

Spurious Topic Drop in Swedish

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Abstract

Like English, Swedish is a language with strong subject coercion. One of the exceptions to the rule that the subject must be pronounced is found when the subject is Topic dropped from sentence initial position, resulting in a V1 declarative with no visible subject. Since Topic drop also involves dropping from first position of objects and complements of prepositions, it cannot be analyzed as a subject property per se.

Expletive subjects may be left out in Swedish, not only from the left most position but also from a position to the right of a sentence initial locative adverb, as in (i):

- (i) På hotellrummet var smutsigt.
in hotelroom.DEF was dirty

In the absence of Topic drop, we would have expected an expletive *det* ‘it, there’ in the position immediately following the tensed verb. see (ii):

- (ii) På hotellrummet var det smutsigt.
in hotelroom.DEF was it dirty

Another case where an expletive subject may be left out from non-initial position is illustrated in (iii); this type of examples were first observed by Engdahl (2010).

- (iii) Det var bra att du sa (Expected: *Det var det bra att du sa*)
that was good that you said

The first *det* must be analyzed as heading an A-bar chain with its foot in the complement of the embedded V. Note that there is no subject in the matrix clause.

In my paper I will argue that (i) and (iii) may be seen as displaying a specific kind of Topic drop, here called *Spurious Topic drop*, since deletion does not effect the left most element of the clause. There is a handful of similar cases in Swedish, that can be subsumed under the rubric Spurious Topic drop. In all cases, an expletive subject may be missing despite the fact that there is something in the leftmost position. For some reason, the option to use Spurious Topic drop seems to be characteristic for Swedish among the Mainland Scandinavian languages; Modern Danish and Norwegian do not allow these types of unpronounced subjects.