

Pronominal object shift in the light of object placement in general

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This paper addresses the phenomenon of pronominal object shift in Danish and Swedish and to which extent it is relevant to analyse object shift as an isolated choice between two positions. An extensive corpus investigation shows that there are in these languages distinct strategies for the placement of pronominal objects, that has not previously been discussed in the object shift literature. On the basis of this investigation, we argue that it is necessary to explore all positions for pronominal objects to be able to analyse the underlying causes of pronominal object shift.

Most previous analyses of pronominal object shift in Scandinavian languages focus on pronouns with NP antecedents and on the two positions preceding and following a sentence adverbial, hence the notion object *shift* (cf. Holmberg 1986, 1999; Hellan & Platzack 1995; Josefsson 1992, 2003; Sells 2001; Svenonius 2002; and Vikner 1994, 1997). In (1 a) the pronoun *henne* ('her') is placed in the shifted position preceding the negation *inte*, and in (1 b) in the in situ position following the negation.

- (1) a. Jag såg henne inte.[SW]
I saw her not
'I didn't see her.'
- b. Jag såg inte henne.[SW]
I saw not her
'I didn't see her.'

The standard assumption is that it is obligatory for weak pronominal objects to shift and that only contrasted or focussed pronominal objects appear in situ in standard Danish. In Swedish, it has been noted that also weak objects appear in situ to some extent.

However, recent research has shown that there is a significant difference in distribution between object pronouns with NP antecedents (here $PRON_{np}$, eg. *henne*, above) and object pronouns with sentence and VP antecedents (here $det_{s/vp}$, eg. *det* in example (2) below). In a comparison of the shifted and the in situ position, more $det_{s/vp}$ appear in situ in both languages.

- (2) a. Jag tror/kan inte det.[SW]
I think/can not that
'I don't think so./I can't.'

Furthermore, it has been shown in recent research that while a $PRON_{np}$ is generally contrasted or focussed in situ, a $det_{s/vp}$ is generally not both in Swedish and in Danish. For $det_{s/vp}$ it is instead the factivity of the matrix verb (cf. Karttunen 1971) that affects the object position. $Det_{s/vp}$ with factive matrix verbs have a higher cognitive status (just as $PRON_{np}$, cf. Gundel, Hedberg & Zacharski 1993; Gundel, Hegarty & Borthen 2003; Borthen & Fretheim 1999) and are licensed in the shifted position more frequently than $det_{s/vp}$ with non-factive matrix verbs, that appear in situ to a greater extent.

The corpus study of this paper shows that there are significantly different strategies for the placement of pronominal objects with different cognitive status in Danish and in Swedish, and it is not until we include all word order options for pronominal objects that the patterns emerge. Consequently, we argue that – contrary to what have been assumed in previous studies of pronominal object shift – it is not feasible to analyse object shift as a choice between two positions, the in situ position, following the negation and the shifted position preceding it. Both the initial position, and the possibility of omitting the pronoun altogether must be considered in an analysis of object shift.

The new data strongly supports the assumption that factive verbs take cognitively highly accessible pronominal objects. In Swedish, the unmarked option for the factive verbs *förstå* ('understand') and *veta*

(‘know’) turns out to be to leave out the pronominal object entirely in declarative clauses (59–67%), see (3). This indicates that information related to the pronoun is cognitively highly accessible.

- (3) Jag vet inte. Jag förstår inte. [SW]
I know not I understand not
‘I don’t know. I don’t understand.’

In Danish pronominal complements to the counterparts of these verbs, *vide* and *forstå*, are generally not left out, but mostly realised in the shifted position (39–56%) see (4), where only weak – and hence accessible – objects appear, or in the initial position (28–38%).

- (4) Jeg ved det ikke. Jeg forstår det ikke [DA]
I know it not I understand it not
‘I don’t know. I don’t understand.’

When the matrix verb is non-factive, i.e. *tro* and *tycka/synes* (‘think, believe’), the objects are not left out, and they are rare in the shifted position in Danish (10–27%), and even more so in Swedish (1–10%). For non-factive verbs it is instead the initial position that is the unmarked option in declarative clauses (for Danish 73–88% and for Swedish 64–84%). In questions, where there is no possibility of placing an object in the initial position, the in situ placement dominates both in Danish and in Swedish for non-factive verbs.

An investigation of only two positions, shifted or in situ, would here for example wrongly lead to the conclusion that pronominal objects to factive verbs in Swedish appear in situ in up to 50% of the cases, when the real number is in fact that only 3% appear in this position. The corpus data including all possible positions instead leads to an analysis where a pronominal object to a factive predicate gets the value 0 for the ACTVN feature in the i-structure (cf. O’Connor 2006). In Swedish, these will generally be linked to a c-structure with a zero instantiation of the object. In Danish, these objects are instead normally linked to a c-structure where the object is in the shifted position. Pronominal objects to non-factive predicates will normally get a higher ACTVN value, due to them being less accessible, and they will normally be linked to the in situ position or the initial position, depending on sentence type and other factors.

Selected references

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