

Ambiguous copula sentences in Danish: evidence against the inversion hypothesis.  
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This paper brings new evidence to bear on the hypothesis that specificational copula sentences ('My best friend is Sparky') are inverted predicational structures ('Sparky is my best friend') as argued for by Williams (1983) and Partee (1986). I show that, at least in Danish, specificational copula sentences cannot be analysed as an inverted form of predicational sentences.

There is consistent and cumulative evidence that the string in (1)

- (1)      Min bedste ven    er Sparky  
          my best    friend is Sparky
- (2)      Sparky er min bedste ven  
          Sparky is my best    friend

is structurally ambiguous between an inverted predicational structure where the clause-initial phrase has undergone A-bar movement to Spec-CP (3a) and a non-inverted specificational structure where the clause-initial phrase occupies Spec-IP and no A-bar movement has occurred (3b).

- (3)      a.    [<sub>CP</sub> [Min bedste ven]<sub>k</sub> er<sub>i</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> Sparky<sub>j</sub> t<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> t<sub>k</sub>]]]  
          b.    [<sub>IP</sub> [Min beste ven]<sub>j</sub> er<sub>i</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>j</sub> Sparky]]

If specificational sentences were inverted predicational structures, this this structural ambiguity would be difficult to account for.

As observed by Jespersen (1924: 153), the position of negation resolves the ambiguity of strings like that in (1). Clause-final negation indicates an inverted predicational structure (4a/3a), whereas non-final negation indicates a non-inverted specificational structure (3b/4b). I take negation to mark the left edge of VP (Vikner 1995: 46ff).

- (4)      a.    [ Min bedste ven    ]<sub>k</sub> er Sparky ikke t<sub>k</sub>  
          my best    friend    is Sparky not
- b.    [ Min bedste ven    ] er ikke Sparky  
          my best    friend    is not Sparky

Using the position of negation to identify the structure, I show that the two structures differ with respect to anaphor binding:

- (5)      a.    [ Sin<sub>i</sub> kones bedste ven    ]<sub>k</sub> er Sparky<sub>i</sub> ikke t<sub>k</sub>  
          self's wife's best    friend    is Sparky not
- b.    \*[ Sin<sub>i</sub> kones bedste ven    ] er ikke Sparky<sub>i</sub>  
          self's wife's best    friend    is not Sparky

licensing of negative polarity items:

- (6)      a.    [ Nogen stor    atlet    ]<sub>k</sub> er Sparky ikke t<sub>k</sub>  
          any    great athlete    is Sparky ikke
- b.    \*[ Nogen stor    atlet    ] er ikke Sparky  
          any    great athlete    is not Sparky

and embedding:

- (7)      a.    \*Det er en kendsgerning at    [ min bedste ven    ]<sub>k</sub> er Sparky ikke t<sub>k</sub>  
          it    is a fact                    that my best    friend    is Sparky not
- b.    Det er en kendsgerning at    [ min bedste ven    ] ikke er Sparky  
          it    is a fact                    that my best    friend    not is Sparky

These differences are all accounted for by the two structures in (3), assuming that anaphors and negative polarity items (NPI) must be licensed by a c-commanding antecedent/negation, and that the relevant licensing relations can be satisfied under reconstruction. In the inverted predicational structure in (5a) ‘Sparky’ can thus bind the anaphor ‘sin’ because it c-commands the trace of the DP containing the anaphor. In (5b) ‘Sparky’ does not c-command the trace of the DP containing the anaphor, and binding is impossible. In (6a) the NPI ‘nogen’ is licensed by virtue of the negation ‘ikke’ c-commanding the trace of the DP containing ‘nogen’. (6b) shows that the NPI is not licensed in subject position. Finally, the ungrammaticality of (7a) is due to the fact that no Spec-CP position is available for the fronted phrase in this embedded context, since it is not a context in which ‘embedded V2’ is licensed (Vikner 1995: 124–9).

These facts show that specificational structures must be distinguished from inverted predicational structures in Danish. Specificational structures must also be distinguished from uninverted predicational structures: unlike predicational structures, specificational structures do not invert, as evidenced by the ungrammaticality of (8), which also shows that proper names cannot function as predicates in copula constructions (Longobardi 1994).

- (8) \* [ Sparky ]<sub>k</sub> er min bedste ven ikke t<sub>k</sub>  
       Sparky is my best friend not

Based on similar facts in English Heycock and Kroch (1999: 376–8) argue that specificational copula constructions (‘equatives’ in their terms) have a radically different syntactic structure than predicational copula sentences. The Danish data presented in this paper support their argument.

## References

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