Abstract

Olofsson, Arne, arne.olofsson@hum.gu.se, Professor, Dept. of English, University of Gothenburg, Sweden: “Future in change: How long will the infinitive marker att be retained after temporal kommer?” Språk och stil 18, 2008, pp. 143–155.

In Swedish, there is no inflectional verb form to indicate future time. To some extent the present tense can be used, but two constructions use auxiliaries. The main forms are traditionally given as skall and kommer att, with the latter cited as having the infinitive marker att of the main verb linked to it, much like the tradition for ought to in English grammar. Bona fide modal auxiliaries in Swedish take an infinitive without the infinitive marker att, and kommer has been developing in that direction for the last few decades. Standard grammars and usage guides still tend to regard the use of kommer plus a bare infinitive as only marginally acceptable.

The present article discusses the position today of kommer on a cline where the extremes are the full main verb and the bona fide auxiliary. Corpora of newspaper texts show that the dropping of att after kommer occurred marginally in the period from the 1960s through the 1990s, with strong acceleration starting around 2000. A recent experiment in which Swedish university students translated two sentences from English into Swedish demonstrated two things very clearly: (1) The dropping of att after kommer is characteristic of young speakers and very much age-related; and (2) The dropping of att increases for all age-groups when there is a distance (created by interposed words) between kommer and the infinitive of the main verb. A report in English on the experiment has been e-published in Nordic Journal of English Studies 6:1.

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