

## In Search of (Null) Arguments: A Review of Tests for Argumenthood in Swedish

Null objects are generally considered more frequent both in Old Norse and in Modern Icelandic than in Modern Mainland Scandinavian languages (Rögnvaldsson 1990; Sigurðsson 1993). Clearly, there is cross-linguistic variation among the Scandinavian languages with respect to restrictions on null objects. However, the null object phenomenon is not particularly well studied, at least not in Mainland Scandinavian languages (but see e.g. Åfarli and Creider 1987; Vikner 2003 and Sigurðsson 2011).

A fundamental problem when studying null objects is that we do not really know what a null object is – there are at least two different kinds distinguished in the international literature, sometimes referred to as definite (1a) and indefinite (1b) null complements (e.g. Fillmore 1986):

- (1) a. *Hon öppnade en bok och försökte läsa Ø.*  
           she opened a book and tried read  
           ‘She opened a book and tried to read.’  
       b. *Han sitter och läser.*  
           he sits and reads  
           ‘He is reading.’

A definite null object is often referential. This is the kind that is most well studied in Scandinavian syntax. However, according to Fillmore (1986), the key property of the definite null complement is that the referent is specific and retrievable from the (extralinguistic) context. This singles out the definite null complements from the indefinite null complements, where the referent is generally unknown or irrelevant. Under this definition, null object phenomena raise questions concerning what an object really is. In fact, we might ask what, if anything, is omitted in examples like (2a), (b) and (c), and what the difference is between the different complements in (2), including Ø in (2a):

- (2) a. *Hon ringer.*  
           she calls  
           ‘She is calling.’  
       b. *Hon ringer till honom.*  
           she calls to him  
           ‘She is calling him.’  
       c. *Hon ringer honom.*  
           she calls him  
           ‘She is calling him.’  
       d. *Hon ringer ett samtal (till honom).*  
           she calls a call to him  
           ‘She is placing a call to him.’

In order to answer these questions, a study of null objects must take the distinction between arguments and non-arguments into account. In the literature, categories such as arguments, complements and adjuncts are often taken for granted, and the use of the different terms varies. Notably, while e.g. Toivonen (2012) talks about arguments, Dowty (2003) uses the term complement.

Needham & Toivonen (2011) and Toivonen (2012) present a number of different tests for argumenthood from the literature, such as word order tests, alternation tests and extraction tests. It is not immediately clear, however, that the different tests distinguish between the same categories.

In this talk, I review the tests for argumenthood using Swedish data, taking Toivonen (2012) as a starting point. Since the discussion is typically based on English data, all tests do not directly transfer to Swedish. The tests are also attributed to different domains, and sometimes it is unclear what properties the different tests really test for – some of them are clearly of a more semantic nature while others are more syntactic.

The critical question for my continued work on null objects in Swedish is what distinguishes overt arguments from non-arguments and null arguments. Another fundamental question is how arguments and non-arguments relate to notions such as complement and adjunct. These two questions both have implications for our understanding of cross-linguistic variation in null objects among the Scandinavian languages, and they are both addressed in this talk.

## References

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