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

and the syntax-pragmatics interface

Verner Egerland

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

---

1 Many thanks to Dianne Jonas, Valéria Molnár, Christer Platzack, and Michael Rochemont for useful criticism and comments on previous versions of this paper, as well as to the audience of the *Grammatik i Fokus*-colloquium, Lund, February 2012. All remaining errors are my own.

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 apropos 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. 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

---

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, jag träffar honom imorgon.
John I meet him tomorrow.

‘John, I will meet him 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 träffar jag honom imorgon.
John 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.\footnote{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) (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 aproppå-construction does not unambiguously correspond to any of these three constructions.

3 The syntactic properties of the aproppå-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.\footnote{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).}

(5) Apropå Johan, jag träffar honom imorgon.

APROPOS John I see him tomorrow
(6) Apropå Johan träffar jag honom imorgon.

‘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

(6)’

CP

Apropå Johan

CP

Subject

C’

C

TP

C

Subject

Verb

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:

\[(7) \quad *\text{Apropå Johan}_i \text{ träffade jag } t_i \text{ igår.} \]

\[\text{APROPOS John}_i \text{ met I } t_i \text{ yesterday} \]

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):

---

\(^5\) 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-\(\alpha\) 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 heart of this article.
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
cocurrence 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 på att 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 på att jag måste köpa henne en present.

APROPOS Mary I came on that 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 på att låna honom pengar.

APROPOS to John I am tired of to lend him money

(19) Apropå till Maria, jag kom på att jag måste köpa henne 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 köpa henne en present.

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 mig bo i sin egen lägenhet.

let Mary me stay in own apartment

B: Apropå sin egen lägenhet,

APROPOS own apartment

jag hörde att Maria ska sälja den.

I heard that Mary 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 mig bo i sin egen lägenhet.

let John me stay in own apartment

B: *Apropå sin egen lägenhet,

APROPOS own apartment

jag hörde att Maria ska sälja den.

I heard that Mary 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 förlånga 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

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 förlånga 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.

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 there restaurant.

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 there restaurant.

3.4 To summarize so far, the aproppå-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 compare 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.
    \textsc{concerning} John \textsc{I see him tomorrow}

(34) Beträffande Johan träffar jag honom imorgon.
    \textsc{concerning} John \textsc{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) *… apropos 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 *apropô*-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):

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

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

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):
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.

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):

(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):

(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):
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 it is 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\textsubscript{[nom]} I wake always clock six

   ‘Me, I always wake up at six o’clock’

(53) Jag? Vakna klockan sex?
   I\textsubscript{[nom]} wake clock six

   ‘Me? Waking up at six o’clock?’

(54) Vem vaknar klockan sex? - Inte jag.
   Who wakes clock six - Not I\textsubscript{[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 aproå 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,
extration 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 aproå Johan att det är dags att kontakta honom igen.
   we said APROPOS John that it is time to contact him again
(57) *Johan_i said 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 said 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/\(^{\prime}\)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/\(^{\prime}\)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.

---

\(^7\) 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.
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:\(^8\)

\[(65)\text{CONCERNING}(\text{speaker, topic, proposition})\]

\[(66)\text{APROPOS}(\text{speaker, topic, proposition})\]

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 apropos and

---

\(^8\) 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 aproppå 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 påloppmarknaden.

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 påloppmarknaden.

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.

**Selected references**


Benincà, Paola (1986) Il lato sinistro della frase italiana. *Association of Teachers of Italian Journal* 47, 57-85


