

# Inverse case attraction in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish

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This article compares the distribution of case forms in third-person plural pronouns (*deldem* ‘they/them’) with restrictive relative clauses across Danish, Norwegian Bokmål, and Swedish. The analysis is based on two new studies of pronoun case in subjects and prepositional complements in Norwegian and Swedish, as well as results from three previous studies of the construction in Danish. The findings reveal frequent deviations from the norm, with nominative forms appearing where oblique is expected, and vice versa (e.g. *Tak til de<sub>NOM</sub> der gør en indsats* ‘Thanks to they who make an effort’ and *Dem<sub>OBL</sub> der gør sig umage, belønnes derfor* ‘Them who make an effort, are rewarded therefore’). The article discusses standard grammatical descriptions, particularly those regarding deviations from the main rules: in Danish and Norwegian, nominative is only used for subjects, whereas in Swedish, it extends to other roles, such as predicatives. Oblique case, on the other hand, is limited to objects and prepositional complements. The article rejects the so-called *article analysis*, which interprets nominative forms in oblique contexts as articles, arguing instead that nominative use in prepositional complements is better explained by *inverse case attraction*. This phenomenon occurs when the head of a relative clause takes its case from the relative pronoun, rather than from its syntactic function. Regarding subjects, the findings confirm the validity of the main rule in Norwegian and Swedish. In Danish, however, the use of oblique case is better explained by alternative mechanisms, such as the *anaphora rule*, rather than inverse case attraction. The anaphora rule, a variant of the main rule, restricts the use of nominative case to anaphoric (or cataphoric) subjects. Pronominal subjects that are made identifiable by other means – such as deixis or a determinative adjunct, like a restrictive relative clause – take the oblique case.

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