

# Embedded declaratives, assertion and swear words

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## Abstract

This article discusses embedded declaratives and their force of expressing assertion, a topic that was debated by Anna-Lena Wiklund and Marit Julien in both numbers of this working paper series 2009. Two questions are focused: “Is the assertedness of V2 declaratives in Mainland Scandinavian structurally inherent?” and “Can also embedded non-V2 declaratives express assertion?” The answer here is yes on both questions, which means that I take a third position beside the ones raised in the previous debate.

A swear word test, originally proposed by Julien, but rejected by Wiklund, is also scrutinized. It is shown that swear words actually can be used to discriminate between asserted and non-asserted declaratives. However, the dividing line does not go between V2 and non-V2 clauses, as assumed by Julien.

## 1. Introduction

In the 83<sup>rd</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> numbers of the WPSS, a vivid debate between Anna-Lena Wiklund (2009a, b) and Marit Julien (2009) about the illocutionary force of embedded declaratives took place. One of the issues under discussion concerned the possibility of using swear words as a tool to distinguish between embedded V2 declaratives and their non-V2 counterparts also on semantic grounds. Julien claimed to have support from a swear word test that V2 declaratives are asserted, whereas non-V2 declaratives are not. However, her judgements were rejected by Wiklund.

Having done substantial research on the relation between the structure and meaning of clauses (Stroh-Wollin 2002: Chapter 6), as well as on different aspects on swear words (e.g. Stroh-Wollin 2008), I cannot refrain from giving a late contribution to the debate. My purpose is, first, to argue for the view that embedded V2 declaratives are asserted on structural grounds, which Wiklund finds problematic, and that non-V2 declaratives, though structurally unmarked in this respect, may express assertions as well, namely if embedded under asserting predicates, which is against Julien’s view. Secondly, I will show that swear words and other discourse markers actually

can be used to distinguish between asserted and non-asserted declaratives, once we have abandoned the idea that the dividing line goes between V2 and non-V2.

In section 2 below, I try to sort out the different main standpoints on the relation between embedded V2, non-V2 and assertion and give my own view of the matter. In section 3, I present a kind of swear word typology accounting for different features of some important emphatic swear word phrases. In section 4, I discuss what emphatic swear words in embedded declaratives may tell us. Section 5, finally, contains some concluding remarks.

## **2. Assertion and embedded declaratives – what’s it all about?**

### **2.1 Background**

In 1973, Joan B. Hooper and Sandra A. Thompson published an influential article where they drew attention to the fact that declarative subclauses may exhibit main clause features in some contexts but not in others. Predicates which may take *that*-clause complements were divided into subgroups on a semantic basis, and the authors concluded from their investigation that complement clauses could undergo, with the terminology of the time, root transformations only when embedded under predicates permitting a reading of the subclause as asserted. With a root transformation follows a surface structure that is otherwise associated with main clauses (“root clauses”), see for example (1a); cf. (1b) where no root transformation has been applied.

- (1) a. Carol told us that never in her life she had seen a bear.  
b. Carol told us that she had never in her life seen a bear.

Root transformations are excluded if the matrix predicate does not allow an asserted complement. This holds true irrespective of whether the predicate combines with a presupposed complement, cf. (2a–b), or with a complement which is neither asserted nor presupposed, cf. (3a–b).

- (2) a. It is so surprising that Carol has never in her life been to France.  
b. \*It is so surprising that never in her life Carol has been to France.

- (3) a. It is unlikely that Carol has passed her exam this time.  
 b. \*It is unlikely that this time Carol has passed her exam.

The matrix predicate in (1a–b), *tell*, belongs to class A in the typology of Hooper & Thompson, which contains verbs of saying (*say, report, claim* etc.). These verbs are taken to be strongly assertive and their complements assertions, however, *indirect* assertions, i.e. cited or reported assertions.

Sentences containing asserted complement clauses, e.g. such as the ones in (1), are taken to express two assertions: the main clause assertion (in the example above: claiming that Carol told us something) and the subclause assertion (above: reporting what Carol told us). Further, it is assumed that a subclause assertion may be foregrounded as the *main assertion* of the sentence, in which case (so called) root transformations may operate on the subclause, cf. (1a).

The applicability on Swedish of the typology suggested in Hooper & Thompson 1973 was discussed by Lars-Gunnar Andersson in his thesis from 1975. Andersson's conclusion was that the typology on the whole works also for Swedish. In recent years, different researchers have confronted the theory with authentic language and noticed that subclauses with main clause word order actually do appear (to a varying degree) after predicates which are not supposed to take asserted complements. The conclusions vary, but e.g. Marit Julien (2007), who has examined corpora examples of embedded V2 declaratives in Norwegian and Swedish, maintains the view that embedded declaratives with main clause word order express assertions. This is also my position.

According to my intuition, the asserted nature of embedded V2 declaratives remains when they turn up in unexpected contexts. The meaning of the matrix predicate, on the other hand, may be affected, or the relation between the matrix and the subclause. Further, when taking spontaneous spoken language into consideration, one has also to be aware of the possibility that some examples are simply anacolutha.

## 2.2 What's the problem?

The paper by Hooper and Thompson (and the work of Andersson) played an important role in my thesis, when struggling with a model for the left periphery of the clause (Stroh-Wollin 2002:138 ff.). As I do believe in firm a relation between structure and meaning, the assumption that assertion could

be structurally encoded seemed reasonable. I claimed that assertion actually was encoded and encoded in the same way in main clause declaratives and *that*-clauses with main clause word order.

Hooper & Thompson, on their part, did not assume any structural encoding of assertion. They just claimed to have provided an explanation for the restricted applicability of root transformations, “in terms of the communicative function of this class of rules”: root transformations are emphatic in nature and therefore not appropriate if the content of the clause is presupposed (and relegated to the background) or if the speaker is not certain about whether the proposition of the clause is true or not. (Hooper & Thompson 1973:495)

However, it is not self-evident that an explanation in terms of emphasis can be presumed to the same degree in Swedish, where “root transformations” not always lead to fronting of some non-subject constituent. The basic characteristic of main clause word order in Swedish is the V2 feature, which means that the finite verb appears in second position, before sentential adverbials (or other adverbials in mid-clause position). The default word order of subclauses on the other hand is V-in-situ, which means that the finite verb follows sentential adverbials. Now, the constituent before the finite verb in a V2 declarative, whether independent or embedded, may be a topicalized non-subject constituent, see the embedded clause in (4a), but it may as well be the subject, see (4b); cf. (4c) with the default V-in-situ word order of subclauses.

- (4) a. Carola sa att aldrig hade hon sett en björn.  
       Carola said that never had she seen a bear
- b. Carola sa att hon hade aldrig sett en björn.  
       Carola said that she had never seen a bear
- c. Carola sa att hon aldrig hade sett en björn.  
       Carola said that she never had seen a bear

It is reasonable to regard the topicalized adverbial in (4a) as emphatic. But it is not as obvious that also (4b) should be understood in terms of emphasis. According to my intuition, there is rather a difference in “directness” between (4b) and (4c).

Partly inspired by the account in Rizzi 1997, I proposed in my thesis a ForceP–FinP model of the left periphery of the clause. However, contrary to Rizzi, I associated the ForceP first and foremost with main clauses. The

ForceP was assumed to make the clause a “sentence”, i.e. a grammatical counterpart to a speech act, with a defined value corresponding to some prototypical speech act. In the normal case, I did not assume any ForceP projection for subclauses, taking “typing” of subclauses to be a matter of the lower FinP. But, important in this context, subordinate declaratives with main clause word order, inevitably connected with assertion, were expected to have a ForceP after all.

My conclusion was the following: “If a declarative clause exhibits features which it can get only through specification in ForceP, then it also expresses an asserted proposition.” (Stroh-Wollin 2002:145, translated from Swedish)

Later, Marit Julien (2007) has taken a rather similar standpoint (with minimal reference to my thesis, though). Julien also suggests a Force projection with relevance for the asserted force of embedded V2 declaratives. A difference between my account and Julien’s concerns the position of the finite verb; Julien places it in the Force head, whereas I place it in the lower Fin head, for reason that I do not take fronting of the finite verb to be theoretically excluded in clauses which do not express independent speech acts. But this matter is not at stake when dealing with declaratives in Mainland Scandinavian, where V2 unambiguously signals “main clause word order”. Suffice it to say, in this context, that Julien and I agree on the claim that assertion follows from the structure of V2 declaratives in Mainland Scandinavian.

This standpoint is, however, met with some scepticism from Anna-Lena Wiklund (and some colleges of hers), see Wiklund 2009a and references there. The problem is not, if I have understood things correctly, the asserted status of embedded V2 declaratives, but how to handle non-V2 clauses. It is not clear, Wiklund (2009a:31) argues, in what sense an embedded non-V2 clause in an assertive context, cf. (4c) above, is not also an assertion. I fully agree on this point, but I do not draw the same conclusion as Wiklund, that asserted non-V2 is problematic for the hypothesis that assertion in V2 declaratives is structurally encoded. (It remains unclear to me to what extent Wiklund (2009b) maintains this view in her second contribution to the debate.)

Besides the conclusion on a structural encoding of assertion, I also concluded in my thesis that non-V2 declaratives could be contextually interpreted assertions. I wrote: “If a declarative clause does not exhibit features that it would get through specification in ForceP, then it is interpreted from

the context as asserted or non-asserted, in the latter case possibly as presupposed.”<sup>1</sup> (Stroh-Wollin 2002:146, translated from Swedish)

From her answer to Wiklund (2009a), I can see that Julien (2009), contrary to me (and Hooper & Thompson 1973), does not accept contextual interpretation of assertion. Julien judges an embedded non-V2 clause like the one in (4c) above as simply “reported”, not asserted (Julien 2009:231). It is of course reported, but so are the embedded clauses in (4a) and (4b) as well. In my view, the embedded clauses in (4a–c) do all express assertions on behalf of the reported speaker, i.e. they are indirect assertions.

Thus, evidently in contrast to both Wiklund and Julien, I accept different sources for the interpretation of assertion.

### 2.3 Different views – formal and pragmatic aspects

In sum, the position of Julien is that there is a kind of one-to-one-relation between structure and meaning in embedded declaratives: V2 clauses are asserted, non-V2 clauses are not, whereas Wiklund rejects the idea that assertion is at all related to the structure of embedded declaratives, since also non-V2 clauses seem to be potentially asserted. In my view, both standpoints are wrong. Whether or not a clause is asserted is a semantic interpretation of a certain clause with a certain structure in a certain context.

It may be that a structure does not leave any space for further interpretation as regards the asserted status of the clause. This is the case with V2 declaratives in Mainland Scandinavian, whether syntactically independent or embedded. The structurally endowed markedness of such clauses is, as I see it, formal in nature. We may say that a V2 declarative has a specified value of a formal feature; let us just call the feature *f* and say the value is [+ASS]. This feature value is only consistent with the interpretation of the clause as asserted.

The formal *f*-feature in a non-V2 declarative on the other hand may be valued [+/-ASS].<sup>2</sup> In this case, the semantics of the context plays a vital role

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<sup>1</sup> Both Wiklund (2009a) and Julien (2009) operate with a possibility that an embedded clause may be asserted and presupposed at the same time. I fail to see the logic of such a view, but I leave this problem aside here.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that the open value on the *f*-feature means that the clause totally lacks clause type specification. A *that*-clause with V-in-situ is still a declarative clause, contrasting as such with a corresponding *if*-clause. We may suggest that an *if*-clause has a [-ASS] value on the force feature.

in the interpretation of the clause as asserted or not; in the latter case it may possibly be presupposed. If the context does not provide information enough for a decisive judgement concerning the asserted status of the clause, which may happen sometimes, then the clause remains ambiguous in this respect.

This analysis of embedded V2 and non-V2 declaratives (in Mainland Scandinavian) is summarized in (5) and (6) respectively.

- (5) structure: V2 →  
 value on the f-feature: [+ASS] →  
 only possible interpretation: asserted
- (6) structure: V-in-situ →  
 value on the f-feature: [+/-ASS] →  
 contextual interpretation: asserted or non-asserted; if non-asserted,  
 possibly presupposed

When the speaker has a choice between using an embedded V2 clause or an embedded non-V2 clause, then the choice may have more or less pragmatic impact. Hooper & Thompson (1973), on their part, distinguish two different readings based on whether it is the main clause or the subclause that expresses the main assertion, with the effect that the content of the subclause is backgrounded or foregrounded. A related phenomenon is the concept of “main point utterance” referred to by Wiklund (2009a), even though it was introduced for a different reason.

When talking about reported speech, I think “directness” would be an especially appropriate way to distinguish the pragmatic effect of embedded V2; keeping the word order from the original statement may be taken as a more direct kind of reporting. It is interesting, though, that the reporting speaker, also in normal V2 report, makes deictic adjustments vis-à-vis the original statement, so that the embedded clause is consistent with the speaker perspective of the matrix clause.

It is of course possible to quote a statement in its original form. If an *att* ‘that’ turns up in such cases, which may happen, it is followed by an intonational break, so that it appears as a “visible colon”, rather than an ordinary complementizer heading the following quotation, see (7a). As soon as the reported speech is introduced by a “true” complementizer, the applicable deictic adjustments have to be made, irrespective of whether the clause is V2 or non-V2, see (7b–c). The pronoun *jag* (‘I’) and the verb *har* (‘has’) in (7a) are adjusted to *hon* (‘she’) and *hade* (‘had’), respectively, in (7b–c).

- (7) a. Carola sa (så här)/(att): ”Jag har aldrig sett en björn.”  
 Carola said (this)/(that): “I have never seen a bear.”
- b. Carola sa att hon hade aldrig sett en björn.  
 Carola said that she had never seen a bear
- c. Carola sa att hon aldrig hade sett en björn.  
 Carola said that she never had seen a bear

The different versions of report in (7) show that reporting by using an embedded V2 clause is just half way to the directness of the original statement. However, I claim there is a pragmatic difference, albeit subtle, between (7b) and (7c).

For Julien (2009:228) the subtle, but discernible, effect of V2 versus non-V2 in similar examples is a question of assertion. She claims to have support for her assumption by introducing a swear word test. (Julien 2009:225 ff.) Adding a discourse-oriented phrase like *för helvete* ‘for hell’s sake’ would, according to Julien, be better in (7b) than in (7c).

The validity of the swear word test is rejected in Wiklund 2009b, and Wiklund is certainly right when arguing that the test does not clearly discriminate between V2 and non-V2 declaratives, as suggested by Julien. But, from my point of view, the problem is that Julien tries to prove that non-V2 declaratives cannot be asserted, which I believe is wrong.

However, the idea of the swear word test is actually very good. Swear words may in fact be used to support the idea that non-V2 clauses are asserted when embedded under assertive predicates, which I will return to in section 4. The preceding section, section 3 below, gives a preparatory overview of the pragmatic impact of different swear words.

### 3. Emphatic swear words – a typology

#### 3.1 Sorting swear words

A couple of years ago, I studied the swearing in 45 Swedish dramas from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Among other things, I sorted out the 2 200 instances of swearing that I came across in a word list, where I tried to capture all sorts of relevant information concerning the swear word phrases. (Stroh-



Wollin 2008<sup>3</sup>) Carefully planning the word list was a research process in itself, helping me a lot to see parallels between different phrases on the basis of e.g. their pragmatic functions and/or syntactic distribution.

It became very evident, for instance, that the origin of a swear word phrase in a certain speech act formula is (normally) clearly traceable in its meaning or pragmatic function, even though in most cases one does not bother at all about the literal meaning of the expression (and even though the pronunciation of it may have drifted away considerably from the origin). An oath formula, for example, may be used by the speaker as a tool to emphasize that (s)he is serious about what (s)he is saying. A lot of different oath formulas, celestial, e.g. *min själ* ('my soul'), as well as diabolic, e.g. *ta mig fan* ('may the devil take me'), are used in this way, see (8a–b).

- (8) a. Nu går jag **min själ** och lägger mej.  
 b. Nu går jag **ta mej fan** och lägger mej  
 'Now I'll [SWEAR WORD PHRASE] go to bed.'

It is obvious too, that expressions of very different kinds or origin can overlap as regards their pragmatic and syntactic functions. A phrase like *i Guds namn* ('in the name of God') may be used as an initial or final "annex"<sup>4</sup> to a clause, and sometimes as a modal adverbial inside a clause, but it can in addition be a strengthener of a *wh*-word, see (9a–b). Strengthening of a *wh*-word is also possible with a phrase like *i helvete* ('in hell'), see (10a). The phrase *i helvete* is, however, not a possible substitute for *i Guds namn* in (9a), but *för helvete* (lit. for hell, 'for hell's sake') is, see (10b).

- (9) a. Lugna ner dig lite, **i Guds namn!**  
 'Calm down a bit, in the name of God!'  
 b. Var **i Guds namn** är mina glasögon?  
 'Where for God's sake are my specs?'
- (10) a. Var **i helvete** är mina glasögon?  
 'Where in hell are my specs?'

<sup>3</sup> This report does not only contain the word list, but also extensive comments and analyses, among other things concerning what I give an account of below.

<sup>4</sup> The term *annex* used here is introduced by the Swedish Academy Grammar (Teleman, Hellberg & Andersson 1999) for elements that are not syntactically integrated in a clause but closely tied to it, and usually could also, as an alternative, have been a constituent within the clause proper.

b. Lugna ner dig lite, **för helvete** (\*i helvete)!

‘Calm down a bit, for hell’s sake!’

The swear word phrases mentioned above are all examples of expressions, which finally were just labelled “emphatic marker” in my word list. This was not because other expressions were not taken to be emphatic, but for want of anything better, since they were hard to characterize in different respects. For instance, they are often externally tied to a sentence proper, as initial or final annexes, but do not function as independent interjections. Many of them also frequently appear clause integrated, in most cases, as normal, non-parenthetical, modal adverbials. This is not least the case with oath formulas in modern Swedish. Oath formulas, however, may also have a kind of matrix function as in e.g. *förbanne mig om ...* (‘I’ll be damned if ...’).<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1 below, gives an account of some important emphatic markers and their syntactic uses. The words in capitals can be substituted for some equivalent. *Fan* may for instance be exchanged for *satan*, *tusan*, *sjutton* etc. The use of the word *Guds* is very stable in the phrase *för Guds skull* ‘for God’s sake’, but modern Swedes most often prefer a substitute for *Guds* in the phrase *i Guds namn* ‘in the name of God’, e.g. *herrans* ‘the lord’s’ or *jösse*, genitive of *jösses*, which is a colloquial variant to *Jesus*.<sup>6</sup>

The chart shows two functions besides the ones already discussed: “emphatic negation” refers to expressions like *i helvete* (*heller*) and *fan heller* (‘not bloody likely’); “after *inte*, *nog* and *visst*” is relevant only for the word *fan* and its equivalents, which can be emphatically added to three specific adverbs: *inte* (‘not’), *nog* (‘surely’) and *visst* (‘surely’).

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<sup>5</sup> The matrix function is not necessarily held by a finite expression. A phrase like e.g. *min själ* (‘my soul’) works equally well before an *if*-clause. Further, it is likely that expressions as *förbanne mig* (‘I’ll be damned’), *ta mig fan* (‘may the devil take me’) etc. are not finite matrixes either, but grammaticalized words. Writings such as *tammefan* (< *ta mig fan*) and *fantamej* (< *fan ta mig*) support this suggestion.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase *i Guds namn* may also, contrary to *i herrans namn* and *i jösse namn*, be used literally, which maybe explains why the latter phrases are preferred to the former in colloquial speech. But even though it may appear less idiomatic (in modern Swedish) than some alternative variant, I have chosen to use the phrase *i Guds namn* in the examples and the discussion here. *I Guds namn* is the original phrase, and the phrase that, once established in non-religious talk, has offered the pattern for creative variants.

Syntactic function:	matrix	annex/ modal adverbial	after <i>wh</i> -word	in emphatic negation	after <i>inte</i> , <i>nog</i> and <i>visst</i>
OATH FORMULAS	+	+			
<i>för FAN</i> / <i>för HELVETE</i> 'for hell's sake'		+			
<i>för Guds skull</i> 'for God's sake'		+			
<i>i GUDS namn</i> 'in the name of God'		+	+		
<i>i HELVETE</i> 'in hell'			+	+	
<i>FAN</i> 'the devil'		+	+	+	+

Figure 1. Syntactic uses of important emphatic swear word phrases.

### 3.2 The pragmatic functions of emphatic swear words

Let us now take a closer look at the pragmatic functions that different swear word phrases may take when tied to sentences as annexes or used as clause integrated modal adverbials. We may then make a distinction between the oath formulas on the one hand and phrases as *för fan*, *för helvete*, *för Guds skull* and *i Guds namn* on the other hand. (I disregard here that also a single *fan* may appear in the same positions – often with a rather vague contribution to the utterance. See Stroh-Wollin 2008:100 ff. and Stroh-Wollin 2010.)

The oath formulas are, as mentioned above, used by speakers to signal that they are serious about their message. Thus, an oath formula is emphatic vis-à-vis the content of the clause. The other phrases, however, are most often emphatic vis-à-vis the addressee, in the sense that they signal the speaker's irritation towards and/or appeal to the listener. The diabolic phrases normally express strong irritation, whereas a flavour of appeal is often more apparent when the celestial phrases are used. These pragmatic functions are summarized in figure 2.

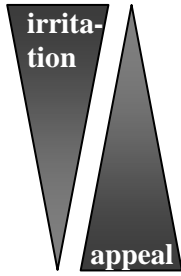
oath formulas, e.g.: <i>ta mig FAN</i> ‘may the devil take me’ <i>förbanne mig</i> ‘I’ll be damned’ <i>min själ</i> ‘my soul’	Emphatic vis-à-vis the content of the clause.
<i>för FAN/</i> <i>för HELVETE</i> ‘for hell’s sake’	 Emphatic vis-à-vis the addressee.
<i>för Guds skull</i> ‘for God’s sake’	
<i>i GUDS namn</i> ‘in the name of God’	

Figure 2. Pragmatic functions of emphatic swear word phrases used as clause integrated modal adverbials or alternatively, with approximately the same function, as external annexes. Swear words which are emphatic vis-à-vis the addressee signal irritation and/or appeal; *för fan* and *för helvete* signal chiefly irritation, whereas the celestial phrases are more appealing, *i Guds namn* more so than *för Guds skull*.

Some words can be added in order to be a little more precise about the use of the two kinds of expressions. In what way for instance is a user of an oath formula serious about the message? Close to the function of real oaths is the stressing that something stated is true. However, when used in this way the oath formula also conveys the message that the content of the clause is surprising or remarkable in some other way, se (11a). Further, it can be used to stress a value judgment as in (11b) or the speaker’s intention to do something, cf. (8a–b) above.

- (11) a. Du kanske inte tror mig, men hon har **ta mig fan** sett en björn.  
 ‘You maybe don’t believe me, but she has [SW. WORD] seen a bear.’
- b. Detta är **ta mig fan** den sämsta bok jag någonsin har läst.  
 ‘This is [SW. WORD] the worst book I have ever read.’

Among the more addressee-oriented phrases, there are two with celestial background, *i Guds namn* and *för Guds skull*. The pragmatic function of the phrase *i Guds namn* (‘in the name of God’) can be traced back to the use of it to refer to the authority of God, which the listener was assumed to respect.

The phrase *för Guds skull* ('for God's sake') is originally an appeal to the compassion of a Christian soul, but it works in colloquial speech more often as an appeal to the listener's sense, for instance because the speaker finds the state of affairs absurd. In practice both phrases appear very much in the same contexts (disregarding the use of *i Guds namn* after *wh*-words), but at least a touch of irritation seems to be signalled when *för Guds skull* is used, whereas this is not necessarily the case with *i Guds namn*. Both types come with both declaratives and imperatives; see (12a–b).

- (12) a. Jag kan **i Guds namn/för Guds skull** inte handla annorlunda.  
 'I cannot, in the name of God/for God's sake, act differently.'  
 b. Gå då, **i Guds namn/för Guds skull!**  
 'Well, leave then, in the name of God/for God's sake.'

The diabolic phrases *för fan* and *för helvete* ('for hell's sake') are blasphemous variants of *för Guds skull*. As such they can be taken to be stronger, which explains the high degree of irritation they convey. The irritation, which was a natural ingredient already in the secular use of the celestial phrase, is emphasized when diabolic phrases are used. Along with the ingredient of irritation becoming more prominent in these phrases, the less appealing they seem.

However, the vocative nature of appeal is still preserved in the diabolic phrases, which means that they readily come with imperatives (as do the celestial phrases). They may also (as well as the celestial phrases) have the effect of clarifying that a non-imperative should be understood as a command; cf. (13a–b). In addition to what is actually stated in (13a), the swear word phrase in (13b) pragmatically contributes with the following: "I am irritated because it is not quiet here and I am trying to sleep. Keep quiet!"

- (13) a. Jag vill ha tyst omkring mig när jag sover.  
 'I want silence around me when I sleep.'  
 b. Jag vill **för helvete** ha tyst omkring mig när jag sover.  
 'I want silence around me when I sleep, for hell's sake.'

## 4. Emphatic swear word phrases in embedded declaratives

### 4.1 A swear word test to distinguish asserted clauses?

As mentioned above, Julien has suggested a swear word test to distinguish the assertedness in embedded V2 clauses, claiming that swear words such as *för fan* and *för helvete* work better in embedded V2 than in non-V2. The test is discussed and rejected in Wiklund 2009a, where also some more discourse-oriented expressions are taken into account: *ju* (~‘(as) you know’), *fasen* (euphemism for *fan*), *ärligt talat* (‘honestly speaking’), *nämligen* (~‘you see’) and *minsann* (~ ‘indeed’). In her answer to Wiklund, Julien (2009) explicitly makes a difference between the different discourse markers. She argues that *för fan* and *för helvete* appear to have “a closer affiliation with certain types of illocutionary force than other discourse-oriented expressions” (Julien 2009:226).

The specific nature of *för fan* and *för helvete* is, according to Julien, discernible in the power of these phrases to strengthen, not only assertions, but also imperatives and simple *yes*’s or *no*’s, see (14a–c), given as (2a–c) in Julien 2009.

- (14) a. Jag kan **för fan** inte gå och fika i mysbyxor.  
 ‘I can for fuck’s sake not go and have a coffee wearing sweat pants.’
- b. Njut då **för fan**!  
 ‘Enjoy then, for fuck’s sake.’
- c. Nej **för fan**!  
 ‘No, for fuck’s sake.’

Julien points out that *ju*, *fasen*, *ärligt talat*, *nämligen* and *minsann* work equally well as *för fan* in (14a), but that they are bad with imperatives and thus cannot replace *för fan* in (14b). She also claims that *ju*, *fasen*, *ärligt talat*, *nämligen* and *minsann* cannot, contrary to *för fan*, be in the same intonational phrase as an interjection, even though e.g. “nej, ärligt talat”, with the tag as a separate intonational phrase, would be okay. As regards this last point, I fail to see there is a difference of principle here. It is for instance also possible to say “nej fan” or “nej minsann” without any pause between the interjection and the discourse particle.

The inclination to use *för fan* and *för helvete* with imperatives is accounted for in section 3 above. It is needless then to comment further on this fact as such. But, since the observation that a lot of other discourse markers do not come with imperatives is correct, we may conclude that Julien intuitively and correctly has distinguished *för fan* and *för helvete* from other discourse-oriented expressions and pointed out one of their characteristic features. Only, we may add *i Guds namn* and *för Guds skull* to the same group (cf. section 3); these celestial phrases, albeit somewhat outdated, could both replace *för fan* in all examples in (14a–c).

Julien (2009:228) takes the behaviour of *för fan* and its counterparts to be evidence that they first and foremost serve as “strengtheners of various kinds of illocutionary force”. However, the affinity to *various* kinds of illocutionary force is not necessarily a good quality if one wants to distinguish asserted clauses from non-asserted ones, which was Julien’s purpose. With the purpose to discriminate between asserted and non-asserted clauses, it could be more appropriate to look for some element(s) with a more exclusive affinity to asserted contexts.

Further, I cannot agree with Julien on the judgement that *för fan* and *för helvete* regularly work better in embedded V2 than in non-V2. I admit that sometimes a V2 clause would be (slightly) preferred to a non-V2 variant; perhaps the sentences in (15a–b) demonstrate this. But, the non-V2 variant is often not weird at all, and I think Wiklund (2009b:234) is right that in many cases the non-V2 word order even seems to be the more natural. An unpretentious check on the internet also confirmed that expressions of the kind in question were clearly more common in non-V2 clauses than in (embedded) V2 clauses; (16) is one example with non-V2.<sup>7</sup>

- (15) a. Hon sa att hon hade **för fan** inga planer på att gifta sig.  
 b. Hon sa att hon **för fan** inte hade några planer på att gifta sig.  
 ‘She said that she didn’t have any plans to marry, for hell’s sake.’

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<sup>7</sup> The following strings were searched at Google in November 2010: ”att [han/hon] [för fan/helvete] [är/var/har/hade/ska/skall/skulle/kan/kunde/får/fick]” and ”att [han/hon] [är/var/har/hade/ska/skall/skulle/kan/kunde/får/fick] [för fan/helvete]”. The result was: 34 non-V2 clauses versus 6 V2 clauses. Just to be sure that there was no fundamental difference between Swedish and Norwegian that could explain that Julien’s intuition deviated from Wiklund’s and mine, I also searched for non-V2 examples in Norwegian. I found several by searching the strings captured by “at [han/hun] [for faen/fanden/pokker/helvete]”.

- (16) Runt klockan 3 på natten så ringde en väldigt svartsjuk Thomas och skrek åt denna man att han **för HELVETE** ska hålla sig borta från hans fru ... (Google 2010-11-09)  
 ‘Around three in the morning a very jealous Thomas phoned and shouted at this man that he should, for hell’s sake, stay away from his wife ...’

I think we can simply conclude that phrases like *för fan* and *för helvete* do not clearly distinguish between V2 and non-V2. I will return to the question of whether this has anything to tell us about the clauses’ status as regards assertion.

## 4.2 Reported speech and swear words

If focusing especially on reported speech, one may ask oneself if the addressee-oriented phrases *för fan* and *för helvete* are in some cases more congruous with V2 than non-V2, because V2 clauses are more “direct”, i.e. closer to the original statement, than non-V2 clauses (cf. section 2). I think this is a plausible explanation if the embedded V2 variant in (15a) is preferable to the non-V2 variant in (15b). In other cases, e.g. (16), it might be that an adjustment to V2 word order is superfluous because the context makes the reported message very “direct” anyway.

Wiklund (2009b:235) argues in favour of a difference in “*point of viewness*”, according to which only the reporting speaker may be taken as responsible for evaluating the truth value of an embedded V2 assertion, such as (15a), whereas either the reporting speaker or the reported speaker (referred to by the subject of the matrix clause) may be responsible for evaluating the truth value of an embedded non-V2 assertion, such as (15b). This means that Wiklund’s view is rather the opposite of mine, in the sense that she takes an embedded V2 clause to be less, in stead of more, close to the reported speaker. In addition, her suggestion is against the claim of Hooper & Thompson (1973) that (all) *that*-clauses in reported speech express indirect assertions, i.e. assertions on behalf of the reported speaker.

Nevertheless, I will leave open the question of whether it is sometimes possible to make a statement in the form of an embedded assertion in a reported speech (in which case the reported speaker probably would be degraded to merely a source of information). But, this said, I cannot accept the idea that embedded V2 would never be compatible with a reading where the



reported speaker is the asserting speaker. On the contrary, I take this to be the normal situation.

As a kind of support for her *point of view*-assumption, Wiklund (2009b: 235) gives the examples in (17a–b) with the comment that swear words “that *prima facie* seem to include reference to the speaker”, such as *fan i mig* (the devil in me), are compatible with both word orders.

- (17) a. Hon såg att han **fan i mig** inte hade läst brevet.  
 b. Hon såg att han hade **fan i mig** inte läst brevet.  
 ‘She saw that he had [SWEAR WORD] not read the letter.’

Only, these examples do not, for a couple of reasons, prove anything. First, they are not examples of reported speech, which means that there cannot be but one speaker, and we already know that both word orders are possible in these cases (V2 provided that the subclause is asserted). Whether or not a swear word “that *prima facie* seem to include reference to the speaker” may be present in the embedded clause, does not add anything to that insight. Secondly, it appears as Wiklund assumes, in spite of her more cautious wording “*prima facie* seem to”, that a reference to the speaker actually is present in *fan i mig*, which may not be the case.

Now, we can replace the matrix predicate in (17a–b) with a predicate of saying. Let us take (18a) to be the original utterance, just to make it clear that the swear word is assumed to come from the reported speaker. (18b) shows how the utterance in (18a) is transformed into an embedded non-V2 clause in indirect speech; (18c) shows the corresponding V2 clause.

- (18) a. Han har **fan i mig** inte läst brevet.  
 ‘He has [SWEAR WORD] not read the letter.’  
 b. Hon sa/skrek att han **fan i mig** inte hade läst brevet.  
 c. Hon sa/skrek att han hade **fan i mig** inte läst brevet.  
 ‘She said/shouted that he had [SWEAR WORD] not read the letter.’

People I have asked accept both word orders accounted for in (18b–c) and accept at same time that *fan i mig*, in both cases, comes from the reported speaker. Thus, we can conclude that *fan i mig* does not express reference to the speaker; the deictic meaning of *mig* (‘me’) in this expression has simply faded away. This holds true also for other oath formulas such as *ta mig fan* (‘may the devil take me’) and *förbanne mig* (‘I’ll be damned’). We can also

conclude that V2 word order does certainly not exclude a reading where the reported speaker is the asserting speaker.

In sum, discrepancies in judgements on embedded V2 versus non-V2 are not a question of “point of view” in the sense suggested by Wiklund.

### 4.3 Assertion or not – can the swear words help us decide?

I stated above that the swear word test suggested by Julien does not discriminate between V2 and non-V2. Thus, it cannot be used to prove that embedded non-V2 clauses are not asserted, if we want to maintain the idea that embedded V2 clauses are, which we want. Instead we may ask if the possibility to include expressions such as *för fan* and *för helvete* in both V2 and non-V2 clauses rather talks in favour of taking both kinds to express assertions. However, since *för fan* and *för helvete* are not exclusively found in asserted contexts, this is not self-evident.

What we really would like is a discourse marker with a more specific function to affirm assertions. When looking among the swear words, the most evident choice would be the oath formulas, being derived from expressions used to certify one’s truthfulness. However, many swear words tend to expand their uses, leading to pragmatic overlapping between different kinds of expressions, which may be a little risky. One can argue, for instance, that the oath formula *fan i mig* in (18a) not only confirms the stated fact as such, but also may signal the speaker’s indignation. If so, a replacement of *fan i mig* with e.g. *för fan* would have very little pragmatic impact.

I think it is, nevertheless, possible to maintain the idea that oath formulas are good testers of assertion. But it may be even better to use the word *minsann* (~‘indeed’). Interestingly enough, this word is the final result of a grammaticalization process of a medieval phrase, *a mina sann*, meaning ‘on my truthfulness’. In other words, it was originally a kind of non-religious oath. It shares with the swear word oaths that it may express a touch of surprise or signal that the state of affairs is remarkable in some way. But it is not as stigmatized and not as strongly emphatic as the swear words, which is a favour in testing, because it may sound more natural in many cases.

*Minsann* is, as also Julien pointed out, bad with imperatives, see (19a). But even more relevant, it seems to be bad in clearly non-asserted declaratives, see (19b), as well as in presupposed *that*-clauses, see (19c).

- (19) a. \*Njut då, **minsann**!  
 ‘Enjoy then, indeed.’
- b. \*Det är osannolikt att hon **minsann** hade sett en björn.  
 ‘It is unlikely that she had indeed seen a bear.’
- c. \*Hon ångrade att hon **minsann** hade varit på bio den där kvällen.  
 ‘She regretted that she had indeed been to the cinema that night.’<sup>8</sup>

Now, testing *minsann* in *that*-clauses embedded under a strongly assertive predicate as e.g. *berätta* ‘tell’ shows that both V2 and non-V2 word order is okay, see (20a–b).

- (20) a. Hon berättade att hon hade **minsann** sett en björn.  
 b. Hon berättade att hon **minsann** hade sett en björn.  
 ‘She told us that she had indeed seen a bear.’

It is hard not to interpret the embedded clause in (20b) as asserted. This may be problematic if one takes assertion to be exclusively connected to V2 word order. However, if we accept that assertion can come from the context as well as from the structure, it is not surprising at all.

Now finally, what about swear words instead of *minsann* in clauses like the ones in (19b–c) and (20a–b)? I think both kinds of emphatic swear word phrases, *för fan* and its counterparts on the one hand and the oath formulas on the other, are (potentially) acceptable in (20a–b), but bad in (19b–c). The acceptability in (20a–b) may to some extent depend on the context, whereas no context would help if trying the swear words in (19b–c). Thus the swear word phrases behave very much in the same way in embedded declaratives as does *minsann*, disregarding that the latter discourse marker is very easily accepted in (20a–b) and demands no specific imagination as regards the context.

This means that even the emphatic swear word phrases discussed here might be usable in a way for testing assertion in embedded clauses. The affirmative oath formulas are semantically and pragmatically most close to *minsann* and their parallel behaviours are little surprising. As expected swear word oaths are also as bad as *minsann* with imperatives. The usefulness of expressions such as *för fan* does, however, not mean that these expressions

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<sup>8</sup> The Swedish verb *ångra* is, contrary to its English counterpart *regret*, not possible as a verb of saying.

affirm the truth value of a proposition – they do not; if they did, they would not appear with imperatives. Their discriminating power is rather due to the fact that their emphatic impact is inconsistent with non-assertion.

So, I think Julien (2009) is mistaken when she takes *för fan* and *för helvete* to be better suited than *minsann* for identifying assertion. What might have misled her is that the strong emphasis connected with the swear word phrases sometimes appear to be more easily accepted if the embedded assertion is clearly foregrounded, to speak with Hooper & Thompson (1973). If so, V2 may be favoured in some cases. But it is my impression that also the context may influence the choice. In reported speech for instance, I think swear words often come more natural in V2 clauses if the matrix predicate is a form of a simple *say*, but that non-V2 is just as fine after a form of a more expressive verb, such as *shout*.

## 5. Concluding remarks

The analysis in the preceding section shows that we have strong support for the idea that embedded non-V2 declaratives may express assertions, which means that the semantics of the embedding predicate is crucial for the interpretation of the complement clause as asserted or not.

Another conclusion was that certain swear words are appropriate only in asserted complement declaratives because of their emphatic impact, which is not congruous with non-assertion. As mentioned earlier (cf. section 2.2) Hooper & Thompson (1973:495) explained the applicability of root transformations in the same way. However, Mainland Scandinavian V2 declaratives are not necessarily associated with emphasis. Instead I proposed that the main clause word order rather encodes the asserted reading as such.

The power of expressing assertions is a characteristic feature of declarative main clauses, and a feature by virtue of which declarative main clauses are used as independent speech acts. Does this mean that we also must take embedded V2-clauses to express speech acts? I believe the answer is no.

First, we must take the notion of speech act to be first and foremost a pragmatic concept, tied to the speaker's intention with the utterance. The prototypical pairing of a certain structure and a speech act such as a statement does not allow us to confuse the concepts. I have argued that V2 declaratives in Mainland Scandinavian possess a formal feature, derivationally encoded, which is semantically interpreted as assertion. The use of an assert-

ion-expressing clause is, however, still negotiable. It may be used to state something, but a speaker may also have some other purpose with an utterance which is structurally a main clause declarative. It is, for example, easy to imagine a situation where (21) is both intended as and taken for a command.

(21) Nu går du ut ur rummet!  
 ‘Now you leave this room!’

It should be emphasized that the clause in (21), in my view, remains asserted. It does matter for the pragmatic interpretation that the leaving of the room is presented as a fact. In sum, there is reason to keep apart the formal, the semantic and the pragmatic sides of an utterance, which is, however, not saying that anything can mean anything.

Secondly, when headed by a complementizer, the V2 clause is automatically made dependent on the matrix. This dependence is visible in the deictic adjustments that sometimes have to be made in indirect reported speech, in order to apply the reported speaker’s perspective as expressed in the matrix clause also on the embedded clause. Pragmatically, embedding means that the asserted clause expresses an *indirect* assertion and becomes a part of a wider speech act, rather than functioning as an independent speech act in itself.

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