

A semi-configurational CxG approach to clausal syntax in a verb-second language: the example of Swedish

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In this talk we will sketch a CxG account of clausal syntax in Swedish, thereby addressing some unresolved general issues in CxG syntax. While clausal syntax is a main priority for most other frameworks, it is somewhat understudied from a CxG perspective, at least outside English. Furthermore, existing CxG models of English syntax (Fillmore & Kay 1995; Sag 2010; 2012) are not readily adaptable to languages such as Swedish, since they are based on a basic NP+VP structure (subject-predicate construction), in line with English word order patterns. Swedish, however, is a so-called V2 language, with the finite verb in second place in the clause, which means that the subject follows the verb whenever it is not clause-initial, as shown in (1).

- (1) Då åkte jag till Spanien
then went I to Spain
'Then I went to Spain.'

Considering this, an S=NP+VP analysis must be seen as inadequate as a general point of departure for Swedish clausal syntax. To account for the V2 pattern, Swedish grammars typically assume a topological model adapted from Danish (cf. Diderichsen 1946; Telemann et al. 1999). While this model has proven fairly successful, not all structures fit the general schema and its flat structure has limited power to handle hierarchical relations (cf. Andréasson 2007, 2008), for example regarding scope (2) and coordination (3).

- (2) Jag kan också inte [flytta till Spanien].
I can also not move to Spain
'It is also possible that I don't move to Spain.'
- (3) Vi ska [spela golf] och [städä garaget] på lördag.
we shall play golf and clean garage-the on Saturday
'We will play golf and clean the garage on Saturday.'

Since the topological clause schemas consist of linearly ordered slots, they do not apply well to constituents that span more than one slot, such as the phrases within brackets in (2–3). Hence, they cannot handle either the scope differences in (2) or the coordinated verb phrases in (3). Some of these issues are addressed by the “not too hierarchical model” of Swedish syntax (Börjars et al. 2003; Engdahl et al. 2004; Andréasson 2008). The main idea of this model is to assume phrasal hierarchy only when supported by constituency tests, which tends to motivate semi-configurational analyses. In this paper, we combine ideas from these two approaches and adapt them to a CxG setting. Key to our proposal, and one of the more novel aspects of the approach, is that clauses with simple and split predicates are treated differently. There are several kinds of syntactic variation that are sensitive to this distinction, for example so-called object shift (cf. Holmberg (1986), as illustrated in (4–6).

- (4) Jag såg henne inte/inte henne.
I saw her not/not her
'I didn't see her.'
- (5) *Jag har henne inte sett.
I have her not seen
'I haven't seen her.'
- (6) (6) Jag har inte sett henne.
I have not seen her
'I haven't seen her'

The aim of the approach presented here is to contribute both to the description of Swedish and to the development of CxG syntax in general. By adding a constructional perspective to previous approaches to Swedish syntax we may straightforwardly combine different kinds of properties in an integrated account, including for example the effects of simple/split predicates. On the other hand, we make a theoretical contribution to CxG by addressing general syntactic phenomena not captured by previous accounts of CxG syntax. In particular, we account for structures that do not fit a straight-forward phrase structural approach as typically assumed for English.

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