The *Apropos*-Topic, the *Concerning*-Topic

and the syntax-pragmatics interface[1]

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Abstract

A structure introduced by "topic markers" such as *apropos* or *concerning* is not identifiable with any of the construction types that alter the information structure of the clause involving the left periphery. That is to say, *apropos* and *concerning* do not introduce a topicalization, nor a dislocation, nor a "hanging topic", given some commonly assumed criteria. Instead, it is argued here that *apropos* and *concerning* introduce three-place predicates relating the speaker with the discourse topic and the propositional content of the following matrix. The two expressions differ with respect to the topic argument: while *concerning* imposes aboutness continuity on the following proposition, the *apropos* topic is subject to a givenness requirement, as it must refer to an element in the preceding discourse. The argumentation is based on Swedish data.

1   Introduction

While topicalization and dislocation have attracted much attention in the literature on generative grammar, less has been written about such lexical expressions that are used to explicitly mark a topical element and which usually occur in sentence initial position. Well-studied Germanic and Romance languages have a rather considerable repertory of such expressions, as for instance English *with respect to x*, *with regard to x*, *apropos x*, *concerning x*, *as for x*, *speaking of x*, *regarding x*, *as far as x is concerned*, just to mention a few. In traditional treatments, there has been a tendency to list such topic markers as one homogeneous class, because they fall "within the same general area of

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meaning" (Quirk et al. 1985: 706). It is clear, however, that different subclasses can and should be recognized within this category. The interest of these expressions lies in the fact that they do not straightforwardly correspond to those topicalization and dislocation structures that have been identified and analyzed in the syntactic literature. Neither are their information structure properties very well understood. Such topic markers, in fact, offer interesting evidence concerning the relation between syntactic form and pragmatic function. The overarching question is to what extent the syntax-pragmatics interface is "uniform" in the sense of Culicover & Jackendoff (2006: 132). In the following, I will argue that there are cases in which syntactic displacement can apply without any obvious interpretive effect, that is, without any clear pragmatic or other interpretable feature triggering movement. This observation poses an interesting problem for the hypothesis that movement to the left periphery targets designated positions with a precise feature specification, as in much work following the seminal study of Rizzi (1997) (e.g. Benincà & Poletto 2004, Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007). Moreover, there are important distinctions to be made within the class of topic marking expressions at the level of information structure. These distinctions appear to have little or no consequence for syntax, a fact which suggests that syntax can be entirely opaque to information structure. This observation, in turn, is interestingly problematic for approaches that propose to derive syntactic structure from pragmatic features (e.g. Erteschik-Shir 2006).

In this paper, I discuss such claims on the basis of Swedish data. From a purely intuitive viewpoint, which remains to be spelled out in detail, the Swedish word *apropå* introduces a topicalization of sorts in (1).

(1) Apropå   Johan, jag träffade   honom igår.

APROPOS John   I   met   him   yesterday

'Speaking of John, I met him yesterday'

The word *apropå* is a 18th century borrowing from French *à propos*, which has equivalents in other Romance languages, such as Italian *a proposito* and Spanish *a propósito*, as well as being integrated in the lexicon of several Germanic languages, cf. Danish, English, German, and Norwegian *apropos*. Clearly, some basic properties of such expression are consistent across the languages where the word is attested. Nevertheless, these languages may differ with respect to some patterns; these however go beyond present aims. I concentrate on the analysis of Swedish, leaving a cross-linguistic survey to future research. From now on and throughout this paper, I refer to the fronted constituent introduced by *apropå* in (1) as the APROPOS TOPIC (APT). To begin with, I take the APT to be representative for topic marking expressions such as those listed above. As we proceed, however, it will become obvious that, among such markers, different subclasses must be recognized.

The paper is organized as follows: in section 2, I briefly present the three major construction types identified in the literature, which alter the information structure of the clause involving the left periphery. In 3, it is shown that the APT does not pattern with any of these construction types.[2] In section 4, turning to pragmatics, I argue that there are systematic interpretive differences between the APT and a different class of marking expressions that I term *concerning*-topics. Section 5 deals with the categorial and syntactic status of the expressions in question, while section 6 contains some cross-linguistic comparative remarks.

2   The syntactic properties of topicalization, dislocation, and hanging topics

Following fairly common assumptions (Ross 1967, Cinque 1990, van Riemsdijk 1997, Alexiadou 2006, among many others), I assume that there are three major

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[2] The term "construction" will be used throughout in a purely descriptive fashion, without implications as for the theoretical status of the concept of construction.

construction types altering the information structure of an assertive sentence by involving the periphery: topicalization, dislocation, and hanging topics. Their respective properties are briefly illustrated with Swedish data:

2.1 The syntactic topicalization structure is analyzed as an A'-dependency holding between the topicalized element in sentence initial position, [Spec, C] according to the standard analysis (Platzack 1986), and its trace, licensed as a variable. In a V2 language such as Swedish, topicalization obligatorily triggers subject inversion. In Swedish, the structure is associated with contrastive focus:

(2) Johan$_i$ träffar jag t_i imorgon.

John$_i$ meet I t_i tomorrow.

'John, I will meet tomorrow'

2.2 The dislocation structure does not involve the nuclear clause; for instance, it has been analyzed as base generation in the left periphery (Cinque 1990) or as displacement at PF (Erteschik-Shir 2006). The dislocated element is repeated by a resumptive pronoun internal to the clause. The following matrix clause has the canonical subject-verb word order:

(3) Johan, jag träffar honom imorgon.

John I see him tomorrow

'John I will meet him tomorrow'

2.3 The hanging topic is placed in the left periphery but, unlike dislocation, does not need to be syntactically connected with the matrix (e.g. Alexiadou 2006). That is to say, in an example such as (4), the hanging topic is not

introduced by a preposition despite the fact that it refers to an oblique argument in the matrix:[3]

(4) (Ja) den där   restaurangen (ja), dit   går jag gärna   tillbaka.

(yes)that there   restaurant.the (yes)there   go I   willingly back

'Well, that restaurant, I'd like to go back there'

In the following section, I will go through the criteria in turn, showing that the *apropå*-construction does not unambiguously correspond to any of these three constructions.

3 The syntactic properties of the *apropå*-construction

To begin with, consider that the APT in Swedish is compatible with two different word order patterns. In (5), the introducing APT is followed by straight word order (subject-verb) in the matrix. In (6), on the other hand, we see a case of subject inversion triggered by the APT.[4]

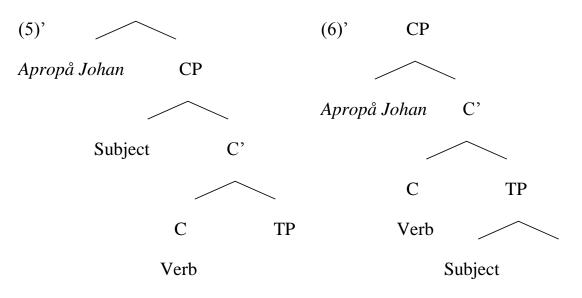(5) Apropå   Johan, jag träffar honom imorgon.

APROPOS John   I   see   him   tomorrow

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[3] The hanging topic in Swedish is often introduced by some marker such as *ja* 'yes' which can appear on either side of the topic as is shown in (4) (cf. English *well* in the gloss of (4)). With no such introducer, the hanging topic is sometimes quite marginal in the author's opinion.

[4] Some speakers prefer inserting the adverbial element *så* between the APT and the finite verb in an example such as (6), though not in (5). This is a matter of rather idiosyncratic variation which has no bearing on the following discussion. It should be noticed that the element in question frequently attaches to the finite verb when the sentence-initial position is occupied by elements other than the subject (Egerland & Falk 2010, Eide 2011).

(6) Apropå   Johan   träffar jag   honom imorgon.

APROPOS John   see   I   him   tomorrow

'Speaking of John, I'll see him tomorrow' = (5), (6)

There are two surface differences between (5) and (6): the word order and the intonation. In (5), there is a prosodic break between the APT and the following matrix, typical of that of a left dislocation or a hanging topic structure. In the example (6), on the other hand, there is no such break, but the intonation contour of a topicalization. Consider the two structures in (5)' and (6)':

(5)'

Apropå Johan   CP

               Subject   C'

                          C   TP

                      Verb

(6)'   CP

        Apropå Johan   C'

                      C   TP

                  Verb   Subject

I assume that, in (5)', the APT is situated in a left peripheral position. For concreteness, suppose this is a Topic Phrase external to the nuclear clause (Rizzi 1997), though the following discussion does not crucially rely on this assumption. In (6)', given that Swedish is a V2 language, the subject inversion is an indication that the APT is in [Spec, C] following the standard analysis of Swedish sentence structure (Platzack 1986, Holmberg & Platzack 1995).

Interestingly, however, there are no other syntactic or interpretive differences between (5) and (6). In all examples that follow, the two are entirely interchangeable. That is to say, there is no independently motivated feature in the derivation that can be assumed to account for the difference between the structures in (5)' and (6)', and the choice between them, therefore, could be advanced as a case of syntactic optionality. In the vein of Chomsky (2008), it

may be assumed that movement to [Spec, C] in (6) is triggered by an edge feature, but such a solution is essentially ad hoc.[5]

Another possibility is to assume that pragmatic features are assigned pre-syntactically as part of the lexical array, as in Erteschik-Shir (2006). The assignment of such pragmatic features yields a representation projected in syntax and then valued in relation to the context. Whereas the pre-syntactic assignment of pragmatic features is optional, the syntactic evaluation of the features is not. In such a model, the APT would enter the derivation carrying the feature "Topic" which would trigger movement to [Spec, C]. The structure in (5)', then, would be the result of post-syntactic displacement of the APT, at PF. But the achievement of such an analysis would only be to push optionality from the syntax to PF. Furthermore, it is clear that, in (5)', [Spec, C] is free for a different element such as the subject, a fact that is left unexplained. I will not further discuss the theoretical implications of the apparently open choice between (5)' and (6)'.

Superficially then, the APT of (5) looks like a left dislocation and that of (6) like topicalization. However, neither of these analyses can be defended as I will show in *3.1-3.3*.

3.1   Despite its similarity with topicalization, it is very clear that the APT does not undergo A'-movement even when it targets [Spec, C]: Firstly, the APT does not leave behind a trace analyzed as a variable:

(7) *Apropå Johan$_i$ träffade jag t_i igår.

 APROPOS John$_i$ met   I t_i yesterday

Secondly, the APT does not give raise to weak crossover effects (Postal 1971). Consider the difference between the topicalization in (8) and the APT in (9):

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[5] In their analysis of scrambling in Dutch, Neeleman & de Koot (2008: 142) argue that the introduction of edge features can be seen as a return to the move-α strategy of Government and Binding Theory. Be that as it may, the assumption of an edge feature in (6)' will not have any particular consequences for the issues that lie at hart of this article.

(8) *Dickens$_i$ gjorde hans$_i$ roman om   Pickwick t_i berömd.

Dickens$_i$ made his$_i$ novel about Pickwick t_i famous

(9) Apropå D.$_i$ gjorde hans$_i$ roman om   Pickwick honom$_i$ berömd.

APROPOS D.$_i$ made his$_i$ novel about Pickwick him$_i$ famous

'Apropos Dickens, his novel about Pickwick made him famous'

Thirdly, the APT does not license parasitic gaps:

(10) *$^?$Apropå brevet   skrev han det utan   att   skicka _.

APROPOS letter.the   wrote he   it   without to   send   _

Hence, the APT in (6) is not a topicalization structure.

3.2   As we have seen, the APT in (5) is superficially similar to left dislocation, but this analysis can be excluded as well. To begin with, consider that Swedish, trivially, does not allow for multiple APTs unlike Romance left dislocation. The example (11) is from Cinque (1990: 58).

(11) Di vestiti,   a me,   Gianni, in quel negozio,   non mi ce ne

clothes   to me John   in that shop   not-to-me-there-of-them

ha   mai comprati.

has ever bought

(12) *Apropå   Johan, apropå   den där restaurangen,

     APROPOS John   APROPOS that there restaurant.the

     jag går gärna dit   med honom igen.

     I   go   gladly there   with him   again

This restriction could have an independent source, perhaps related to the fact that Swedish is a V2 language and, hence, has a restricted left periphery as compared to Italian or French. However, note that, when the APT appears in the left peripheral position, some element of the clause can be topicalized: an argument coreferent with the topic (13), a different element of the clause (14), or some element designated for the [Spec, C] position such as a *wh*-expression (15):

(13) Apropå   Johan, honom träffade   jag igår.

     APROPOS John   him   met   I   yesterday

(14) Apropå   Johan, igår   träffade jag honom.

     APROPOS John   yesterday   met   I   him

(15) Apropå   Johan, vem träffade   honom igår?

     APROPOS John   who met   him   yesterday

Hence, Swedish can indeed have two elements preceding the verb in the matrix, one in [Spec, C] the other in an external, peripheral position; it is specifically the co-occurrence of two APTs that is barred, as in (12).

Furthermore, the APT does not need to be syntactically connected with the following matrix. Consider the examples in (16)-(19):

(16) Apropå   Johan, jag   är   trött   påatt låna honom pengar.

   APROPOS John   I   am   tired   of to   lend him   money

   'Apropos John, I'm tired of lending him money'

(17) Apropå   Maria, jag   kom   påatt jag   måste köpahenne enpresent.

   APROPOS Mary I   came   onthat I   must   buy   her   a gift

   'Apropos Mary, it came to my mind that I have to buy her a gift'

(18) ^{??}Apropå till   Johan, jag   är   trött   påattlåna honom pengar.

   APROPOS to   John   I   am   tired   of to lend him   money

(19) ^{??}Apropå till Maria, jag   kom på   att   jag   måste köpahenne en present.

   APROPOS to Mary   I   came on   that I   must   buy   her   a gift

The APTs in (16)-(17) are not introduced by prepositions although the corresponding elements in the nuclear clause are PPs. Still, PPs such as those of (18)-(19) are not totally excluded provided a particular kind of context, namely one in which the prepositional expression is in some way retrieved from the preceding discourse. The prepositional APT in the dialogue of (20) is slightly marginal but not unacceptable in my opinion:

(20) A:I går   ringde jag   till   Maria.

    yesterday called I   to   Mary

   B:Apropå   till   Maria, jag   måste köpahenne enpresent.

    APROPOS to   Mary I   must   buy   her   a gift

However, (20) is not a case of syntactic connectivity. Rather, the APT in (20) has the flavor of an echo, and its acceptability is dependent on the preceding discourse. A similar consideration holds for the occurrence of anaphors in the

APT. An example such as (21) is (marginally) acceptable provided that the anaphoric possessive can be retrieved from preceding discourse:

(21) A:När   jag   var   i   London

   when   I   was   in London

   lät   Maria$_i$ mig   bo   i   sin$_i$ egen lägenhet.

   let   Mary   me   stay in *poss*$_{[anaph.]i}$ own apartment

 B:Apropå   sin$_i$ egen lägenhet,

   APROPOS *poss*$_{[anaph.]i}$ own apartment

   jag   hörde   att   Maria$_i$ ska   sälja den.

   I   heard   that Mary$_i$ will sell it

Arguably, the example (21) is a misleading sign of syntactic connectivity. If the discourse antecedent is different from the following grammatical subject *Mary*, the anaphoric expression cannot be bound by the grammatical subject:

(22) A: När   jag   var   i   London

   when   I   was   in London

   lät   Johan$_j$ mig   bo   i   sin$_j$ egen lägenhet.

   let   John$_j$ me   stay in *poss*$_{[anaph.]j}$ own apartment

 B:*Apropå   sin$_i$ egen lägenhet,

   APROPOS *poss*$_{[anaph.]i}$ own apartment

   jag   hörde   att   Maria$_i$ ska   sälja den.

   I   heard   that Mary$_i$ will sell it

That is to say, if the anaphoric possessive in A's utterance of (22) refers to John, that of B's utterance cannot be disjoint in reference.

3.3 Having excluded that the APT is a case of topicalization or dislocation, the remaining alternative is that of a hanging topic. But such an analysis, too, faces problems when confronted with the data. First of all, hanging topics in Swedish never trigger subject inversion:

(23) *(Ja)lägenhet   (ja)   har hon hittat en i centrum.

    (yes)apartment   (yes)   has she found one in town centre

Secondly, hanging topics are known to occur in root environments (e.g. Alexiadou 2006: 672). Consider the hanging topic in (24) and the APT in (25):

(24) (Ja) lägenhet   (ja), hon har hittat en i centrum.

    yes apartment   yes she has found one in town centre

(25) Apropå   lägenhet,   hon har hittat en i centrum.

    APROPOS apartment   she has found one in town centre

Whereas the hanging topic cannot successfully be inserted in a subordinate (26), there is no such restriction on the APT (27):

(26) *Hon sa att hon, lägenhet,   hade hittat en i centrum.

    She   said that she apartment   had found one in town centre

(27) Hon sa att hon apropå   lägenhet   hade hittat en i centrum.

    She said that she apropos   apartment   had found one in town centre

Furthermore, the APT can actually introduce a relative clause, as in (28):

(28) Igår   läste jag en   intressant   artikel i tidningen,

yesterday read I   an   interesting   article in newspaper.the

apropå   vilket jag inte har kommit ihåg

APROPOS which I   not have remembered

att   förlänga prenumerationen.

to   renew   subscription.the

'Yesterday I read an interesting article in the paper, speaking of which I have forgotten to renew my subscription'

The relative pronoun *vilket* 'which' refers to the propositional content of the matrix. The example can be paraphrased: *The fact that I read an article yesterday makes me realize that I have forgotten* etc. The clause introduced by APT in (28) is undoubtedly subordinate as is obvious from word order: the finite verb stays in the lower portion of the sentence structure and, hence, appears to the right of negation, as is common in Swedish subordinates (Holmberg & Platzack 1995). The main clause word order, where the finite verb is raised higher than the negation, is not acceptable:[6]

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[6] Crucially, there is no intonation break after the APT in (29). If there is, the example is equally acceptable, but analyzable in a different way:
(i)   … apropå   vilket, jag har   inte kommit ihåg att förlänga prenumerationen.
      … APROPOS which I   have not   remembered to renew   subscription.the
The example in (i) is paraphrasable as … *speaking of which: I have forgot to renew my subscription*.

(29) *…apropå vilket jag har inte kommit ihåg

… APROPOS which I   have not   remembered

att   förlänga prenumerationen.

to   renew   subscription.the

In this sense, the APT is clearly distinct from hanging topics.

Lastly, hanging topics are subject to a restriction of ordering in the sense that they only appear in the sentence initial position (30), never in sentence final position (31), as discussed by e.g. Benincà (1988).

(30) Den där   restaurangen, jag går gärna   tillbakadit.

that there   restaurant.the I   go   willingly back   there

(31) *Jag går gärna   tillbakadit,   den där restaurangen.

I   go   willingly back   there   that thererestaurant.the

On the contrary, the APT can appear not only to the left but also to the right of the matrix, as in (32):

(32) Jag går gärna   tillbakadit, apropå   den där restaurangen.

I   go   willingly back   there APROPOS   that thererestaurant.the

3.4 To summarize so far, the *apropå*-construction cannot unambiguously be identified with any of the three syntactic dependencies taken into consideration. The APT is neither topicalized through A'-movement, nor is it left dislocated, nor is it a hanging topic. These conclusions hold regardless of the word order of

the matrix, which is always open for the two options illustrated in (5) and (6). I now turn to the pragmatic properties of the construction.

4.   The pragmatic properties of *apropos*-topics and *concerning*-topics

First and foremost, there are no interpretive differences what so ever associated with the two word order patterns illustrated in (5)-(6) above. Whether the APT appears in a peripheral position where it is followed by the canonical subject verb order (5), or is placed in [Spec, C] triggering subject inversion (6), has no consequence for the information structure of the expression. In the following examples, as well as in the preceding ones, the two are entirely interchangeable.

In order to understand the pragmatic properties of the APT, we need to comprare the APT with another group of expressions belonging to the same general area of meaning and with an apparently similar discourse function: the Swedish expression *beträffande* 'concerning' introduces a topic of sorts in a fashion superficially similar to the APT. It allows for the same two word order patterns that we have seen previously:

(33) Beträffande   Johan, jag träffar honom imorgon.

 CONCERNING John   I   see   him   tomorrow

(34) Beträffande   Johan träffar jag honom imorgon.

 CONCERNING John   see   I   him   tomorrow

 'Concerning John, I'll see him tomorrow' = (33), (34)

Despite the superficial similarity to the APT, the expression illustrated in (33)-(34) shows systematic pragmatic differences with respect to the APT in a way that justifies a distinction between two different classes of topic markers. If we

have chosen to call the former *apropos*-topic (APT), let us term the second the *concerning*-topic (CNT). These two classes are perfectly alike with respect to the syntactic criteria considered in section *3*, but differ with respect to information structure, as is discussed in *4.1*-*4.3*.

4.1 The first difference between APTs and CNTs resides in the fact that CNTs can introduce a new element, a kind of subtopic, into the discourse, whereas APTs do not have any such property. Consider the following two examples in relation to the context:

[*Context:* We had a lovely week in Greece. The weather was beautiful and the food was good, and …]

(35) …beträffande   hotellet   var   det   utmärkt.

    CONCERNING   hotel.the   was   it   excellent

'… and as for the hotel, it was excellent'

(36) *… apropå   hotellet   var   det   utmärkt.

    APROPOS   hotel.the   was   it   excellent

'… and apropos the hotel, it was excellent'

In the context of (35)-(36), the hotel has not actually been mentioned. It is a discourse-new element, at most inferred from the general description and could perhaps count as "old information" by virtue of predictability (e.g. Prince 1981: 226): in this context, some information about the hotel may be expected and, say, given by association. However, this associative link to the context is not sufficient to introduce the *hotel* as an APT. It seems that the *apropå*-construction actually requires explicit mention of the topic in the preceding discourse. This in turn means that, by these two expressions, the APT and the CNT, a distinction is lexicalized between topics that are "old" because explicitly mentioned, and those that are merely inferred, such as *hotel* in (35)-(36).

4.2 The second difference between APTs and CNTs has to do with the topic of the following matrix. In examples such as (37)-(38), the APT presents a Topic, *John*, which must have been previously mentioned but has a purely associative link with the content of the matrix.

(37) Apropå   Johan   träffade   jag   Maria   igår.

    APROPOS John   met   I   Mary   yesterday

    'Speaking of John, yesterday I met Mary.'

(38) Apropå   Johan, nu   regnar det   igen.

    APROPOS John   now rains   it   again

    'Speaking of John, now it's raining again.'

The example (37) implies that I associate John with Mary, while (38) suggests that I for some reason associate John with poor weather. In other words, the following matrix does not need to be "about" the argument introduced as an APT. In other words, there is no requirement on aboutness continuity with respect to the matrix (Prince 1998, Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007). Importantly, such a radical shift is not acceptable with the CNT, as is clear from (39)-(40):

(39) ^{??}Beträffande   Johan   träffade   jag   Maria   igår.

    CONCERNING   John   met   I   Mary   yesterday

    'Concerning John, yesterday I met Mary.'

(40) ^{??}Beträffande   Johan, nu   regnar det   igen.

    CONCERNING   John   now rains   it   again

    'Concerning John, now it's raining again'

This means that the CNT imposes aboutness continuity on the matrix (Reinhart 1981: 63). In simple terms, if I start out by saying *beträffande Johan* 'concerning John', whatever follows has to be about John.

It appears, then, that one of the constructions is the mirror image of the other: The APT must have been mentioned in the previous discourse; it may or may not be the topic of the following matrix. The CNT may or may not have been previously mentioned; it must be the topic of the following matrix. The generalization can be formally expressed as in (41)-(42):

(41) $x_i \ldots [\text{APT TOPIC}_i [_{CP} \ldots (x_i) \ldots]]$

(42) $(x_i) \ldots [\text{CNT TOPIC}_i [_{CP} \ldots x_i \ldots]]$

The structures in (41)-(42) capture the intuition that the CNT imposes aboutness continuity forwards, on the matrix, while the APT requires aboutness continuity backwards, in the preceding discourse. A further conclusion derives from the generalization in (41)-(42): topic tests building on the substitution of the topic by expressions such as *as for x*, or embedding of the utterance in *about*-sentences (Reinhart 1981: 64-65), are not applicable to all sorts of topics, but only to topics of a certain kind, and must therefore be used with caution. The CNT can be substituted by *as for x*, but the APT cannot. Moreover, an utterance such as *apropos John, she said that it is raining again* cannot felicitously be paraphrased as [#]*she said about John that it is raining again*.

4.3 The third difference between the two classes of topics concerns their relation with focus and can presumably be derived from the generalization stated in (41)-(42). To begin with, CNTs are not readily compatible with a coreferent focused argument in the matrix (43), whereas a non-coreferent argument is perfectly acceptable (44):

(43) ^{?*}Beträffande Johan såg jag HONOM i affären   igår.

      CONCERNING John   saw I   HIM   in shop.the   yesterday

      'As for John, I saw HIM in the shop yesterday.'

(44) Beträffande   Johan såg jag honom i AFFÄREN igår.

      CONCERNING John   saw I   him   in SHOP.THE yesterday.

      'As for John, I saw him in THE SHOP yesterday.'

The unacceptability of (43) is expected given the structure in (42). In (43), the CNT establishes *John* as the topic of the clause. If intonation then signals John as the focus, we get a mismatch of pragmatic interpretations, i.e. a violation of the focus restriction of Molnár (1998).

      In the case of APTs, things are more complicated. Clearly, the status of a sentence such as (45), when uttered out of the blue, is doubtful.

(45) ^{??}Apropå Johan såg jag HONOM i affären   igår.

      APROPOS John   saw I   HIM   in shop.the   yesterday.

      'Speaking of John, I saw HIM in the shop yesterday'

The reason for this is that, in a decontextualized example such as (45), I expect John to be the sentence topic. However, a focused reading can be acceptable under the appropriate circumstances. Suppose that somebody has been telling me about a problem of his/hers and asks me for advice. I cannot give any, after which the conversation continues on some other topic until incidentally John is mentioned. In such a discourse, I can actually say something like (46) or (47):

(46) Apropå   Johan, HAN   kanske vet   lösningen.

 APROPOS John   HE   maybe knows solution.the

 'Speaking of John, HE might have the solution.'

(47) Apropå   Johan, det är med HONOM du   måste   tala.

 APROPOS John   it   is with HIM   you   must   speak

 'Speaking of John, it's with HIM you should speak.'

In (46)-(47), the APT is placed in a peripheral position and, hence, followed by canonical subject-verb word order. If, instead, the APT appears in [Spec, C], nothing changes as for the interpretation, as in (48)-(49):

(48) Apropå   Johan kanske HAN   har lösningen.

 APROPOS John   maybe HE   has solution.the

(49) Apropå   Johan är det   med HONOM du   måste   tala.

 APROPOS John   is it   with HIM   you   must   speak

This is so because the APT retrieves John as the topic from the immediately preceding discourse, but does not impose any restriction on the status of John in the matrix. The structure in (41) is in fact silent on the topic-hood of John in the matrix. Rather, the APT in (46)-(49) brings us back to a point of the preceding discourse in which John was not the topic.

4.4 I conclude from this that it is possible to identify two classes of topic expressions which consistently give raise to distinct information structures. It should be noticed that the different readings have no syntactic reflex. In particular, both the APT and the CNT are compatible with the same two word order patterns that have been illustrated in (5)-(6) and (33)-(34) above. I now

turn to the last issue that concerns the categorial and syntactic status of the expression in question.

5.   The categorial status of APROPOS and CONCERNING

In traditional Swedish grammar, expressions such as APROPOS and CONCERNING have been understood as prepositional in nature (e.g. Teleman et al. 1999: 715). A similar tendency is found, for instance, in the English grammatical tradition (e.g. Quirk et al. 1985: 670). In this section, I will outline an alternative view which I believe to be theoretically preferable and more consistent with the empirical facts.

One reason behind the traditional idea of identifying such expressions with prepositions may be related to morphological case. In fact, the pronominal argument of APT invariably carries objective case:

(50) Apropå   mig, …   /   Beträffande   mig …

APROPÅ   me$_{[obj.]}$ /   CONCERNING   me$_{[obj.]}$

(51) *Apropå   jag, … /   *Beträffande   jag …

APROPÅ   I$_{[nom.]}$ /   CONCERNING   I$_{[nom.]}$

Consider, to begin with, that it can be excluded that accusative in (50) is an instance of default case assignment given that default case in Swedish is unambiguously nominative. Only nominative is acceptable in the contexts suggested as criteria for default case assignment in Schütze (2001: 210-216), as for instance in left dislocation (52), "Mad magazine" sentences (53), and ellipsis (54):

(52) Jag,   jag   vaknar alltid   klockan   sex.

     I$_{[nom]}$ I   wake   always clock   six

     'Me, I always wake up at six o'clock'

(53) Jag?   Vakna klockan   sex?

     I$_{[nom]}$ wake   clock   six

     'Me? Waking up at six o'clock?'

(54) Vem   vaknar klockan   sex? - Inte   jag.

     Who   wakes clock   six   - Not   I$_{[nom]}$

     'Who is waking up at six o'clock? - Not me.'

Having established that the objective case in (50) is not a default case, consider that there is no compelling reason to assume that objective case in (50) is assigned by prepositions. Note that *apropå* and *beträffande* would be atypical prepositions. They are never selected; there is no expression in the language that obligatorily subcategorizes for any of them. Presumably as a result of this, extraction out of the alleged PP is straightforwardly ungrammatical. Compare (55)-(56) with (57)-(58):

(55) Vi   sa   beträffande   Johan

     we   said CONCERNING   John

     att   det är dags att   kontakta honom igen.

     that it   is time to   contact   him   again

(56) Vi   sa   apropå   Johan att   det är dags att   kontakta honom igen.

     we   said APROPOS John   that it   is time to   contact   him   again

(57) *Johan$_i$ sa   vi   beträffande t_i

John$_i$ said we   CONCERNING t_i

att   det   är dags att kontakta   honom igen.

that it   is time to contact   him   again

(58) *Johan$_i$ sa   vi   apropå t_i

John$_i$ said we   APROPOS t_i

att   det   är dags att kontakta   honom igen.

that it   is time to contact   him   again

Hence, preposition stranding is not acceptable with any of these expressions. Given a prepositional analysis of *apropå* and *beträffande*, the traditional taxonomy assumes, not unexpectedly, that a very large number of words belong to the class of prepositions. Some of these are borrowings, such as *apropå*, while others are derived from other word classes, notably verbs such as *beträffande*, present participle of the verb *beträffa* (which in turn is borrowed from German). Note, then, that the traditional approach makes prepositions become an "open" word class. Arguably, such a move has the effect of complicating the theory of prepositions, considerably and unnecessarily.

Rejecting the prepositional analysis, I assume that accusative case in these constructions is to be understood as structural case and I will pursue a rather different intuition about these elements. As has become clear from the previous discussion, both APTs and CNTs have similarities with hanging topics, however with the important difference that APTs and CNTs can occur in subordinate clauses. When they do, they are subject to so-called logophoric shift (e.g. Reuland 2006). In (59)-(60), the APT and the CNT introducing the matrix clauses are speaker oriented: trivially, they relate the content of the matrix to the speaker's previous discourse. On the other hand, in (61)-(62), where they are embedded in the complement of the verb *say*, the salient reading is that in which

they relate to the grammatical subject's previous discourse (though it is not entirely excluded that they still relate to the speaker):[7]

(59) Beträffande   Johan träffade   hon honom igår. (speaker orientation)

    CONCERNING   John   met   she   him   yesterday.

(60) Apropå   Johan träffade   hon honom igår.   (speaker orientation)

    APROPOS John   met   she   him   yesterday.

(61) Hon sa   att   hon beträffande   Johan

    she said that she CONCERNING   John

    hade träffat honom dagen innan.   (subject/$^?$speaker orientation)

    had met   him   day.the before.

(62) Hon sa   att   hon apropå   Johan

    she said that she APROPOS   John

    hade träffat honom dagen innan.   (subject/$^?$speaker orientation)

    had met   him   day.the before.

When CNTs and APTs appear in clauses selected by other predicates than verbs of saying, things change. If, as in (63)-(64), the predicate of the main clause is *I did not believe*, for instance, the logophoric shift is blocked.

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[7] As I mentioned already in f.n. 3, the examples of (59)-(60) should not be confused with those cases in which a clear intonation break signals the beginning of a new main clause: *She said that, concerning John: she met him yesterday*. Such a structure, too, is acceptable in Swedish but irrelevant for the present discussion.

(63) ?Jag trodde   inte på att han beträffande   Johan

I   believed not on   that he   CONCERNING   John

hade träffat honom dagen innan.

had met   him   day.the before.

(64) ?Jag trodde   inte på att han apropå   Johan

I   believed not on   that he   APROPOS John

hade träffat honom dagen innan.

had met   him   day.the before.

That is to say, the topic introducers of (63)-(64) relate to the speaker, not to the embedded subject, to the extent such a reference can at all be established: the acceptability of both (63) and (64) is downgraded in my opinion.

Suppose, then, that APTs and CNTs actually introduce logophoric predication, elaborating on the proposal of Speas & Tenny (2003). More precisely, I assume that they are to be understood as three-place predicates, taking as their arguments (a) the *speaker*, (b) the *topic*, and (c) the propositional content of the following matrix:[8]

(65) CONCERNING(*speaker*, *topic*, *proposition*)

(66) APROPOS(*speaker*, *topic*, *proposition*)

The role of the *speaker* in (65)-(66) can be shifted to the grammatical subject (the embedded speaker) when APTs and CNTs appear in subordinate environments. This analysis is intended to capture the intuition that *apropå* and

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[8] According to (65)-(66), the internal argument is taken to be the matrix proposition, rather than the actual CP. This has to be the case, given that both CNTs and APTs can appear lower in the structure than the complementizer.

beträffande are structurally similar in the sense that they lexicalize the relation between a proposition, its topic, and its "logophoric centre" in Bianchi's (2003) sense. The syntactic projections of the two predications in (65) and (66) are structurally identical. The difference between them lies only in the nature of the topic argument which imposes aboutness continuity forwards, in the following proposition, in the case of CNTs, and backwards, with an element in the preceding discourse, in the case of APTs, as stated in (41) and (42). Since preceding and following topics can easily coincide, and often do, CNTs and APTs can look superficially identical in a number of cases. It is presumably because of this circumstance that CNTs and APTs have been understood to belong to the same class of words in much of the traditional literature on topicalization.

6.   Comparative remarks and further speculations

Throughout the discussion, I have refrained from comparative remarks. However, some cross-linguistic comments may be called for at this point, though they will be kept at a minimum.

To begin with, note that Swedish word order facts are not generally attested among V2 languages. In German, for instance, subject inversion as in (68) is not acceptable:

(67) Apropos Johan, ich   treffe   ihn   morgen.

APROPOS John   I   see   him tomorrow

(68) *Apropos Johan   treffe   ich   ihn   morgen.

APROPOS John   see   I   him tomorrow

German word order facts, then, indicate that the German APT has to be in a peripheral position. The comparison of Swedish and German suggests that not only is the form-function mapping not uniform, it is also subject to language specific variations. The question is whether such a state of affairs justifies the claim of Prince (1998) the relation between syntax and discourse is arbitrary quite as much as "the relation between phonological form and lexical meaning". Though this limited set of data cannot provide any conclusive results, it appears that the basic distinction between APTs and CNTs is indeed found in a variety of Germanic and Romance languages and, hence, could reflect a universal property of language. As the reader may have noticed, some assumptions lie implicit already in the choice of wording in the English glosses. It seems to me that Swedish *apropå x* most naturally translates into English *speaking of x* or *apropos x*, while *beträffande x* looks more similar to *as for x* or *concerning x*. Moreover, the APT in Romance seems to be equivalent to French *à propos de x* or Italian *a proposito de x*, not unexpectedly, while the CNT rather seems to correspond to French *en ce qui concerne x* and Italian *per quanto riguarda x*. The validity of these impressionistic remarks remains to be explored. Note, however, that some distinctions similar to those discussed for Swedish are indeed encountered in Italian. My consultants report a contrast between (69) and (70), in the by now familiar context:

[*Context:* We had a lovely week in Greece. The weather was beautiful and the food was good, and …]

(69) …per quanto riguarda   l'   albergo, era   eccellente.

     FOR WHAT CONCERNS the hotel   (it)was excellent

    '… and as for the hotel, it was excellent'

(70) *… a proposito dell' albergo era   eccellente.

     APROPOS   of.the hotel   (it)was excellent

Likewise, the same difference is attested between (71) and (72), as we found in Swedish (37) and (39).

(71) *Per quanto riguarda Gianni, ieri ho incontrato Maria.

FOR WHAT CONCERNS John yesterday (I)have met Mary

'Concerning John, yesterday I met Mary.'

(72) A proposito di Gianni, ieri ho incontrato Maria.

APROPOS of John yesterday (I)have met Mary

'Speaking of John, yesterday I met Mary.'

Lastly, it is clearly possible that we can identify not only two but more subclasses among such topic markers with consistently different properties with respect to pragmatic criteria that have not been discussed in this paper. One example may suffice: consider the English expression *as far as x is concerned*, and its Swedish equivalent *vad anbelangar* 'what concerns', in the following examples:

(73) As far as the table is concerned, we bought it at the flea market.

(74) Vad bordet anbelangar, vi köpte det på loppmarknaden.

what table.the concerns we bought it at flee market.the

(75) ??As far as the table is concerned, prices are low at the flea market.

(76) ??Vad bordet anbelangar, priserna är låga på loppmarknaden.

what table.the concerns prices are low at flee market.the

Such a topic marking is acceptable in (73)-(74) but awkward in (75)-(76), apparently because of the lack of aboutness continuity with respect to the

matrix. However, the aboutness condition is relaxed in a context such as that of (77)-(78), where the topic is a sentient entity:

[Context: She would like to go to Hawaii on their vacation but …]

(77) … as far as John is concerned they could just as well stay at home.

(78) … vad Johan anbelangar kan de   lika gärna   stanna hemma

       what John   concerns   can they like well   stay   home

In the case of (77)-(78), a further complication seems to be introduced. Here, *as far as John is concerned* relates not only to the speaker's view point, but expresses John's attitude towards the proposition. The example comes to mean more or less *in John's opinion* or *if the decision is left to John*. This kind of reading sets (77)-(78) aside from the CNTs and the APTs discussed in the previous sections. Consequently, *as far as x is concerned* seems to represent a third subclass of topic markers.

6.   Conclusion

The survey of topic marking expressions in Swedish has been essentially limited to two classes of expressions, defined as *apropos*-topics and *concerning*-topics. The former are subject to a condition on aboutness continuity "backwards" - they have to continue an explicit topic from the preceding discourse - while the latter impose continuity "forwards" - with respect to the following matrix. Neither of these topic marking expressions can successfully be analyzed as any of the constructions in the syntactic literature: topicalization, dislocation, or hanging topics. Syntax and pragmatics, hence, must be recognized as separate and autonomous, though correlating, modules of the theory. Lastly, it is not a priori obvious that even closely related languages should have the same

repertory of such expressions, and cross-linguistic as well as idiosyncratic variation is far from unexpected. Still, some general observations on topic marking expressions in Swedish indeed seem to carry over to other Germanic and Romance languages.

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