Abstract

Engdahl, Elisabet, elisabet.engdahl@svenska.gu.se, Professor, Dept. of Swedish Language, University of Gothenburg, Sweden: “What is happening to the subject requirement? On subjectless clauses introduced by det”. Språk och stil 20, 2010, pp. 81–104.

Grammatical descriptions of contemporary Swedish normally state that Swedish has a strong subject requirement: finite clauses (except imperatives and conjoined clauses) must contain an overt subject. If the clause lacks a referential subject, the expletive det is inserted either in initial position, e.g. the so-called fundament, or in the subject position following the main verb in a matrix clause. In this article, a new clause type is presented and analyzed. The initial det in examples such as det var bra att du sa (‘it was good that you said’) at first appears to be an expletive subject, but can be interpreted as the missing object of the embedded clause, which means that the matrix clause has no overt subject. The new construction resembles so-called tough constructions such as det är lätt att säga (‘it is easy to say’), but differs in several respects: it is not restricted to adjectival complements, the complement clause is finite, and the fronted object can only appear in initial position [Spec, CP], not in the postverbal subject position [Spec, IP]. So far the new construction has mainly been attested in informal spoken language, but it seems to be spreading to other registers and used with initial elements in addition to det.

Keywords: expletive subject, formal subject, subject requirement, topicalization, tough movement, Swedish.