

The force of the argument

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Abstract

In reply to Wiklund (2009), this paper addresses once again embedded V2 clauses in Scandinavian: the behaviour of certain discourse oriented elements in these clauses, the possibility of topicalising embedded V2 clauses, and the optionality of embedded V2. The conclusion is that the analysis according to which embedded V2 clauses have illocutionary force can still be maintained.

1. Introduction

Wiklund (2009) argues against the view that embedded declarative V2 clauses differ from embedded declarative non-V2 clauses in Scandinavian in that the former have illocutionary force — in other words, they are asserted — while the latter are characterised by absence of illocutionary force.

The idea that embedded V2 clauses are asserted was defended in Julien (2007) and Julien (2008), and consequently, it is only as expected that Wiklund (2009) explicitly argues against these contributions. However, since Wiklund's short paper does not quite give justice to the arguments put forward by Julien, I feel that a reply is in place in order to avoid further misunderstandings.

The following phenomena are discussed by Wiklund (2009) in connection with embedded V2: discourse oriented adverbial elements, topicalisation of embedded clauses, and the possibility of replacing embedded V2-clauses with non-V2 clauses. Here, I will deal with these phenomena in that order.

2. Discourse oriented adverbial elements

Wiklund (2009:33) claims that “according to Julien (2008), the V2 word order is preferred with discourse-oriented swear words”, and she states that she and many other speakers do not agree. She then gives the following examples of

embedded non-V2 clauses containing discourse markers (her examples (10a-d), all in Swedish):

- (1)a. Hon upptäckte att han ju inte hade rest.
she discovered that he you.know not had gone
- b. Hon sa att han fassen inte hade gjort ett skit.
she said that he SwearWord not had done a shit
- c. Hon sa att han ärligt talat inte hade betalat.
she said that he honestly speaking not had paid
- d. Vi upptäckte att de nämligen/minsann inte hade kommit.
we discovered that they you.see/indeed not had come

I completely agree that the above examples are fully acceptable, and that many discourse oriented elements are just as good in non-V2 order as in V2 order in Scandinavian. But note that the examples given in Julien (2008) involved one particular swear word phrase, *for fanden* (Da)/*for faen* (No)/*för fan* (Swe), which appears to have a closer affiliation with certain types of illocutionary force than other discourse oriented expressions. It can strengthen an assertion or an imperative, and even the force in a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The Swedish examples in (2), which were given as (62a-c) in Julien (2008), illustrate this:

- (2)a. Jag kan för fan inte gå och fika i mysbyxor!
I can for devil not go and have.coffee in sweat.pants
 ‘I can for fuck’s sake not go and have a coffee wearing sweat pants!’
- b. Njut då för fan!
enjoy then for devil
 ‘Enjoy then, for fuck’s sake!’
- c. Nej för fan!
no for devil
 ‘No, for fuck’s sake!’

My statement that “discourse oriented swearword phrases like *for fanden*” work in this way was a hedge, since I cannot say for certain that there are not other expressions with the same effect. But it is nevertheless clear that none of the discourse-oriented adverbs in (1) have exactly the same effect as *for fanden*.

Although they are all acceptable in a declarative clause like (2a), as shown in (3), they arguably do not make the same semantic contribution as *för fan* (and variants):

- (3) Jag kan ju /fasen /ärligt talat /nämligen/minsann
I can you.know/SwearWord/honestly speaking/you.see /indeed
 inte gå och fika i mysbyxor!
not go and have.coffee in sweat.pants
 ‘I can [insert adverb here] not go and have a coffee wearing sweat pants!’

And if we replace *för fan* in (2b) and (2c) with the discourse oriented adverbs in (1), the result is ill-formed, at least if the adverb is in the same intonational phrase as the imperative or the interjection, as is the case with *för fan* in (2bc):

- (4)a. Njut då #ju /#fasen /#ärligt talat
enjoy then you.know/SwearWord/honestly speaking
 /#nämligen/#minsann!
 /you.see/indeed
- b. Nej, #ju /#fasen /#ärligt talat /#nämligen
no you.know/SwearWord/honestly speaking/you.see
 /#minsann!
 /indeed

The tag *ärligt talat* ‘honestly speaking’ can combine with imperatives and with ‘yes’ and ‘no’ if it constitutes a separate intonational phrase, which is an indication that it is not structurally integrated with the rest of the utterance. *För fan*, by contrast, can appear in the same intonational phrase as the imperative or interjection, which indicates that it is structurally integrated into the utterance.

In addition, *för fan* can appear inside imperatives, as in (5):

- (5) Rekommendera nu för fan inte din egen blogg!
recommend now for devil not your own blog
 ‘Don’t you bloody recommend your own blog!’

This is completely impossible for the other discourse markers under discussion:

- (6) Rekommendera nu #ju /#fasen /#ärligt talat
 recommend now *you.know/SwearWord/honestly speaking*
 /#nämligen /#minsann inte din egen blogg!
 /*you.see* indeed not your own blog

Hence, I maintain that *för fan* (and its counterparts in other Scandinavian varieties) first and foremost serves as a strengthener of various kinds of illocutionary force. In other words, it was not randomly chosen in the examples given in Julien (2008).

A final point made in Julien (2008) was that *för fan* (and its counterparts) is better in embedded V2 clauses than in embedded non-V2 clauses (example (63) in Julien (2008)):

- (7)a. Hon sa **att** hon **hade** för fan inte betalat räkning-en i tid.
she said that she had for devil not paid bill-DEF in time
 ‘She said that she had for fuck’s sake not paid the bill on time.’
- b. ?? Hon sa **att** hon för fan inte **hade** betalat räkning-en i tid.
she said that she for devil not had paid bill-DEF in time

The difference is subtle, and not immediately noticed by everyone, but it is nevertheless there. If it is true that *för fan* is affiliated with illocutionary force, the contrast between (7a) and (7b) suggests that illocutionary force is present in the embedded clause in (7a), which has V2 order, in a way that it is not in the embedded clause in (7b), which has non-V2 order.

3. Topicalisation of embedded clauses

Wiklund (2009) further claims that embedded V2 clauses cannot be topicalised, i.e. moved to initial position in their matrix clause, and she suggests that this may be due to whatever is responsible for their root status, and not necessarily a consequence of their V2 order or their illocutionary force.

However, I showed in Julien (2007) that it is not completely impossible to have a V2 clause in the initial position. The following minimal pair of Norwegian sentences was presented as an illustration (example (51ab) in Julien (2007)):

- (8)a. At den gutt-en *ikke* **var** som andre glemte de alltid
that that boy-DEF not was like others forgot they always
 ‘That that boy was not like the others, they always forgot.’
- b. ? At den gutt-en **var** *ikke* som andre glemte de alltid
that that boy-DEF was not like others forgot they always
 ‘That that boy was not like the others, they always forgot.’

As indicated, I find (8b) only slightly less perfect than (8a), although (8b) involves a topicalised embedded clause with V2 order, whereas the topicalised embedded clause in (8a) has non-V2 order.

Furthermore, I proposed in Julien (2007) that the reason why embedded V2 clauses often resist topicalisation has to do with their discourse status. Let me quote from Julien (2007:44):

Fronted constituents are often topics, and clauses that are topics must have a content that is given in the discourse. That is, the proposition that they represent should be presupposed rather than asserted, and since V2 clauses are necessarily asserted, they are normally not good as topics.

I then argued that some embedded V2 clauses, namely those that are embedded under factive or semifactive predicates, are both presupposed and asserted. That is, whereas the proposition that the embedded clause represents has to be presupposed by the speaker, it is not necessarily known by the hearer, so that it is possible for the speaker to treat it as new information for the hearer (in fact, this is very close to the characterisation that Wiklund (2009) gives of her example (4)). It is its presupposed status that makes the embedded clause in (8b) acceptable in initial position, while its V2 order is connected to its asserted status.

I also pointed out in Julien (2007) that if an embedded V2 clause is focused, for example in the sense that it represents the relevant new information in an answer to a *wh*-question, it can appear in the initial position of its matrix clause. Thus, (9), with an embedded V2 clause in initial position, is a possible answer to a question like “What did she say?” (again the example is Norwegian).

- (9) At poet **kan** du *ikke* bli var det hun sa.
that poet can you not become was it she said
 ‘That you cannot become a poet was what she said.’

My conclusion was that there are no structural difficulties with having an embedded V2 clause in the initial position of its matrix clause. Instead, it is the asserted status of embedded V2 clauses that in many cases prevent them from appearing in that position (as Faarlund, Lie & Vannebo 1997: 984 also suggest).

4. V2 versus non-V2

Wiklund (2009:31–32) notes that non-V2 order is always possible in Swedish embedded clauses, even in those cases where V2-order is an alternative, and that it is not clear in what sense embedded clauses with non-V2 order are not also assertions. This is then seen as another problem for the approach I have been defending, according to which only V2 clauses are asserted.

To illustrate her argument, Wiklund (2009) gives the following example of a question, given here as (10), with four possible answers, repeated here as (11ab) and (12ab):

- (10) Varför kom han inte på festen?
why came he not on party.DEF
 ‘Why didn’t he come to the party?’

- (11)a. Han påstod att han inte hade tid.
he claimed that he not had time
 ‘He claimed that he did not have time.’

- b. Han påstod att han hade inte tid.
he claimed that he had not time
 ‘He claimed that he did not have time.’

- (12)a. Någon sa att dom inte ville ha en idiot där.
someone said that they not wanted have an idiot there
 ‘Someone said that they didn’t want an idiot there.’

- b. Någon sa att dom ville inte ha en idiot där.
someone said that they wanted not have an idiot there
 ‘Someone said that they didn’t want an idiot there.’

As we see, the a) answers involve an embedded clause with non-V2 order, while the b) answers involve an embedded clause with V2 order. And as Wiklund points out, the two versions are in either case equally acceptable, and moreover,

they have the same properties with respect to the main assertion — in (11a) and (11b), the embedded clause represents the main assertion, whereas in (12a) and (12b), the whole sentence represents the main assertion. I agree with this, and I am also not aware of any differences between the Mainland Scandinavian varieties in this respect.

However, as I see it the similarities between V2 and non-V2 noted by Wiklund only demonstrate that embedded V2 cannot be accounted for in terms of main assertion, contrary to the proposal put forward by Bentzen et al. (2007) and Wiklund et al. (2009). The analysis according to which embedded V2 clauses are asserted whereas non-V2 clauses are not still goes through. On this analysis, when the embedded clause has non-V2 order, as in (11a) and (12a), the proposition that the embedded clause represents is not in itself asserted. It is just reported, while it is the whole sentence containing the embedded clause that is asserted. But when the embedded clause has V2 order, as in (11b) and (12b), both the matrix clause and the embedded clause are asserted—in other words, both clauses have a Force head. The pragmatic difference between the two options is so subtle that it for many purposes can be ignored. It is there nevertheless, and as I have shown, the discourse marker *för fan* is sensitive to it. Speakers' intuitions also tend to point in the same direction. While I am perfectly aware that more convincing tests would be desirable, I also think that the lack of knockdown tests does not necessarily mean that the approach in itself is mistaken.

5. Conclusion

Embedded V2 clauses in Scandinavian are pragmatically different from non-V2 clauses. One piece of evidence is that certain discourse-oriented elements that are sensitive to illocutionary force are more acceptable in embedded V2 clauses than in non-V2 clauses.

The fact that V2 clauses often resist topicalisation, unlike non-V2 clauses, is also a consequence of the asserted status of V2 clauses. However, if the clause is also presupposed, which is the case if it is embedded under a factive or semifactive predicate, it can be treated as a topic and moved to initial position. Movement to initial position is also possible if the clause is focused.

Finally, it must be noted that there is only a subtle pragmatic difference between a construction with an embedded clause that is asserted in its own right and a construction where only the larger sentence containing the embedded is asserted. As a consequence, the illocutionary force of embedded V2 clauses is not easily perceived, and tests that unambiguously demonstrate its presence are hard to find.

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