Workshop on Syntax and Semantics
on the occasion of William Miki Thorsen's PhD defence

October 9, 2024. Building 1481, room 366, Aarhus University

Program:

11:15-11:20	Welcome
11:20-12:10	**Johan Brandtler** (& David Håkansson): *Subject placement in Swedish - a corpus study in variation*
12:20-13:10	**Ken Ramshøj Christensen & Anne Mette Nyvad**: *Alternative agreement in Danish – mismatch or grammar?*
13:10-14:10	Lunch
14:10-15-00	**Kasper Boye**: *Defining grammaticalization and deconstructing the lexical-grammatical continuum*
15:10-16:00	**Sten Vikner**: *VP-internal subjects and binding in fronted DPs/VPs in Danish/English*

Abstracts:

Subject placement in Swedish - a corpus study in variation
Johan Brandlter (Stockholm University) & David Håkansson (Uppsala University)

The aim of this paper is to uncover the principles governing the relative ordering of the syntactic subject and clausal negation in Swedish declarative main clauses. In standard descriptions of the Scandinavian languages, the subject occupies a position to the immediate linear right of the finite verb and to the left of clause adverbials: *Den filmen ville Sven inte se*. According to Teleman et al (1999, 4:94), the possibility of placing the subject to the right of adverbials is seemingly unrestricted in Swedish, at least with nominal subjects: *Den filmen ville **inte** Sven se*. Given that word order in Swedish is relatively strict, and that syntactic function is based on placement within the clause rather than case marking, this seemingly "free variation" is a rather curious phenomenon. In this talk, we argue that subject placement in relation to negation in the Swedish middle field is not free, but governed by a complex interplay of a number of different factors, relating to both the subject (length and definiteness) and the hosting clause (active/passive, simple/complex verb phrase, clause type). Our findings are based on a corpus study containing more than 25 million words, involving almost 3.000 sentences of nominal subjects in the middle field.

Slides: https://tildeweb.au.dk/au572/PhD_workshop_MWT/Brandtler_A_corpus study_in_variation.pdf

Defining grammaticalization and deconstructing the lexical-grammatical continuum
Kasper Boye (University of Copenhagen)

There is wide agreement about approximately what grammaticalization but a more profound understanding faces two major challenges. One is that the presupposed distinction between grammatical and lexical is itself hard to get a grip on (e.g. Boye & Harder 2012: 1-6). The other challenge is that even with a theoretically anchored and well-defined distinction between grammatical and lexical, it is not clear that grammaticalization is a distinct type of

language change rather than an epiphenomenon (e.g. Campbell 2001: 151). Boye & Harder (2012) offered a solution to the first challenge, arguing for an understanding of grammatical elements as defined by conventionalized discourse secondary status (roughly, attentional background status). However, they circumvented the second challenge. Rather than attempting to define grammaticalization as a diachronic phenomenon, they defined it in terms of its result, namely as "the diachronic change that gives rise to linguistic expressions that are by convention ancillary and as such discursively secondary" (Boye & Harder 2012: 22). This definition is problematic as it includes all changes under grammaticalization as long as the output is a grammatical (i.e. secondary by convention) element. This paper has two aims: Firstly, it proposes a definition of grammaticalization which is still based on the understanding of grammatical elements in Boye & Harder (2012), but which targets the nature of grammaticalization as a diachronic phenomenon: Grammaticalization is the conventionalization of discourse secondary status. Secondly, the paper discusses central implications of the proposed definition.

Slides: https://tildeweb.au.dk/au572/PhD_workshop_MWT/Boye_Defining_grammaticalization.pdf

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Alternative agreement in Danish – mismatch or grammar?
Ken Ramshøj Christensen & Anne Mette Nyvad (Aarhus University)

In informal variants of spoken and (unedited) written Danish, predicative adjectives sometimes agree with a prepositional object (P-Obj) instead of with the subject (which is standard), even when the P-Obj is explicitly accusative, as in 'Dem er jeg vild-e med' (Them, I am crazy-PLUR about). In this talk, we present evidence from a series of experiments involving elicitation (sentence completion), acceptability judgments, corpus data, and self-paced reading task with forced choice (G-Maze). The results show that (1), even though people mostly produce standard agreement, it is easy to elicit alternative agreement. The tendency is even stronger when the P-Obj is singular and fronted. The studies also show that it is a good idea to use different methods / experimental approaches to study the same phenomenon, because the results partly support, partly challenge earlier results, depending on the method.

Slides: https://tildeweb.au.dk/au572/PhD_workshop_MWT/Christensen-Nyvad_Alt-AGR-DK.pdf

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VP-internal subjects and binding in fronted DPs/VPs in Danish/English
Sten Vikner (Aarhus University)

Abstract: I will present an argument in favour of the analysis that the subject of an active sentence is base-generated not in IP-spec (which corresponds to **n** in Diderichsen 1946) but further to the right, i.e. in VP-spec (which is a position to the left of **a** and to the right of **V** in Diderichsen 1946). The argument involves fronted VPs (*sende børnene hjem turde han ikke ___* / *They promised to finish the work by 4 PM, and finish the work by 4 PM they will ___*), and it is based on the fact that reflexives and reciprocals inside such fronted VPs behave differently from reflexives and reciprocals inside other fronted phrases, e.g. *wh*-DPs (*How many jokes about the herself did the president laugh at ___?*). I will discuss this difference and show how it can be accounted for under the VP-internal subject hypothesis.

Handout: https://tildeweb.au.dk/au132769/handouts/vikner-ho-2024-VP-int-subj--binding-in-fronted-DPs-VPs.pdf