

Readings on Unbounded Dependencies in Scandinavian Languages

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Umeå 1982

Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, Sweden

Discontinuous Questions and Subjacency in Norwegian*

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0. Introduction

In this paper I will discuss two Subjacency problems in Norwegian. First I will claim that \bar{S} , not S, is a bounding node for Subjacency in Norwegian. Secondly, I will maintain that the claim that there should be an asymmetry between wh-movement and relative clause formation with respect to Subjacency, is false.

1. \bar{S} as a bounding node

In transformational grammar it was early observed that the power of the transformations was too strong, and that one had to formulate restrictions on their use. In the early 70's Noam Chomsky claimed that several of the proposed restrictions were instances of a more general restriction called Subjacency. This principle states that no rule may involve X and Y in the configuration

$$(1) \dots X \dots [\alpha [\beta \dots Y \dots \beta] \alpha] \dots X \dots$$

Bounding nodes were at first taken to be S and NP. After a distinction between S and \bar{S} was made by Joan Bresnan, there was some uncertainty whether S or \bar{S} was the bounding node. Chomsky (1977) discusses both possibilities and settles for assuming S as bounding node (Chomsky 1977: 116 f.).

An example which illustrates the application of the principle of Subjacency, is the following:

- (2) a. Hvem innrømte Per at han hadde slått?
 whom admitted Per that he had hit?
- b. *Hvem innrømte Per det faktum at han hadde slått?
 whom admitted Per the fact that he had hit?

Sentence (2b) is ungrammatical (or at least considerably odd) in Norwegian, whereas (2a) is quite straightforward. This may be explained by Subjacency. In (2a) *hvem* is moved from the end of the subordinate clause to the rightmost COMP position, and from there further to the initial COMP position, passing at most only one bounding node each time:

$$(2a') \quad \bar{S} \text{ COMP } \left[\underset{\uparrow}{S} \text{ innrømte Per } \left[\underset{\uparrow}{\bar{S}} \text{ COMP } \left[\underset{\uparrow}{S} \text{ han hadde slått hvem?} \right] \right] \right]$$

(2b), however, is blocked because passing from one COMP to the other, *hvem* would cross two bounding nodes, thus violating the principle of Subjacency

$$(2b') \quad \bar{S} \text{ COMP } \left[\underset{\uparrow}{S} \text{ innrømte Per } \left[\underset{\uparrow}{NP} \text{ det faktum } \left[\underset{\uparrow}{\bar{S}} \text{ COMP } \left[\underset{\uparrow}{S} \text{ han hadde slått hvem?} \right] \right] \right] \right]$$

However, even though Subjacency can "explain" why (2b) is ungrammatical, it cannot tell why sentences with the same grammatical structure like (3) and (4), are grammatical.

(3) Den stillingen regnet mange med muligheten av at Tom ville søke.

(4) Denne stillingen kjenner jeg mange som har søkt.
(see also Introduction, this volume.)

I will not discuss these problems here, however. I will only claim that if Subjacency is valid for Norwegian and if there is a bounding node at the sentence level, then the bounding node must be \bar{S} , not S. This claim is based upon the behavior of wh-questions with split question phrases.

Like most other European languages, the question word in Norwegian is in the beginning of the sentence both in direct and indirect questions:

(5) Hva sier du?
what say you? (= What do you say?)

(6) Jeg veit ikke hva han sa
I know not what he said

In (5) and (6) the question phrase consists of the interrogative word alone. But the interrogative word may be only a part of a complex constituent. If so, there are in principle three ways of constructing the sentence:

(i) the wh-word is in initial position and the rest of the constituent (NP, AdvP, AdjP) adjacent to it (to the right):

(7) Hvilken bok leser du?
which book read you?

(8) Hvor langt er det til Bergen?
how far is it to Bergen?

(ii) the wh-word (or a complex NP) may be placed after a preposition first in the sentence (pied piping) (which is not frequent in ordinary speech):

(9) Til hvem skriver du?
to whom write you?

(10) Med hvilket tog reiser du?
with which train go you?

(iii) the question phrase may be split into two parts, the wh-word coming initially and the rest of the constituent inside the sentence (or a subordinate clause):

(11) Hva leser du for ei bok?
what read you for a book? (=Which book do you read?)

(12) Hvor skal vi gå hen?
where shall we go thither? (=Where shall we go?)

Such non-continuous question phrases are of the following types:

A. hva + for + NP
what + for + NP

(13) Hva er dette for noe?
what is this for something? (=What is this?)

(14) Hva er dette for noe tull?
what is this for some nonsense? (=What nonsense is this?)

(15) Hva leser du for bøker?
what read you for books? (=Which books do you read?)

B. Hvem + sin (si, sitt, sine) + NP
who(m) + refl. poss. pron. + NP

(16) Hvem er dette sin bil?
who is this (refl.) car? (=Whose car is this?)

This is a syntactic loan from Middle Low German, used mostly in Western and Northern Norway, but now coming more into use also in Eastern Norway. It is used also in ordinary NPs:

(17) Dette er Kari sine bøker (=This is Kari's books)

C. Hvor + hen
where + thither/there (=where (directive or locative))

(18) Hvor bor du hen? (=Where do you live?)

Discontinuous questions, especially of type A, are very frequent in casual speech, and for many speakers a question like

(19) (=13) Hva er dette for noe?

is more idiomatic than the more literal

(20) Hva er dette?

Discontinuous questions may alternate with questions with the whole question phrase in the beginning of the sentence. Thus, in addition to (15) and (16) we have (21) and (22):

(21) Hva for bøker leser du?

(22) Hvem sin bil er dette?

If we think about this in terms of transformations, we may say that the second part of the question phrase may follow the wh-word to the beginning of the sentence or remain inside the sentence, at a place where such constituents normally are, i.e., if it is an object, it remains at the object's place etc. The two possibilities may be illustrated like this:

(23) \bar{S} COMP $\{S$ du leser $\{NP$ $\{NP$ hva $\{PP$ for bøker $\}\}\}\}$

If *hva for* + NP is subject, we might expect the whole question phrase to be in the beginning of the sentence, because that is where subjects normally are. This may be true:

- (24) Hva for noe ligger på bordet?
 what (for s.) lies on the table?

More common, however, is in this case a cleft sentence, either with the question phrase in the beginning:

- (25) a. Hva for noe er det som ligger på bordet?
 what (for s.) is it that lies on the table?

or – even more idiomatic to the present writer – with the PP after the verb and *det* (it):

- (25) b. Hva er det for noe som ligger på bordet?

Also in cases when the question phrase is not a subject, we may have a cleft construction. If the question phrase is complex, the same possibilities are present as in the previous examples:

- (26) a. Hva for noe er det du leser?
 what (for s.) is it you read?

- b. Hva er det for noe du leser?

But in addition the PP may be left in the subordinate clause:

- c. Hva er det du leser for noe?

(To the present writer the last alternative sounds more idiomatic than the others.)

The same possibilities exist in other cases:

- (27) a. Hva for en fyr var det du prata med?
 what for a guy was it you spoke with?

- b. Hva var det for en fyr du prata med?

- c. Hva var det du prata med for en fyr?

- (28) a. Hvor hen er det du bor?
 where (there/thither) is it you live?

- b. Hvor er det hen du bor?

- c. Hvor er det du bor hen?

This system is not restricted to cleft constructions:

- (29) a. Hva for noe sa du jeg skulle kjøpe?
 what (for s.) said you I should buy?

- b. Hva sa du for noe jeg skulle kjøpe?

- c. Hva sa du jeg skulle kjøpe for noe?

If we still think in terms of transformations, we see that in the previous sentences the PP must have originated in the subordinate clause. The *wh*-word is obligatory moved to the front (COMP), while the movement of the PP is facultative, as the variants a, b, and c show. The surface structure of (26c), including traces which show the movement of *hva*, should be something like

- (30) [\bar{S} Hva [S er det t [\bar{S} t [S du leser t for noe]]]]

Here the PP *for noe* remains at its original place. But it may also follow *hva* via 2 to 3, giving (26b), or move further with *hva* to 4, giving (26a).

Whereas the PP *for noe* has three possible places in the sentences in (26) and (29), there are only two possibilities when *hva for noe* (or *hva for ei bok* etc.) is subject, as it is shown in (25a) and (25b). In these sentences *for noe* has been moved out of the subordinate clause. If the PP had remained in the clause, we would have got

- (25) c. *Hva er det for noe ligger på bordet

- (25) d. *Hva er det som for noe ligger på bordet

which for some unknown reason are clearly ungrammatical.

Having established some facts about Norwegian questions, we shall proceed to see what consequences these facts have for the formulation of the Subjacency condition.

In a question with a complex question phrase like

- (31) a. Hva er dette for noe?
 what is this (for something)?

hva has been moved from inside an NP and across an S node to COMP, as indicated here:

- (31) b. [\bar{S} Hva [S er dette [NP t for noe?]]]

If S and NP are bounding nodes, this would be a violation of Subjacency, if NP and \bar{S} are bounding nodes, it is not. Therefore, we conclude that if Subjacency is a valid restriction at all in Norwegian, \bar{S} , not S, must be the bounding node on the sentence level.

The same argument holds for the other examples shown below:

- (32) [\bar{S} Hva [S leser du [NP t for noe?]]]

including the sentences with a subordinate clause:

- (33) [\bar{S} Hva [S er det [\bar{S} [S du leser [NP t for noe?]]]]]

This analysis hinges on two assumptions, however. One is that *hva for noe* and most of the other question phrases are NPs. (Obvious exceptions are *hvor hen* (=where) and *hva . . . for* (=why).)

The first assumption is confirmed by the fact that *hva for noe* can be replaced by *hva* in all sentences without any change of meaning. The other question phrases with *hva for* + NP, too, can always be replaced by *hva* (disregarding some selectional restrictions). Therefore, there should be no doubt of the fact that these phrases are NPs.

The other assumption is that the PPs, e.g. *for noe* in

- (34) Hva er det du leser for noe?

is inside the dependent clause. Theoretically, it could be outside the clause, as indicated here:

(34) a. Hva er det [§ du leser] for noe?

That means that the PP could have been extraposed by some rule. If so, *hva* is free to move without violating Subjacency.

That this cannot be the case can be seen from the fact that the other constituents of the subordinate clause may be found to the right of the PP:

(35) a. Hva er det du leser for noe på trikken?
 what is it you read (for s.) on the streetcar?

b. *Hva er det du leser på trikken for noe?

This shows that the PP *for noe* has the normal object place in the clause, which confirms that *hva* has been moved out of the NP and out of the clause.

2. The wh-element as a separate word

We have not discussed here the status of *hva* in complex question phrases like *hva for noe*. The obvious answer would be to call it an NP like *hva* elsewhere, which is an analysis that I do not disagree with. I will, however, mention another way of looking at it, which might add some insight into this construction. Since this point of view is more natural for colloquial variants of Norwegian I will use such examples here.

In casual Norwegian as it may be spoken in Oslo we may instead of *hva* find *å/ø(t)/* (historically the same word as *hva*). That means that we find sentences like:

(36) Å er dette for noe?
 what is this (for something)?

(37) Å er det du leser for noe?
 what is it you read (for s.)?

In the written language we may have several different question words: *hva* (what), *hvem* (who), *hvordan* (how), etc. In colloquial variants of e.g. the Oslo language, however, the situation is somewhat different. In many cases we may replace the single question word by a question phrase consisting of *å* and a second part:

Hva (what):	Å for noe
Hvem (who):	Å for noen
Hvilket(n) (which):	Å for en/noen/Ø
Hvor (where):	Å hen
Når (when):	Å ti' (lit. what time)
Hvorfor (why):	Å ... for (or: åffer)

Examples (see also (36) and (37)):

(38) Å er det for noen som har tatt boka mi?
 'who is it that has taken my book?'

(39) Å er dette for ei bok?
 'Which book is this?'

(40) Å var du hen i går?
 'Where were you yesterday?'

(41) Å ti' kommer du?
 'When do you come?'

(42) Å gjør du det for?
 'What do you do that for?' (=Why do you do that?)

Å may also be used alone in the meaning *how* (old) or *which*:

(43) Å gammel er han?
 'How old is he?'

(44) Å dag var det?
 'Which day was that?'

It has been claimed in transformational grammar (Katz & Postal 1964:89 f.) that a question word like *what* should be analyzed in deep structure as *wh* + *something*, *who* as *wh* + *somebody*, etc., i.e. all question words are supposed to consist of an abstract wh-element plus an element specifying the semantic content of the word. In surface structure, however, this wh-element never appears as a separate word either in English or in ordinary Norwegian. In colloquial Norwegian, however, it could be said that the surface structure is parallel to the deep structure in this respect, *å* being the wh-element and the rest of the question phrase the postulated second element.

This analysis does in fact – to some extent – fit quite well with our description of such phrases. In all the examples above the wh-element *å* has the same phonetic content, which means that *å* has no semantic interpretation of its own – except for the interpretation one might give to the wh-element itself. The specific interpretation of each question phrase is given by the latter part of phrase.

One might argue, however, that this is not fully correct, since *å* also may mean *what*. This is true, but on the other hand, while a sentence like

(45) Hva er det?
 'What is that?'

is correct in formal and written Norwegian, the same sentence with *å* is often odd without *for noe* (especially in non-cleft sentences):

(46) ?Å er det?

(47) Å er det for noe?

This fact could be seen as a confirmation of the claim that *å* has lost its original semantic content, which now has to be added by other means.

In transformational grammar it has been claimed that it is because of the wh-element that question words have to be moved to the beginning of the sentence (in COMP) in languages like English and Norwegian. In colloquial Norwegian, where the wh-element is a word of its own, it is consequently only this word that has its obligatory place in COMP. The latter part of the question phrase does not need to be moved to the front. Therefore we get examples like

(48) a. Å for noe er det du leser?
 'What is it you read?'

b. Å er det for noe du leser?

c. Å er det du leser for noe? (Cfr. 26)

(In some cases, however, the whole question phrase has to be placed in COMP, e.g. *å ti* and *å for* (åller) in most cases.)

We have now seen that some data confirm the claim that *å* should be analyzed as an abstract wh-element. However, this analysis does not fit all question phrases, not even in colloquial Norwegian. For one thing we do not have a split question phrases in all cases, even in this variant of Norwegian. *How* is normally rendered by *åssen*, which can never be split into two words. And more common than using *å for en/ noen* for *who is hvem/ (vem/)*, which also can never be split. On the other hand, phrases like

- (49) Å hvem stasjon er det du skal gå av på?
Which station is it you shall leave at?

have been cited as genuine Oslo speech (Bull 1980:60). Similar constructions have been cited from other dialects:

- (50) Å hvem har sagt det?
'Who has said that?'

(Kristiansand) (Johnsen 1942:134).

3. A non-existing asymmetry

Maling (1978) claims that there is an asymmetry between Scandinavian (including Icelandic) relative clauses and questions with respect to wh-movement. Her argument is based upon data of the following sort:

- (51) *Hva visste ingen hvem (som) skrev?
what knew nobody who (that) wrote?
(52) Dette er sangen som ingen visste hvem (som) skrev
this is the song that nobody knew who (that) wrote

If the grammaticality of these sentences is correctly indicated here, there is a problem. It is usually claimed that wh-movement is involved in the derivation of relative clauses, including *som*-relatives in Norwegian. For both sentences there is a problem with respect to Subjacency because COMP will be doubly filled at some point in the derivation. But even if the prohibition of the doubly filled COMP is relaxed, there remains a problem, viz. why there is a difference between relatives and wh-questions, as shown in the examples above. Maling claims on the basis of these data that the Relativization by Deletion rule is distinct from the wh-movement rule. She further claims that the behavior of Scandinavian relatives is a strong argument for a grammar that allows unbounded movement rules.

Taraldsen (1978:635) tries to solve Maling's dilemma by disclaiming her data. He maintains that there is no difference in grammaticality between (51) and (52) and, consequently, that her problem is non-existing.

I will claim, however, that Maling's judgements are basically correct as far as these sentences go. In my view there is a difference in grammaticality between (51) and (52), even if it may not be so great as she is indicating. However, I will claim that this difference has nothing to do with relativization and wh-movement as such, but is due to other facts. That means that the alleged asymmetry is fictitious.

If Maling is correct, it would be hard to explain that her ungrammatical (51) becomes grammatical if it is clefted:

- (53) Hva var det ingen visste hvem (som) skrev?

Whatever blocks (51) does not seem to block (53). It is, contrary to Maling's view, possible to question an NP inside a wh-island.

If we look at some other sentences, it becomes quite clear that the ungrammaticality of (51) has nothing to do with wh-movements as such. Quite parallel to (51) and (53), here repeated for convenience (with my grammaticality judgement):

- (51) ??Hva visste ingen hvem (som) skrev?

- (53) Hva var det ingen visste hvem (som) skrev?

are sentences like the following:

- (54) ??Hva visste ingen?
what knew nobody?

- (55) Hva var det ingen visste?
what was it that nobody knew?

This shows that in some cases a cleft version of the question is strongly preferred in Norwegian (especially in colloquial speech), a fact that has nothing to do with wh-movement as such.

The reason why a cleft version is preferred here is explained in Lie (1978), but the main points shall be given here.

In many cases a cleft and a non-cleft wh-question can be used without any difference in meaning. But there is a tendency for cleft questions to be used in some cases and not in others. Informally, we could say that when it is obvious to the speaker and the hearer that the wh-word refers to something, a cleft version is preferred.

Therefore a sentence like

- (56) ??Hva bråker?
what noises (=What is making noise?)

is almost impossible because the question presupposes that it is known to the speaker and the hearer that there is *something* making noise. A cleft version is therefore preferred:

- (57) Hva er det som bråker?

On the other hand if a question like

- (58) Hva sier du om en skitur?
what say you of a ski-trip? (=Would you like to go skiing?)

is used as a suggestion, there is no obvious referent of the wh-word (yet), and, consequently, the cleft version is blocked:

- (59) ??Hva er det du sier om en skitur?

(This sentence is possible, however, if the speaker knows that "you" have said something about going skiing, but does not know what. Then the existence of a referent for *hva* is obvious, and the cleft version may be used.)

In a question like

(60) What didn't John do?

it is claimed by Lyons (1977:597) that this sentence presupposes that there is something that John did not do. Therefore, as we might expect, the cleft version is more natural in Norwegian:

(61) Hva var det Jon ikke gjorde?

(62) ^{??}Hva gjorde ikke Jon?

Turning back to our examples (51) and (54) we see that the same kind of presupposition is found there: it is presupposed that there is something that nobody knows. Therefore, a cleft version is preferred.

If my claim is correct, however, we would expect to find examples parallel to the ones Maling has given that are grammatical. And such sentences exist. For semantic reasons they are not easy to find, but the following examples are fully grammatical:

(63) Hva veit alle hva er (for noe)?
what knows everybody what is (for something)?

(64) Hvem veit alle hvor bor (hen)?
who knows everybody where lives?

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have seen that question phrases in Norwegian are very often split into two discontinuous parts. The properties of such questions show that if the Subjacency restriction is valid for Norwegian at all, the bounding nodes must be NP and \bar{S} (not S).

We have also seen that a question word may be analyzed into two parts: a wh-element and a second part giving the semantic content of that particular question word. In standard Norwegian, formal style, these two elements are more often incorporated into one word. Theoretically, we might think of another system where the two postulated elements are two distinct words. Such a system is not found in Scandinavian. But what we do find in colloquial Norwegian of Oslo (and other dialects) is a mixture of these two systems, the last system seemingly being gradually stronger over time. And this mixture may give rise to different analyses of such construction.

Finally, I have tried to show that with respect to wh-movement and Subjacency there is no real asymmetry between relative clauses and questions in Norwegian, contrary to some earlier claims.

References

*NOTE

I am indebted to Elisabet Engdahl, Eva Ejerhed, and Kirsti Koch Christensen for valuable criticism of this paper and to Joan Maling for many clarifying remarks about these problems in general.

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