

Reflexive possessive 'sin'

In English when we see a statement like “*She talked with her neighbour about her car*” it is assumed that the first person mentioned (She) is talking with her neighbour about her own her car (in bad English “She’s car”) and not the neighbour’s car. Swedish has a way to remove this potential ambiguity by the use of *sin*, *sitt* and *sina*.

So by **sin**, **sitt** and **sina** we can easily distinguish between:

- **Hon pratade med grannen om hennes bil.** *She spoke to the neighbour about the neighbour’s car.*
- **Hon pratade med grannen om sin bil.** *She spoke to the neighbour about her (own) car.*

This distinction does not exist in English, which can give rise to confusion (and require clarification about who you are actually referring to).

When do we use the Swedish *sin*, *sitt*, *sina*?

We use this reflexive possessive pronoun when we say that the noun belongs to the subject in the sentence.

Hon talade om sin bil. *She talked about her (own) car.*

The word **sin** links back to the subject (**hon**), and means that the car belongs to the subject.

We use **sin** in this example, because **sin** is the **en**-word version – and the word **bil** is an **en**-word. If it was an **ett**-word instead, let’s say **hus**, then the sentence would look like this:

- **Hon pratade om sitt hus.** *She spoke about her (own) house.*

We would use **sitt**, because this is the **ett**-word version of this reflexive possessive pronoun. **Sin** and **sitt** are used when the noun is singular (just one thing).

If the noun is in plural, you would use the plural-version (regardless of whether the noun is **en** or **ett** in singular) – **sina** – like this:

- **Hon pratade om sina bilar.** *She spoke about her own cars.*

But if she was talking to her neighbour about the neighbour’s house, or cars, the sentences would look like this:

- **Hon pratade med grannen om hennes hus.** *She spoke about her house(s).*
- **Hon pratade med grannen om hennes bilar.** *She spoke about her cars.*

So the important thing is that the noun belongs to the subject of the sentence. If so, you use **sin**, **sitt**, or **sina**.

Only use in third person!

Sin, sitt, sina are only used in this way for the third person – both singular and plural. So, in other words, this only kicks in when you talk about someone else (not **jag** or **du**). It could be **han** or **hon**, or **de**. It could also be when you use people's names when you talk about them in third person.

However, it is important to remember that we only use **sin, sitt, sina** when it is in the object position. We do not use it when the noun is a part of the subject.

Hon pratade länge med sin granne. *She talked for a long time with her neighbour.*

Here, **hon** is the subject and **sin granne** is the object.

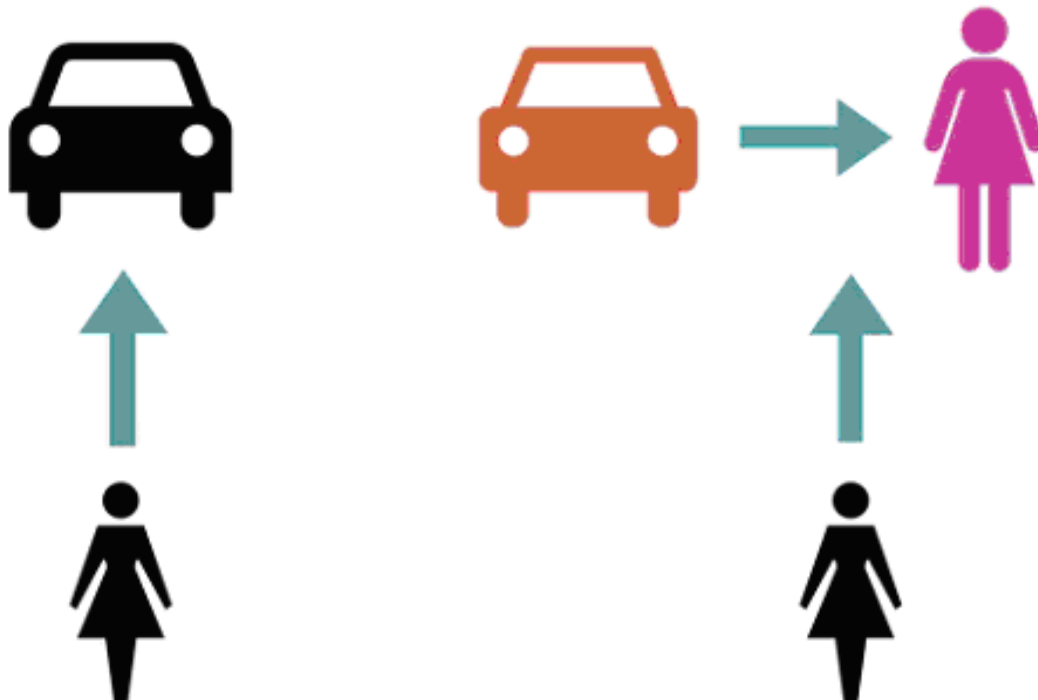
It can never be a subject

Hon pratade länge med sin granne. *She talked for a long time with her neighbour.*

Here, **hon** is the subject and **sin granne** is the object.

Hon och hennes granne pratade länge. *She and her neighbour talked for a long time.*

But here, **hon och hennes granne** are together the subject. In this case, we use **hennes** instead as **sin/sitt/sina** can never be a part of the subject in a sentence.



Hon var glad över **sin** bil.

*She was happy
about her (own) car.*

Hon var glad över **hennes** bil.

*She was happy about her
(the other woman's) car.*

The future of Swedish sin

Interestingly, according to research, this distinction is become more blurred – especially among young people who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue.

They are less likely to use **sin**, **sitt**, **sina** and would instead use **hans**, **hennes** or **deras**. They are also particularly likely to use **hans**, **hennes** or **deras** after a preposition, such as **på** or **av**.

So for example: **Vem är han arg på?** *Who is he angry at (/with)?* **På hans mamma.** *(At) his mother.*

Whereas those who have Swedish as a mother tongue are more likely to say **På sin mamma**, in this case.

Resources

1) Joakim at Say It In Swedish (**in English**, skip to 0:45 to start).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XAUtgTb3jc&ab_channel=SayItInSwedish

2) Joakim at Say It In Swedish, a refresher and continuation of the above (**in English**)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHhaC8VvYzk>

3) Peter at SFI explains reflexive pronouns; sin, sitt and sina (**in Swedish**)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeACs5nSi0Q&ab_channel=PeterSFI