

Subject requirement and optionality
Irene Franco – University of Leiden
i.franco@hum.leidenuniv.nl

The present paper addresses diverse facts that apparently reveal a subject/object asymmetry in Scandinavian languages. Such facts scope from specific complementizer insertion in some Mainland Scandinavian (restrictive) relative clauses and embedded Wh- questions (*som*, in 1, 2) to stylistic fronting (SF) in Icelandic subject extractions (in bold in 3).

Norwegian

- (1) a. Jeg kjenner mannen **(SOM)* kom hit. *subject extraction*
 I know the man *SOM* came here
 b. Jeg hater mannen *(SOM)* Maria skal møte i morgen. *object extraction*
 I hate the man *SOM* Mary will meet tomorrow

Swedish

- (2) a. Hon undrade vem **(SOM)* kom. *subject extraction*
 she asked who *SOM* came
 b. Hon undrade vem *(SOM)* Johan träffade. *object extraction*
 She wondered who *SOM* John met

Icelandic

- (3) a. Þetta er maðurinn [sem ___ vildi lesa allar bækurnar]
 this is man.the that wanted read all books.the
 b. Þetta er maðurinn [sem **lesa** vildi ___ allar bækurnar]
 this is man.the that read wanted all books.the
 “This is the man who wanted to read all the books” [Thráinsson 2007, 374, 7.79]

It has been proposed that *som* insertion, which is obligatory in local subject extractions, functions as a nominative licenser for the subject, on a par with the French *qui* complementizer, in the *que/qui* alternation (Taraldsen 2001). Following the proposal of Boef & Franco (in prep.) based on novel facts on long A'-dependencies as in (4) and (5), the idea that *som* is a nominative licenser is rejected.

Norwegian

- (4)a. Jeg kjenner mannen *(SOM)* du sa *(*SOM)* kom hit. *subject extraction*
 I know the man *SOM* you said *SOM* came here
 b. Jeg hater mannen *(SOM)* du sa *(*SOM)* Maria skal møte i morgen. *obj extraction*
 I hate the man *SOM* you said *SOM* Mary will meet tomorrow

Swedish

- (5)a. Hon undrade vem *(SOM)* du hoppas *(*SOM)* kommer hit. *subject extraction*
 she asked who *SOM* you hope *SOM* come here
 b. Hon undrade vem *(SOM)* du hoppas *(*SOM)* Maria ska träffa imorgon. *obj extraction*
 she asked who *SOM* you hope *SOM* Mary will meet tomorrow

On the one hand, lack of *som* insertion in the most embedded clause in (4) and (5) argues against the “nominative” hypothesis, on the other hand, its optionality in the higher clause as well as in object extractions (cf. 1b and 2b) requires an explanation in the respect of economy principles. The same problem is posed by the optionality of SF in Icelandic: as (3) shows, SF alternates with a subject gap.

The paper proposes a unifying analysis of the facts so far illustrated, with the help of further comparative and diachronic data. It is argued that the optionality in the distribution of *som* and of SF is the combined result of a specific diachronic evolution and of the properties of the information structure. With regard to the latter aspect, it is proposed that *som* and SF are different ways to spell-out locally the “aboutness” topic (Cardinaletti 2004, Frascarelli 2007), under the assumption that Germanic V2 languages license their null arguments configurationally, with a topic-drop system (Sigurðsson 2010, 2011). The proposal also discusses the potential advantages of solving the optionality problem through a fine-grained cartographic structure, rather than identifying it with some PF mechanism or by assuming different feature specifications for the same lexical items.