Danish Verb Phrase Anaphora: Deep or surface?

In the original typology of anaphora introduced by Hankamer and Sag (1976) for English, most types of surface anaphora are null, notably Verb Phrase Ellipsis (VPE), Sluicing, and NP-Ellipsis. Hankamer and Sag argue that this correlation within English is accidental, and more generally that the deep vs. surface distinction is orthogonal to whether the anaphoric element has a phonological realization or not. They cite *do so* anaphora as their primary example of overt surface anaphora, but recent work by Kehler and Ward (1999) has shown that the characterization of *do so* as surface anaphora is problematic, an observation that calls into question whether overt surface anaphora exists at all. In this paper, we examine a little-studied type of anaphora in Danish, Verb Phrase Anaphora (VPA), in which a proform *det* is substituted for a *vP* and is anaphoric to an antecedent *vP* (1). We argue that VPA must be analyzed as possessing underlying syntactic structure, confirming the existence of overt surface anaphora.

Danish VPA is highly reminiscent of English VPE with two noticeable differences. First, the anaphoric *vP* is realized overtly as *det*. Second, *det* participates in A-movement, generally appearing in sentence-initial position (Spec-CP), as in (1). Like VPE, but unlike *do so*, VPA is licensed by any modal or auxiliary and does not restrict the semantics of the antecedent *vP* (data not shown). Since VPA patterns with VPE in these respects, VPA might be a type of surface anaphora in which a fully articulated *vP* is realized as the proform *det*. In support of this hypothesis, VPA passes Hankamer and Sag’s original diagnostics for surface anaphora: it exhibits the Missing Antecedent Phenomenon (3), it strongly prefers a linguistic antecedent, as shown by the infelicity of (4), and it requires parallelism in transitivity between the antecedent and target clauses (5). VPA is also available with unaccusative (6) and passive (7) verbs. If the single argument of unaccusative and passive verbs originates as the sister of V, then the grammaticality of (6) and (7) constitutes further evidence that *det* has internal syntactic structure.

If VPA is surface anaphora, we predict that A-extraction out of the *vP* should also be possible, as it is for VPE in English (Schuyler 2001). However, this is not possible, as illustrated for a direct object wh-phrase in (8) and an indirect object wh-phrase in (9). The ungrammaticality of A-extraction from the anaphoric *vP* would follow directly from an analysis of *det* as deep anaphora, since there would be nothing to extract. Such an analysis would have to resolve how a deep anaphor could test positive for surface anaphora according to the traditional diagnostics of Hankamer and Sag. Furthermore, this analysis would be at odds with the long-standing assumption that passive and unaccusative subjects are Merged as the complement of V. As a deep anaphor, *det* could not contain these DPs and they would have to be Merged in their surface position in Spec-TP; the question then is how they receive their thematic roles.

This paradox can be resolved if the lack of A-extraction from the anaphoric *vP* is understood as following from locality effects. Since the *vP* pronounced as *det* conveys given information and is topic, it participates in discourse movement, raising to Spec-CP (1). When another discourse-marked element occupies Spec-CP, *det* is prevented from fronting and remains in situ; this is shown for a subject wh-phrase in (2). Since the subject wh-phrase is located in Spec-TP, it is closer to C than the topic-marked *vP* and so is expected to raise to Spec-CP instead of the *vP*. For internal arguments, however, the *vP* will always be closer to C than any wh-phrase contained inside it, assuming a definition of locality based on dominance (Fitzpatrick 2002:446). Hence, (8–9) are ungrammatical.

The analysis of Danish VPA as surface anaphora, together with general principles of locality, accounts straightforwardly for the data in (1–9) and reaffirms Hankamer and Sag’s claim that some instances of surface anaphora are overt.
(1) Han siger han kan hækle, men det kan han ikke.
He says he can crochet but DET can he not
‘He says he can crochet, but he can’t.’

(2) Jeg kan ikke hækle, men hvem kan egentlig det?
I can not crochet but who can actually DET
‘I don’t know how to crochet, but who actually can?’

(3) Jeg har aldrig redet på en kamel, men det har Ivan og han siger at den stank
I have never ridden on a camel but DET has Ivan and he says that it stank
terribly
‘I have never ridden a camel, but Ivan has and he says it stank terribly.’

(4) [A and B are observing C struggling to swim in a pool]
A: # Det kan jeg heller ikke.
DEI can I either not
Intended: ‘I can’t swim either.’

(5) * Jeg ville hænge hesteskoen over døren og det gør den nu.
I wanted hang horseshoe-the over door-the and DET does it now
Intended: ‘I wanted to hang the horseshoe over the door and it hangs there now.’

(6) Bare det ville bryde sammen lige nu! Men det gjorde det selvfølgelig ikke!
just it would break together right now but DET did it of course not
‘If only the train would break down right now! But of course it didn’t!’

(7) Det var første gang, jeg ønskede at blive afsat, og det blev jeg.
it was first time I wanted to become dismissed and DET became I
‘It was the first time I had wanted to be dismissed and I was.’

(8) * Jeg ved hvilken hundehvalp I ikke burde adoptere, men jeg ved ikke hvilken
I know which puppy you not should adopt but I know not which
(hundehvalp) I burde DET.
puppy you should DET
Intended: ‘I know which puppy you should not adopt but I don’t know which puppy you
should.’

(9) * Jeg ved hvem Susan gav sin nøgle, men jeg ved ikke hvem Palle gjorde det.
I know who Susan gave her key but I know not who Palle did DET
Intended: ‘I know who Susan gave her key to but I don’t know to whom Palle did.’