Several ways of being together: A case study of Swedish sociative markers

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In some languages, a marker used for joint or collective action (a sociative marker) is also used to mark what I will call *centripetal* motion, or motion from several directions into a single point (following the use of the term by Dickey 2005 to describe one of the meanings of the Slavic verbal prefix *s-*/*z-*). For example, English together colexifies these two meanings (*working together*, *glue the pieces together*) while in Russian these meanings are disexpressed (Haspelmath 2023) (*rabotat' vmeste'* work together', *s-kleit' detali* 'glue the pieces together').

Swedish offers an opportunity to study the expression of these meanings in more detail, since it has three sociative markers that to some degree overlap in meaning, but also differ in their scope of extended meanings and in their syntactic functions. Example (1) illustrates *ihop*, *samman* and *tillsammans*, that are all translation equivalents of English *together*.

(1) Swedish (Germanic<Indo-European: Corpus "Familjeliv: Känsliga rummet")

Du	*har*	*säkert*	*inte*	*mer*	*som*	*binder*	*er*	***samman***
you	have	probably	not	more	that	binds	you	**together**
än	*andra*	*som*	*varit*	***tillsammans***	*länge*		*och*	*har*
than	others	who	been	**together**	a.long.time		and	have
barn		***ihop***.						
children		**together**						

'You probably have no more that binds you together than others who have been together for a long time and have children together.'

In this talk, I present the results of a corpus-based study of these three markers, analyzing the syntactic and semantic properties of each marker using a sample of 500 examples for each form from a social media corpus (Forsberg et al. 2025).

Tillsammans occurs exclusively as a a free adverb. *Ihop* occurs both as a free adverb and as a verbal particle, forming semantic and syntactic complex units with verbs (particle verbs). *Samman*, in modern Swedish, is mainly used as a particle.

The main meaning expressed by verb-cum-particle combinations with *ihop* and *samman* is centripetal motion, including implosion, and downwards motion. As is typical of directional markers (see Dahl 2024), particle verbs with *ihop* and *samman* also have a range of extended meanings, based on a centripetal spatial metaphor, such as accumulation, confusion, collision, mental breakdown and fabricating and inventing. As verbal particles, *ihop* and *samman* function as "aspectual bounders" (Bybee and Dahl 1989: 85-86), i.e. adding telicity to the verb. In some cases, such as *mögla ihop* 'become completely mouldy', *ihop* seems to add a sense of total affectedness, or "maximal extent" (Dahl 2024: 13).

As free adverbs, *tillsammans* and, to a lesser degree, *ihop*, specialize in the expression of joint action and do not have resultative uses. A simplified summary of the results is shown in Table 1.

	tillsammans (adverb)	*ihop* (adverb)	*ihop* (particle)	*samman* (particle)
joint action	+	+		
centripetal motion			+	+

Thus, I argue that there is a correlation between the boundedness of the marker and its semantics. This is consistent with the idea of diagrammatic iconicity (Bybee, 1985) in that meanings more relevant to the verb are coded closer to the verb. A hypothesis to be tested on a larger sample of languages would be if the centripetal meaning always correlates with a higher degree of boundedness to the verb, in the case where a language has two sociative markers differing in boundedness.

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