

Project: *Main/Embedded Clause Asymmetries in the Scandinavian languages (MECAS)*

Project members (alphabetical order):

- Johan Brandtler, Lunds universitet
- Piotr Garbacz, Lunds universitet
- Gunnar Hrafn Hrafnbjargarson, Lunds universitet
- David Håkansson, Lunds Universitet
- Anna-Lena Wiklund, Lunds universitet

Background

The background of our project is best described by two papers written by Christer Platzack in the 80s (Platzack 1987a,b), where he demonstrates for Swedish that even though it is possible to formulate characteristic features or rules that help us distinguish embedded clauses from main clauses, there are also clauses that share properties of both and therefore are not as easily classified (see also Andersson 1975). By way of illustration, consider the five descriptive characteristics frequently used in grammar classes to help students identify embedded clauses in Swedish (cf. Platzack 1987a):

1. It cannot appear alone.
2. Sentential adverbs appear before the finite verb.
3. The auxiliary *ha* (have) can be omitted.
4. It is introduced by a subordinate conjunction (complementizer).
5. The conjunction is immediately followed by the subject.

How do we classify e.g. exclamative clauses of the kind *Att han inte kom!* (that he not came) according to these criteria? These appear alone, thus qualify as main clauses by (1) but pattern with embedded clauses with regard to the remaining properties (2)-(5). Embedded verb second clauses constitute another case in point; *Han sa att han hade inte läst boken* (he said that he had not read the book). These appear to be main clauses with respect to property (2) but embedded clauses with respect to properties (4) and (5). Classification with regard to property (1) depends on whether the subjunction should be ignored in this test and classification with respect to property (3) poses yet another problem; if the auxiliary is omitted, we have no finite verb to determine the presence or absence of property (2). To complicate the matter a little further, the subordinate conjunction can in fact be dropped. If we move the object of the embedded clause to the position immediately following the subjunction; *Han sa att boken hade han inte läst* (he said that the book had he not read), the clause counts as a main clause by (1) (if we choose to ignore the subjunction for this purpose), (2), (3), and (4) but the clause still has to be introduced by a subordinate conjunction (5), which tells us it is an embedded clause. Some of the problems, as Platzack suggests, are immediately solved when we take the hierarchical structure into consideration. Others, however, remain. Our wish is to gather the relevant empirical generalizations reached since the time of Platzack's publications and analyze these from the viewpoint of what we know about grammar today. The partly different backgrounds of the five project members will help us investigate the area from syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, as well as sociolinguistic viewpoints. In addition, both synchronic and diachronic aspects of embedding are on our research agenda. The fact that our recent research areas display overlappings (both theoretically and topic wise) gives us a solid base from which the project can develop.

Empirical base

All of the above listed properties and related issues have gained attention within the field recently, increasing the empirical base. Root (main clause) phenomena in general formed the topic of two workshops; a NORMS workshop on Root phenomena and the Left Periphery, at the University of Tromsø, May 19-20, 2008; a workshop on Root Phenomena, at ZAS (Berlin), Sept. 2-4, 2009. Exclamatives have also been the topic of a NORMS Workshop at the University of Tromsø, 22 – 23 October 2007. Semantic and syntactic (a)symmetries between the V2 word order and the non-V2 word order in Scandinavian embedded clauses have been extensively discussed in a series of papers lately, see e.g. Bentzen et al. (2007), Wiklund et al. (2007), Julien (2007), Brandtler (2008), Wiklund et al. (2009), Hrafnbjargarson and Wiklund (2009), Petersson (2009), Wiklund (2010), and Hrafnbjargarson and Wiklund (2010). Data from Icelandic (Angantýsson 2001, Angantýsson 2007), Northern Norwegian (Bentzen 2007), and from the Swedish dialect of Övdalian (Garbacz 2006, 2010, Submitted) that concern verb placement asymmetries between main and subordinate clauses have forced us to revisit many of the dominating assumptions about verb placement in Scandinavian. Auxiliary-drop has been investigated for Norwegian and Swedish in Julien (2000) and is now apparently appearing also in varieties of Icelandic. Other topics relating to main/embedded asymmetries that have been discussed lately concern subordinating conjunctions (cf. Stroh-Wollin 2002 on Swedish) and referential null subjects (see Håkansson 2008 on Old Swedish). The above listed works are merely a tiny part of what has been written on the topics but constitute a representative sample of what will be of relevance for the present project.

The start up phase – aims

What is missing, according to us, is a systematic investigation of recent findings within the field, investigations that we expect will lead to the identification of new correlations between the phenomena at issue and potentially a modification of the assumptions (empirical as well as theoretical) that dominate our descriptions of the Scandinavian languages today and our attempts to explain why these languages behave the way they do. The aim of the start up period is threefold (the final part constitutes the main goal, as mentioned above):

- Gather the generalizations formulated in recent works in the form of a database (a report).
- Identify correlations in the database that will enable us to formulate specific hypotheses.
- Write a project plan based on the hypotheses formulated.

Focal points of PoE

Our work during the project start up will center around five specific topics relating to the research interests of the project members. Along the lines of the above listed aims, the start up phase will involve the creation of a database containing empirical generalizations from each of the five research areas, the formulation of hypotheses, and the writing of a project plan.

(i) Declarative/exclamative symmetries - Brandtler

It is well-known that complements to semi-factive predicates (such as *know*, *discover*) may take V2-complements in Swedish, parallel to complements to assertive predicates. In contrast, complements to emotive factive predicates as well as non-assertive predicates do not allow the V2 word order. This observation has posed a problem for any approach to embedded V2 which is based on the semantic/syntactic properties of embedding predicates. In what sense is the presupposed complement to a semi-factive predicate similar to the 'asserted' complement of an assertive predicate? And in what sense is the presupposed semi-factive complement different from the equally presupposed (emotive)

factive complement? In his dissertation (Brandtler 2010), Johan Brandtler shows that an approach that builds on the notion of truth-evaluability can account for these properties and in addition that there is a similarity between emotive factive complements and Swedish *att*-exclamatives on the one hand, and semi-factive complements and Swedish *wh*-exclamatives on the other, a similarity that has hitherto gone unnoticed. This finding points to symmetries between declaratives and exclamatives that may tell us more about embedding, perhaps by virtue of a clearer picture of what it is not.

(ii) Main/embedded asymmetries in Övdalian - Garbacz

Having shown in his dissertation that the embedded word order of Traditional Övdalian (the Övdalian spoken by the oldest speakers today) differs from that of standard Swedish in several respects (Garbacz 2010), Piotr Garbacz wishes to expand the empirical base by examining present day Övdalian, which is believed to display a word order that is more similar to standard Swedish with regard to e.g. verb placement. The plan is to investigate (1) the position of the finite verb with respect to sentential adverbials, (2) the possibility of topicalization in embedded contexts (so-called embedded V2), (3) the possibility of placing light elements between the complementizer and the finite verb in embedded clauses without an overt subject (so-called Stylistic Fronting), (4) the possibility of omitting the auxiliary *åvå* (have), and (5) the possibility of omitting the conjunction. A comparison of Traditional Övdalian and Present day Övdalian on the one hand and these two varieties and Swedish on the other will enable us to look for correlations between the phenomena investigated.

(iii) Apparent absence of main/embedded asymmetries in Icelandic - Hrafnbjargarson

The standard assumption has long been that topicalization is allowed rather freely in Icelandic embedded clauses. This assumption is based on the observation that non-subject fronting is possible in environments where other V2 languages, such as Swedish, display restrictions. Although Hrafnbjargarson has questioned this assumption recently, it is clear that Icelandic differs from the rest of the Scandinavian languages in that main clause word order has a wider distribution. Subject-initial V2 word order is always possible and in fact preferred in embedded clauses where the adverb may precede the finite verb. Thus, on the above list of criteria used to identify embedded clauses in Swedish, no. 2 cannot be used for Icelandic. In fact, only one of the criteria, no. 1, seems to identify embedded clauses in Icelandic. The auxiliary *hafa* 'have' may not be omitted. Exclamatives display main clause word order and may be introduced by a subordinate conjunction in Icelandic. Finally, the conjunction is not always immediately followed by the subject. In some cases the conjunction is even directly followed by the verb. These facts seem to indicate that certain asymmetries go hand in hand, at least within the Scandinavian languages. We expect that a thorough study of a language like Icelandic, where superficial asymmetries appear to be missing, will lead to new findings, new diagnostics, and a deeper understanding of embedding.

(iv) Diachronic and sociolinguistic cues to embedded main clause word order - Håkansson

In Modern Swedish, there is a significant difference between main and subordinate clauses as far as the word order is concerned. Whereas finite verbs generally precede sentence adverbials in main clauses, the internal order is diametrically opposed in subordinate clauses. Much of the previous research on the syntax of the Scandinavian languages has highlighted that this word order difference has developed during Early Modern Swedish (1526–1732), and in Old Swedish (1225–1526), subordinate clauses are considered to have the same word order as main clauses. However, David Håkansson has shown that it is possible to find the Modern Swedish subordinate clause word order also in Old Swedish (Håkansson 2008), a fact which calls for further investigation and potentially

for modifications of some of the assumptions that determines our understanding of main/embedded word order asymmetries. For this diachronic part of the project, Håkansson intends to investigate the variation in subordinate clause word order during the history of Swedish both from a synchronic and a diachronic point of view. This way, our project also involves a sociolinguistic aspect.

(v) Embedding and restructuring - Wiklund

In her book (Wiklund 2007), Anna-Lena Wiklund shows that (varieties) of all Scandinavian languages display restructuring (clause union), which is a particular kind of embedding where two clauses appear to be fused or partially overlapping, not only with respect to argument structures but also with regard to the functional structure of the clause. A closer look at main/embedded clause asymmetries shows a clear correlation with non-restructured/restructured clauses. The more main clause properties, the more structure (or features). The less restructured, the more structure (or features). The plan is to investigate how much of what we label embedding can be accounted for in terms of restructuring, hypothesizing that embedding means presence of restructuring from a syntactic point of view. For this purpose, deictic shifts and its relation to main/embedded asymmetries will be examined.

Workshop on Main/Embedded Asymmetries in Scandinavian, LU, April 14-15, 2011

The start-up phase will conclude with a two day workshop on main/embedded asymmetries in the Scandinavian languages, organized by the five project members. The workshop will be arranged at Lund University.

1st call for papers: November 15

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