

Null arguments are retained throughout MidN, like bare nouns (Kinn, 2016).

Similar chronological development corroborates inherent connection.



## What about the indefinite article?

It seems possible that the indefinite article became obligatory *before* the definite article.

Did the modern, indefinite article emerge *before* DP?

Recall: according to Julien (2005) there is no [indef] feature, and the indefinite article is generated in CardP, not *nP*.

The numeral *éinn*

- ▶ may have been reanalysed/grammaticalised as an indef article without any strict syntactic relation to D
- ▶ This development may have been completed **before** D became obligatory.

## Conclusion

- ▶ Bare nouns are found throughout MidN.
- ▶ There is no clear evidence that MidN went through a stage at which bare nouns could only be indefinite.
- ▶ I have sketched a syntactic analysis whereby the loss of bare nouns is connected to the rise of D as an obligatory functional category. It is possible, however, that the *indefinite* article arose independently of this.

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