

Fronted pronominal objects in the mainland Scandinavian languages

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Swedish, Norwegian and Danish all allow fronting of object pronouns as in (1)–(3). The examples are from the Nordic Dialect Corpus.¹

(1)	a. de ville ha reda på man hade gjort sin första bilaffär och den _i gjorde jag <i>e_i</i> 1950 strax före julen.	sv
	b. fast den _i tror jag de har rivit <i>e_i</i> nu, den kåken _i	sv
(2)	a. og så fikk vi tak i en annen ovn inni Bjerkvika men den _i liker jeg sj- ikke <i>e_i</i> e #	no
	b. den perfekte ferien _i den _i trur jeg vi hadde <i>e_i</i> i fjor	no
(3)	a. så har jeg en sort mappe på den storrelse där og den _i lægger jeg <i>e_i</i> på # håndvasken	da
	b. min far han sagde jo altså den første bil der kom til ærø den _i var de jo bange for <i>e_i</i>	da

We assume these are all examples of topicalization, and the purpose of this talk is to investigate this type of fronting from the perspective of information packaging and cognitive status.

Engdahl (1997) describes two types of topics in the Scandinavian languages: *contrastive* and *continuous*. Topics of the latter type receive no particular stress, and serve to "establish cohesion between the two utterances" (p. 72). One of her examples is given in (4).

(4) Igår köpte jag en jeansjacka. Den_j ska jag ha *e_j* på mig imorgon. (Engdahl 1997, p. 72)

Erteschik-Shir (2007) makes a slightly different distinction. In her terminology, a topic that refers to a newly introduced referent in the previous sentence, as in (4), is called a *switch topic* whereas the term *continued topic* is used in case the topic was the topic of the preceding sentence as well. This is exemplified in (5), where the topic of A's utterance is continued in B's.

(5) A: Hans_i kan jeg godt lide.
B: Ham_i kan jeg også lide *e_i*. (Erteschik-Shir 2007, p.12)

The Scandinavian languages differ from English, where unstressed personal pronouns are normally not topicalized; compare the English version of (2a) in (6).

(6) a. * but it_i I don't like *e_i*
b. but I don't like it
c. but that (one)_i I don't like *e_i*

The pronoun *it* cannot receive stress and cannot be topicalized, which suggests that topicalization in English always involves some notion of contrast. Gundel (2010) argues

¹ <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/>

that the difference between *it* and *that* reflects the cognitive status of their referent, i.e. how accessible it is to the speaker and the addressee. Borthen & Haugereid (2005, p. 222) make a similar point, viz. that unaccented personal pronouns signal that their discourse referent has to be the current center of attention. This is the natural class of nominals that are prohibited in English topicalization, they claim, and they also argue that Norwegian patterns with English in this respect. However, the Scandinavian languages use fronted pronominal objects in many more contexts than English, as shown by (1)–(3).

Using data from the Nordic Dialect Corpus, we investigate fronted object pronouns in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, looking in particular at the role of the initial pronoun in the discourse context. We try to establish its cognitive status and to what extent this influences its prosodic realization and the information packaging of the utterance.

References

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