

The interpretation of subjects and its relation to verb movement

Kristine Bentzen

CASTL, University of Tromsø

1. Introduction

1.1 Subject interpretation and the placement of adverbs

- Subjects in Scandinavian receive different interpretations depending on their position with respect to adverbs (cf. Holmberg 1993, Bobaljik & Jonas 1996, Svenonius 2002).
- Svenonius (2002) (citing data from Nilsen 1997:23) suggests that subjects preceding sentential adverbs get a strong reading, whereas subjects following adverbs get a weak reading (“strong” and “weak” in the sense of Milsark 1977):

- (1) a. Røykeforbudet brøt en student **kanskje** allerede i går.
smoking.ban.DEF broke a student maybe already yesterday
“A (specific) student might have violated the smoking ban as early as yesterday.”
- b. Røykeforbudet brøt **kanskje** en student allerede i går.
smoking.ban.DEF broke maybe a student already yesterday
“Some student (or other) may have violated the smoking ban as early as yesterday.”

- The position of the verb is not taken into account here. In main clauses it is in the second position, and in subordinate clauses it remains within VP in the standard varieties of Mainland Scandinavian:

- (2) a. ... ettersom en student **kanskje** allerede brøt røykeforbudet i går.
as a student maybe already broke smoking.ban.DEF yesterday
“... as a (specific) student might have violated the smoking ban as early as yesterday.”
- b. ... ettersom **kanskje** en student allerede brøt røykeforbudet i går.
as maybe a student already broke smoking.ban.DEF yesterday
“... as some student (or other) may have violated the smoking ban as early as yesterday.”

1.2 The aim of this talk

- I will show that the interpretation of subjects in Northern Norwegian (NN) subordinate clauses is related to the position of the verb.
- I will suggest that a projection carrying a feature like “strong subject” (here called ITP “Inner Topic Phrase”) is responsible for verb movement in subordinate clauses, and in addition provides the subject with its strong interpretation.

2. Independent V-to-I movement in Northern Norwegian

- It is traditionally assumed to be a split between Icelandic and the Mainland Scandinavian languages (MSc) with respect to independent V-to-I movement; Icelandic allows it, MSc does not. This has been claimed to be related to the richness of verbal inflection (Vikner 1995, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Bobaljik & Thráinsson 1998, Rohrbacher 1999).
- However, some varieties of MSc do allow such verb movement despite the lack of rich inflectional verbal morphology.¹ Iversen (1918) and Bentzen (2003) have shown that Northern Norwegian (NN) exhibits verb movement in several non-V2-contexts: subordinate declarative clauses (3a), relative clauses (3b), subordinate *wh*-questions (3c), and main *wh*-questions without inversion (3d)²:

- (3) a. Han e mistenkt ettersom han {tok} **vanligvis** {tok} med sæ alle pengan.
he is suspect as he took usually took with REFL all money.DEF
 “He is a suspect as he usually took all the money with him.”
- b. Plassen som han {krangla} **vanligvis** {krangla} til sæ, va opptatt idag.
seat.DEF that he quarreled usually quarreled to REFL was occupied today
 “The seat the he usually managed to grab (by quarreling), was occupied today.”
- c. Vi lurte på kem han {lånte} **vanligvis** {lånte} penga til.
we wondered on who he lent usually lent money to
 “We wondered who he usually lent money to.”
- d. Kem han {lånte} **vanligvis** {lånte} penga til?
who he lent usually lent money to
 “Who did he usually lend money to?”

- The verb movement facts of NN are difficult to explain by alluding to morphology as NN has an impoverished verbal inflectional morphology.

(4) The present and past tense verbal paradigm in Northern Norwegian:

<u>(i) hoppe ‘jump’</u>		<u>(ii) spise ‘eat’</u>		<u>(iii) bo ‘live’</u>	
<u>Present:</u>	<u>Past:</u>	<u>Present:</u>	<u>Past:</u>	<u>Present:</u>	<u>Past:</u>
æ hoppe	hoppa	æ spis	spiste	æ bor	bodde
du hoppe	hoppa	du spis	spiste	du bor	bodde
han hoppe	hoppa	han spis	spiste	han bor	bodde
vi hoppe	hoppa	vi spis	spiste	vi bor	bodde
dokker hoppe	hoppa	dokker spis	spiste	dokker bor	bodde
dem hoppe	hoppa	dem spis	spiste	dem bor	bodde

¹ See Platzack & Holmberg (1989) for data from the Swedish dialect of Kronoby.

² On the lack of V2 effects in certain main *wh*-questions in NN, see Rice & Svenonius (1998), Westergaard (2003), Sollid (2003).

3. Subject positions and their interpretation

- The interpretation of subjects is correlated to verb movement in subordinate clauses:
 - when the verb has moved past an adverb the subject receives a strong reading only
 - when the verb has not moved, the subject may either receive a strong or a weak reading
- Strong subjects include definite DPs and universally quantified DPs, whereas weak subjects include indefinite nouns and nouns modified by number determiners (Milsark 1977, Diesing 1992, Kratzer 1995).
- The following data show that this alternation in subject interpretation corresponds to the verb movement patterns in NN subordinate clauses.

3.1 Specific versus non-specific

- Subjects such as *nån eleva* “some pupils” may receive either a specific or a non-specific reading in main clauses:

- (5) *Nån eleva kom vanligvis for seint til timan.*
some pupils came usually too late to classes.DEF
“Some (specific) pupils usually were late for class.” or
“Usually there were some pupils who were late for class.”

- In existential *there* constructions, the subject has to follow the adverb, and it only has the weak reading:

- (6) *Det kom {*nån eleva} vanligvis {nån eleva} for seint til timan.*
there came {some pupils} usually {some pupils} too late to classes.DEF
“Usually there were some pupils who were late for class.”

- In subordinate clauses the subject gets the specific reading only if the verb has moved past the adverb, whereas when the verb has not move, both the specific and the non-specific readings are available:

- (7) *Læreren starta aldri med en gang*
teacher.DEF began never with one time
a. ... *ettersom nån eleva vanligvis kom for seint til timan.*
as some pupils usually came too late to classes.DEF
“The teacher never started at once, as some pupils usually were late for class.”
(ambiguous)

b. ... ettersom nån eleva kom **vanligvis** for seint til timan.

as some pupils came usually too late to classes.DEF

“The teacher never started at once, as some (specific) pupils usually were late for class.”

3.2 *Generic versus existential*

• Kratzer (1995) has shown that only existential subjects are compatible with *there*-insertion (8a-9a, based on Kratzer’s examples):

(8) a. Brannmanna e tilgjengelig.

firemen are available

b. Brannmanna e modig.

firemen are brave

(9) a. Det e brannmanna tilgjengelig.

there are firemen available

b. *Det e brannmanna modig.

there are firemen brave

• Verb movement in NN subordinate clauses is only available with generic subjects, as in (10a). When the subject has the existential reading, verb movement is not possible, as in (10b):

(10) Vi følte oss i trygge hender ...

we felt us in safe hands

a. ettersom brannmanna {e} **vanligvis** {e} modig.

as firemen {are} usually {are} brave

“We felt safe as firemen usually are brave.”

b. ettersom brannmanna {*e} **vanligvis** {e} tilgjengelig.

as firemen {are} usually {are} available

“We felt safe as firemen usually are available.”

3.3 *Binding of reflexives*

• Binding of reflexives is also connected to strong-weak subject readings and verb movement.

• Some NN varieties have two reflexives, *sin/si/sitt/sine* and *hannes/hennes* “his/her,” both of which can be bound by a regular non-specific subject, as seen in (11a). However, typically strong subjects, such as proper nouns, can only bind the reflexive *sin/si/sitt/sine* (11b):

- (11) a. Gitaristen_i glemte **ofte** utstyret sitt_{i/*j}/hannes_{i/j} etter konserta.
guitarist.DEF forgot often gear.DEF his/his after concerts
“The guitarist often forgot his gear after concerts.”
- b. Han Jon_i pusse **regelmessig** tennern sine_{i/*j}/hannes_{*i/j}.
he John brushes regularly teeth.DEF his/his
“John regularly brushes his teeth.”

• In subordinate clauses with verb movement definite subjects behave as strong subjects with respect to binding of the reflexive. Thus, when there is no verb movement, both types of reflexives can be bound by the subject (12a), whereas if the verb has moved, the subject can only bind *sin/si/sitt/sine* and not *hannes/hennes* (12b):

- (12) Trommisen blei irritert ...
drummer.DEF became annoyed...
- a. ettersom gitaristen_i **så ofte** glemte utstyret sitt_{i/*j}/hannes_{i/j} etter konserta.
as guitarist.DEF so often forgot gear.DEF his/his after concerts
- b. ettersom gitaristen_i glemte **så ofte** utstyret sitt_{i/*j}/hannes_{*i/j} etter konserta.
as guitarist.DEF forgot so often gear.DEF his/his after concerts
“The drummer got annoyed as the guitarist so often forgot his gear after concerts.”

3.4 Partitives and universally quantified subjects

• Partitives and universally quantified subjects behave like strong subjects in subordinate constructions with verb movement.

• (13) shows that partitives can only have the specific reading when the verb has moved:

- (13) Læreren tok alltid med når ekstra brødskeive ...
teacher.DEF took always with some extra sandwiches...
- a. ettersom en av guttan **som oftest** glemte matpakken hjemme.
as one of boys.DEF as most-often forgot packed-lunch.DEF home
“The teacher always brought some extra sandwiches, as it was almost always the case that one of the boys had forgotten his lunch at home.”
- b. ettersom en av guttan glemte **som oftest** matpakken hjemme.
as one of boys.DEF forgot as most-often packed-lunch.DEF home
“The teacher always brought some extra sandwiches, as one of the boys almost always had forgotten his lunch at home.”

- Universally quantified subjects exhibit the same binding restrictions in subordinate clauses as those shown above for definite subjects. In main clauses, they can bind both types of reflexives (14a). The same is true in subordinate clauses without verb movement (14b). However, in subordinate clauses with verb movement, quantified subjects can only bind *sin/si/sitt/sine*, and not *hannes/hennes* (14c):

- (14) a. Eihver flink jente_i pusse **alltid** tennern sine_{i/*j}/hennes_{i/j} på kvelden.
every good girl brushes always teeth.DEF her/her in evening.DEF
- b. ... ettersom eihver flink jente_i **alltid** pusse tennern sine_{i/*j}/hennes_{i/j} på kvelden.
as every good girl always brushes teeth.DEF her/her in evening.DEF
- c. ... ettersom eihver flink jente_i pusse **alltid** tennern sine_{i/*j}/hennes_{*i/j} på kvelden.
as every good girl brushes always teeth.DEF her/her in evening.DEF

4. A new projection and some further data

- I suggest here that subordinate clauses with verb movement contain a projection with “strong subject” features (Internal Topic Phrase, ITP).
- The presence of ITP requires verb movement to its head position. When the verb has moved, the subject also has to move to (at least) the specifier position of ITP, and in this position it receives the strong interpretation.

- (15) ... [ettersom [_{ITP} nån eleva_j kommer_i [_{IP} t_j **vanligvis** t_i for seint]]]
as some pupils come usually too late
 “...as some (specific) pupils usually are late for class.”

- In structures where the subject gets a weak interpretation, the ITP projection is not present. Thus, there is no verb movement, and hence the subject is not forced to move either:

- (16) ... [ettersom [_{IP} nån eleva_j **vanligvis** kommer for seint]]
as some pupils usually come too late
 “... as usually there are some pupils who are late for class.”

- We have to assume that there is (at least) one projection above the ITP, as can be seen from examples with multiple adverbs:

- (17) ... [ettersom [_{?P} nån eleva_j **sannsynligvis** [_{ITP} t_j kommer_i [_{IP} t_j **vanligvis** t_i for seint]]]]
as some pupils probably come usually too late
 “... as some (specific) pupils probably usually are late for class.”

- In subordinate clauses subjects obligatorily have the strong reading whenever the verb has moved out of the VP, regardless of how high the subject is positioned (and as long as it precedes the verb):

(18) ... ettersom **sannsynligvis** nån eleva kommer **vanligvis** for seint.
as probably some pupils come usually too late
“... as some (specific) pupils probably usually are late for class.”

- However, if the verb remains in situ, both the strong and the weak readings seem to be available, again regardless of the subject’s position:

(19) a. ... ettersom nån eleva **sannsynligvis vanligvis** kommer for seint.
as some pupils probably usually come too late
b. ... ettersom **sannsynligvis** nån eleva **vanligvis** kommer for seint.
as probably some pupils usually come too late
c. ... ettersom **sannsynligvis vanligvis** nån eleva kommer for seint.
as probably usually some pupils come too late
“... as usually there are some pupils who are late for class.”

References:

- Bentzen, K. (2003): Acquiring V-to-I movement in the absence of morphological cues. Dahl, A., P. Svenonius & M. R. Westergaard (ed.): *Proceedings of the 19th Scandinavian Conference of Linguistics* 31.3, 573–588.
- Bobaljik, J.D. & Jonas, D. (1996): Subject positions and the roles of TP. *Linguistic Inquiry* 27, 195–236.
- Bobaljik, J.D. & Thráinsson, H. (1998): Two heads aren't always better than one. *Syntax* 1.1, 37–71.
- Diesing, M. (1992): *Indefinites*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Holmberg, A. (1993): Two subject positions in IP in Mainland Scandinavian. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 52, 29–41.
- Holmberg, A. & Platzack, C. (1995): *The Role of Inflection in Scandinavian Syntax*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Iversen, R. (1918): *Syntaksen i Tromsø Bymaal*. Kristiania: Bymaals-Lagets Forlag.
- Kratzer, A. (1995): Stage-level and individual-level predicates. Carlson, G. and Pelletier, F. (eds.): *The Generic Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 125–175.
- Milsark, G.L. (1977): Towards an explanation of certain peculiarities of the existential constructions in English. *Linguistic Analysis* 3.1, 1–29.
- Nilsen, Ø. (1997): Adverbs and A-shifts. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 59, 1–31.
- Platzack, C. & Holmberg, A. (1989): The role of AGR and finiteness. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 43, 51–76.
- Rice, C. & Svenonius, P. (1998): Prosodic V2 in Northern Norwegian. (Manuscript, University of Tromsø).
- Rohrbacher, B. W. (1999): *Morphology-Driven Syntax: A Theory of V to I raising and pro-drop*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins (= Linguistik Aktuell 15).
- Sollid, H. (2003): *Dialektsyntaks i Nordreisa: Språkdannelse og stabilisering i møtet mellom kvensk og norsk [Dialectal Syntax in Nordreisa]*. PhD thesis, University of Tromsø.
- Svenonius, P. (2002): Subject Positions and the Placement of Adverbials. Svenonius, P. (ed.): *Subjects, Expletives, and the EPP*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 201–242.
- Vikner, S. (1995): *Verb Movement and Expletive Subjects in the Germanic Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Westergaard, M. R. (2003): Word order in *wh*-questions in a North Norwegian dialect: some evidence from an acquisition study. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 26.1, 81–109.

Kristine Bentzen
CASTL
University of Tromsø
kristine.bentzen@hum.uit.no