

Relative clauses, small clauses, and extraction in Swedish

This talk investigates extraction from relative clauses (ERC) in Swedish, and argues, contra a recent proposal (Kush 2011, Kush et al. 2013), that there is extraction from full-blown relative clauses, and not just from small clauses. Evidence comes from ERC-sentences with matrix predicates like *träffa* ‘meet’ and from extraction from non-subject RCs. I also provide an argument inspired by Keenan’s (1987) account of existential sentences that the RCs in several ERC-sentences attach inside DP, like regular restrictive RCs.

The mainland Scandinavian languages are known to allow sentences like (1), which are commonly analyzed as involving extraction from an RC (e.g. Erteschik-Shir 1973, Engdahl 1997).

- (1) [Det språket]_i finns det många [som talar *t*₁].
that language are there many that speak
‘There are many people who speak that language.’ (Engdahl 1997:59)

Examples like (1) are of interest from a theoretical point of view since they appear to be in violation of principles like Subjacency and the Phase Impenetrability Condition, and the structure of the RC in such examples is a point of contention in the literature. While some argue that the RCs in ERC-sentences are not structurally different from other RCs (Erteschik-Shir 1973, Engdahl 1997), others argue that they are not RCs at all (Kush 2011, Kush et al. 2013).

Kush (2011) and Kush et al. (2013) propose that the RC-like constituents in examples like (1) are not real relative clauses but small clauses, which means that ERC is only illusory. The proposal builds on the fact that the relative complementizer *som* ‘that’ is homophonous with a predicational *som*, similar to the English particle ‘as’, which has been argued to head small clauses (Eide & Åfarli 1999). Instead of a relative complex, sentences like (1) involve a PredP: *Det språket finns det* [_{PredP} *många* [_{Pred'} *som* [_{TP} *talar*]]]. As an extraction sentence is parsed, there will be an amelioration effect if it is possible to reanalyze the RC as such a small clause. The analysis gets support from an acceptability study, where extraction from an RC (or RC-like constituent) in the complement of a small clause–selecting verb received higher acceptability ratings than extraction from the complement of a verb that does not select a small clause (Kush 2011). However, there is also experimental evidence from both Danish and Swedish that casts doubt on the small clause hypothesis (Christensen & Nyvad 2014, Müller 2015).

In this talk, I take a closer look at the RCs in examples like (1) and other ERC-sentences based on another type of data, taking as a starting point a collection of 270 spontaneously produced extraction sentences from conversation, radio, and written Swedish (Lindahl 2017). An investigation of the matrix predicates that occur in these ERC-sentences shows that extraction often occurs in environments where it is predicted to be acceptable by the small clause hypothesis, with matrix predicates like *vara* ‘be’, *finnas* ‘exist’, and *se* ‘see’. However, there are also examples with extraction from RCs in the complement of verbs like *träffa* ‘meet’, as illustrated by (2), which are not amenable to a small clause analysis.

- (2) Det_i har jag inte träffat någon [som gjort *t*₁]
that have I not met someone that done
‘I haven’t met anyone who has done that.’

While such examples are quite rare, they are perfectly acceptable. This suggests that there is extraction from full-blown RCs, since *träffa* does not select a small clause. Another piece of evidence for this conclusion is shown in (3).

- (3) [just den här delen av matten]₁ kommer ni inte hitta nåt jobb₂ [där₂ man behöver *t*₁ *t*₂]
 precisely the here part of the math will you not find some job where one needs
 ‘You won’t find any job where you need THIS part of math.’

This example exhibits extraction from a non-subject relative clause, which cannot be analyzed as a small clause, given that small clauses are assumed to be “subject-oriented” (Kush et al. 2013), i.e. that the DP in the specifier of PredP will correspond to the subject argument in a clause, and can never be interpreted as corresponding to a non-subject argument.

I also provide an argument inspired by Keenan’s (1987) account of existential sentences that the *som*-constituents in several ERC-sentences with existential verbs (*vara* ‘be’ and *finnas* ‘exist’) should be analyzed as regular RCs. Keenan has several arguments that existential sentences in English have the structure *there is* [DP] [XP], where XP is predicated of DP, and he suggests that the RC-like clauses that occur in some existential sentences can be analyzed as instantiating the XP-predicate in this structure. Similar arguments can be made for Swedish existentials, and it is possible to extract a phrase out of the RC-like clauses in such sentences. However, there are also ERC-sentences like (4), where such an analysis of the RC-like clause is not as natural.

- (4) Det₁ finns det [DP många [som säger *t*₁]] [i Göteborg].
 that exist there many that say in Gothenburg
 ‘There are many people who say so in Gothenburg.’

The most natural interpretation of this sentence is that the PP *i Göteborg* ‘in Gothenburg’ is predicated of *många som säger det* ‘many people who say so’, and that the *som*-constituent is consequently part of DP in this case. Crucially, extraction is possible in such cases as well. This observation taken together with the observations about possible matrix predicates and extraction from non-subject relatives indicates that the RCs in several ERC-sentences are regular restrictive RCs, and that ERC is not illusory.

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