Configurationality and Subjecthood

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On revient toujours à ses premières amours

- Syntax

- French Stylistic Inversion

- Olivier Bonami, Danièle Godard and Jean-Marie Marandin: Constituency and word order in French subject inversion.

Extreme Configurationality

- SVO languages have a dedicated subject position/ dedicated subject positions. Only elements in that position are subjects

- SOV languages have no such positions.

- Hubert Haider (?)

- SVO languages: French, English, Scandinavian languages …

Constituency and word order in French subject inversion

- Extraction triggered inversion: le miroir où se voit Paul … (BGM)

	inverted NP	subject	object
1. binding of *se*	yes	yes	no
2. quantitative *en* construction	no	no	yes
3. bare Qs *tous, beaucoup*	no	yes	no
4. floating *beaucoup (. . . de N)*	no	no	yes
5. *de N* in negative context	yes	no	yes
6. *combien* extraction	yes	no	yes
7. number agreement with finite V	yes	yes	no
8. person agreement with finite V	no	yes	no

FIGURE 1 Properties of subjects, objects and inverted NPs in ETI

- French Locative inversion: Dans le lac se reflétait un chateau. (BGM)

Icelandic and Swedish presentational constructions

Most researchers on Scandinavian languages have assumed that the indefinite NP in this construction is an object but as we will see, this assumption has been repeated more often than it has been checked.

Icelandic

- **Það** hafði **einhver köttur** *alltaf* verið í eldhúsinu.

- EXPL had some cat always been in kitchen-the

- Það hafði *alltaf* **einhver köttur** verið í eldhúsinu.

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- Það hafði alltaf *verið* **einhver köttur** í eldhúsinu.

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Indefinite NP within the VP

- Það hafa hlaupið **nokkrar rollur** yfir veginn.

- EXPL have-pl run some sheep across road-the

- Það hefur **einhver** stolið hjólinu mínu.

- EXPL has somebody stolen bike mine

- *Það hefur stolið **einhver** hjólinu mínu.

- EXPL has stolen somebody bike mine

Subject properties of indefinite NPs in non-canonical positions

Subject properties in Icelandic (from ZMT)

    position just before or just after the tensed verb

    obligatory reflexivization

    subject ellipsis

    controlled element in equi deletion: cannot be demonstrated

    raising

Reflexivization

- Það hafa **margir furðufuglar** komið hingað í dag með einkennilegar uppfinningar **sínar**/*þeirra.

- EXPL have many strange-fellows come here to day with peculiar inventions their-refl/*their-non-refl

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- EXPL have come many strange-fellows here to day with peculiar inventions their-refl/*their-non-refl

Subject Ellipsis

- Það hafa komið **margir furðufuglar** hingað í dag og farið í kröfugönguna.

- EXPL have come many-NOM strange-fellows-NOM here to day and gone to demonstration-the.

Raising

- *Jón telur **það** vera **hesta/hestar** í kirkjugarðinum.

- John believes there to-be horses-ACC/NOM in churchyard-the

- Jón telur vera **hesta** í kirkjugarðinum.

- John believes to-be horses-ACC in churchyard-the

Swedish

- **Det** hade (*en katt) alltid (*en katt) varit **en katt** i köket.

- EXPL had (*a cat) always (*a cat) been a cat in kitchen-the

- *Det har stulit någon student cykeln.

- EXPL has stolen some student bike-the

- Hade **det** alltid varit **en katt** i köket?

Reflexivization and subject ellipsis: first discussed in Börjars and Vincent (2005)

- Det kom **en man** med **sin**/*hans fru.

- EXPL came a man with his-refl/his-non-refl wife

- Det har kommit **en student** och frågat efter dig.

- EXPL has come a student and asked after you

Raising

- ?Johan anser **det** ha varit **för många möss** i badkaret.

- John considers EXPL have been too many mice in bathtub-the

- **Det** anses ha varit **för många möss** i badkaret.

- EXPL consider-PAS have been too many mice in bathtub-the

Neither case marking nor position uniquely identify subjects. Based on ZMT, Halldor2004 and others, it seems to have been assumed that, as casemarking was not the relevant coding property, it had to be position but the facts above suggest that this is not generally true. Nor is it an either/or condition, since it seems one can find "quirky" subjects in VP internal position as shown in the following example.

- Það hefur að sögn rekið nokkra hvali á land með kálfunum sínum í óveðrinu í nótt.

- EXPL has reportedly driven/drifted some whales-ACC to land with their calves in the bad weather in night

- Some whales have reportedly beached themselves overnight in the bad weather with their calves.

- Subjects in Icelandic seem to be determined by the mapping from thematic roles, however that mapping is exactly defined.

- What is then the theoretical status of the canonical subject positions? They are clearly the statistically most prevalent positions in which subjects are found in Icelandic and Swedish, but that is hardly a syntactic distinction. They can also be claimed to be unmarked positions in the sense that all types of subjects can occur in these positions, whereas the other positions are more restricted. But bare non-specific indefinites are, in fact, not very good in the canonical positions in Icelandic as in other SVO languages such as French.

- Whether these facts are interesting from a syntactic point of view depends on the nature of these constraints: if, as has often been claimed, they are pragmatic in nature (e.g. based on discourse structure), it is not clear that they should be accounted for in syntactic terms.

Constraints on VP internal subjects: passives

- Það var fleygt **nokkrum stúdentum** út af skrifstofum **sínum**/??þeirra.

- EXPL was kicked some students out of office their-refl/non-refl.

- *Það var fleygt **nokkrum stúdentum** út af skemmtistaðnum og urðu æstir.

- EXPL was kicked several students out of nightclub-the and were upset

Reflexivization but no coordination

Constraints on VP-internal subjects: thematic relations

Clear agents in VP-internal position are not very good. Subjects of movement verbs are OK but they can be analyzed as themes. Goals and experiencers are also less than perfect. (They are all good in the position between the tensed and the untended verb.)

- ?*Það var hjalpað **gömlum manni** yfir götuna.

- EXPL was helped old man across street-the

- ?*Það hefur verið **mörgum börnum** kalt.

- EXPL have been many children cold.

Constraints on VP-internal subjects: a positional constraint?

- Það hefur hraett börnin **einhver mynd**.

- EXPL has frightened children-the-DAT some picture

Swedish

No constraint against agents:

- Det har arbetat **många människor** här.

- EXPL have worked many people   here

- Det har sjungit **några islänningar** i vår kör.

- EXPL have sung some Icelanders in our choir

- Det har ringt nån till dig.

- EXPL has phoned someone to you

Swedish constraints

Again only reflexivization is possible in the passive:

- Det hade körts ut **några studenter** från **sina**/? deras kontor.

- EXPL had kick-PASS out some students from their-refl/non-refl offices

- *Det hade körts ut **några studenter** och var upprörda.

- EXPL had kicked-PASS out some students and were upset

As in Icelandic, there are restrictions on experiencer subjects,

- *Det hade frusit **några barn** i natt.

- EXPL had frozen some children in night

Conclusions and Musings

- Indefinite subjects in non-canonical positions in the active voice have clear subject properties. Some of the characteristics we proposed as subject properties in ZMT (the positional ones) might be topic properties, some others HA properties.

- One should not expect the constraints on indefinite NPs in Icelandic to be very similar to those on French Stylistic Inversion subjects. The constraints should follow from the function of the construction and the French and Scandinavian one are different.

- We have stated some constraints on the indefinite NPs in terms of thematic relations but it might be better to see these as constraints on what can be part of a scene-setting expression, e.g. no focus on the agent. Suggestions about how to do this better, very welcome!

- Doing syntax without understanding the pragmatics is dangerous!

- The pragmatic constraints and the syntactic constraints might not be completely independent: the fact that the syntactic word order possibilities in Swedish are more constrained than in Icelandic seems to interact with the thematic constraints on the VP-internal indefinite subjects.

- As noted in Börjars and Vincent (2005), constraint based frameworks should not have any problems with these facts but an optimality theory type of approach is most likely most indicated.

- O. Bonami, D. Godard and J.-M. Marandin 1999 Constituency and word order in French subject inversion, in Bouma et al. *Constraints and Resources in Natural Language Syntax and Semantics*, CSLI.

- K. Börjars and N. Vincent 2005 Position versus function in Scandinavian Presentational Constructions, *LFG2005*, CSLI.

- A. Zaenen, J. Maling and H. Traínsson 1985 Case and Grammatical Functions: The Icelandic Passive, *NLLT*.

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Thank you