

# Deaccented verbs in Swedish

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## Abstract

Deaccenting of verbs in Swedish has previously been briefly described in the literature. It has been said to occur in verbs in particle verb constructions, lexicalized phrases, before indefinite plural objects and some specific constructions. This study shows a wider variety of deaccented verbs. It shows that it can take place in the whole particle verb construction before another constituent, before definite singular objects as well as before prepositional phrases functioning as adverbials.

## Introduction

In this article, we present a small study on deaccenting of verbs in Swedish. We look at some instances where the verb is deaccented before and incorporated into a prosodic word together with its object or following constituent, much like a particle verb, where the verb is deaccented before its particle. The phenomenon is briefly described in previous research.

Myrberg & Riad (2013) mention deaccenting of content words. According to them, deaccenting occurs in three types of phrases (p. 260):

1. lexicalized phrases such as *röda MATtan* ‘red carpet’
2. some names such as *Röda KORSet* ‘Red Cross’
3. particle verbs such as *hoppa UPP* ‘jump up’

In all these cases, the non-final word is deaccented. Myrberg & Riad (2013) state that these phrases look much like compounds, since they behave as what they call one maximal prosodic word. In their account, the maximal prosodic word can contain only one accent. The difference in relation to compounds is that the stress is to the right in deaccented phrases, whereas it is to the left in compounds. Since the pitch accent associates with the head, which in these cases is the second word, the initial word is deaccented in the three cases mentioned. According to Riad (2012), the reason why it is possible to have deaccented lexical words in running speech is because culminativity is non-obligatory at the level of the maximal prosodic word in Swedish.

One phenomenon not mentioned by Myrberg & Riad (2013) is deaccenting of verbs that are not part of particle verb constructions. This kind of deaccenting is mentioned by Myrberg in her

dissertation about the intonational phonology of Stockholm Swedish (2010). She describes deaccenting in particle verbs and lexicalized phrases, such as *hänga LÄPP* ‘be sad’, lit. ‘hang lip’ and *spela KORT* ‘play cards’ (p. 81). However, she also states that verbs (including auxiliary verbs) can be deaccented when they are followed by a plural indefinite object (p. 82), as in sentence 4.

4. *Jag ska laga kopiatÖRer.*  
‘I’m going to mend copying machines’  
(Myrberg, 2010, p. 82)

Here the verbs *ska laga* are deaccented. She also points out that this applies to whole particle verb constructions as well, as in 5.

5. *Hon bryter sönder SAXar.*  
‘She breaks scissors’  
(ibid.)

Here *bryter sönder* is deaccented. Myrberg notes that the scope and constraints of this phenomenon have not been thoroughly studied.

Anward & Linell (1975) studied lexicalized phrases, which they found to receive a ‘summarizing accent’ (*sammanfattningsaccent*), where the non-final word is deaccented. However, they also mention syntactic constructions where the object is replaceable by another object with a similar semantic meaning, which can receive “sammanfattningsaccent”. Some examples are 6 and 7.

6. *dricka VIN (öl, kaffe, vatten)*  
‘drink wine (beer, coffee, water)’  
(Anward & Linell, 1975, p. 107)
7. *lukta BRÄNT (skit, mat, gott)*  
‘smell [like] burnt (shit, food, good)  
(ibid.)

Here the non-final word is deaccented.

The aim of this study is to describe different types of deaccenting of verbs in Swedish, both those types which have been described in previous research, which can be corroborated by our empirical data, and other types that are present in our material, which to the best of our knowledge have not been touched upon yet. We do not present a thorough analysis of the phenomenon, but point to some interesting findings worthy of further investigation.

## Material and method

The material for this study was not recorded for the specific purposes of the present research question, but to be used in a game application. This means that the material is not controlled to show the full range of how deaccenting of verbs works, but it will provide a hint for further investigation. The persons recorded were between 19-32 years old and they were all from the Stockholm Region. There were 4 men and 2 women and in total 800 different sentences was recorded. 600 sentences differentiated between non-focal nouns with accent 1-associated noun suffixes (the definite singular suffix *-en/-et*) and with accent 2-associated noun suffixes (the indefinite plural suffix *-er/-ar*), as in example 8. 200 sentences differentiated between non-focal verbs with accent 1-associated verb suffixes (the present tense suffix *-er*) and with accent 2-associated verb suffixes (the past tense suffix *-te*), as in example 9.

- 8. a. *Anna såg falken i trädet.*  
‘Anna saw the falcon in the tree.’
- b. *Anna såg falkar i trädet.*  
‘Anna saw falcons in the tree.’
- 9. a. *Solen bleker Lovisas kläder.*  
‘The sun bleaches Lovisa’s clothing.’
- b. *Solen blekte Lovisas kläder.*  
‘The sun bleached Lovisa’s clothing.’

When going through the material, we discovered several cases where the verbs were deaccented. We decided to look further into this phenomenon. We went through all the material, and noted every instance of deaccenting. The sentences were then classified into different syntactic categories. F0 curves were extracted in Praat.

## Results

In our material, we found instances of deaccenting in both lexicalized phrases and in particle verbs, as would be expected according to Myrberg & Riad’s categorization. The final constituents in these cases were associated with a word accent, as is expected. One example of a deaccented verb in a lexicalized phrase occurred in the following sentence:

- 10. *Gabriel stöper ljus på julen.*  
‘Gabriel makes candles at Christmas.’

*Stöper* is deaccented and *ljus* carries the word accent. The deaccenting also occurred in the corresponding past tense sentence.

An example of deaccenting of a verb in a particle verb construction is shown in sentence 11.

- 11. *Charlotta fryser in mycket bär på sommaren.*  
‘Charlotta freezes a lot of berries in the summer.’

*Fryser* is deaccented and *in* carries the word accent.

We also found the kind of deaccenting that Myrberg mentions in her dissertation, the kind where a verb is deaccented when followed by an indefinite plural noun phrase. An example is shown in sentence 12.

- 12. *Amanda planerade rutter med hjälp av GPS.*  
‘Amanda planned routes with GPS.’

Here, the speaker deaccented the verb *planerade* only in this case, not in the corresponding definite singular noun phrase sentence, *Amanda planerade rutten* (‘the route’) *med GPS*. This is shown in figure 1 and 2.

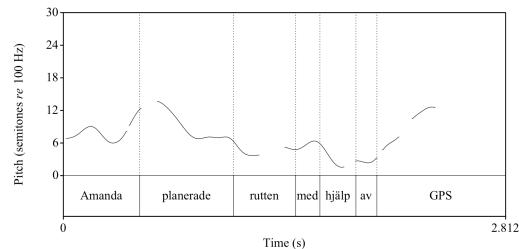


Figure 1. ‘Amanda planned the route with GPS.’

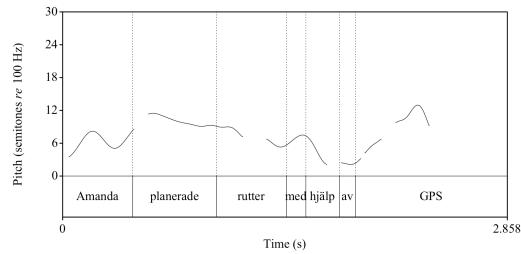


Figure 2. '*Amanda planned routes with GPS.*'

There were also deaccented particle verbs, which is also briefly touched upon by Myrberg (2010, p. 82). This is shown in figure 3.

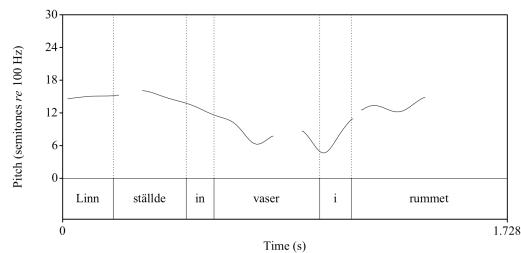


Figure 3. '*Linn put vases in the room.*'

Here, the whole particle verb construction *ställde in* is deaccented, not just the verb *ställde*.

Furthermore, in VPs with auxilliary verbs, both the auxiliary and the main verb can be deaccented, as is shown in figure 4, where *måste byta* is deaccented. This example can be compared to sentence 4 above.

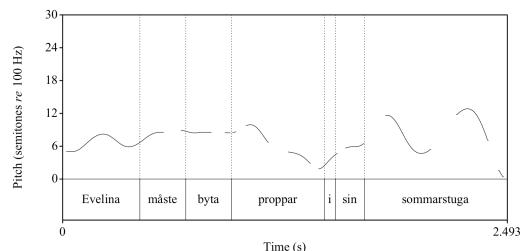


Figure 4. '*Evelina has to change fuses in her summer house.*'

Apart from these more expected findings, which corroborate previous research on the phenomenon, we found three types of deaccenting that to the best of our knowledge have not been mentioned in previous literature. First, deaccenting can occur when the object is not indefinite plural, but definite singular, as in figure 5.

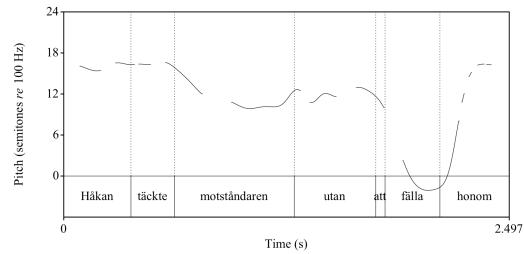


Figure 5. '*Håkan covered the opponent without tripping him.*'

Here, the phrase is not a lexicalized phrase, so the deaccenting of the verb *täckte* cannot be caused by that. The verb is not a particle verb, and, as mentioned, the noun phrase is definite singular, not indefinite plural.

Second, not only objects can follow the deaccented verbs but also PPs, where the PP functions as an adverbial, as in figure 6.

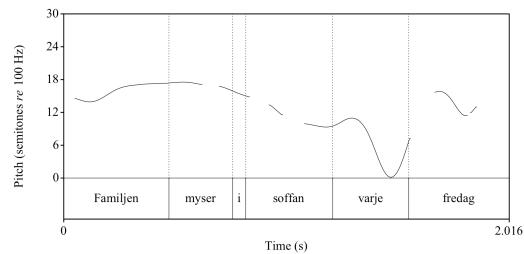


Figure 6. '*The family cuddles in the sofa every Friday.*'

The third type is a mixture of some previously mentioned types. They bear similarities to the type that Anward & Linell (1975) describe, where some verbs are prone to be deaccented in similar constructions but with different objects, see sentence 6 and 7 above. Examples from our material, with the verb *satte* 'put', are shown in figure 7, 8 and 9.

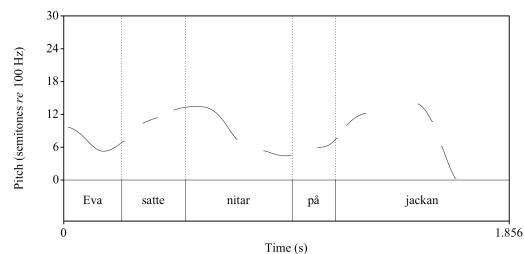


Figure 7. '*Eva put rivets on the jacket.*'

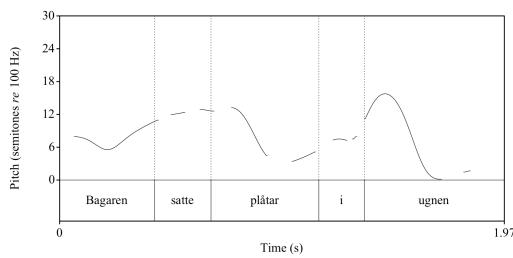


Figure 8. 'The baker put trays in the oven.'

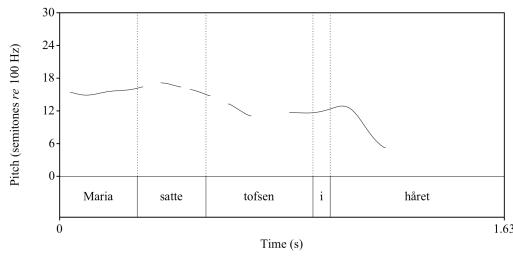


Figure 9. 'Maria put the hair-tie in the hair.'

In the first two examples above, the objects are indefinite plural, and notably, in the third one, the object is definite singular. The verb *satte* seems to be easily deaccented. The difference between these examples and those in Anward & Linell is that their examples are only indefinite singular cases, whereas in our material, both indefinite plural and definite singular seem to be able to be accompanied by deaccenting.

When it comes to particle verbs, there is one more interesting finding. To make sure that our speakers would put accents on the verbs we needed to record, adverbials were inserted between the verb and the particle, since we assumed that the speakers then might treat the constituents as separate prosodic words. However, the speakers had a few different strategies to mark particle verbs nevertheless. Figure 10 shows an example where the verb is deaccented and forms a prosodic word together with the adverbial, which receives the word accent.

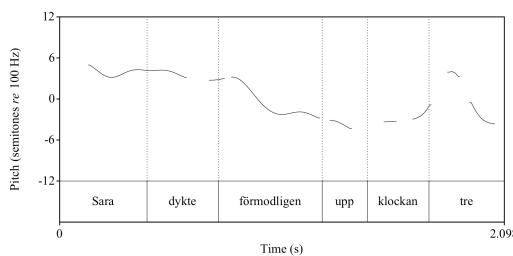


Figure 10. 'Sara probably showed up at three.'

This type is mentioned by Myrberg & Riad (2013) as well.

Another strategy is shown in figure 11, where the speaker forms one prosodic word of the verb, the adverb *and* the particle. The particle carries the word accent.

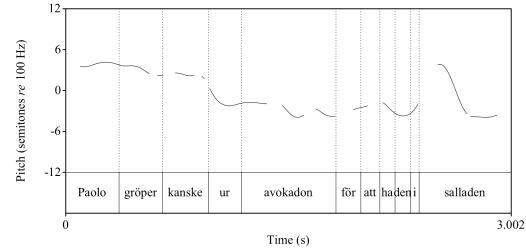


Figure 11. 'Paolo maybe scoops out the avocado to put it in the salad.'

Finally, figure 12 shows how the verb forms a prosodic word on its own, but the adverbial *kanske* 'maybe' gets deaccented before the particle.

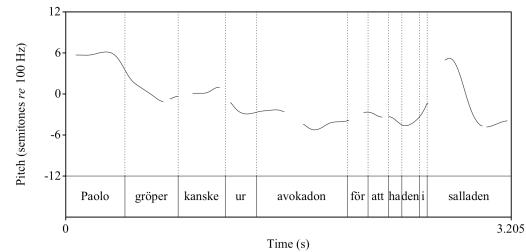


Figure 12. 'Paolo maybe scoops out the avocado to have it in the salad.'

## Discussion

As can be seen in the data, the whole VP, or the VP and a PP, forms one prosodic word with only one word accent, which in these cases always is located on the NP/PP (the object/adverbial). This deaccenting has been previously described in relation to Swedish word accents, but our material showed a wider range of occurrence of the phenomenon than has hitherto been described.

As stated, our purpose is not to provide an exhaustive analysis, but to point at new research possibilities. This phenomenon needs to be studied more closely and more systematically in order to get a full picture of how deaccenting works. We do not know how common the phenomenon is, since we cannot provide statistical data from this study, as the material was recorded for another purpose. Another question concerns what the motivation for deaccenting is. Is there any pragmatic or semantic reason to deaccent the verbs? Are there verbs that can never be deaccented and in that case, why?

## **Summary**

This article has shown a wide range of cases where verbs are deaccented. We have both corroborated previous research findings by e.g. Myberg & Riad and Anward & Linell with empirical data, and presented new cases of deaccenting of verbs. A systematic analysis of these other types of deaccenting is desirable and remains to be undertaken.

## **Acknowledgements**

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